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The Ku Klux Klan was a formidable force in the Lone Star State during the 1920s. In this selection, Dr. Procter recounts the violent confrontation between a Klan mob and two intrepid Texas lawmen—Red Burton and Bob Buchanan—in McLennan County in 1921.

A wave of fear swept across Texas in the summer and fall of 1921. Masked men in white robes paraded triumphantly; flaming crosses illuminated the sky, eerie and ominous in the darkness; and bands of night riders, vigilante style, tortured or murdered their victims in the name of law and order. At crossroads and in Texas towns, billboards demanding “One Hundred Per Cent Americanism,” “Booze Must and Shall Go,” “Love Thy Neighbor as Thyself but Leave His Wife

Alone,” “Keep This a White Man’s Country,” apprised citizens that a new force, supposedly patriotic, most assuredly moralistic, definitely restrictive, was moving into their community. Preaching racism and religious bigotry, the Invisible Empire of Kleagles and Imperial Wizards and Grand Dragons called for a war against malevolent groups such as radicals, foreigners, and “niggers” to keep them from undermining “pure” American institutions. And how? The Ku Klux Klan had the answer. The best element of society must purge all “alien” forces, no matter how great the cost, no matter what the method.

For $10 “true” Americans could join the Klan; for $10 they could help save the United States. At last they had found an effective vehicle for alleviating the frustrations of a rapidly changing world, for fighting against conditions both disturbing and startling. To them it was shocking how much society was degenerating, how immoral people were becoming. The family, with its spiritual and moral base, was showing signs of fracturing, even of disintegrating. Some women were choosing a career instead of marriage; divorce in preference to self-sacrifice for their children; plunging necklines and rising skirts in defiance of modesty and decency. Yet political leaders on both the national and local levels, although staunch advocates of law and order, were apparently helpless to combat trends toward the disruption of society. Prostitution and gambling were increasing; “racketeer” and “speak-easy” and “booze” were becoming familiar terms in the English language; and that “Noble Experiment,” the Eighteenth Amendment, was ineffective—and laughable.

To make matters worse, American institutions seemed to be under heavy attack. Since the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917, “true” Americans believed that Communists and radicals were trying to undermine the American system. United States Attorney General A. Mitchell Palmer had moved in the right direction by ferreting out those “traitors” in the government and bringing them to trial. But this “witch hunt,” as the radical press called his actions, had definite limitations; in no way could he noticeably affect local situations. At the same time, the New Immigration, alien and Catholic, spouting strange political philosophies that were often critical of the American way of life, was also weakening this nation by its “mongrelizing taints.” Those dark-skinned peoples, who lived in slums and tended toward vice and corruption, usually could not speak English, much less understand how democracy functioned. Equally alarming were attempts to paralyze the economy, to engulf the United States in depression. And who was to blame? Obviously, the “true” Americans agreed, it was the alien element, such as the “Uncle Shylock,” the avaricious Jew who kept prices high and wages low.

So in October 1921, Klansmen were marching in Texas almost 100,000 strong, raising the fiery cross and the American flag in unison, denouncing the cancerous evils and corrupting vices in their midst, then enrolling “good solid middle-class citizens” in their ranks: lawyers, doctors, bankers, businessmen, even ministers and policemen. Already they had organized and paraded in Houston, Beaumont, Dallas, Fort Worth, Waco, Austin, and San Antonio. Now they were moving into rural communities. In East Texas and along the Gulf Coast their gospel spread like wildfire; on the Black Prairie in North Texas they were equally successful. The next region to “educate” lay in the center of the state, a land of rolling prairies dotted with small, fairly prosperous farming villages. But here the Invisible Empire hit a snag in the form of two law enforcement officers, Red Burton and Bob Buchanan.
Born on August 10, 1885, near Mart, Texas, Marvin “Red” Burton was the youngest son of John F. and Alice Cubley Burton. Originally from Montrose, Mississippi, his parents had migrated to Texas in the early 1880s and bought a farm between Mart and Waco. In that locale Red Burton grew to manhood, a typical product of his environment and of the era. Like most farm boys in Central Texas, he had specific family chores, helping his father in the fields and his mother around the house. Whenever possible he went to school, but scholastic endeavors did not prevent him from learning to fish, ride, and shoot well. Overall, life was not easy for Red; work hours were long and tasks often tedious. The span from childhood to maturity was brief.

