

### *Chapter Three*

#### THE BIG RED SCARE

**I**F THE American people turned a deaf ear to Woodrow Wilson's plea for the League of Nations during the early years of the Post-war Decade, it was not simply because they were too weary of foreign entanglements and noble efforts to heed him. They were listening to something else. They were listening to ugly rumors of a huge radical conspiracy against the government and institutions of the United States. They had their ears cocked for the detonation of bombs and the tramp of Bolshevik armies. They seriously thought—or at least millions of them did, millions of otherwise reasonable citizens—that a Red revolution might begin in the United States the next month or next week, and they were less concerned with making the world safe for democracy than with making America safe for themselves.

Those were the days when column after column of the front pages of the newspapers shouted the news of strikes and anti-Bolshevist riots; when radicals shot down Armistice Day paraders in the streets of Centralia, Washington, and in revenge the patriotic citizenry took out of the jail a member of the I. W. W.—a white American, be it noted—and lynched him by tying a rope around his neck and throwing him off a bridge; when properly elected members of the Assembly of New York State were expelled (and their constituents thereby disfranchised) simply because they had been elected as members of the venerable Socialist Party; when a jury in Indiana took two minutes to acquit a man for shooting and killing an alien because he had shouted, "To hell with the United States"; and when the Vice-Presi-

dent of the nation cited as a dangerous manifestation of radicalism in the women's colleges the fact that the girl debaters of Radcliffe had upheld the affirmative in an intercollegiate debate on the subject: "Resolved, that the recognition of labor unions by employers is essential to successful collective bargaining." It was an era of lawless and disorderly defense of law and order, of unconstitutional defense of the Constitution, of suspicion and civil conflict—in a very literal sense, a reign of terror.

For this national panic there was a degree of justification. During the war the labor movement had been steadily gaining in momentum and prestige. There had been hundreds of strikes, induced chiefly by the rising prices of everything that the laboring-man needed in order to live, but also by his new consciousness of his power. The government, in order to keep up production and maintain industrial peace, had encouraged collective bargaining, elevated Samuel Gompers to one of the seats of the mighty in the war councils at Washington, and given the workers some reason to hope that with the coming of peace new benefits would be showered upon them. Peace came, and hope was deferred. Prices still rose, employers resisted wage increases with a new solidarity and continued to insist on long hours of work, Woodrow Wilson went off to Europe in quest of universal peace and forgot all about the laboring-men; and in anger and despair, they took up the only weapon ready to their hand—the strike. All over the country they struck. There were strikes in the building trades, among the longshoremen, the stockyard workers, the shipyard men, the subway men, the shoe-workers, the carpenters, the telephone operators, and so on *ad infinitum*, until by November, 1919, the total number of men and women on strike in the industrial states was estimated by Alvin Johnson to be at least a million, with enough more in the non-industrial states, or voluntarily abstaining from work though not engaged in

recognized strikes, to bring the grand total to something like two million.

Nor were all of these men striking merely for recognition of their unions or for increases in pay or shorter hours—the traditional causes. Some of them were demanding a new industrial order, the displacement of capitalistic control of industry (or at least of their own industry) by government control: in short, something approaching a socialist régime. The hitherto conservative railroad workers came out for the Plumb Plan, by which the government would continue to direct the railroads and labor would have a voice in the management. When in September, 1919, the United Mine Workers voted to strike, they boldly advocated the nationalization of the mines; and a delegate who began his speech before the crowded convention with the words, "Nationalization is impossible," was drowned out by boos and jeers and cries of "Coal operator! Throw him out!" In the Northwest the I. W. W. was fighting to get the whip hand over capital through One Big Union. In North Dakota and the adjoining grain states, two hundred thousand farmers joined Townley's Non-Partisan League, described by its enemies—with some truth—as an agrarian soviet. (Townley's candidate for governor of Minnesota in 1916, by the way, had been a Swedish-American named Charles A. Lindbergh, who would have been amazed to hear that his family was destined to be allied by marriage to that of a Morgan partner.) There was an unmistakable trend toward socialistic ideas both in the ranks of labor and among liberal intellectuals. The Socialist party, watching the success of the Russian Revolution, was flirting with the idea of violent mass-action. And there was, too, a rag-tag-and-bobtail collection of communists and anarchists, many of them former Socialists, nearly all of them foreign-born, most of them Russian, who talked of going still further, who took their gospel direct from Moscow and, presumably with the aid of Rus-

sian funds, preached it aggressively among the slum and factory-town population.

This latter group of communists and anarchists constituted a very narrow minority of the radical movement—absurdly narrow when we consider all the to-do that was made about them. Late in 1919 Professor Gordon S. Watkins of the University of Illinois, writing in the *Atlantic Monthly*, set the membership of the Socialist party at 39,000, of the Communist Labor party at from 10,000 to 30,000, and of the Communist party at from 30,000 to 60,000. In other words, according to this estimate, the Communists could muster at the most hardly more than one-tenth of one per cent of the adult population of the country; and the three parties together—the majority of whose members were probably content to work for their ends by lawful means—brought the proportion to hardly more than two-tenths of one per cent, a rather slender nucleus, it would seem, for a revolutionary mass movement.

But the American business man was in no mood to consider whether it was a slender nucleus or not. He, too, had come out of the war with his fighting blood up, ready to lick the next thing that stood in his way. He wanted to get back to business and enjoy his profits. Labor stood in his way and threatened his profits. He had come out of the war with a militant patriotism; and mingling his idealistic with his selfish motives, after the manner of all men at all times, he developed a fervent belief that 100-per-cent Americanism and the Welfare of God's Own Country and Loyalty to the Teachings of the Founding Fathers implied the right of the business man to kick the union organizer out of his workshop. He had come to distrust anything and everything that was foreign, and this radicalism he saw as the spawn of long-haired slavs and unwashed East-Side Jews. And, finally, he had been nourished during the war years upon stories of spies and plotters and international intrigue. He had been

convinced that German sympathizers signaled to one another with lights from mountain-tops and put ground glass into surgical dressings, and he had formed the habit of expecting tennis courts to conceal gun-emplacements. His credulity had thus been stretched until he was quite ready to believe that a struggle of American laboring-men for better wages was the beginning of an armed rebellion directed by Lenin and Trotsky, and that behind every innocent professor who taught that there were arguments for as well as against socialism there was a bearded rascal from eastern Europe with a money bag in one hand and a smoking bomb in the other.

