

THE AMERICAN LEGION: THE G. A. R. OF THE FUTURE

"It Exists to Put Something in the Government and Not to Take Something Away From It." Is the Apt Slogan Advanced by Theodore Roosevelt, Jr.

BY GEORGE PALMER PUTMAN

"THAT'S the most satisfactory experience I've had in two years!" exclaimed the man in civilian clothes seated beside me at the St. Louis caucus of the American Legion in May.

"What?" I asked.

With a grin he indicated a uniformed brigadier-general and a colonel just behind us, obliged to stand because of the lack of chairs.

"Two months ago it would have been a nervous shock simply to get this close to a B. G.," he explained. "And now, just think of not even having to offer one your seat!"

The incident echoes the spirit of that altogether unique gathering of world-war veterans whose sprang what has been called the "G. A. R. of the future," and which actually will be a mightier force because the boundaries of its membership are those of the entire nation itself.

Those who witnessed the official birth of the American legion at that St. Louis caucus, and especially those who saw its very beginning at the initial meeting in Paris in March, feel that the legion itself is a most pertinent answer to the inquiry "What did America get out of the war?"

For already the American Legion has struck its stride and is becoming actually as well as potentially one of the great forces in our national life. A force for good, too, if the methods with which it is started shall be continued.

"What is the American Legion?" Briefly, it is the organization of American veterans of the world war. It is nonpartisan, nonpolitical and non-sectarian. It is essentially a civilian organization, neither military nor militaristic. It makes no distinction of rank and no distinction between overseas men and those who did not get overseas.

Its purposes are happily expressed in the phrase "politics, not parties." Even more to the point is the apt statement made by Theodore Roosevelt Jr. at St. Louis, a statement which has come to be something of a slogan for the new organization.

"The American Legion exists to put something in the government, not to take something away from it."

The first organization of the legion was in Paris on March 15 of this year, when a thousand officers and men representing all units of the A. E. F. adopted a tentative constitution and selected the name "American Legion." The action of this Paris meeting was confirmed and amplified by a similar meeting held in St. Louis, May 3 to 10, when a thousand soldier delegates gathered from every state in the Union in an extremely picturesque and unique convention.

At the St. Louis meeting no steps for permanent organization were taken nor was effort made to bind the legion in any way as to its policies. The essential purpose at St. Louis was to get things started in America. The first regular national convention of the legion will be held in Minneapolis armistice day, November 11. At that time it is expected that the overseas forces will be home and full and complete representation of all branches of the service will be on hand to voice their views.

Between now and November the legion is organizing and functioning under a dual leadership. The Paris caucus and the St. Louis caucus each chose a committee of 34 to represent it until November. These two committees are now operating together in general charge of the legion. The temporary officers functioning in connection with this joint committee are Henry D. Lindsley of Texas, chairman; Bennett C. Clark of Missouri, vice-chairman; Eric Fisher Wood of Pennsylvania, secretary; Gaspar Bacon, of Massachusetts, treasurer. The temporary headquarters are in New York city.

So much for the present working basis of the legion.

On a midsummer morning in 1918 ambulance after ambulance unloaded its cargo of wounded humanity at a base hospital in Paris. The wounded were being conveyed rapidly from the front and the entire hospital was astir with nurses, surgeons and orderlies. A major surgeon almost staggered out of an operating room where he had been on duty for 22 hours and started for his quarters when a colonel arrived on an inspection trip.

"Pretty busy," remarked the colonel as he acknowledged the major's salute.

"Busy?" replied the major.

"Good Lord, the only people about here that aren't busy are the dead ones. Even the wounded are busy planning to hobble around at conventions when the big show is over. Already they are talking about how they intend to take a hand in things after the war when they get home."

Over across the street a sergeant, limping slightly, stopped under a shade tree and leaned against it to rest. He was almost well of his wound and eagerly awaited the word that would send him to join his regiment, the 38th United States Infantry. As he passed under the tree another soldier with a mending wound in the knee and just able to be about stopped to speak to him. The sergeant's hand rose in quick salute, for the newcomer was an officer.

