

EGYPT

BY W. A. S. DOUGLAS

IN WARTIME I had unconsciously done the editor a trifling favor, but I had forgotten the circumstances long since. When I walked into his combination newspaper and job printing office a few days ago he dropped a fistful of proofs and rushed at me with both hands stretched out in welcome. It seemed, from what he told me, that I was in a measure responsible for his business success.

I first met him when he was superintending the activities of a detail of potato-peelers in a battalion cook-house. I had missed the noon meal at the place where I was due to get it and was foraging. He fixed me up with two ham-and-egg sandwiches, a beaker of coffee, and a lot of conversation. I learned then that we were both of a trade. Scribblers. In addition he was a born cook.

From then on, while I remained in that camp, my breakfast problem was solved. Being the expert malingerer that all old soldiers are, I so arranged my day's toil that I did not have to begin it before ten of the morning. Thus I could sleep till nine. The difficulty about that was that breakfasts shut off all over the place hours before my private reveille.

I had been eating in my new-found friend's cook-house about two weeks when one bright morning the depot brigade commander came clanking in, looking for trouble. I had just finished a whole grapefruit. Before me was a minute steak sprinkled with chives and cooked in butter. To one side was a stack of golden brown French-fried potatoes. To the other, a plateful of toast. A jug of coffee and a pot of red currant jelly completed the lay-out.

The colonel stared at me a moment wall-eyed. But we had learned to understand each other long before this. Time was when he had toted a rifle and a bayonet, foot-slogged and sounded out with the best of them.

He swallowed the water in his mouth. "How come, Loafer, how come?" he shouted.

I pointed with my fork at the young man who had prepared the repast. The commandant straddled the bench opposite me, sat down and unbuckled his belt.

"Make it two, Oscar," he yelled at my cook.

"Here," he continued—and he grinned in anticipation—"is where I pick up the first decent meal I have had since they hooked me up with this lousy outfit."

That same night the cook's name appeared in orders. He was promoted to sergeant and appointed purveyor to the officers' mess, at that time caring for about two hundred and fifty commissioned men. Great pickings!

I departed for other fields shortly after, but the editor stayed on his new job until his discharge from the army, nine months later. He must have practised the most rigid economy on his pay of \$55 a month, for he told me that he came out with a bank-roll of \$2500. He had gone in with seventy-five cents! Strange but true, as many an ex-soldier can testify. I have met members of that mess and have yet to hear one who complained of the chow set before them. So apparently everybody was satisfied.

With his savings the former cook invested in the little newspaper he was now

running, and it pleased him to repeat that his present prosperity was due to the fact that I had paraded his talents before the brigade commandant.

This was in Egypt, where the editor had settled—that interesting bottom end of Southern Illinois watered by rivers as muddy and sluggish as the Nile and capitated by the city of Cairo. It is rich farming country, and where it is not that it is even richer coal country. Its towns have figured much in the public prints of late, especially in those journals that specialize in murder. Herrin, Benton, Marion and Harrisburg—their names have been blazed all over the nation in the matter of killings, Ku Klux riots, gang and gunmen activities, rum-running, bootlegger-feuds, and the like.

"However, we sparkle," the editor told me as he closed his desk, dragged on his coat and pushed me through the door to the street. "Our night life is the most cosmopolitan thing this side of Paris. I'll show you."

II

I stared down the tree-lined road. A flivver or two stood at rest in the shade. I counted five people on the sidewalks, taking in territory as far as my eye could reach. Two blocks away, a freight train was chugging back and forth on the tracks. The burg was apparently sound asleep.

"What! Here?" I asked him—and I laughed.

"No, I never dirty my own doorstep," he answered, very dignified indeed. "Not but what I could provide a pleasure or two right here if I wasn't as circumspect as I am. But you'll stop laughing before the sun rises."

We rode for an hour past rich farms and through tiny hamlets and so into a town slightly larger than the seat of the editor's activities. He pulled up in front of a decent looking little hotel, disappeared inside, and emerged a few moments later with a companion. I was then introduced to a

Mr. Seligsburg, a pleasant Jewish gentleman. He informed me that he represented an Eastern trunk and bag manufacturing company. He had, it seemed, made contact with the editor on the day before, and, like myself, had been promised a glint of the white lights.