## § 2

The events of 1919 did much to feed this fear. On the 28th of April—while Wilson was negotiating the Peace Treaty at Paris, and homecoming troops were parading under Victory Arches—an infernal machine “big enough to blow out the entire side of the County-City Building” was found in Mayor Ole Hanson’s mail at Seattle. Mayor Hanson had been stumping the country to arouse it to the Red Menace. The following afternoon a colored servant opened a package addressed to Senator Thomas R. Hardwick at his home in Atlanta, Georgia, and a bomb in the package blew off her hands. Senator Hardwick, as chairman of the Immigration Committee of the Senate, had proposed restricting immigration as a means of keeping out Bolshevism.

At two o’clock the next morning Charles Caplan, a clerk in the parcel post division of the New York Post Office, was on his way home to Harlem when he read in a newspaper about the Hardwick bomb. The package was described in this news story as being about six inches long and three inches wide; as being done up in brown paper and, like the Hanson bomb, marked with the (false, of course) return

address of Gimbel Brothers in New York. There was something familiar to Mr. Caplan about this description. He thought he remembered having seen some packages like that. He racked his brain, and suddenly it all came back to him. He hurried back to the Post Office—and found, neatly laid away on a shelf where he had put them because of insufficient postage, sixteen little brown-paper packages with the Gimbel return address on them. They were addressed to Attorney-General Palmer, Postmaster-General Burleson, Judge Landis of Chicago, Justice Holmes of the Supreme Court, Secretary of Labor Wilson, Commissioner of Immigration Caminetti, J. P. Morgan, John D. Rockefeller, and a number of other government officials and capitalists. The packages were examined by the police in a neighboring fire-house, and found to contain bombs. Others had started on their way through the mails; the total number ultimately accounted for reached thirty-six. (None of the other packages were carelessly opened, it is hardly necessary to say; for the next few days people in high station were very circumspect about undoing brown-paper packages.) The list of intended recipients was strong evidence that the bombs had been sent by an alien radical.

Hardly more than a month later there was a series of bomb explosions, the most successful of which damaged the front of Attorney-General Palmer's house in Washington. It came in the evening; Mr. Palmer had just left the library on the ground floor and turned out the lights and gone up to bed when there was a bang as of something hitting the front door, followed by the crash of the explosion. The limbs of a man blown to pieces were found outside, and close by, according to the newspaper reports, lay a copy of *Plain Words*, a radical publication.

The American public read the big headlines about these outrages and savagely resolved to get back at "these radicals."

How some of them did so may be illustrated by two incidents out of dozens which took place during those days. Both of them occurred on May Day of 1919—just after Mr. Caplan had found the brown-paper packages on the Post Office shelf. On the afternoon of May Day the owners and staff of the *New York Call*, a Socialist paper, were holding a reception to celebrate the opening of their new office. There were hundreds of men, women, and children gathered in the building for innocent palaver. A mob of soldiers and sailors stormed in and demanded that the "Bolshevist" posters be torn down. When the demand was refused, they destroyed the literature on the tables, smashed up the offices, drove the crowd out into the street, and clubbed them so vigorously—standing in a semicircle outside the front door and belaboring them as they emerged—that seven members of the *Call* staff went to the hospital.

In Cleveland, on the same day, there was a Socialist parade headed by a red flag. An army lieutenant demanded that the flag be lowered, and thereupon with a group of soldiers leaped into the ranks of the procession and precipitated a free-for-all fight. The police came and charged into the *mêlée*—and from that moment a series of riots began which spread through the city. Scores of people were injured, one man was killed, and the Socialist headquarters were utterly demolished by a gang that defended American institutions by throwing typewriters and office furniture out into the street.

The summer of 1919 passed. The Senate debated the Peace Treaty. The House passed the Volstead Act. The Suffrage Amendment passed Congress and went to the States. The R-34 made the first transatlantic dirigible flight from England to Mineola, Long Island, and returned safely. People laughed over "*The Young Visitors*" and wondered whether Daisy Ashford was really James M. Barrie. The newspapers denounced sugar-hoarders and food profiteers

as the cost of living kept on climbing. The first funeral by airplane was held. Ministers lamented the increasing laxity of morals among the young. But still the fear and hatred of Bolshevism gripped the American mind as new strikes broke out and labor became more aggressive and revolution spread like a scourge through Europe. And then, in September, came the Boston police strike, and the fear was redoubled.

### § 3

The Boston police had a grievance: their pay was based on a minimum of \$1,100, out of which uniforms had to be bought, and \$1,100 would buy mighty little at 1919 prices. They succumbed to the epidemic of unionism, formed a union, and affiliated with the American Federation of Labor. Police Commissioner Curtis, a stiff-necked martinet, had forbidden them to affiliate with any outside organization, and he straightway brought charges against nineteen officers and members of the union for having violated his orders, found them guilty, and suspended them. The Irish blood of the police was heated, and they threatened to strike. A committee appointed by the mayor to adjust the dispute proposed a compromise, but to Mr. Curtis this looked like surrender. He refused to budge. Thereupon, on September 9, 1919, a large proportion of the police walked out at the time of the evening roll call.

