

WHATEVER HAPPENED TO BROTHER DAVE?

“Welcome to Klan Country,” the billboard reads. It’s Dave Gardner’s country, too, home and platform for a sharp-talking comedian who once was a national celebrity



by Larry L. King

IT IS WARM AND MUGGY for North Carolina in late May, a very Southern night, with flying bugs and scents of grass in the air. Young men cruising with their car windows down sound mating calls on their nightly inspections of root-beer stands or What-a-Burger palaces, while on many city porches old men cherish their post-supper memories of farms they will never till again. You must escape Charlotte’s shopping-center vapors and downtown exhaust clouds to savor it, though once in shaded residential sections or on semi-rural lanes, the grass fragrance is green, clean, and nostalgic, inspiring thoughts of forgotten alfalfa growths, of discovering Faulkner, of parking near the football field on summer nights a world ago to wrestle the price of the evening’s movie and popcorn out of the sweetly moist flesh of Becky Sue or Alma Mae or Betty Lou.

Though oven temperatures prevail as the visitor drives ten miles out of Charlotte to the ordered and pastoral campus of little Davidson College, that school’s football team is grimly grunting and maiming its sweaty way through the merciless tortures of spring practice. Along the rural roadways are young Huck Finns taking their country pleasures, “antique shops” with their \$3.98 crocheted bedspreads and old vases probably certified all the way back to 1947, Confederate flags or decals superimposed on license plates. Old country stores thrive near new red-brick ramblers with camp-trailers or motorboats near at hand, and, further on, are declining shacks where poor whites or poorer blacks take the sun on rude wooden porches in the presence of ragged kids and peeling old Buicks parked in the front yards. Near midnight, en route to Charlotte’s Pecan Grove Club to catch the second show, the car radio offers gut-jangling country tunes and ad-

vertisements for Chick Starter (which is not a new aphrodisiac for hippie girls, but a product to feed infant chickens) while warm-weather fliers dash themselves into eternity and gooey gobs against the windshield. They can whoop of the New South with its rapid industrialization and economic or cultural leaps all they want, but some things cannot be paved over by asphalt or changed by factory smokestacks—things rooted deeply in the Southern soil, the Southern soul, the Southern psyche.

Welcome home. *Welcome to Klan Country*, as a giant billboard says.

A couple of Good Ole Boys in butch haircuts and white short-sleeved sports shirts temporarily disadvantaged by neckties are drinking from a brown bag out on the unpaved parking lot at the Pecan Grove Club, sneaking a few manly snorts in rebellion against the mixed potions their wives force on them inside, and one is volunteering probably louder than he knows that the goddamn Tar Heel football team won’t never amount to a shit till they hire a big-time coach like ole Bear Bryant. The sight of a dude in a beard and an Eastern-cut suit obviously too flannelly for Southern latitudes is enough to bring them pause. When their eyes begin to calculate exactly where the heavy artillery should be unloaded, the visitor consults with his Confederate ancestors and offers in his best drawl, “Evenin’ fellers, how yawl?” Then he slouches on by like he was moseying down to the 7-11 to buy hisself some Moon Pies and Ara-Cee Colas. This inspirational act passes him by without fisticuffs, though when the ole boys see how his hair hangs over his collar in back one says *Shee-ee-it, Hon!*, and the explosive laughter sends the visitor’s heart flying out in empathy toward the ghost of Thomas Wolfe

Contributing editor Larry L. King is on the road again after a year’s respite at Harvard as a Nieman Fellow. Other Americans he has profiled in Harper’s include Nelson Rockefeller, Louis Armstrong, and Harold E. Hughes.

The Pecan Grove Club is dark enough to conceal from the curious those gentlemen who might be in the company of ladies to whom they hold no clear titles. The coatless, tieless, and paunchy combination *maitre d'hôtel* and floor bouncer, who points the path to tables by flashlight, is clearly miffed that a naked Scotch bottle should be openly flaunted rather than decently masqueraded in the obligatory brown bag. His eyes accuse the visitor of inferior breeding, inspiring one to marvel again at that limitless capacity the South has for self-deception, for honoring show over substance, for choosing illusion when reality might better serve. This is a bottle club, meaning that for \$6-per-head cover you sneak your own booze in as if freshly stolen and obliged to be smuggled past a convention of Methodist bishops. In exchange for such cooperative deceptions, which in no way violate or improve the law, but do faithfully serve tradition, the house provides gratis setups. Beer is free on demand, delivered as regularly as one of several yawning waitresses may be provoked into action; nothing moves them quicker than the clear beacon of a green bill exposed to the uncertain light. Dinner is extra, an expenditure all except a dozen of the fifty-odd customers have avoided because they must later settle the claims of baby-sitters. Between musical numbers the band leader endorses generosity by reminding customers that waitresses work strictly for tips. Out in the bar area a tough-faced little brunette complains of those SOB's at Table Four who expect tons of ice, Cokes, beer, and ass-pinch-ing privileges in exchange for each four-bit gift.

Except for probably a few airline hostesses or young secretaries in miniskirts, and their mildly sideburned escorts, this could be 1960 again. Women wear domed and lacquered beehive hairdos; bristling crew cuts prevail among the males. Dancing is dogged, more of duty in the couple's motions than of soul or fun. They shuffle and two-step to such vintage ballads as "Misty," "I Wish You Love," and "Poke Salad Annie," while The Frantics, who prefer to blow their music à go-go, are so obviously bored you get the impression they are all chewing gum. When The Frantics can no longer tolerate imitation Lawrence Welk or, occasionally, Johnny Cash, they up the tempo and the decibel level enough that the dance platform could not be more efficiently cleared by a black with a switchblade. And that is the signal for Brother Dave, out in the wings, to light a fresh cigarette and prepare to spring onstage.

The Pecan Grove Club seats 550 in enthusiastic circumstances. On evenings such as this, however, owner David Rabie doubts whether Soldier Field has more unoccupied seats in a midnight snowstorm. Rabie is a swarthy, intense man who published poetry at age sixteen and who in the 1950s was a United Nations correspondent for an Israeli publication. Somewhere in there he came to Charlotte to peddle Oriental rugs, and somehow about eight years ago he found himself owning the Pecan Grove Club. Tonight he is full of passionate bulletins that anyone eager for the same foolish ex-

perience can buy him for a song and a loose promise. He stands outside shortly before the second show, slapping at flying creatures and fingering a dead cigar, under a sign proclaiming the feature attraction: a comedian billed as Brother Dave Gardner. "I'm losing my ass," the reformed poet confides. "I'm paying this guy a thousand bucks a night. And look at the house."

