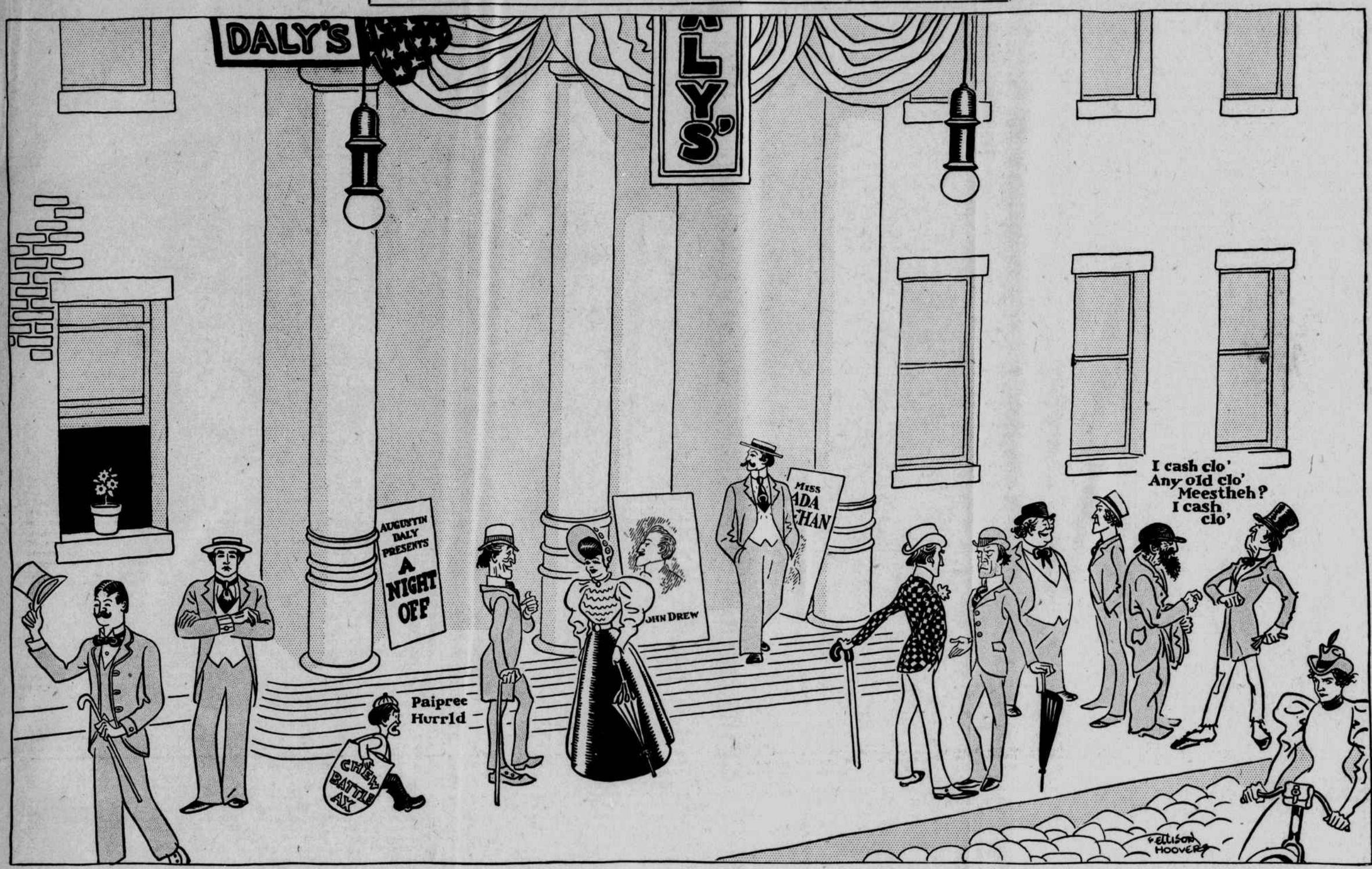
WHEN WERE THE GOOD OLD DAYS?