With the city left defenseless, hoodlums proceeded to enjoy themselves. That night they smashed windows and looted stores. Mayor Peters called for State troops. The next day the Governor called out the State Guard, and a volunteer police force began to try to cope with the situation. The Guardsmen and volunteer police—ex-service men, Harvard students, cotton brokers from the Back Bay—were inexperienced, and the hoodlums knew it. Guardsmen were



goaded into firing on a mob in South Boston and killed two people. For days there was intermittent violence, especially when Guardsmen upheld the majesty of the law by breaking up crap games in that garden of sober Puritanism, Boston Common. The casualty list grew, and the country looked on with dismay as the Central Labor Union, representing the organized trade unionists of the city, debated holding a general strike on behalf of the policemen. Perhaps, people thought, the dreaded revolution was beginning here and now.

But presently it began to appear that public opinion in Boston, as everywhere else, was overwhelmingly against the police and that theirs was a lost cause. The Central Labor Union prudently decided not to call a general strike. Mr. Curtis discharged the nineteen men whom he had previously suspended and began to recruit a new force.

Realizing that the game was nearly up, old Samuel Gompers, down in Washington, tried to intervene. He wired to the Governor of Massachusetts that the action of the Police Commissioner was unwarranted and autocratic.

The Governor of Massachusetts was an inconspicuous, sour-faced man with a reputation for saying as little as possible and never jeopardizing his political position by being betrayed into a false move. He made the right move now. He replied to Gompers that there was "no right to strike against the public safety by anybody, anywhere, any time"—and overnight he became a national hero. If there had been any doubt that the strike was collapsing, it vanished when the press of the whole country applauded Calvin Coolidge. For many a week to come, amateur policemen, pressed into emergency service, would come home at night to the water side of Beacon Street to complain that directing traffic was even more arduous than a whole day of golf at the Country Club; it took time to recruit a new force. But recruited it was, and Boston breathed again.

Organized labor, however, was in striking mood. A few days later, several hundred thousand steel-workers walked out of the mills—after Judge Gary had shown as stiff a neck as Commissioner Curtis and had refused to deal with their union representatives.

Now there was little radicalism among the steel strikers. Their strike was a protest against low wages and long hours. A considerable proportion of them worked a twelve-hour day, and they had a potentially strong case. But the steel magnates had learned something from the Boston Police Strike. The public was jumpy and would condemn any cause on which the Bolshevist label could be pinned. The steel magnates found little difficulty in pinning a Bolshevist label on the strikers. William Z. Foster, the most energetic and intelligent of the strike organizers, had been a syndicalist (and later, although even Judge Gary didn't know it then, was to become a Communist). Copies of a syndicalist pamphlet by Foster appeared in newspaper offices and were seized upon avidly to show what a revolutionary fellow he was. Foster was trying to substitute unions organized by industries for the ineffective craft unions, which were at the mercy of a huge concern like the Steel Corporation; therefore, according to the newspapers, Foster was a "borer from within" and the strike was part of a radical conspiracy. The public was sufficiently frightened to prove more interested in defeating borers from within than in mitigating the lot of obscure Slavs who spent twelve hours a day in the steel mills.

The great steel strike had been in progress only a few weeks when a great coal strike impended. In this case nobody needed to point out to the public the Red specter lurking behind the striking miners. The miners had already succeeded in pinning the Bolshevist label on themselves by their enthusiastic vote for nationalization; and to the indiscriminating newspaper reader, public control of the min-

ing industry was all of a piece with communism, anarchism, bomb-throwing, and general Red ruin. Here was a new threat to the Republic. Something must be done. The Government must act.

It acted. A. Mitchell Palmer, Attorney-General of the United States, who enjoyed being called the "Fighting Quaker," saw his shining opportunity and came to the rescue of the Constitution.

#### § 4

There is a certain grim humor in the fact that what Mr. Palmer did during the next three months was done by him as the chief legal officer of an Administration which had come into power to bring about the New Freedom. Woodrow Wilson was ill in the White House, out of touch with affairs, and dreaming only of his lamented League: that is the only explanation.

On the day before the coal strike was due to begin, the Attorney-General secured from a Federal Judge in Indianapolis an order enjoining the leaders of the strike from doing anything whatever to further it. He did this under the provisions of a food-and-fuel-control Act which forbade restriction of coal production during the war. In actual fact the war was not only over, it had been over for nearly a year: but legally it was not over—the Peace Treaty still languished in the Senate. This food-and-fuel-control law, in further actual fact, had been passed by the Senate after Senator Husting had explicitly declared that he was "authorized by the Secretary of Labor, Mr. Wilson, to say that the Administration does not construe this bill as prohibiting strikes and peaceful picketing and will not so construe it." But Mr. Palmer either had never heard of this assurance or cared nothing about it or decided that unforeseen conditions had arisen. He got his injunction, and the coal strike was

doomed, although the next day something like four hundred thousand coal miners, now leaderless by decree of the Federal Government, walked out of the mines.

The public knew nothing of the broken pledge, of course; it would have been a bold newspaper proprietor who would have published Senator Husting's statement, even had he known about it. It took genuine courage for a paper even to say, as did the *New York World* at that time, that there was "no Bolshevik menace in the United States and no I. W. W. menace that an ordinarily capable police force is not competent to deal with." The press applauded the injunction as it had applauded Calvin Coolidge. The Fighting Quaker took heart. His next move was to direct a series of raids in which Communist leaders were rounded up for deportation to Russia, *via* Finland, on the ship *Buford*, jocosely known as the "Soviet Ark." Again there was enthusiasm—and apparently there was little concern over the right of the Administration to tear from their families men who had as yet committed no crime. Mr. Palmer decided to give the American public more of the same; and thereupon he carried through a new series of raids which set a new record in American history for executive transgression of individual constitutional rights.

