Editorial Page of The Birmingham Eccentric

A free, responsible and aggressive Press is democracy's first line of defense

Knocking on Wood

with JOHN H. HARWOOD

THE HOUR GROWS CLOSER

THE American Air force and Navy will probably be the first to get into the war, present developments indicate, although it would not be surprised to see a couple of divisions of an AEF get into action at some outpost of the world struggle.

The British-Greek defeat in the Balkans, while it was regrettable, came as no surprise, for never did that alliance have enough men, airplanes or guns to withstand the German rush. Particularly must the soldiers have missed the high command for failure to send enough planes to check the Nazi air force as it did at Dunkirk; but the British did not send the planes and pilots because they could not be spared from other battle fronts. In fact, the whole Balkan adventure of the British was a token affair, a noble gesture of assistance to two little countries which dared to fight.

This war, more than any other, is taking a tragic toll of the cream of each nation's young men, for mortality has been high on the various air forces and everyone knows that only the smartest, most physically-fit men are admitted to the branch of the service.

So, without doubt, Britain has need of many more pilots. Not only that, with attacks being feared at Gibraltar, at Singapore, at the Suez Canal, and in England itself, the British must have need of more foot soldiers and their equipment. That open naval assistance could be helpful has been obvious for some time.

The hour of America's participation in the war grows nearer every day, and the administration and our armed forces have been preparing for it since the fall of France, but never have they been brave enough to admit their plans and thus permit congress to debate the basic issues. Rather, the Administration has been making policy rather than Congress.

We are in so deep that I am almost at the verge of concluding: "What's the use of kidding ourselves any longer? This country is being run by the Administration, not Congress, and the Administration is committed to war. Why wait? Why not start complete convoy service at once, send an army to Africa to help the Reds, seize Dakar, and prepare our General Headquarters Air Force for immediate foreign service?"

THE FAMOUS FINNIGIN

The Publisher's auxiliary recently revealed for the first time, to me at least, the origin of the famous old phrase: "Off again, on again, gone again, Finnigin." The article follows:

In 1879 Strickland Gillilan, destined for future fame as a humorist, after-dinner speaker and lecturer, was editor of the Richmond (Ind.) Daily Palladium. One day in March of that year news was scarce in Richmond and Editor Gillilan found himself with nothing "to fill up the paper." Some time previously he had heard a story about the facetious report of a minor railroad accident which a section boss named Finnigin had sent to his superintendent who was named Flannigan. The story popped into his mind again and he immediately composed a "poetic" version of it.

"I was astounded" that evening after the paper came out to find that old rodgers who never had been known to smile were laughing when I approached them," said Mr. Gillilan in telling of the origin of the poem. "'Hello, Finnigin,' they said. 'Well,' I said to myself, 'what Finnigin has these mummies doing.' If it could do that to them, I decided, maybe it was good enough for others to see. You know, we didn't have many subscribers and anything that appeared in our paper didn't circulate far. Our sworn circulation amounted to only 2,500. So I changed a word or two in the poem and sent it to Life, the humorous magazine, which published it. It has been reprinted almost every year since that time, and I have recited it thousands of times at the request of audiences." The poem follows:

Off Again, On Again, Gone Again, Finnigin

Superintindint wuz Flansigan;
Boss av section was Finnigin;
Whinever the kyars got offen the thrack
An' muddled up things t' th' devil an back,
Finnigin writ it to Flannigan,
Affeby the wrick wuz all on again.
That is, this Finnigin
Reported to Flannigan,
"Make'em brief, Finnigan!"
From Finnigin to Flannigan,
"Reports won't be long again."

Wan day on the section av Finnigin,
On the road sup'rintinded by Flannigan,
A rail gave way on a bit av a curve
An' some kyars went off as they made the swerve.
"There's nobody hurted," says Finnigin,
"But reports must be made to Flannigan."
And he sinked at McGorrigan,
As married a Finnigin.

He wuz shantyin' thin, wuz Finnigin,
As manny's a railroader's been again,
An' the smokey ol' lamp was burning bright
In Finnigin's shanty all that night,
Bilin' down his report, wuz Finnigin,
An' he writed this here: "Mister Flannigan:
"Off again, on again,
"Gone again.—Finnigin."

