

CHAPTER III

GEORGE R. DALE: Editor....

It would be difficult to present a highly documented picture of Muncie during the two or three years of complete Klan control. The two daily papers were judiciously silent in their editorial columns about Klan activities. After all, in this commercial world a newspaper has to exist and to does so by paid advertising. It would have been economic folly to jeopardize the papers' incomes merely because of deitorial policy. If the papers fought the Klan they would be exposed to the wrath of an Invisible Empire that could miraculously stop advertizing intimidation. On the other hand, there were the Jewish merchants and small Cargolic minority and others who might refuse to advertise if the papers became too obviously pro-Klan. The result was no editorial policy of any kind with respect to the Klan. This was roughly the situation that prevailed over the entire state of Indiana.

There was, however, one exception to this rule --and a glaring one. That was a four-page weekly newspaper called The Muncie Post Democrat,¹ edited by an insignificant little man well past his prime who at first glance seemed to dispel any doubts as to the certainty of Darwin's theory of evolution.

¹The name was later changed to the Post-Democrat.

With quick wit and a sharper tongue, George R. Dale became the terror of the Klan. An iconoclast, a crusader, it was he who made the first visible inroads into Klan dominance in Indiana. It was he who gave heart and in fact shamed the great metropolitan newspapers into following suit in attacking the movement he so bitterly disliked.²

There is no specific explanation for George Dale's intense and bitter hatred of the Klan other than in his dislike for hypocrisy and sham he would have attacked any person or organization which he felt embodied these elements. He would have been the first to attack any organization smacking of fascism. He might have been a counterpart of Sinclair Lewis' Doremus Jessup.

Loved by some, hated by more, but respected by all for his abilities, he left an important mark upon Muncie and wrote a fascinating page in the history of American journalism. A master of invective and diatribe he proved once again the political power of the pen. And if his personal weaknesses prevent the honest observer from dubbing him a "great" man in character, at least the principles for which he stood have been those of great men.

² See Douglas, W.A.S., *op. cit.*, p. 484. For a brief resume of Dale's fight with the Klan see Seldes, G., Freedom of the Press, Indianapolis, 1935, p. 335ff. He says that "among the outstanding examples of achievements of the American free press as listed by Col. McCormick of the Chicago Tribune are the destruction of the K.K.K. and the case of George R. Dale, Muncie, Ind., publisher, sentenced for contempt of court".

Known as a "character", a fighter, a person who could be counted on to be "agin' it" when some controversial issue was facing the city, he remained an outsider all his life. He was a non-conformist who never "belonged" with the "nice people" of Middletown. He lived by a set of values completely foreign to theirs. What an exasperated community thought of him during the middle of his term as mayor of Muncie was well summed up in the opinion of the editor of the Press: "His nearly complete failure in administration of the city's affairs...may be ascribed almost wholly to his lack of judgement and to a misconception of his own ability."³ This attitude "represents the judgement of a culture living by compromise and indirection regarding the frank, often mixtaken efforts of a lifelong crusader forced by temperament and circumstances to 'go it alone.' The life of George Dale provides an interesting commentary on the culture in which he lived: it could not use him and he could not use it."⁴

Born in Monticello,⁵ Indiana, in 1869, Dale lived there just long enough to receive his formal education

³Muncie Evening Press, Feb. 1, 1933.

⁴Middletown In Transition, p. 324 n.

⁵The following biographical material comes almost entirely verbatim from Mrs. Dale. Some may be found in Roll, C.: Indiana, Chicago, 1931; vol.5, p.191. Most of his obituaries mentioned before carry some information of this sort. See also my article "Middletown's Maverick Mayor", in the Harvard Guardian, vol. II, no. 2; p. 31.

in the public schools. His father, a Civil War veteran, practised law and had a reputation for being a great fighter and political reformer. This is the only possible environmental explanation for Dale's own missionary zeal. The fact that his father was almost beaten to death before his eyes by thugs after winning a case left an indelible impression upon young Dale's mind. For the first time he saw how much the truth could hurt. Whether this incident had much to do with formulating his own crusading character is highly doubtful. As his wife said, many years later, when asked to what she attributed her late husband's disregard for the accepted values of the community in favor of the reformer's mantle; "There is no explanation. Every once in a while there's one of them born."

At the death of his parents, Dale went to Hartford City, Indiana, and worked in a factory just long enough to decide he would never be a manual laborer. He was 21 when, with a friend he started his first newspaper in Hartford City. From that time his career was journalism. He edited, at various times, several newspapers in and around Hartford City. One thing common to all his publications was that they were factious; always dedicated to "cleaning up dirty politics" in one place or other. In time his unique journalistic style evolved;

biting yet humorous, tactless but always truthful. Satirical and blunt on the one hand, he was equally a master of innuendo on the other. Ridicule tempered with wit, audacity tempered with more audacity made his name a fearful thing to those he opposed.

When Hartford City was incorporated Dale served as its first city clerk. It was the only political office he held until he became mayor of Muncie. Politics was his avocation. Often he remarked that he was much more interested in making or breaking someone else political-ly with his pen than in holding office himself.

Most of his early editorial battles were waged around the issue of prohibition. At a time when many counties in Indiana were instituting local option the county in which Dale published his papers was wringing wet. One of his papers, the Hartford City Journal, was financed by a group of local "drys", representing both political parties, who asked Dale to "clean up" the city with it. He refused the help of the "sanctimonious old hypocrites" in the Anti-Saloon League and did the cleaning job so well that he was once heard to remark while passing through Hartford City years later, "Didn't I fix this town,? It's sure a dead hole now."

In fact he "fixed" his home town so well that there was not much left against which he could crusade. Then

too, economic pressure caused by a growing family induced him to move to Muncie, a much larger city, where he had been offered a third interest in a new political paper sponsored by Dr. Bunch, then mayor. But with Bunch's fall from grace there was little more incentive to continue with the paper and Dale sold his interest. In 1921 he decided to start his own paper again.