Consequently, when only eighteen, Burton married a local girl and assumed the more difficult responsibilities of making a living. Starting without “a dollar in the world,” he worked wherever possible, but essentially his life was without purpose or direction. In 1905 he landed a job on a ranch near Wortham, Texas. Then, in 1913, he returned to the Waco area and, with the savings of the last eight years, purchased a lot and built a house. Once again he was penniless and out of work, lacking even “money enough to buy ... groceries.”

But in 1914, after pouring concrete for storm sewers (and not too regularly), Burton informed his wife one morning: “I’m going to work at somethin’. I don’t know what it does; I don’t care what it pays. I’m going to work.” Determined and almost desperate, he applied for a position with the Cleveland Construction Company. When the foreman sarcastically announced, “Sonny, we have work to do here but you wouldn’t do it,” Burton bristled, “You don’t know me, man; I’ll do anything honorable.” And looking at the lean-muscled, 62 farm boy, almost skinny at 180 pounds, the foreman suddenly changed his mind. Perhaps something in Burton’s voice, his clipped, terse comments, his firm, positive tone, carried conviction. Or possibly his appearance—light blue eyes, sandy red hair and ruddy complexion, a mask of defiance and resolution, huge hands, noticeably scarred and calloused, hanging like hammocks from his shirtsleeves—made the foreman recognize a difference in this applicant. But whatever the reason, he found himself saying: “I’ll tell you what, Sonny. You come over here tomorrow morning and ... we’ll run you off.” That was one thing no one ever did. Burton stayed three years.

After that day, Red Burton never went hungry again; he was too much in demand. Within three weeks he was elevated to foreman, even though obviously inexperienced. When he expressed feelings of inadequacy, his boss explained the promotion this way: “I know you don’t know a whole lot but you will work. I’ll help you if you get in trouble.” He never had to, however, for Burton learned his trade well. But even more importantly, he won the respect of the men under him. Those who met his standards could count on steady employment, while those who were “toughs” or troublemakers (and there were plenty of that sort in construction work) learned to steer clear of him or quit. He would—and could—back up his decisions.

In August 1917, Burton decided to change jobs, but not because he was unhappy. It was a matter of economics. The United States government, upon entering World War I, contracted the Grace Construction Company to build an airfield at Richfield, a few miles west of Waco. Since thousands of men were enlisting or being drafted into the armed forces, labor was hard to
come by and even more difficult to keep. The Grace Company officials therefore offered Burton a job as foreman at double his present salary. They knew his reputation: that he was a tough taskmaster, that he inspired loyalty, that his men were ready to fight for him.

For two and a half weeks at Richfield, Burton measured up to all advance notices. Then, in an unexpected turn of events, the Waco Police Department drafted him into its ranks. Although the city council could in no way enforce such an act, Burton decided to serve for six months. He liked the idea of public service, of doing “things for other people.” Besides, he was overworked, almost exhausted, and here was a chance, he reasoned, to “rest up” before returning to his old job.

How wrong he was! At nearby Camp MacArthur thousands of soldiers, mostly from the Midwest, had arrived and were inundating Waco, causing the usual problems between townspeople and the military. For the first few months, therefore, Burton had his hands full directing traffic as well as learning police procedures and gaining an understanding of the problems and techniques of law enforcement. Then he was assigned to night duty, patrolling residential and outlying districts on a motorcycle—and the orientation process began all over again. Gradually, as the months rolled by and as he became more involved, thoughts of returning to construction work faded away; each day he found “policing” more and more fascinating.

But in 1919, with the passage of the Eighteenth Amendment, Burton was caught in a situation which law officers have always dreaded. Besides having to enforce an unpopular law, he watched it corrupt some of his colleagues, thereby placing him in a difficult position. Because he was not “on the take,” word went out to “get Red Burton lined up.” After all, contraband liquor was bringing high prices and police salaries were low. Yet in spite of all inducements—promises of money, promotion, and favors—he steadfastly refused. So one morning in September his chief informed him that “for the good of the department” he was transferring him to a daytime schedule. Incensed over this roundabout way of curtailing his effectiveness (most of the contraband arrived at night), Burton replied: “Well, sir, if I thought it was better for the department, I wouldn’t say a word”—and he quit.