Summer Morning on the Old Rialto



A. E. F. Veterans Plan Pilgrimage to Foch's Birthplace

WHEN the 250 American veterans who are journeying to France in August have completed their programme of ceremonious visits to various French cities they will turn their faces toward the Pyrenees and in the little town of Taubes, the birthplace of Ferdinand Foch, they will take part in a simple and most impressive function.

The Pont Roosevelt is to be dedicated at Chateau-Thierry, in the presence of the A. E. F. men, a monument is to unveiled at Flirey and a statue of Jeanne d'Arc is to be presented to the city of Blois. At Rheims the veterans will take part in the presentation of a gift of 3,000,000 francs to the City Library in behalf of the Carnegie Foundation. But when they meet Marshal Foch on the threshold of his home and greet him in the name of the American army that fought with him the delegation of veterans will feel that they are taking part in a historical occasion.

John G. Emery, National Commander of the American Legion, has written to Marshal Foch to tell him that the French Government's invitation has been accepted and that on that pilgrimage the Americans will esteem it a privilege and an honor to visit his birthplace and leave there a simple token of the affection, admiration and respect which the American Legion and this nation hold for him.

"I have written also to President Millerand," said Mr. Emery "pointing out that we are revisiting France with a sense of genuine reverence and humility to receive for the A. E. F. the monument which has been erected in its honor at Flirey. We believe that the town of Flirey and the battlefields of Lorraine stand as a monument in themselves, a monument of the union of the French and American people. President Millerand's invitation came through the French Ambassador and I accepted it at the White House in the presence of Mr. Harding.

"I have every reason to believe that our visit to France this summer will add to the good-will we have for our ally and strengthen still further the ties that bind us."

Mr. Emery has asked Premier Briand to convey to the French Minister of War and Minister of Marine the fraternal greeting of the American Legion. The reunion of French and American veterans is being looked forward to eagerly on both sides of the water, the National Commander believes, and all preparations have been completed here for selecting the 250 delegates.

The Narrow Escape of the U. S. S. Ponticus

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dealing with the Captain. It should be remembered that the night was pitch black and that every light discernible from outside the ship was thoroughly screened. This was a necessary and obligatory precaution, since we were in the war zone, where an enemy raider or submarine might be encountered at any moment.

The vessel's rolling and pitching in the storm were so violent that we had to make our way by holding on to hand rails and stanchions at every step. Stopping for a few minutes in the wheel house, we managed to disconnect the wires leading to the Captain's bell without being perceived by the quartermaster on watch. Then, well armed and ready to shoot if necessary, we reached the Captain's door just abaft the wheel house, on the upper deck. It opened into a large office, furnished, among other things, with a safe for confidential documents, a writing desk and the large table on which was spread the chart by which the Ponticus was being navigated. Adjoining the office was the Captain's bedroom.

On hearing our knock Johnson replied cheerily:

"Come in."

We entered to find him reclining on his berth, reading by an electric light, of which the thick green shade prevented the rays from illuminating the apartment other than very dimly.

"Good evening, Cantwell. What do you wish?"

My answer was hardly in accord with this polite greeting.

"Hands up," I said, as we covered him with our pistols. "Don't budge an inch or cry out or you are a dead man."

Up went his hands, naturally; but quite as naturally he asked indignantly: "What does this outrage mean?"

"You'll find out soon enough," I replied. Then to Baker, "Tie him up, hands and feet, and gag him. I'll see that he doesn't move or shout, unless he wants to die."

Struggling and protesting, he was promptly gagged and then his hands were firmly lashed behind his back. His feet were also bound. Just as promptly the passion depicted on his countenance gave place to alarm as he realized that he was in grave danger, to say the least. His first sputtering indignation, manifest even in spite of the gag, faded away, his eyes "registered" terror and we believed that the muffled babbling through his gag was a plea for mercy, after the well known German fashion.

