

GEORGE W. VROMAN VETERAN UNION PACIFIC ENGINEER

Forty Years of Life in a Locomotive Cab, the Record of a Man Who Is Still Active and Vigorous Enough to Take Part in Life Despite the Pension Granted Him.

FOR forty years George W. Vroman has sat daily in the cab of a Union Pacific locomotive, and for five years previous with the Wabash, with his unflinching hand upon the throttle of the mighty steed of steam and has guided it safely over millions of miles of track; for forty-five years George W. Vroman has sat in the cab of the engine of progress with his mental eye upon the gauge which shows the standing of his fellow-engineers. In plain prose and without frills or metaphor, he has daily had an eye on the welfare of his fellow-workmen and has been a leader in their councils and their representative in the councils with their superior officers, always on the lookout to see that better wages and better hours were given the men to whose charge are daily entrusted thousands of lives as they speed over the steel rails at lightning speed.

George W. Vroman, who has recently been retired by the Union Pacific on a pension which is said to be sufficient to keep him the remainder of his life, was born in the town of Fitchburg, Dane county, Wisconsin, September 27, 1841. Fitchburg is near the capital at Madison, and here he lived until he became of age. In 1857 he attended Albion academy for a year, and in 1859 went to the University of Wisconsin, where he remained for two years, until circumstances compelled him to quit college before completing his full college course, and to go out into the world to earn his own way through life.

When he had reached his majority he went to Lafayette, Ind., where he entered the service of the Wabash railroad as a fireman, in December, 1861. For two years he shoveled coal into the iron monster, and was then promoted to be an engineer. In the fall of that year he was given charge of the roundhouse at State Line, between Indiana and Illinois, which position he held for a year, when he again resumed road service until January, 1869. At that time he resigned and came west to seek a position on the new Union Pacific railroad, which was just completed between Omaha and the west. On January 26, 1869, he went to work for the Overland route, running a freight engine between North Platte and Sidney until 1872, when he was promoted to a regular passenger run. He made his home in North Platte and from that time until a few weeks ago, when he was retired, he has been in continuous service of the Union Pacific railroad.

Brought His Bride Along

The country was wild and full of bandits and Indians when Mr. Vroman moved to the west, but he decided that he would ask Mary E. Jordan of Indianapolis to share his fortunes with him in the new country, so on November 1, 1872, they were married at Indianapolis, and to this union seven children have been born. One died in infancy, but six still survive, four boys and two girls. They are Blanch M., Clarence J., Walter J., Arby T., Ralph W. and Clarence W.

Ever on the alert to do something for the betterment of his fellow-employees, Mr. Vroman, at Laramie, in April, 1877, organized the first general committee of adjustment, and was elected to the office of general chairman, which position he held continuously, except for one term of two years, until the close of 1906. This committee has been of immense value to the engineers, not only of the Union Pacific, but of the entire country, and has not only succeeded in heading off several contemplated reductions on the part of the managers, but has also been instrumental in securing several raises in pay and a general shortening of hours.

One special case where quick action on the part of this committee headed off a reduction came shortly after the committee was formed. On June 26, 1877, two months after the committee was organized, an order was posted along the line of the Union Pacific making a reduction of from 5 to 10 per cent on all employees, effective July 1, thus giving but twelve hours' notice. A hurried call for a meeting of the general committee of adjustment was made for Omaha, where, after a short conference with the officials, they succeeded in having the order rescinded. This prompt action on the part of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers in meeting this emergency proved beneficial to all employees of the road, for the cut was not made in any department.

Acting under the advice of George Vroman the engineers of the Union Pacific, in March, 1885, formulated their first regular schedule of pay and conditions under which they were to work. This agreement was made with the company, but the firemen were not represented. By recommendation of Mr. Vroman they were carried along and received proportional benefits. Just before the schedule was made the Kansas Central was taken into the Union Pacific system. Here the engineers were paid very low wages, but the schedule of the main line was made to apply to them, and they were brought up to the standard pay.

Busy Days for Vroman

The Kansas Central was segregated from the Union Pacific system in March, 1888, and alleged to be under separate management under W. H. Baldwin, Jr., whose father was one of the directors of the Union Pacific system. Before he had had time to warm his official chair Mr. Baldwin proposed a reduction of wages of engineers and firemen, to take effect April 1. The engineers and firemen held a conference with Mr. Baldwin, asking for a restoration of the wages in accordance with the schedule, but he declined to make any concessions. The engineers called upon General Chairman Vroman, who met Mr. Baldwin at Leavenworth, Kan., and after a very short conference Mr. Baldwin offered to restore about one-half the reduction. Mr. Vroman simply said that he could not vary from the schedule without the sanction of the general committee of adjustment and would take the case up with General Manager Thomas L. Kimball at Omaha. The general committee met in Omaha, and, after a conference with Mr. Kimball lasting several days, it was proposed to have the question arbitrated. Captain Rustin, who at that time was general manager of the Omaha Cable company, operating cars in Omaha, was selected by Mr. Kimball and Mr. Vroman as arbitrator.

