

# CURRENT TOPICS

MR. ROOSEVELT greatly surprised the country in the dismissal of Herbert W. Bowen, United States minister to Venezuela, in the endorsement of Francis B. Loomis, assistant secretary of state, and in the "almost hysterical endorsement"—as it is referred to by one newspaper correspondent—of Secretary of the Navy Morton. Though Mr. Roosevelt has been given to surprising his friends it is plain that he outdid himself in his public statements with respect to the Bowen-Loomis case. Concerning the Morton endorsement Walter Wellman, Washington correspondent for the Chicago Record-Herald, says: "President Roosevelt virtually places wings upon the broad shoulders of the young man who is now both secretary of the navy in this city and chairman of the board of directors of the Equitable Life Assurance society in New York." The Kansas City Journal, a republican paper, referring to the dismissal of Bowen, prints in red letters at the top of its first page the words: "Strange that Minister Bowen did not profit by the fate of General Bristow."

IT WILL be remembered that Minister Bowen preferred charges against Assistant Secretary of State Loomis. The charges related to certain acts of Mr. Loomis while he was acting as minister to Venezuela. After an investigation made by Secretary of War Taft the secretary reported, saying that there was nothing dishonorable in the Loomis transactions, but that he was "indiscreet." Mr. Taft said that Mr. Loomis was not justified in becoming personally interested in any of the schemes, but he held that Loomis had been "most cruelly slandered," and pointed out that Mr. Loomis' bitter experience in this case makes it necessary to point out the moral that a minister cannot afford in the country to which he is accredited to make personal investments.

PRESIDENT ROOSEVELT approved the Taft report, and ordered Bowen's dismissal. He stated that he would have accepted his resignation, but for the fact that Mr. Bowen said that he could not afford to resign because resignation would imply an admission of misconduct. Mr. Roosevelt bitterly arraigned Minister Bowen, declaring that his conduct is "especially reprehensible." The president seems to be particularly aggrieved because Mr. Bowen asked one of his witnesses to enter the employ of a certain company for the purpose, as the president puts it in plain words, "of stealing documents which he hoped might incriminate Mr. Loomis." The president says that Mr. Bowen has "evidently for many months, indeed for the last two years, devoted himself to hunting for scandal and gossip," until it became a monomania and caused him "to show complete disloyalty to the country he represented."

MR. ROOSEVELT devotes a considerable portion of his statement to an effort to show that Mr. Bowen sought to reflect on Secretary of State Hay in some of his letters. And it would seem that he also brought Bowen to account on a sort of lese majeste charge by emphasizing the fact that in a letter to Secretary Taft Mr. Bowen addressed the secretary of war as "My dear Bill." He seems to be thoroughly incensed because Mr. Bowen furnished his charges against Mr. Loomis, and some of the documents thereto, to representatives of a New York newspaper, and says that the testimony shows that newspaper correspondents were shown many official letters bearing on the controversy. Mr. Bowen is charged by the president as having "instigated and requested and actually secured the publication of an attack upon the assistant secretary of state, and furnished to the press copies of documents believed to reflect upon the assistant secretary of state, which documents were already before the secretary of state for investigation." He says that these attacks by Bowen upon his official chief were made "in a furtive and underhand manner," and that "such conduct is inexcusable and shows Mr. Bowen's entire unfitness to remain in the diplomatic service without regard to whether the charges he has made against Mr. Loomis are true or false."

BUT MR. ROOSEVELT gives Mr. Loomis a clean bill, and says that Secretary Taft's investigation shows these charges to be false. The president further charges Mr. Bowen with having sought to secure from the cable operator at La Guayra incriminating telegrams against Mr. Loomis. The president says: "Mr. Bowen has been a long time in the consular and diplomatic service. During much of that time he has done good work, and until recently I had hoped to promote him. If I could condone his misconduct in this case I would gladly do so, but his usefulness in the diplomatic service is at an end. I do not desire to punish him. Save for the great risk to the service which would be involved in his retention I would be willing to let his conduct go unpunished, save by a severe admonition, but I feel that it is impossible to retain him without exposing the interests of the government to a risk so great that it can not justifiably be incurred."

MR. BOWEN is evidently determined not to tamely submit to the president's castigation. On June 21 he made public a statement replying to Mr. Roosevelt's letter of dismissal. Bowen declares that "the Venezuela scandal constitutes a national disgrace." He says that soon after he called the matter to the attention of the department of state he received a cable offer from Washington of diplomatic promotion that would remove him from Caracas. He declares that he regarded the offer as an attempt to bribe him, veiled under the offer of a higher position and inspired by Mr. Loomis, and he insists that the recent departmental inquiry should not prevent "an open, impartial, fearless and thorough investigation into all the facts."

