

# Entirely New Social Life in Washington

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

**S**OCIETY 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 labor, weariness, and money. That is one of the chief reasons for its elimination in the Winter of 1917-18, America's first Winter as a belligerent. All the physical and mental energy and the money outlay that have hitherto gone into doing the correct trivial thing at the correct moment, according to social usage, are being devoted to bigger things. Another chief reason, obviously, is the matter of good taste.

This, of course, is a forecast rather than a statement of something already done or begun. The formal social season of the capital does not start until the night of the Cabinet dinner at the White House, about the middle of December. But there will be no formal dinner for the Cabinet officers and their wives at the White House this year. That affair, as well as the three other important dinners and the four receptions ordinarily given in the course of the three Winter months, is removed from the White House social calendar for the coming season.

Under the peace régime these affairs were the Cabinet, diplomatic, Supreme Court, and Speaker's dinners, and the Supreme Court, diplomatic, Congressional, and army and navy receptions. The first change in that long established sequence of White House functions came in the first year of the European war, during the period of the country's neutrality. It became necessary then, of course, to give two diplomatic dinners, one for the Ambassadors of the Entente powers and of the neutral countries, and another for the representatives of the Central Powers and of the neutral countries. So for three years the neutrals were sure of two dinners a year at the President's table, but they were a constantly diminishing group. Entertaining this year would be much simpler, because everybody now in Washington is the friend of everybody else, in the diplomatic sense. It would be still simpler not to entertain 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 that, also, in two parts, to keep the belligerents away from each other, so it was omitted altogether. And last Winter the army and navy 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 February.

So, having heard these preliminary indications of what war might mean to its formalities, the capital is now prepared to take the doing away with the whole program as a matter of course. Unofficial Washington will take its cue from the White House in these matters, regardless of the old notion that official society and unofficial society in Washington are two very different things. It is significant that they are not nearly so different as they were before the war. But that is another phase of the matter.

Needless to say, the dinners which the Cabinet members and their wives have given to the President and the President's wife for many years will also be eliminated, and furthermore, the wives of the Cabinet ministers and of the Supreme Court Justices have all abolished their formal reception days. Lesser wives of Washington are following suit, which means that for the period of the war women will "just drop in" on other



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Mrs. Woodrow Wilson.

women they really want to see. If they are too busy doing war work to "drop in," they will not take the trouble to send servants around with their cards. Of course, all these women are eager for an early peace of the right sort, but they are enjoying this war respite from formality, particularly several of the Cabinet wives, who are glad of the freedom to be working for the same end for which their husbands, as part of the Government, are working.

So much for Washington's official society and the wartime cessation of its society activities as such. Social, not society, activities are different, and they are in full swing. They consist of war work in its thousand and one phases. It is because of this work that all Washington is getting together, the official and the unofficial; the old residents and the newcomers, of whom there are many thousands, all brought here by the summons of the Government to help. The old residents are no longer supercilious, (they are friendly even to members of the House of Representatives,) and the newcomers are not the snubbed, forlorn outsiders they used to be in the national city.

The case of the Metropolitan Club is one illustration of that fact. When Mr. Taft was President he took occasion to publicly chastise the Metropolitan Club for what he considered its snobbishness. Membership in the club had been refused to two men of his Cabinet, and to two members of Congress from New York. Whereupon Mr. Taft issued a statement denouncing a certain type of Washington men who could get on club committees when they were not fit to get on anything



(C) G. V. Rusk.  
Mrs. Robert Lansing, Wife of Secretary of State.

else, and there vote to keep their betters out of social organizations. The Metropolitan Club of today is a changed institution. It is hospitable. It is extending its privileges to men from other cities without waiting to have them passed upon for membership. The same is true of all the other clubs. One of them has been genial host to so many hundreds of war workers from other cities that it has recently bought adjoining property to make room for the newcomers. The Army and Navy Club is struggling with a problem peculiar to itself, due to the large number of reserve officers who have been taken into

the army. To take them all in as members would give to the total membership a predominance of army men that would swamp the navy members numerically. In the meantime, the reserve army officers are being received with open arms in other clubs, and the young men of the officers' training camp at Fort Myer have established a new club of their own on Sixteenth Street.

Speaking of clubs, there is not the slightest trace of excitement among their members over the fact that with the beginning of next month Washington is to be bone dry. It is not even an interesting topic of conversation, except among the barroom people who have got to go out of business, and the temperance workers who have won the capital over to prohibition. That such a change as this is awaited with indifference in clubs and homes may be taken as an indication of the seriousness with which the capital is considering other matters. A Washington hostess happened to glance at her array of wine glasses the

other day, and said she wondered what she would do with them.

"It is too bad," she added, "that they can't make bullets out of glass. All these things, and millions more like them in Washington, might be melted up for war purposes"—an impractical idea, of course, but it shows how women of that sort, who once devoted their energies to dance and dinner giving, and so forth, now see war and war work in everything they touch.

Of course, there are women's clubs in Washington by the score; clubs so-called, really societies for doing all sorts of things in normal times, but now societies for doing one thing—war work. Every one of them has been converted to the main purpose. No matter what they once were doing, the insignia of crossed knitting needles would now do for them all. If they are not knitting, they are making bandages or collecting books for soldiers, or helping the Treasury Department sell war bonds. Also these organizations of women are rid of the schisms and factional rows that threatened the existence of several of them during the period of American neutrality. Then they were divided between war and peace, and it was a serious matter, as any one of several harassed lady Presidents might have told you in those days. War has brought peace and unanimity.

Housing is one of the big social problems of Washington incidental to the war—not the housing of the poor this time, but housing for the families of men coming from all parts of the country to help the Government, and, to a much less extent, for those coming to get something out of the Government.

When Breckinridge Long of the State Department placed his home at the disposal of the Balfour party last Spring, and when owners of other notable mansions turned them over to the war missions from our other allies, they were, unconsciously, setting a fashion that has become prevalent throughout the city. There were practically no houses closed during the Summer. Wealthy Washington families who could get away left their homes open for families from out of town, in some cases as a matter of business, in many cases as a matter of hospitality toward strangers. This was something that never had been done before. Now the owners have returned, and the Summer tenants have had to take quarters elsewhere.

The despised hall bedroom of Washington has become a real factor in the war. The woman "in reduced circumstances," who lets rooms or takes boarders in what was once a private house of distinction, is no longer an object of sympathy. She is simply one who is doing something for her country by sheltering those who are working for it in other ways. So real is the difficulty of the shortage of living quarters that clergymen have appealed from their pulpits to the congregations to help out in any way they can. At the close of his sermon last Sunday the Rev. U. G. Pierce of the Unitarian Church asked all parishioners who had spare rooms in their homes to report the fact if those rooms could be made available for lodgers.

"We have given our men and our money," said the Rev. Mr. Pierce to his congregation, "and now, here in Washington, we must share our homes with those who have responded to the call of the Government to come here. Their work cannot be done to the best advantage unless we can make them comfortable."

When this pulpit appeal was mentioned to an old retired army General, a Washingtonian of the sort who would have been excited a little while ago if

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Mrs. Josephus Daniels, Wife of Secretary of Navy.

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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 from other cities who are not snubbed and forlorn 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 so soon as they have shown their 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 got 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 col-

lege towns, with all their Faculties rolled into one. The scientist who is working his head off out 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 apply 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 about 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.



Left to Right: Mrs. Louis D. Brandeis, Wife of Supreme Court Justice; Mrs. William G. McAdoo, Wife of Secretary of the Treasury, and Mrs. Newton D. Baker, Wife of Secretary of War.

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