

AN ADVENTURE IN GEORGIA

BY CHARLES F. PEKOR, JR.

WHEN, toward the end of 1920, Julian Harris and his wife came back to Georgia to settle down there were few signs that anyone took more than a polite and passing interest in the event. Even to their fellow journalists of the State it was of only the mildest importance. What they noted was simply the fact that a former managing editor of the *Atlanta Constitution* (more recently editor and general manager, for a brief space, of the Paris edition of the *New York Herald*) had returned to his native parts and bought a half share in the inconsequential Columbus *Enquirer-Sun*. The *Enquirer-Sun* was a dull paper in a town on the Chattahoochee river, facing Alabama across the stream. It had little circulation, and rather less influence. The general belief in Georgia editorial rooms, no doubt, was that Harris had tired of the great world and its wickedness, and yearned only to spend the remainder of his days in the placid round of a respectable editor in a Christian town.

But that notion did not prevail for long. At once the *Enquirer-Sun* began to show an enterprise and an energy long passed from Georgia journalism. The old editor, Loyless, had been protesting against the excesses of the Klan, then in full blast in the State; when Harris joined him that protest suddenly became sharp and devastating. The other newspapers of the State were all afraid of the dragons and kleagles. But not the *Enquirer-Sun*. It tackled them head-on, and early in 1921 its own denunciations were reinforced by the blistering articles of the *New York World*. No other paper in Georgia dared print those articles, but

Harris printed them. And simultaneously he began printing other articles of a daring and unprecedented character. He tackled the Fundamentalists; he tackled the Volstead Act; he tackled the State's camorra of tin-horn politicians; he even tackled the courts. In six months the *Enquirer-Sun* began to be talked about; in a year it began to acquire a following; in two years it was leading the journalism of Georgia; in three years it was the most quoted and probably the most influential newspaper south of the Potomac.

Last May the syndics of the Pulitzer Foundation had one of their somewhat rare attacks of sound judgment. Canvassing the United States for the paper that had rendered the "most disinterested and meritorious public service" during 1925, they at last became aware of the Columbus *Enquirer-Sun*. They had overlooked it in 1924 and 1925, but they saw it in 1926. So they gave the Harrises the Pulitzer gold medal, and elected Julian Harris a member of the Pulitzer Advisory Board. He succeeded the late Solomon B. Griffin, of the *Springfield Republican*. The fact, no doubt, caused rejoicing throughout the South.

II

When Harris came home to Georgia, in the Autumn of 1920, he came into as dispiriting an atmosphere, journalistically speaking, as Christendom could offer. Thomas W. Loyless had sold the *Augusta Chronicle* and he and R. L. McKenney of Macon, an absentee, owned the half-moribund Columbus *Enquirer-Sun*. Harris heard that McKenney wanted to sell. The tradi-

tional hankering of every newspaper man to control some sort of newspaper somewhere, sometime, and run it precisely "as a newspaper ought to be run," had been long stirring in him. Once, he had said nay to Lord Northcliffe when offered the advertising managership of the London *Daily Mirror* because he did not want to give up the hope of achieving his dream back home. Likewise, he had a great affection for the State of his nativity. So he went to Columbus to look into the thing.

Columbus crouches on the red banks of the muddy Chattahoochee, at the head of navigation. Across the stream, as I have said, lies Alabama, whose motto is "Here We Rest." In 1828, the same year that Mirabeau Buonaparte Lamar, first Vice-President and second President of the Republic of Texas, established what is now the *Enquirer-Sun*, the Georgia Legislature laid out what are now the town's broad and shady streets, catalogued the place as a trading-post, and called it Columbus. Atlanta was raw and shabby when Columbus, solid and superior, cast cannon and built gunboats for the Confederacy. It is now a cotton-mill town and once called itself the Lowell of the South. But even the local Chamber of Commerce claims only 70,000 souls within four miles of the courthouse, and this area includes the faubourgs of Phenix City and Girard, over in Alabama, centers in the manufacture and marketing of corn liquor. Perhaps a fourth of the community looks to the mills for its bread and goes to work too early to read a morning newspaper. The city was governed until January, 1923, by a council that, with a score of men, seemed to get along with the yeomanry with less fuss than the present city commission of five, elected from the city at large and usually from the commercial nobility.

Not in the city limits, but hard by, is Fort Benning, an army post supporting also the Army Infantry School. The school is a sort of teachers' institute for officers, and a large proportion of the post's population of about 5000 is of the officer class.