Congressional Comment by Representative George A. Dondero 17th Michigan District

(Congressional Record, April 18, 1941)

The St. Lawrence Question

The St. Lawrence seaway and power project proposes a direct route to the Atlantic through the St. Lawrence Channel, providing a minimum depth of 27 feet as contrasted with the present limit of 14 feet through the existing canals on the St. Lawrence River.

Studies by the Federal Government indicate that this new channel would accommodate more than half of the world's cargo tonnage and would open up a vast new inland empire benefitting 40,000,000 of our people in about 20 States on or near the Great Lakes.

The effect of the seaway would be to create a new frontier in America and open up vast channels of trade not now enjoyed by the great inland empire. Studies by the United States Department of Commerce indicate that it would be only be a tremendous aid to defense but that it would have incalculable benefits from a lasting long-range standpoint.

From the large perspective of national welfare, the seaway project has received the enthusiastic endorsement of every single President since William Howard Taft. A plank in the Republican Presidential platform of 1932 endorsed it. A Republican President negotiated a treaty with Canada in 1932 and a Democratic President supported it in Congress.

A New Frontier

Opposition comes principally from powerfully organized local groups such as power interests in New York State, the railroads, certain Great Lakes carriers, and Gulf, Atlantic seaboard, and a few Great Lakes ports now collecting tolls for the transshipment of goods for the export market.

Versailles Treaty And Adolf Hitler

Two weeks ago, in comment titled, "France Finds Defeat Expensive," we referred to some folks being moved by "sloppy sentimentalism" when they attempted to place responsibility for present-day world troubles upon the harsh terms of the famous Treaty of Versailles.

Most of the world believes that this Treaty was responsible, in its terrific demands upon then defeated Germany, for causing the rise of Hitlerism in Germany, with its contemporary barbarism in Europe. As a matter-of-fact from information that was told to Michigan editors in East Lansing last January by a former member of the German Reichstag, this Treaty of Versailles never was kept intact, as to actual original terms being carried out by the Allies. In other words, the financial demands upon Germany for reparations were softened by the Charles B. Dawes and the Owen Young plans; the Allied Army of Occupation was withdrawn six years before necessary.

In brief, the sum total of the Allied demands upon Germany, severe as they may have been, were as nothing compared to the demands now being made upon her vanquished nations by the Nazis under Hitler.

We are reiterating these statements here because last week we received a letter from a well-known Birmingham citizen (who requested that we do not print his letter with his name included), in which he chided us for using the words "sloppy sentimentalities" as a description of "those who apparently don't go along with your thought in the matter."

Our friendly critic continues: "However bad the Germans are, and they are bad today, does not make Versailles right. When a man is sinking in a mire, anyone who will offer to pull him out will find that the mired man will go along with him. Versailles made the mire for Germany, and Hitler came along and so far as the people know, he was the one to pull them out. Previous to Hitler, when the German people were struggling in the task of trying to sustain democracy, what did England and France do to help? Nothing. That was the time when the so-called democracies might have been able to save the world, if they had shown a little more brotherly love; but they were too selfish for that.

"The whole mess is 'world power politics,' which you know as well as anyone else who will give it a little thought. Let's not cloud the issue with Versailles and 'sloppy sentimentalists.'"

So endeth the letter from our Birmingham critic.

Now, Good Friend who wrote this letter, please don't assume that the phrase "sloppy sentimentalists" is meant to apply to all who accuse the Versailles Treaty of being the chief, even single, cause of this present World War. We agree with you mightily that the Versailles Treaty, as with practically every treaty ever written by a victor nation, or nations, over the prostrate form of a vanquished enemy, have been contributory causes to the almost unceasing wars that history has recorded.

We also agree that had France and England, following the World War No. 1, accepted more of the letter and the spirit of ex-President Woodrow Wilson, in dealing with the restoration of post-war Germany, under the Weimar Republic, this present war would not now be going on; at least it would have been deferred for some years to come. So we don't argue with you upon the basic evils that result from any treaty born on a bloody battlefield.

