

The Diplomat as High Priest

ABOUT a long table in a big room are seated fifty tired and sprawling journalists. Though the room is kept too warm, as government buildings always are, most of the men wear their overcoats, preferring that to the alternative of sitting on them. The few women present are of the pretty and adventurous type which goes into newspaper work because smitten with romanticism. They sit modestly in the background, while the males preen themselves and pose—just a little—before them. Down the hall sounds a step—consciously firm, consciously brisk. The reporters straighten their copy paper, push their hats out of the way on the top of the table. And in he comes—a Diplomat!

There is an impressive pause while he hangs his hat on the one solitary hatrack, which is usually left vacant for him by the respectful gentlemen of the press. The outriders, so to speak, who have entered with him, take up respectful positions in the rear. He sits. A journalist, bashful in the presence of greatness, may ask a question, or the Diplomat may volunteer a few words of his own. In either case, his opening remarks will be the same.

"France wants . . ." he says, looking consciously earnest and fixedly pleasant.

Sometimes it is "France thinks . . ." or "France feels . . ." and of course as often as it is France it is Japan, or Britain, or the United States, or China, which wants or thinks or feels. All the journalists jot down the Diplomat's remarks; and next morning, there it is in the headlines—"France wants. . . ." "Japan thinks. . . ."

Yet this is nonsense. No such thing as a France, capable of thinking, exists. A great many Frenchmen exist, it is true, and if you could get a cross-section of all their thoughts at the moment that the journalists are interviewing the Diplomat, they would run: "I'm hungry. . . . I want more money what a pretty girl that is my rheumatism hurts this car is too crowded I hope my wife will [will not] die" And so on, whether the thinkers be Japanese, British, French, American. (For the best descriptions of this sort of thing, see almost any of the Russian novelists.)

It is true that the Diplomat is the official representative of a government. That government was placed in power by a majority or at least a plurality of the voters, who are in turn a small minority of the total population. The election, the chances are

twenty to one, turned on issues quite other than those the Diplomat is now discussing. Indeed, individual members of the government may have been elected, one because he had curly black hair, another because his wife had money, a third because his opponent was found out in a rascality.

You may argue, perhaps, that the Diplomat finds out what his country thinks by reading the daily press? But it is possible for the papers to be filled with ideas repudiated by the people. All the "respectable" press of New York City was against Mayor Hylan in the election of 1921, and nearly all the people were for him.

No; when Diplomat speaks as "the voice of his country," that action is fantastic absurdity. The interesting and important thing about him is that he does not believe it is fantastic absurdity. He devoutly feels in the marrow of his bones that in some way which is not quite clear to him, he knows what is best for the millions—or hundreds of millions—he represents. It is an article of faith in which he cannot be shaken, that his decisions on behalf of his people are miraculously right. He magnifies himself into oneness with those people, he becomes the nation incarnate in short, he has all the psychological qualities of a high priest.

The scene described in my opening sentences happens to be at the Washington Conference, where it has been daily, almost hourly, reenacted. But the Diplomats are the same the world over, and always. Like the high priests, they claim to possess a special body of information not vouchsafed to lesser mortals. Like the high priests they know better than you do what is good for you. Like the high priests, they claim infallibility and never admit their mistakes.

For they do make mistakes. They make the most hideous mistakes. The Diplomat's imperturbable smugness is just as apt to be exhibited when he has led his nation to the verge of the precipice as when he has set the people's feet upon the pathway to the mountain heights. Indeed, I think it can be shown that in the modern world nearly all the standards of the diplomats, the working rules of their game, are such as tend toward disaster rather than happiness.

In such a Conference as we have been seeing at Washington, for example, decisions of great importance are made. Who makes them? And what criteria are applied in the mental process of arriving at them?