These officers lend color to the community life, and scores of them have carried away wives from the civilian population. Fort Benning was named for a Confederate general hailing from Columbus. Its quarters without friction in city or on reservation a Negro regiment, the historic Twenty-Fourth, lately of Brownsville, Texas. Officers from the late enemy hordes occasionally visit Fort Benning. One such, there recently, was Lieutenant General Schirmer, retired, who during the last two years of the war was chief of artillery of the German Army. Captain Pat Leiber, the weapon specialist, asked him whether the Germans really ever had a gun that would shoot seventy-five miles.

"Ah!" the veteran war-horse replied. "Ninety miles plus. But we made one grave error. First, we should have investigated your Georgia corn liquor, and mixed some of it with the powder we used in the big gun. Then we could have shot two hundred miles."

Columbus has no Watch and Ward Society, but it has a public library that recently barred Sherwood Anderson's "Dark Laughter." Most of the books in Columbus homes are there only after school hours. Such was the chosen theater of Julian and Julia Harris' journalistic operations in 1920.

Julian Harris began his newspaper career in his home State and had something of a reputation in the craft before he ever left Georgia, for at twenty-four he was managing editor of the Atlanta *Constitution*, with but two predecessors, the distinguished Henry W. Grady and Clark Howell, the latter now editor. After several years on the Atlanta dailies and in various other jobs, including the editorship of the *Uncle Remus Magazine*, he sold his home in Atlanta and took Mrs. Harris abroad. Returning after a year, in December, 1913, he was offered the Sunday editorship of the New York *Herald*. He agreed to take the post if Mr. Bennett would kill the so-called Sunday Committee, which had supervision over the

Sunday editor, and the committee's death warrant was duly cabled from Paris. In the Summer of 1915 Harris was made advertising manager of the *Evening Telegram*, and in December went to Paris as editor-in-charge of the European edition of the *Herald*. In the Fall of 1916, he resigned, returned to America, trained at Plattsburg, and then served as captain in the Military Intelligence Department until December, 1918. After a few months as assistant to the managing editor of the *Herald*, he went to Europe again as correspondent, and in 1920 again took charge of the Paris *Herald* as editor and general manager. A month or two later, when Munsey bought the Bennett papers, Harris left and traveled a while on the Continent. Then he came home and heard about the Columbus *Enquirer-Sun*.

There was a definite understanding when the alliance was made with Loyless at Columbus that not only would the anti-Klan crusade Loyless had begun be continued with increased energy, but that the paper would stand determinedly against race prejudice, religious intolerance and social injustice to the poor whites and blacks. The new ownership was acclaimed by the unsuspecting Rotary Club as "the greatest thing that has happened to Columbus since we got the camp." Then everybody went to work, Loyless as editor and the Harris in the background—Harris eclipsed under the title and grind of business manager, and his wife reading proof, writing an occasional special article, and running a weekly book page. Harris, at this time, had scarcely been identified by the community save as a son of Joel Chandler Harris, "who wrote 'Uncle Remus.'" Mrs. Harris had published a "Life and Letters of Joel Chandler Harris," and had translated into English "The Foundling Prince," a collection of Roumanian folklore. She had also contributed a number of syndicated articles to the New York *Herald*. But in Columbus she was known only as the wife of the son of Joel Chandler Harris.

Automatically, as such, she and Harris were received into the homes that matter in Columbus. Today they know and are interested in everything and everybody in the town, but they betray a weakness for young people with ideas. In their suburban apartment, walled with books, many of them bound by Mrs. Harris herself in the days when she had leisure for the crafts, all comers are made charmingly welcome. The Harris in themselves are as youthful in appearance as in tastes and feeling. Julian's stature is slightly below the average, his figure is a little plump, and his face is round, boyish and animated. Mrs. Harris dresses the part of neither uplifter nor intellectual. Short, red-brown hair, coifed skilfully to afford the convenience without the appearance of a bob, a rosy, pleasing face—there you have her. Her laboratory is at home: a desk and a typewriter in a corner of the dining-room.

The *Enquirer-Sun* office is distinctly Southern and old-fashioned. One scents printer's-ink at the front door. Circulation, advertising and news departments and the composing room are merely partitioned off. The editor has his little compound with shellacked page matrices as mural decorations, newspapers piled high over his desk, and hook-files full of editorials and news stories. It is not a shrine of Service; it is a very business-like workshop.

III

The Klan saluted the *Enquirer-Sun* with a full-dress parade even before Harris succeeded Loyless as editor. Harris and a reporter stood in front of the office, pretending to recognize individual marchers and write down their names. There really were no names, but neither were there any more parades. The klan found it more comfortable thereafter to threaten by the process of anonymous letters.