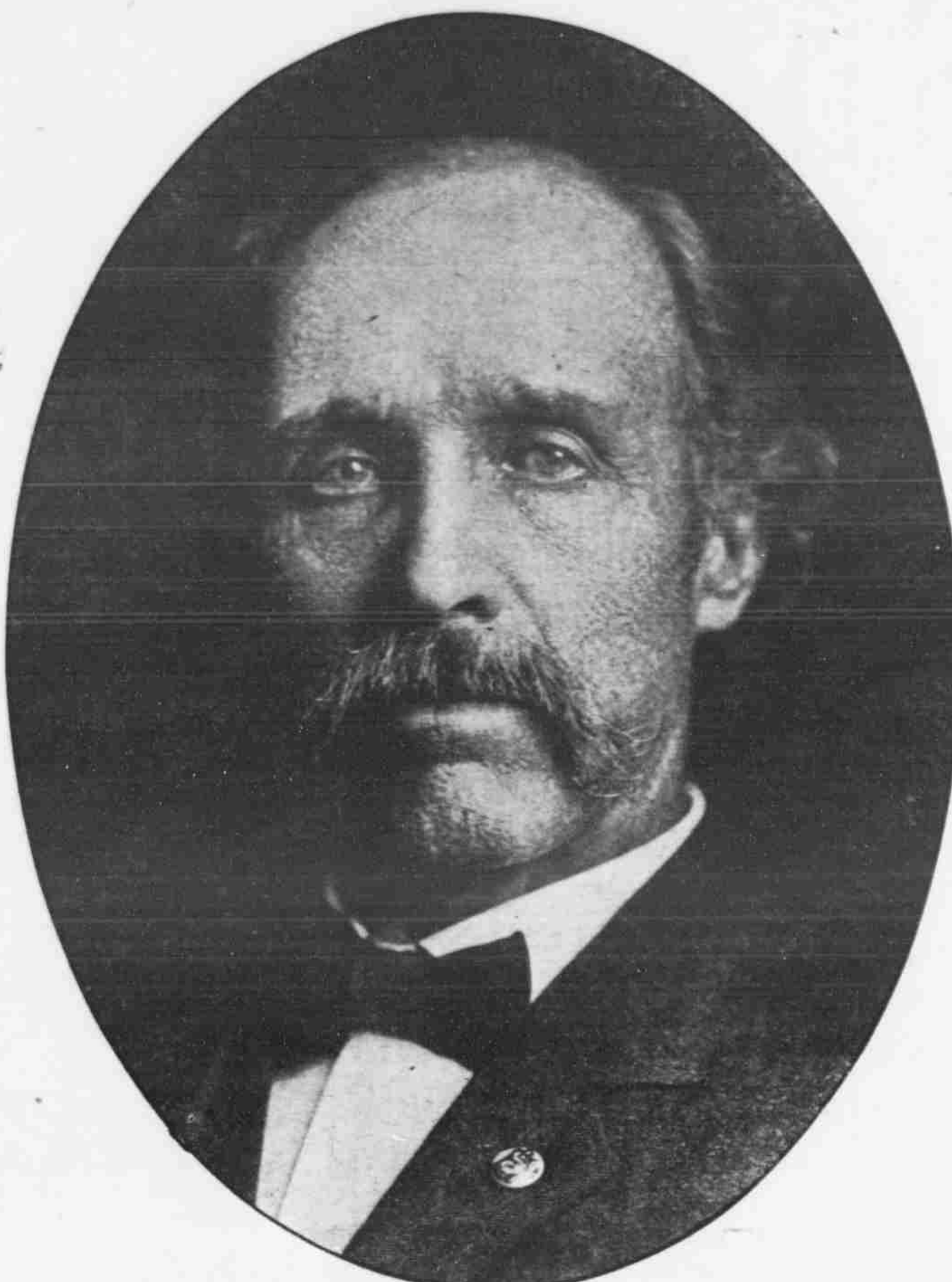
On June 16, at the Millard hotel, Mr. Vroman and General Manager Kimball presented their documentary evidence and made their oral arguments before the arbitrator, who on the following day rendered his decision in favor of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers, restoring the wages of the men on the Kansas Central railroad.

