



"The Klan has more (state) Governors now than it ever had," says the Wiz

There is feverish activity in Suite 756 of the Hurt Building in Atlanta, Ga., these days. The Ku Klux Klan is staging a nationwide comeback and this is its national headquarters. Fat, shrewd-smiling, garrulous Old Doc Evans is still Emperor and Imperial Wizard, but he's now apparently only fronting for a Big Boss who has some sensational new plans which have already begun to click. Once again the Klan is holding hands with politicians all over the country, but the hand-holding is being done under the table. The big drive begins in May.

THERE are three names neatly painted on the door of Room 756 in the towering Hurt Building in Atlanta, Ga.: H. W. Evans, J. A. Cole-scott and E. Jack Smith, but there is no indication of the business the three are engaged in and no firm is credited to this room on the information board listings in the lobby.

The door opens upon an ordinary reception room furnished with a couple of comfortable chairs, a book-case containing a few pamphlets and magazines and a well-thumbed copy of *Who's Who in America*, latest edition.

The reception room faces Cole-scott's and Smith's offices but these gentlemen are seldom in. To the left of the reception room is another office occupied by two girls, one of whom checks incoming mail against bound files of names kept in a safe in a corner. The other receives the mail, answers the constantly ringing telephone and acts as general secretary to H. W. Evans, whose private office is off this room.

Though the five-room suite is such as could be found in any modern office building, the place nevertheless has an air of mystery and conspiracy about it. Stacks of mail are delivered

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addressed to the Southeastern Construction Company, Hurt Building, Atlanta, but there is no Southeastern Construction Co. listed on the lobby's information board. Other mail addressed to P. O. Box 1204, Atlanta, is brought in by a gentleman later identified as Colescott and deposited on the secretary's desk. More mail addressed to P. O. Box 1429, Columbus, O., and to 1707 Cardiff Road, Columbus and to the Akia Club, 1106 S. High St. also Columbus, finds its way to the mail pile where it is efficiently opened, sorted, and passed on to the girl checking the names. Most of the letters contain checks, money orders and filled-in application blanks.

The telephone rings. The secretary listens for a moment. Gov. E. D. Rivers of Georgia appears to be on the phone and you gather that he'd like to speak to H. W. Evans.

"I'm sorry, Governor," the girl says with easy familiarity. "He's busy right now. Will you call back later?"

Visitors appear, bend low over the secretary's desk, whisper a word or two and are ushered into Evans's private office, and when the conference is over they leave as mysteriously as they appeared. Seldom is a visitor's name announced loudly enough to be heard by others in the office and no casual visitor stumbling accidentally into the office would suspect from anything about it that this was the secret national headquarters of the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan. The headquarters is supposed to be on Roswell Road in Atlanta but the work is actually done in this suite so cautiously unlisted in the building directory.

It is here, in the unlisted offices of the Southeastern Construction Co., that the secret hooded order once thought dead and decomposed, is being revived again with shadowy, unidentified forces in the background obviously pulling the strings.

There is an almost feverish activity in these efforts to rebuild a political and propaganda machine which once had five million members and profoundly influenced the country's political life.

Today, Hiram W. Evans, "Old Doc Evans" they call him, is hard at work with the old sales talk about the "menace of the Pope and the Catholic Church" but to which is added a new twist about the additional "menace of communism." Once the Klan controlled Governors, United States Senators and Congressmen, state and municipal public officials and the Klan is "riding again" in some parts of the country while at the same time it is laying careful plans to ride on a national scale for the 1940 elections in an effort to recapture at least

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a part of its old power and influence.

The new Klan sales talk has been slightly changed for a changing time. With the nation showing its displeasure at religious persecution, the Klan now uses the Catholic Church and the Pope only where it might help and does not try to make it a national issue.

I had many long interviews with the old Imperial Wizard of the Klan and the burden of his refrain was that emphasis on religion didn't pay.

"I'm not going to lose the Klan this time as I lost it before," he told me. "I lost the Klan over the Catholic issue in 1928. We defeated Al Smith for President but it broke the organization, so I'm not making the Pope a national issue any more. It just doesn't pay."

