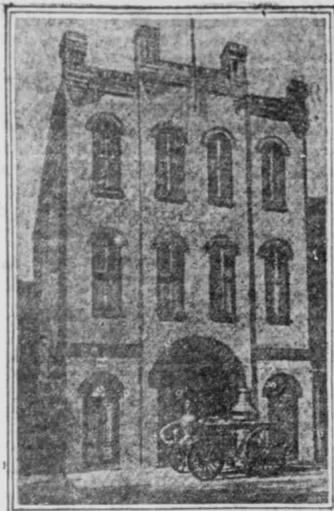


The Thrilling Fire Rescues that Sent Ten "Heroes" to Jail

And the Surprising Climax to the Carefully Staged Performance of the Vigilant Boys, Who Thought That the Columbia, Pa., Girls Admired Screen Stars More Than Their Local Firemen.



Home of the Vigilant Fire Company No. 2 at Columbia, Pa.

THOSE who believe in the Pythagorean theory might say that the recent arrest of 10 firemen on the charge of incendiarism at Columbia, Pa., which placed that small city down stage in the public spotlight, was just a matter of metempsychosis, and that the soul of the historic firebug, Herostratus, had merely transmigrated to the men accused of setting fire to structures in their town to give themselves a "rep" as heroes. Readers doubtless will recall that Herostratus was what the vulgar today would call a "nut" who, having failed to get his name inscribed in the hall of fame, sought to write it—and succeeded—in the annals of infamy, by burning to the ground the beautiful temple of Artemis, the Greek goddess of the hunt, which was a landmark in the architecture of the ancient city of Ephesus.

But, on the contrary, those who are not interested in things ancient and mythological will tell you that the whole sad affair was nothing but the logical sequence to the psychology of the volunteer firemen whose own efficiency had destroyed a chance of playing in the limelight of public attention. These will go even further. They'll blame the arrest of the ten "vamps" on the girl vamps of Columbia, who egged on the men of Vigilant company to perform those sorry deeds which have caused their incarceration.

By Joseph H. Appelgate

FULLY to appreciate this story one must understand the volunteer fireman; one must bear in mind that the only pay he ever gets is that of praise, and that laudation is to him what catnip is to a cat. No one seems to understand what either gets from either habit. But both fairly roll in it and that's all there is about it. Just like those the world over are the firemen and the cats at Columbia, Pa.

No nobler organization exists anywhere in the world than the "vamps." Its personnel is composed of the most public-spirited men. They risk their lives for their fellow-citizens and sometimes sacrifice them. They are probably the last remaining organization in the country which typifies the spirit of Americanism and neighborly helpfulness that cut the clearing, blazed the trail and set up the standards of the white man's civilization on the far-flung frontiers of an Indian-infested and dangerous country. Justly proud are the "vamps" of their heritage and their uniform.

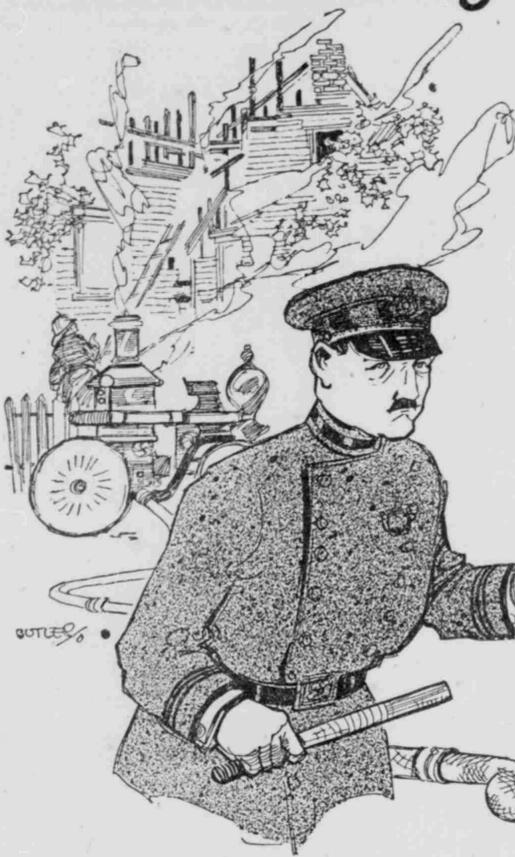
It was a different kind of vamp at Columbia which started the trouble. The girls of the town, who had been bitten by the movie bug and had set their standards of men and things by what they saw flashed on the screen, determined to vamp the local firemen into heroic deeds or have nothing to do with them. And, as there was nothing doing as far as fires were concerned, they ostracized the smoke-esters and lionized the World War veterans much to the bitter envy and disappointment of the young firemen of the town. It was rather rough on the boys of Vigilant company of Columbia, Pa.