Under the drastic war-time Sedition Act, the Secretary of Labor had the power to deport aliens who were anarchists, or believed in or advocated the overthrow of the government by violence, or were affiliated with any organization that so believed or advocated. Mr. Palmer now decided to "co-operate" with the Secretary of Labor by rounding up the alien membership of the Communist party for wholesale deportation. His under-cover agents had already worked their way into the organization; one of them, indeed, was said to have become a leader in his district (which raised the philosophical question whether government agents in

such positions would have imperiled their jobs by counseling moderation among the comrades).

In scores of cities all over the United States, when the Communists were simultaneously meeting at their various headquarters on New Year's Day of 1920, Mr. Palmer's agents and police and voluntary aides fell upon them—fell upon everybody, in fact, who was in the hall, regardless of whether he was a Communist or not (how could one tell?)—and bundled them off to jail, with or without warrant. Every conceivable bit of evidence—literature, membership lists, books, papers, pictures on the wall, everything—was seized, with or without a search warrant. On this and succeeding nights other Communists and suspected Communists were seized in their homes. Over six thousand men were arrested in all, and thrust summarily behind the bars for days or weeks—often without any chance to learn what was the explicit charge against them. At least one American citizen, not a Communist, was jailed for days through some mistake—probably a confusion of names—and barely escaped deportation. In Detroit, over a hundred men were herded into a bull-pen measuring twenty-four by thirty feet and kept there for a week under conditions which the mayor of the city called intolerable. In Hartford, while the suspects were in jail the authorities took the further precaution of arresting and incarcerating all visitors who came to see them, a friendly call being regarded as *prima facie* evidence of affiliation with the Communist party.

Ultimately a considerable proportion of the prisoners were released for want of sufficient evidence that they were Communists. Ultimately, too, it was divulged that in the whole country-wide raid upon these dangerous men—supposedly armed to the teeth—exactly three pistols were found, and no explosives at all. But at the time the newspapers were full of reports from Mr. Palmer's office that new evidence of a gigantic plot against the safety of the country

had been unearthed; and although the steel strike was failing, the coal strike was failing, and any danger of a socialistic régime, to say nothing of a revolution, was daily fading, nevertheless to the great mass of the American people the Bolshevik bogey became more terrifying than ever.

Mr. Palmer was in full cry. In public statements he was reminding the twenty million owners of Liberty bonds and the nine million farm-owners and the eleven million owners of savings accounts, that the Reds proposed to take away all they had. He was distributing boiler-plate propaganda to the press, containing pictures of horrid-looking Bolsheviks with bristling beards, and asking if such as these should rule over America. Politicians were quoting the suggestion of Guy Empey that the proper implements for dealing with the Reds could be "found in any hardware store," or proclaiming, "My motto for the Reds is S. O. S.—ship or shoot. I believe we should place them all on a ship of stone, with sails of lead, and that their first stopping-place should be hell." College graduates were calling for the dismissal of professors suspected of radicalism; school-teachers were being made to sign oaths of allegiance; business men with unorthodox political or economic ideas were learning to hold their tongues if they wanted to hold their jobs. Hysteria had reached its height.

## § 5

Nor did it quickly subside. For the professional super-patriots (and assorted special propagandists disguised as super-patriots) had only begun to fight. Innumerable patriotic societies had sprung up, each with its executive secretary, and executive secretaries must live, and therefore must conjure up new and ever greater menaces. Innumerable other gentlemen now discovered that they could defeat whatever they wanted to defeat by tarring it conspicuously

with the Bolshevist brush. Big-navy men, believers in compulsory military service, drys, anti-cigarette campaigners, anti-evolution Fundamentalists, defenders of the moral order, book censors, Jew-haters, Negro-haters, landlords, manufacturers, utility executives, upholders of every sort of cause, good, bad, and indifferent, all wrapped themselves in Old Glory and the mantle of the Founding Fathers and allied their opponents with Lenin. The open shop, for example, became the "American plan." For years a pestilence of speakers and writers continued to afflict the country with tales of "sinister and subversive agitators." Elderly ladies in gilt chairs in ornate drawing-rooms heard from executive secretaries that the agents of the government had unearthed new radical conspiracies too fiendish to be divulged before the proper time. Their husbands were told at luncheon clubs that the colleges were honeycombed with Bolshevism. A cloud of suspicion hung in the air, and intolerance became an American virtue.

William J. Burns put the number of resident Communists at 422,000, and S. Stanwood Menken of the National Security League made it 600,000—figures at least ten times as large as those of Professor Watkins. Dwight Braman, president of the Allied Patriotic Societies, told Governor Smith of New York that the Reds were holding 10,000 meetings in the country every week and that 350 radical newspapers had been established in the preceding six months.

But not only the Communists were dangerous; they had, it seemed, well-disguised or unwitting allies in more respectable circles. The Russian Famine Fund Committee, according to Ralph Easley of the National Civic Federation, included sixty pronounced Bolshevist sympathizers. Frederick J. Libby of the National Council for the Reduction of Armaments was said by one of the loudest of the super-patriots to be a Communist educated in Russia who visited Russia for

instructions (although as a matter of fact the pacifist churchman had never been in Russia, had no affiliations with Russia, and had on his board only American citizens). *The Nation*, *The New Republic*, and *The Freeman* were classed as "revolutionary" by the executive secretary of the American Defense Society. Even *The Survey* was denounced by the writers of the Lusk Report as having "the endorsement of revolutionary groups." Ralph Easley pointed with alarm to the National League of Women Voters, the Federal Council of Churches, and the Foreign Policy Association. There was hardly a liberal civic organization in the land at which these protectors of the nation did not bid the citizenry to shudder. Even the National Information Bureau, which investigated charities and was headed by no less a pillar of New York respectability than Robert W. DeForest, fell under suspicion. Mr. DeForest, it was claimed, must be too busy to pay attention to what was going on; for along with him were people like Rabbi Wise and Norman Thomas and Oswald Villard and Jane Addams and Scott Nearing and Paul U. Kellogg, many of whom were tainted by radical associations.