"What is your issue now?" I asked.

"Americanism," he said, smiling shrewdly. "That's the issue today. Americanism. The people can get excited about that."

"What's your program for putting 'Americanism' across?"

"We're a secret organization," he said cautiously, "and our program is secret. We're not shouting it from the housetops like we used to. Our program is sent out as instructions to our field men and then passed on by word of mouth. We got into a lot of trouble before by talking and writing too much."

I jotted down some notes while he was speaking and he continued:

"Why, we've even stopped getting out printed material. You know, over the years, a name crops out once in a while and ten or 15 years later, when you figure everything's been forgotten, the person runs for some political office and it comes up to haunt us. Pretty near ruins the man politically, and sometimes economically, so we're not putting anything in writing any more. Nobody's going to get anything on us this time."

After the debacle of 1928 the Klan was quiescent until the dark days of the depression, when restless unemployed threatened to take matters into their own hands in a few isolated places, but with the Roosevelt public works measures the sporadic outbreaks died out and so did the Klan's efforts to stir again. It was not until the Committee for Industrial Organization came into being with an aggressive unionization policy, the passage of the Wagner and other acts friendly to organized labor, did the Klan perk up again. Preceding the 1938 elections it became busy again in the political field in a few scattered areas in the south and central industrial region, and after the elections, in November, 1938, plans were secretly and carefully prepared for a large-

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scale drive to begin in May, 1939—just in time to be a factor in the coming presidential campaign. The secret plans have mapped out a distinct industrial and political program, the latter scarcely distinguishable from blackmail.

Since the decision was made to become active again on a large scale, the Klan has established regional offices in New York, Chicago, Denver and Los Angeles, from which the work is to be directed. The locations of these offices are carefully guarded secrets. Just where the money came from for this new activity is equally secret and it might make a fruitful study for a Congressional investigative body. The plans embrace a "regional program" for the country and the "Kiss of Death" political strategy.

The regional program plan has not been completed at the time this is being written but on a broad scale it calls for a division of the country, so far as the Klan is concerned, into regions instead of states and the cashing in of regional industrial, racial and religious differences in the country.

The New England states, for instance, form a distinctive regional group with textiles as one of the major industries. The southeastern states in which the textile industry has developed rapidly, forms another regional group with textiles as one of the major industries.

New England mill employees consist of native Americans along with a considerable proportion of foreign born or of foreign ancestry, a large proportion of whom are Catholics. Southeastern mill employees are chiefly native American stock, mostly Protestant, and employees in southern mills usually get a lower wage scale than those in the north for the same kind of work.

The Klan procedure, which has already started in several sections of the south, is to call attention to these wage and religious differences. The Klan points out that the native Protestant stock get lower wage scales because they are not organized like the Catholics up north who have officials in public office to safeguard their interests.

In New England, on the other hand, the Klan strategy calls for emphasis on the migration of textile mills to the south in search of cheaper labor with the result that employees are thrown out of jobs. Thus the Klan aims to play upon the prejudices and economic distress of one region of the country against another.

The political strategy of the "Kiss of Death" was decided upon in case the Klan does not recover its old strength and the "regional" strategy

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does not work out.

When the Klan broke up more than a decade ago, the nature of its activities was pretty well publicized and denounced. Reputable persons have since avoided the Klan like a plague and so great is the stigma attached to the secret hooded order which chalked up a record of terrorism and viciousness, that the few public officials who still play around with it, deny it if anyone ever accuses them of it. A Klan tie-up, even in wide areas in the south, today spells political suicide for any candidate for public office and the Klan knows it.

Suppose, for instance, there is an election which will apparently be closely contested. Either candidate may win. The new Klan policy is not to support either major party as a party.

Each local Klan picks its own favorite in its own bailiwick. Let us further assume, that in one of these neck and neck areas where a few votes will turn the tide, the Republican (or vice versa) wants to turn voters against his opponent. An arrangement can be made with an unscrupulous candidate for the Klan to give his opponent the "Kiss of Death."

