

The Presidents and the Press

By HERBERT COREY

A PRESIDENT of the United States once discussed with me his relations with the press. "I can find an answer for any other problem," said he; "it may not be precisely the right answer, but it will probably work. I do not know how to deal with the press. That problem is insoluble."

The President of the day—whoever he may be—probably soon learns to regard the journalistic mob which beleaguers him with feelings compounded of enmity and fear. In a happier day the President was able to select a few intimates through whom to address the country. The other members of the body of Washington correspondents found themselves twenty-four hours late on whatever piece of news the President wished to put out. That phase of Washington correspondence came to an end with the opening of the World War, if, indeed, the changing tempo had not put a period to it at an earlier date. When a President nowadays talks to the press, it is to an audience of correspondents ranging in number from a dozen to two hundred. The majority are, in effect, strangers to him. In any group, whether of correspondents or men in some other occupation, there are variations in ability, integrity and meanness. This fact must be borne in mind. All are there for the purpose of getting a story. Some are moved by personal or partisan considerations. If he does not give them a story, they go away grumbling. That grumbling may easily assume the

proportions of a grievance. If he does give them a story, he may not rely upon the discretion of the body, because the body has no discretion. It is not organized and is therefore beyond control. Each of its members knows that some one of the number may, under temptation, shuffle off his responsibility upon the news editor back home. If the President asks the coöperation of the correspondents, some of them may suspect him of trying to put something over. If he does not ask their coöperation, some of them may run hog wild. If a correspondent breaks faith and is disciplined, he becomes a martyr. If he does not break faith, his news editor may eloquently inquire if he is still asleep. A President soon learns that a correspondent who likes him personally and supports his policies may be regarded by some of his fellows as fatuous and suborned, and that a correspondent who doubts his every word and motive thinks of himself as being as importantly patriotic as was Gen. Israel Putnam. There

are so many correspondents that they cannot be dealt with as individuals, and every attempt to deal with them as a body has

been just a mess. No wonder the President quoted looked on the problem as insoluble.

Not long ago France accused President Hoover of a blunder in diplomacy because his plan to grant Germany a year's grace was published before he had consulted the nations in interest. Because of the wounded *amour propre* of the French statesmen the plan almost fell through. They felt and said that Mr. Hoover had, in effect, presented a pistol at their heads. The consequent month's delay in putting the plan into operation greatly lessened the good results which had been hoped for. Yet Mr. Hoover had not been at fault. He had hoped to have forty-eight hours in which to communicate by telephone with the European capitals, after the eighty leaders of Congress had assured him in conference of their support, and before a suggestion of the proposed moratorium appeared in the press. No more time could possibly be taken, because of the urgency of the situation. He was not given an hour, in fact. The correspondents learned, through the various leaky channels of Washington politics, the general

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minister to state the general Brazilian economic case, he said:

"We cannot adopt other than an optimistic outlook. In Brazil, unemployment practically does not exist. Living is relatively cheap, the milreis having, by a rare phenomenon, retained and even increased its normal purchasing power. There is no misery. We have no floating debt. Budgets are balanced and the national administration parsimoniously carried out. I believe, therefore, that we have the right to trust in our own future. Brazil needs foreign capital for the development of its own resources. In fact, all our problems can be summed up in labor and capital. Foreign capital will, therefore, always be welcomed and will enjoy all the guaranties it requires. It is especially desirable that it seek employment in the opening of new means of communication and in the perfecting of those at present existing, in the electrification of railroads, in the development of sugar and tobacco production, in the silk worm industry, which finds exceptionally favorable conditions in Brazil, in the utilization of our textile fibers, in the development of the cattle-raising industry, in iron and steel mills, in petroleum exploration, and in many other enterprises which it is unnecessary to enumerate.

"President Hoover's European moratorium plan will have an indirect effect of the greatest importance on all South American countries. It would, however, be very desirable if, in accordance with the generous ideas of his program, means could be studied for extending direct assistance to those countries which have no social questions, and are faced solely with momentary difficulties. These would disappear with the bestowal of the credits which they deserve."

Breaking the Rubber Monopoly

For the final phase let us have a swift look at Yankee operations, especially a recent development—the Ford rubber project, upon which more than \$7,000,000 has already been expended. To understand it you must first get the rubber background, past and present.

The Amazon Valley is the natural habitat of the wild rubber tree. The existence of rubber was first observed soon after the discovery of America. Early explorers noticed that certain Indian tribes of South America played with a ball composed of an elastic and resilient substance drawn out of a tree. Subsequently it was found to possess

the power of erasing lead-pencil marks. Hence the name "India rubber." The rubber tree, however, was not scientifically identified until well into the eighteenth century.