There was danger lurking in the theater and the movies. The Moscow Art Theater, the Chauve Souris, and Fyodor Chaliapin were viewed by Mr. Braman of the Allied Patriotic Societies as propagandizing agencies of the Soviets; and according to Mr. Whitney of the American Defense Society, not only Norma Talmadge but—yes—Charlie Chaplin and Will Rogers were mentioned in "Communist files."

Books, too, must be carefully scanned for the all-pervasive evil. Miss Hermine Schwed, speaking for the Better America Federation, a band of California patriots, disapproved of *Main Street* because it "created a distaste for the conventional good life of the American," and called John Dewey and James Harvey Robinson "most dangerous to young people." And as for the schools and colleges, here the



danger was more insidious and far-reaching still. According to Mr. Whitney, Professors Felix Frankfurter and Zacharia Chafee (*sic*) of Harvard and Frederick Wells Williams and Max Solomon Mandell of Yale were "too wise not to know that their words, publicly uttered and even used in classrooms, are, to put it conservatively, decidedly encouraging to the Communists." The schools must be firmly taken in hand: text-books must be combed for slights to heroes of American history, none but conservative speakers must be allowed within the precincts of school or college, and courses teaching reverence for the Constitution must be universal and compulsory.

The effect of these admonitions was oppressive. The fear of the radicals was accompanied and followed by a fear of being thought radical. If you wanted to get on in business, to be received in the best circles of Gopher Prairie or Middletown, you must appear to conform. Any deviation from the opinions of Judge Gary and Mr. Palmer was viewed askance. A liberal journalist, visiting a formerly outspoken Hoosier in his office, was not permitted to talk politics until his frightened host had closed and locked the door and closed the window (which gave on an airshaft perhaps fifty feet wide, with offices on the other side where there might be ears to hear the words of heresy). Said a former resident of a Middle Western city, returning to it after a long absence: "These people are all afraid of something. What is it?" The authors of *Middletown* quoted a lonely political dissenter forced into conformity by the iron pressure of public opinion as saying, bitterly, "I just run away from it all to my books." He dared not utter his economic opinions openly; to deviate ever so little from those of the Legion and the Rotary Club would be to brand himself as a Bolshevik.

"America," wrote Katharine Fullerton Gerould in *Harpers Magazine* as late as 1922, "is no longer a free country,

in the old sense; and liberty is, increasingly, a mere rhetorical figure. . . . No thinking citizen, I venture to say, can express in freedom more than a part of his honest convictions. I do not of course refer to convictions that are frankly criminal. I do mean that everywhere, on every hand, free speech is choked off in one direction or another. The only way in which an American citizen who is really interested in all the social and political problems of his country can preserve any freedom of expression, is to choose the mob that is most sympathetic to him, and abide under the shadow of that mob."

Sentiments such as these were expressed so frequently and so vehemently in later years that it is astonishing to recall that in 1922 it required some temerity to put them in print. When Mrs. Gerould's article was published, hundreds of letters poured into the Harper office and into her house—letters denouncing her in scurrilous terms as subversive and a Bolshevik, letters rejoicing that at last some one had stood up and told the truth. To such a point had the country been carried by the shoutings of the super-patriots.

## § 6

The intolerance of those days took many forms. Almost inevitably it took the form of an ugly flare-up of feeling against the Negro, the Jew, and the Roman Catholic. The emotions of group loyalty and of hatred, expanded during war-time and then suddenly denied their intended expression, found a perverted release in the persecution not only of supposed radicals, but also of other elements which to the dominant American group—the white Protestants—seemed alien or "un-American."

Negroes had migrated during the war by the hundreds of thousands into the industrial North, drawn thither by high wages and by the openings in mill and factory oc-

casioned by the draft. Wherever their numbers increased they had no choice but to move into districts previously reserved for the whites, there to jostle with the whites in street cars and public places, and in a hundred other ways to upset the delicate equilibrium of racial adjustment. In the South as well as in the North the Negroes had felt the stirrings of a new sense of independence; had they not been called to the colors just as the whites had been, and had they not been fighting for democracy and oppressed minorities? When peace came, and they found they were to be put in their place once more, some of them showed their resentment; and in the uneasy atmosphere of the day this was enough to kindle the violent racial passions which smoulder under the surface of human nature. Bolshevism was bad enough, thought the whites, but if the niggers ever got beyond control . . .

One sultry afternoon in the summer of 1919 a seventeen-year-old colored boy was swimming in Lake Michigan by a Chicago bathing-beach. Part of the shore had been set aside by mutual understanding for the use of the whites, another part for the Negroes. The boy took hold of a railroad tie floating in the water and drifted across the invisible line. Stones were thrown at him; a white boy started to swim toward him. The colored boy let go of the railroad tie, swam a few strokes, and sank. He was drowned. Whether he had been hit by any of the stones was uncertain, but the Negroes on the shore accused the whites of stoning him to death, and a fight began. This small incident struck the match that set off a bonfire of race hatred. The Negro population of Chicago had doubled in a decade, the blacks had crowded into white neighborhoods, and nerves were raw. The disorder spread to other parts of the city—and the final result was that for nearly a week Chicago was virtually in a state of civil war; there were mobbings of Negroes, beatings, stabbings, gang raids through the Negro district, shoot-

ings by Negroes in defense, and wanton destruction of houses and property; when order was finally restored it was found that fifteen whites and twenty-three Negroes had been killed, five hundred and thirty-seven people had been injured, and a thousand had been left homeless and destitute.

