

The New Republic
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Star-Spangled Men

I OPEN the memoirs of General Grant, Volume II, at the place where he is describing the surrender of General Lee, and find the following:

I was without a sword, as I usually was when on horseback on (sic) the field, and wore a soldier's blouse for a coat, with the shoulder straps of my rank to indicate to the army who I was.

Anno, 1865. I look out of my window and observe an officer of the United States Army passing down the street. Anno, 1920. Like General Grant, he is without a sword. Like General Grant, he wears a sort of soldier's blouse for a coat. Like General Grant, he employs shoulder straps to indicate to the army who he is. But there is something more. On the left breast of this officer, apparently a major, there blazes so brilliant a mass of color that, as the sun strikes it and the flash bangs my eyes, I wink, catch my breath and sneeze. There are two long strips, each starting at the sternum and disappearing into the shadows of the axillia—every hue in the rainbow, the spectroscope, the kaleidoscope — imperial purples, sforzando reds, wild Irish greens, romantic blues, loud yellows and oranges, rich maroons, sentimental pinks, all the half-tones from ultra-violet to infra-red, all the vibrations from the impalpable to the unendurable. A gallant Soldat, indeed! How he would shame a circus ticket-wagon, a Bakst drop-curtain, if he wore all the medals and badges, the stars and crosses, the pendants and lavallieres, that go with those ribbons! . . . I glance at his sleeves. Two simple golden stripes on the one—twelve months beyond the raging main. None on the other—the Kaiser's cannon missed him. . . .

II

What all these ribbons may signify I am sure I don't know; probably they belong to campaign medals and tell the tale of innumerable and inordinate butcheries in foreign parts—of Filipinos, Mexicans, Haitians, Dominicans, perhaps even Prussians. But in addition to campaign medals and the Distinguished Service Medal there are now certainly enough foreign orders in the United States to give a distinct brilliance to the national scene, viewed, say, from Mars. The Frederician tradition, borrowed by the ragged Continentals and embodied in Article I, Section 9, of the Constitution, lasted until 1918, and then suddenly blew up; to mention it today is a sort of indecorum, and tomorrow, no doubt, will be a species of treason. Down with Frederick; up with John Philip Sousa! Imagine what General Pershing would look like at a state banquet of his American favorite order, the Benevolent and Protective one of Elks, in all the Byzantine splendor of his casket of ribbons, badges, stars, garters, sunbursts and cockades—the lordly Bath of the grateful homeland, with its somewhat disconcerting "Ich dien"; the gorgeous tricolor baldrics, sashes and festoons of the Legion d'Honneur; the grand cross of SS. Maurizio e Lazzaro of Italy;