If those early garnerers of wild rubber had envisaged the motor era they would not have ravaged the vast forest treasure of Brazil. Two factors contributed to the collapse of the industry in the Amazon area. One was the hardship involved in obtaining the product. Explained in the simplest fashion, the rubber tree is tapped and gives forth a milky substance called latex, which is put on a paddle and cooked over a wood fire. The sticky, brownish-black, pliable residue which collects on the paddle is rubber. This process involves immense toil, because the latex cups must be emptied every day. Each native in the Amazon region had to watch from 75 to 125 trees a day. Moreover, he was compelled to stand over the fire, which meant that he inhaled the smoke.

Ruthless exploitation marked the high tide of the wild-rubber era in Brazil. The only other source of supply was the Belgian Congo. The price of the crude product shot up to nearly three dollars a pound. As a result, the name of the state of Para, heart of the rubber domain, became synonymous with that of the product. Manaus, located 1000 miles from the mouth of the Amazon, suddenly developed a population of 80,000, and was as frenzied in wickedness and activity as any mining town in Alaska, Australia or South Africa after a big strike. As automobile production expanded, the Brazilian output, due to the primitive conditions under which it was harvested, could not keep pace with demand. Moreover, the seeds taken out of Brazil had brought forth slips which were now planted in the Dutch and British East Indies. The age of plantation rubber was on, contributing the second factor which spelled the doom of Brazil as a source of supply. Long before 1925 the production was negligible as compared with Malaya.

We consume considerably more than half the crude rubber produced, at a cost, in normal times, of \$300,000,000. There are exactly 300 needs for rubber in automobile construction and operation. Such an essential commodity should have free market play in accordance with the law of supply and demand. The British, whose output is the largest in the East Indies, thought otherwise. Through the Stevenson Act, which went into effect in November, 1922, they established a control of distribution through export quotas. The

inevitable price pinch occurred. In 1925 rubber soared from twenty cents a pound to \$1.21, in a spectacular, runaway market which enriched planters and stockholders. We then discovered, to our cost, that rubber is not only highly elastic in quality but in manipulation as well. Tire consumers of the United States paid the freight for this diverting example of government interference.

Any government control, however, whether in coffee, sugar or rubber, is a boomerang. It invariably leads to drastic economy and the opening up of new and competitive areas of production. The ill wind eventually blows good to the victim. So it was with the all-needful rubber. We began to salvage old tires and reclaim abandoned stocks. Within a few years the rubber market broke and the Stevenson Act had to be repealed.

Cutting Travel Time in Half

Beginning in 1926, we talked a great deal about making ourselves independent of the British supply. Only two North Americans capitalized the mood in a big way. One was Harvey Firestone, who had laid out immense plantations in Liberia. The other was Henry Ford, who launched his Brazilian enterprise in 1927 with the organization of the Companhia Ford Industrial do Brasil. A concession of more than 3,000,000 acres was obtained in the valley of the Tapajos River, a tributary of the Amazon, at a point 600 miles inland from the port of Belem, known in the United States as Para. There is a water frontage of seventy-five miles on the Tapajos. Here has been launched the undertaking which may mean the economic rebirth of one of the richest productive areas in the Western Hemisphere.

Another North American agency contributory to Brazilian social and economic advance is aviation. On October thirtieth last the final link of the east-coast air mail and passenger service from Miami to Buenos Aires was completed. The dream of encircling South America by Yankee aircraft became a reality. It is now possible to leave New York and make a plane journey down the Atlantic coast to the Argentine capital, cross the Andes, and then go up the west coast, returning via Panama to the original point of departure in exactly seventeen days. By rail and boat, making close connections, the same trip would consume not less than forty-two days.

To no other major South American country, with the possible exception

of Peru, does aviation mean quite so much as to Brazil. In the north, the Amazon and its tributaries provide means of communication. Because of the inadequacy of rail transport elsewhere, the aeroplane is a godsend. Its political significance has begun to be felt. Formerly the northern coast of Brazil was so remote from the federal capital at Rio that the central government had little control over the actions of local authorities. Today it is only necessary to telegraph an official at Belem and he can be in Rio by plane in two and a half days' time. By boat it would require approximately two weeks.

Yankee air interests did not enter Brazil until the summer of 1929. The mail and passenger service has made for closer business relationship with us. Through the radio service maintained on the planes, a traveler can keep in constant touch with his office in New York or elsewhere. The saving in time is evident when I say that between Rio and New York mail takes thirteen days by boat. By plane it is seven days.