Less than a year later there was another riot of major proportions in Tulsa. Wherever the colored population had spread, there was a new tension in the relations between the races. It was not alleviated by the gospel of white supremacy preached by speakers and writers such as Lothrop Stoddard, whose *Rising Tide of Color* proclaimed that the dark-skinned races constituted a worse threat to Western civilization than the Germans or the Bolsheviks.

The Jews, too, fell under the suspicion of a majority bent upon an undiluted Americanism. Here was a group of inevitably divided loyalty, many of whose members were undeniably prominent among the Bolsheviks in Russia and among the radical immigrants in America. Henry Ford discovered the menace of the "International Jew," and his *Dearborn Independent* accused the unhappy race of plotting the subjugation of the whole world and (for good measure) of being the source of almost every American affliction, including high rents, the shortage of farm labor, jazz, gambling, drunkenness, loose morals, and even short skirts. The Ford attack, absurd as it was, was merely an exaggerated manifestation of a widespread anti-Semitism. Prejudice became as pervasive as the air. Landlords grew less disposed to rent to Jewish tenants, and schools to admit Jewish boys and girls; there was a public scandal at Annapolis over the hazing of a Jewish boy; Harvard College seriously debated limiting the number of Jewish students; and all over the country Jews felt that a barrier had fallen between them and the Gentiles. Nor did the Roman Catholics escape censure in the regions in which they were in a

minority. Did not the members of this Church take their orders from a foreign pope, and did not the pope claim temporal power, and did not Catholics insist upon teaching their children in their own way rather than in the American public schools, and was not all this un-American and treasonable?

It was in such an atmosphere that the Ku-Klux Klan blossomed into power.

The Klan had been founded as far back as 1915 by a Georgian named Colonel William Joseph Simmons, but its first five years had been lean. When 1920 arrived, Colonel Simmons had only a few hundred members in his amiable patriotic and fraternal order, which drew its inspiration from the Ku-Klux Klan of Reconstruction days and stood for white supremacy and sentimental Southern idealism in general. But in 1920 Simmons put the task of organizing the Order into hands of one Edward Y. Clarke of the Southern Publicity Association. Clarke's gifts of salesmanship, hitherto expended on such blameless causes as the Roosevelt Memorial Association and the Near East Relief, were prodigious. The time was ripe for the Klan, and he knew it. Not only could it be represented to potential members as the defender of the white against the black, of Gentile against Jew, and of Protestant against Catholic, and thus trade on all the newly inflamed fears of the credulous small-towner, but its white robe and hood, its flaming cross, its secrecy, and the preposterous vocabulary of its ritual could be made the vehicle for all that infantile love of hocus-pocus and mummery, that lust for secret adventure, which survives in the adult whose lot is cast in drab places. Here was a chance to dress up the village bigot and let him be a Knight of the Invisible Empire. The formula was perfect. And there was another inviting fact to be borne in mind. Well organized, such an Order could be made a paying proposition.

The salesmen of memberships were given the entrancing title of Kleagles; the country was divided into Realms headed by King Kleagles, and the Realms into Domains headed by Grand Goblins; Clarke himself, as chief organizer, became Imperial Kleagle, and the art of nomenclature reached its fantastic pinnacle in the title bestowed upon Colonel Simmons: he became the Imperial Wizard. A membership cost ten dollars; and as four of this went into the pocket of the Kleagle who made the sale, it was soon apparent that a diligent Kleagle need not fear the wolf at the door. Kleagling became one of the profitable industries of the decade. The King Kleagle of the Realm and Grand Goblin of the Domain took a small rake-off from the remaining six dollars of the membership fee, and the balance poured into the Imperial Treasury at Atlanta.

An inconvenient congressional investigation in 1921—brought about largely by sundry reports of tarrings and featherings and floggings, and by the disclosure of many of the Klan's secrets by the *New York World*—led ultimately to the banishment of Imperial Kleagle Clarke, and Colonel Simmons was succeeded as Imperial Wizard by a Texas dentist named Hiram Wesley Evans, who referred to himself, perhaps with some justice, as "the most average man in America"; but a humming sales organization had been built up and the Klan continued to grow. It grew, in fact, with such inordinate rapidity that early in 1924 its membership had reached—according to the careful estimates of Stanley Frost—the staggering figure of nearly four and a half millions. It came to wield great political power, dominating for a time the seven states of Oregon, Oklahoma, Texas, Arkansas, Indiana, Ohio, and California. Its chief strongholds were the New South, the Middle West, and the Pacific coast, but it had invaded almost every part of the country and had even reached the gates of that stronghold of Jewry, Catholicism, and sophistication, New York City. So far had

Clarke's genius and the hospitable temper of the times carried it.

The objects of the Order as stated in its Constitution were "to unite white male persons, native-born Gentile citizens of the United States of America, who owe no allegiance of any nature to any foreign government, nation, institution, sect, ruler, person, or people; whose morals are good, whose reputations and vocations are exemplary . . . to cultivate and promote patriotism toward our Civil Government; to practice an honorable Klannishness toward each other; to exemplify a practical benevolence; to shield the sanctity of the home and the chastity of womanhood; to maintain forever white supremacy, to teach and faithfully inculcate a high spiritual philosophy through an exalted ritualism, and by a practical devotion to conserve, protect, and maintain the distinctive institutions, rights, privileges, principles, traditions and ideals of a pure Americanism."

Thus the theory. In practice the "pure Americanism" varied with the locality. At first, in the South, white supremacy was the Klan's chief objective, but as time went on and the organization grew and spread, opposition to the Jew and above all to the Catholic proved the best talking point for Kleagles in most localities. Nor did the methods of the local Klan organizations usually suggest the possession of a "high spiritual philosophy." These local organizations were largely autonomous and beyond control from Atlanta. They were drawn, as a rule, mostly from the less educated and less disciplined elements of the white Protestant community. ("You think the influential men belong here?" commented an outspoken observer in an Indiana city. "Then look at their shoes when they march in parade. The sheet doesn't cover the shoes.") Though Imperial Wizard Evans inveighed against lawlessness, the members of the local Klans were not always content with voting against allowing children to attend parochial schools, or voting against Cath-

olic candidates for office, or burning fiery crosses on the hill-top back of the town to show the niggers that the whites meant business. The secrecy of the Klan was an invitation to more direct action.