But we do publish as our conviction the belief that the Versailles Treaty, in and of itself, did not create the type of warfare now being conducted by Hitler & Co. This current war reveals the facties of every manner of crookedness, dirty double-dealing, moral turpitude, diplomatic unclealiness, etc., etc., that the devil-incarnated can think of. Hitler's record in this war offers plenty of proof that his word is without any dependability at all; by comparison, the former German Kaiser was a scholar and a gentleman.

Germany's financial demands, for example, upon France today demand eight millions of dollars every day to support the Nazi army in France's territory; that is at the rate of two billion, nine hundred twenty millions of dollars per year. That's only to maintain the present army; it is not any part of what Germany, if finally victorious, may demand from France.

In conclusion, we cannot refrain from declaring that the basic cause of modern war is a maladjustment of economic opportunity and wealth that exists over the whole earth; a single nation, or a group of nations, will never be able to prevent the recurrence of future wars until a lawful economic truth is perceived in human consciousness, and then applied actually in the business of producing and distributing the wealth that man is capable of creating.

Armchair Philosopher

THE RIGHT START

There is a man I know who has a sign above his desk which reads: "Be pleasant, every morning until ten o'clock. The rest of the day will take care of itself." This suggestion creates an atmosphere of good cheer in the office. Everybody has the habit of starting the day with a smile and a pleasant word, thus setting the right keynote for the entire day.

Another man I know reads something inspiring before he leaves home in the morning. He believes that setting up exercises are as important for the mind as for the body. He tunes up his mind with big, positive, constructive thoughts before the day's business battle begins.

In a psychology class I attended, the instructor always started the session by asking: "How is everybody today?" and we were taught to enthusiastically respond in unison, "Fine and dandy and why shouldn't we be?" It was almost magical the way those words vitalized the meeting.

Getting off to the right start is at least half the secret of a successful day.

Eaton's Bill Now Awaits Governor

Several years ago Elton R. Eaton, Plymouth, Michigan publisher, then a member of the House of Representatives at Lansing, attempted to put through a bill that would make it difficult for a political boss to control heavily populated Wayne County. Mr. Eaton's bill sought to create five areas in Wayne County, one for each Congressional district, each area to hold its own political convention for the nomination of delegates to State and County conventions.

His bill passed the House, but was defeated by the single vote of Felix Elvin, then a member of the Senate. Elvin, Eaton claimed, was dominated by political bosses Frank H. McKay and Edward N. Barnard.

Times goes on and now the present Michigan Legislature has passed a bill, patterned after Eaton's, which awaits the signature of Governor Murray D. Van Wagoner to make it a law. It is hardly conceivable that the Governor will fail to attach his signature to this much needed piece of legislation.

When this bill becomes law, Wayne County, which includes Detroit, will have a chance to break the gang of the political bosses who, for many years, have been able to make a farce of State conventions by the simple expedient of swapping State jobs and patronage for the votes that such men like Barnard have been able to carry around on their vest pockets.

THIS WEEK THE CHILDREN'S AID SOCIETY is receiving congratulations on its 50th anniversary of service, and in the center of the spotlight will be one of Michigan's most public-spirited men, Col. Edwin S. George, our neighbor in Bloomfield Hills, president of the Society since 1926. Col. George, in this community is chiefly beloved for his generosity in giving the Boy Scouts a large tract of land for their camping activities, but also as a part of his many public-spirited endeavors. Long Life and Health to Colonel!

ONE EVENING LAST WEEK, at the Birmingham Boy Scout Camp on Col. Edwin S. George's estate in Bloomfield Hills, a local chap named Charles S. Kinnison was given a plaque, symbolic of his 2 years of helpful work for the youth of this community. The plaque, the gift of the Birmingham Boy Scout Committee, was in recognition of Mr. Kinnison's interest in boys' welfare. Mr. Kinnison, known better as "Chuck," deserved this gift from the hands of Col. George, who made the presentation for the committee. But, nice as this testimonial affair was, as we said last week, we'll wager that Mr. Kinnison long ago received many times over, from the lips and lives of boys whom have been influenced by him, that rare and soulful recompense that comes from within one's own self; a feeling of spiritual exaltation that comes alone from doing good.