Then why had he booked Brother Dave?

"I had him here about three years ago and made good money. He was doing more straight comedy then—not so much of this political nonsense. A year later he was deeper into the political thing and I just broke even. This time he's knocking everything—religion, the colored, even the dead Kennedys. It's a disaster. People are calling up to complain." The disaffected club owner turns his mind back from Tuesday to Friday and the special disaster of opening night: "You never saw such a house! I spent eighteen hundred dollars for promotion and then had to refund three thousand at the door when he didn't show. Kidnapped by Indians! Can you imagine that? He says he was kidnapped by the Cherokees!"

"Detained" is the word Miss Millie Gardner used when the visitor arrived at a Charlotte motel on Monday afternoon and telephoned the comic's three-room suite to inquire how the show had been going. Miss Millie, a weathered blonde who acts as her husband's booking agent, did not supply a standard response: "Well, we didn't make opening night on account of the Cherokees."

Beg your pardon?

"We were detained by some Indians. I've called in the FBI." Ah . . . yes ma'am?

"They have the full report. And I've reported it to Congressman Jonas' office."

Yes. Well. How does one go about getting, ah, detained by Indians in the America of 1970?

"We'll talk about it after the show," Miss Millie said. "I'm not sure I trust the telephone."

THE FIRST TIME HE APPEARED on the Jack Paar show, back in 1957, Brother Dave Gardner was a minor comic who for ten years had played tired strip joints and dingy bottle clubs throughout the Bible and boll-weevil belt, working close to the horns of bullish hecklers and wall-eyed drunks. He had sometimes entertained Rotarians in the assault on their weekly veal cutlets, or discouraged traveling salesmen who gathered in third-rate hotels rather desperately to court fun between the exhortations of their sales managers to get out and more aggressively hawk the aluminum siding, fire insurance, or farm machinery that rode the saddles atop their small pinched lives. He had played drums on something called *The Winkie Martindale Show* in Memphis, where he first began to crack jokes, and he had a straight singing record, *White Silver Sands*, that, in the long run, excited him more than it did others. He was best known in the deeper boondocks. If they wore brown shoes, white socks, clip-on bowties, or butch haircuts, then Brother

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Dave likely had made them laugh at one way-station or another where laughter was no small gift. He was of and from them, the son of a Tennessee carpenter who liked to think of himself as being "in the construction industry"; he knew what it was to drop school in the tenth grade, to not make it with the quality chicks because your clothes were not the best and because you were scrawny and had never been outstanding at book reports or athletics. He knew what it was to work at dull jobs where they paid you in small coin every Friday, and would not have lamented your death except as your funeral hindered commerce.

He rated no seat on the celebrity couch where Paar's favored guests grouped to smile, to crack limp jokes about Ike's golf or the hole in Adlai's shoe or the pelvis of Elvis, all the while preening and plugging their latest movies, records, new noses, or fuzzy theories. Horatio Alger was still to be believed in the America of 1957, and so when they offered Brother Dave a four-minute, stand-up shot (wedged between a network station break and spiels by Hugh Downs for dog food) he nearly knocked 'em down getting into position.

Brother Dave rattled off a monologue presenting Brutus in the execution of Caesar, product of a wildly inventive brain that some later would suspect of having influenced Mort Sahl, Jonathan Winters, Bill Cosby, Lenny Bruce, Dick Gregory, Flip Wilson. The studio audience, Paar, and the folks out there in television land broke up as in cornpone accents Caesar put the final question: *Et tu, Brute?* And Brutus, who had known trouble keeping his toga out of his bicycle spokes and who had earlier heard yon Cassius described as a picky eater and "about half-smart," answered, "Naw man, I ain't even et *one*." Paar received a thousand letters and telegrams begging more. NBC-TV welcomed the unknown comic to a three-year association to include sixty-odd appearances on the Paar show alone, and RCA provided a lucrative recording contract. His first album, *Rejoice, Dear Hearts!*, sold almost as frantically as hoola hoops. *Kick Thine Own Self* and seven other album successes followed, each a combination of hip, headlines, and down-home wit. He appeared in a Broadway play, banked up to \$30,000 per week for campus one-nighters, and made connections with Las Vegas gambling emporiums where a hot comic smart enough to avoid house tables could depend on a weekly take-home of \$25,000 plus free lodgings. Miss Millie, a slender blonde who married him in 1947 within six weeks of his first booking in the small St. Louis club where she bossed the hat-check concession, knew opportunity's knock; in her role as traveling manager she efficiently guided him away from the perils of roulette wheels and chorus girls, which was not always easy, because little in Brother Dave's natural instincts rides him toward the more pious precincts when he is rolling free.

His Brutus-dirks-Caesar routine became a comedy classic, as did the bit reporting on David's slaying of "the overgrown Philadelphian," Goliath, with a smooth stone "wrapped up in a blue-suede

tennis-shoe tongue." Probably his best-known tale involved the high-speed deaths of two Alabama motorcyclists, Miss Baby and Mister Chuck. In that routine he appeared to put down lawmen, Dixie customs, blacks, cyclists, truckers, and casual bystanders while showing no special malice toward any. He was Andy Griffin running downhill with the brakes off, slightly zonked, and maybe plotting a practical joke to severely embarrass nice old Aunt Bea—or maybe more than embarrass her: his routines had a way of stressing humor in death. There was about him some combination of fun and menace, one sensed, slices of the high-school dropout who perhaps had read Shakespeare on his own but who still might efficiently (and not always fairly) clean your pockets at the pool hall, or deliberately direct Yankee tourists to the wrongest possible road should they be foolish enough to inquire the most direct route to Birmingham.