During the first year of its publication, the Muncie Post-Democrat cried out against public utilities privately owned, vice, and the Republican party but carried very little Ku Klux Klan information with the exception of a few scattered remarks about anonymous letters and threats that suggested Klan tactics. Dale's remarks were so abusive and outspoken that few people in Muncie did more than shake their heads when the following editorial appeared on the front page of his paper. It carried a challenge and a declaration of faith:

"Last Friday night a band of armed thugs, with their faces completely obscured by black masks, jumped from an automobile.... and murderously assaulted the editor of the Post-Democrat and his eighteen year old son.

Another automobile accompanied the death car, but the skunks occupying that car did not get out. Guns were stuck in the faces of the editor and his son and they were ordered to throw up their hands. The former grasped the gun and succeeded in discharging it at the thug who held him up, possibly wounding him.

Just as the shot was fired, one of the gangsters struck the publisher a severe blow with a blackjack and at the same time one of the scoundrels beat the boy over the head with the butt of a revolver, after the boy had shown resistance. The gangsters then jumped into their car and drove away, accompanied by the other car.

Before leaving, however, the assassin who had beaten the defenseless youth, took deliberate aim at him and shot, the bullet going wild, however.

The attack was cowardly, and was evidently the work of men who would fear to show their ugly faces in open combat. It was very evidently the work of men who fear the Post-Democrat, and who took that method of attempting to instill fear into the heart of the publisher....

The Post-Democrat wishes to serve notice, here and now, to those who hope to intimidate us into servile fear of reprisals, that they have picked the wrong bird. The rule of the blackjack, the automatic, the black mask and the dark lantern, never works.

It might be possible for these dastardly cowards, who did not hesitate to beat up a boy because of their hatred and fear of his father, to inflict some serious injury on their victim, or even murder him but sure and sudden punishment awaits the perpetrators.

This is a civilized community, populated by people who believe in law and order and who abhor crookedness either in business or politics.... Muncie is not going to submit to the rule of such a small majority. If bands of gangsters are allowed to go unpunished, then law and order ceases and every man should carry a gun to protect his life.

The Muncie Press was the only one of the two dailies here to find fault, editorially, with the vicious assault of the masked assassins. It very truthfully said that the men should be apprehended and given the maximum punishment provided for by law. It might have gone farther and said that the cowards who hid in their obscure offices and inspired the attack, should also be dealt with as severely as the men who wore the masks.

The Star did not consider it worth while to make editorial comment on an act which was meant to strike at the very heart of the freedom of the press.

The Star evidently fears to antagonize the thugs. Possibly the editor would be afraid to go home in the dark if it said naughty things about the rude thugs who wore terrifying masks and carried pop guns.

There are some who seem to think that the attack was made by common, ordinary gangsters, working under orders issued by some common underworld boss. We are inclined to believe that there will be some surprises when the real facts are known and when the dirty skunks are compelled to stand before the bar of justice with the masks stripped from their engaging maps.

The Post-Democrat does not intend to be throttled by fear of personal violence. It will continue to tell the truth about the activities of crooked politicians and their lawless understrappers, in spite of the terrorist program which seems to have been inaugurated in Muncie.

Citizens who believe in law and order, and who do not want to see the city turned over to scoundrelly Apaches with masks over their faces and murder in their hearts, should stand behind the Post-Democrat in its efforts to promote decent government and to expose crooked politics."⁶

Sparing no names, Dale had been laying bare the state of Muncie's politics and from the above editorial it is clear that he looked upon the attack as a result of personal animosity on the part of persons he had exposed. The Klan was scarcely mentioned. Had Dale the slightest notion that the Klan was connected with this attack he would have certainly referred to it in his next editorial. He was later convinced that the attacked whom he "possibly" wounded died the next day.

To show how little he was frightened, Dale published a scathing editorial the next week about "A Villainous

⁶ Muncie Post-Democrat, March 31, 1922.

Political Gang" in which he continued his serious charges against Muncie's political mogul and their unholy practices. Said he,

"We have the evidence that this attack was inspired by an article published in the Post-Democrat the week before which exposed the infamous deal whereby certain democrats and republicans in Muncie, threatened with prosecution in the federal court, had been assured by corrupt republican politicians that 'everything would be Jake' with the criminals if they would organize the secure votes for Senator New and the local candidates on the Billy Williams (Republican) slate.... The Post-Democrat put in print what was in the minds of many, namely, that there was ample ground for the suspicion that votes were to be traded for immunity and almost immediately after that the armed and masked thugs attempted to murder the publisher and his son.... When a desperate band of bi-partisan politicians, fearing that justice will overtake them, boldly attempt to murder a man who has the courage to make a battle in the interests of the citizens of Delaware county, it is high time for everybody to wake up."⁷

For the next few months Dale settled back into his usual role of "hell raiser" and levelled a steady barrage at his pet peeves of the moment; the "bi-partisan" machine which he insisted had complete control over Muncie and the vice conditions which that machine was allowing to run rampant. Soon he found a real subject for attack in the Ku Klux Klan.

Until this time the name of the Klan meant very little to most Muncie citizens. The daily papers had carried a few scattered stories about the activities of a hooded

⁷ Ibid., April 7, 1922.

organization but most of these reports came from the South and Southwest and few people gave more than a passing thought to the possibility that this organization might come to Muncie. Dale's was the first newspaper in the city to even discuss the new organization, yet there was nothing in his earliest comments to suggest that in a very short time he would engage in mortal combat with the white sheets. In fact he even seemed to look with favor upon the new "patriotic" organization. Here was a group of vigilantes standing for "law and order" and were not these the same things for which he stood! But this favorable attitude lasted only a short time. It soon turned to one of jesting about big men in masks. The jests became vicious sarcasm and bitter verbal lashing. Dale was fighting the Klan.

When the little publisher wrote the following editorial-story he had not yet seen the implications of his suggestion:

"Last Sunday night twelve robed and shrouded knights of the Ku Klux Klan, marched into the Methodist Church at Eaton, (a small town in the same county as Muncie) while services were in progress and took charge of the service. They left, after presenting the minister an envelope containing thirty-five dollars.

A note accompanied the gift, on Ku Klux stationery, indicating the Klansmen belonged to a Muncie organization. Very few people outside of those who belong, were aware of the fact that the Ku Klux have an organization here, but it is known that the order is strong here and that there are probably six hundred members in Muncie.