Actually Burton only changed jobs, not professions. Because of his fine record, Bob Buchanan, the sheriff of McLennan County, offered him a deputy's commission. What a lucky break it was for both men. Besides seeing eye-to-eye concerning law enforcement, they became close friends. And on October 1, 1921, at Lorena, Texas, approximately thirteen miles south of Waco, they had need of each other. Together—and alone—they faced the Klan.

Robert “Bob” Buchanan was a rugged law-enforcement officer and a formidable opponent, cut from the same mold as frontier marshals and Texas Rangers. Although fifty years old, he looked much younger, possibly because of his smooth, tanned face and black, wavy hair. Physically he was an impressive man, carrying 225 pounds easily on a sturdy 6'1 build. A huge Colt .38 “thummbuster” on a .45 frame strapped to his left hip made him even more imposing. Yet his eyes, coal-black, piercing, at times ominous and unfathomable, were his dominant feature. When someone challenged him, they were like gale warnings, prominent and threatening. No one was going to run over Bob Buchanan. He represented the
law—and that meant fair, impartial enforcement. Never did he allow political pressure or expediency or friendship to interfere with duty. Of course, this strict adherence to the law, this tough application of justice, was also an Achilles' heel. But he knew no other way; to him any other conduct was unthinkable.

Even with law officers like Burton and Buchanan in McLennan County, the Klan leaders decided to act on October 1. Having already organized thoroughly in Waco, they planned a Saturday evening rally at Lorena, where they would march with fiery crosses through the black section of town and then convene, ironically enough, at the Baptist Church for an ice cream supper. Throughout Waco and the surrounding areas they tacked up notices, announcing in bold black type: "The Ku Klux Klan Will Parade Tonight at 8:30."

Surprisingly, neither Buchanan nor Burton was aware of these arrangements. Both were busy investigating a cotton theft in the nearby towns of Leroy and Mart. Yet while on the job they came to an understanding concerning the Klan. Each soon discovered that the other was not a member. In fact, they both voiced grave misgivings as to its purpose and activities, especially since a demonstration in Mart the previous Saturday had caused considerable damage. "If there is ever another parade in McLennan County while I am sheriff, I intend to find out who is responsible," Buchanan asserted emphatically, "and if I am out of the country, I want you to do it." Burton agreed. The matter was closed. Both sensed, however, that a "bad situation" might soon develop.

The two men had no idea that a confrontation was imminent. Upon their return to Waco that afternoon, however, several citizens from Lorena were waiting in Buchanan's office to inform him of a scheduled mass meeting and to appeal for help. Within a few minutes they had their answer. Turning to Burton, the sheriff asked, "Will you go down there with me?" And when Red replied he would, they were on their way.

It was a beautiful autumn afternoon as they rode to Lorena. The air was crisp, the sun bright, the countryside a greenish-brown, not quite ready to succumb to winter. With approximately 350 inhabitants, Lorena resembled many other Central Texas farm communities in the 1920s. Situated on a rolling black prairie, it rose into view easily, the spires from its several churches and the roofs of rambling two-story frame houses surrounded by large shade trees, obvious landmarks. Like so many small towns it had two principal avenues: Main Street, comprising most of the business district, and Highway 81, cutting through the best residential area. Where these two thoroughfares intersected, townspeople had built a funeral parlor, bank, Ford agency, and combination drug and general store, symbols of a permanent and growing community. Except for market day, Saturday mornings, and holidays, the atmosphere was always easygoing, relaxed, often phlegmatic.

But by the time the two lawmen arrived that evening, Lorena had changed dramatically. On the outskirts hundreds of cars, suvneys, and wagons were parked haphazardly along the highway or in nearby fields. Along the streets vast throngs, estimated at 15,000 to 20,000 people, were milling about restlessly, though apparently in a festive mood. And as the sun quickly receded and the evening shadows lengthened, they eagerly anticipated the forthcoming events, for less than half a mile to the north hundreds of hooded, white-robed figures were assembling in a cotton field.
In order to maintain some semblance of authority and keep the peace, Buchanan promptly sought out the town leaders. Although known to be "pretty hotheaded" at times, he was extremely calm and "reasonable" that evening. Carefully, he explained his position. He had not come to stop their parade; on the contrary, as far as he was concerned they could march all night. But as sheriff of McLennan County, he announced, "I think I'm entitled to know who's responsible for it, so if anything happens I can know who to look for." For instance, he explained, whenever a circus came to town, the owners always made arrangements with him and the police regarding the parade. Consequently, if the leaders would identify themselves to him by raising their hoods when marching by, he would be satisfied.