If a white girl reported that a colored man had made improper advances to her—even if the charge were unsupported and based on nothing more than a neurotic imagination—a white-sheeted band might spirit the Negro off to the woods and “teach him a lesson” with tar and feathers or with the whip. If a white man stood up for a Negro in a race quarrel, he might be kidnapped and beaten up. If a colored woman refused to sell her land at an arbitrary price which she considered too low, and a Klansman wanted the land, she might receive the K. K. K. ultimatum—sell or be thrown out. Klan members would boycott Jewish merchants, refuse to hire Catholic boys, refuse to rent their houses to Catholics. A hideous tragedy in Louisiana, where five men were kidnapped and later found bound with wire and drowned in a lake, was laid to Klansmen. R. A. Patton, writing in *Current History*, reported a grim series of brutalities from Alabama: “A lad whipped with branches until his back was ribboned flesh; a Negress beaten and left helpless to contract pneumonia from exposure and die; a white girl, divorcée, beaten into unconsciousness in her own home; a naturalized foreigner flogged until his back was a pulp because he married an American woman; a Negro lashed until he sold his land to a white man for a fraction of its value.”

Even where there were no such outrages, there was at least the threat of them. The white-robed army paraded, the burning cross glowed across the valley, people whispered to one another in the darkness and wondered “who they were after this time,” and fear and suspicion ran from house to house. Furthermore, criminals and gangs of hoodlums quickly learned to take advantage of the Klan’s existence: if



they wanted to burn some one's barn or raid the slums beyond the railroad tracks, they could do it with impunity now: would not the Klan be held responsible? Anyone could chalk the letters K. K. K. on a fence and be sure that the sheriff would move warily. Thus, as in the case of the Red hysteria, a movement conceived in fear perpetuated fear and brought with it all manner of cruelties and crimes.

Slowly, as the years passed and the war-time emotions ebbed, the power of the Klan waned, until in many districts it was dead and in others it had become merely a political faction dominated by spoilsmen: but not until it had become a thing of terror to millions of men and women.

## § 7

After the Palmer raids at the beginning of 1920 the hunt for radicals went on. In April the five Socialist members of the New York State Assembly were expelled on the ground that (as the report of the Judiciary Committee put it) they were members of "a disloyal organization composed exclusively of perpetual traitors." When Young Theodore Roosevelt spoke against the motion to expel, he was solemnly rebuked by Speaker Sweet, who mounted the rostrum and read aloud passages from the writings of T. R. senior, in order that the Americanism of the father might be painfully contrasted with the un-Americanism of the son. When Assemblyman Cuvillier, in the midst of a speech, spied two of the Socialist members actually occupying the seats to which they had been elected, he cried: "These two men who sit there with a smile and a smirk on their faces are just as much representatives of the Russian Soviet Government as if they were Lenin and Trotsky themselves. They are little Lenins, little Trotskys in our midst." The little Lenins and Trotskys were thrown out by an overwhelming vote, and the *New York Times* announced the next day that "It

was an American vote altogether, a patriotic and conservative vote. An immense majority of the American people will approve and sanction the Assembly's action." That statement, coming from the discreet *Times*, is a measure of the temper of the day.

Nevertheless, the tide was almost ready to turn. Charles Evans Hughes protested against the Assembly's action, thereby almost causing apoplexy among some of his sedate fellow-members of the Union League Club, who wondered if such a good Republican could be becoming a parlor pink. May Day of 1920 arrived in due course, and although Mr. Palmer dutifully informed the world in advance that May Day had been selected by the radicals as the date for a general strike and for assassinations, nothing happened. The police, fully mobilized, waited for a revolutionary onslaught that never arrived. The political conventions rolled round, and although Calvin Coolidge was swept into the Republican nomination for Vice-President on his record as the man who broke the Boston police strike, it was noteworthy that the Democratic Convention did not sweep the Fighting Quaker into anything at all, and that there was a certain unseemly levity among his opponents, who insisted upon referring to him as the quaking fighter, the faking fighter, and the quaking quitter. It began to look as if the country were beginning to regain its sense of humor.

Strikes and riots and legislative enactments and judicial rulings against radicals continued, but with the coming of the summer of 1920 there were at least other things to compete for the attention of the country. There was the presidential campaign; the affable Mr. Harding was mouthing orotund generalizations from his front porch, and the desperate Mr. Cox was steaming about the country, trying to pull Woodrow Wilson's chestnuts out of the fire. There was the ticklish business situation: people had been revolting against high prices for months, and overall parades had been

held, and the Rev. George M. Elsbree of Philadelphia had preached a sermon in overalls, and there had been an overall wedding in New York (parson, bride, and groom all photographed for the rotogravure section in overalls), and the department stores had been driven to reduce prices, and now it was apparent that business was riding for a fall, strikes or no strikes, radicals or no radicals.

There was the hue and cry over the discovery of the bogus get-rich-quick schemes of Charles Ponzi of Boston. There was Woman Suffrage, now at last a fact, with ratification of the Amendment by the States completed on August 18th. Finally, there was Prohibition, also at last a fact, and an absorbing topic at dinner tables. In those days people sat with bated breath to hear how So-and-so had made very good gin right in his own cellar, and just what formula would fulfill the higher destiny of raisins, and how bootleggers brought liquor down from Canada. It was all new and exciting. That the Big Red Scare was already perceptibly abating by the end of the summer of 1920 was shown by the fact that the nation managed to keep its head surprisingly well when a real disaster, probably attributable to an anarchist gang, took place on the 16th of September.