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The Knights declare in their letter....that they stand for law and order and for fair play. There is certainly plenty of room for an organization of this kind to work in Delaware County.

The Post-Democrat would suggest that the doubtful klansmen don their pillow case helmets and white robes and call upon a few of the political double crossers who are now at work trying to put across a slate of candidates whose election will make law and order a joke in Delaware County.

They might also make a tour of inspection out at the county infirmary and get at the truth of some things which the recent grand jury seemed to have overlooked.

They might investigate why vicious criminals are allowed to go practically scot free after the commission of abominable crimes and why brutal murders and attempted murders have not even been investigated by the officers whose sworn duty it is to uphold law and order in Delaware County.

It is the failure of sworn officers of the law to act in behalf of the public welfare that encourages the formation of the Ku Klux and kindred organizations."⁸

In this last sentence Dale summed up one of the still most powerful incentives to the fascist solution. Still unaware of the heights to which Klan power would soar about him, he could well afford to be mild in his opinions toward it. Had the Klan stayed out of politics, George Dale might never have fought it.

Muncie began reading in its daily papers more about Klan activity in other parts of the country during the first part of the summer of 1922. George Dale began to tell about Klan activity in Muncie. Now openly questioning the motives of the secret organization he was issuing

⁸ Ibid., April 28, 1922. The italics are mine.

Mild warnings to Klan members to examine the orders of their leaders. "If the Kluckers expect anybody to take them seriously, they had better wake up and find out whether those who are directing the movements of the organization are in it for patriotism or for politics and revenge."⁹

In the same issue of the Post-Democrat there was a news story accusing the Klan of slipping in one of their members on a jury trying another Klansman. The prosecuting attorney was a well known Klansman by this time. Said Dale of this situation;

"Strange things are happening in Muncie these days. Hundred of citizens here, many of them being men of high character, are joining the Ku Klux Klan, but we question very much whether or not a very large percentage of these are really aware of the things pulled off by an inner circle of Kluckers, who, most likely, refrain from informing the rank and file....of their maneuvers.... The courts are the final resort of citizens seeking fair play. If unscrupulous members of the Ku Klux Klan make any further attempts to put over funny business in the court room there is bound to be a reaction. The attempt on the part of the highest officers of the local Klan to cause the removal of officers who have been especially active against law breakers, ought to make the honest members of the Klan sit up and wonder why an order which claims to stand for law and order should attempt to destroy officials who stand for law and order, at the command of men who were elected to office by the solid vote of the law breaking element of Muncie."¹⁰

⁹ Ibid., June 9, 1922.

¹⁰ Ibid.

Joked Dale on his editorial page;

"The Ku Klux does not initiate, it 'naturalizes'. If only those who belong are naturalized, what is the status of those who do not wear a Mother Goose cap and parade in a nighty?"¹¹

By June 1922 Muncie was completely covered by the Klan tidal wave. The Klan became bolder in its claim of political control in the city. Its rapid growth could be measured visibly in almost regular Saturday night parades where the numbers of ten dollar bills that had been pried from their owners during the past week was attested to by the increasing length of the parades. Woe to the Negro who might be caught on the streets during these parades; woe to anyone who failed to salute the flag as it passed -- being used as a saddle blanket over a worn-out plow horse. The Klan became arrogant. It took over the public parks for its "naturalization" rites and kept out all but its members. Its control over the police was a fait accompli. Muncie shrugged its shoulders; Dale became violent in his attacks.

"One hears it every day on the street that the Ku Klux Klan here is made up of 'our very best citizens.' This is repeated so often that those who hear it are willing and ready to say the same thing, parrot like, whenever it occurs to them to do so.... Under the guise of being

¹¹Ibid.

strong for law and order, unscrupulous members are grinding axes for a rotten, corrupt, bi-partisan gang who hope to obtain political supremacy here and keep themselves out of federal prison by threatening free born white people with the wrath of the Klan."¹²

Convinced now that the Klan had been responsible for the attack upon his life Dale roared: "The thing that looms big is the fact that if the Klan wants to murder a citizen and does murder him, it ought to feel fairly safe, with the prosecuting attorney and other public officers belonging to the order.... It may be possible that by reason of numbers the Klansmen may be led into assaulting or probably murdering some fearless individual who does not believe in ghosts, but in the end law and order will prevail, even if rivers of blood flow down the streets of Muncie, in the accomplishment of that purpose."¹³

It seemed as if David had picked an invulnerable Goliath. To many of the disinterested people of Muncie this fight looked a little silly, if not sad --one insignificant old man fighting a powerful and wealthy organization like the Klan. Life was to become rather difficult for the little editor during the next few years but he was

¹²
Ibid., June 16, 1922.

¹³
Ibid.

also to have his day -- even if it was a short one.

He continued his bitter anti-Klan editorials. Angered at the fact that the Klan controlled the police he exclaimed; "The impudence of the assumption on the part of the Klan that it is the ordained keeper of the conduct and the morals of all who refuse to wear a masked peaked cap and night gown, is galling to those who know something of the personnel of the Klan."¹⁴ In his editorials he tried all the tricks of his facile pen to discredit the Klan. He ridiculed -- his most potent method of attack -- the foolish mummerly and regalew of the organization; he laughed at Klan antics, he sore at the Klan. And the Klan swore at him but could do very little about it. At times he stopped to real "yellow" journalism as in the following example but he put over his point in the process:

"The Ku Klux had better order out their nighties and send another mob around after the editor of the Post-Democrat, for we are now preparing the data for an interesting short story entitled, 'Law, Order, Morality and Americanism as exemplified by Blodd Puddin' Hank, the Ho Vamp of the Ku Klux.'

The hero of this exciting tale is one of the most prominent members of the Ku Klux Klan. Reading from the card signed by every applicant to the order we find that the Klucker must stand, among other things, for 'Protection of Our Pure Womanhood.'

This dirty scoundrel of the peaked hat and lily white gown, seduced the wife of a brother Klucker

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Ibid., June 23, 1922.

and broke up his home, thus demonstrating to his brethren that it may be wrong to debauch the wife, or sister of one who does not belong, but that a member may go as far as he likes within the sainted precincts of Kluckerdom.