This arbitration has gone down in history as a notable event and was considered a remarkable victory for organized labor because it was the first case on record of a difference between railroad employees and railroad officials being adjusted by arbitration. It is more common now, but it was considered a notable concession at that time, as it had no precedent in history.

Another Great Victory

Another notable victory was won for organized labor a few years later through the efforts of Mr. Vroman. During the years of 1888 and 1889, through the acquisition of contiguous lines, the Union Pacific had a mileage of 8,000 miles, and the men and officials were moving along swimmingly through these prosperous years until October, 1892, when the panic caused the system to pass into the hands of receivers. In February, 1894, the receivers petitioned the United States court for the district of Nebraska, proposing new schedules and making a reduction on all labor, both organized and unorganized. George W. Vroman had been made general chairman of the board of chairmen, representing all organized labor on the system, and he called a meeting of the general chairmen at Denver immediately on hearing of the application. They formulated an answer to the receivers' petition, which they filed, and were given a hearing before United States Judges Hallett and Riner, for Colorado and Wyoming. They won their case and the receivers took an appeal to the United States court of appeals at St. Louis, before Judge H. C. Caldwell. The receivers were ordered to a hearing early in April in Omaha in the United States court, before Judge Caldwell, with Judge Riner sitting with him.

Organized labor all over the country was interested in the case



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and leading officials of all the principal organizations were present at the hearing. The court room was crowded to its fullest capacity and all were intensely interested in the every act of the court and the evidence of the witnesses.

The next morning, April 5, Judge Caldwell ordered that the receivers should conduct the business of the road under the old schedule of pay, in accordance with the desires of the employees. The case was notable from the fact that organized labor had reached the jurisdiction of the highest court ever reached in the history of organized labor. The press of the entire country took up the case and it was commented on as a precedent as to the rights of labor serving under the jurisdiction of a United States court and under receivers.

No further friction was had for some time, as everything moved along quite well until the company began to procure motive power of greater capacity. Mr. Vroman and the general committee again

got busy and succeeded in having an increased compensation allowed for running engines of greater capacity and handling greater tonnage per train, but with greater profit to the company.

P. M. Arthur, grand chief engineer of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers, was for years considered to be one of the most able and conservative labor leaders this country ever produced. In every convention of that organization, held during his incumbency, he had no opposing candidate except once. On that occasion the name of George W. Vroman was presented, and he received 122 votes, and it was to be seen that with a little electioneering he would have been elected to the office and given the title of grand chief engineer. This shows the immense popularity of the man who has always been willing and ready to go to the front for his fellow-men. He had no fear of the money powers and was always fighting for the rights of labor.

Mr. Vroman left the throttle long enough at one time to take the position of mechanical foreman of the Union Pacific shops at North Platte, but was soon induced to take up the cause of the engineers as the general chairman of the board of adjustment. While in this position he held not only the esteem of all the employees, but was considered by the officials as broad minded, conservative and able, and to him to a great extent must be attributed the comprehensive schedules of the Union Pacific railroad and the exceedingly harmonious relations that have always existed between the road and its employees in the engine and train service. General Manager Moller was once heard to say that only the loyalty of his trainmen could put such a large volume of business over the crowded rails, and it is such men as George W. Vroman who tend to produce this harmony which works to the welfare of all.

One Plan That Died

At one time Mr. Vroman conceived the idea that it would be a fine thing to build a railroad in which the railroad employees of the country could invest their savings. He figured that there were then 1,000,000 railroad employees, and that if each would invest \$10 a road could be built from San Diego to Salt Lake, following practically the same line as the new San Pedro line follows. His idea was to build a line without bonded indebtedness, having the men pay for their shares on the installment plan. Associated with Mr. Vroman in this scheme was U. S. Grant, Jr. The road was planned at the wrong time, as the financial troubles of 1893 and 1894 blocked the plan.

In October, 1896, the Union Pacific put on the fast Chicago-Denver special and east-bound from Julesburg to North Platte the eighty-one miles was scheduled at fifty-four miles an hour, the fastest schedule west of New York at that time. Engineer Vroman was selected to run that train, and for nearly five months averaged fifty-seven miles per hour, and many nights when the train was late made the run of eighty-one miles in from twenty-three to thirty-one minutes, and had no delays on his account. The class of the engines at that time did not have the large driving wheels—sixty-nine inches being the largest at that time, while now they have engines on the run with wheels eighty-one inches in diameter, or nearly seven feet.

