

WE GIVE YOU THE HOTELS

Personal Service Is Full of Practical Magic

● "The guest is always right."

Such is the watchword of the modern hotel. Incredible queries are answered; strange requests are taken care of without the flicker of an eyelash on the part of the hotel employees, or a single ripple on the surface calm of the hotel management. It is all a part of what is known in the hotels as "personal service."

A gentleman wants to know how long a course he has to take before he can practice as a licensed masseur in the State of Illinois. A lady wants a maid to come in every morning and wash her back. The confident mother of a six-months' old baby sends down his bottles to be sterilized in the hotel kitchen and please will they make up the attached formula for him every day? Each demand is promptly and effectively taken care of and if some one

spent a bad fifteen minutes with the Medical Society of New York or if the caps on the baby's bottles presented a serious problem until the big Italian chef with a dexterous turn of the

wrist slipped them on with a "I haf nine *bambini* at home," the would-be masseur and the young mother never knew it. My guess is that the hotel manager's desk is the nearest thing we have to Aladdin's Lamp.

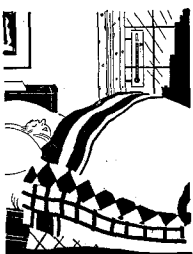
● At the **Gotham**, for instance, a very important lady telephones from Washington that she is coming to New York, is anxious to stay at the **Gotham**, and must have a quart of fresh goat's milk every day. Mr. Max Haering, the manager, who is a Swiss, brought up on goat's milk, thought that was easy and assured the lady that it would be on hand. "Then," he told me, "began as bad a twenty-four hours as I've had in a long time." He called up all the big milk companies in New York. Nothing doing. One after another he called the farms that supply the hotel with other necessities, all with the same result. People don't keep goats any more. By this time I was breathless.



Remembering *Heidi* and the rosy cheeks her Alpine goat's milk and cheese had given her, I knew that the sick woman *must* have what the doctor prescribed and the time was getting short. "What *did* you do?" I asked. Finally, after hours at the telephone he had found a little farm in the centre of New Jersey that kept a goat or two, and the farmer agreed to bring in the precious quart every day. By this time I had become so old-worldish that I half expected Mr. Haering to tell me that the farmer had sent it in in a dog cart with a little boy running along beside it, but apparently it was driven in by the usual Ford and even at that took over an hour each way. And the lady was much obliged, but not a great deal more.

● Delmonico's idea of personal service (which is pretty general) is to treat the guests of the hotel exactly as if they were guests in a private home. Maids are asked to report illnesses, anniversaries and birthdays that may come to their attention and flowers or cakes or both are sent in to the guest as the case seems to require. If a lady is ill, the housekeeper always goes in to see her and find out if there is anything she can do. If it's a man, the assistant manager, very properly, goes to offer his services. A certain anonymous lady who comes to the hotel frequently, sleeps on her right side. At first sight, this seems unimportant enough. But since the lady also cannot sleep facing a window this means that whenever she comes to the hotel she must be given a room where the bed faces a blank right wall. Things like that are almost automatic, Mr. Martin, the manager, tells me. A card index is kept of

every guest and of each request the guest makes, so that at Delmonico's one never asks for a thing like that twice. Mr. Martin's favorite story (and mine) is this. A lady who had an apartment in the hotel had gone to Florida for a few weeks. One day the as-



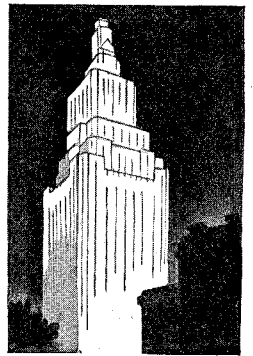
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VIEW FROM GUEST ROOMS

sistant manager, walking by, heard a victrola playing in the supposedly empty apartment. He walked in and there sat one of the hotel maids complacently playing the lady's victrola. On being severely reprimanded she explained serenely and truthfully that she had been instructed to come in every day during the lady's absence and play three classical records for the canary. He was used to it, it started him singing and kept him in voice. Fact.

