

# 'Twas a Son of St. Patrick Who Gave Us One of Our Most Familiar Lincoln Yarns—The Story of Grant's Whisky

By **ELMO SCOTT WATSON**  
(Released by Western Newspaper Union.)

OF ALL the stories told about Abraham Lincoln few are more familiar to the average American than the famous "Grant's whisky" yarn. Yet none of them has less basis of fact than this one. According to it, the Great Emancipator, in response to a protest that the general whom he was about to appoint commander-in-chief of the Union armies was too much given to drinking whisky, is supposed to have replied, "Well, I wish you would tell me the brand of whisky that Grant drinks. I would like to send a barrel of it to each of my other generals."

There are several versions of the inspiration for this reply. One is that it was "a member of his cabinet" who uttered the protest against Grant's appointment because of his alleged intemperate habits. Another is that "a delegation of clergymen" called on the President and asked him not to put the victor of Vicksburg in high command. In either case Lincoln's reply is essentially the same, and it has been quoted an endless number of times by banquet speakers, lecturers and others more concerned with "getting a laugh" than with historical accuracy.

For the fact is that Lincoln never received any such protest against Grant's appointment for the reason given in the story and therefore did not make the reply attributed to him. Moreover, several times, after the yarn had been widely circulated, he disclaimed authorship of the quip. But he did so with such evident approval of its humor that his denial helped increase the popularity of the story.

The real author of this story, which was entirely fictitious, was a "son of St. Patrick," Irish-born Charles G. Halpine, a correspondent for the New York Herald during the Civil war, who signed his dispatches with the typical Irish name of "Miles O'Reilly." Halpine was born near Oldcastle, County Meath, Ireland, November 20, 1829, the son of an Episcopal clergyman



ULYSSES S. GRANT

who was also editor of the Dublin Evening Mail. Entering Trinity college in Dublin while still a boy, young Halpine soon gave evidence of the literary ability that ran in his family. Although he began the study of medicine, after his graduation in 1846, he soon gave that up to enter the more congenial field of journalism.

He began contributing to newspapers in Ireland and England, married young and, believing that America offered better opportunities for success, emigrated to this country in 1849. He went first to Boston where he obtained a position on the Boston Post. Then he went to Ireland until he established himself in his adopted country. Soon after her arrival he became the leading editor of the Carpet-Bag, a humorous magazine which had been established by Benjamin Shillaber of "Mrs. Partington" fame and Dr. Shepley.

But the Carpet-Bag proved to be a failure and in 1852 Halpine moved to New York where he wrote for the New York Tribune, worked for a few months on the New York Herald and then joined Henry Raymond on the New York Times. After a short stay on the Times he became a partner of John Clancy in the publication of the New York Leader for which



Charles G. Halpine

he did his best work. Both his political articles and humorous writings were so popular that the circulation of the Leader increased tremendously and it soon became a political power in New York.

**Joins Union Army.**  
By this time the young Irish immigrant was enjoying a large income, but at the outbreak of the Civil war he gave this up to accept a commission as a lieutenant in the sixty-ninth New York regiment, commanded by Colonel Corcoran. So rapidly did he master the details of military life that he was promoted to major and became adjutant on the staff of Gen. David Hunter. When Maj. Gen. Henry W. Halleck became commander-in-chief of the Union armies, Halpine was transferred to his staff and stationed in Washington. In addition to preparing all of Halleck's official correspondence, Halpine began writing again for the New York Herald.

Under the nom de plume of "Miles O'Reilly," he assumed the character of a private in the forty-seventh New York regiment and began writing a series of amusing articles which became instantly popular. It was in one of these articles that Halpine started the Lincoln-Grant "whisky myth" which has persisted to this day.

In its issue of November 26, 1863, the New York Herald carried a five-column article, signed by "Private Miles O'Reilly," which was given almost as much prominence in the paper as the news story of the victories near Chattanooga. It was captioned "Miles O'Reilly at the White House" and was a wholly fictitious account of O'Reilly's being made a guest of honor at a large function at the White House, attended by all the Washington notables, including President Lincoln, Secretary Stanton, General Halleck and Lord Lyons, the British ambassador.