A Flapper's Idea of a Hero

"Aw say!" ejaculated one of the girls to one of the firemen who accosted her on the street to ask if he might call on her. "What kind of a pal would you make for a live girl, anyway? You are a counterfeit. You strut around in uniform and never do anything. If you want to get in with us girls why don't you rescue someone at a fire or do something to show that you've got the pep of Wallace Reid. There's a man for you!"

Shifting her gum from one to 'other cheek she whisked away.

It was a resounding slap in the face. It was a sort of "hands not a hero's will never win mine"



ultimatum. It was a startling awakening. It fairly stunned the young man and started his mind working. And he ruminated something in this fashion:

"What would be the harm? The firemen would get there soon enough to prevent injury or loss of life. And as for property loss—why, the insurance companies are protecting all the business structures. Why not?"

The suggestion was obvious. If the girls really wanted fires—and the flapper who had made the remark represented the coterie in the city, and, therefore, probably was spokeswoman for them all—why, by heck! fires they would have!

It should here be explained that the remark of the movie-mad girl had been inspired by a pretty free discussion of the subject among her friends, and it was not to be otherwise expected than that other girls should say similar things to other young vamps.

Suddenly, the long-silent fire alarm began to screech its iron-throated summons. Not occasionally, this month and that. But every night. Residences, office buildings, manufactories, began to go up in smoke, and peaceful sleep became as scarce in that community as an attentive office boy in the baseball season. Life was one darned fire after another, and, in the front pages of the local newspapers, there began to bloom the names of heroic firemen, so that, when a "vamp" walked through the streets, his admiring neighbors would point him out to the uninformed and say:

"See that man? Well, that's so and so, the fireman who made that wonderful rescue of the mother and baby at last night's fire. Oh, we have some fire department, I'll say!"

Thus did youth have its way and thus did the erstwhile jilted fire laddies win their way into the graces of girls whose kisses were grateful and whose devotion so entire that no one not garbed as a "vamp" had a chance with the baby vamps of Columbia. The park benches groaned with them, the dim hallways were filled with them—these spooning fire heroes and their lady loves! It was rather costly and risky work, but it worked! Vulcan made a corking cupid.

Then, one day not long ago, a stranger happened in town, an out-at-the-elbows, fringed-trousers individual, whose beard was unkempt and whose whole appearance was that of the man who jazzed through the high wages of war work and again tumbled to the bottom of the social scale. He loitered about street corners, where young men were wont to congregate to hurl pleasantries at passing girls. He was frequently ordered to "move on" by the policemen. He openly "trapped butts" with the dexterity of the graduate hobo.

Slouching near a corner one night the ragged stranger happened within earshot of a youth and a girl.

"You ain't no hero," said the girl. "Why didn't you get in like Jack and climb up that ladder instead of tending to the hose. You let Jack

carry that woman down the ladder when you should have done it yourself. You're a hunk, you are!"

"All right, Mollie, but you wait until the next fire!" replied the civilian-dressed fireman.

"And when is that?" asked the girl, flippantly.

The youth whispered to her and the girl laughed.