Within thirty minutes, after much huddling and conferring, two McLennan County officials who were well-known to both Buchanan and Burton stepped forward to assume responsibility. Jovially the sheriff remarked that they need not lift their hoods because he would "know either of their hides in a tanning yard." So the matter was resolved—but not for long. A majority of the Klan leaders would not accept this agreement. Unhappy with the two officials for violating one of the basic rules of membership—that of secrecy—they rejected Buchanan's proposal, confident that their decision would cause no significant reverberations. After all, what could two law officers, alone and without public support, do? How could they prevent thousands from parading? The answers were obvious, the questions rhetorical. After taking precautionary steps, just in case the lawmen should react foolishly, the Klansmen quickly formed into lines of white-robed figures, raised several American flags, lit huge crosses (one man, however, had wired one electrically), and began the march.

Meanwhile, Buchanan and Burton were chatting amiably and visiting with friends at the main intersection, unaware that the Klan was not going to cooperate. Then the situation changed dramatically. Out of the crowd the two county officials emerged in front of Burton, told him what had just happened, and rather fearfully asked if the sheriff would "think hard of them" if they did not participate. Rushing across the street, Red was repeating the conversation to Buchanan, who was listening silent and grim-faced, when a resounding roar announced the beginning of the parade. Out onto Highway 81 the Klansmen came, a sea of white-robed figures outlined against the night. Without a word to anyone Buchanan, with jaw set, and wearing a mask of determination, began marching toward the marchers. Burton, remembering that the sheriff had earlier told him to "stay close" in case of trouble, followed some fifteen to twenty feet behind. Nearer and nearer they moved toward the mass of white, the crowd closing in behind them, both hostility and fear apparent in the expressions of the people.

Now the antagonists were face to face, just a few feet apart; yet Buchanan never hesitated or wavered. Whether unafraid of the consequences or feeling that he had no choice, he reacted bravely, even heroically. Confronting the first two leaders who were carrying a flaming cross, he reached out and slammed it to the ground, then raised up the hood of the nearest figure and resolutely declared: "I don't know you, but if I ever see your face again I will."

As Buchanan moved toward the second man, all hell broke loose. Stealthily, a robed form, later identified as a Waco policeman, crept up behind him and either with a blackjack or billyclub knocked him to the ground. Then, upon seizing the sheriff's pistol, the outraged Klansmen
swarmed over him as he lay prostrate in the road, hitting and beating him repeatedly. At the same time Red Burton “was completely covered with men,” two or three holding him while others pounded at his face and body. Physically powerful and doubly so because he was fighting for his life, he repeatedly broke away from one group only to be grabbed by another. Suddenly, two pistol shots rang out, startling the melee into silence. Buchanan, hurt and bleeding, yelled out: “Red, they’ve shot me.”

Now the action became deadlier. Flicking out a pocketknife with a four-inch blade, the sheriff, even though badly wounded, slashed and stabbed two of his antagonists. Then Burton, like a man possessed, wild and uncontrollable after seeing his comrade fall, reacted almost unbelievably in the next few minutes. Never losing sight of the man who had shot Buchanan, he managed to pull a small .38 Colt automatic from his left pants pocket and fired two shots. The would-be killer dropped. Oblivious to the punishing blows from men who were still pummeling him, Burton fired the remaining seven bullets at Klansmen near the sheriff, definitely hitting one and possibly several others. For some reason the mob had failed to take his holstered single-action .41 Colt; but in his highly excited state of mind he had no time to ponder such an oversight, for he needed the weapon. Wrenching his pinned right arm free, he unsheathed the .41 Colt and stuck the barrel into the stomach of a prominent Lorena businessman, T. C. Westbrook, who was still trying to hold him. In a cold, deadly voice he said: “Mr. Westbrook, I love you like a daddy, but if I am not released I’m going to kill you.” And for the first time since the fight began he was free of fists and arms and bodies.

Bruised and blood-smeared, Burton quickly assessed the situation as he stood in the highway exposed and unprotected—and it was not to his liking. In front of him, some ten yards away, the sheriff was staggering but on his feet, bleeding profusely from wounds in his right chest and leg. Approximately fifty feet to his left a robed Klansman was leveling a pistol at Buchanan, while at about the same distance on his right someone was also shooting at the sheriff.