He increasingly became a social comic, putting the knock on JFK, on Castro, on the latest absurdity as reflected in newspaper headlines or by the careless utterances of our kings or pharaohs. If he speared Hoffa in one breath then surely in the next he would gig McClellan; if he made Democrats feel comfortable at the expense of Republicans they soon would discover ecstasy to be a two-way street. On the Paar show, after making professional liberals nervous through his near-perfect imitations of the ill-advantaged but irrepressible Roosevelt, Jabo and Willie ("home boys," he called them), he would say in his thick winter-molasses accent that he believed in one race, "the human race," and then the libs could expel their nervous do-gooder air while Paar beamed and the studio audience applauded. Yes, dear hearts, he enjoyed a merry ride, accumulating a thirty-two-room Mediterranean villa on a Hollywood hill, a luxury yacht, multiple Cadillacs, a second fine home on Biloxi's expensive sands. It was a glorious cruise, save for a little choppy water such as when he accidentally left Miss Millie behind in a West Texas motel room and didn't recall it until several days later in Louisiana, and also excepting that one major misunderstanding in 1962 when Atlanta police charged him with being in the company of an excessive number of amphetamine tablets and assorted other "uppers"—a condition inspiring Jack Paar to fresh public tears and Brother Dave Gardner to the successful investment of \$5,000 in attorney's fees. And then shortly after John F. Kennedy's assassination, he disappeared from the national scene.

Last winter among the snows of Cambridge, I listened again to Brother Dave's old records with a black friend, Wally Terry of *Time*, a fellow Niemar Fellow at Harvard. We debated whether the comedian's lines sometimes bordered on racial bigotry or whether he simply was a funny man with a rare gift for the exploitation of sensitive ethnic material a pacesetter who so pinpointed the various insanities of our social confusions that he may have been a decade ahead of the times. Given Brother Dave's weird and conflicting pronouncements, far-out sound effects, and amazing gift for reproducing a

regional accents, our repeated listenings only muddled the issue. "Whatever *happened* to Brother Dave?" Wally asked. In that instant I determined to find out.

Celebrity Services inquiries on the East and West Coasts failed to locate him. He was not currently registered with any agent known to the major booking agencies. NBC and RCA disclaimed pertinent knowledge. His California home stood vacant and boarded; he had apparently left no forwarding address. Telephone operators ruined several rumors in failing to make connections in Nashville, Memphis, Biloxi, New Orleans. Then a writer friend in Charlotte, John Carr, telephoned to say that Brother Dave would be playing his city in late May.

BROTHER DAVE APPEARED to "When the Saints Go Marching In," amending the original lyrics to include information that among the marching saints he expects to count Congressman L. Mendel Rivers, Spiro Agnew, Martha Mitchell, and Georgia's Lester Maddox. He was smaller than one had remembered, perhaps five and one-half feet tall, with stubby arms and a welterweight's torso. A sallow, lined face and a pompadoured crown of wiry silver hair made him look older than his forty-four years. "I'd smoke in my sleep if I had somebody to hold 'em, and I'd smoke chains if I could light 'em," he said of his nicotine habit, and taking a couple of quick drags he went to work:

"All who love America shout *Glory!* . . . Oh, dear hearts, don't you wish the other side could hear us? Wouldn't it shake up ther fuzzy ole heads? All this and Spiro too! *Glory!*" (*Cheers.*) "Martha Mitchell, ain't she good?" (*Cheers.*) "Beloved, the ole liberal commie long-haired traitor hippies"—interrupted by applause before reaching the punch line, he joined the laughter—"Yeah, them crazy cats say Brother Dave am against minority groups. No such thing, dear hearts. I'm *for* the minorities—the Armed Forces and the Po-leece. I wouldn't even mind paying taxes if it all went to them. Somebody say, 'You mean Brother Dave's for the heat?' You damn right, beloved. That ole pig, as the hippies call him, he's out there protecting society. And if you ain't a part of society, dear hearts, then what right you got to go around throwing rocks at it?"

"And the military, I love 'em so much I send my hoes to Fort Bragg to get 'em shined. Somebody ay, 'Yeah, but ain't it ugly for a soldier to kill?' Naw, man, that's his *gig*. You know, dear hearts, in't nothing wrong with patriotism. By God, I *groove* on it. You can fly as high on patriotism as you can on acid. I'd love to join a patriotic outfit—I'd join the Klan, only I ain't got enough morals." (*Cheers, applause.*) "Let's all shout *Glory!* for the sraeli Army." (*Uncertain applause: why cheer the Christ-killing Jews?*) "Yeah, man, that Israeli army fought them rag-heads for six days and on the seventh day they rested. Dear hearts, the Israelis re fighting for State's Rights just like we are." (*Boistrous cheers, now that the ideology is clear.*) Them Jews is patient cats. It took 'em two thou-

sand years to get their Wailing Wall back. Dear hearts, how long you think it'd take a Southern Baptist to get his *church* back?" Southern Baptists were apparently well represented, for the responsive roar sent Brother Dave into a further exploration of religious territory. This caused no break in his regular routine, simply because there is no set routine; he jumps from subject to subject, going where the laugh lines guide him, much in the manner of a Presidential candidate whose basic speech is capable of alterations fitting all local conditions.

"I put one over on the Supreme Court today, beloved. Yeah, man, I sneaked off and prayed all morning! Prayer's *good*, beloved. Prayer is askin' for it and meditating is waitin' for it. Somebody say, 'Brother Dave, how come you talk so much about God in night clubs and honky-tonks?' Dear hearts, on account of it's against the law to mention Him in school! Yeah, man, spirituality is where it's at. Course, you turn the other cheek today and some damn hippie'll take a brick and knock your jaw off.

"Dr. Billy Graham—he's all right, I dig Billy. Yeah, except he disappointed me when he got on TV and tokened up for the hippies and yippies. Said they was good cats. Billy's a Christian you know—he thinks you *supposed* to love everybody, and I'm one of them eye-for-an-eye cats. I'm for Billy, though: he's got so many guts he prays in public. He even prays at the White House when Crafty Richard posts him some of them palace guards with their cute little Hitler hats. But Billy got on TV and said"—and here Brother Dave gave an accurate imitation of Dr. Graham in the practice of dime-store Churchill—"I was coming out of the el-a-va-tor in New Ya-wuk recently, and one of those hippie fellows came along, and he *spoke* to me.' And I said, 'Hell, Billy, don't you know that cheap trash will speak to anybody who'll speak to em?' Somebody say, 'You know good and well Dr. Graham couldn't hear him say that! Brother Dave's flipped out and is talkin' to hisself.' Yeah, beloved, ain't nothing wrong with that! Talk to yourself, dear hearts. By God, you'll enjoy the rare pleasure of listening to somebody with some damn sense."