"Expect to get back soon, sergeant?" said the officer.

"Yes, sir," he replied. "Anxious to go back and get the whole job over, sir."

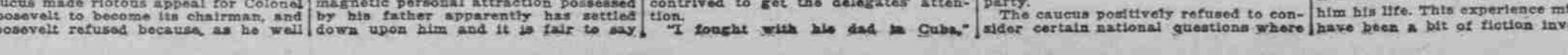
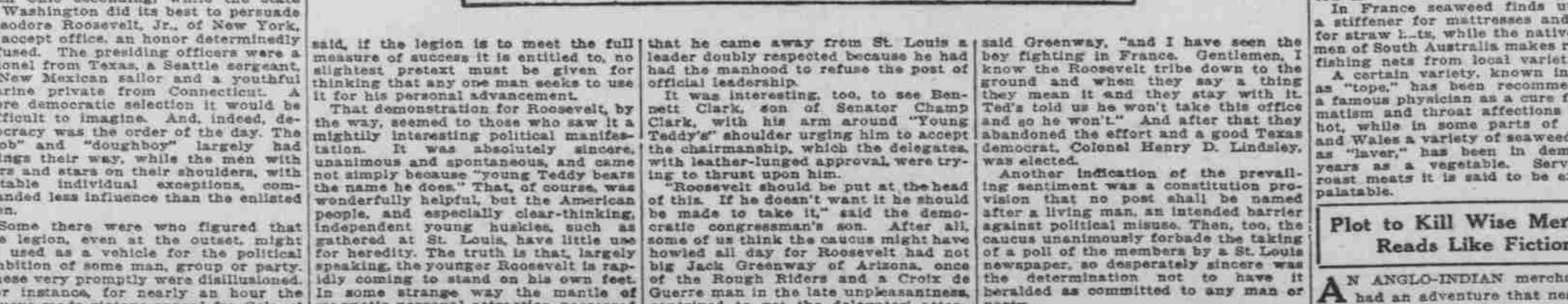
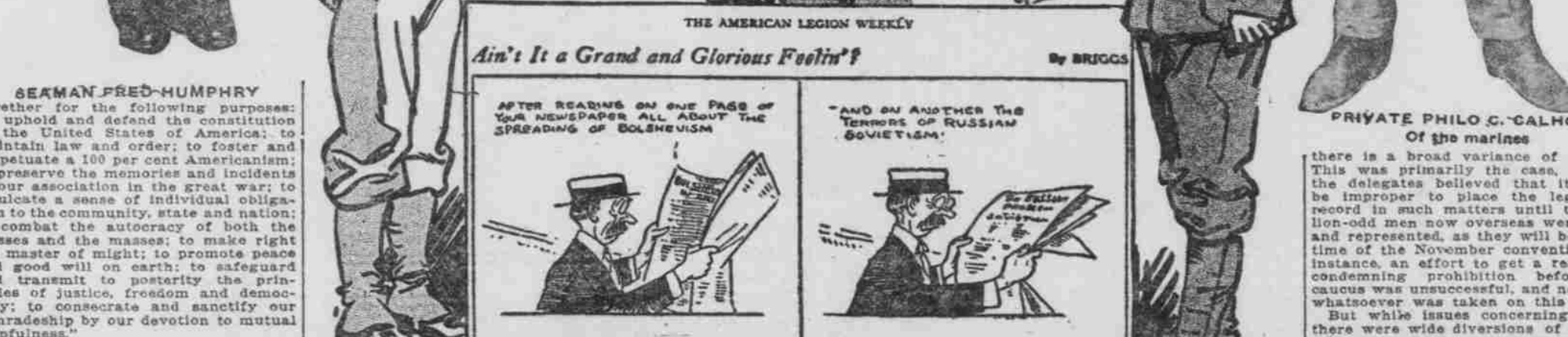
"So am I," responded the officer. "But what we will all do when the Germans really are licked?"

"Go home and start a veterans' association for the good of the country, sir," the sergeant answered.