Unlike conditions on the west coast, the Pan-American Airways have strong competition on the Atlantic seaboard south of Panama. The two competing lines are the Condor Syndicate, which is German, and the Compagnie Generale Aeropostale, owned by government-subsidized French interests. The latter company links France with Brazil by way of Dakar, Africa. Small, fast boats are used to transport the mail from Dakar to Natal. It is intended to substitute seaplanes for them and make it an all-air service.

The Brazilians have always entertained the friendliest feelings for us, and their mood is reciprocated. On July fourth, 1931, a Friendship Monument, made possible by nickels and dimes contributed by North American school children, was dedicated on the harbor front at Rio. Provisional President Vargas accepted it on behalf of Brazil. This statue, by the way, arrived in Rio in 1922. Because of a difference of opinion as to site, it remained in cold storage for nine years.

No other South American country approaches Brazil in potentialities for expansion. She possesses the largest of all areas available for the support of the human race and the creation of productive industry. Once purged of political unrest, the republic can become a commanding economic power in the New World.

Editor's Note—This is the fourth of a series of South American articles by Mr. Marcossou. The next will be devoted to Argentina.

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outlines of the plan and descended on him in a body.

"Premature publication may defeat the plan we have in mind," urged the President.

"We want the story," said the correspondents. "The people are entitled to know what is going on. We will print what we know, in any case."

The body of correspondents was, in fact, helpless to prevent the publication of the facts, even at the possible cost of a world collapse. They knew that they could not rely on a collective promise not to print. Even if all the correspondents present kept such a promise faithfully, there would certainly be some correspondent not present who would be free to print. There

was also the extreme probability that a few visiting editors were present at the presidential conference. A field day of that sort brings visiting editors out like sand flies. A visiting editor is often weak under the temptation offered by a big story in Washington, where he maintains a highly paid correspondent. He feels that if he can scoop the correspondent on his own ground the correspondent will be less cocky thereafter, and seldom is a visiting editor quite clear on the restrictions implied by his admission to a press conference. Anyhow, someone would be sure to talk. Correspondents are not the grave, stern men their readers think them. They are as chatty as cockatoos. One paper could spill the

beans as effectively as all the papers. The correspondents did not agree to postpone the story of the moratorium, because they could not postpone it. They were as helpless as Mr. Hoover himself.

No President has ever had a good press from the point of view of the President. His privacy is invaded, his word is openly doubted and his motives habitually suspected. No pigeon ever had a good hunter. It is the habit of the Washington correspondents to wait, guns in hands, until the Administration can be popped out of the trap. On those days when the Administration obstinately refuses to pop, there being no international bicker or big-time politics in sight, the reporters are

expected by their editors to produce lively yarns from Washington about the wife, dog, necktie, breakfast sausage or mongoose of the President. It is on the days when these human-interest stories are printed that the current President revises his opinion of the human race. It is, he sees, far lower than he had feared.

If no President ever had—from his point of view—a good press, some Presidents have had a worse press than others. These variations are governed—or so it seems to me—not so much by the merit of the man who happens to be the President as by the conditions which surround his presidency. Mr. Coolidge held office during a period of

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peace and prosperity, and was therefore enabled to wear a wide hat and a pair of fur chaps for the photographers without incurring general enmity. A study of the photography of the period leads to the conclusion that the only person who hated Mr. Coolidge in fur chaps was Mr. Coolidge. Mr. Hoover began his term almost synchronously with a world-wide disaster. If he were to pose in such garb, the roar of disapproval could be heard from Will Rogers to the Bering Sea. The major questions passed on by Mr. Coolidge had been so thoroughly debated that their terms were familiar to the reading public. Mr. Hoover fell heir to a new series. That part of the press which is dissatisfied with Mr. Hoover personally, progressively or politically began to set springes, with the new problems as bait. That is the luck of the presidency.

Mr. Harding once groaned to his secretary: "George, how can any man be fool enough to take this job?"

The Presidents and the press were on fairly good terms as recently as the Taft Administration. Only fairly good terms, of course. The opposition always regarded the President as a menace, but until Taft was elected, the President at least had a home life and a front door that could be locked. If he wished to ride through Rock Creek Park in the early morning, he was free to select a pair of admirals for companions if he wished.

Nowadays an early morning ride through Rock Creek Park would resemble a cavalry maneuver. In those simpler days few reporters visited the White House and still fewer made regular calls. For the most part they picked up White House news on Capitol Hill. Nowadays they might be found under the rugs. They are as permanent items in the establishment as Rudolph Forster in the office or the secret-service men trying to look like visiting haberdashers. No man enters the White House without their knowledge or escapes after a talk with the President until he has Told All. Few men are equipped to withstand a rapid-fire questioning by men who are high-speed and merciless questioners, and many are the good plans that have been marred by revelations made on the White House lawn. Because the man they are watching is merely the President of the United States, they are free to write as impersonally as of the Sphinx at Gizeh. The usually equable Harding lost his temper because of one critic of his sartorial devices.