**A Party at the White House.**  
A part of Halpine's dispatch, describing the festivities at the White House, reads as follows: "Colonel Bell, please touch the bell," said Mr. Lincoln, "and let Burgdorf, my messenger, send us up the decanters and things. I have some French wines sent me from Paris by Secretary of Legation Pennington, whose tongue is so completely occupied in the business of tasting vintages that he has never had time to teach it French, though a resident in Paris many years. If you prefer whisky, I have some that can be relied upon—a present from Mr. Leslie Combs. I call it 'Grant's Particular' and Halleck is about issuing an order that all his generals shall use it."

"With the news we have today from Chattanooga," said General Halleck gayly, "I think the country will indorse the order to which Mr. Lincoln has referred. For my own part, I'll take some of that whisky—just enough to drown a mosquito, Kelton—and, with the President's permission, our first toast will be the health of Ulysses Grant, the river-horse of the Mississippi."

"Secretary Stanton seconded the toast in a neat and spirited address, Mr. Lincoln frequently applauding. The health was received with all the honors, every one present standing up while the liquor went down, and the company giving three cheers for General Grant, and then three more, and then three after that to top off with."

The story spread all over the country and eventually "Private Miles O'Reilly's" part in it and his authorship of it were forgotten. People began telling it as "another good Abe Lincoln yarn." Naturally, the friends of General Grant, who had been troubled by rumors of his intemperance, were glad to spread the story, since Lincoln's alleged remark provided a good excuse for

his drinking, if it was true that he was addicted to liquor.

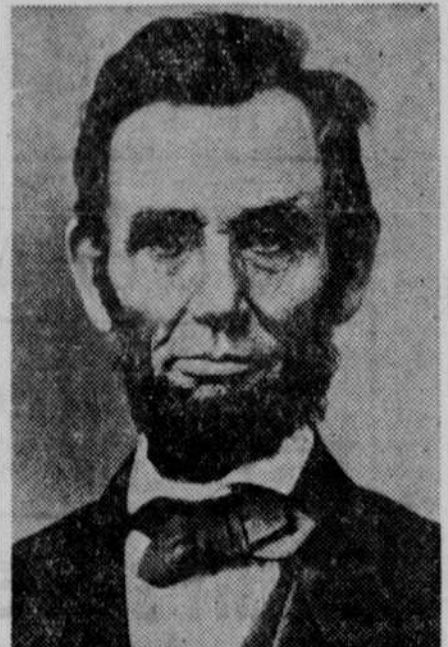
As the story gained currency, it occurred to some of Lincoln's friends to ask him if the story were true. Among them were the war department telegraphers, his "boys" whom he saw nearly every day when he called at the telegraph office to get the latest news from the front. One of these was Albert B. Chandler, later president of the Postal Telegraph company.

**Lincoln Denies Authorship.**  
In 1895 Chandler attempted to dispel the myth by making this statement: "Major Eckert asked Mr. Lincoln if the story of his interview with the complainants against General Grant was true, viz. that he had inquired solicitously where the general got his liquor and, on being told that the information could not be given, the President replied that he would very much like to find out, so that he might get enough to send a barrel to each of his generals. Mr. Lincoln said that he had heard the story before, and that it would have been very good if he had said it but that he didn't. He supposed it was 'charged to him' to give it currency."

"He then said the original of the story was in King George's time. Bitter complaints were made to the king against his General Wolfe (victor over Montcalm at the Battle of Quebec which ended the French and Indian war), in which it was charged that he was mad. The king replied angrily, 'I wish he would bite some of my other generals, then.'"

"He then mentioned a bright saying which he had recently heard during the draft riots in New York, in which the Irish figured most conspicuously—'It is said that General Kilpatrick is going to New York to quell the riot; but his name has nothing to do with it.'"

Similar testimony is given by Chaplain James B. Merwin, who was commissioned by Lincoln to talk temperance to the soldiers.



ABRAHAM LINCOLN

Merwin stated that Lincoln denied authorship of the quip about Grant and said that the joke was a hundred years old when he first heard it attributed to him.

Although Halpine's chief claim to fame seems to rest upon his authorship of this story which became a favorite "Lincoln myth," he had other distinctions which should make his name memorable. For, as the popularity of his "Private Miles O'Reilly at the White House" demonstrated, he had a genius for imaginative writing. He had proved that early in his career as a New York journalist. To win a bet he produced a long account of the resuscitation of a pirate named Hicks, who had been executed on Bedloe's island, and this hoax, which was believed by many people, caused a great deal of excitement in New York.