Harris' first day as editor got him into trouble. A county peace officer conspicuous for his zeal in Law Enforcement had slaughtered a former county officer sus-

pected by the drys of trafficking in the stuff. The W. C. T. U. held a prayer-meeting at the leading Methodist church for the comfort of the accused. Judge George P. Munro, of the Superior Court of Muscogee county, without motion from either prosecution or defense, ordered a change of venue. He reasoned that the prayer-meeting had inflamed the friends of the deceased and that consequently the life of the accused, if he were tried in Columbus, would be endangered. Harris, in an editorial on his first day as editor, entitled "Putting Out a Fire With Gasoline," characterized the Judge's action as an insult to Columbus and Muscogee county, and argued that he had contributed more toward inflaming the passions of the deceased's friends than would a hundred prayer-meetings.

The new editor was arrested for contempt of court, marched to the bar between two officers, lectured for an hour on the sanctity of the law and of the Superior Court of Muscogee county, and invited to defend himself. He replied in kind, informing the Court blandly of the responsibilities and privileges of the press and reserving the right to do it all again if necessary. "In the language of the Scriptures," said the prudent Judge, finally dismissing the charge of contempt, "go and sin no more."

Circulation managers of the *Enquirer-Sun* have led unhappy lives, and been hard to keep. The Harris-Loyless coalition started with a modest 3400 net. This moved up to 5000, but the initial attack on the Klan cost a round thousand. When the Harrises came into full control of the paper in 1922, they began to call the Volstead Act bad names, and 300 old subscribers abandoned ship in a body. This was the first breath of any suggestion from any Georgia newspaper that Prohibition was not quite perfect. For a full year, the *Enquirer-Sun* carried on without a kind word from any contemporary editor or subscriber. But not now. The people of Columbus, battered by Harris' arguments,

gradually began to see the light, and to-day fanatic Prohibitionists among them are very few, indeed. As for Harris, all he asks for is "properly permented beer and light wines, and true temperance."

When the Scopes trial began in the adjoining State of Tennessee, the Harrises were discovered among the small company that saw in the contest a struggle for liberty. Their paper was still far from opulent, but they recognized in the trial the newspaper story of a lifetime, so they went to Dayton as their own reporters, and were amazed to find no other Georgia newspaper represented there. Beside the expenses of the trip and the cost of telegraph tolls, the *Enquirer-Sun's* service in reporting the buffoonery cost it 400 Fundamentalists subscribers. But 250 of these have come back into the fold since.

"What do you think of those Harrises!" exploded a pious member of the Columbus bar while the trial was in progress. "Taking dinner with that low-down Clarence Darrow up there at Dayton—and writing about it!"

But for the *Enquirer-Sun* Georgia instead of Tennessee would have been the scene of the trial. In 1924 the Georgia House of Representatives committee on education, by a vote of 13 to 0, reported favorably a bill withdrawing State funds from any school teaching the theory of biological evolution. Until then, William Jennings Bryan's devout crusade to check the advance of science had been taken seriously only by Kentucky, and even in Kentucky his bill had perished. But this Georgia business was serious—a unanimous committee report. The *Enquirer-Sun* surrendered its entire editorial page to the subject, with Mrs. Harris explaining Darwinism and narrating its history while her husband addressed himself to uncompromising editorials of protest, day in and day out. When the bill came to a vote at last, it met an overwhelming and, to Georgia, astonishing defeat. The majority of Georgia legislators were (and are) on the *Enquirer-Sun's* mailing-list. Once again, since the

Scopes trial, the issue has been brought to life in the Georgia Legislature. But the *Enquirer-Sun* squelched it a second time—and denounced the pedagogues of the State for not speaking out. I quote from a characteristic editorial:

Something is wrong somewhere when educators, the men and women who are supposed to be willing to sacrifice everything to their ideal of integrity of intellect, have no word in defense of learning. The *Enquirer-Sun* invites from any educator in Columbus or elsewhere in Georgia some word on this unusual condition, this amazing symptom—clear-eyed Knowledge apparently cringing at the misshapen feet of Ignorance.

Many letters poured in from pedagogues in praise of the paper's stand, but all of them were marked "confidential" and "not for publication."

A specialist in municipal management was imported from Pennsylvania when Columbus adopted the commission-manager form of government. The commission was given plainly to understand by the local patriots that Columbus did not need a Yankee to run the town, but the Yankee was brought in, anyhow. However, after Mayor J. Homer Dimon's residence had been dynamited and his front porch blown away, the Yankee was waylaid and beaten and went away in disgust. Then the community entertained itself with rumors. One of them concerned a plot hatched, appropriately enough, in a cemetery at midnight, with private detectives listening in, to blow up the houses of the city commissioners and an apartment-house owned by the mayor and fortuitously sheltering Julian and Julia Harris. The commissioners had faith enough in the report to employ guards so alert that even Harris was held up one night at his own doorstep.