It was dusk by now and the electric lamps were burning. We drove on for about two blocks, past a corner where a pair of swing doors brought back certain memories.

"Wide open," I remarked.

"The expression is inadequate," answered the editor.

He herded us inside. We found ourselves up against a long bar with the usual gentleman in a white apron officiating. The floor was sanded and half a dozen tables were ranged against the wall. About twenty citizens were engaged in the business of drinking when we entered. They all knew the editor.

"Hullo, John," came a chorus.

"Hullo, John," smiled the bartender. He wiped his hands on his apron and exchanged grips as Mr. Seligsburg and I were presented as regular guys.

"What's it going to be, boys?" asked White Apron.

"Three half-and-halves," ordered the editor. "You'll like this," he told us. "It's a great drink."

The bartender placed before us what were once called small beer-glasses. Into each he poured a measure of a dark red, rather thick liquid, and then he topped it with an equal portion of a clear white fluid.

"What is it?" asked Mr. Seligsburg.

"Half home-made port wine and half home-made corn liquor," answered the editor.

"I'm scared of corn liquor," said Mr. Seligsburg dubiously.

Everybody turned round to look at him. No animosity in the scrutiny. Just pained surprise. A gentleman in overalls acted as spokesmen for the Egyptians.

"Stranger here?" he asked.

"New York," answered Mr. Seligsburg.

"Well, now, that explains it," said Overalls. "You ain't never drunk the corn we make in Egypt."

"Swallow that," he said suddenly with a sort of menace in his tone.

Mr. Seligsburg put the liquor to his lips, tasted it, and then tossed it down in one swallow.

"That's a drink," he said, putting down his glass. I tipped my own, as did the editor. It was sweet and potent, devoid of oil or smell.

"Just kind of knew you'd change your mind," beamed Overalls.

III

"Call the sheriff," spoke the editor to the bartender.

"Whatever for?" I asked nervously.

"Think I'd bring a buddy of mine into this man's town and not have him meet the dignitaries?" he answered. "You'll shake hands with the sheriff. He'll like you and he'll send for the mayor. You don't know the heart that beats in Egypt. But you'll learn."

While the bartender busied himself at the telephone, the editor led us outside and pointed straight across the street.

"There," he said, raising his hat as he spoke, "is the Roman Catholic church."

Then he pointed diagonally across to a frame building sporting a large wooden cross.

"That," he explained, "is the headquarters of the Ku Klux Klan."

He swung us both half right and pointed again. This time to a pretty little brick church standing above the road on a well-kept green lawn dotted with rustic benches.

"There's the Methodist church," he told us, and then turned us again till we faced the swing doors through which we had come out. "Let's have another drink."

In the midst of this one the sheriff arrived. A big broad-shouldered fellow. A native of Kentucky, who had drifted this far north in his youth.

"He's a Republican and a Klansman," explained the editor. "And he's proud of it. As proud as I am of being a Catholic. Aren't you, Harry?"

The sheriff nodded his head.

"I tell you," continued the editor, "we're real cosmopolitans around here. We're effervescent."

The sheriff, it seemed, had had a snorter or two previous to this meeting. He weaved slightly and clutched now and again at the bar, but declared that a couple of the half-and-halves would steady him. So he belted three measures of port wine and corn liquor and then went into a long dissertation on the excellence of the latter as brewed in Egypt. It was apparently a matter of great sectional pride, judging from the way that all the Egyptians spoke of it.

The sheriff took a bottle and poured a measure of the corn into a glass. Then he took several sprigs of mint, squeezed them tightly over the drink and dropped them in. To this he added a drop of white syrup. He stirred the concoction with his trigger finger.

"Drink that yere," he said to me.

I did, found it quite palatable, and said so.

"As I see it," he declaimed in his native dialect, "it's jest the lovin' cyaah the fahmehs gives to the makin' of this yere man's drink. Nothin' that's bootlegged yere fohm fohin paats can touch ouh 'gyptian cawn."

He swallowed another noggin.

"It's jest the lovin' cyaah," he continued, and then thumped the bar so that the glasses rang. "An' that's why the — — keeps a votin' dry."