Lieutenant-Colonel Theodore Roosevelt, then major, was the officer and Sergeant William Patterson, later killed in action, was the enlisted man and the institution was based on the story told by the latter soldier who said it was the first time that he had heard the subject of a veterans' association mentioned, although he had thought of it frequently since his discharge with a mending wound in the knee and just able to be about stopped to speak to him.

From such a beginning as that—a beginning which doubtless was duplicated countless times throughout the A. E. F.—came the Paris caucus. Just what the legion stands for as a result of that caucus and the later meeting in St. Louis can be expressed no better than by the preamble to the constitution:

"For God and country we associate



were involved, on certain clear-cut principles the legion was outspoken.

Here in brief is what the legion did in St. Louis:

It demanded investigation of the pardon and subsequent honorable discharge by the war department of convicted conscientious objectors.

It condemned the activities of the I. W. W., the anarchists and the international socialists.

It protested against certain notorious business concerns who are employing men in uniform to peddle their wares.

It recommended that Congress should take steps to reclaim arid, swamp and cut-over timber lands, to afford ex-service men an opportunity to establish homes for themselves and a fitting place in the constructive work of the country.

It demanded of congress the same disability pay for men of the national guard and national army as now pertains to those in the regular establishment.

It initiated a campaign to secure to service men their rights and privileges under the war-risk insurance act.

It demanded that congress should depart to their own countries those aliens who refused to join the colors at the outbreak of the war and pleaded their citizenship in other countries to escape the draft.

It undertook to see that disabled soldiers, sailors and marines should be brought into contact with the rehabilitation department of the government, which department helps them to learn and gain lucrative occupations.

It authorized the appointment of a competent legislative committee to see that the above recommendations were effectively acted upon by congress, and that committee is now at work.

It authorized the establishment of a bureau to aid service men to get re-employment, and of a legal bureau to help them get from the government their overdue pay and allotments.

These two bureaus have organized at the national headquarters of the legion and are in active operation.

"What was the most notable thing done?" I asked Colonel Roosevelt at the close of the St. Louis caucus.

"Turning down the grab for extra pay," came the prompt reply. "It's some soldiers' convention which carries on like that."

Colonel Roosevelt referred to a resolution which had been introduced demanding six months' extra pay to discharged soldiers. Generally speaking, a move of that character is sure to be supported by most of those who would be directly benefited. But the American legion caucus smashed the precedent, for unanimously it voted against the personal immediate interests of its members.

Unanimously the caucus voted against the resolution, and a precedent unique in soldier organizations and one auguring great things for the future was set.

Eligible for membership is every man and woman who wore the uniform between April 6, 1917, and November 11, 1918, honorably discharged or eligible to honorable discharge by army or navy department. Its ranks are also open to all American citizens who fought with any of our allies during the entire period of the great war. Emphatically, conscientious objectors are excluded. Uncompromising Americanism was the keynote of the caucus. Some have said that the legion would be the "G. A. R. of the future," but the legion's opportunities for service seem greater even than those of the civil war organization because of the nation-wide character of its membership. It is of the north and the south, the east and the west.

Is the league a "fly-by-night" organization? Is it in competition with any other soldiers' organization? Is it conducted for the profit of any one?

The answer to each of these queries is "No."

Is the American Legion firmly established? Is it permanent? Is it of, for and by the men who wore the uniform and no one else?

Emphatically the answer is "Yes."

Is the American Legion approved and endorsed by the proper people?

Emphatically "Yes."

Of course, the real answer to that is that it has been not only approved but actually created by service men from every overseas theater and from every state in the union. But beyond that it also has the positive stamp of approval of Secretary Baker, General March, Admiral Sims, General Barnett and a host of others.

The Legion commenced on July 4 the publication of a weekly periodical, The American Legion Weekly. In the initial issue messages of greeting to the Legion from leaders in peace and war are printed.

As those who have been active in the formation of the Legion believe, and seemingly with good reason, its possibilities for development are almost limitless. For instance, it is estimated that the state organizations will within perhaps two months, enroll close to half a million men while the minimum roster is only limited by the number of those who served, four million.