CONGRATULATIONS to the Birmingham Exchange Club, who, last week, celebrated the 17th anniversary of the organization in Birmingham. Those local business and professional men meet every Tuesday noon at the Community House; fine fellowship, concern over community problems, and considerable personal engagement in sports by many of them, stand to the credit of this service club. May this club continue indefinitely!

REMEMBER Poor Richard's saying that "charity begins at home"; which is a very nice way of suggesting that the campaign to raise funds to support Birmingham's Community House, for the coming year is worthy of our financial consideration.

HATS OFF, GENTLEMEN, to the Birmingham branch of the Women's National Farm & Garden Association, for their splendid program of making the Birmingham Federal Building a riot of flowering crabapple trees, which wound up with Arbor Day exercises last Friday afternoon. These women have started a fine community objective; may it ever continue, and spread over the whole bloomin' town!

DO YOU THINK PRIME MINISTER Winston Churchill's scathing and contemptuous reference to Italy's Premier Mussolini last Sunday, over the radio? We have never heard so much contempt compressed into so few words, is Britain's fearless leader said that, after this war is over, Mussolini will face the kind of trial that Italian people will send him into oblivion.

WE NOTE A TENDENCY on the part of Governor Murray D. Van Wagoner to inject some legislation in Michigan. Has the Governor become wedded to the complete policy of governmental regimentation?

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Uncle Sam Has A Two-way Job

People's Column

The Eccentric plans to receive communications from its readers for publication in this column, but signatures must be given. Letters must be limited to 500 words and must be typewritten. Address them to Editor, The Eccentric, Birmingham.

World War Veteran Protests Our Entry

To the Editor:

You can publish this copy of my letter if you wish. I am against our getting into the present war. I'm not anti-Semitic, but this is not our war.

SHELTON WRIGHT

Hon. Arthur H. Vandenberg,
U. S. Senate,
Senate Office Building,
Washington, D. C.

Dear Mr. Vandenberg:

The letter is to tell you exactly the attitude of my family toward the United States getting into World War No. 2. Both parents in travelling two states I find pay friends and acquaintances well.

Since this letter is written as an individual and not at the suggestion of any organization.

I did go to World War No. 1 for the United States, declared war, I paid up every way by Liberty and joined the French army. This I did of choice for three years and yet couldn't see their people fighting for the last, and so I joined what I felt the only one to retire of his wife who went over together (on my side of the family to the war. I enlisted and my entire family signed over as did her father respectively two years overseas as Chaplain. I believe the two families did their bit and no two years more of my time I have yet to pay government that effort and that loss of life. I am decidedly against our entering World War No. 2.

If the United States were ever attacked their would never be any hesitancy on the part of myself or my two sons, regardless of age, of shedding our blood for any duty. If the majority of the people have a similar feeling it is wrong for any small group to decide that we, our land, should enter World War No. 2.

Respectfully,
SHELTON WRIGHT.

It's So!

Another factor in the Alabama farm diversification programs is the increasing cultivation of defense plants.—Montgomery Advertiser.

Publicity Chairman Extends Appreciation

To the Editor:

As the publicity chairman for the Birmingham Branch of the American Association of University Women for the past two years, I wish to thank you and your staff for the many courtesies extended to us.

We are indeed grateful for the news-space given to information concerning our programs and activities.

MARJORIE JANE MULLIN
(Mrs. George W. Mullin)

Greek Relief Group Plans Tag Day

A tag day is planned for the Greek War Relief fund in June 14, it was decided at the City Commission meeting Monday night. Dr. Peter Aristes, spokesman, asked for permission this Saturday, but that was denied because of the Girl Scout Penties solicitation on that day. Two weeks later will be Poppy Day, and the Commission decided a longer interval would be advisable, suggesting June 14.

A laugh is worth a hundred groans in any market.—Lamb.

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