The libertine who debauched the wife of another Klansman is still a member in good standing, with the accent on the standing. He is one of the elect who has enlisted with the rest of the sanctified and glorified brethren who have set out to readjust the morals and behavior of the citizenship of Muncie.

We will give the Ku Klux exactly five days to tar and feather, expel and publicly expose this rotten libertine, who poses as a 'protector of fine womanhood' and exponent of law and order.*15

Every week Dale came out with more Klan stories. He reported every Klan move during the previous week and always capitalized upon the slightest misstep of a known member. Especially sarcastic about the secrecy of the organization he never lost a chance to strike at it. "Doesn't it seem strange", he asked, "that the only real one hundred per cent Americans in Muncie, who belong to an organization that would commit no crime greater than slitting a throat or burning a barn, should be so terribly ashamed to be recognized as a member?"

"It is said that there are two thousand members in Muncie but every man who belongs denies it. Apparently

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Ibid., June 30, 1922. See Middletown, p. 122n., for a situation which suggests that the above editorial might have been more significant than mere "dirt" in showing what the Klan was doing to upset the institution of the family in Muncie.

the prime requisite of klansmanship is to be a damned liar, to quote the words of our esteemed district attorney."¹⁶ Furthermore Dale constantly admonished the Democratic party to steer clear of the Klan which he looked upon as a Republican organization. He warned that "Inasmuch as the machinery of the local Ku Klux Klan is in the hands of the high priests of the republican standpat machine, and as these able machinists deliberately affiliated with, and assumed management of, the lawless organization for the purpose of obtaining control of the police department and the county offices in the fall election, democrats should shun this grotesque outfit as they would the cholera."¹⁷

Dale now became crazed with the fight. Almost every item in his four-page weekly had something in it attacking the Klan. A note of masochistic joy in the struggle, hysterical laughter in the face of overwhelming odds, began to play about each new editorial. Samson was wrecking havoc among the Philistines with the jawbone of an ass and yet secretly wishing to become a martyr at the same time. He made editorial capital of each new attack upon himself. In August, 1922, the headlines of the Post-Demo-

¹⁶ Muncie Post-Democrat, July 21, 1922.

¹⁷ Ibid., August 11, 1922.

crat read thusly: SKULL AND CROSS BONES ADORNS LETTER SENT PUBLISHER BY ANONYMOUS WRITER. Under this heading came the following story:

"The editor of the Post-Democrat receives many anonymous letters. Some of them seem to be from friends, while others are vindictive and full of malice.

"One received this week charged us with fighting the Protestant faith and made the threat that some day 'three thousand of us' would wreak vengeance.

"The letter was signed by three initials, was adorned by a crude drawing of a skull and cross bones and wound up with the heavily underscored words, 'Better Check Out Now.'

"We will merely state to this cowardly sneak who hides his identity behind false initials, the same as he conceals his carcass in a sheet and his face behind a mask when he attends the Ku Klux ghost dance, that he has the number sized up about right.

"It would take just about three thousand such cattle as that to even attempt to frighten one man who is not afraid of the scalawag outfit that he belongs to.

"We take it that this anonymous skunk is threatening us with the vengeance of the Ku Klux Klan, because we happen to be exposing the real purposes of the gang who control the machinery of the outlaw organization here.... It will take more than threats of violence to frighten us. We fear no cowardly masked and sheeted organization that claims to be God's chosen people and the only one hundred per cent Americans in existance...."18

In the same issue Dale showed how the Klan was playing on the emotions of simple people by walking into churches during services, donating money, praying, that Klan leaders were making a gooddeal of money on klan "suckers"

was another favored argument.¹⁹ Every week, aside from his own editorials, Dale's paper carried anti-Klan opinions of various prominent persons and publications from all over the country. Important national Klan information was easily available because high Klan officials made the important Klan stronghold, Muncie, a frequent rendezvous. Hiram Evans was often around and it was in Muncie that E. Y. Clarke, the real organizing genius behind the Klan, met his Waterloo by having liquor found among his possessions.²⁰ As the fall elections drew close Dale begged the people of Muncie to "forget politics and kill this thing (the Klan) off at the polls."²¹

When in October, 1922, the vacillating mayor of Muncie admittedly gave in to Klan pressure,²² Dale was furious. The idea of anyone bowing to his despised antagonists was more than he could bear. Venting his wrath upon an already cringing chief executive he sneered; "To the infantile and confused mind of the man who still has the temerity to call himself the mayor of Muncie, this idiotic tempest in a teapot sounded louder than the guns

¹⁹ Ibid., Oct. 6, 1922.

²⁰ Ibid., Sept. 8, 1922.

²¹ Ibid., Sept. 22, 1922.

²² See Chapter II, n. 35, supra.

of the battle of the Marne.

"He fell at the first fusillade of blank cartridges and agreed to do anything in the world that the Ku Klux or anybody else would tell him to do, provided they told him quickly in order that he might obey orders without the slightest delay."²³

The Klan was not deaf to Dale's attacks. The difficulty was how to silence him. Violence would immediately be attributed to the Klan and would be bad publicity for 100% Americanism. More subtle counsel prevailed within the order and there began a series of reprisals against Dale which did not necessarily bear the Klan stamp. After the attack upon him and his son, Dale asked the Klan Chief of Police for a permit to carry a gun -- for self defense. The permit was cheerfully given -- almost too cheerfully -- because one day Dale found himself arrested by the Klan Sheriff on charges of carrying a concealed weapon.²⁴ Dale saw in the concealed weapon charge an attempt to "frame" him. He was rearrested on a bench

²³ Muncie Post Democrat, Oct. 13, 1922. Incidentally, it was during this storm in question that Dale announced the jump in circulation of his paper from 2,000 to 5,000 copies per week. The demand was exceeding the supply. (Ibid., Oct. 27, 1922). Muncie was beginning to take slight notice.

²⁴ Ibid., Nov. 10, 1922.

warrant from the circuit court and his case taken from the city to the county court. "PROMOTED, B'GOSH" was the heading of his editorial which went on:

"It is a distinct pleasure for the Post-Democrat to be able to confirm, thus early, its pre-election predictions. In its secret councils the moving criminal spirits of the Ku Klux Klan declared that it would 'get' Dale and how the stage is set. The arrest was made by a Ku Klux sheriff, the case filed with one Ku Klux judge who transferred it to the jurisdiction of another Ku Klux judge and the state is represented by a Ku Klux prosecutor.