"Keep that man out of the White House," he ordered on one occasion. "That fellow that can't let my pants alone. He keeps writing that they are too long."

When Confidence Was Respected

The reporter could not be kept out. An attempt to keep him out for such a cause would have made millions of readers shriek at the breakfast table. But there was a time when such a reporter would not have been permitted to get in. Correspondents in the elder days interpreted the news instead of peddling piddling gossip. Men like Samuel G. Blythe and Oscar Coolidge and a score of others discussed with senators and cabinet members the important events of the day. Sometimes the discussions took place at Shoomacher's. If they received a confidence they respected it, even if they were scooped in consequence. Their editors expected the news of the day on

politics rather than biology. The correspondent of a great Western daily learned that Mrs. Alice Longworth would be a mother.

"Of course, I could not print it," he explained to his editor, when a rival paper had used the story. "It came to me in confidence."

After journalistic methods had changed, the editor of the same paper was told that a blessed event was hoped for in the Coolidge family. The story was untrue. The Washington correspondent was assured at the White House that it was utterly false. The editor made a double-column box of the denial and placed it on the first page. It had a greater news value than a mere affirmation would have had. It was only by exercising whatever of authority over the press is still vested in the President, plus an almost personal appeal, that the news associations consented to ignore an embarrassing fiction. The editor of the paper which printed the denial was grim in his explanation.

"We got scooped on the Longworth baby," he said. "We were gentlemen then."

Roosevelt's Trial Balloons

The first signs of the coming change were noted under President Taft. The correspondents knew and liked him. The body of correspondents, too, were professionally pleased with the departure of Theodore Roosevelt. He made news—plenty of news—but he was fulminant and uncertain. News reception by the populace had not yet been tuned to high-speed frequencies and what was then known as a trial balloon was often launched by Roosevelt. If the trial balloon met with public approval, all went very well. If it did not, the reporter who had launched it might find himself denied. In these more cynical days a diplomatic denial is understood to mean that the denying diplomat only means that the stolen watch was not found in his pocket, but in that simpler era the denied correspondent took offense. They called it umbrage then. There are correspondents still alive who are as full of umbrage as they were the day that President Roosevelt denied them. He was the first President, however, to develop a clear idea of press management.

He knew that it is never possible to have satisfactory dealings with a large group of reporters, and so he selected a few as his news mediums. Those who were not selected were displeased by this presidential favoritism, but there was nothing they could do about it. The presidential favorites got all the big stories. Roosevelt knew that a Monday-morning paper was apt to be empty, and so he floated his best stories on Sunday night. It was great to be one of the selected correspondents, up to the moment when one of the selected was thrown over the battlements.

This history is adduced to explain why President Taft was welcomed by the correspondents. Yet it was during his presidency that the reportorial beleaguering of the White House began.

Big Bill Price was charged by the Washington Star with the duty of reporting whatever went on at the White House. Mr. Price was of a generous style of architecture and an exceedingly able man. He was the first reporter to make a daily visit to the White House. Having reached his goal, it was his custom to sit down and

rest. Mr. Taft liked Price and appreciated the fact that a man of weight does not enjoy pedestrianism. He began to give Price bits of news to save him the long toil over Capitol Hill, where most of the White House news had been originating in senatorial offices, and presently provided him with a desk at which to write his stories. Other reporters soon demanded equal privileges. Now the White House reporters are sufficiently numerous to have an association which gives an annual dinner and elects officers, although it does not include all the men who, as regular correspondents, have the right to attend the periodic press conferences with the President. Mr. Taft was the first to suffer under the new system. On one occasion he was so angered by an impertinently personal story sent out by one of his newly welcomed guests that he canceled every appointment for the day.

"But you are giving an important dinner this evening," his aides remonstrated.

"Call it off!" said the President. "I will not go."

It could not be called off, but the host appeared at it half an hour late. One after another his secretaries and more intimate friends had urged upon him the necessity of dressing for the dinner, and one after another they had beaten disordered retreats. It was not until Mrs. Taft exercised her wifely authority that he consented to forgo his grievance. White House reporting had not reached full efflorescence at that time and the reporters failed to report that a body of distinguished men had been kept waiting until the President had been able to button his collar without burning it. The incident would be good first-page news nowadays. It would have been good first-page news then, in fact, but the reporters were afraid to tell the story. There was at that time some question as to what measures of retaliation a President might take.