More than is generally supposed, the Diplomat himself makes these decisions. He talks about "consulting my government," about being "under orders from my government." But to quite a degree, this is mere prestidigitation. "My government" is the great big black bear in the closet—listen to his growls! If you aren't a good boy I'll let him out. Or it is the invisible partner in the back office, implacably grim and mercenary. But suppose the Diplomat is honest and does consult his government, as the high priest sometimes consults the graven image in the hidden holy place. What is this government? Another Diplomat, or two or three of him, sitting at the other end of a cable, somewhat confused by remoteness, somewhat preoccupied, as Diplomat always is, with the desire to go on wearing a silk hat, to continue to drive through the streets in a barouche, bowing left and right.

The fundamental hypothesis of Diplomat is—and the Washington Conference illustrates this admirably—that his country has a motto. This motto Diplomat knows by inner revelation to be: More for Us and Less for You. Only the limits of practicability prevent its being: All for Us and None for You. The human happiness of the individual human beings in Your Country is not considered. It may be mentioned, but it is never a factor of any real weight. Neither is the human happiness of the people in Our Country except insofar as it may be wrapped up with their material prosperity. Even then, Diplomat is more likely to do things for the trading class, small in numbers, than for the rest of the population.

The high priest never admits a human frailty; and the mistakes of Diplomat and his friends are acknowledged only by his enemies and, years later, by historians. The Japanese delegation at Washington blundered when it accepted the Hughes plan in such half-hearted and chilly fashion; a world of goodwill among the Western peoples was within their grasp had they but closed their fingers on it. The Chinese delegation blundered when it uttered its ten principles and then permitted the discussion to descend to details without having pointed out the exact application of the principles to each of China's grievances. But can you imagine a Chinese delegate standing up and saying, in the American idiom they understand so well: "My colleagues and I pulled an awful boner last week. We want to go back and start over?"

This notion of the infallibility of the Diplomat has had a serious, if not disastrous effect, in the case of Charles Evans Hughes. Mr. Hughes started the Conference with a bombshell, which was probably an excellent bit of psychological

technic. The reverberation all over the world was so instantaneous and loud that by itself it became a sort of success. That very fact tended to fix and harden Mr. Hughes's attitude toward the rest of the Conference. After such an acclaim, success on the naval ratio became all-important to Mr. Hughes. Before long it was evident that a second American bombshell was urgently needed, giving an irreducible-minimum program for China. But a second bombshell would have been an anti-climax, and a Diplomat must not deal in them any more than a high priest must trip while ascending the altar steps. We are only beginning to see how serious the consequences of this development may be. Mr. Hughes's position is something like that of Mr. Wilson at Paris. If a Diplomat comes in like a lion, he simply dare not go out like a lamb. Even though he is, and a shorn one, he must roar as he exits. The necessity for saving face, which causes so much of the world's woe, demands it.

No one is ingenuous enough to suppose that the peculiar mental processes of the Diplomats result from personal aberrations of the men occupying those posts. They are not selected for the work because of their peculiarities; the peculiarities (for so they are from a sane point of view) develop after they are in office. Senator Underwood, as likeable and genial as any man in Washington, moves remote and austere behind the veil as a delegate. Senator Lodge suffers a sea-change into something new and Wilsonian. The pressure is too great for humankind. If Theodore Roosevelt, even the old Theodore Roosevelt of 1901-1908, had happened to be President at the conclusion of the World War and had gone to Paris to negotiate the peace, I do not doubt that in his talks with newspapermen he would have been evasive.

That the development of Diplomats is natural and even inevitable does not prevent its being tragic for the plain people of the world whom they are supposed to represent. If we look about us today and see the earth sick and sorry, with misery almost everywhere and hope of amelioration almost nowhere, the question becomes pertinent: can the old-school Diplomats, who are all we have today, make any enduring peace on earth?

Do we not need, breaking up through the crust of tradition, the protagonists of a new humanism who, with strong commonsense, will seek to solve our pressing problems on a basis first of all, of the greatest good to the greatest number? Not much time will be needed, after the close of the Washington Conference, to answer this question and determine whether or not we have reached the end of an era in diplomacy. **BRUCE BLIVEN.**

Washington.