Of thrilling experiences Mr. Vroman has had his share, as one may well imagine when it is considered that for forty years he drove his engine over the plains from North Platte to Sidney. He could write a volume of his narrow escapes, but the most thrilling was the Big Springs train robber on September 18, 1877. Mr. Vroman was engineer on the Overland express that night when the train was stopped by robbers, one of whom shot at the engineer from the water tank, but fortunately he escaped injury. The robbers secured \$55,000 from the express car and from the passengers, but did not attempt to rob the mail, which contained many thousand dollars more in registered packages.

Chase for Robbers

The story of the chase of these robbers is most thrilling. Joel Collins was nearby with a bunch of cattle he and his men had driven from Texas. They appeared on the scene and offered their services to search for the robbers. D. E. Leach, telegraph operator at Ogallala, went to Collins' camp and there saw some circles which had been cut from handkerchiefs to make masks. He came back that night and saw Collins and his men dividing the swag. Collins was recognized in the depot at Buffalo Park, where the station agent saw him reading a letter. The sheriff was notified, but he let Collins go. Afterwards the sheriff changed his mind and went after him. When they met Collins and his companion were killed. Tied in the legs of old overalls was found \$20,000 of the money in gold. The weight of this had hindered the men in their escape. The rest of the gang was zealously followed and all were either killed or captured with the exception of Sam Bass, who made his escape, although wounded.

Engineer Vroman is at present retired from active service and resides with his family at North Platte, the next door neighbor to Colonel W. F. Cody, with whom he has been intimate for the last thirty years. One of Colonel Cody's sisters married a locomotive engineer, Ed Bradford, at North Platte.

Although retired, Mr. Vroman is a very active man and is probably the best known locomotive engineer in the United States, his prominence for many years in the councils of the grand conventions having given him a wide acquaintance and a reputation which has extended over the entire field of organized labor. His broad knowledge of all branches of railroad business has made him a most valuable man in all conferences which he has attended and today his advice is sought by railroad men because of his broad experience.

Hayti's Strange Ruler Unlike Any Other Potentate

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Hayti, May 10.—Possibly somewhere in the jungles of Africa, or perhaps in the mystic east, or on the planet Mars, there is a president, potentate, shah, rajah, sultan or some other sort of ruler who is as strange and grotesquely impossible as President Nord Alexis of Hayti, but certainly there is none to compare in the Western Hemisphere. Castro of Venezuela, that "monkey of the Andes," comes close, perhaps, but Castro's style differs, and, while he defies the great powers of the earth, he does not approach in pure picturesqueness the venerable old man who sits in the presidential palace here and runs this little black republic to suit himself.

Imagine a typical Ethiopian between 90 and 100 years of age, bloodthirsty and apparently only half civilized, a dealer of death to political enemies, a believer in the horrible voodooism, and you have just a faint idea of what he really is. For anything more one must come to Hayti and see for himself.

For 105 years the country has been under the same sort of rule as now. The natives gained their independence from the French, and since that time the history of the country has been one of strife and blood.

Shut off from all the rest of the world, it has gone on a downward path, until now it seems that nothing can save it from utter ruin except intervention by the powers. No steps have recently been taken toward saving what is left and building upon it. The government robs the people, and the people, thoroughly accustomed to this procedure, don't seem to care much.

Alexis rules with a hand of iron. Some day a revolution against him will doubtless be successful, if he lives until another may be organized, but for the present his will is law. A personal or political enemy is dealt with summarily and harshly.

The shooting of twenty-seven alleged conspirators on March 15 by order of Alexis is the most recent example of his way of ruling, yet as time passes and the perspective is larger that slaughter will be but a mere detail in the history of his regime, perhaps one of the worst details, but no very much worse than many other things which have been done and others which will be done, no doubt, unless foreigners take charge. The character of Alexis is easily accounted for.

His father was a so-called prince of Cape Haytian, the northernmost part of the country. Alexis the elder held a high position in the household of Emperor Henry Christophe, a barbarian, who left behind him when he committed suicide in 1820 a horrible trail of blood and deeds which native historians pass over as "many unfortunate acts."

The ideas of Christophe were handed down to Alexis, himself a page to the emperor. A mighty and brutal man was Christophe, whose history as told here is scarcely believable. Once Christophe doubted the loyalty of the chief of police of Port-au-Prince, and thereupon he asked this officer if he were really loyal. The chief naturally enough said he was, whereupon Christophe told him to prove it by bringing the heads of his (the police chief's) wife and daughter, which the chief did, and Christophe was convinced of his love and support.