the sinister Danilo of Montenegro, with its cabalistic monogram of Danilo I and its sinister hieroglyphics; the breastplate of the Paulownia of Japan, with its rising sun of thirty-two white rays, its blood-red heart, its background of green leaves and its white ribbon edged with red; the mystical St. Saviour of Greece, with its Greek motto and its brilliantly enameled figure of Christ; above all, the Croix de Guerre of Czechoslovakia, a new one and hence not listed in the books, but surely no shrinking violet! Alas, Pershing was on the wrong side—that is, for one with a fancy for gauds of that sort. The most blinding of all known orders is the Medijie of Turkey, which not only entitles the holder to his pick of four wives, but also absolutely requires him to wear a red fez and a frozen star covering his whole facade. I was offered this order by Turkish spies during the war, and it wobbled me a good deal. The Alexander of Bulgaria is almost as seductive. The badge consists of an eight-pointed white cross, with crossed swords between the arms and a red Bulgarian lion over the swords. The motto is "Za Chrabrost!" Then there are the Prussian orders—the Red and Black Eagles, the Pour le Merite, the Prussian Crown, the Hohenzollern and the rest. And the Golden Fleece of Austria—perhaps the noblest of them all. Think of the Golden Fleece on a man born in Linn County, Missouri! . . . I begin to doubt that the General would have got it, even supposing him to have taken the other side. The Japs, I note, gave him only the grand cordon of the Paulownia, and the Belgians and Montenegrins were similarly cautious. There are higher classes. The highest of the Paulownia is only for princes, which is to say, only for non-Missourians. . . . Pershing is the champion, with General March a bad second. March is a K.C.M.G., and entitled to wear a large cross of white enamel bearing a lithograph of the Archangel Michael and the motto, "Auspicium Melloris Aevi," but he is not a K.C.B. Admirals Benson and Sims are also grand crosses of Michael and George, and like most other respectable Americans, members of the Legion of Honor, but they seem to have been forgotten by the Greeks, the Montenegrins, the Italians and the Belgians. The waspish Sims appears to cherish obsolete constitutional prejudices; he has even refused the D.S.M. It would be hard to think of any other American who would refuse it, or, failing it, the grand decoration of chivalry of the Independent Order of Odd Fellows. It was by way of the Odd Fellows, I suspect, that the lust to glitter and jingle got into the arteries of Americanos. For years the old tradition served to keep the military bosom bare of millinery, but all the while the weakness for baubles was working its wicked will upon the civil population. Rank by rank, they became Knights Pythias, Odd Fellows, Red Men, Masons, Knights Templar, Elks, Moose, Woodmen—and in every new order there were thirty-two degrees, and for every degree there was a badge, and for every badge there was a yard of ribbon, and for every yard of ribbon there was a bushel of spangles. There is an undertaker in Hagerstown, Md., who belongs to eighteen orders, all knightly, all splendiferous. When he robes himself to plant a fellow joiner he weighs three hundred pounds and sparkles and flashes like the mouth of hell itself. He is entitled to bear seven swords, all jeweled, and to hang his watch chain with the golden busts of nine wild animals, all with rubies for eyes. Put beside this lowly washer of the dead, Pershing newly polished would seem almost a Trappist. . . .

III.

But even so the civil arm is robbed of its just dues in the department of gauds and radioactivity, no doubt by the direct operation of military vanity and jealousy. Despite a million proofs (and perhaps a billion eloquent arguments) to the contrary, it is still the theory at the official ribbon counter that the only man who serves in a war is the man who serves in uniform.

This is soft for the Bevo officer, who at least has his silver stripes and the spurs that gnawed into his desk, but it is hard upon his brother Irving, the dollar-a-year man, who worked twenty hours a day for fourteen months buying soap-powder, canned asparagus and raincoats. Irving not only labored with inconceivable diligence, he also faced hazards of no mean order; for on the one hand was his natural prejudice in favor of a very liberal rewarding of commercial enterprise, and on the other hand was his patriotism and his superstitious fear of Atlanta Penitentiary. I dare say that many and many a time, after working his twenty hours, he found it difficult to sleep the remaining four hours. I know, in fact, survivors of that obscure service who are far worse wrecks today than Pershing is. Their reward is—what? Winks, sniffs, innuendoes. If they would indulge themselves in the now almost universal American yearning to go adorned, they must join the Knights of Pythias or the Rotary Club.

What I propose is a branch of the Distinguished Service Order for civilians—perhaps, better still, a distinct order for civilians, closed to the military and with badges of different colors and areas, to mark off varying services to democracy. Let it run, like the Japanese Paulownia, from high to low—the lowest class for the patriot who sacrificed only time, money and a few nights' sleep; the highest for the great martyr who hung his country's altar with his dignity, his decency and his sacred honor. For Irving and his nervous insomnia, a simple rosette, with an iron badge bearing the national motto, "Safety First"; for the university president who prohibited the teaching of the enemy language in his learned grove, heaved the works of Goethe out of the university library, cashiered every-professor unwilling to support Woodrow for the first vacancy in the Trinity, took to the stump for the National Security League, and made two hundred speeches in moving picture theatres—for this giant of loyal endeavor let no 100 per cent American speak of anything less than the grand cross of the order, with a gold badge in polychrome enamel and stained glass, a baldric of the national colors, a violet plug hat with a sunburst on the side, the privilege of the floor of Congress, and a pension of \$10,000 a year. After all, the cost would not be excessive; there are not many of them. Such prodigies of patriotism are possible only to rare and gifted men. For the grand cordons of the order, e. g., college professors who spied upon and reported the seditions of their associates, state presidents of the American Protective League, alien property custodians, judges whose sentences of conscientious objectors mounted to more than 50,000 years, members of Dr. Creel's committee of American historians, the authors of the Sisson documents, etc.—pensions of \$10 a day would be enough, with silver badges and no plug hats. For the lower ranks, bronze badges and the legal right to the title of "the Hon.", already every true American's by courtesy.