The beehives and butcher cuts were bobbing in merriment now, David Rabie's being perhaps the only grim face in the room, but then he was counting empty tables. Now Brother Dave combined spirituality and sex: "People say motels is sinful. Say, 'Motels am the devil's own doing.' Naw, dear hearts, you drive by them motels at two or three in the morning and you can hear folks digging on spirituality. Services never cease! Yeah, you can hear 'em in there saying, 'Oh, *God!* Lord *Jesus!* Ain't it *good.*' . . . You know, the Catholics got a terrible advantage over us Baptists and Methodists and Cambellites and whatnot: they can take a friend to the Holiday Inn and bounce her off the walls for thirty-six hours and then go confess it to a priest. *We* do it and then can't tell *nobody.* . . . I ain't got nothing against sex education in the schools, dear hearts, except it makes us parents feel like we didn't do it right. . . . Can you imagine the

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vanity of that Civil Wrongs song, 'We shall overcome'? Now, beloved, how can any mortal do that?"

THE GOOD OLE BOYS HAD LOOSENED their ties, their laughter contained more of steel on stone, drinks flowed a bit quicker from the brown bags. The bouncer, who had earlier ignored a lone heckler, moved over to encourage his silence after a flower from the bush of Southern Womanhood called out of the darkness, "Shut up, you Yankee smart ass!" Her command clued Brother Dave to his next line: "Some people say I hate Yankees. Naw, beloved, I love 'em when they come down here bringing money to invest and fleeing them damned crumbling cities and welfare lines and the demands and street barbecues of our 'New Citizens.'" (*Cheers as he pursed his lips into exaggerated thickness, then hopped around scratching himself under the arms and hoo-hoo-hooing like Cheetah in some Tarzanian rage.*) "Yankees are moving South in droves! The South's integrated now, see, and they're segregated up North and they're getting spooked about it." (*Cheers and laughter: take that, you two-faced Yankee swine.*) "The only Yankees I don't like are them that stay up yonder and grow long hair and raise liberal young uns who dodge the draft and smoke aspirins and shoot-up peanut butter."

From here he made a natural leap into dope jokes—and here he lost the crowd. Charlotte's beer addicts and whiskey heads sat unmoved when Brother Dave took a deep whiff of his cigarette lighter and then pantomined euphoria. When Little Orphan Annie was nominated as "the first acid head—you ever dig them eyes?"—they made no response. "I discovered you can get high on smog, beloved. Yeah, and as soon as Washington found out you can get your head together on smog, man, they outlawed it!... You know, dear hearts, if them SDS cats and Weathermen and hippies and yuppies and all them other crazies would smoke more, and burn less, this ole world would smell sweeter and swing higher." He told a story of two hip-cats in a restaurant, one saying to the other, "Let's blow this joint," and getting the response, "Naw, man, let's pass it on to the waitress." Only laughter from the band signified a familiarity with certain cultural sophistications among show-folk and hippies.

The act was now going sour before folks convinced that marijuana is pure ole dope and dope inspires you to cut up Grandmaw with bread knives. Brother Dave retreated to politics: "I pulled for Barry Goldwater and he only carried five states. I pulled for George Wallace and he only carried five states. I believe if God was to run He'd only carry five states—and they'd all be in the South." (*Cheers: this they understood.*) "Beloved, I love the South!" (*Cheers.*) "And I love America!" (*Cheers.*) "All who love 'em shout *Glory!*... Ah, that's wonderful, beloved. Don't you wish they could hear us up in Washington?" (*Cheers.*) "And you know, by God, *lately I think they do!*" (*Cheers,*

applause, Rebel yells.) "Man, I don't know how to act since we finally got us a President!" (*Bull's-eye.*) "You know, the ole Yankee newspapers put the ugly mouth on those good people down in Lamar, South Carolina. Yeah, man, said they'd beat up on some New Citizens' little schoolchildren. Naw, beloved, that ain't true! They didn't hurt them lovely children—all they did was take some chains and whip up on some old school buses." (*Loudest cheers of the night, brown bags banging on tables.*) "Course, it made the professional liberals slobber at the mouth—but we all know what a professional liberal is: somebody that's educated beyond their capacity. Like Bill Bullblight—err, Fulbright. Crafty Richard say to Senator Fulbright, 'Bill, I think we ought to go in there, by God, and bomb Hanoi and blow them damn slopeheads plumb off the damn map,' and Fulbright say, 'Oh, us doesn't dare do that, Richard, 'cause then us won't have nobody to negotiate with.'... Do yawl remember, dear hearts, when they awarded that Nobel Peace Prize to the late Dr. Junior on account of his efficiency in teaching our New Citizens to riot? Man, what's that Nobel cat doing giving a *peace* prize, after he done went and invented dynamite?... Some say that segregation is evil and integration is correct. Now, if that be the case, why do we have ladies' rooms? But we gonna get our country back one day soon." (*Cheers.*) "Yeah, beloved, them Green Berets and the Po-leece and the National Guard and them other good guys has had just about enough and by God, dear hearts, they can beat you into bad health." (*Rising cheers.*)

Then he hit them with the line that caused a sudden shocked silence, a line that even many of the Good Ole Boys deepest into the mysteries of their brown bags were not braced for, and it stunned them, caused gasps, a quick dark murder of laughter. Maybe the wild grin on his face, the sheer exuberance of his delivery, were as petrifying as the line itself: "*God, wasn't that a clean hit on Dr. Junior?*"

The hard core cheered, and somebody up front shouted *Glory!* At least ten people got up and made for the exit, however. A heavy, middle-aged blond in green eyeshadow and an overflowing green pantsuit descended on the visitor, who sat morosely smoking at the rear of the hall: "Are you with the idiot?" No, not really. "Well, he's gone too damn far. I love the South and I love my country, and that idiot is putting 'em down. Where's the manager?" David Rabie came with a pained look to take three minutes of perfected abuse, periodically spreading his hands in unconditional surrender "His damn jokes are forty years old," the blond raged. "You call this shit entertainment? Joke about murder? I'm gonna call the *Charlotte Ot server* and tell 'em what you got out here. Why do you hire that idiot?" David Rabie explained how it was to be a businessman, saying that entertainer of all creeds had played the Pecan Grove Club. He rattled off names—Brenda Lee, Maxine Brown, Ro Hamilton, LaVerne Baker, Count Basie, The Fou Freshmen, Lee Dorsey—noting that "several of them are colored." When the storm blew out he turned

to the visitor: "For God's sake, talk to him! Ask him to leave that offensive material out. People want to hear the old routines that made him famous, not this crap. Look at the house—count it!" The visitor did; there now remained twenty-one revelers. By the time Brother Dave ended his turn with a trap-drum recital, there were thirteen survivors.

