PORTRAIT OF A FOREIGN CORRESPONDENT

(A "Listener" Interview)

IN a certain film (recently seen in New Zealand) dealing with the adventures of a newspaper correspondent in Europe, the owner of an American paper was shown tearing his hair at the ineptitude of his highly-paid special writers in London and Paris. Finally he summons one of his hack police reporters. "What are your views on the crisis in Europe?" he asks. "What crisis?" asks the reporter, and his delighted boss makes him a foreign correspondent on the spot.

With a reminiscent twinkle, Hallett E. Abend confesses that the story isn't as improbable as it may sound, and that even stranger things have been known to happen in the American newspaper world. Mr. Abend — emphasis on the "-bend" — is the famous Far Eastern correspondent of *The New York Times* who paid a flying visit to New Zealand the other day, and when it comes to the life and adventures of a foreign correspondent, he knows what he is talking about, for he has been one for 16 years.

You get the impression from Mr. Abend that there is nothing spectacular about his job, and that if you pumped him you could probably collect enough material for a "Foreign Correspondent Debunks Foreign Correspondents" story. He looks about 50 years of age, and everything about him is quiet and restrained except his bright, two-toned brown and white shoes. He is of medium height, well built, has short, curly grey hair, smokes Camel cigarettes one after the other through a long ivory holder, and collects Chinese paintings and antiques.

His newspaper career has not been sensational, he says. He went to Stanford University and has been in newspaper work ever since—that is to say, apart from a short spell in Hollywood during the silent days. His Hollywood experiences are important. But for them, he wouldn't have been the expert on the Far East that he is to-day. He was city editor of *The Los Angeles Times* when he received an invitation from the Talmadge sisters to join their independent producing unit and write film captions.

Those were the days, you may remember, when the boys who wrote the captions helped things along with such stirring proclamations as "Came the Dawn," "And Another Day Broke," or merely "Later that Night." Mr. Abend doesn't boast of having written anything so original as "Came the Dawn"; all the same he maintains that writing captions wasn't as simple as it sounds.

Hollywood, he recalls with a sigh, got him down. He stood just eighteen months of it, and then he quit—in spite of the big money which everybody was making; in spite of the real estate advertisements which proclaimed that mushrooming Hollywood was the Land of Promise.

He quit; and he got as far away from Hollywood as he could. He took a single steamship fare to China.

Quite unknown to the rest of the world, big things were cooking up in China as far back as 1926. Chiang Kai-Shek's star was on the ascendant; that of Borodin, mystery man of the Kremlin, was still bright. At Canton, the first day he arrived, Mr. Abend saw Soviet munitions of war pouring into China in a steady stream. Mr. Abend's trained nose smelled big stories. Chiang Kai-Shek, it told him, was the man to watch.

AS HOLLYWOOD SEES HIM: Joel McCrea and Robert Benchley in a scene from the United Artists' film "Foreign Correspondent." And, says Hallett Abend in the interview on this page, strange things really do happen in the American newspaper world

HALLETT E. ABEND
Hollywood got him down

He Had China To Himself

As yet, few people outside China had any suspicion that the vast country was stirring uneasily in its sleep, and the only other American newspaper correspondent in that part of the world was an Associated Press man at Shanghai. "It was a bonanza," says Mr. Abend. For six years he wandered up and down China chasing civil wars, watching Chiang Kai-Shek's star rise, Borodin's decline. In 1932 he covered the fighting in Shanghai, and during the last four years he has been a ringside spectator at the Japanese invasion proper.

In his spare time he collected Chinese paintings and jade and any other curios and antiques he could get his hand on. Also a Scotch terrier and a dachshund, which he admits is an unfortunate combination. His collection of antiques, now stored at his home in Alexandria, Virginia, took an expert from the New York Metropolitan Museum three days to sort, check, and value. Besides being a hobby it's a good investment, he points out. Personally he'd sooner have a Ming vase than twice its value in stocks which may tumble at the slightest breath of cold air down Wall Street.

An Eye To The Future

With an eye to the future, Mr. Abend has carefully weaned himself away from the day-to-day urgency of daily newspaper work, and now he writes more magazine and feature articles and sends fewer urgent cables. His present trip is primarily for *The Readers' Digest*, and when he gets back to America he hopes to find time to break the back of the first of four books he has contracted to write.

Composition doesn't worry him in the least once he has forced himself to settle down to it. He can plug away quite happily on his midget typewriter whether he's on flying boat, train, or in his hotel bedroom waiting for an appointment to have a drink with a politician. When the pressure is on he turns out an easy 1,200 words an hour—all day if need be. He admits, though, that there is danger in too great facility.

Wanted—A Chinese Cook

His ambition now is to settle down on a 168-acre dairy farm he recently bought himself in the State of Vermont, in the heart of the maple country on America's east coast, and chop wood and grow things and potter among his Chinese curios and write books and generally spend his remaining years in dignity and comfort.

And we mustn't forget his passion for Chinese cooking. Mr. Abend is preparing to dedicate his next book to anyone who can find him a good Chinese cook. They're scarce these days, and while good Chinese cooking is the best in the world, if it is bad it is execrable. Mr. Abend mentioned his need to Dr. Hu Shih, Chinese Ambassador in Washington, who regretted that he could not help him, but urbanely hoped that Mr. Abend would eventually find a good Chinese cook, because he, Dr. Hu Shih, would then bribe him into his own service.

THE ATLANTIC AGE

(Continued from previous page)

The free people of the Americas—Canadians and West Indians as well as New Yorkers and Argentines—are all vitally concerned to defend their own doorstep as well as to break the threat of an attack before it gets there. That is what they are helping us to do in Europe; and it is only logical for us to do the same for them on the American side of the Atlantic.

After all, the challenge in the world to-day is to the most American of all things — freedom and independence. It was not an American invention. If anyone can claim that honour, it is probably the Greeks, who have broken tyrannies before and will break them again. But it was a taste for independence, for living their own lives, which took thousands upon thousands of men overseas. If they wished to form fours and salute and conform with the established order, they could have stayed at home. But they preferred a larger way of life; and when their governments in Europe failed to find room for it, they broke away into the free nations of the New World. That is the biggest fact about the Americas, their independence. Each nation of the continent celebrates its Independence Day; and when they do, we can join with them and wish them luck. But they know, as well as we do, that there would not be many Independence Days under the New Order. The whole Atlantic world would be swung round and pointed in depressing discipline towards the East, towards the lands that never see the sea. That would be a denial of the whole history of the Americas; and because mankind does not march backwards, it will not happen. Our defence of the Atlantic world is a great chapter of American history as well as of our own. That is the significance of the war for the Americas and their position in the world to-day.