Not, of course, that I am insensitive to the services of the gentlemen of these lower ranks, but in such matters one must go by rarity rather than by intrinsic value. If the grand cordon or even the nickel-plated eagle of the third class were given to every patriot who bored a hole through the floor of his flat to get evidence against his neighbors, the Krausmeyers, and to everyone who visited the Hofbrauhaus nightly, denounced the Kaiser in scathing terms, and demanded assent from Rudolph and Emil, the waiters, and to everyone who notified the Department of Justice when the wireless plant was opened in the Skat-room of the Arion Liedertafel, and to all who took a valiant part in slacker raids, and to all who lent their stenographers funds at 6 per cent to buy 4 per cent Liberty bonds, and to all who sold out at 99 and are now buying in at 84.56, and to all who served as jurors or perjurers in cases against Socialists, and to all the Irish who snitched upon the Irish—if decorations were thrown about with any such lavishness, then there would be no nickel left for our bathrooms and battleships. On the civilian side as on the military side the great rewards of war go, not to mere dogged

industry and fidelity, but to originality — to the unprecedented, the arresting, the bizarre. The man who invented the story about the German plant for converting the corpses of the slain into soap did more for democracy, and hence deserves a more brilliant recognition, than a thousand uninspired hawkers of ordinary atrocity stories. For him the grand cordon, with two silver badges and the chair of history at Columbia, would be scarcely enough; for them any precious metal would be too much.

Whether or not the Y. M. C. A. has bedizened its heroes I do not know; since the chief Y. M. C. A. lamassary in my native town became the scene of carnalities which engaged the morals police I have ceased to frequent evangelical society. If not, then there should be some governmental recognition of these consecrated and much-maligned patriots. The members of the American Legion, true enough, dislike them, and have a habit of reviling them when the near-beer flows. They charged too much for cigarettes; they turned an unfriendly eye upon the red wine of France and upon the exigent gratitude of the fair; they had a habit of being absent when the shells burst in air and doughboys craved chocolates and spiritual consolation. Well, some say this and some say that. There were at least Y. M. C. A. workers who rose above patriotism to super-patriotism. Eager beyond all telling to seize muskets and help make the world safe for democracy, they throttled their yearning that they might serve the ungrateful and blue-nosed Methodist God. Had it not been for their sacrifice the poor working girl would have worked vaster execution upon the rank and file than even the horrendous Hun—and perhaps upon the officers too, at least upon the youngest and oldest. If, as may be plausibly argued, these soldiers of the soul deserve to live at all, then they surely deserve to wear white enameled crosses of the third class, with gilt dollar marks superimposed. Motto: "Glory, glory, hallelujah! . . . "

IV.

But what of the vaudeville actors, the cheer leaders, the doughnut fryers, the camp librarians, the press agents ? I am not forgetting them. Let them be distributed among all the classes from the seventh to the eighth, according to their deserts. And the agitators against German music? And the specialists in the crimes of the German professors? And the collectors of funds for the Czecho-Slovaks, the Armenians, the Syrians, the Lithuanians, the Poles ? And the eagle-eyed scientists who discovered ground glass in pumpernickel, arsenic in dill pickles, bichloride tablets in Bismarck herrings, pathogenic organisms in aniline dyes? And the editorial writers and headline writers? And the authors of books describing how the Kaiser told them the whole plot in 1913, while they were pulling his teeth or cobbling his shoes? And the ex-ambassadors? And the Nietzschefresser? And the Chautauqua lecturers? And the four-minute men? And the reverend clergy? Let no grateful heart forget them!

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