Even the ordinarily good-natured and obliging Taft, however, rarely granted audience to reporters, singly or in groups, on matters of public import. The established pattern of diplomacy was followed and the statements issued were mostly of a formal character. It remained for President Wilson to recognize the shift in the reading habits of the public and in journalistic methods, and to institute the press conferences which all correspondents in good standing might attend. Mr. Wilson was magnificently in earnest when he inaugurated "pitiless publicity." It was his conviction that every citizen should know all that his President is doing and that every correspondent would valiantly and with discretion support him in his effort to tell all. Enthusiasm and energy radiated from him the day he told the reportorial body what he planned to do. He was friendly, confident and happy.

The Era of Pitiless Publicity

Mr. Wilson's previous experience with journalists had been during his term as governor of New Jersey. He had had a program to put through and he had refused to enter into the arrangements that are common between officeholders and the political chiefs who have aided them to office. His best weapon then was publicity of the most pitiless kind, and he did not realize that the problem and its factors had changed when he became President. For a brief time the correspondents reveled in news from the head of the

state. Mr. Wilson had assumed that they would use discretion in their writing. They assumed that whatever he told them was to be printed, as had been the habit under the former plan. It seemed to Mr. Wilson that they had no appreciation of their responsibilities. They cheerily asked questions which revealed or suggested friction with other countries. Many questions tended to create friction. Mr. Wilson began to look on his policy of publicity with distaste and upon the correspondents with a more positive feeling.

"Too many of them are half-baked boys," he said.

It is true that many were younger than had been the rule for Washington correspondents, but the explanation was in the fact that newspapers had stepped up their news policies. The pleasant, somewhat leisurely days were forever at an end. The relations of public men toward the correspondents in Washington had been something like the relations of public men in London toward the leader writers of the great dailies. The correspondents got the news, of course, but they were equally interested in the interpretation of the news.

When the World War began, correspondents were perforce translated to the status of reporters. Many of the men reporting events in Washington had been sent on from their home offices because they could get the news. They neither knew nor cared about the traditions of what, with the cockiness of youth, they regarded as a somewhat somnolent past, and they had been trained in the hard school of which the politician and the policeman are the pedagogues. Presently Mr. Wilson called the corps of correspondents together.

"I am about to address you as Woodrow Wilson," he said, "and not as the President."

Fatherly Advice From the President

He was literally pallid with fury. The newspapers had been filled with gossip about Miss Margaret Wilson. The gossip was the product of that change in journalism which was later to produce the tabloid. An item from the back stairs might be more interesting than an item from the grand stairs. If Miss Wilson appeared in public with one man, the fact was widely chronicled. If, the following day, she appeared with another man, the reporters fought to get to the telephones. President Wilson talked to that gathering of reporters as they had never been talked to before. Somewhere in the private files is the stenographic record.

"This must stop," he said. "On the next offense I shall do what any other indignant father would do. I will punch the man who prints it in the nose."

With the advent of the war, the system of handouts was initiated. So much news was originating daily in the departments that it was a physical impossibility for the Washington staff of any paper to cover them all, and the Government press agent came into being. It is a poor Government bureau nowadays which does not issue an occasional press sheet. The handouts have had two results: The reporters are no longer obliged to maintain the intimate personal contacts which had produced news in the past, and have been freed from the restraint that had been imposed by the necessity of keeping on good terms with news sources. As all reporters suspect all press agents,

they regard all handouts with suspicion. A Government press agent must put the Government's best foot foremost, just as any other press agent must try to further the interests of his employer.

Newspapers had increased in size and the public taste had changed. Readers were no longer content to glow with partisan fury as they read the eloquence of their favorite correspondent or to chuckle at his humor. They wanted news—spot news—on which striking headlines might be written. Mr. Wilson found himself confronted at every conference with hard-boiled reporters determined to tear each fact of the least significance from his custody. In the end he abandoned his effort to take the public into his full confidence and frankly sought to use the press to further what he believed to be the national interest. It is not a criticism of the correspondents, but merely a recognition of an altered journalistic condition to say that their attitude toward the President—whoever he may be—is now that of a police reporter toward the chief of the homicide squad. They want the story of the crime.

"Be careful what you say to the press," was the advice given Warren G. Harding.

"That's nonsense," said the newly sworn President. "I am a newspaperman myself and I know all about reporters. They will not throw me down."

They did let him down—from the point of view of a President—because they could not do otherwise. Mr. Harding told the assembled correspondents at the National Press Club that he proposed to talk to them with candor because he knew he could do so safely. That would have been feasible if he had been dealing with them as individuals, but it was wholly impossible in dealing with them as a group. One little indiscretion here, added to another little indiscretion there, became a major indiscretion. He had assumed that they were friendly. Most of them were friendly to him, personally, but professionally they were cold as snakes. He talked without full knowledge of the facts about the islands in the Pacific on one occasion.

