

THE DISINTEGRATION OF THE KU KLUX KLAN

is seen by the *Montgomery Advertiser* and a number of American newspapers in the recent doffing of what has been the most bitterly criticized feature of its regalia—the mask. This is the second time in history that the Klan has discarded its hood, remarks the *Brooklyn Eagle*. No longer will shrouded faces march in the dusk of the evening behind a fiery cross; open faces openly arrived at seems to be the order of the day. In place of the old régime a new degree has been created—The Knights of the Great Forest. In other words, notes the *New York World*, “the Klan has taken to the woods.” With the mask go some of the secret and weird ceremonies of the order, says a Birmingham dispatch to the *New York Times*, but the membership roll is still held inviolate, and the oath and ritual are supposed to remain secret. The candidate of the new “K-Trio” degree, which admits him to the new order, is said to pledge himself to be loyal to the United States and to strive for supremacy of the white race.

What effect will this “face-lifting operation” have on the fortunes of the Ku Klux Klan? The *Norfolk Virginian-Pilot*, which thus lightly characterizes the latest move of the order, apparently doesn’t take the action of Imperial Wizard Evans very seriously. Nor does the *Decatur (Ala.) Daily*, which merely observes that the laundry bills of the members will be reduced thereby. “It has always been a recognized fact that the Klan derived much of its strength from the secrecy which the mask made possible,” we are reminded by the *South Bend Tribune*; what will happen now that the most important reason for public criticism has been removed?

In the opinion of the *Camden (N. J.) Post*, “the Ku Klux Klan has arrived at the jumping-off place. As an organization, it is through.” We read on:

“The Klan could have existed nowhere on the face of the earth, except in America. It was a success, temporarily, because it appealed to the playboy instinct of grown-ups and offered burning phrases of patriotism as the excuse for gallivanting about at nights. It blended together a childish mystery and romanticism with pretensions of deeply serious work for the grand old flag. It was as nice as kids playing Injun in the barn lot.

“It failed because its ‘patriotism’ was not real, but ancient bigotry in a new guise. It failed because its ‘mystery’ soon became an open secret and a tedious bore. It failed because its highest officers stood revealed as dollar grabbers. It failed, finally, because the genuine American sense of humor finally asserted itself and laughed the Klan out of court.”

“By unmasking, the Klan admits defeat,” agrees a Southern paper, the *Columbus (Ga.) Enquirer-Sun*, edited by Julian Harris, son of Joel Chandler Harris. There was no place for it in true American activities, explains the *New Haven Journal-Courier*. To the *New York Times*, “the Klan is of no importance now except as a reminder of certain foolish trends in American life.” The mask, says the *Winston-Salem Journal*, “opened the way to the perpetration of many an outrage, the commission of which was hid at the feet of the hooded order, whether justly or unjustly.”

That the Klan bowed to popular opinion in abandoning its disguise is the contention of the *Birmingham News*, which says

The Klan Goes in Face- Lifting

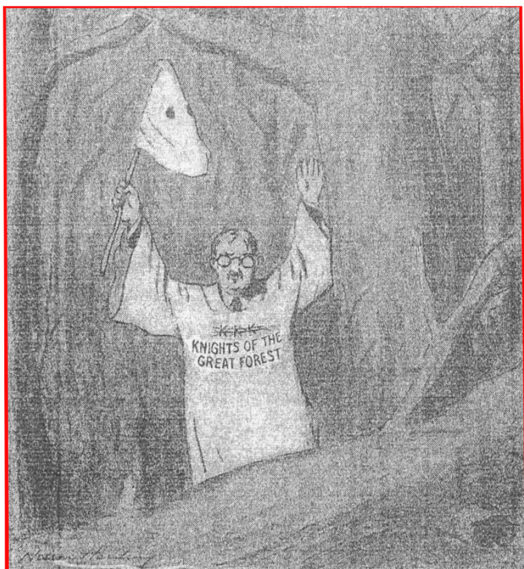
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in its news columns: "States and municipalities throughout the country are outlawing the mask. To forestall universal legislation against the hood, Klan officials deemed it wise to act voluntarily." According to a statement given out at the Klan's headquarters in Washington by Dr. Hiram W. Evans, Emperor and Imperial Wizard of the order, the action is in preparation "for new and larger activities in our national life." Says the statement, in part:

"By virtue of the power and authority in me vested as Emperor and Imperial Wizard of the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan, and in performance of the solemn duty assigned to me by its constitution and laws, I do hereby proclaim the following edict:

"That on and after midnight of February twenty-second,



"KLAMARADI!"