In conclusion we arise to remark to the low down, grafting, good for nothing and wholly criminal Ku Klux outfit and its servelings in office.... that they are all going to have a hell roaring lively time 'getting' the Post-Democrat."25

Dale now found a new target, the Judge of the county circuit court, and he proceeded to blaze away. Especially bitter at the judge's sanctimonious attitude toward erring youth, he made His Honor appear rather silly at times when he would sentence a young person to the penal farm from the avowed purpose of making him a "better citizen". Dale ridiculed what he considered the hypocritical "reforming" attitude of this Judge who was one of the guiding lights behind periodical "clean-up" campaigns in Muncie. He reviewed the personal life -- a sordid one, at that, -- of the prosecuting attorney who asked a jury to give a liquor violator the maximum sentence under the law just because Dale was present in the guilty person's

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Ibid., Dec. 1, 1922.

restaurant when the arrest was made.²⁶

But if Dale was an editorial opportunist when dealing with personalities he was none the less effective in presenting arguments which appealed to higher sensibilities of the people. It was unfortunate for the support of his policies that he usually alienated the "nicer elements" of the community who, shocked by his indelicate treatment of private lives, neglected to read such truly patriotic editorials as the following:

ONE HUNDRED PER CENT AMERICANISM -- WHAT IS IT?

"There should be such a thing as one hundred per cent Americanism, but the man or group of men who claim to be true hundred per cent Americans and hold others to be enemies to their country who do not believe and act as they do, are not true Americans.

"The real one hundred per cent American does not boast continually of his patriotism.

"The isolationist, who declares himself to be the only true American, is merely stupid, and demonstrates his lack of historical information, sacred and profane.

"If Americanism means what the isolationist declares it to mean, the true American has no call to need the divine injunction 'go ye unto the uttermost parts of the earth.'

"If the false one hundred per cent American cult is to be the standard, then why send money to suffering Armenia, supplies to starving Europe or famine stricken China, or missionaries to the heathen races of the world?

"If Americanism means contented isolation while the entire world goes to ruin, then we want none of it in ours.

"And finally, if the real Americanism of this country is going to stand much longer for the false

assumptions of an 'invisible empire' which claims a monopoly on Americanism, then will we begin to lose faith and hope in American institutions.

"Muncie is cursed by the presence of this organization, and has been compelled to listen to its hypocritical pretensions of one hundred per cent Americanism and is compelled to look to members of this organization for official management of the affairs of the city and county.

"Judge Dearth, a member of the Ku Klux Klan, sits supreme in the court house, in a position of power, and the hundred percenters openly boast that they are able to punish enemies and reward friends through their locally controlled courts.

"The crimes that have been committed in the name of patriotism are legion, and unless some strong hand intervenes and tears the mask completely from the face of this insidious, sneaking organization in Muncie, no citizen who dares to lift his hand against its aggressions may consider himself safe from persecution, or possibly assault and eath.

"No true American could belong to an order which assumes to be greater than the government. In Muncie and Delaware county, the Klan has set up a super-government, which boastfully declares its control of state and government officials, and that its dictum is the final word of authority.

"Men meeting furtively at night...wearing gown and mask, and actuated by malice, hatred and hbgotry, conspire against enemies of the Klan and serve notice on public officials that these men shall be punished by boycott, loss of position, or framed up prosecution.

"Juries are selected at these criminal sessions of masked outlaws and verdicts are rendered in advance and sentences of social and business ostracism passed upon men and women who fail to measure up the Americanization standard of the Ku Klux Klan.

"Real Americanism will eventually drive fake Americanism to the wall." The traitors in the saddle are riding to a swift and certain fall. It is inconceivable that a free city like Muncie will stand for this evil thing much longer."27

The implications are apparent. Here was a single individual beginning to see the real significance of the

27
Ibid., Feb. 23, 1923.

Klan for America. If patriotism is one of "the most powerful latent emotional storm-centers of Middletown"²⁸ it would be hardly stretching a point to apply this analysis to the whole nation. Patriotism and nationalism are handmaidens. The strength of its appeal to patriotism is usually a good indication of the strength of a government. Dale had begun to see that if any great mass movement could swing the traditional symbols -- of which patriotism was one -- behind its activities, it would soon gain control of the government. He saw such a situation in Italy and was to see a similar one take place in Germany. If the Klan was to corner the market on "Americanism" it would soon corner the government. If the Klan came so near to achieving this goal why could not a similar organization achieve it at some future date if it avoided the mistakes of the Klan, the A.P.A., and the Know Nothings? Why not the Fascist or National Socialist appeal in the land of the free?

Dale was now striking at the very roots of Klan appeal. Furthermore, he was openly offending the Judge before whom he was soon to be tried. He became more defiant and more fearless. The more the Klan threatened and warned the more he published.

In February, 1923, while helping federal agents

²⁸ See Middletown, p. 481ff.

investigating political conditions in Muncie, Dale was indicted by the grand jury for "manufacturing, possessing, bartering and giving away liquor and helping maintain a liquor nuisance."²⁹ He had been present in the office of a local attorney when police entered and found a liquor bottle there.³⁰ Seeing unholy workings of the Klan back of this indictment, said Dale,

"Klan members have openly threatened to "get" and to "frame" Dale, time and again, but we have about as much fear of this cowardly gang as we have of a flock of jack-rabbits. When we get through with them their strangle hold on Delaware county will be broken, if God spares our life until the task is completed.

And in the meantime we are expecting further demonstrations from their puny courts and Klux dominated "law enforcement" agencies.

The Post-Democrat refuses to regard any public official free from suspicion, from constable to judge, who belongs to this masked aggregation of night riding fools and knaves.³¹

Affairs now moved swiftly. In his March 2, 1923 paper Dale openly accused city and county officers of "shielding, protecting and failing and neglecting to prosecute numerous and divers persons to them well known to be engaged in the illicit and illegal sale of intoxicating liquors in the city and county."³² He further

²⁹ Muncie Post-Democrat, Nov. 30, 1923.