When the Company Goes Home

WHEN the party breaks up and the guests and visitors go home, when just the family is left here and we all begin to talk at once about the biggest party we have ever given, when this fast approaching period of relaxation arrives, Washington will be itself again. Then will come the freshet of gossip, comment, and appraisal of the Conference and of all the figures who participated in it.

Washington has had on and is still wearing its company manners. It wears them a little stiffly sometimes, particularly some of the big boys in the Senate who are at the party but not in it or of it. Their time is coming, and they know it. So does Mr. Hughes. When oysters are eaten they are put in the bill, and in the end somebody has to cast up the reckoning and pay it. That moment is approaching; is nearly here.

I make no doubt that all the treaties, conventions, what not that come out of the Conference will be ratified and approved by the Senate, but not until they have been talked about and picked over. That process cannot be carried through at ease until the out-of-town high contracting parties have gone home. We shall want to take stock of our situation and examine the new postures and relations into which we have entered. This is not only the biggest and the most important set of exercises that we have ever sponsored, but the proceedings have gone forward at such a dizzying pace that the Senators have not been able to keep up. They know the conclusions and acceptances that have been reached, but are not fully informed as to how they were reached. Mr. Borah, among others, has given fair warning that he does not "want to be estopped hereafter by silence at this time."

While the Senate is thus engaged in the performance of its routine duty the balance of Washington will be engaged in hanging the new portraits that have been acquired for the local gallery and in appraising and interpreting the alien sojourners who by their presence and acts have so enlivened and colored these domestic precincts.

The Conference itself has lacked color and pageantry. It has been so direct, so fast moving, so in accordance with program, so business-like in its methods and its dispatch of business that it has inevitably taken on an aspect of bleakness. It has lacked clashes, drama, intrigue, suspense—the climax came on the opening day—and, therefore, has been the most difficult performance imagina-

ble to write about. In consequence it has been much over written. This has been perceived in unexpected places.

Lord Riddell received the other day a post card from Omaha bearing the simple inscription: "Luke 19:3." It proved to be a reference to that certain publican and rich man, Zaccheus, who climbed a sycamore tree his Lord and Master for to see. The verse read: "And he sought to see Jesus who he was; and could not for the press . . ." The Omaha man made his point neatly and sent it to the right address.

Lord Riddell, Mr. H. G. Wells and Mr. Arthur James Balfour have been the three most conspicuous Englishmen here. A more diverse trio in their antecedents, backgrounds and outlook on life could not have been devised. I fancy they do not see much of one another at home. The late Richard K. Fox, Upton Sinclair and Elihu Root are, I suppose, as near as we could come to matching them, and even that would be an incomplete and inadequate comparison. To me—the mere presence here of these three in their respective capacities is the most illuminating chapter in the history of present-day England that could be presented.

I thought when Bob Smillie and his fellow laborites had produced before them in the King's Robing Room in the environs of the House of Lords, the Duke of Hamilton, the Duke of Northumberland and others of the most exalted gentry to put to them the question that Mazet and Lexow put to Croker and Devery: "Where did you get it?" that the extremest limits of topsyturvydom had been reached. I never expected to live to see the day when Lord Riddell would be the official spokesman for the British Empire (or Commonwealth as you prefer) at such a Conference as this.

You have only to refer to the files of the newspapers, since the Conference began to see how admirably, how completely and how efficiently Lord Riddell has performed his task. It has been a case of one hundred percent saturation. He has been not only spokesman for the British, but has not hesitated when need seemed to exist or occasion warrant to speak for us or the other major nations participating in the Conference. It was Lord Riddell who made it known that the French desired ten battleships of 35,000 tons each. He has been most helpful—in that way.

He was particularly active in the lean period