Instinctively, Burton swung into action. With two shots he ended the threat to Buchanan, the man crumpling to the ground in a heap. Then he whisked to face his own assailant. In haste he fired several times, missing on each attempt but causing the man to flee. In fact, upon realizing that Burton could not be stopped and with bullets hitting indiscriminately in their midst, the crowd had dispersed, men and women scattering frantically in all directions.

Burton then turned to help Buchanan, but during the last exchange of gunfire someone had carried him to the drugstore at the intersection. So Red Burton hobbled and stumbled down the highway, unaware that he had been wounded in the right thigh. All about him was confusion. In a few short minutes Lorena had become a hate-filled disaster area. The town was a shambles, white robes and debris strewn everywhere, the streets spattered with blood, Klansmen confused and disorganized, their leaders striving to regroup. In the middle of the intersection a former Waco judge was damning and cursing the two lawmen at the top of his lungs, encouraging the apprehensive to more violence. For a fleeting moment Burton had “an evil thought,” but with only one bullet left in his .41 Colt he decided not “to waste it on the old son-of-a-bitch.”

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After considerable physical exertion, Burton finally reached the front door of the drugstore, fearful that his comrade was mortally wounded because boastful Klansmen were shouting that they had killed Buchanan. Once inside he took command, threatening and cursing those who seemed to be more afraid of the Klan than of him. To Wiley Stem, a Waco policeman, he gave specific instructions to bolt the door and let no one in “unless someone had been injured.” At the same instant he flipped back Stem’s coat, grabbed his .45 Colt automatic, and grimly said, “Wiley, I need this and you have no use for it, so I’m taking it.” Then he hurried over to Buchanan, who was sitting upright in a chair, obviously in pain and having difficulty breathing, blood flowing profusely from his chest. “Burton, they’ve killed me,” the sheriff weakly exclaimed, to which Red replied: “No, Bob, those sons-of-bitches can’t kill you; you just can’t die.”

But for the moment Burton could not be sure that anyone would not die. Outside the building Klansmen were milling about, venting their hate and frustration by angrily shouting: “Get a rope! Get a rope! Let’s hang ’em.” Inside, the foul stench of sweat and blood grew stronger, the moans of suffering men reverberating through the room as more and more wounded were brought in. Among them were Louis Crow, a prominent Waco businessman and ironically a close friend of the sheriff, with a deep stab wound in the chest; Ed Howard, a Waco policeman, knifed in the stomach; Carl West of Lorena, shot in the neck; and at least five others suffering from bullet or knife wounds. Already medical assistance was on the way, for Burton had summoned ambulances from Waco. But with the mob threatening to break in at any moment, and with an enraged Red Burton fingering a fully loaded gun and ready to kill anyone who threatened the wounded Buchanan, the chances of another bloodbath seemed definite.

Buchanan, however, realizing that trouble would continue as long as he and Burton were in town, repeatedly pleaded with his “friend” not to wait for the ambulance. Unsuccessful at first, he used the one argument which Burton could not resist. “I have always thought you were the best friend I had in the world,” the sheriff declared, “and if you are, you will take me to the hospital.” To that plea there could be only one answer. So Burton instructed Wiley Stem to “get a car” and bring it to the side entrance on Highway 81. Then he asked for someone to help him with the sheriff, but everyone shied away, fearful of what the Klan might do. He therefore draped Buchanan across his shoulder and back, holding him with his right hand, and dragged him across the room and out the side door through the crowd to the waiting car. Just in case the Klansmen intended to carry out their threats, he had Stem’s .45 Colt automatic in his left hand, cocked and ready for action. But they had had enough of Burton for one night; they wanted no more. In silence they let the lawmen depart.

At breakneck speed Burton drove along the narrow winding highway to Waco, his thoughts a mass of mixed emotions. Worried and increasingly concerned, he kept checking on Buchanan, who was coughing spasmodically and sometimes gagging, watching him push a forefinger into the chest wound to stop the flow of blood. As ambulances passed by, clanging and screaming in the night, he bitterly reflected upon the events of the evening, the threats and violence, the unreasoning hatred of the mob, the feeling of loneliness when no one would help him. Suddenly, robed figures appeared on his right, running across a cotton field, and instinctively
he reached for his .45 Colt automatic, feelings of vengeance and retribution welling up inside him. As if reading his mind, Buchanan spoke out almost pleadingly: “No, Burton, I think they whipped us; let’s not have any more trouble.”