³⁰ Extensive inquiry as to whether or not Dale drank has resulted in a uniformly negative answer. This is especially interesting in view of the fact that many of his legal troubles were in connection with alleged violation of liquor laws.

³¹ Muncie Post-Democrat, Feb. 23, 1923.

³² Muncie Evening Press, March, 14, 1923.

anatagonized Judge Dearth by insisting that his jury commissioners "...said sheriff, said prosecuting attorney and many of said police officials are members of a secret organization known as the Ku Klux Klan and they use their offices for the purpose of favoring and protecting other members of their organization."³³

The Judge, charging him with indirect contempt of court for these accusations, sentenced Dale to 90 days in jail and imposed a fine of \$500.³⁴

Commented the Judge; "If Dale and the others of his character do not like this country they should go to Russia where anarchy rules."

Commented the Prosecuting Attorney; "He would even slander a child as it played about its mother's knees". His publication is a "dirty scandal sheet and not a newspaper." Advertisers in the Post-Democrat were roundly shamed.

Commented the Press; "When Judge Dearth had announced his finding some of the persons in the court room moved forward to congratulate him. The court only replied that 'The court was just doing its duty.'³⁵

. If anyone thought this sentence would silence Dale he

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid., Muncie Morning Star, March 15, 1923.

³⁵ Muncie Evening Press, March 14, 1923.

was due for a surprise. The next week the Post-Democrat repeated and elaborated upon its previous accusations in answer to Dearth's decision. Enraged, the judge now charged Dale with direct contempt of court and doubled the sentence.³⁶ On the same day the Press carried an editorial on reformers:

"Professional reformers should, but never will, understand that the people do not wish to be professionally reformed by the brainless blatherskites that commonly are in the game of interfering with other people's business for revenue only or through pure meddlesomeness. When the people believe they need reforming, they do it themselves and do a thorough job of it, their reason having been convinced by acts uninfluenced by the narrow prejudices of witch burners."³⁷

This editorial more or less representing the opinion of "upright" Muncie came too closely upon the heels of Dale's sentences not to have referred to them. It carried with it the I-told-you-so attitude of a community addressing its burnt child.

Dale spent the next eleven days in jail, the last three in the state reformatory, until released on bond by order of the Indiana Supreme Court.³⁸ The next day he called upon the Governor to criticize the state penal farm and the way it was operated.³⁹ Eagerly he seized upon his new difficulty to publicize rotten prison conditions. Furthermore he warned

³⁶ Ibid., March 17, 1923; Muncie Morning Star, March 18, 1923.

³⁷ Muncie Evening Press, March 17, 1923.

³⁸ Ibid., March 28, 1923.

³⁹ Ibid., March 29, 1923.

those responsible for his "framed" conviction that he would hunt them "down until the last man who participated in the vicious plot will be exposed in his infamy."⁴⁰

Muncie heard a good deal about "that dire and dismal hell hole and blot in the fair name of Indiana -- the state penal farm."⁴¹ Pathos, humor, and indignation were registered in Dale's stories about his three days in prison. His readers laughed with him as he told about how he went through the routine of becoming a full-fledged "jail-bird"; how his head was shaved to resemble a billiard ball; how his "manly form" was encased in the "gorgeous habiliments" presented all prison inmates. Revolting were his reports of prison food, sanitary conditions, and brutality.⁴² The reformer was beating his drums.

But reforming and crusading require financial backing no matter how holy the mission. Dale had very little of this and recent developments were cutting down his already meagre income. His paper was little more than a year old and not too much space was devoted to advertising. The revenue from official notices of the county was unsteady be-

⁴⁰ Muncie Post-Democrat, March 30, 1923.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid., also issue of April 26, 1923.

cause trustees were not always prompt in paying their bills. Dale was often forced to go to threaten suit to get his county advertising bills paid.⁴³ His court fights were increasing. After his release from the penal farm he was sued by a Muncie grocer for criminal libel for calling that person a "hundred per cent draft dodger."⁴⁴ Conditions eventually became so pressing that Dale had to ask the public for help to enable him to continue fighting. Said he,

"'Getting' the publisher of the Post-Democrat by a never ending series of petty prosecutions may appear to some to be a simple and easy way to destroy the newspaper, but we are still on the job, thank you, in spite of arrests, jails and penal farms..."⁴⁵

He went on to show that the powers of arrest and prosecution in Muncie lay with acknowledged Klansmen and that at the taxpayer's expense these persons were having a fiasco with Dale by administering "Klucker's Revenge."

⁴³ Ibid., April 13, 1923.

⁴⁴ Ibid., April 6, 1923. This grocer was an agent for the Firey Cross, an official Klan publication.

⁴⁵ Ibid., March 30, 1923.

He explained:

"They know that the editor of the Post-Democrat is handicapped by having to pay lawyers for defense ...and knowing that we have not got money enough to pay this enormous expense they feel certain that the end is in sight.

There has been some response to the request for financial aid from those who see in this remarkable tug of war a test which will finally determine whether or not right and justice shall rule. It is absolutely necessary that more funds be raised. It is your fight as well as ours. Every friend of freedom and justice should contribute.

It is very likely that there will be other prosecutions. We were informed the other day that at a Ku Klux meeting held a short time ago it was decided to bring some criminal libel actions. Nothing would surprise us now, after the transactions of the past three weeks. Contribute to this cause at once."⁴⁶

Forseeing the intensity of the storm which had already broken he was trying now to enlist the aid of the people. The problem was to convince them that what had up until this time been a purely private battle was being waged in the public interest. But here a dilemma which Dale faced all his life came into sharp relief. Fighting required money. By its own standards Middletown regarded the possession of money the index of a man's standing in the community; that is, of his measure of "success". In these terms Dale was never a "successful" man. He had substituted crusading for the profit motive -- a thing completely alien to his environment. Thus when circumstances forced him to appeal to the community for financial aid his problem was much more diffi-

cult than it would have been had he moved in planes familiar to local society. In the end he did get support, but it came from the American newspapers, not the people of Muncie.