The faithful lingered under pecan and oak trees while two black men ran to fetch their cars. A citizen in a butch haircut and a \$29.95 suit straight off the rack led forward a blind man with his seeing-eye dog: "Brother Dave, this ole boy is blind and everything, but he don't beg or peddle pencils or nothin'. He's got this little newsstand down at the YMCA, and, by God, he *works*."

"Bless your heart, beloved."

"He don't set on his ass and howl for help just because he's blind," the citizen clarified.

"God bless you," Brother Dave cooed, shaking the blind man's hand. "You know, they got a rule up in Washington that if you break a sweat they'll take you off welfare."

The blind man beamed; his sponsor whooped.

"Course, a cat that sweats don't want it nohow. Don't yawl give up, you hear? We gonna get our country back someday."

HE DUCKED INTO A GOLD CADILLAC driven by his sixteen-year-old son, Junior, and within ten minutes was back in the motel room where Miss Millie waited with a barking French poodle named Mister. Mister may wear a rhinestone collar and sport sissy little ribbons atop his iron-gray head, but let a stranger approach Miss Millie even to light her cigarette and Mister has conniptions in the voice of a surly Doberman pinscher.

Miss Millie, who took her meals off trays in the room, and whom the visitor never discovered outside a gauzy green dressing gown during his six-day observations, was reading one of her seven books by H. L. Hunt. "How was the show?" Miss Millie asked.

"Nothing wrong with the show," Brother Dave said. "The goddamn house is the problem. You could of fired a .410 and not hit anybody at the second show."

"Damn those Cherokees," Miss Millie said.

Yes, *how about* those Cherokees? What had happened? It was the fifth or sixth time the visitor had put that question, receiving only vague and disjointed reports.

"We're driving along Highway 19, coming down from Tennessee," Brother Dave said. "Hell, I didn't know we was on a damned Indian reservation. Me and Miss Millie was in the lead Caddy and our son was trailing in the other one. The Cherokee Patrol stopped him, man. Wouldn't let the cat go."

Why?

"They wouldn't say. But you can figure it out."

When the puzzled visitor remained mute, Brother Dave added, "They're part of this Third World hing."

Beg pardon?

"Aw, man, don't you know what's happening? Who attacked a meeting of the Klan here in North Carolina two or three years ago, when the Klan cats wasn't doing nothing but burning crosses and singing hymns?"

The Cherokees?

"Damn right, beloved. They're part of this thing!"

"Dave," Miss Millie said, "the FBI asked us not to talk about this."

"Aw, he's all right," Brother Dave said with a nod in the visitor's direction. "Don't you hear that accent? He's from Texas, just like ole H. L. Hunt. Beloved, do you know Mr. Hunt?"

Only by reputation.

"Then you don't know him at all!" This from Miss Millie, suddenly and with surprising heat, her voice crackling and smoldering like a summer storm. "The left-wing press has smeared him all his life. They even tried to link him with JFK's assassination, and we all know that was ordered by Moscow."

"I got interested in Mr. Hunt's patriotic work about six years ago," Brother Dave said. "So I checked him out and he checked me out, and we got our heads together. We've become real good friends. Miss Millie and me have been his guest in that big ole house he lives in—the one patterned after George Washington's. That's the nicest, kindest, gentlest, smartest ole boy in the world. He ought to have the Congressional Medal of Honor. If America is saved, beloved, he's the one who's saved it nearly single-handed. Here, let me show you what Ruth gave us. That's Mrs. Hunt." He produced what appeared to be a catalogue advertising furniture, which Mrs. Hunt had mysteriously autographed along with sentiments speaking well of friendship and patriotism. Which seems like a minimal gift from the wife of the world's richest man or thereabouts.

Does H. L. Hunt in any way subsidize Brother Dave's work?

"Naw, man. I ain't asked him for nothing. In the first place, I don't need to: I've got bread and investments so I don't have to work, except I want to get my message across. All Mr. Hunt's got that I want is his wisdom. He's my teacher."

"You should read *Alpaca*," Miss Millie said. "It's the best novel I've ever read. There's this model Constitution in there that H. L. Hunt wrote." (The "model Constitution" recommends that each citizen be given a number of votes in direct ratio to his net financial worth, and would preclude anyone drawing a government salary, pension, or welfare check from voting; citizens would be permitted to sell their votes to others with greater interests in good government.)

Back to the Cherokee caper: what reason had they given for detaining Junior?

"They just said he was on Indian land. When we swung around to see what the score was, they told us it was none of our damn business and to clear out. We begged, pleaded, flashed our identification—all they said was, 'Get moving.' Then they threatened us with guns."

"Dave!"

"He made a natural leap into dope jokes—and here he lost the crowd. Charlotte's beer addicts and whiskey heads sat unmoved...."

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"All right, Miss Millie. They held us up about an hour or more. But it took four or five hours to get our son out of that damn mess, and that caused us to miss opening night."

And how had they ultimately freed Junior?

"Dave, now, we just can't talk about this," Miss Millie instructed in schoolmarm tones.

"Them cats *had* to know who I was, dear hearts. It wasn't no accident. By God, you wait until that Bureau of Indian Affairs gets through with 'em!"

"Dave!"

The comedian invited the visitor into an adjoining room, where he offered a recording by comic David Frye: "This cat cracks me up. Only thing is, he propagandizes for the Leftists. But you got to hear this one track, man." David Frye imitated Richard Nixon taking a few experimental marijuana pokes and then trying to talk hip, the humor grounded in "Nixon's" continuing to sound (even when stoned beyond the capabilities of Mount Rushmore) like the eight-year-old who received a black leather briefcase for Christmas and who, furthermore, was delighted with the gift. "Can't you imagine ole Crafty Richard turned on?" Brother Dave cackled.

Junior entered from the main room: "Dad, quick! J. Robert Jones is out here."

"Oh, my God!" Brother Dave pinched out a little something he and the visitor had been smoking, frantically fanning the air. "Look, beloved, would you mind waiting in here with the boy? I've got some personal business with this cat."