Doubtless, had we not been two to one, with the advantage on our side of weapons loaded and cocked, he might have made strenuous resistance. As it was, nothing was left to him but to submit and to pray that his captors would be more compassionate than he or any of his foul breed would have shown themselves had the situation been reversed. In this he was mistaken, for to our suspicions were now joined a thorough loathing and a determination to do unto him even as he would have done to us. Doubtless additional evidence of his intended treachery might exist, although not absolutely required. If so, it would probably be somewhere in his apartment or on his person. To search for it was our next move.

Baker now stood by him with an automatic pressed against his chest, while I searched his pockets for the keys to his desk and private safe. These secured, I went through his belongings, finding a number of letters in German, which were of a personal nature and not important; but tucked away in the inner pocket of a waistcoat was what I needed, a document from the German Spy Headquarters, Wilhelmstrasse, Berlin, directing Johnson, or as he was therein named, Kapitan-Leutenant K—— B——, Kaiserliche Marine, to bring the Ponticus to a stated rendezvous, of which the latitude and longitude were given, at noon of the second day after his receipt of a radiogram beginning with the word "Barcelona"—all other words having no signification. There he was to surrender her to a submarine which would be in waiting.

Holding this up, I opened on him in my choicest German billingsgate. My sea trips had provided me with a fairly workable vocabulary of objurgation for special emergencies, and that I thoroughly enjoyed pouring into his ears some of its fairest gems can be easily imagined. I told him that he was a "schmutziger Schweinhund"; a dirty German spy, who had been detected before he could carry out his nefarious intentions, and that his fate would be decided immediately by three "idiotic Americans" sitting on his case as a drumhead court-martial. His amazement at learning that I knew his language as well as he did filled him with impotent rage. This was a development which he had not foreseen. His fury at being thus fooled by me was short lived, however, being quickly replaced by blind horror as the significance of his situation grew upon him.

Stedman was now called in from the bridge through the voice pipe over the Captain's bunk.

A few brief sentences made the case clear to him. We then drew away to a corner of the room and conferred in whispers.

"What shall we do with him?" I asked my colleagues.

It was agreed that he must pay with his life the penalty for his crime, but "how?" was the question. Stedman made the happy suggestion to allow him to commit suicide, urging that a regular trial before a court-martial would only give undue publicity to a regrettable affair reflecting discredit on the navy and possibly bring to the scoundrel a certain amount of glory in his own country. Moreover, the Administration in Washington, in all possibility, would let him off with a paternal warning, or at most a short term of imprisonment. This did not appear to us an adequate punishment for his hideous crime, so, rightly or wrongly, we took matters into our own hands; notified Johnson that he had been condemned to death and offered him the alternative to be shot where he was or to jump overboard, a free man. In the latter event we would toss a lifebuoy after him and within his reach.

Unhesitatingly he chose the second horn of the dilemma. His feet and hands were then unbound. We three led him out through the door and to the side of the ship, where, and not until then, the gag was removed from his mouth.

"May God forgive you for what you meant to do," said I. "You have staked your life on the game you tried to play and you have lost. Nevertheless, we are giving you one chance to save it, little as you deserve consideration. Are you ready?"

"Yes," he answered in a low tone.

"One, two, three," I counted. At the word three Stedman tossed a life preserver overboard. It was instantly followed by Johnson, who jumped to the rail and with a wild yell, "Hoch der Kaiser!" hurled himself after it into the boiling waters.

The cry of "Man overboard!" was at once raised by Baker; Stedman and I ran to the bridge. As officer of the deck, he stopped the ship and manned the lifeboat. In a loud voice, however, I ordered him not to risk the lives of seven men by lowering the lifeboat in such a sea, but to stand by the unfortunate sailor, getting the ship as near him as possible and to leeward. In this way the traditions of the service were observed. Ostensibly we did all that could be done to save a drowning shipmate, but every one on board realized that no human being could survive in such a seething cauldron.