● When Balbo and his ninety-five men were staying at the **Ambassador**, the whole hotel went Italian pretty thoroughly. Four Italian-speaking operators were on the switchboard day and night and all the operators were taught to count up to sixteen so that they could take the room calls. The elevator boys all had to learn to count, too, so that they could let the men off at the right floors—and all this just as a matter of course to make it easier for the Italian visitors. "As a matter of fact," said Miss Catherine Bourne, the **Ambassador's** agreeable and competent telephone supervisor, "all our girls could practically speak Italian by the time the fliers left. Of course they're used to lots of languages on the board." It usually takes them a little while to work out expressions that the English use, but they soon learn that "boots" means "bootblack," "motor" means "car" and "chemist," "druggist." Every possible human need goes over the wires of the hotel switchboard. Some one called the radio man at the **Ambassador** the other day to ask him to fix the radio so that it wouldn't run so fast.

● At the **Savoy Plaza**, Miss Helen Roche, the supervisor of telephones, told me some of the problems she and her staff have had to unravel. Once a woman called her and wanted her to help locate a maid that she had had seven years before. It took her about three hours and the maid was in the guest's room the next day. Gold star for the **Savoy Plaza**. Another guest who lives there was spending the winter in Paris. She called Miss Roche from Paris and gave her specific directions as to how to measure several pieces of furniture in her apartment. She was buying very expensive brocades for re-upholstering them and wanted exact measurements. Responsible jobs like that are just part of the day's work to the seasoned hotel operator. Locating people that guests know vaguely are in "some hotel in New York," and putting through long-distance calls for the Joneses "who are in some big hotel in Chicago" is almost as much a routine job as putting in a house call, and costs the hotel guest no more for extra service.

● Who hasn't heard of Richard and Holling Lowe of Franklin, Idaho, who wrote the General Electric Company asking to exchange their collection of birds' eggs and various other precious objects for a Frigidaire for their mother, and of their resulting trip, as the guests of the same G. E. Co., to New York? There was one incident connected with that trip that I hadn't heard until Mr. O'Connell of the **Biltmore** told it to me a day or two ago. The two boys were put up at the **Biltmore** with their mother, in no less a place than the Presidential Suite, and I don't doubt that the G. E. Co. and the Hotel thought they'd done pretty well by the family from out of the West. They had barely closed the doors on them, however, when the telephone at the desk rang. It was one of the boys. Apparently Mrs. Lowe couldn't find a rocking chair in the whole of the Presidential Suite, and would it be possible to find her one? So, quick as a flash, a comfortable old-fashioned one was dragged out of the store-room, dusted off, and sent up to Mrs. Lowe who from then on seemed to have nothing left to wish for.

The **Biltmore** is a mine of information

on personal service. One man who comes there often, has his own mattress with his own name tag—the very kind your mother hopefully sewed on your handkerchiefs when you went away to college—stitched on it. The mattress is kept in the store-room and carefully brought out each time the gentleman comes to town. He just can't sleep on anything else. Another man must have every bulb in the room changed till they're all 60-watt. And he goes around and looks at the mark on each to make sure. Still another man *must* have eight blankets on his bed regardless of the season. These may seem definitely odd requests, but woe unto the hotel manager who overlooks them. He even learns to keep calm when guests ask, as they often do at the **Biltmore** when chartering plane passage, to have the hotel guarantee them perfect safety on the flight.

These generalizations I gathered at the **Biltmore** too. There is very much less lost since the depression—two-thirds less, in fact. People seem to be holding on to what they have. Men usually leave inexpensive stuff. Women can be expected to leave anything from jewels down. Men demand bodily comfort from a hotel; women color and atmosphere. Most women dislike orchid and green, and men, for the most part, like red in furniture and drapes.