—Harding in the Brooklyn Eagle.

year of our Lord nineteen hundred and twenty-eight, no mask or visor shall be upon the helmet of the regalia of any Klansman. It shall hereafter be unlawful for any Klansman to wear any mask or visor as part of his regalia, and each Klansman who shall be unavoidably absent from the meeting of a klan to be held throughout the invisible empire on the twenty-second day of February shall, as soon thereafter as possible, attend a regular meeting of a klan and there become a member of the Knights of the Great Forest."

But, objects the *Hartford Courant*, "while the leopard can remove its mask, it can not change its spots." The Klan remains the same, "an organization of prejudice, masking itself under the name of Americanism," declares the *Albany News*. In another editorial, the *Hartford paper* "doubts that this stripping off of the mask in the limelight will create any warmer public sentiment for the Klan. Let it strip off its intolerance if it wishes to make an impression on the country." To the *Montgomery Advertiser*, this unmasking business "is the beginning of the end." Continues the *Alabama paper*:

"The Ku Klux Klan continues to disintegrate. Everywhere it is losing strength. Members are dropping out by the thousands. Even in its greatest strongholds the Klan is going fast. In fact, it appears to be going faster in States where it was once strong than in others, doubtless because in those States the exposure of Klan outrages, committed while the organization was powerful, has done more to discredit the Klan and turn public sentiment against it.

"Now the Klan proposes to discard the mask, thinking thereby to regain some of its lost strength. Klan officials believe that with the mask removed many will be attracted to the order who otherwise would not join. Finally, the mask is to be

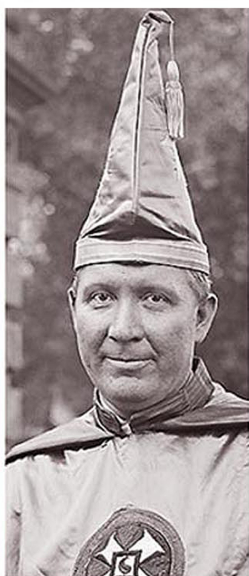
removed, it is said, because Klan officials realize that it would be only a matter of time before legislation in the various States would compel the members to unmask.

"That the Klan has been a political organization all along, of course, is well known. But the Klan has pretended to exist for other purposes. It is now revealed as an organization existing solely for political purposes, and admittedly so. As such, we do not believe very many new members will be attracted to it. Americans do not like to be told for whom they can vote and for whom they must not vote.

"The chief aim of the Klan now is to prevent the nomination and election of Alfred E. Smith to the Presidency. On the strength of its opposition to Governor Smith it hopes to attract new members, and more money—for the Klan is primarily a money-making organization."

"Even the grand new degree, which has been made obligatory upon every member of the Klan—at one dollar a head—is an obvious device to fill a sinking treasury," maintains the *Birmingham Age-Herald*. But the *New York Herald Tribune* agrees with the *Montgomery Advertiser* that the unmasking of the Klan has considerable political significance. Says this New York paper:

"It may be that Emperor Hiram Evans entertains the notion that the Klan, by putting its house in order at this time, will find itself in a stronger position to exert some influence on the Presidential campaign. If so, he is laboring under a delusion. Except as one of a host of fraternal orders based on dark oaths and fancy ritual, the Klan, we should say, is through."



*Imperial Wizard
Hiram W. Evans*

(image added)

Imperial Wizard Evans has frankly declared in a *World's Work* article that every atom of the Klan's power will be used at the Democratic National Convention to defeat the nomination of the New York Governor, and, if necessary, at the polls in November to defeat his election. According to the Imperial Wizard:

"Our work in the coming campaign will be like that of an evangelist—to spread the truth. We shall try to make the issue so clear that no one may mistake it. We shall show how Smith is inextricably allied with bossism, with nullification, with alienism, with priest-rule. We shall show what all these mean, what danger they carry."

