Entirely New Social Life in Washington

Formal Dinners and Official Receptions Abandoned—Strangers Heartily Welcome in Circles Which Were Once Too Exclusive to Penetrate

SOCIETY activity in Washington, in the old formal sense of peace days, has been added to the list of unessential industries to be suspended for the period of the war. It may be classed properly as an industry, inasmuch as it involved much work and expense. That is one of the chief reasons for its elimination in the Winter of 1917.

The first change in that long established sequence of White House functions came in the first year of the war, during the period of the country's neutrality. It became necessary then, of course, to make the dinner for the Ambassadors of the Entente powers and of the neutral countries, and also for the representatives of the Central Powers and of the neutral countries. So for three years the neutral countries' dinner was at the President's table, but they were a constantly diminishing group. Entertaining this year was much more simple, because every body now in Washington is the friend of everybody else, in the diplomatic sense, it would be still simpler, but not to intending at all—and that is the program.

Another change made early in the war was the elimination of the diplomatic reception. It would have been necessary to give an especially large one, to take the doing of as much social work as possible, but that has been omitted, because it happened to be set for a date that came immediately after the breaking of relations between the United States and Germany in February.

So, having heard these preliminary indications of what war might mean to its formalities, the capital is now prepared to take the doing of as much social work as possible, and work for the relief of beligerents away from each other, so it was omitted altogether. And last Winter the army in Europe reception was omitted, because it happened to be set for a date that came immediately after the breaking of relations between the United States and Germany in Feb-

Published: October 21, 1917

Copyright © The New York Times
Entirely New Social Life in Washington

(Continued from Page 10)

told that he could not buy his wine in his own loved capital, he demurred.

"Oh," he said, "I don't believe it has come to that yet in Washington. In camp, on the plains, or in the wilderness, yes, I would share my tent, of course, because I would know the stranger could not go elsewhere. But it is not that way in Washington yet."

Later this same General was convinced. He heard of a professor from the Pacific Coast, a scientist of such attainments that the Government wanted him, and sent for him. The man came and brought his wife and three children, for he knew that the service was to be for the period of the war. Being a good scientist, he never thought of such details as getting living quarters for himself and his family in advance. When he arrived his plight was serious. It was some time before he could get straightened out. It is no answer to a case of that sort to say "go to a hotel." In the first place, the hotels are crowded. In the second place, the Pacific Coast scientist, whose case may be taken as quite typical, had left a professorship with a small salary to take a Government job with a smaller one. The hotel for him and his wife and his three children was out of the question.

The hotel, even the club, is out of the question for a good many of these newcomers if they are to do their best work. There are limitations to the truth of Samuel Johnson's assertion that the best thing ever devised by man for the joy of man was the inn. Here is the proof. A Cleveland man who has been doing Government work in Washington for many weeks was asked why he went all the way home every week and used up his time and energy on traveling back and forth.

"I didn't at first, but I found I had to keep in trim for this war job," he replied. "At first I was in a hotel and was very comfortable. Then I was lucky enough to get a room in a club, where I was more comfortable and thought I could stand it indefinitely, but I was wrong. The strain of this work is something we have never known before in our country, and the people who are doing it have got to relax occasionally if they want to continue to be effective. You can't relax in a club or a hotel in this town, because everybody is talking about the war and the thing you are working on. Heaven help the man on this job who hasn't got a family and a home where he can find something sufficiently personal and intimate to make him forget Germany for a few minutes! That's why I go home to Cleveland when I get a chance."

If I ever succeed in finding a house here that is big enough for my tribe I'll move here and be fixed for the war."

Of course this man will find a house eventually, as have many others who have moved to Washington with their wives and children, much to the delight of the latter—for Washington, though very serious, is in no sense lugubrious. It is even cheerful in its hard work and the most interesting place in the world outside of Europe. It is especially the wives of other cities who are not snubbed and FORIOM outsiders, as they might have been years ago had they come on some other errand—sightseeing, or social climbing, for example. These are the people toward whom the old residents and the official families are not supercilious. They have been taken into the social life of the place under war conditions, easily and naturally, just as soon as they have shown interest in the work that is being done and indicated their desire to participate in it. So there need be no vain social longings and jealous heartburnings. The woman from out of town may find herself working on a committee with a Washington woman whom she could not have met within ten miles of a year ago. And the common interest is all that is needed nowadays as a stepping stone to companionship.

All these remarkable changes in the social life of Washington have come about easily, without any feeling of having something vital wrenched away. The city has such a tremendous amount of what is real in its makeup at all times that it does not miss the artificialities when the necessity arises to put them aside under the stress of war. If there is an intellectual aristocracy anywhere in this country it is right in the national capital, and anybody who has brains and breeding can get into such an aristocracy. Obviously, the outsiders who have been called here to help solve difficult scientific and economic problems have both. Hence they are welcome, much in the same way that the family of the new member of the Faculty is welcomed in the small college town. Washington is a combination of a good many small college towns, with all their Faculties rolled into one. The scientist who is working his head off at the Bureau of Standards to devise some way of producing a vital war necessity which this country has never thought it could produce before, the chemist in the Department of Agriculture doing something big to help feed a world, the economist who has come here to supply workable theories of his own to great problems, the officers of France and England and Italy who have come to help teach us to fight in the new way—all these and many more in many lines are the newcomers to Washington with their families. The clubs and the homes of Washington are open to them.

They don't bring much money with them, and they won't take any away. But that does not count in the new social régime. The men of their own sort who are here all the time don't have much money either, and one of the great comforts of the situation is that everybody knows just what everybody else has, thanks to the fact that all Government salaries are matter of public record. The doctor of this or that or the other science, working for the Government for $5,000 a year—work that he would get much more for anywhere else—knows that all his friends know he is getting five thousand a year, so what would be the use of his trying to live as if he were getting ten thousand? That is a great factor in making life comfortable in Washington society. Why doesn't the doctor of this or that or the other thing go where he would get more? Then he wouldn't be in Washington and couldn't belong to the Cosmos Club. a sufficient answer.