

# Preparing and Handling the President's Message



MAJOR O. L. PRUDEN, ASSISTANT SECRETARY TO THE PRESIDENT, BEARING THE MESSAGE TO THE CAPITOL.

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**T**HE message which the president of the United States transmits to congress at the beginning of each session, in which he reviews the work of the various executive departments for the preceding year and makes recommendations for the future easily ranks as the most important state document in the republic, and from the time the chief magistrate commences work upon it until it is made public the contents are a matter of paramount interest to the national law makers and to the country at large.

The method of preparing a presidential message is far-reaching in its scope. As a first step the chief executive, some weeks before he is ready to begin the actual work of writing the document, asks each member of his cabinet to prepare a report covering the workings of his branch of the government and embodying his recommendations for the ensuing year, including an estimate of the amount of money which will be required for the maintenance of the department under his direction. When a president has been in office for several years he is usually so closely in touch with governmental affairs generally that he needs this data principally as memoranda, but when, as in the case of President Roosevelt, a man is unexpectedly called upon to assume the responsibilities of the highest office in the land and is required to present a congressional message almost immediately the task of familiarizing himself with all the interests involved is a herculean one.

Different presidents have had widely

varying methods of preparing their messages. Prior to the McKinley administration it was the custom of each chief executive to write his message out in long hand. President Cleveland, who is rather a laborious worker and some of whose messages to congress were somewhat lengthy, found the preparation of such documents a sore tax upon his time. The late President McKinley and President Roosevelt have both had recourse to more modern methods and have dictated large portions of their messages to Secretary G. B. Cortelyou.

In later years, however, there has been no rule for this. In some instances President McKinley dictated practically an entire message, and then, again, in the case of some of the comparatively brief messages submitted on special occasions, as during the Spanish-American war, entire documents were written in his own hand. The business of the government has now attained to such proportions that it is doubtful if it will ever again be practicable for a president to set out to pen personally his entire letter of advice to congress. Moreover, if the present occupant of the White House has husbanded his time in one direction he has made a more liberal expenditure of it in another, for, whereas former presidents were wont to incorporate bodily in their messages the reports prepared by the cabinet officials, Mr. Roosevelt insisted on rewriting everything submitted for embodiment in his initial presidential message and infusing into the recommendations his own personal convictions.

## Easy for McKinley.

Probably no man who has stood at the head of the nation was enabled to prepare a congressional message with less apparent effort than the late President McKinley. He had a habit of jotting down suggestions and recording lines of thought at odd moments, and thus the general trend of the discussion seemed to literally shape itself. Coming to his duties as chief magistrate only a few months before he must present an exhaustive declaration of policy, President Roosevelt had no opportunity of such leisurely methods in the preparation of his first message. Almost from the outset he adopted the plan of seeing no visitors after 1:30 o'clock in the afternoon and thus gave up the hours after lunch each day almost exclusively to work on the message. Not infrequently he devoted a portion of the evening to the same task, and on the only occasion during the early weeks of his administration when he visited the theater he departed after the first act in order to get in some work on his message.

After a presidential message has been dictated to the secretaries or penned by hand it is transcribed in typewritten form, and after revision by the president is sent to the government printing office to be put in type. When the "proof" comes from Uncle Sam's big printing establishment it undergoes another revision, and perhaps this may be repeated several times. There has been a great difference in the tendency of chief executives to make alterations in their messages after the documents were in type. Some presidents have practically rewritten their misdeeds, to the discomfiture of the compositors, while others, notably President McKinley, have, as a rule, made very few corrections.

## Putting it in Type.

The manner of handling a presidential message at the government printing office is very interesting, for it is here that there exists the greatest danger of disclosure of the contents. Considerable secrecy must be maintained as to the import of this great letter of advice, for were it

possible for stock manipulators and speculators of various kinds to learn in advance the character of some of the measures advocated the financial and business stability of the country might be momentarily shaken as a result of the unscrupulous efforts of such schemers to enrich themselves. Once, during the Hayes administration, a presidential message was stolen and the theft is reported to have netted the perpetrators many thousand dollars, but there has never been a repetition of the loss. The message from the time it is delivered at the printing office until it emerges in pamphlet form, ready for delivery at the White House, is solely in charge of one official, who is held responsible for its safe keeping. Presidential messages range in length from 12,000 to 20,000 words and in preparing such a document for the typesetters it is cut up into pieces so small that no compositor can gain any definite knowledge of the subject under discussion. The work is also so distributed among hundreds of typesetters that it is impracticable for any group of men to "compare notes" with a view to ascertaining the import of any particular part of the document.

## Keeping it Dark.

The assembling of all these various masses of type is entrusted to a man of known responsibility and the same care is exercised with regard to the employees who print the documents and bind them. Much the same system is followed that prevails in the Bureau of Printing and Engraving, where currency is printed. Each sheet of paper which is issued for use in printing a presidential message must be accounted for ere the workman to whom it has been entrusted is allowed to leave the building at night.