The procedure is simple:

The Klan announces its support for the opponent of the man of its choice! Meetings are held, fiery crosses are burned, Klansmen parade in their nightshirts and the customary Klan tactics are pursued, including, if found advisable, a little terrorism and a few beatings. The community's decent citizens conclude that the candidate supported by the Klan must be closely tied up with it.

The victim of the "Kiss of Death" naturally repudiates the Klan's support. He denies any sort of sympathy with the hooded order and shrieks until he is apoplectic that he does not want the Klan's votes but the more he denounces and repudiates it, the more intensively the Klan campaigns for him—and there is no law to stop the Klan from campaigning for a candidate. The Catholic, the Jew, and in northern areas, the Negro vote is immediately alienated from any candidate who is so intensively supported by the Klan. The decent Protestant, labor and liberal vote is equally alienated and the candidate given the "Kiss of Death" loses enough votes to enable his opponent to win.

THE "Emperor and Imperial Wizard of the Invisible Empire" who is supposed to direct this new Klan effort is getting old and becoming a bit garrulous. He spends most of his time in his private office lolling before a glass-covered desk, granting interviews to mysterious callers. They call

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him "Old Doc Evans" because he used to pull teeth in Dallas, Texas before it dawned on him that people never got very rich putting gold into other people's mouths.

He was very amiable when I walked into the secret headquarters and said I wanted to interview him, and the interviews lasted for six days, several hours each day. Most of them were recorded by his private secretary and a transcript of the questions and answers given to me so that I couldn't misquote him.

After the first few minutes I concluded that the new Klan policy is directed by some unidentified person or persons pulling the strings behind the scenes, for the old man threw phrases around without having any idea of what he was talking about. On many occasions during our talks, he became so befuddled with an unaccustomed terminology when he tried to deal with economic forces, unionism and cultural aspects of Americanism, that he floundered and groped pathetically in every direction to explain what he meant and then gave up helplessly. I got the impression that he was trying to explain something someone had told him but which he hadn't grasped clearly, and in trying to explain it to me, he just tossed words and phrases around in which there was a hodge-podge of communism, Catholicism, Judaism, unionism, patriotism, Americanism and a few more isms served in a loud voice with many a shake of the head and hands.

I think the best way to illustrate the old Wiz's thinking is to quote, without any change, from the first two questions I asked him, and I have 50 pages of such transcribed notes.

The first question I asked was, "What is the present program of the Klan and how does it differ from the old one?"

"The Klan," said the Wiz, speaking slowly and choosing his words carefully, "has had but one objective from its reincarnation and that is to reserve the time-worn and present system of operation—this relates both to Government and to the cultural forms of society, as representing the instincts of the people and their practices. We seek to preserve not only the American form of Government, but the cultural impulses from which our order of Government has been formed for 150 years."

"What are those cultural impulses?"

"What I have reference to is the type of minds and manners of hardy frontier people. Certain things they did then were necessary, and the people can't stand and won't stand—they

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will emote and revolt. We wouldn't buy tea, but we did pay all kinds of tariff, but the people emoted on tariff on tea. You remember the tea tax! You cross their instincts to the place where you take away from life certain things more valuable than life itself. Whatever is the instinctive belief of the mass of people is their inalienable right that they protect the Government, as long as they have a common mind. When the form doesn't favor the instinctive belief of the people they will emote and if the Government is strong enough it will destroy their feeling of independence. If they are strong enough they will change the Government to the change of times. Under trying times and varying conditions the emotional outbursts come from the instinctive dangers they feel themselves to be in in regard to their Holy of Holies—liberty. Interference is always a dangerous problem, or to destroy their system, whether it is growing corn or raising tobacco. They don't want interference by some other system. It is a protest against change in which they do not occur."

The rest of his explanations were as clear and vivid as these. From time to time I grasped what he was trying to say but virtually every time I asked a question he would start rambling on about the "cultural impulses" for which the Klan was riding again.