Presently the man left the girl and the ragged one stumbled along behind. The youth turned the corner. Then, suddenly, the "shadow" disappeared and, instead, a well-dressed man with soft hat and tightly buttoned coat followed the fireman. Had the wind been particularly strong that day it would have revealed that the lining of the fine looking coat was quite tattered!

The Stranger Gets Busy

Nor was the stranger hobo seen again that day, but at midnight, when fire suddenly broke out in a dwelling near the center of the city, and not far from the home of the youth who had been talking that afternoon with the girl, he reappeared. He was quite a busy person, it was noted, assisting the firemen to the point of personal danger, so much so that a rescue party was sent to get him after he had remained quite long in the burning house, in the basement room where the fire had started. They found him, did these heroic firemen, on his hands and knees. He apparently had been overcome by the smoke. Anyway, it was so thick in there that they did not see the quick motion with which he stuffed something into his pocket—something that was charred and gave off the strong odor of kerosene oil.

After that the hobo was at every fire. The smoke-eaters got to know him. They really appreciated his help. Once, he too was mentioned in the account of a local newspaper as an "unknown hero" who had helped save a child. Also, it was noticed, that the tramp, whose conversation led some to remark that he had "seen better days," got on speaking terms with the girls, who made him quite a confidant of their love secrets, he was so engaging and interesting in his conversation, despite his shabbiness.

This continued for several weeks until, one afternoon, a body of state troopers jogged into town. They were led by a man in uniform who strangely resembled the ragged stranger. Before they left they had served warrants on ten of the "vamps," charging them with arson. Two of the firemen for whom they had warrants got

away. Then, having cleaned up his case, Inspector Thomas S. Ryan of the arson squad of the state constabulary, went out on another case, taking his ragged clothes and his fringed trousers and his convertible coat and soft hat with him. But, before he went away, he said:

"It was the strangest case I ever worked on. I knew it was incendiarism from the very outset, but the utter lack of robbery along with it puzzled me. Then I overheard the conversation between the girl and the firemen and everything became clear. I followed that man that day and later shadowed him to the house where he started the fire. I let him go the limit because, in the eyes of the law, a conspiracy must go so far in order to come within the meaning of the statutes. Then I got the burned, oil-soaked rag and proceeded to do the same thing in several other cases.

"The firemen worked in twos and threes and sometimes fours. In most instances it was the love of the girls that inspired them to make the fires. But in one or two cases, where older men were involved, they merely did it to 'show off' the efficiency of the fire-fighting force."

Alleged Firebugs

The men arrested were: George J. Murr, Chester L. Bentley, George J. Grab, Charles R. Reamer, William Hasselbach, Clayton S. Kise, Albert Lowery, Harold G. Murr, Clayton S. Kise and William J. Ziegler, the latter the fire company's driver.

According to Inspector Ryan the "teams" and their alleged acts of incendiarism were: Smith, Bentley and G. Murr, small warehouse. H. Murr and Albert Lowery, two-story brick house.

Bentley, Reamer and Grab, three-story brick building.

Hasselbach and G. Murr, Union Hotel stable.

G. Murr and Bibb, big garage.

G. Murr and Kise, warehouse.

G. Murr, the Hiram Wilson stable.

H. Murr and Lowery, two-story frame house.

Small outbuilding fires are charged to H. Murr, Reamer, Smith, Grab and Lowery in number.

Most of the fires did considerable damage, in most cases the buildings being gutted before the "fire fighters" got in action or had a chance to do the hero stuff.



William J. Ziegler.



Albert Lowery.

PHOTOGRAPHS OF TEN MEMBERS OF THE VIGILANT FIRE COMPANY ARRESTED ON CHARGES OF ARSON



Clayton H. Smith.



Chester L. Bentley.



George J. Grab.



Charles R. Reamer.



Clayton S. Kise.



William Hasselbach.



George J. Murr.



Harold G. Murr.

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