Catchwords appeal to the Georgia imagination. *Exempli gratia*: "It's Great To Be a Georgian." Whatever its origin, the Georgia press took a fancy to it. It made an arresting lead for any old editorial and a clinching conclusion for any old argument. Governor Clifford Walker officially indorsed it and its future became assured. Julian Harris then helped himself to the

slogan for the first time, but he made a rearrangement of the words, and it became, "Is It Great To Be a Georgian?"

Is it great to be a Georgian? Is it great to be a son or a daughter of a State which seeks to cover its many shames with the unceasing utterance of an unmeaning slogan? Is it great to be a citizen of a State which indorsed the lynching of a prisoner and insulted and defamed a Governor [John M. Slaton] who as a man and a leader stood and still stands head and shoulders above any person who assailed him? Is it great to be a citizen of a State which is the proud parent of a cowardly hooded order founded and fostered by men who have been proved liars, drunkards, blackmailers and murderers? Is it great to be a citizen of a State whose Governor is a member of and subservient to that vicious masked gang and whose officials are either members of or in sympathy with it? Is it great to be a citizen of a State where a mob openly lynches a lunatic and no effort is made to capture and condemn the murderers who committed this revolting crime? Is it great to be a citizen of a State which has a larger percentage of illiteracy and which spends less *per capita* for education than any other State in the Union?

Then the general condition of Georgia was surveyed under the caption, "Well, Who Cares?" Thus:

Claude West, thief and forger, got away with \$140,000 of the State of Georgia's money. He was sentenced to five years in the penitentiary and was pardoned last week after serving four years. Mule Hicks, an ignorant 17-year-old Negro, stole a mule worth less than \$100. He was sentenced to serve twenty years at hard labor. After serving twelve years he was still in the chain gang, and as a result of his treatment attempted to escape. He was convicted of murder and sentenced to hang, although not a witness saw the killing. Mule Hicks is a Negro. *Who cares?*

An obscure dispatch reporting the Ku Klux Klonvocation in the Fall of 1924 mentioned the address of "the Governor of a great State." Governor Walker was absent from Georgia, having informed newspaper men he was going to Philadelphia "to rest." The Klonvocation was at Kansas City. Julian Harris, handicapped by limited finances, appealed successfully to Herbert Bayard Swope for the coöperation of the *New York World* in covering the Kansas City end, while the *Enquirer-Sun's* Atlanta correspondent, John W. Hammond, pestered His Excellency for an answer to the paper's editorial demand

that he confess or deny that he was the Governor and Georgia the great State. Eventually, Walker came through. It was too much for one editorial. The *Enquirer-Sun* reviewed the episode in a blazing three-installment serial entitled "Smoked Out."

IV

But the *Enquirer-Sun* is a great deal more than the usual journalistic crusader. There is absolutely nothing sensational about it. Its news matter is printed under decorous heads, and its editorial page, with Harris' trenchant and well-written editorials, Mrs. Harris' reviews of books and other articles, the "Home Brew" column of W. H. Tucker, and the "Good Morning" column of W. C. Woodall, is dignified and extremely readable. Very few big city papers, indeed, have editorial pages so intelligent. The great and growing influence of the paper, not only in Georgia but throughout the South, is due less to its assaults upon the prevailing stupidity than to its patient expositions of the new common sense. Its brief career shows how much may be accomplished, even in the most unfavorable surroundings, by one resolute and intelligent editor. There were plenty of enlightened men in Georgia before Harris came home, but they were scattered and unorganized, and very few of them were newspaper editors. Harris simply awoke them to a consciousness of their power.

His example, so far, has had but little effect upon the big dailies of Atlanta. In 1921, after Harris had nearly completed printing the New York *World's* series of articles against the Klan, Hearst's *Atlanta Georgian* entered the fray and lost 8500 subscribers thereby, but the other sheets of the town are still political hacks of the old sort. It is in the smaller towns that most of Harris' influence shows itself. Half of his editorials are addressed to their editors, and the response grows more hearty month by month. Few Southern States, indeed, can show more vigorous and enlightened small-town papers than

the Macon *Telegraph*, the Albany *Herald*, the Americus *Times-Recorder*, the Greensboro *Herald-Journal*, the Dalton *Citizen*, the Madison *Madisonian*, the Cartersville *Tribune-News*, the De Kalb *New Era* and the *Cobb County Times* of Marietta. Of this refreshing group the *Enquirer-Sun* is the leader—and it gets valuable help, too, from the excellent Montgomery *Advertiser*, across the Chattahoochee. Some time ago someone thought to find out which paper in Georgia was most quoted by the rest of the State press. In the period under review the *Atlanta Journal*, run by John S. Cohen, Democratic national committeeman for Georgia, was quoted eleven times, the *Atlanta Constitution*, Clark Howell's paper, fourteen times, the Macon *Telegraph* thirty-eight times, and the *Enquirer-Sun* eighty-five times. Yet the *Enquirer-Sun's* circulation is still only 7,000 a day.