Junior is lanky and wiry, six feet two, with a mop of long blond hair which his mother despises and which his father disapproves of but defends on the grounds that his son would be disadvantaged in the romance department should he look exceedingly square in a hip age. In military schools for six years before withdrawing a few months ago, he is convinced that neither Harvard nor Yale teaches as much as he'll learn on the road with Dad. After he had exhibited various karate chops, Junior demonstrated with flourishes the most effective methods for quickly extracting a switchblade. He was performing his third or fourth guitar solo, between lectures explaining the basic uses of girls, when Brother Dave reappeared from the main quarters: "Come on in, beloved, and meet a friend."

A small, dark-haired man wearing a strangely familiar face and a sly country grin sat in an easy chair, not bothering to rise for handshakes. "This is J. Robert Jones," Brother Dave said. The visitor's mental equipment whirred and clicked: *J. Robert Jones . . . North Carolinian . . . Grand Dragon and Holy Terror of the United Klans of America . . . Convicted of Contempt of Congress . . . Recently released from federal prison.*

Mister, the bejeweled toy watchdog, was growling and snapping another irritating concert at the visitor's heels. "Come on dog," the visitor said. "You should be adjusted to me by now."

"Maybe he don't like hippies." Though the Holy Terror smiled, his eyes seemed to calculate how much bearded beef might dress out by the pound.

"Well, I'd hoped my accent might help."

"Yeah, Bob," Brother Dave said. "He's from Texas."

"Everybody got to be from *somewhere*," the Holy Terror said. "Ole Lyndon's from Texas, but he never amounted to much."

"Look, beloved," Brother Dave said, laughing nervously. "Would you mind seeing me tomorrow?"

Junior provided an escort to the visitor's room, only a small lawn and a swimming pool away from the Gardner quarters: "You know who that was you just met?"

"No," the visitor lied.

Junior produced the Grand Dragon and Holy Terror's calling card, as neatly and professionally done as that of any Wall Street broker. He produced another, this one from a Klan branch located in Natchez, and bearing the red-letter legend: "You are WHITE because your grandfather believed in SEGREGATION." These documents reduced Junior to helpless laughter: "Man, don't that blow your mind?"

"Have you dug those cars?" The visitor looked in the indicated direction to observe two cars parked near the Gardner quarters. He noted the silhouettes of several men. "You know who they are?"

The visitor guessed they might be associates of the Holy Terror.

"Yeah, man! I bet they got enough guns to waste half of North Carolina."

This was not comforting as a bedtime thought. The visitor peered through the muggy night, lamenting that he had never learned to identify automobiles beyond their color, being unable to distinguish a Ford from a Lincoln unless he discovers clues written in manufacturer's chrome.

"They'll be there when the sun comes up, man," Junior chortled. "The Klan watches after Dad everywhere he goes. And they can see *your* room as well as my old man's." Much cheered by the thought, and stabbing the air with a switchblade he turned back to the family quarters where sleep is always taken in shifts as added protection against midnight conspiracies.

THREE OR FOUR DAYS AND NIGHTS had carelessly mingled since the visitor had been introduced to the Holy Terror. The same jokes at the Club, the same laughter, had burned the mind like acid. The house had been building nightly, in size and frenzy. The first night following the appearance of the Holy Terror, Rabie counted more than three hundred; Junior had slyly intimated that the gate's quantum jump had not been merely coincidental with that visit.

Since Brother Dave performs his guard watch by night and sleeps by day, many nocturnal sessions had revealed a plethora of conspiracies. He strolled about in an old dressing gown, incessantly smoking, periodically peeking through the parted drapes to determine, one assumed, whether any amphibious

assaults might be headed our way from the pool.

"Beloved," he said during one such seance, "do you know why Congress inserted 'under God' in the Pledge of Allegiance, at near-about the same time the Supreme Court ruled there couldn't be no prayer in the schools?"

By now the visitor did not know whether it was a plot of the Federal Reserve Board, International Jewry, charity rackets, Julian Bond, or the television networks, all of which had received their due licks. So he just said, "No."

"Man, to confuse us. To divide us. That's the way this thing works, see." And he would be off down the steepest ideological slopes, waving his arms and wildly scattering cigarette ashes, delivering private monologues of which the following is a typical composite: "I've always been conservative and believed in segregation for them that wants it, dear heart, and nothing not being forced on nobody. But for years, man, I trusted my government—even believed what I read in the newspapers. Then I got to thinking, 'Damn it, something's bad wrong!' We had the biggest bomb in the world and couldn't win no wars. And we lost China and three-fourths of Europe and 'Cuber' and all them damn Mau-Mau nations, man, and then some good Americans uncovered Alger Hiss and Harry Dexter White and them other spying Communist cats and I started seeing a pattern in it. Man, the problem had to come from within! And the more I looked into the thing, I decided that was only part of it: *within* was doing the mischief, but *without* was calling the signals, you dig? Like, you think 'the people' elected Roosevelt, don't you? Naw, man, that's what the big money combines conditioned you to think. Hell, man, the *Rothschilds* put FDR in. The House of Morgan. And they started us toward One World government. And now, beloved, we can't even control our kids. We can't even be white without having to make excuses for it, and I'm sick and tired of making excuses for being white. Ole Nixon, hell, he's better than what we've had, but don't you know that cat ain't his own man? *Nelson Rockefeller* put him in office. Yeah, man, set him up in a big rich New York law firm and moved him in that same fancy building ole Rocky lives in, and then went out and spent six million dollars pretending like he was running against him!"

Here Brother Dave collapsed into helpless laughter at how clever the Rockefellers, Rothschilds, Stalins, and possibly the Denver Mint had been in their conspiratorial deceptions, a thing he frequently does when revealing the larger menaces, as if to say, *Hoo, boy, didn't they put one over on humanity that time?*

"I mean, man, you can even see it in *little* things." *Laughs.*) "Like why do our Post Office buildings just say 'U.S.,' dear heart, without adding 'of America?'" *Laughs.*) "How come, beloved, the Supreme Court and the hairy kids and the damned nades all started acting up *at once?*" *Laughs.*) "And how come JFK and Dr. Junior rode in open convertibles or stood out on balconies where folks could get clean shots at 'em?" *Laughs.*) "Man,

don't you know them cats was following orders to be sacrificed?" *Laughs.*)

Then he would sober himself as quickly as he had laughed, marching about and saying a military *coup d'etat* might soon be the only method left for preserving America's precious freedoms, defending the Ohio National Guard in its conduct at Kent State, enthusiastically endorsing New York hardhats in their Wall Street attacks on beards, declaring himself to be the only "strict Constructionist" in show business and assigning even John Wayne and Bob Hope to the liberal camp. He offered a grim warning represented as being in the visitor's best interests: "Look, man, I know they wear that damn long hair and face fuzz up there in New York. But you gotta realize, beloved, the revolution is *on*. It's *here*. People are going by appearances, now, dear heart, 'cause everybody's choosed up sides. I worry about my own son getting hit by a sniper because of that damn long hair. It's dangerous to walk around looking hairy, man. You could get zapped."