"I do not regard the four-power Pacific pact as covering the principal islands claimed by Japan," said he.

A New Technic for Reporters

Perhaps one-half the reporters there knew that statement, put in print, would at once arouse the Japanese Government to fury. Instead of warning Mr. Harding, they printed the story. It was hardly on the streets before Secretary of State Hughes was in the White House to offer his resignation. He was persuaded to withdraw it, and Harding at once changed his policy toward the correspondents.

"All questions must be presented in writing," he ordered. "None will be replied to until the department affected has been consulted. If no reply is made, there must be no reference to the fact that the question has been asked."

During the Arms Conference of 1921, Mr. Hughes refused to deal with the press, and Lord Riddell acted as spokesman for both the American and the British delegations. This was bitterly resented by the American reporters and no convincing explanation has ever been made, but it may be presumed that Mr. Hughes took this step in order to minimize as far as possible narratives of conflict between the two

great English-speaking nations. There is drama in a story of combat, and there is no drama whatever in a story of peaceful and friendly agreement. If there had been a spokesman for the United States, it is as certain as anything can humanly be that in a moment of unwise candor or irritation or forgetfulness he would let drop a word that could be translated into a war whoop. Lord Riddell was self-possessed and extremely—oh, extremely—astute. He made no mistakes and he did his own country's cause no harm.

Coolidge and the Reporters

On one occasion Mr. Harding made a long, fast and somewhat dangerous automobile ride. There were so many reporters in his entourage that the story was printed in defiance of the President's wishes.

"I'll not go any farther with these men," the President stormed when he read the morning papers. "I'll get on the train and go back to Washington. I'll not let one of them on board."

"But you cannot do that," said Secretary George B. Christian. "What do you think they would write if you did that?"

It would be wild exaggeration to say that Mr. Coolidge's relations with the press were satisfactory to Mr. Coolidge. On more than one occasion he beat on the table, but he always stopped beating before he hurt his hand. He has ordered his secretaries to get an offending reporter on the telephone and ask him why he did it, and tell him that he must not do it again, but there was a tacit understanding that this was not for the record. In the afternoon the secretary would regret that he had been unable to get in touch with the reporter.

"I will speak to him when he comes in," the secretary would say.

"Never mind it now," was the almost invariable reply. "Just as well you didn't get him."

If his press relations did not always satisfy him, however, it is probable that Mr. Coolidge had less trouble with the press than any other President since McKinley's time. He had been in politics all his life and he knew newspapermen better than they knew themselves. He knew what to tell them and what not to tell them, and how to tell them. It had been Mr. Harding's custom to walk into the conference with a thick sheaf of written questions in his hand and leaf them over in search of the queries he wished to answer. The reporters whose questions were ignored usually walked out of the conference red-faced and declamatory. Mr. Coolidge brought to the conference only those questions he proposed to answer, and, upon occasion, had no hesitation in admitting that he did not know an answer. "I have sent it over to the department to get some information."

There were times when he made no satisfactory reply to any query. On such occasions he not infrequently half turned his back on his eager audience and gazed out the window and delivered a short talk on the good of the order. When he turned back, a subwink might be detected in the calm Coolidge eye. It did not satisfy his

interrogators, but they unwillingly shared his placid enjoyment. There was always the chance, too, that he would wise-crack in a dignified and Vermontish fashion, as when someone asked him to comment on Rupert Hughes' *Life of Washington*.

"I see that the Monument still stands," said he.

It is the habit of the clerical force of the White House to paste on yellow sheets such items of news or editorials as the pasting clerk thinks may interest the President. Under some Presidents this had been carried so far that daily graphs were prepared, which presumably showed the rise or fall of public opinion. Mr. Coolidge did not bother about such things. It is to be doubted if he ever looked at the yellow sheets. The one paper that he insisted on seeing daily was the now-defunct *New York World*.

"I must see the World," he would say. "If it praises anything I have done, I know I am wrong."

He refrained from watching the press because he knew that no good would come of it.

"When I first came to the White House," he said, "I made up my mind that I could not please everyone." A stage wait. "So I just made up my mind I would try to please myself. So far I've been pretty well satisfied."