MR. BOWEN says that when he went to Venezuela in 1901 as Loomis' successor he heard many rumors seriously affecting Loomis' integrity. It was charged that Loomis while minister used his public position to fill his private purse by obtaining interests in concessions and various claims against the Venezuela government. He was also charged with having been in the pay of the Bermudez Asphalt company, and to have made use of his position to give color to the belief that the United States government was on the side of that company in its controversy with Venezuela. He says that he forwarded certain important documents left in the legation by his predecessor to the state department and that he received a letter from Secretary Hay acknowledging receipt of these documents and saying, "I have been greatly surprised and pained in reading the documents you sent me."

BOWEN DENIES that he had any part in instigating these charges. He says that he is not responsible for Mr. Loomis' "unsavory reputation in Caracas" nor for the circulation of scandalous reports about him. He says he believes Mr. Loomis to be a dishonest man and transmitted to the state department the documents which in Mr. Bowen's opinion established Mr. Loomis' dishonesty simply because he considered that to be his duty to the United States government. He denies that he attempted to steal or otherwise improperly procure any information. He says that he made use of confidential agents and consular officers only in Venezuela for the accumulation of the facts, and that the state department on at least two occasions provided money with which to procure secret information.

MR. BOWEN gives the text of an interesting letter which was among the papers he found in the legation archives. This letter is signed by Assistant Secretary of State Loomis, then minister to Venezuela, and is addressed to W. R. Russel and says: "Dear Sir: In reference to the presentation of Mr. Mercado's claim, which I bought, I want to state that the only terms of settlement which I accept other than a full cash payment of about 30,400 bolivars in gold are the following: I will accept 20,000 bolivars in gold, and 10,400 bolivars in salt bonds at the rate of

82 per cent, or 5 per cent below the quoted market rate, provided it does not go below 80 per cent. Very truly,  
"F. B. LOOMIS."

MR. BOWEN draws particular attention to the words, "which I bought," in this letter. He also gives the text of a letter from Charles R. Mayers, and addressed to Francis B. Loomis, which letter refers to services rendered by Mr. Loomis in securing and contracting for furnishing a loan to Venezuela. Mr. Bowen concludes his statement in these words: "Mr. Loomis explains that if this contract, which was to give a million and a quarter, had gone through he intended to resign. The conduct of this man who, as American minister was willing to participate in such transactions as the foregoing, is considered by his official superior as merely 'indiscreet' and he is retained in the public service. My personal feeling and fortune are of light interest to the public. But it does concern the whole country that its diplomatic representatives abroad should be men of clean character and unsullied reputation, and every American citizen should be especially concerned when a man, who as minister to a foreign state, has been the cause of grave scandals affecting his personal integrity and the honor of his government, is promoted to the high office of first assistant secretary of state and controls very important negotiations with the very government at whose capital he caused the scandals and gained a tainted reputation."

AS AN ILLUSTRATION of the best "defense" that can be made for Loomis an editorial appearing in the Lincoln (Nebraska) Journal, a republican paper, is interesting. While the Journal says that everybody is gratified because the "charges of actual wrong-doing, specific or implied, have been shown to be without fact," it is unfortunate that "they were not shown to be without foundation." This republican paper says: "In short, Mr. Loomis had paved the way to the commonest variety of political graft. For 'participating in enterprises in furthering which he might, and did find, his position useful,' August W. Machen stands convicted of crime, Congressman Littauer of New York is besmirched, two United States senators are under indictment, and numberless state and county and city officials are in prison or in disgrace. The practice of using a public office as a sort of inside track for the promotion of its private money making enterprises has thrown the United States senate under suspicion, and has been the mainspring of all the corrupt political machines with which the country has been cursed. It is evident that the country needs a race of office holders who will perform their duties from a sense of honor and patriotism, content with their salaries and an approving conscience for their reward. It is to be hoped that the insistence upon this ideal which Secretary Taft demands of our diplomatic representatives may be extended to all public officers at home and abroad. If any are inconvenienced at this, on account of their inability to live on their legal salaries, it is entirely possible that good men can be found to take their places whose wants are simpler and expenses less. At all events, some such reform is essential to making public office a public trust, and not a private snap. The case of Mr. Loomis is a fortunate illustration of our need to be warned in this respect." At last accounts Mr. Loomis had not been required to sever his connection with the state department.

MR. ROOSEVELT'S statement with respect to Secretary of the Navy Morton, like his letter dismissing Minister Bowen, has attracted widespread attention. Some of the correspondence between Attorney General Moody and Messrs. Harmon and Judson, the attorneys charged to investigate the Santa Fe rebate affair, is printed. Harmon and Judson reported that the Santa Fe had persistently violated the law and recommended that the railroad company and its principal officers and agents, perhaps including some subordinate officers and agents, be arraigned for contempt of court in making and carrying out the rebate agreements referred to. Attorney General