To Klansmen visiting the camp had been added Green Berets and their wives down from Fort Bragg, and a local lady with skinny legs and a zealot's gleam who spoke frequently of the occult, of haunted houses, of reincarnation, of séances, of a devout belief in the prophesies of Jeanne Dixon and in the profits of racial segregation. There had been a young sailor with a Confederate flag stitched inside the lining of his jumper so that when he unbuttoned his sleeve and rolled it back the flag winked and blinked in all its lost glory, and the sailor in outraged young innocence had proclaimed after one midnight show that those Communists *in the Pentagon*, now, must soon be stopped. There had been private screenings of a film produced at a small college in Searcy, Arkansas (represented as having been shipped in by H. L. Hunt for Brother Dave's continuing education), which told of a conspiracy linking the Black Panthers, Ho Chi Minh, student rebels, and large segments of Congress.

One night at the Pecan Grove Club the visitor noted with shock the arrival of a party of black people. Within three minutes of Brother Dave's opening blasts he was not surprised to hear loud and disgruntled comments from their direction. Whites at neighboring tables glared and shushed. Just as the dispute approached cussing terrain David Rabie appeared, agitated about one silly millimeter short of pure panic, to say how delighted he would be to refund money. The visitor sighed in concert with the club owner when the blacks accepted. (Rabie later said, "I told them at the door, 'I don't think this is your type of show,' but they didn't get the message.")

There had been one wild adrenaline moment when two Good Ole Boys in discouragingly robust health had paused at the visitor's table to sneer as Brother Dave accomplished cadenzas of abuse against long-haired traitors abroad in the land: "*Here's* one of them bastards." The visitor negotiated the best possible grip on his Scotch bottle, felt himself tense to deliver a desperate overhand smash should that necessity descend, felt some

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reckless ancient joy of combat surging up that he had long presumed civilized out of him, and then, fortunately for his skin and for his long years of refurbishing, a waitress came running with the bulletin that *No, no, he's with Brother Dave, yawl leave him alone, now, you hear?* The ole boys laughed sheepishly and stuck out their rough workmen's hands, telling the visitor they hadn't meant nothing by it, that they was real sorry, and one had begged a private introduction after the show in behalf of his father-in-law visiting from Pine Bluff.

There had been moments, too, with Klansmen in close proximity to the visitor's bed, with intrigue heavy on the night air, when paranoia had proved contagious. The visitor debated whether to telephone friends in the East to give some clue to his associates, in the event he should be discovered in some Southern creek bed wrapped in more chains than he might conveniently swim in. After rejecting the notion as melodramatic, he had surrendered to it in a midmorning relapse. Later, he had informed Brother Dave of his precautions, adding (to the tune of much merriment from among Green Berets and assorted other camp followers) that should anyone offer him a guided tour of the city it would take all hands plus the goddamn dog to load him in the car.

AS THE WEEKEND OF THE CHARLOTTE 600 Stock Car Races approached, Good Ole Boys and their ladies flocked in from all over Dixie. Less fun and more pure damn mischief entered Brother Dave's act: "Albert Gore is a whore." James Baldwin made the show as "a low-life, bug-eyed, queer nigger." Senator Fulbright slipped from being Bullblight to "a sissy-britches traitor." The louder the cheers the more he spewed venom, and the more venom the louder the cheers.

The cheers told the visitor something it sickened him to hear, reaffirmed something dark and crazy and ancient he had hoped, and had half-believed, might be drying up in Southern blood. *They didn't hurt them lovely children! All they did was take some chains and whip up on some old school buses.* Yes, the mood was as openly belligerent as before Selma Bridge, before Bull Connor's police dogs and fire hoses, before the murder of Martin Luther King. It had become unfashionable, after all that highly publicized violence had pushed Congress into a mildly militant civil-rights mood, to flaunt one's prejudices. Meddling Justice Department agents, scoldings from newspapers and Presidents and Chamber of Commerce finks motivated by the almighty dollar, had caused one to defend the Southern Way of Life only in fairly gentlemanly terms. But a new mood had come to Washington, a thing called the Southern Strategy had arrived there, along with a President who received hard-hats in his office on the heels of their public assaults and a Vice President whose words could be as inflammatory as any George Wallace ever uttered. Even the best people could now telephone news-

paper editors to demand the crucifixion of a United States Senator, without losing face. *Martha Mitchell, ain't she good?* Busing of students slowed down, the Justice Department for the first time in sixteen years *opposed* integration of certain Southern school districts, and when four Kent State students lay dead, our President said through a spokesman that, well, play with fire and you'll get burned. *God, wasn't that a clean hit on Doctor Junior?* Not only gas jockeys, traveling salesmen, and Klansmen were among the cheering faithful; it was no trouble to discover lawyers, schoolteachers, merchants, and physicians in the overflowing house.

So there are few surprises left in the visitor as we rejoin him yawning on the edge of his bed before dawn. The telephone rings. "Come on over, beloved. I got a little surprise for you."

Surprise! There is a black man in the room, a muscular cat with a T-shirt showing his chest to good advantage, the sleeves ripped out the better to exhibit his biceps. This dude has some hustle in him, a little jive, for earlier he has sidled up to the visitor to announce that if a man want something to love or smoke that he cannot immediately get from room service, why, then, he know where it might be got. The black man is sitting near a large color photo stuck in the edge of a mirror, and in the photo—*Surprise!*—am de Grandest Dragon an Holiest Terror ob de Newnited Klans of America and his wife, the happy couple in colorful silk robe with tassels and decals and braids until Kingfish himself could not have conceived more ostentatious costumes for the boys down at the Mystic Knight of the Sea Lodge.