We all had another and then the sheriff announced that it was meet that the mayor should come down and greet those whom the editor was now terming guests of the city. The bartender took over the duty of letting the chief executive know that he was "wanted before the bar pronto."

Apparently this was a standard pro-

cedure, for in ten minutes the mayor arrived. A little skinny man, as hospitable and anxious to please as his fellow official.

"Now I'm going to prove to you just how cosmopolitan we are around here," shouted the editor. "Look at the folks I've gathered here to meet you. Here's Seligsburg, a Jew and a wet. Here's the mayor, a Democrat, a Methodist and a wet. Here's the sheriff, a Republican, a Klansman and a wet. Here's me, a Catholic, a Socialist and a wet. All sorts of creeds united in one holy cause!"

"To hell with Prohibition!" bawled the sheriff, his glass held high. We all drank to the sentiment, including the balance of the customers scattered along the bar and at the tables.

IV

Time passed quickly, as it always does in pleasant company. The conversation was brilliant and interesting—or so it seemed to me under the urge of the frequent half-and-halves. We talked of politics, county, State and national. More than an hour so passed. The sheriff had been silent for several moments and so the editor's attention was directed to him in the midst of an encomium of Al Smith.

"What's the matter, Harry?" he cried, hastening to him. As he caught him by the arm, the sheriff gulped ominously, looked about the place wildly, and then made a mad dash for the door. He staggered across the street and came up against the side of the Catholic church.

The editor, Mr. Seligsburg and I had reached the swing doors in pursuit.

"My God, he's not going to do that if I can help it!" yelled the editor. He raced across and caught his friend round the waist, at the same time jerking his head back.

"Harry," he shouted, "you mustn't be sick against the church! For my sake, Harry!"

The sheriff gulped and threw his head even farther back. He half broke away,

as if willing to head for some other place.

The editor got his arm round him again and started to steer.

"Come here and help me," he yelled to us. I had on a new suit of clothes, and no Klan sheriff, no matter how big-hearted, was going to spoil it for me. But Mr. Seligsburg went over. Between the two of them they moved the huge Kentuckian across from the Catholic church to the Klan hall, and leaned him against that edifice.

"Now, Harry, get it off your chest," counselled the editor.

And Harry did.

They moved him inside the door to the stairs when the worst was over and seated him on the second step.

"You rest a while here and be as sick as you want to," said the editor.

"We'll leave him here a while," he told us, and so we returned to the saloon. We found it emptied considerably, but the mayor was still there. He was sitting at a table, his head laid on his arms, and loud snores attested to the fact that he was asleep.

"You got to get him out of here, John," announced the bartender. "That hellish mixture of yours got him. He can't stand much no time."

"Let him sleep it off," advised the editor. "Give us another drink."

"No, sirree! He don't sleep here. The last time was the finish. He swore the next joint he woke up in drunk would be closed for the rest of his administration. Get him out of here, I tell you!"

"Oh, all right," answered John.

"And you can't take him to the hotel or to home, neither," continued White Apron. "His missus mustn't see him, nor the folks 'round town."

"I'll find a place for him. I'll help out any Methodist."

With much groaning, grunting and dragging of his feet along the ground, the editor and Mr. Seligsburg hauled the mayor out. They carried him across the street and never gave up till they had laid

him to rest on one of the pretty rustic benches that spotted the lawn of the Methodist church. On his way back to the saloon the editor took a peep inside the door of the Klan hall. The sheriff, too, was snoring peacefully.

"Return, therefore, unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's," quoted the editor as he dusted his hands. "Hey, where are you going?" he shouted at Mr. Seligsburg, who was moving off in the general direction of the hotel.

The salesman halted and turned around.

"I know there's no synagogue in this man's town," he said. "But the gentleman who looks after the spiritual needs of my people here is the man I hope to sell a bill of goods to in the morning. I'll take no chances of your putting me to sleep on his doorstep. Good-night and thanks!"

And so he left us.

V

"And now what do you think of our night life?" asked the editor as we walked along the street. "Didn't I tell you we were effervescent?"