Upon his return to New York he served on the staff of Gen. John A. Dix and during that time wrote a series of articles exposing the corruption of the city government which attracted the attention of the Citizens' association. As a result he was offered the editorship of the Citizen, the organ of the reform movement which was inaugurated at that time. Soon afterwards he bought the paper and plunged into politics to fight "Boss" Tweed. He scored his first victory when a coalition of Democrats and Republicans elected him to county register by a large majority and this was followed by other political triumphs.

During all this time, Halpine had continued with his literary labors and his constant writing made him subject to insomnia for which he took opiates. The result was a tragic end to his career—through the mistake of a druggist he took an overdose of chloroform, when attacked by a severe pain in his head, and died on August 3, 1868.

Reference has been made previously to Halpine's part in enrolling the first regiment of Negro soldiers. This was a subject which caused a great deal of discussion early in the Civil war. Of course, the Confederates were horrified and threatened all sorts of reprisals against Union officers who enlisted or commanded Negroes.

Even in the North there was considerable opposition to the idea, since it was held that "only white men should be allowed to fight for the Union." Halpine took notice of this discussion in one of his most famous poems:

**Sambo's Right to Be Kilt**  
Some tell us 'tis a burnin' shame  
To make the niggers fight;  
An' that the thrade of bein' kilt  
Belongs but to the white:  
But as for me, upon my soul!  
So liberal are we here,  
I'll let Sambo be murdered instead  
Of myself,  
On every day of the year,  
On every day of the year, boys,  
And in every hour of the day;  
The right to be kilt I'll divide  
Wid him,  
An' divil a word I'll say.

In battle's wild commotion  
I shouldn't at all object  
If Sambo's body should stop a ball  
That was comin' for me direct;  
And the prod of a Southern bagnet,  
So generous are we here,  
I'll resign, and let Sambo take it  
On every day in the year,  
On every day in the year, boys,  
And wid none o' your nasty pride,  
All my right in a southern bagnet  
Wid Sambo I'll divide!

The men who object to Sambo  
Should take his place and fight;  
And it's better to have a nigger's hue  
Than a liver that's wake an' white.  
Though Sambo's black as the ace  
Of spades,  
His finger a trigger can pull,  
And his eye runs straight on the barrel-sights  
From undher its thatch of wool.  
So hear me all, boys darlin',  
Don't think I'm tippin' you chaff,  
The right to be kilt we'll divide  
Wid him,  
And give him the largest half!

Among Halpine's published works after the war were "Lyrics by the Letter H," "Life and Adventures, Songs, Services, and Speeches of Private Miles O'Reilly, 47th. Regiment, New York Volunteers" and "Baked Meats of the Funeral: a Collection of Essays, Poems, Speeches, and Banquets by Private Miles O'Reilly." Among the poems in the latter volume is one which has often been reprinted. In some respects, its theme was curiously prophetic of the "Last Man" banquets held by Civil war veterans during recent years. It reads as follows:

**The Thousand and Thirty-Seven**  
(April 20, 1864.)  
Three years ago, today,  
We raised our hands to Heaven,  
And, on the rolls of muster,  
Our names were thirty-seven;  
There were just a thousand bayonets,  
And the swords were thirty-seven,  
As we took the oath of service  
With our right hands raised to Heaven.

Oh, 'twas a gallant day,  
In memory still adored,  
That day of our sun-bright nuptials  
With the musket and the sword!  
Shrill rang the fifes, the bugles blared,  
And beneath a cloudless heaven  
Far flashed a thousand bayonets,  
And the swords were thirty-seven.

Of the thousand stalwart bayonets  
Two hundred march today;  
Hundreds lie in Virginia swamps,  
And hundreds in Maryland clay;  
While other hundreds—less happy—drag  
Their mangled limbs around,  
And envy the deep, calm, blessed sleep  
Of the battlefield's holy ground.

For the swords—one night a week ago  
The remnant, just eleven—  
Gathered around a banqueting board  
With seats for thirty-seven.  
There were two came in on crutches,  
And two had each but a hand,  
To pour the wine and raise the cup  
As we toasted "Our Flag and Land!"

And the room seemed filled with whisperm  
As we looked at the vacant seats,  
And with choking throats we pushed aside  
The rich but untasted meats;  
Then in silence we brimmed our glasses  
As we stood up—just eleven—  
And bowed as we drank to the Dead  
Who had made us Thirty-seven!

