

# CHEEK - AND SOME LUCK:

## A Journalist Tracks Down Two Famous American Colleagues

EARLY last week "The Listener" discovered by accident that two famous American correspondents were in Wellington. But no one knew where they were or how they were to be found. We knew, however, that if they were not found and interviewed within an hour or two it would be too late. It WAS too late, as things turned out, to get a formal interview, but our representative found his men. Here, in his own words, is the reason why he got no further.

IT was pure cheek on my part and mischievous connivance on the part of a fellow journalist that got me the only press interview given by H. R. Knickerbocker (Chicago Sun) and Joseph C. Harsch (Christian Science



JOSEPH C. HARSCH  
He gave a big wink

Monitor) during their rushed visit to Wellington. I knew these two famous American foreign correspondents would be hard on the job themselves as soon as they set foot in New Zealand, and that they would be very difficult to get at, but I made up my mind I was going to see them all the same.

In the first place I did not know where they were, and no one I knew could tell me. So I went "on spec" to the reception counter of a certain hotel and without a blush I said: "Could I speak to Mr. Knickerbocker, please." "Yes, just a minute."

Dazed with surprise at locating him so easily, I found myself speaking to the great man himself in a moment.

"No. I'm terribly sorry. I'm in the middle of what's going to be a 5,000-word cable. I've never been so busy in my life. No, not even one minute. Terribly sorry."

In fact, this pleasant drawling voice really sounded sorry. So was I. I rang off.

Later I thought out plans for a second attempt. I wrote Mr. Knickerbocker a note, and in the afternoon, shortly before I knew the visitors were to leave, I gave the note to a hotel porter. Then I inquired for Mr. Harsch.

Sitting in the foyer, impatiently, I saw luggage carrying American labels. A typewriter came down in the lift. In a moment a message was given to me: "Would you go up to 510 please?"

So I made for 510, in the company of a porter who said he had to get some luggage from that room anyway. The door opened. We both walked in.

### "Help Me Pack!"

"Look, I've got to get out of here in five minutes. Help me pack, will you?" said Joseph C. Harsch, almost frantic. There was no beating about the bush. I began packing socks, dressing gown, coat, electrical fittings for a razor.

I picked up a mysterious looking oval gadget: "What on earth's this?"

"That's a clock. Now what did you want me to tell you?"

This was the first intimation I had had that Harsch knew I was a journalist.

"Well," I laughed, "I don't know whether you can tell me anything much at the moment! Where do these go? Do you want this docket, it won't be much use to you? As a matter of fact, I had meant to ask you if you had sent away anything about New Zealand and what you'd said. I'll take the typewriter. Maybe I could have a look at your cable before it goes?"

"Sure. You're welcome to anything in it as far as I'm concerned. Have I got everything? I tell you what; you see the Director of Publicity; he'll fix you up. You can have any of my stuff. I think that would go for Knick too."

Down we went in the lift, and then we looked over the luggage. At the counter Mr. Harsch tried to pay a big bill in a hurry, in dollars. I suggested that a traveller's cheque might be quicker. In a moment Mr. Knickerbocker came to the rescue and I saw him for the first time. If anybody asked me to describe him now, all I could say is that he is stouter than press photographs of him would indicate; that he has that pink complexion that sometimes goes with sandy red hair; that he wore a fawn crash hat; and there was a big brown scorch in the trouser-leg of his tweed suit where he might have been standing against a heater. As for Mr. Harsch, he is a smaller man, neat, slim, with that

sallow American complexion, and quick blue eyes; kind, and a good chap.

### The Getaway

"Knick" produced New Zealand pound notes and the bills were paid. Luggage began to move out. Important people closed in on my famous colleagues. I clung to Mr. Harsch's typewriter and coat, trusting they would get me through. No one but two famous journalists knew that I was myself a journalist. If some of the people there had known, I would have been removed. At the right moment, I whispered in Mr. Harsch's ear, "You get me into that car somehow." "We'll see," he promised.

The party moved out to the cars. Last farewells with important people, messages to other important people. The two Americans climbed into their car. I gave Mr. Harsch his things and looked longingly through the window. He made signs, the door opened, a Government official asked me: "Who are you?" I confessed. "Jump in then."

There was nowhere to sit. Mr. Knickerbocker, Mr. Harsch, and a very important official filled the rear seat. So I propped myself on the back of the front seat, my shoulders against the roof, my head bent down. We swirled away, and two harassed Americans began to worry about their luggage. Would the other car get it there safely? They fished permits and tickets from their pockets, and sighed with relief to find they had everything. I decided that the best way to get on with these two journalists, whose jobs I shall never covet, was to keep my mouth shut.

### A Pressman's Wink

I kept it shut, but every now and then I looked at Joseph C. Harsch, and he gave me a big wink. He knew what I was up to. He had been up to it once himself. He had discovered on arriving in this little country that he was news himself, that he didn't have to ask to get into places; people had to ask to get to him. And he thought it was fun.

Mr. Knickerbocker hadn't quite sized me up, though. I wondered if he knew what I was. So I asked him if he had got my note, which had been



H. R. KNICKERBOCKER  
Photographed with "a mighty impressive camera"

designed to make him consent to see me on his way out of Wellington. He had a lot of notes—he flourished a bundle—but he hadn't had time to read them yet, he said.

They heard about all the journalists who had very much wanted to meet them, but who had been told that it was impossible.

"Yes, I'm terribly sorry," said Mr. Knickerbocker. It was that same sincere Southern drawl I had heard on the telephone the same morning. This time I was able to look at Mr. Knickerbocker and see for myself. He really was terribly sorry.

"I would have taken you up in the Press Gallery to meet them all," the official said. "Maybe they could have found a drink for Mr. Harsch."

"But not for me, though. Oh no! These people have got the spot on us two, haven't they?" said Mr. Knickerbocker to Mr. Harsch.

The two Americans enthused about the kindnesses people had done them—"They really are marvellous people here." They requested that their gratitude should be conveyed to the ones who deserved it.

Suddenly Mr. Harsch remembered a funny incident, apropos of all the people who had wanted to get in touch with them.

"The police rang up. Yes, the police. They asked for Knickerbocker" (I would love to be able to represent on paper the delightful way in which only another American could pronounce that name).

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