We passed the police-station, which was in a store on Main Street. Through the big glass windows we saw a dozen officers sprawled around the common-room. The doors were open to the mild night air.

"Hullo, boys," yelled the editor.

"Hullo, John," shouted the policemen.

"Now, ain't that just grand?" he demanded as we walked on. "All Klansmen in there, and they cheer me as I go by! Let's go past again and get another welcome."

We did.

"Hullo, boys," yelled the editor.

"Hullo, John," shouted the cops.

"That's one of the most marvellous things in the world," he told me as we went on. "Me a Catholic and all those lousy Klansmen hurrying at me! It just shows what a great leveller drink can be. Let's do it again."

I didn't want to, but he insisted. This time the answering hullo seemed rather forced. A frown on the faces of one or two of the police testified to their belief that they were being kidded. But to the editor the greeting apparently appeared just as genuine as ever.

"Let's go past once more. That sure is stimulating," he said. But I said no, and stuck to it.

We visited several more saloons and encountered many prominent and hospitable persons. But it was approaching midnight. The warning came in the person of a policeman who stuck his head in through the swinging doors and rapped on the side of one.

"Closing time, Fred," he announced to the bartender.

"Come on, boys," advised the bartender. "Drink her up and be on your way. When the law says close, we got to close."

"This has been a pleasant evening," I said to the editor as we stood outside. "I thank you for the presentation."

"What do you mean, presentation?" he answered. "This has just been a curtain-raiser. I told you I'd show you the sunrise in Egypt."

And he did.

TOM HEFLIN

BY JOHN W. OWENS

THE most unfortunate result of the latter-day spiritual development of the Hon. J. Thomas Heflin, Senator from Alabama, has not been noticed in the numerous current discussions of his high services to the nation. It is that we have lost, in an era of such dreadful conformity that Calvin Coolidge is by way of becoming the national model, the likeliest candidate in the whole of this broad land for the important post of Picturesque Statesman.

Tom, in his day, had great possibilities, not the least of which were physical. Soon after he came up to Washington, following a succession of such triumphs on his native heath as election to the mayoralty of his town and to the portfolio of state in the cabinet of Alabama, and began specializing on a larger scale in the Negro question, information that he was not without a certain promise was conveyed to old Senator Gorman, of Maryland, then boss of the Democratic party. Gorman was having difficulty in keeping within his fold the more intelligent and decent white people of his own State, so he had turned to the convenient Nigger, seeking on the one hand to use him as a bugaboo, and on the other to scare or trick him out of his naturally Republican ballot. Concluding from reports that reached him that Tom's line would go well in Maryland, he invited him to Baltimore for a palaver. Albert J. Almoney, a happy functionary at Democratic headquarters there, was sent to receive Tom and dock him at the old Eutaw House. When Albert returned, Gorman asked him what he thought of the visitor. "Senator," said Albert, who hailed from

a hard-riding country, "Senator, he's as handsome as a studhoss!"

He was, indeed, pleasant to the eye in those days—a strapping six-footer with only a trace of embonpoint, agile and not too far from graceful, with a face cut after the model of the idealized young Confederate soldier, and a fine crop of dark hair that ruffled romantically when the breezes blew or oratory was uncorked. His sartorial ensemble befitted him. He wore a Prince Albert coat, a b'iled shirt and a choker collar. His voice was loud and agreeable, if a trifle unctuous. And he had manner. It was slightly overdone perhaps, even as his garments had a shade too much emphasis and his voice that unctuous note. One felt that he might not be exactly three-ply. But Gorman liked him and decided to use him, and after his first voyage to Maryland he was recalled many, many times. His comings from Washington were festive occasions around Democratic headquarters, which were ruled in those days by one of the most sincere epicures ever developed in this land, the late General Murray Vandiver, and a body of able-stomached lieutenants. No man ever went away with a more glorious table record behind him than Tom Heflin. He could be eloquent, and he knew how to eat.

Nor were these triumphs in Maryland sporadic efforts. Tom's running mate in Washington in those days and for many years afterward was the lamented Ollie James of Kentucky. That Gargantuan creature was likened to everything from the back of a hack upward and downward, but he was never excluded from the status of a man, whatever the test of manhood