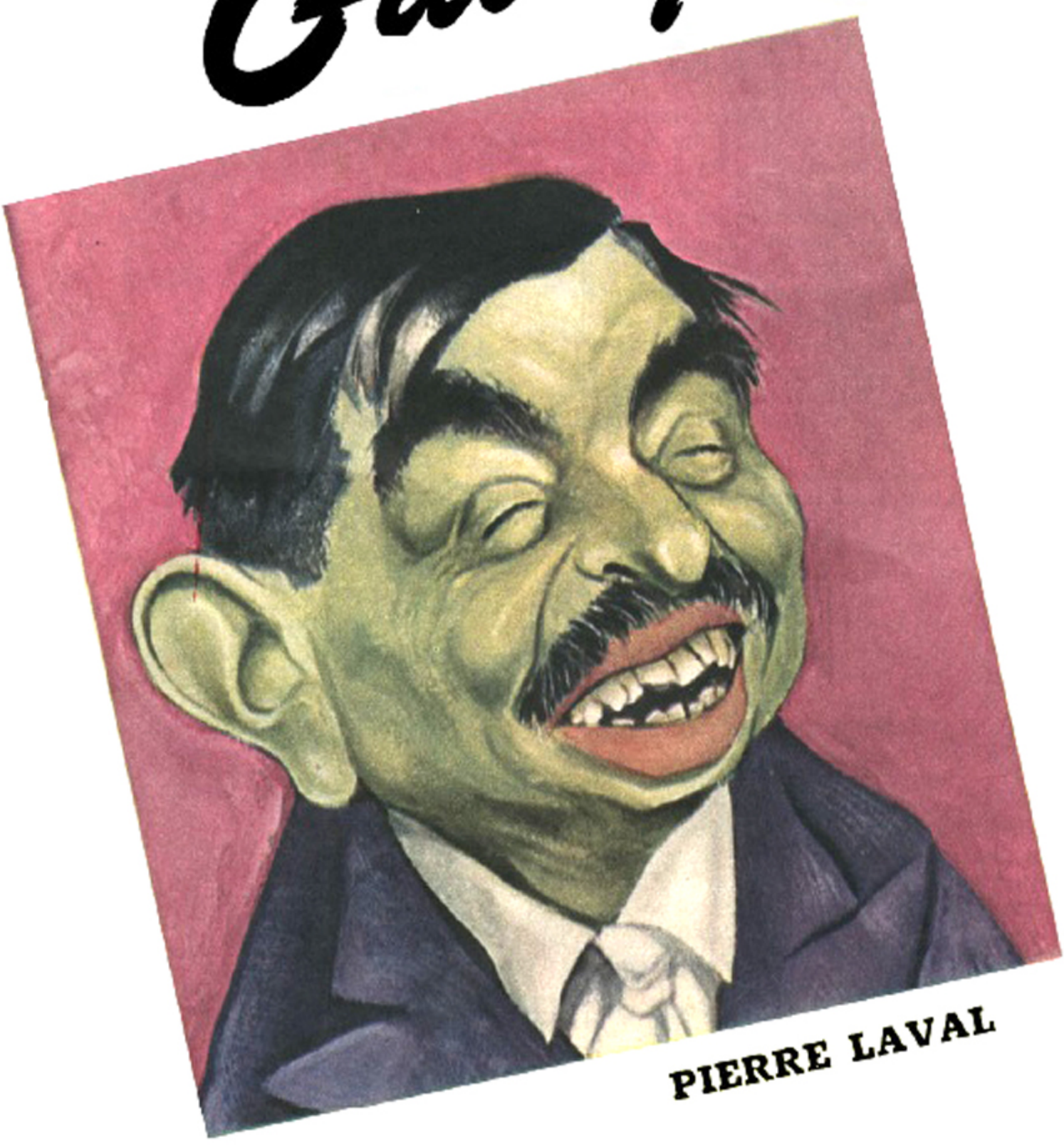
Collier's
OCTOBER 16, 1943
p. 74

THE Guilty



PIERRE LAVAL

THERE is no more tragic indictment of the French people, no better explanation of France's decline and fall, than the damning fact that Pierre Laval held high place in public life for thirty years, a scrofulous streak in the nation's blood stream. A liar, a cheat, a thief, a coward, an informer and a traitor, yet he was permitted to serve as a deputy, a senator, a member of the Cabinet and even as Premier.

There was not even the excuse of a persuasive personal appeal, for the man's dirty hair, yellow teeth and food-spotted clothes offended both the eye and the nose. As for ability, a whole country jested that Laval was "a schoolteacher without education, a lawyer without knowledge of the law, and a politician without a party." Socialist, Conservative, Communist, now Catholic and now anticlerical, he made his lack of principle a boast.

Prior to 1914, he tried to sell out his people to the Germans, scuttling back and forth between Paris and Switzerland on errands of betrayal. When war came he refused to bear arms, pleading varicose veins, and busied himself with defeatist activities. Trapped finally by the secret police, he escaped punishment by peaching on his confederates. As shameless as venal, there was never a time when his official favors were not for sale. Even when Premier, he forced his Minister of Health to certify the health-giving properties of some polluted springs, and sold them for a fortune to a company under government control.

(continued)

OldMagazineArticles.com

It has not yet been proved that he took Nazi money, but it is a matter of record that he stood for a Franco-German alliance, reviling England as France's real enemy. After the flight from Paris, when Weygand and others urged the transfer of the government to North Africa, it was Pierre Laval who induced surrender, spreading the lie that Hitler had promised honorable, even favorable, terms.

At Pétain's side as vice-premier, the aged marshal soon recognized Laval as a Nazi tool, and kicked him out in a notable burst of rage. Now came crawling, boot-licking visits to Berlin, and the spring of 1942 saw Laval restored to power as Chief of Government, the real ruler of France.

Forced into the open for the first time in his life, and knowing well the fate that awaits him in event of defeat, no order from Berchtesgaden has gone unheeded. Up to date, more than 2,000,000 Frenchmen have been sent into the Reich as slave workers, and riots are suppressed no less bloodily than in Poland or Norway.

Creating a Gestapo of his own, Laval has imprisoned and shot with all the enthusiasm of a Himmler, and answers the repeated attempts on his life by throwing out dragnets that catch even women and children. He starves Frenchmen that Germans may gorge, imposing the death penalty on farmers failing to meet their quota of grain and garden truck.

Commanded by Berlin to rob and persecute the Jews, Laval obeyed with a ferocious zeal that aroused every Frenchman to new rage and resistance. Jews were even dragged from their beds in hospitals, and in one district alone, three hundred committed suicide rather than face the horrors of Laval's concentration camps. When the Catholic clergy protested his barbarities, Laval arrested priests and bishops, shouting that he did not propose to "take lessons in humanity from the preachers of a discredited faith."

Pierre Laval! False to his fellow men, to his country and to his God. Long a traitor, now a mass murderer. *Remember him!* ★★★

CARICATURE BY BAM BERMAN

OldMagazineArticles.com