Brother Dave guides the visitor to a chair, lean over and delivers his biggest surprise in a nea whisper: "Hey, man, I been putting you on. I don really know H. L. Hunt! What's that cat ever don for anybody? You ever hear of that rich ole thin giving a dime to charity? Naw! You know a littl something else, dear heart? Brother Dave am no what you think he am. Beloved, he am a secret liberal. Beloved, he am believe most faithfully in the Democratic party. He am a counterspy."

Yeah, the visitor says, he am personally believe strongly in tooth-fairies.

"Naw, man, I'm telling you like it is! This who thing is an act. It's a big put-on." Brother Dave leans against a table and laughs until one think he might choke, enjoying what is apparently the biggest political joke since the Reichstag fire.

Junior enters from stage left, as opposed to stage right where Miss Millie is presumably in blissful slumber. He jerks his thumb toward the room I has vacated.

"You think about it, beloved," Brother Dave instructs. "I'll be back in a little bit."

During Brother Dave's absence, Junior flash his Klan cards for the edification of the black man. "Don't that blow your mind?" "Naw, man," the black cat says, "I done lived down here too long." The visitor dozes on the couch, only dimly aware that Junior is teaching the black man karate, that Mister is admitted to the room after scratching

a door, that the TV set switches from a test-pattern to the early news and market reports. He is slumbering soundly when Brother Dave wakes him by wafting hot coffee under his nose. They are alone.

"You thought about what I told you, beloved?"

"It won't wash," the visitor said. "That story contradicts your entire history. I suspect you've checked me out with H. L. Hunt. If I believed in security as much as you do, I would have checked me out the minute I walked in the door."

"Why didn't you tell us you had read *Alpaca*?" Brother Dave asks in injured tones. "Not only that, beloved, but had knocked it in some damn book review."

"Dear heart, nobody asked me." There is an exchange of humorless smiles.

What had the Dallas report revealed about the visitor?

"Well, he's got all you cats computerized. I told him your name and within three minutes he gave me your middle initial—it's L, dear heart—and he said that you're an enemy of the people."

An enemy of the people? *Glory!*

"You didn't fool Miss Millie for a damn minute," he said.

"Or Mister." Again the humorless smiles.

"I wish you could meet H. L. Hunt, beloved. I think he might straighten you out. I mean, I don't want to talk *down* to you, man. But the trouble is that people like you are being exploited through your political ignorance."

Who is my exploiter?

"Beloved, you know that as well as I do. Oh well, as long as two cats can smoke aspirins together, nan, I feel like there's always hope. Let's don't talk no more politics, 'cause we might have a fistfight or Miss Millie might sic the dog on you." (*Laughs.*)

Why had he so abruptly disappeared from the national scene? Had a boycott been enforced against his political views?

"Naw, man. I could be on national TV if I wanted to push it. But after that funny plane crash in 1966, I decided against it."

Funny plane crash?

"Yeah, I'd charted one of them executive jobs out of Biloxi for my whole family. About ten minutes before we was to take off, they said something was wrong with it and shifted us to another one. Dear heart, it didn't fly twelve miles till it fell. *Blap!* Killed the pilot, bugged up the copilot, and broke hell out of all the rest of us—Miss Millie, she still hasn't recovered. I got the message. Somebody up there don't like me. Maybe I know too much."

Such as?

The big stage grin: "I am know multitudes and reveals but small particles. I am know long division and secrets of Hinduism. . . . Beloved, let me fix you another of them nasty ole Scotches and maybe we'll soon have one less fuzzy liberal with a functioning liver. And from here on, dear heart, let us speak nothing but trash and joy."

There was inconsequential chatter, Brother Dave artling his guest by saying how he digs black median Dick Gregory ("Dick didn't know what

he was getting into when he went on that Freedom Ride in Mississippi, man, 'cause he's from Chicago") and Garry Moore (a Jew) who had been extremely nice to him when he first broke into television and Paul Newman ("who's politically ignorant but has the guts to act for his beliefs").

As the visitor prepared to leave, Brother Dave produced a document for his inspection. From a mobile-home outfit in Alabama, and sent to transmit certain brochures, it appeared to be a routine business letter with its half-formal, half-friendly pitch; one had seen its cousins mailed out by the thousands from Congressmen to their voters, from magazines soliciting subscriptions, from countless outfits with wares to hawk. As he puzzled over its significance, Brother Dave's finger pinpointed the closing sentence: *We highly value your interest in Such-and-So Homes.*

"That means a lot to me, beloved," he said. "That shows you what they think of me in the South. They love me down here."

THERE WAS A MOB SCENE in the Gardner quarters on the visitor's last night before he would catch a plane to the decadent East, Brother Dave in a euphoric state because an overflow house had cheered his wildest salvos. Junior ran in and out with a series of young belles, Green Berets in high spirits popped beer cans, photographers took Brother Dave's picture, and Mister almost collapsed with so many strangers to intimidate. One was reminded of getaway day when the visiting ball club has concluded a successful road tour, has swept its last series, and now looks forward to a long stand at home.

Not all was happiness or joy, alas. David Rabie and the comedian quarreled over their failure to reach a satisfactory financial adjustment owing to Brother Dave's missed opening night, this leading to more dithyrambs against the Cherokees. Then a beribboned Green Beret sergeant, skin-headed and badly wounded in Vietnam and really quite a sincere ole boy, cursed the New Army's coddling of recruits so that discipline had gone to hell and you couldn't hardly find recruits with enthusiasm for killing anymore. And, finally, it had been confided that Miss Millie had taken to her bed with a headache rather than be in the visitor's presence once her suspicions of his character had been verified.

Standing by the swimming pool in the warm North Carolina air, Brother Dave touched the visitor's arm: "Look, man, if you ever get your head about half straightened out and decide you want to know where it's really at, politically, get in touch. I'll be your teacher. There's not much time left, beloved, to save America."

He turned away, himself only a few hours from the road and a dozen one-nighters in Georgia, providing Miss Millie did not carry through her threat to cancel them because of race wars in Augusta. At the door he pursed his lips thickly, gave the clenched fist of the Black Power salute, and shouted, "Power to the people." Laughing, dear hearts. Laughing. □

"Not only gas jockeys, traveling salesmen, and Klansmen were among the cheering faithful; it was no trouble to discover lawyers, schoolteachers, merchants, and physicians in the overflowing house."