So onward they raced toward Waco, Burton blaring the car horn to clear the way after reaching the city limits. Upon arrival at the Colgin Hospital, just across from the county jail (which was also the sheriff’s home), they proceeded with the help of an attendant to the second-floor emergency room. Then events quite similar to the drugstore scene at Lorena happened all over again. With the Buchanan family and Burton standing guard at the door, doctors worked feverishly on the wounded and suffering men who streamed into the operating room. In the corridors, newspaper reporters and law officers, as well as county and district officials, were trying to piece together from the participants exactly what had happened, while outside in the street, thousands of people began gathering, surly and hostile, threatening to storm the hospital and lynch the two lawmen.

In all this frenzied commotion Burton remained calm and seemingly unmoved. Now painfully aware of both the multiple bruises on his body and the gunshot wound in his leg, he slumped into a chair to rest while listening without comment as I. Mac Wood, Buchanan’s office deputy (and a Klansman), told what the mob was plotting. To pleas that he sneak out the back way and barricade himself in the county jail, Burton replied: “No, Mac, I have never had to be locked in jail yet.” If, however, the Klansmen wanted trouble, he would accommodate them, Burton informed Wood, because he intended to come out soon.

At 4:00 Sunday morning Burton left the hospital. Although limping badly, he opened the front door, hobbled down the steps, and moved defiantly through the crowd, never speaking to or noticing anyone, yet expecting a confrontation each step of the way. After a few hushed, extremely tense minutes he had run the gauntlet and was safe within the county jail. For the moment he had faced the mob and had backed them down.

But the issue was by no means resolved, for the Klansmen were determined to win out. With Buchanan incapacitated, Burton was now in charge and therefore the key to the situation. Yet every attempt to outwit, pressure, or scare him failed miserably. When a fellow deputy, with whom he had worked closely, told him “to line up with the Klan” or “be a damn fool,” Burton grabbed him by the back of the neck and the seat of the pants, unceremoniously dragged him into the county clerk’s office, and ordered one of the secretaries to stamp “Canceled” across his commission as a deputy sheriff. Later the same day, two county commissioners tried still another approach, offering him a thirty-day paid vacation (to begin immediately) because they were afraid for his safety. Thanking them for their concern, he resolutely announced that he had “no intention of leaving.” And if Klansmen wanted him, they would find him “in the sheriff’s office,” he asserted, “eighteen or twenty hours each day.”

For over a week the pressure continued to mount, but Burton remained adamant. No matter that friends and prominent citizens asked him to submit to the Klan, no matter that public opinion was overwhelmingly against him and the sheriff, he would not back down, even after Crow died on October 4 and most of Waco turned out to mourn a “fallen hero.” Scornful of hundreds of posters offering a “$5,000 Reward for Red Burton, Dead or Alive,” he purposely

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appeared more prominently in public, challenging the Klan by his presence. Against a barrage of threats on his life, he countered with equally violent actions and statements. Whenever drivers happened to pull up beside him in a car, they found an automatic shotgun pointing out the window. During one difficult day after visiting Buchanan, who was still on the critical list, he bitterly and unwisely declared: “My greatest desire is that I may live to see . . . the streets of Lorena grow up in weeds.”

Consequently, the Klansmen realized that only one course of action was left: Kill Red Burton! Throughout McLennan County and Central Texas word went out for Klansmen to assemble in Waco, whereupon they would march on the county jail and lynch Red Burton. On Wednesday afternoon, October 10, men began gathering on the city street corners, whispering their thoughts and plans. But as their numbers increased into the hundreds and then thousands, they boldly announced their intentions. Under the cover of darkness, with fiery crosses illuminating the sky, they were going to demonstrate what would happen to those who opposed the Klan.

By late afternoon Red Burton recognized the full extent of the danger. Yet he could do nothing. The Klansmen had the offensive; it was their move. That was the worst part—the feeling of helplessness, the loneliness, the waiting. To say the least, Burton was “considerably worried”; he knew that his opponents were deadly serious.