"The power of the Klan still makes itself felt in many States," we are told by the *Albany Knickerbocker Press*, published in what is temporarily Governor Smith's "home town." "It must be considered by the politicians." But, admits this paper, the Klan "is not the dominant, almost threatening, force which it was four years ago." Continues *The Knickerbocker Press*:

"It is said the Klan has been dwindling in numbers. If that is true, the abandonment of the mask and the creation of the new order should swell them again. The Klan may well come to exercise a considerable influence throughout the country as an association of good citizens, pursuing their objectives openly and frankly. Its metamorphosis should be its salvation."

In another *World's Work* article, dealing with the Klan's power in politics, Stanley Frost maintains that the order "may easily become the deciding power in either of the approaching national conventions." Continues this well-known writer:

"The Klan's political power is as simple as it is real: it is a

threat of personal reprisal upon recalcitrant politicians, a threat too dangerous to be ignored but too vague to be estimated or offset. This threat is the more terrifying because of its vagueness; behind the Klan mask is a political power of unknown potency, and one that can not be reached even for propitiation and bargaining unless it wishes to be reached. In most of the country no man who defies it can provide measures for his political security with any assurance that they will prove at all adequate.

"Klan membership to-day is only about a third of what it was in 1924. In Indiana, for example, the Klan claimed 500,000 members in 1924, and election returns more or less bore out the boast; it is doubtful whether there are 125,000 in the State to-day. In Colorado there seems to have been a drop of from around 75,000 to about 25,000. Yet there are offsets, and not small ones. In the first place, the remnant of members, tho much smaller, is more cohesive, of higher average mentality, and better disciplined. The Klan still holds a sufficient membership, and one sufficiently secret, to leave most politicians in most of the country uncertain as to just how dangerous it is, and therefore much inclined to propitiate it.

"In considering the weight that the Klan will be able to throw against Governor Smith this year, a little speculation is permissible. The great growth and prosperity of the Klan came during the last national campaign; the Klan methods, its appeal to emotion, its evangelistic program, all have their greatest value during times of excitement. In the main, also, its purposes are of the kind about which nothing can be done, and in which there is consequently little interest, except during elections, and especially national elections. It may quite safely

be predicted, then, that the Klan membership will be considerably larger in November than it is to-day. It seems doubtful whether it can reach the strength of 1924, since emotions once aroused and then allowed to die are hard to arouse again.

"But I believe it is also true, as Klan leaders claim, that nine-tenths of the men who have dropt out, even those deeply disgusted with the order, nevertheless remain in sympathy with its principles. If so, the millions of ex-members must be counted as political allies. If, during the coming campaign, it should even approximate its previous strength, the improved discipline of its members, the better leadership, and the spread of its propaganda will make it a more formidable opponent than before.

"Assuming that he [Evans] can keep the control he now has, however, the line-up of forces in the next Democratic Convention becomes clear. It will be Governor Smith against the Klan, as it was in 1924. I believe the Klan can prevent Smith's nomination, unless it decides that its objective, which is to place a mortal political disqualification upon all Catholics, can best be accomplished by allowing his nomination and then insuring that he is crushingly beaten at the election. This condition will be true whether the issue be fought out on the Catholic question, which is unlikely, or on Prohibition. It is far too early to offer any prediction as to the result, save one: The tensions, storms, quarrels, hatreds, and bitterness of 1924 will be repeated, and perhaps intensified."

The "new and larger activities" for which the unmasked Klan is now ready are explained by Dr. Evans, reports the *Washington Post*, as comprising "an intensive effort to promote the assimilation of those aliens now in America for the sturdy support of the Constitution and American laws and the inculcation through the United States of the wholesome patriotism based upon the fundamentals of Americanism as established in the founding of the Republic."



THE KLAN COMES OUT INTO THE OPEN

Whether a lean treasury influenced the Ku Klux Klan to doff the mask and thus increase its membership, as some newspapers claim; whether the desire to defeat Governor Smith at the Democratic Convention was behind the move, as several writers insist; or whether the ambition to do bigger and better things caused the change, as the Imperial Wizard of the order declares, the fact remains that the Klan has abolished this part of its regalia. The photograph shows four members appearing for the first time without their masks.