Throughout the interviews the old Wiz got himself comfortably set. He leaned backwards in his swivel chair, stared at the ceiling and, when asked a question he could not answer, he would raise his voice and orate. I was fascinated in watching this deeply ignorant man with fat, pudgy hands lying loosely on a big belly so that you got the feeling that he might suddenly give birth to some monstrosity. He seldom changed his position but rambled on and on. When the interviews were over he must have realized that he had waded into water out of his depth for he telephoned me at my hotel and in a deep, fiery cross tone, he announced: "Say! I want to see you!"

When I got to the Wiz's office I found the carbon copies of the interviews spread out on his desk and a comical look of astonishment on his face.

"Say," he greeted me, "this thing's got to be edited!"

"Oh, I'm not going to use all of it," I said.

"Look," he continued, still with that comical expression, "I don't like to swear. I don't believe in swearing but this, sir, is the God damndest nonsense I ever read!"

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"I thought so, too," I agreed.

The old Wiz looked keenly at me and smiled. "Just edit it up a bit, will you?" he asked. "The way it reads now it's just crazy!"

When we got off the deep stuff about "cultural impulses" and touched on subjects with which he was familiar, the answers were fairly clear. I had been interested in the Southeastern Construction Co which was supposed to be run by E. Jack Smith who occupied an office in the suite, but a little inquiry disclosed that the company was owned "in partnership" by the old Wiz and his immediate family and was doing a nice little business selling road construction to the State of Georgia and some municipalities.

"You and Gov. Rivers are very friendly, aren't you?" I asked.

"Not more than a lot of people."

"Wasn't the Governor an Exalted Cyclops in the Klan in Lakeland, Ga.?"

"Yes, sir. He was."

He returned to the subject of road building.

"Has your road construction business increased since Rivers became Governor?"

"Yes, quite a lot," he smiled.

"And the company doing all that business doesn't even have its name on the lobby bulletin board or on an office door?"

"Yep. That's right."

"How do people find you?"

"Oh, they manage."

"Has the Klan any political influence in Florida?"

"We are very strong there. It's one of our strongest states."

"Doing much road construction work there?"

"Yes, quite a bit."

"Got an office in Florida?"

"Nope. No office."

"How about Alabama and South Carolina? Is the Klan strong in those states?"

"Pretty strong."

"Doing any road construction work in those states?"

"Yep."

"Got any offices there?"

"Nope. No offices."

"Business just flows right in, eh? Right into an office which isn't even listed?"

"Aw, no," he protested. "We have to go out and get it."

"How about Texas?"

"What about it?" he countered.

Which brings us to the story of Philip E. Fox who was a high Klan leader when the Klan was in its heyday and had tremendous political influence.

Fox had been persuaded by Doc

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Evans to leave Dallas and establish himself in Atlanta. One day in 1923, Fox calmly rose from his chair in the Klan's Imperial Palace, walked in on a Captain William Coburn and unhurriedly shot him to death. It was after a sensational trial that he was sentenced, in 1924, to a term of life imprisonment.

He was confined to the state prison farm where he cultivated flowers, but before his case had a chance to be forgotten, the Klan's political influence began to slip and it was 1933 before something could be done about getting his release. Talmadge was then Governor and after a few talks with the Wizard, Talmadge decided that Fox was too good and valuable a man to keep in prison, and so he paroled him.

The old Wiz boasts that when Rivers became Governor he had a little talk with him, and Fox's citizenship rights were restored. The now completely freed killer found his way back to Dallas and became one of the acting geniuses who elected W. Lee O'Daniell as the hillbilly-band Governor of the largest state in the union.

"Fox was in constant touch with you during the election, wasn't he?" I asked.

"Yep. We've always been good friends and he writes to me often."

"Does he still ask for advice—and things like that?"

"Yep."

"Klan got a lot of influence in Texas?"

The old Wizard smiled and winked a long, slow wink. "We have more Governors now than we ever had," he said in a confidential tone. "But we're not talking so much about it. When we have a real Klansman in office we keep quiet nowadays. Now," he cautioned, "don't go getting the idea that I'm claiming the hillbilly Governor. I'm just saying that Fox helped a little and Fox is a very good friend of mine." ●