The conflict was evidenced by his fighting for city and county legal advertising which he insisted was due him as the only publisher of a Democratic paper in the county.⁴⁷ When there were rumors of a rival Democratic weekly to be created in Muncie he sensed a Republican backing which promised the legal advertising to this new paper. Snorting his defiance of a group of so-called Democrats who would sell their souls "for a little measly legal advertising", he proceeded to make clear his own position in money matters as follows: "If the Post-Democrat were in business solely for money, we would probably fawn at the feet of every two by four republican city, county and township statesman who has a nickel's worth of advertising to give out but, strange as it may seem....the editor of this paper refuses to play Fido at a republican feast and sit up on his hind legs and 'speak' for a bone and lick the boots of the giver."⁴⁸

⁴⁷The state law guarantees publication of all legal notices in at least two newspapers; one representing each political party.

⁴⁸Muncie Post-Democrat, April 13, 1923.

For the next few weeks there was a lull between tempests. Not a clever propagandist like Dr. Goebbels, Dale knew no "scientific" theory of "dosing" the public in proper amounts.⁴⁹ The effect of falling back into his regular routine of lambasting several things at a time instead of one was bound to be a let-down from the more concentrated attacks of the past weeks. In any case the Klan still held first place on his "fight" list. Then came another pet hate, "business class" control of the city's affairs. The proposal of the "chamber of commerce crowd" that a new river boulevard be built in Muncie and the enactment of this proposal by the city council brought down a storm of pent-up venom from Dale. He reviewed all the things wrong with the city in showing why that boulevard should not be built.⁵⁰ He charged the city administration with having no interest in the poor man; with being the tool of wealthy interests. Attacking tax-evasion by the rich he pointed out how this class was paying much less than its rightful share of the city's expenses while the poor man was overtaxed on everything "down to his false teeth and his jack knife." He began cutting deeper into

⁴⁹ Cf. Morstein Marx, F., op. cit., p.104 where the German Propaganda Minister is quoted as follows; "In the field of propaganda all depends on prudent dosing and the selection of the right moment."

⁵⁰ The boulevard was actually begun a decade later during Dale's term as mayor.

the social pattern by characterizing Muncie as a "community
governed by two sets of rules--one set for the obscure,
 uninfluential and financially helpless, and the other set
 for the financial gents who meet in the commercial club
 with the sycophantic ministerial association to thank the
 good Lord that they are not as other men and to order the
 passage of laws and ordinances for the governing of others,
 but not themselves.

"It is true that Muncie has an underworld and a redlight
It is there in all its sordid ugliness, block after
 block, occupied almost wholly by white and colored pro-
 stitutes, coke peddlers and "snow sniffers," bootleggers,
 booze runners and thieves.

Why is it there,....Gentlemen of the clergy, you who
 have signed a blanket endorsement in behalf of ALL city
 and county officials, take a trip down there, get ac-
 quainted with the denizens of the redlight, go through
 the miserable shacks, shanties and bug roosts they occupy,
 and then get down on your knees and find out whether God
 will ever forgive you for pleading not guilty for public
 officials who permit the redlight to flourish in order
 that jails may be filled with penal farm fodder and ballot
 boxes stuffed with the votes of protected law violators.

Boulevards, parks, shade trees, beautified river front,
 harps, wings, halos--damnation! Forget it for awhile and
 clean out the redlight. Condemn and tear down the shacks
 which fester in the midst of a city of decent people. A
 great work could be done there. The entire south end of
 the city is contaminated by the redlight. It is due to
 the people of the Southside that the redlight be torn
 down and that residences of modern type, occupied by law
 abiding citizens, be erected in their place.

It's all right to reach the ornamental stage at the
 right time but the time is not yet. Leaving the unspeak-
 ably filthy, lawless and obscene redlight as it is and
 spending the people's money for mere ornamentation of a
 favored portion of the city, is the height of folly. It
 is absurd and unthinkable. It's too much like shaving
 the lawn in front of a magnificent residence and permit-
 ting jimson weed to grow in the back yard; or hanging a
 hundred thousand dollar painting in the parlor and harbor-
 ing cockroaches in the kitchen and bedbugs upstairs."51

⁵¹ Muncie Post-Democrat, April 20, 1923.

Such accusations and challenges at a time when his name was becoming a familiar sound in Muncie was like pouring salt on the community's open wounds. Dale was crystallizing and bringing into the open what many people in Muncie were beginning to feel and yet not willing to admit. It did not fit with the traditional symbols of American democracy; with the "Middletown Spirit";⁵² to say that the city was divided by the railroad tracks. It was irksome to the "city fathers" to hear someone shout that they were under the control of the "chamber of commerce crowd"; it annoyed the Chamber of Commerce to have someone suggest that it was working in the sole interests of the people on the northside; it made people on the southside wonder about the values by which they were trying to live. Microcosmic Muncie was beginning to give evidence of the great social change which has not as yet been completed in America; that is, the trend from a dynamic to a static society. Free social mobility was giving way to class stratification. Here was the first intimation of a change in Muncie's life that was to produce acute pains ten years later. And George Dale was one of the first to see it; probably the first to admit it. It was he who threw the first stone into the hornets nest but the resulting buzzing has been so loud that only a few of Middletown's strongest souls have dared follow suit.

If Dale alienated the monied classes of Muncie with this sort of accusation, he certainly endeared himself to the hearts of those "on the other side of the tracks", the same group of people who sent him into the mayor's office in 1930 with the greatest plurality any candidate up to that time ever had received.⁵³ Here was a champion who was willing to give direction if only the people followed. But it was too early for Dale to even consider being on the inside politically. He was being much more effective hammering away at the opposition. Besides he had just begun to fight the Klan.

His next object for editorial derision was Helen Jackson, the "escaped nun," who caused quite a stir in Muncie during the spring and summer of 1923⁵⁴ and incidentally made a good deal of money in the process. Speaking before large crowds under Klan auspices, she was able to give "first-hand" corroboration to all sorts of Catholic horror stories

53

Ibid., p. 323

54

See Chapter II, n.33, supra.

which the gullible were wont to believe.⁵⁵ Concluded

editor Dale speaking about the "escaped nun":

"When the Post-Democrat takes a shot at some measly pro-German ex-saloon keeper and bootlegger who happens to belong to the Klan, the klansters at once demand that the editor be sent to jail, but when an imposter of the Helen Jackson type hits town and wantonly libels a religious creed and the entire membership of a church, a great howl goes up when an insulted and reviled church congregation demands that she be denied the right to insult their religion.

