



"THE PARADE WAS GRANDER AND GAUDIER BY FAR THAN ANYTHING THE WIZARDS HAD PROPHESED"

## THE KLAN WALKS IN WASHINGTON

"OH, SAY NOT SO!" gasped a Maryland newspaper the other day when everybody was "quivering in excited anticipation of 100,000 ghostly apparitions wafting through the streets of the national capital to the stirring strains of the 'Liberty Stale Blues,'" and word came from Washington that the mammoth parade of the Ku Klux Klan had been called off. This Maryland paper, the *Baltimore Evening Sun*, cried, "Darn! Thus goes a-glimmering the thrill of a lifetime." But the mammoth parade had not been called off, and news that it had not was provocative of press comment the country over. For example, "Go to it, Klan!" said one editor; "let the nighties gleam!" The *Baltimore Sun*, in an editorial headed "Have a Heart!" said: "Washington languishes, a fit place for hook-worms and sleeping sickness. Into that depressing solemnity comes the Ku Klux Klan to kick up a few didoes. Deprive it of its fiery cross? Gosh, no!" The *Syracuse Herald* said: "Ku-Kluxism is least harmful and menacing when the sun shines on it. Only in the dark can it make trouble. For that reason, we say, let them parade." When Thomas L. Avaunt, the former Klan official who is now the head of the Protestant Knights of America, protested to President Coolidge against the proposed demonstration, the *Memphis Commercial Appeal* protested, "Avaunt, Mr. Avaunt, and let the Ku Klux parade!" This was the common attitude, except at the Capitol, where a certain apprehensiveness prevailed, and the *Washington News* took pains to declare, "There isn't going to be the slightest disorder," while the *Washington Evening Star* said, "There is no occasion for alarm," adding:

"Agitation on the score of possible violence is unwarranted by any of the known factors in the case. Permission for this parade was granted by the District Commissioners on condition that the Klansmen march without masks. The fact that otherwise they wear the costume of the order is not of any more importance or significance than the marching of uniformed organizations of any description. The Commissioners could not discriminate between applicants for the right to use the streets for parading purposes, and their action in granting this permit was not only justified but required."

Nevertheless, as a Universal Service dispatch from Washington to the *New York American* informs us, all precautions were taken to prevent disorder, and Thomas L. Avaunt was arrested



HE LED THE PARADE  
Imperial Wizard  
Hiram W. Evans

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and later released. He distributed an anti-Klan circular which read: "All Christian men and women bow their heads in shame when they know their city will soon be bathed in blood."

It was not "bathed in blood" or at all harmed, tho the numbers of the arriving hosts exceeded expectation. On the eve of the demonstration, the *Washington Evening Star* reported:

"Thousands of these white-robed figures, old and young, had congregated east of the Capitol, flaunting American flags and banners emblazoned with the mystic symbols of the Klan, long before the hour set for the start of the unique parade. There were men in white satin robes; they were the kleagles, dragons, kligrapps and other high officers in the various State units. Others wore garments of a cheaper material; they were the rank and file of the 'invisible empire.' Mingling with them, in countless numbers, were the families of the Klansmen."

The parade itself marshaled "from 50,000 to 60,000 white-robed men and women," as the correspondent of the *New York Times* estimates, and H. L. Mencken tells us in the *New York Sun*:

"The Klan put it all over its enemies. The parade was grander and gaudier, by far than anything the wizards had prophesied. It was longer, it was thicker, it was higher in tone. I stood in front of the Treasury for two hours watching the legions pass. They marched in lines of eighteen or twenty, solidly shoulder to shoulder. I retired for refreshment and was gone an hour.

"When I got back Pennsylvania Avenue was still a mass of white from the Treasury down to the foot of Capitol Hill—a full mile of Klansmen and their ladies.

"No one seems to know what brought them in. When the gentlemen of the press went to Klan headquarters they were kicked out. It is not even established who commanded the parade. The Imperial Wizard, the Hon. Mr. Evans, was in it, but he profest to be only a guest. One tale has it that the Klansmen of the North organized the show to annoy and dismay their brethren of the South. Another had it that it was planned by local mayors of the palace to shame and get rid of the august Evans. But if any such evil purpose lurked under the surface there was certainly no sign of it on top."



**KLANSMAN**

Other explanations of the purpose of the Klan parade are offered by various newspapers. According to the *Louisville Post*, "it was the application of a pulmotor to a dying cause." To the *Atlanta Constitution* "the real significance of the gathering" was to be found in "the secret meeting of Klan chiefs." Carlisle Barger, of the *Washington Post*, thinks that a desire to outdo the Holy Name Society's demonstration furnished the incentive, while Paul R. Mallon tells the *Pittsburgh Post* that the affair was "a gesture of Northern Klansmen toward wresting control of the organization from the South."

As the *Providence Journal* reminds us, "some months ago the Klan leaders invited Mr. Coolidge to review the forthcoming parade. Of course they did not really expect him to accede to their request. They were merely bent on putting him in a hole because he had reviewed the parade of a Catholic society of which the admirable purpose is to discourage the taking of the Lord's name in vain."

(added image first appeared in the  
 1925 KKK "Image & Banners" Catalog)