Darkness came quickly that October night in Waco. A light, cold mist was falling, the dampness bringing shivers to those in the streets. At approximately 8:00 P.M. three prominent citizens entered the county jail to see Burton, and to his surprise they wanted to help. “If you knew what all we know, you couldn’t be in Waco, let alone sitting here in the sheriff’s office alone,” one of them began, because “[the Klan is] coming over here . . . to kill you.” Under no circumstances could they condone such behavior; therefore, they were offering their services. They had already decided to hide him in one of their homes, to protect his family, and if necessary to stand with him against the mob; for, as one of them put it, “We need you, but we need you alive.”

To accept their aid was definitely the same choice, the human one; to reject it seemingly foolhardy. But Red Burton, even though deeply moved by their concern, would not run. After all, if the Klansmen really wanted to kill him, they would “finally do it,” he explained, “so they had just as well get through with it tonight.” He was not certain, however, that when actually facing him—and also the possibility of his retaliation—they could do murder. “But I am going to give them a chance,” he told his startled friends. Presently he intended to make his usual nightly check around town.

As Burton recalled later, the next thirty minutes were a nightmare. Almost instinctively he reached for a sawed-off shotgun and placed it under his raincoat. Then over “strong protests” he opened the door and stepped out onto the street. With the sidewalks jammed with people, he had to push through the crowds, his ruddy face reflecting his grim determination. Up Austin Avenue to the Raleigh Hotel, then back to city hall and the police station he walked, catcalls and threats of violence all about him, a mob of people following and closing fast behind him. Crossing over to Sixth Street, he stopped at the Riddle Cafe for a cup of coffee. Sitting at a table near the back, he readied his shotgun as the angry crowd pressed against the large glass window panels. At that moment Mrs. Riddle hesitantly approached him, tears running down her
cheeks, and whispered: "Mr. Burton, when you get ready to leave, my car is at the back door and ... I am going to drive you away from here, because if you don't, those people are going to kill you." Burton again refused help. "Those men think they want to kill me but they don't," he replied, "because they realize that ... some of them will be killed." Besides, he announced, while rising to pay his check, "I didn't come in your back door. I am going out ... just as I came in." And he did, with no one challenging him or even attempting to slow him down en route to the sheriff's office.

Later, Burton readily admitted that he "really had no hopes of returning to the office alive." But now he felt safe. Perhaps his three friends, jubilantly returning to the jail, most accurately assessed what had just happened. As one of them put it: "Burton, you have done the smartest thing that a man ever did ... we thought you were crazy but ... if you had run as we advised you, this thing would have never ended; but now they have gone home with their tails tucked like a bunch of whipped puppies."

The violence was over; however, the evil effects, the cancerous suspicions, the hatreds and animosities, lingered. When Texas Governor Pat Neff ordered an immediate investigation, the Klansmen in Lorena and Waco withheld information and obstructed justice, threatening anyone who might think of testifying against them. Consequently, the McLennan County grand jury returned no indictments but issued "a sweeping rebuke" to Bob Buchanan for his actions. The citizens of Lorena acted in the same spirit; approximately 300 of them signed a petition, vindicating the Klan of its part in "the trouble" and damning the lawmen "for the blood that was spilled." So the bitterness would continue in the county, with people blaming one another for what had happened. And even though the Klan would continue to thrive in Central Texas for several years, the Lorena affair alarmed many thoughtful citizens and thereby aroused staunch opposition against the organization.

No one was a more outstanding opponent of the Klan than Bob Buchanan. A constant reminder of that terrible night, he continued to live for seven years, somewhat crippled by the bullet still in his right leg and physically unable to run for sheriff again. But he never apologized for his actions; instead he battled the Klan, whenever possible showing people what it really stood for. During the next few years he also fought several civil suits brought against him by those wounded at Lorena—and each time he won. In fact, so great was his reputation, so dominant his presence, that the Klan did not parade in Waco until after he retired from office on January 1, 1923.

As for Red Burton, Lorena was just the beginning of a long career in law enforcement. Because of Burton's dedication and valor as a chief deputy in McLennan County, Governor Neff appointed him a Texas Ranger in 1922; he was never disappointed. During the next eleven years Burton became almost a legend in the Ranger service, especially in cases concerning bootleggers, oil boomsers, and Klansmen. Then, in 1933, he returned to Waco to serve as chief of detectives and later as chief of police. Upon retirement in 1951, despite all his many contributions to law enforcement over a thirty-five-year span, he would best be remembered for that night in Lorena—for the example that he and Bob Buchanan had set, where two peace officers, disregarding personal safety, faced the Klan and fought it to a standstill.