A President once said to me: "The reporters hope to find a fight in every situation." Of course they do. The story of a fight is always a good story, because it has color and action. It is the reportorial instinct to sniff around for the traces of a fight, as it is for a good terrier to suspect a mouse in even the most immaculate kitchen. When Premier Laval of France visited Mr. Hoover of Washington, journalistic suspicions were justified. There had been and were then differences of opinion between the two countries on various important matters, and the reporters assumed that M. Laval hoped to iron them out. They could not believe what they were frequently told—that the visit was merely that of one good neighbor to another, and that M. Laval and Mr. Hoover hoped through friendly discussion to reach an understanding rather than a decision.

A Fight That Failed

At first it seemed that a friendly, comfortable, businesslike meeting would lack the desired element of drama. Senator Borah obliged for a moment by saying some things with which M. Laval did not agree, and M. Laval was kind enough to say that he did not agree with Senator Borah. But neither man lost his temper, and when they met at dinner they gave evidence of an immediate joint liking, even if they were handicapped by the inability to be fluent in a common tongue. Then the reporters found the suggestion of a fight for which they were looking. It was announced that M. Laval and Mr. Hoover were unable to get together on the communiqué to be issued to the public over their signatures.

It is a fact that the principals did not spend more than twenty minutes—if they spent that much—in discussing its terms. They had talked over what M. Laval had come to talk over and they had by mutual consent avoided certain features on which they obviously could not agree. The communiqué was simple in its terms, general in its wording and satisfyingly vague. When they had agreed as to what they wanted said, the job of saying it in two languages

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This delicious morsel of humanity has shot like a skyrocket across the sky of the country because of her fascinating beauty and her unquestioned acting-intelligence. She is today the most talked of young person in the Hollywood City of Make-believe.

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(Courtesy of Paramount Pictures)

the star whom you all admire, and

LEWIS STONE

who likely has more millions of friends than any actor on the screen, delighted the author of the prize play, Preston Sturges, as well as the entire UNIVERSAL organization. I present her to you with pride and pleasure.

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Based upon the Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley story. Adapted by John L. Balderston from the play by Peggy Webling.

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HOTEL NEW YORKER

34th Street at 8th Avenue . . . New York City

RALPH HITZ, Managing Director

"THE BIG HOTEL THAT REMEMBERS THE
LITTLE THINGS"

Copr., 1932, H.N.Y.

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was turned over to the secretaries. Anyone who has ever tried to make an English statement over into French which shall mean precisely the same thing will understand the difficult nature of the secretaries' task. Neither Mr. Hoover nor M. Laval heard anything more of it until the secretaries had agreed. But for forty-eight hours the first pages carried tales of a non-existent disagreement.

In Washington it is felt that President Hoover has had an extremely hostile press during the greater part of his Administration. The explanation is in the fact that Mr. Hoover has had a number of new and controversial questions to deal with, and in the allied fact that the reporters are—it being a necessity of their existence—forever looking for a story of combat. The attitude of the press toward a President always interests Washington, a city in which politics is the father and mother of conversation. Everyone in Washington knows at least one cabinet member, two senators, a hatful of congressmen and correspondents to taste. The fact that a group of reporters declared a vendetta upon President Hoover, complete with red fire and feathers in the hair, may not have attracted much attention in the states. In the District of Columbia it often rates as Topic C, Topics A and B having been formalized for some time. The knife-throwing perhaps seems more important than the size of the knife warrants, because during his service as Secretary of Commerce the correspondents were almost unanimously friendly.

"Hoover is stealing your thunder," an indignant friend once complained to President Harding.

"That's nonsense," was Harding's reply. "The more good things are said of President Harding's Cabinet the better it is for President Harding."

A Good Plan That Wouldn't Work

As Secretary of Commerce, Mr. Hoover was the best news source in Washington. His department was continually on the production line with facts showing that American business was growing in grace and American commerce was increasing in prosperity. All reporters like to print stories of

than I did and tipped me off to a room at poor fat old Madame Pelletier's. She's from Bordeaux, trying to make a living with rooms to rent. Tante Sophie. She and her little-girl niece, Ginette. Come and see me. I'll give you the address. Maybe you're wondering—why Casa? Business and pleasure. There's the headquarters here of a big Mohammedan religious association. On the surface, prayers to Allah; underneath, a nationalist movement. I want to talk to them about a little plan I've got. Incidentally, before I go back to the *bled*, I want some fun. A good big bust. 'Gather ye rosebuds while ye may.' Casablanca may not seem much to you, but right now to me it's London, Paris, Berlin, Rome and New York rolled into one. I've been here a week and I'm going to stay a month more. Parley Tate's farewell to civilization. Say, when I start back, why don't you come along yourself? Enjoy life while it lasts. I can fix it. Let other fellows chew the sawdust."

that kind. Apart from that, Mr. Hoover was on the inside of everything that was going on, and he passed on to the reporters what part of his daily news budget he thought should be printed. He was not then under the present necessity of dealing with them en masse, but he was always accessible to the individuals. And the Department of Commerce had no policy to worry over. Every other department, from Labor to the Treasury, must consider daily whether its deeds are conforming to the Administration pattern. The Department of Commerce need only go pegging along, finding new ways to trade old lamps for new, and everyone will be satisfied.