The printed copies of the message are delivered at the White House and from there distributed to the various newspaper offices throughout the country, a courtesy extended in order that the newspapers may not be put to the inconvenience of hurriedly placing in type this enormous document in the few hours intervening between its presentation to congress and the hour at which a majority of the daily papers go to press. Each newspaper agrees, of course, not to divulge any of the contents of the message in advance. In some instances the "advance copies" of the message have been issued to the newspapers six days in advance of the date of delivery, thus allowing time for the document to be transmitted by mail to publications on the Pacific coast, but on the other occasions, owing to tardiness in the completion of the document, less than forty-eight hours has intervened. It has been necessary at such times for the press associations to telegraph the full text of the message to all the prominent daily papers in the more remote sections of the country. This has entailed an expense of thousands of dollars for telegraph tolls alone.

## Special Copy for Congress.

Each member of congress, when he takes his seat to listen to the reading of the presidential message on the morning of a session of the national legislature finds before him a printed copy of the document similar to that furnished to the newspapers. Yet this is not the form in which it reaches the presiding officers of the two houses of congress. The copy of the document which is formally presented for the consideration of each body is in manuscript and the preparation and delivery of these copies are among the important duties of Major O. L. Pruden, assistant secretary to the president, who, next to the chief executive and



PRESIDENT ROOSEVELT AT WORK ON HIS FIRST MESSAGE TO CONGRESS.

Secretary Cortelyou, probably has more to do with the evolution of a presidential message than any other one man.

Major Pruden's first duty in the matter is to prepare manuscript copies of the message—one for the senate and the other for the house of representatives. For this task he is well qualified, being a marvelous penman. Major Pruden, who has been designated the "Sphinx of the White House," because of the zealous manner in which he guards state secrets, was attached to the White House staff by General Grant and has held the position ever since. In addition to transcribing the annual message and other presidential statements—which unbroken precedent decrees shall go forth to the world in plain penmanship—Major Pruden prepares the presidential commission for cabinet officers and other important presidential appointments. In some instances the limited time intervening between the completion of a message and the hour at which it was necessary to present the document to congress has necessitated extraordinary exertion on the part of Major Pruden. For instance, in the case of the last message prepared by President McKinley the assistant secretary worked all day Sunday and Sunday night in order to have the copies ready for the senate and house of representatives on Monday morning. In order to prevent the recurrence of such an emergency President Roosevelt, when he assumed office, declared that henceforth, when time was limited, the advisability of departing from time-

honored custom and sending to each branch of congress a typewritten copy of the document would be seriously considered.

## Formalities of Delivery.

The delivery of the carefully prepared copies of the president's most important official declaration is another duty that develops upon Major Pruden. On the opening morning of a congressional session he goes to the capitol in the one-horse carriage which the government maintains in the White House stables for his use. The same horses, Kendall and Ramrod, a pair of bay geldings, have taken turns in drawing the president's message bearer for almost a decade. Arrived in the senate chamber, Major Pruden, carrying the large white envelope under his arm, advances to a position before the presiding officer and says:

"Mr. President, the president of the United States directs me to submit a message in writing."

With this announcement he hands the package, which is held by the official seal, to the reading clerk and proceeds to the house of representatives, where the ceremony is repeated. Clerks in the two houses of congress read the document aloud simultaneously and modern newspaper enterprise enables the general public in all parts of the country to become cognizant of the contents of the message by means of special editions of the great daily journals quite as promptly as the law makers seated in the halls of congress.

## Episodes and Incidents in the Lives of Noted People

**S**ENATOR N. N. STRANAHAN, who has been selected as collector of the port of New York, has as his given names the states of Nevada and Nebraska. At the time he was born the great west was just beginning to develop, and his father was impressed by reading about these territories.

A crusade has been begun in Washington against the southern custom of men removing their hats while riding in elevators if there are any women passengers. Notices have been posted in the corridors of several large office buildings to the effect that good taste does not require it. The reason for the crusade is said to be altogether hygienic.

Wu Tingfang, the Chinese minister to Washington, was exploring an art gallery there, when he saw a portrait of Li Hung Chang. "It does not look like him," said the Oriental diplomat. "But it is only a three-quarters view," urged an artist who stood near. "It does not look three-quarters like him," retorted Minister Wu as he passed on.

Not one of the theater crowd knew Thomas Brackett Reed, relates the New York Times. The plays were over and the car crowded. The big man was seated, thinking, perhaps, of the days when he was known as the czar, and the cartoonists gave much of their talent and time in caricaturing his ample curves and round face. Perhaps the ex-statesman wondered that there was not one friendly nod or respectful bow

for him among those typical, well-dressed and happy New Yorkers. The conductor knew the man from Maine, and intended to stop the car near 169 Central Park, South, for Mr. Reed does not like to be carried beyond his destination.