● The **Park Lane** is a residential hotel which for that very reason is able to give a special personal touch to its service for transient visitors. People are names and not numbers. Mrs. X. likes a very particular brand of Canadian bacon and likes to buy it herself, but leaves the cooking of it confidently to Georges Goneau, the chef, who fixes it just to her taste. He does the same with ducks which another lady has sent down to her in season. There are at least three people who insist on having their own particular Sanka pots. I can't help wondering whether it's because they think the coffee tastes differently or if they just like the familiar feel of the handle. Several people who live at the **Park Lane** have their meals served with their own linen and silver which the hotel keeps for them in special cupboards. The hotel likes rendering gracious little services like that.

● Mr. George Brown, one of the managers at the **Plaza**, who has been there twenty-seven years, tells me of a problem that faced him last fall. A gentleman who had been coming to the hotel for years, came back last November with an injured foot, wanting more than anything else in the world a rattan porch chair to lie on. Now Mr. Brown had known this gentleman a long time and was personally interested—as I think he is in all who come and go through the **Plaza's** doors—in seeing that he got what he wanted, and though the rattan-porch-chair season had bloomed and gone to seed with the summer zinnias, he took one of the hotel boys, hailed a taxi and set out to see what he could do. As he feared, at the first three stores he approached, he got the same answer. Absolutely nothing in stock. Not again till next summer. Then he went to Macy's. Pushed way off in a corner somewhere he saw just what he was after. "But we are very sorry," said the Department Superintendent, "that chair is a sample and cannot be sold." Mr. Brown could not be thwarted now. He took the elevator straight to the office of Mr. Straus himself, knowing that Mr. Straus had been a friend of the **Plaza** for years, and within fifteen minutes Mr. Brown and the boy and the rattan porch chair were speeding up the Avenue in the taxi, having accomplished the impossible.

● A story that I'd heard around town for a long while I finally tracked down to the **Pierre**. I'd heard that when the King of Siam was here all the floors of his hotel, above his own, had to be cleared out be-



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UNDER RELIANCE DIRECTION

cause of some old Oriental custom or something. Mr. Pierre laughed and explained it so that any Occidental could understand it. The King and the twelve people in his entourage had the Imperial Suite on the 17th floor. The King was very tired and nervous after his long voyage and had to rest, as you remember, for the operation on his eye. So to keep the Suite entirely quiet the whole floor above was cleared out. But that was only part of the service. Ten secret service men were in the hotel all the time. No one was permitted to go near the floor without being questioned by these men. Telephone calls were as rigorously censored. Entertaining royalty is not simple, customs, or no customs, but the **Pierre** takes it in its stride.

• The **Waldorf-Astoria** has a special personal service department called the "About the City" Bureau. This department, as its little folder will tell you, can do anything from doing the shopping for you for the folks back home to telling you where to have your suit invisibly mended. It supplies guides in several languages and can tell you where Helen Morgan is singing now or when Noel Coward is coming to town.

One day a gentleman from Quebec rushed up to the desk at 3:30 in the afternoon. He had a letter from a Canadian Bishop to an eminent dignitary of the church in New York and had to have an answer from the latter gentleman's office before his train left at 9:30 that night for Canada. He was at that moment bound for Wall Street and would return in an hour to see what Miss Eva McAdoo, who is in charge of the Bureau, had been able to accomplish. Now the **Waldorf-Astoria** has many connections around town and through this person and that things were arranged so that when the distraught young man returned from Wall Street he was informed of the exact hour of his appointment with the Eminent Dignitary's private secretary. "This means emeralds in your tiara when you get to heaven, young woman!" was the remark Miss McAdoo heard as he dashed off.

At 8:30 one evening one of the assistant managers of the hotel was hastily summoned by the Information Clerk. The lady in Suite 21 has spilled something on the dress she was to wear to the Ball at the hotel tonight and she must have another before ten o'clock! What was a mere man to do? It was after hours and the Bureau was closed, but the manager reached Miss McAdoo at home, got the name of a costumer, with supreme courage called him, gave the lady's size and color preference, and by ten o'clock five dresses were in Suite 21.