After an hour spent in the seeming attempt to rescue a man who had "gone mad and committed suicide," as we informed the crew, with all the apparent reluctance in the world, the ship resumed her course and Johnson was left to his fate—far more kindly than his deserts warranted. Our last sight of him was for a brief moment after he jumped overboard. He was struggling to seize the lifebuoy, which appeared to evade him as the huge combers carried it out of his reach. Then the darkness swallowed him up, never again to be seen of mortal men.

The rest of the cruise may be passed over briefly. The third degree was applied by Baker and me to the Quartermaster "Smith." From him we ascertained the "focussing" of the compasses by means of tiny magnets glued underneath the compass cards; also such details of the plot as the Captain dared entrust to a seaman. That he was the Captain's only accomplice was reasonably well established. We kept him in close confinement until we reached Queenstown, where, by mutual agreement between Admiral Sims and the British authorities, he was turned over to the tender mercies of the latter, who were notably less disposed than our own to condone so black a villany. I believe that he was first discharged as an enlisted man in the American Navy and then tried as a German spy for plotting against the delivery of the war materials which the Ponticus was bringing over for the British Munitions Department. I am not quite sure, but I labor under the strong conviction that he joined Karl Lody, one of the first of these vermin to suffer for his work.

The case was reported in full to the Navy Department in two documents, one stating with deep regret the temporary insanity and suicide of Lieutenant Charles Johnson, U. S. N. R. F.; the other a confidential and exact account of the whole affair. The latter, I am given to understand, was suppressed "for the public good."

Not only was the Ponticus thus saved from falling into the hands of the enemy, but our code radiogram to the Commander-in-Chief informing him of the discovered plot, but giving no further details, other than the location and hour of the proposed rendezvous, was instrumental in his sending three destroyers to the spot. In the most complete and satisfactory manner they accounted for the German submarine U——. This it would seem was a very different meeting from the one planned by Johnson and his fellow schemers in Berlin. Had it been carried out as intended, the Ponticus would have been added to the list of the countless vessels which have met their end in "the port of missing ships" and this story would never have been told.

Flowers Offer New Source of Spirit for Motors

THE great number of motor vehicles of all kinds is causing serious consideration to be given to the question as to where the gasolene or petrol is to come from to keep these going. Power alcohol is mentioned as a solution. To make this from potatoes is possible, but it requires a ton of potatoes to produce twenty gallons of alcohol. A British writer suggests that the greatest possibilities seem to be offered in tropical and subtropical countries. East Africa is mentioned as an example. In that country two crops of maize can be obtained each year, and about eighty gallons of alcohol can be made from a ton of maize.

In the current number of the *Bulletin of the Imperial Institute* the possibility is discussed of utilizing the mowra flowers of India for the purpose of manufacturing alcohol for use as motor spirit. These flowers possess thick, juicy petals, rich in sugar. They are used by the natives as a foodstuff, and especially for the preparation by fermentation of an alcoholic liquor called daru or mahwa spirit. A single tree will yield as much as 200 to 300 pounds of flowers in a year. The tree also produces a valuable oil seed, which is exported in fairly large quantities to Europe.

During the war the flowers were used in India for the production of acetone, the yield being said to be ten times as much as that obtained by distilling wood, the usual source of this substance. The demand for acetone in India in peace times, however, is not great, and large quantities of the flowers would be available for the manufacture of alcohol, and would appear to be an exceptionally cheap source of this material, as the yield is high compared with that from potatoes and other materials commonly used, about ninety gallons of 95 per cent. alcohol being obtainable from one ton of dried flowers.

It has been estimated that in Hyderabad State alone there are already sufficient mowra trees for the production of 700,000 gallons of proof spirit per annum, in addition to that necessary for the local liquor requirements. A report prepared for the Nizam of Hyderabad states that the total cost of preparing the flowers and transporting them to the factory amounts to $7.25 per ton. It is suggested that the most profitable way of utilizing the flowers would probably be as a source of mixed motor spirit of the natalite type for use in India. That motor spirit can be produced on a manufacturing scale in India from mowra flowers has already been demonstrated, and it is stated that running trials with the spirit proved satisfactory.