But with the many duties of his crowded car the conductor missed the chance to be courteous. The car had passed the corner when the conductor noticed the big man reaching to ring to the motorman. He hurried to the ex-speaker and expressed his sorrow at not stopping at the right place.

"Don't you sympathize with me, sir," said Mr. Reed, with the twinkle in his eye which used to mean danger to presumptuous congressmen. "You must not sympathize with anyone. It is out of style, and the only place you can find sympathy now is in the dictionary."

M. Santos-Dumont, the Brazilian balloonist, is the most popular man in Paris just now. Tradesmen are displaying Santos-Dumont neckties, hats and other articles of apparel, and even cakes similarly named are on sale. It is said, by the way, that President Faure once asked a friend, "Am I really popular?" and received this reply: "Not yet, M. le President; your figure in gingerbread is not yet being sold in the streets."

Prof. Syle, a member of the faculty of a western university, cannot tolerate snobishness on the part of his scholars, and any such offense is sure to call forth some keen, sarcastic comment. The other day, while calling the roll of one of his classes, he came upon the card of a Miss Greene,

He paused and expressed disapproval of the final e in her name by saying: "G-r-e-e-n-e, does that spell Green or Greenie?" Miss Greene promptly replied: "S-y-l-l-e, does that spell Syle or Sillie?"

Praxedes Mateo Sagasta, the Spanish premier, whose health has just completely broken down from catarrh of the stomach, is 73 years old and has been conspicuous in the political life of Spain since 1854, when he was first elected to the Cortes. It was he who forced the recall of Weyler from Cuba. No statesman in Spanish history has averted more crises or so often rescued the country from humiliating situations.

Not as many stories of John D. Rockefeller are told as of man who go about more in public. But now and then we get one. Here is the most recent, related by the Brooklyn Eagle: Years ago Mr. Rockefeller was a poor clerk in Cleveland, drawing a salary of \$40 a month. He had an ailment which required a simple and harmless surgical operation. He went to a surgeon of high repute in Cleveland and arranged to pay so much a month. The surgeon was willing and it took Rockefeller about a year to pay the bill of \$40 without interest.

No so very long ago Mr. Rockefeller sent for the same surgeon, now an old man, and entertained him at his Tarry Forest home. The magnate wanted another consultation regarding the old complaint and chose to send for the surgeon of his youth. They talked it over and then Rockefeller asked for the bill, remarking: "I won't keep

you waiting as I did years ago. Things have changed since then."

"Oh, I am out of practice; I wish no fee, Mr. Rockefeller. That is all right. Don't mention it."

Rockefeller opened a drawer at his desk, disclosing a few pounds of new greenbacks. Putting a few bills in an envelope he handed it to the surgeon, saying: "Well, if you do not want to take a fee, give this to some poor young doctor of your acquaintance." There was \$500 in the envelope, and after arrival home the old surgeon did not think of any young doctor to whom he could give the money and kept it.

A German friend having invited Carl Schurz to spend the remainder of his life in Southern California, Mr. Schurz replied gratefully, but says the literary projects he has on hand preclude the idea of his giving himself up to the enjoyment of nature. Mr. Schurz, by the way, was among the guests at a dinner given to the staff of the New York Evening Post on its 100th anniversary. In his speech he paid the paper the high compliment of saying: "It is not even afraid of its friends."

The relations between Isidore Rayner, attorney general of Maryland, and Admiral Schley beautifully illustrate the fine old southern spirit of chivalry. We call it southern, relates the Brooklyn Eagle, because the graces of friendship seem to blossom more freely in the warmer clime than in New England. When the court of inquiry was ordered Admiral Schley engaged two life-long friends as his counsel. One

was the late Judge Jeremiah Wilson and the other was Mr. Rayner. In asking Mr. Rayner to serve he wrote: "I wish a representative from my own state to represent me in this controversy. I have selected you and it is hardly necessary for me to add that I shall be delighted with your presence and grateful for your distinguished services." Mr. Rayner at once honored the draft made on his friendship and for the honor of his state and its distinguished representative in the navy he strove to prove that the admiral had done his duty as a southern gentleman. And when the inquiry was ended he declined to accept one dollar of pay. He even met his own expenses while in Washington. But the admiral would not let the matter rest here. He has given to Mrs. Rayner a beautiful brooch, studded with diamonds, and to Mr. Rayner a gold watch and chain with a gold pencil as a charm. During the long weeks of the sessions of the court of inquiry Admiral Schley had sat close to his counsel, Mr. Rayner had an old-fashioned, key-winding timepiece, which had long since outlived its usefulness. It did not keep good time and Rayner was in the habit of turning to Admiral Schley frequently and asking the time of day. Like many other lawyers, Mr. Rayner was often without a pencil and he would ask the admiral to loan him his pencil. Because he noted these things the admiral thought the pencil and the watch would be appreciated by his friend. Doubtless it was his remembrance of Mr. Rayner's splendid service that among other things made him say that he was thankful for everything, "not one particular thing, but everything."