At another time Christophe became enraged with the French and issued a decree that thereafter the official language would be English, and that if after twenty-four hours anyone spoke French in his presence he would be executed. To complete the transformation he changed his own name to Henry and has since been known as Christophe, and sometimes as Henri Christophe.

The traditions of Christophe which have been handed down from the last century deal with nothing save bloodshed and the atrocities he committed. His own death was violent and somewhat heroic.

In 1820 he was stricken with paralysis, whereupon his political enemies started a revolution. He swore to cure himself of his ailment and attempted to do so with a bath in a solution of herbs and peppers. It gave him momentary relief, enough to permit him to mount his horse and start for the front.

The paralysis quickly took hold again and Christophe was carried back to his bed. His soldiers went forth to battle with the rebels, Christophe directing the campaign.

Then came the news of desertions from the government ranks and the revolution was thus made successful. When the king received this information he shot himself through the heart. It is doubtful if anyone mourned the loss.

Having been imbued with this sort of rule, it is perhaps not surprising that Alexis is the man he

is, although more than four-score years have gone by since Alexis used to wait upon Emperor Christophe. Alexis came into the presidency in 1902 by force, as have all presidents of Hayti. He had made other efforts in previous years, but had never been successful.

They say now that he desires to remain president until he dies, and that he also has an ambition to proclaim himself emperor, but this latter ambition will doubtless be put aside until the present difficulties have been put out of the way.

Were it not for the earnestness displayed the whole situation would seem absurdly impossible. It is useless to call it opera bouffe, for from that point of view it is even more. The most picturesque part of life here is the army with its scores of generals and all. It is extremely funny to a foreigner, but the soldiers themselves take it most seriously.

President Alexis on a Sunday morning granted an interview to the correspondent of The Bee. The audience was given in a reception room of the presidential residence.

This executive mansion lies in the southern part of the city. It is built of brick and wood, two stories in height and, strange to say, is painted a slate color, with a dark and modest roof. The building itself is surrounded by a compound enclosed in an iron fence with another surrounding that, thus affording two lines of protection.

On the east and north of the executive reservation lies the vast Champ de Mars. In the center of which is a huge statue of Deschamps, who exterminated the whites in 1803. The Champ de Mars is like unto nothing else than a bit of pasture land, where a flock of sheep and many goats are constantly grazing. There are no drives or roadways; the native carriages drive anywhere in the reservation and thus a network of roads, or trails, has marked impossibly what could easily be made an attractive spot.

On this Sunday morning there was a review of soldiers within the palace grounds. This the foreigners did not see, possibly because the soldiers were not in good form, or possibly because no one thought about extending them an invitation.

The entrance to the grounds is through a large gateway, a passage on each side for pedestrians

and a larger one in the center for horses and vehicles. Half clad soldiers filled the street outside and the compound within.

The uniform—perhaps too dignified a word—of the private, who is a soldier only occasionally and a street laborer at all other times, consists of a sort of blouse, trousers tattered and torn and a dilapidated hat. The invariably wretched condition of the hats was surprising. No one ranking under the grade of colonel seemed to have need for shoes.

The officers of higher rank were uniformed brilliantly, but no two were alike. It seemed that each officer must have concocted his own dress. Sometimes there were brilliant scarlet breeches with a purple stripe, sometimes the order was reversed and another dash of color given by a green coat with a vast amount of gold lace. There was a marvelous variety of hats, the cockades with worn aigrettes resembling nothing more than a moth-eaten feather duster.

There was a pause in our progress at the gateway and a general—he must have been that at least—was called. He gave the sign and, after standing aside to permit the exit of half a dozen privates, we were permitted to enter by the sentry.

This individual sat on a boxlike chair at one side of the gate. He had in his possession a long rifle, a chapepot of the type turned out about '70, with a bayonet. The butt of the gun rested between his bare heels as he sat on the box; the point of the bayonet supported the gun against the upright part of the gate, thus making the opposite side of a barrier. To permit passage the energetic sentinel lazily reached down and lifted the gun toward him; then, after the party had passed through, he let it drop back into place.

The broad driveway was guarded by a number of soldiers and a small brass cannon, a Napoleon. The general smell of the place was neutralized a bit by sweet perfume from the rose gardens on either side. President Alexis is a great lover of flowers, we were told.

The doors of the palace were three, each with a chapepot leaning diagonally across, as at the other gate, with a dark sentinel to watch it. A highly-colored—both in uniform and otherwise—officer nodded toward a sentinel and the party went through.