After Halpine's death which Robert B. Roosevelt, uncle of the President, called "a national calamity," Mr. Roosevelt edited a volume of his poems and issued them as "The Poetical Works of Charles G. Halpine."

## Plain Twills, Checks, Plaids Are 'Top' Wools for Your Suit

By **CHERIE NICHOLAS**



AS A starter to the new spring wardrobe one can make no better move than to invest in a stunning suit tailored of the perfectly gorgeous wools that are bringing glory to the fabric realm this season. Not that the wool suit limits in any way, no indeed, not with the two-alike look that designers have contrived to achieve in the multiplicity of types that run the gamut all the way from the simple jacket-and-skirt classic to the new long-jacket effects with pleated skirts, the softly styled bolero models, the smart long-coat ensembles, the casual sports two-piece with its flaring skirt and interchangeable jacket of vivid wool stripes or plaids.

Whipcords, twills or wool crepe in navy blue is outstanding suit news for spring. Navies with white lingerie accents are having a stupendous success. Latest word is white hats with the navy outfits, some of which are trimmed with navy or the order may be reversed—navy hat with white trim. Chic, too, to wear with your navies are the hats carried out in red, white and blue color schemes.

Centered in the picture is one of those simple classy suits that women of discriminating taste do not. Tailored of fashionable navy twill (it is also available in black) its sophisticated simplicity bespeaks style personified. Of course it takes on the inevitable white touches that fashion insists upon this season, which in this instance are expressed in terms of white pique cuffs and collar. To tune to dressier mood lace or befrilled organdy will take the place of the pique. Then, too, for a pretty feminine gesture most likely a dainty lingerie blouse with a frothy jabot will grace this suit. Her white flower toque is not rushing the season for flower hats are coming out in endless parade, in answer to fashion's call.

### Pocket Belt



Pockets, pockets everywhere, and style at high tempo in every one! Straight from Paris to America sweeps the pocket fashion, and presto! the pocket rage is on. The young woman pictured is keyed up to the 'nith degree on the pocket theme. She begins with two decorative pockets on the blouse of her rayon shirtmaker frock. Then what does she do! She does just as fashion would have her do—buys one of the new cash and carry belts, designed by Criterion, to complete her pocket ensemble. For your satisfaction we are telling you that within the recesses of this practical pocket attached to its matching belt, there is plenty of stowaway space for hanky, keys, money and other feminine gadgets. With such perfectly good arguments in its favor as being supremely smart at the same time that it is as utilitarian as can be, small wonder that this new "cash and carry" belt is registering record sales.

### Do It With Mirrors

An evening bag that is a circle of silver metal cloth is given a jeweled look by the application of mirrors.

### Collarbone Accents Go in for Whimsy

You're going to have lots of fun this spring with the collarbone accents—this year's name for what used to be called lapel gadgets. You can wear them on the lapel of your new spring suit or set them near the collarline of your frock (winter or spring).

Consider these: A big green enameled frog with goggling rhinestone eyes (set on springs to make them jiggle), an enameled rooster, whose wing is set on a hinge to make it stand out, or a white lamb with "ruby" eyes and gold chain "fleec" swinging from its back. Other tricks are jewel-breasted gold robins and gold rooster heads with enamel combs.

### Black With Color For College Wear

Black frocks with accents of bright color are excellent selections with which to replenish the college girl's wardrobe at this time of year. Some, made of heavy black crepe, have wide, flared skirts with shirred border details around the hems, while others have simulated collars and cuffs of white beads. Short velvet skirts can be teamed with plain shirred velvet tops, and black wool skirts have white sweater tops embroidered in colored raffia.

### Background Dress Is Best in Colors

Because they combine with so many other fabrics, satins or smooth-surfaced crepes seem to be the most successful materials for the background dress for evening wear. With a satin background dress one can wear jacket or bolero tops in crepes, wool, velvet, fringe, feathers, marabou or beads. Dark, rich shades of satin—garnet red, deep sapphire, pine green—are smartest; or, in a light shade, gold.

## CLASSIFIED DEPARTMENT

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### Headed for Fame

A young man who knows his own points of weakness and strength is on his way to a place of fame among the earth's strong, wise men.