There is a broad variance of opinion. This was primarily the case, because the delegates believed that it would be improper to place the legion on record in such matters until the million-odd men now overseas were home and represented, as they will be at the time of the November convention. For instance, an effort to get a resolution condemning prohibition before the caucus was unsuccessful, and no action whatsoever was taken on "the liquor question."

But while issues concerning which there were wide diversions of opinion

SEAWEED, LONG REGARDED AS WASTE, USEFUL FOR MANY THINGS

Latest Idea Provides Very Good Substitute for Bricks—Six Hundred Thousand Japanese Employed in Its Varied Industries.

FOR a solution of housing and food problems try seaweed.

It sounds absurd, but astute men are taking advantage of the little-known commercial possibilities of what has hitherto been regarded as nature's waste. The latest idea is to utilize seaweed for binding and strengthening a substance made from slag, which has the appearance of concrete and is proving a very good substitute for bricks.

In this way the shortage of building material is being partly overcome. There is no better fertilizer than seaweed, and many acres of corn are being grown on the flat lands of Essex, over which seaweed has been thrown by the tide.

It is estimated that 600,000 Japanese are employed in the seaweed industries, using the weed in the manufacture of such various articles as policeman's boots, picture frames, marbled floors and electric switchboards. They have even found a substitute for cotton in a seaweed called "sugano."

In France seaweed finds utility as a stiffener for mattresses and as size for straw hats, while the native fishes of South Australia makes ropes and fishing nets from local varieties.

A certain variety, known in Ireland as "trops," has been recommended as a famous physician as a cure for rheumatism and throat affections if eaten hot, while in some parts of England and Wales a variety of seaweed, known as "laver," has been in demand for years as a vegetable. Served with roast meats it is said to be extremely palatable.

Another indication of the prevailing sentiment was a constitution provision that no post shall be named after a living man, an intended barrier against political misuse. Then, too, the caucus unanimously forbade the taking of a poll of the members by a St. Louis newspaper, so desperately sincere was the determination not to have it heralded as committed to any man or party.

The caucus positively refused to consider certain national questions where

said Greenway, "and I have seen the boy fighting in France. Gentlemen, I know the Roosevelt tribe down to the ground and when they say a thing they mean it and they stay with it. Ted's told us he won't take this office and so he won't." And after that they abandoned the effort and a good Texas democrat, Colonel Henry D. Lindsley, was elected.

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Plot to Kill Wise Merchant Reads Like Fiction.

AN ANGLO-INDIAN merchant once had an adventure that nearly cost him his life. This experience might well have been a bit of fiction invented by

the great De Quincey for use in his essay on "Murder as a Fine Art."

The merchant had got along well with the natives, but two of his servants had had a quarrel over a girl whom they had wooed. The quarrel interfered in the affair. The unsuccessful suitor, one Lal, began to make trouble and his rival, a Hindu, turned the merchant against him. Nothing happened for some months. Then the merchant went away on business. On his return he was told that Lal had been caught in his bedroom and locked up.

The merchant was tired and after eating went to the cabinet where he kept his cigars.

It was a large case of teak and glass, with an old-fashioned silver Indian lock.

As he was about to insert the key in the keyhole Lal's successful rival, who had been active in the search, cried out that some one surely had been meddling with the lock.

An examination of the keyhole revealed traces of wax. When they opened the case the merchant found everything apparently untouched. Five boxes of cigars were unopened. He opened the sixth box before he went away and removed a few cigars. As he took this box up he noticed on it the marks of a hand.

The cigars looked as if they had not been disturbed. He was about to take one when he noticed that something was wrong with the head. A second and a third were like the first. In each a small almost imperceptible rose thorn had been inserted and on it was a cab of brown slime, still moist, the same color as the cigar.

Feeling convinced that the cigars were poisoned, the merchant sat down and wrote a note to the police. In half an hour an officer appeared with Lal under guard. The merchant stated the case to the officer and, taking one of the cigars, handed it to Lal with the command, "Take it and smoke it."

The man refused. His guilt was proven.