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PRESIDENTS ARE ONLY HUMAN

Memoirs of a Policeman in the White House

EVERYBODY should know that kings and presidents are only human beings, but it is sometimes good for us to be reminded of the fact. Nobody should have any doubt about the humanity of four presidents of the United States this century after reading these excerpts from a new autobiography, "Starling of the White House," published in America by Simon and Schuster. For almost 30 years, from 1914 to 1943, Colonel Edward W. Starling was the personal bodyguard for five U.S. presidents. Head of the White House Secret Service Detail, Starling was the faithful shadow of Wilson, Harding, Coolidge, Hoover, and Roosevelt. His descriptions of them as just plain people give fascination to his memoirs, which were published posthumously, Starling having died two years ago.

OF WILSON

WHEN spring came, our boss (he was then 58) was in love. He was courting a handsome widow, Mrs. Edith Bolling Galt, who lived at 1308 Twentieth Street.

"She's a looker," Pat McKenna, the doorkeeper, told me.

"He's a goner," said Brooks, the valet, who was our barometer for Presidential moods.



THE wedding took place on December 18, at eight o'clock in the evening . . . We ran into the siding at Hot Springs about seven o'clock the next morning. Soon after we stopped I went

back to the private car. I entered quietly and walked down the corridor flanking the bedrooms. Suddenly my ear caught the notes of a familiar melody. Emerging into the sitting room I saw a figure in top hat, tailcoat, and grey morning trousers, standing with his back to me, hands in his pockets, happily dancing a jig. As I watched him he clicked his heels in the air, and from whistling the tune he changed to singing the words, "Oh, you beautiful doll! You great big beautiful doll . . ."

MRS. WILSON looked down at her feet. "I have a lace untied," she said. She looked at me expectantly. Immediately I dropped to one knee.

"May I tie it for you?" I said.

She rested her foot on my trouser leg, raising the skirt of her handsomely-tailored suit at the same time, to reveal a shapely ankle.

"Thank you," she said.

I tensed my shoulder to keep my hands from shaking. Remember, this was twenty-five years ago. When I set her foot back on the ground she said, "You make a very neat bow." Then she looked beyond me and smiled.

The President was standing by the car, staring straight ahead, his nose pointing and his jaws working — tell-tale signs of his anger. Quietly I went to the Secret Service car. He didn't speak to me for two weeks.

OF HARDING

WARREN GAMALIEL

HARDING was a handsome man, friendly and cordial, with sympathetic and gentle eyes. His mouth was weak, and I noticed that he had a "high stomach" — his paunch sat way up, crowding his breastbone. It was several days before I met Mrs. Harding, who was eight years her husband's senior. She seemed well groomed, neatly dressed and highly marcelled when in public. She had a determined mouth, but her eyes lacked decision. They reflected ambition, but they had a clouded, puzzled look, rather than the clear brightness which is associated with an active and logical mentality. Like her husband, she appeared to be in excellent health, but in the way which such news has of getting around we soon were informed that she had only one kidney. The President called her The Duchess, and showed her deference in every way, as did his friends.



I ASKED George B. Christian, his secretary, what exercise the President took, and what sports he enjoyed.

"He loves to play golf," Christian said, "and if he can get into the low nineties he's tickled to death. He enjoys any sport so long as it is not brutal or painful to the players.

"He loathes prize-fighting, for instance, and hunting. He is sensitive to the infliction of pain on anybody or anything."

This was my first insight into the character of a man who could not bear to believe that there was evil in any man, or selfishness behind any plea for help. To the boys at the Press Club he said, "It is a good thing I am not a woman. I cannot say 'no.'"

He chewed tobacco a great deal, and I wondered at the time whether this might not be the source of some of his digestive disturbances. He smoked, too, but I have seen him tear open a cigarette and empty it into his mouth when he was nervous and wanted a chew. Considering the opinion in which most people hold the habit of chewing tobacco, I wonder how President Harding ever



COL. STARLING (right) and CALVIN COOLIDGE
The President measured the sandwiches

got the reputation of being a ladies' man. He wasn't, of course, but the legends about him would make Casanova blush.

On evenings when he did not play poker or go to dinner he liked to attend the theatre. Sitting in the box with him, I could not help contrasting his manners with those of President Wilson. Between the acts of George M. Cohan's *Mary* I saw him put his programme to his mouth and from behind it call out to an old crony in the audience. "Hey, John," he said in a stage whisper, "how do you like the girls?"

OF COOLIDGE

ON awakening in the morning he would walk across the upstairs hallway to the Lincoln Room in his long nightgown and slippers. There he would peek out the window to see whether I was on the lawn. I stood there each morning taking my setting up exercises while waiting for him. If he did not see me he would have Brooks telephone downstairs to ask if I were in the building.

When he was satisfied that I was waiting, he would dress and come downstairs. Sometimes he would tell the elevator operator to take him to the basement. Then he would try to sneak out the east or the west entrance, just to fool me. Everyone on the staff co-operated with me and tipped me off, so I was always able to catch him. One day I turned the tables on him and hid in the police box on the east side. He came out of the engine room, up the east steps, and passed right by me. I