When Mr. Hoover entered the White House, he determined to deal very frankly with the press. He had been able to speak in perfect confidence to the reporters as Secretary of Commerce. They had ably cooperated with him. He believed that he would find in the body of reporters the same disposition to hold up his hands. It seems apparent now that he did not realize that many of its members were hostile to him politically and that all of them, broadly speaking, viewed him as a potential source of news which might sometimes be satisfyingly sensational, and not at all as a Chief Magistrate to whom they owed loyalty. Mr. Hoover determined to drop the White House spokesman, who had become a vaudeville jest under President Coolidge. He announced to the press conference that the statements made to the reporters might be divided into three categories: Those in which the President might be directly quoted. Those which might be ascribed to "high authority." Those which were not to be quoted, but which would be given to the reporters as background, in order that their stories might be more illuminative and interesting.

The only thing wrong with the plan was that it would not work. Perhaps it was too perfect a plan. Reporters are persons and not factories. The men who disliked Mr. Hoover personally, those others who spoke for the straitest sect of Progressives, and those who were opposed politically continued to shade their stories. He was at times quoted directly for statements that should have been charged to the "high

authority." The background material became something of a joke, because it was too often linked directly to the President. The visiting editors wrote stories after attending a press conference that the regularly assigned reporters would never think of writing. The battle *motif* appeared more frequently in the stories from the White House. Secretary of War Hurley visited the Philippines and Mr. Hoover himself wrote the statement which was given to the press on his return. It seemed clear beyond the possibility of misunderstanding, and yet it was so misunderstood that the next day one thousand telegrams came to the President's desk asking: "What do these stories mean about the Philippines? What is it all about?"

When Censure is Censorship

They had not meant anything, in fact, except that news editors demand action in their scenarios. Secretary of Commerce Lamont talked with some industrialists on a plan to restore railroad bonds to investment favor and a few days later called upon President Hoover. When he emerged, the reporters caught him by the sleeve.

"Did you have a talk with the President about your plan for saving railroad bonds?"

"No."

The story appeared that Mr. Lamont had talked with the President about saving railroad bonds. Bond saving was a romantic topic at that moment, with the market shelling like green peas and heads of investing institutions wearing brave, bright smiles when they appeared in public. One of the human-interest stories which have been the warp if not the woof for presidential hair shirts for a generation was so devoid of fact that Theodore Joslin, one of Mr. Hoover's secretaries, asked the reporters to check their facts before writing any story of the White House. Mr. Joslin's well-meant effort became an attempt to clap a censorship on the news. It was a lively story on a dull day.

The points of view of the Presidents and the press must continue to diverge. As the President quoted at the beginning of this article truthfully said: "The problem is insoluble."

SON OF MITHRA

(Continued from Page 13)

I went into the hotel and up the stairs with my head whirling. Parley Tate's proposition was ridiculous, and yet, why not? Suppose a man should become the world's greatest authority on international law—would that make up for the forbidden fun of riding on one wild razzia? I took off my spectacles and thought furtively of certain events that occurred between May, 1917, and January, 1919. Was I really suffering from nervous prostration? It didn't feel like it—not after that talk with Parley Tate.

Under the door of my room a note had been slipped. It proved to be from M. Bertrand.

This recent arrival in the Moroccan postal service was treated with mild contempt by those young men of Casablanca who lived at the hotel. Forty or more, nearsighted, and, so to speak, openly mysterious. It was rumored that he hoped to become a detective; at any rate, he carried in his pocket an imposing police manual to which he stealthily referred.

His interest in me seemed to be a leaning for free lessons in English, and without respite he practiced on me his lamentable efforts in that language. The note was short.

Monsieur [Then, in English]: After I leave you with your American friend this evening I have copy some sayings and proverbs in your beautiful language which I would be please if you correct for me.

Do not monkey with a buzzing saw.
He who touches pich will be defile.
Evil communications corrupt good manners.

A word to the wise is suffisant.
Agréez, monsieur, l'expression de mes bien amicales salutations. BERTRAND.

As I read this over for the second time it occurred to me that M. Bertrand might be trying to tell me something. Perhaps Parley Tate ought to be warned.

IT WAS fat old Aunt Sophie who opened the door at the Pelletier house, but it was little Ginette who entertained the visitor. Somehow,