Once the Atlanta papers were immensely influential throughout the South. All the other smaller Southern dailies and all the country weeklies took their cues from the awesome Atlanta editorial pages, with their stalwart indorsement of the Boys' Pig Club movement and their dashing condemnation of crime. But things are changing under the generalship of the *Enquirer-Sun*. Once groveling little weeklies are becoming cocky and demanding to know the why of this or that. Meanwhile, Harris plugs along under the hot Columbus sun, and Mrs. Harris and the rest of the staff work double time. An occasional Baptist preacher still denounces him as "a menace to the community," but even the Baptists, no doubt, will be flabbergasted by the gold medal. Some time ago, when the most intelligent of them, Pastor Ashby Jones, of Atlanta, quitted the State for St. Louis, he wrote to Harris:

I wish I could tell you what I think you mean to the State and the South. Your high ideals, your sympathetic understanding of social conditions, and your splendid courage are an inspiration to all the forward-looking forces of Georgia.

Harris, I daresay, would delete "inspiration" and "forward-looking." They never appear in his editorials.

EDITORIAL

A mood of constructive criticism being upon me, I propose forthwith that the prevailing method of choosing legislators be abandoned among us, and that the method used in choosing juries be substituted. That is to say, I propose that the men who make our laws be chosen by chance and against their will, instead of by deliberate fraud and against the will of all the rest of us, as now. But is the jury system itself imperfect? Is it occasionally disgraced by gross abuse and scandal? Then so is the system of justice devised and ordained by the Lord God Himself. Didn't He assume that the Noachian Deluge would be a lasting lesson to sinful humanity—that it would put an end to all manner of crime and wickedness, and convert mankind into a race of Methodists? And wasn't Noah himself, its chief beneficiary, lying drunk, naked and uproarious within a year after the ark landed on Ararat? All I argue for the jury system, invented by man, is that it is measurably better than the scheme invented by God. It has its failures and its absurdities, its abuses and its corruptions, but taking one day with another it manifestly works. It is not the fault of juries that so many murderers go unwhipped of justice, and it is not the fault of juries that so many honest men are harassed by preposterous laws. The juries find the gunmen guilty: it is the judges higher up who deliver them from the noose, and turn them out to resume their butcheries. It is from judges again, and not from juries, that Volsteadian padlocks issue, and all the other devices for making a mock of the Bill of Rights. Are juries occasionally sentimental? Then let us not forget that it was their sentimentality, in the Eighteenth Century, that gradually forced a measure of decency and justice

into the English Common Law. It was a jury that blocked the effort of the Department of Justice to railroad Senator Wheeler to prison on false charges. It was another jury that detected and baffled the same Department's perjurers in the O'Leary case, during the late war. And it was yet another jury that delivered the eminent Fatty Arbuckle from what was, perhaps, the most disingenuous and outrageous persecution ever witnessed in a civilized land.

Would any American Legislature, or Congress itself, have resisted the vast pressure of the bureaucracy in these cases? To ask the question is to answer it. The dominant character of every legislative body ever heard of, at least in this great free Republic, is precisely its susceptibility to such pressure. It not only leaps when the bureaucracy cracks the whip; it also leaps to the whip-cracking of scores of extra-legal (and often, indeed, *illegal*) agencies. The Anti-Saloon League, despite its recent disasters, is still so powerful everywhere that four legislators out of five obey it almost instinctively. When it is flouted, as has happened in a few States under an adverse pressure yet more powerful, the thing is marvelled at as a sort of miracle. The bureaucracy itself is seldom flouted at all. When it is in a moral mood, and heaving with altruistic sobs, the thing simply never happens. Is it argued that Congress has nevertheless defied it, and Dr. Coolidge with it? Then the argument comes from persons whose studies of Washington pathology have been very superficial. At least nine-tenths of the idiocies advocated by Dr. Coolidge and his highly dubious friends have been swallowed by both Houses with no more than a few reflex gags. Even the astounding Warren appointment was defeated in the