This is one of the consistencies of one hundred percent Americanism."⁵⁶

Continuing in the same vein he rapped mass ignorance that was fostering Klan growth and allowing such preposterous ideas to take the community by storm:

"The success of Klan propagandists in securing members is based largely upon their ability to make suckers believe preposterous things which never happened and never will happen. However, organized ignorance and credulity is a hard combination to battle. The mule, generally regarded as being rather low in the animal scale, can never

⁵⁵ Just how far these Catholic bogey tales had sunk into the minds of the average Middletowner is shown in Middletown, p. 482, where the Lynds quote the following interview of a member of their staff with the wife of a well-to-do factory worker: "Lady...you have asked me a lot of questions, and now I want to ask you some. Do you belong to the Klan?.... (reply negative)...Well, it's about time you joined the other good people and did something about this Catholic situation. The Pope is trying to get control of this country, and in order to do it, he started the old Klan to stir up trouble among the Protestants, but instead of doing that he only opened their eyes to the situation, and now all the Protestants are getting together in the new Klan to overcome the Catholic menace. I just want to show you here in this copy of the Menace--look at this picture of this poor girl--look at her hands! See, all those fingers gone--just stumps left! She was in a convent where it was considered sinful to wear jewelry, and the Sisters, when they found her wearing some rings, just burned them off her fingers!" Little wonder, then, that this type of story repeated many times should be accepted for gospel by people who were sure that a few years previously German soldiers had done the very same things to French and Belgian babies.

⁵⁶

Muncie Post-Democrat, April 27, 1923.

be taught that it is not proper to balk and kick. Coaxing and beating only serve to intensify these mulish attributes. Likewise life is too short to try to quicken the intelligence of the average klucker, who lies awake of nights, oppressed by the horrible thought that the pope is about to emigrate to America and run for president.

It is such fellows as that who believe the gruesome and altogether improbable tales of Helen Jackson, the "escaped nun," who shrewdly capitalizes mass ignorance, with no apparent concern or care as to the consequences of inflaming ignorant and inflammable minds with false doctrines which might easily lead to wholesale blood letting....Men and women who really believe the preposterous falsehoods which are deliberately promulgated for the despicable purpose of getting money, are usually persons of limited intellectual power, and such people allow prejudice, instead of reason, to sway them.

With hundreds of people here believing that the Jews are preparing to demonetize the rest of the world, that the Pope is coming over to establish a Roman Catholic empire in America and that the Jews and Catholics are financing a plot to cause a negro uprising that will have for its purpose intermarriage between blacks and whites, it is regarded strange that blood has not flown like water in the streets of Muncie.

Hasten the day that the conservative, thinking people of Muncie combine to put their united stamp of disapproval upon a movement which is destined, if not checked, to lead to dreadful disaster!⁵⁷

Although ex post facto examination of Dale's newspaper tirades show them to be powerfully blunt and to the point, their immediate effect upon the Klan was not very great at this early period. By this time the Klan and its motives had been "exposed" time and again. If there were people convinced that these motives were base, they said little about it in public. If they agreed with the principles for which George Dale was fighting they were not willing to offer more than moral support. Dale needed real support. He got it eventually through his appeal to the constitutional guar-

antees of freedom of the press. Still he laughed in the face of his enemies:

"The editor of the Post-Democrat was threatened with five hundred additional prosecutions at the time he was sent to jail for contempt. Possibly there were some foolish enough to believe that threats of that kind will serve to stifle the truth in Muncie. The Post-Democrat publishes only the truth and since actual attempts at murder and frequent threats of murder have failed to scare us into silence, fear of bodily imprisonment is our slightest concern....

With the repeal of the infamous sedition act a hundred and twenty-five years ago it was thought that free speech and a free press were guaranteed to the people of America, but from time to time political tyrants, invested with brief authority, have sought to inflict outrageous punishment upon those who dared to publicly criticize their official acts. Invariably these puny despots have been men of little education and vast conceit, each of whom fondly hope that history, which invariably records the speedy descent of these petty tyrants into political oblivion will not repeat itself in his particular case.

The question of whether or not a Muncie newspaper is to be permitted to tell the truth about conditions in Muncie, is a matter of much greater importance to the citizenship as a whole than it is to the editor whose liberty is threatened.

There are a few people here who cheered mightily when the word was sent out that the editor of the Post-Democrat was in jail and that the Post-Democrat would soon be a thing of the past. Such people are not fit to live in a free republic. Their place is rightfully at the feet of some hereditary monarch. These boot lickers to royalty do not believe in free speech and a free press. They are so lacking in common intelligence that they do not recognize the fact that real ONE HUNDRED PERCENT AMERICANISM demands freedom of the press, and not jails for newspaper writers who seek the redress of wrongs perpetrated on the people by the men they elect to office.⁵⁸

Here again was an attempt to bring the public to his support; Dale was trying to make his fight the people's fight. In this attempt he failed for two reasons; one, because the community as a whole was not aware of the implications of suppres-

⁵⁸ Ibid., April 27, 1923. The italics are mine.

ing the press. On the other hand, he alienated the support of the "business class" elements in the city many of whom could and did see the implications of the Klan and its suppressive activities and who could have given Dale the financial aid he needed to fight it. There was a third reason.

One of his greatest personal faults was blind stubbornness. When he found a target he would hurl himself upon it heedless of the effect of his efforts. Furthermore, his lack of subtlety, although making for clear and understandable reading, lost its effect when hammered out week by week in the same vein. Wit and sarcasm can be dulled by constant repetition and Dale never learned the clever arts of a first-rate propagandist. In his enthusiastic bitterness he failed to clarify issues and crystalize a powerful body of public opinion behind him; he rather confused many who would have liked to support him if they could only be certain of the principles for which he was fighting. His own lack of direction, in the last analysis, kept him from being an effective leader of others. Then, too, his indiscriminate attack upon groups in the community as well as individuals prevented any real coordinated support of his ideals from the community. In attacking the "inner control monied group" whom he charged ran the city, he took into his anathema the whole Northside, business men, and the clergy. Such indiscriminate attacks naturally offended many.