If there was one geographical spot in the United States that could justly be called the financial center of the country, it was the junction of Broad and Wall Streets in New York. Here, on the north side of Wall Street, stood the Sub-Treasury Building, and next to it the United States Assay Office; opposite them, on the southeast corner, an ostentatiously unostentatious three-story limestone building housed the firm of J. P. Morgan & Company, the most powerful nexus of capitalism in the world; on the southwest corner yawned the excavation where the New York Stock Exchange was presently to build its annex, and next to this, on Broad Street, rose the Corinthian pillars of the Exchange itself. Government finance, private finance, the passage of private

control of industry from capitalistic hand to hand: here stood their respective citadels cheek by jowl, as if to symbolize the union into one system of the government and the money power and the direction of business—that system which the radicals so bitterly decried.

Almost at this precise spot, a moment before noon on September 16th, just as the clerks of the neighborhood were getting ready to go out for luncheon, there was a sudden blinding flash of bluish-white light and a terrific crashing roar, followed by the clatter of falling glass from innumerable windows and by the screams of men and women. A huge bomb had gone off in the street in front of the Assay Office and directly opposite the House of Morgan—gone off with such appalling violence that it killed thirty people outright and injured hundreds, wrecked the interior of the Morgan offices, smashed windows for blocks around, and drove an iron slug through the window of the Bankers' Club on the thirty-fourth floor of the Equitable Building.

A great mushroom-shaped cloud of yellowish-green smoke rose slowly into the upper air between the skyscrapers. Below it, the air was filled with dust pouring out of the Morgan windows and the windows of other buildings—dust from shrapnel-bitten plaster walls. And below that, the street ran red with the blood of the dead and dying. Those who by blind chance had escaped the hail of steel picked themselves up and ran in terror as glass and fragments of stone showered down from the buildings above; then there was a surge of people back to the horror again, a vast crowd milling about and trying to help the victims and not knowing what to do first and bumping into one another and shouting; then fire engines and ambulances clanged to the scene and police and hospital orderlies fought their way through the mob and brought it at last to order.

In the House of Morgan, one man had been killed, the chief clerk; dozens were hurt, seventeen had to be taken to

hospitals. But only one partner had been cut in the hand by flying glass; the rest were in conference on the other side of the building or out of town. Mr. Morgan was abroad. The victims of the explosion were not the financial powers of the country, but bank clerks, brokers' men, Wall Street runners, stenographers.

In the Stock Exchange, hardly two hundred feet away, trading had been proceeding at what in those days was considered "good volume"—at the rate of half a million shares or so for the day. Prices had been rising. Reading was being bid up  $2\frac{1}{8}$  points to  $93\frac{3}{4}$ , Baldwin Locomotive was going strong at  $110\frac{3}{4}$ , there was heavy trading in Middle States Oil, Steel was doing well at  $89\frac{3}{8}$ . The crash came, the building shook, and the big windows smashed down in a shower of glass; those on the Broad Street side had their heavy silk curtains drawn, or dozens of men would have been injured. For a moment the brokers, not knowing what had happened, scampered for anything that looked like shelter. Those in the middle of the floor, where an instant before the largest crowd of traders had been gathered around the Reading post, made for the edges of the room lest the dome should fall. But William H. Remick, president of the Exchange, who had been standing with the "money crowd" at the side of the room, kept his head. Remarking to a friend, "I guess it's about time to ring the gong," he mounted the rostrum, rang the gong, and thereby immediately ended trading for the day. (The next day prices continued to rise as if nothing had happened.)

Out in the middle of Wall Street lay the carcass of a horse blown to pieces by the force of the explosion, and here and there were assembled bits of steel and wood and canvas which, with the horse's shoes and the harness, enabled the police to decide that a TNT bomb had gone off in a horse-drawn wagon, presumably left unattended as its driver escaped from the scene. For days and months and years detec-

tives and Federal agents followed up every possible clue. Every wagon in the city, to say nothing of powder wagons, was traced. The slugs which had imbedded themselves in the surrounding buildings were examined and found to be window sash-weights cut in two—but this, despite endless further investigation, led to nothing more than the conclusion that the explosion was a premeditated crime. The horse's shoes were identified and a man was found who had put them on the horse a few days before; he described the driver as a Sicilian, but the clue led no further. Bits of steel and tin found in the neighborhood were studied, manufacturers consulted, records of sale run through. One fragment of iron proved to be the knob of a safe, and the safe was identified; a detective followed the history of the safe from its manufacture through various hands until it went to France with the Army during the war and returned to Hoboken—but there its trail was lost. Every eye-witness's story was tested and analyzed. Reports of warnings of disaster received by business men were run down but yielded nothing of real value. Suspected radicals were rounded up without result. One bit of evidence remained, but how important it was one could not be sure. At almost the exact minute of the explosion, a letter-carrier was said to have found in a post-box two or three blocks from the scene—a box which had been emptied only half an hour before—five sheets of paper on which was crudely printed, with varying mis-spellings,

Rememer

We will not tolerate  
any longer

Free the politiCal  
prisoniers or it will be  
sure death to all oF you

American

Anarchists

Fighters

A prominent coal operator who was sitting in the Morgan offices when the explosion took place promptly declared that there was no question in his mind that it was the work of Bolshevists. After years of fruitless investigation, there was still a question in the minds of those who tried to solve the mystery. But in the loose sense in which the coal operator used the term, he was probably right.

The country followed the early stages of the investigation with absorbed interest. Yet no marked increase in anti-Bolshevist riots took place. If the explosion had occurred a few months earlier, it might have had indirect consequences as ugly as the damage which it did directly. But by this time the American people were coming to their senses sufficiently to realize that no such insane and frightful plot could ever command the support of more than a handful of fanatics.