One morning the telephone of the Bureau rang. To Miss McAdoo's polite good morning a woman's voice said crisply "Weather?" "Outside, you mean?" said Miss McAdoo stalling for time. "Certainly, certainly! What kind of a day is it? Will I need a warm coat today?" Another voice, a man's this time, asked simply, "Where is the black panther?" He meant Frank Buck's black panther of "Bring 'Em Back Alive" fame, but just after one's morning coffee, who would ever think of that? The panther was found through Mr. Buck's agent. Another man wanted two little bears that wouldn't grow up to be big bears as they were to be for pets.

Part of Miss McAdoo's duties is to write discouraging answers to letters written in by young men who want to come to the big city as escorts for ladies who want to go places. One hopeful letter was from a lad out West somewhere who gave among other recommendations about himself, such as what college he had attended and what books he had read, the fact that he had had excellent experience riding the range and canning pineapples. What references for a New York gigolo! Pray heaven he is still riding the range.

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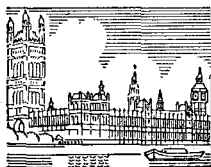
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NOTES FROM THE EDITOR'S OFFICE

Henry F. Pringle, whose biography of Theodore Roosevelt won the Pulitzer Prize, is doing a series of three articles for us on great American editors. Our biographies have met with such hearty response that they will continue.

We can't help being pleased at the group of short stories which we have scheduled for the next few numbers. The writers sound like a roll call of top-flight American writers: Thomas Wolfe, William Faulkner, Erskine Caldwell, Langston Hughes, Grace Flandrau, Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings, Struthers Burt, Nancy Hale.

Leland Stowe, Paris correspondent of *The Herald Tribune*, dropped in and had many interesting things to say about the French situation and how the poilu-in-the-street looks at it. It was his first visit to the United States since 1929 and he was cheered up by what he saw. He prefers it to the country he left in boom times.

Roy Harris, brilliant young American composer, came in to leave some biographical information in connection with his article "America's Future Music" which we shall publish soon. He tells us that Columbia is recording as its first selection of modern American work his symphony played by the Boston Symphony Orchestra.

"Don't look for too much advice. Make a magazine *you* like. Keep on the way you are going," writes one correspondent, in response to a request for his reaction to the magazine. It is cheerful to find such faith and support and it is quite true that a magazine cannot be edited by popular referendum. Yet remarks from our readers are invaluable. The brick bats they send are healthy for us, and there's nothing that begins an editor's day more pleasantly than intelligent letters from pleased readers.

Ben Ray Redman, whose "Obscenity and Censorship" appears in the May *SCRIBNER'S*, wrote an article four years ago for us called "Is Censorship Possible?" His answer was in the negative. Much has happened to prove his thesis since then. He now inquires among other things, will greater literature result from greater freedom?

It is not often that we find space for reminiscence or memoirs, but Stephen Bonsal's account of John L. Sullivan's battles with Charley Mitchell in France and the Emperor William's funeral in Berlin, both happening in the same week and both covered by him for James Gordon Bennett's *Herald* with Arthur Brisbane as rival reporter on the Sullivan story, is a gem. We shall publish it in two numbers, beginning May. Mr. Bonsal was special foreign correspondent for *The Herald* from 1884 to 1906, when he went to Russia to cover uprisings there for *The New York Times*. Some time ago we published Will Irwin's "A Job of Reporting" which told the story of how his newspaper classic "The City That Was," written at the time of the San Francisco earthquake, came into being. Mr. Bonsal here tells how he happened to scoop the world on the meeting between John L. and the Prince of Wales (later King Edward VII).

Albert Jay Nock, whose *A Journal of These Days* has just been published—and a most interesting book it is, will let loose a blast against the powers that be in an early number. It is called "Life, Liberty and . . ."