HUMANISMS

Inner Lights on Lives and Whims of Personages in the Public Eye

By WILLIAM ATHERTON DU PUY

John Barton Payne, at present secretary of the interior, says that life rule number one is: "Don't take yourself too seriously." He is getting so used to changing from one assignment to another that he feels no restraint at all and goes right ahead and does as he pleases. He has become a connoisseur in the amusing circumstances that surround different positions.

When Mr. Payne first entered the Department of the Interior as the successor of Franklin K. Lane, for instance, he was met at the elevator by a most obsequious Negro messenger who bowed and retreated before his chief, distributing obeisance all along the corridor. As his journey progressed other venerable colored messengers arose from their posts and likewise took exercises good for the back muscles.

In the first two days of his incumbency this ceremony was repeated four or five times. Then the secretary pressed a button.

"What's the idea," he asked, "of all these salaaming functionaries scattered about?"

"They have always been here, sir," said the clerk. "They are an institution."

"Well," said Mr. Payne, "take them away and put them to some useful work."

* * *

Likewise, in the Interior Department, there was an age-long custom as to the operation of elevators. Mr. Payne marveled at the promptness with which he got a car when he wanted it. He got in and there were no stops until he reached the floor he desired. He began to notice that there might be other people on the elevator, but that they never wanted to stop eleswhere than at his floor.

He began to ask how it was that he got such marvelous elevator service. His clerk explained that there was an understanding among messengers and elevator men that the right of way belonged to the secretary. There were peculiar signals that indicated the approach of the great man. Receiving one of these an operator disregarded all other passengers and opened the throttle for a through trip. Whoever was aboard rode all the way.

Gradually these courtesies paid to the secretary came to be paid to bureau chiefs and even to division chiefs who had sufficiently established themselves in messenger and operator circles.

So it came to pass that a mere chemist in the Bureau of Mines might start to lunch, his car might be nearing his floor of exit when the secretary signal came. The lever would be thrown to the reverse, he would be hurried to the fourth floor, thence to the destination of the secretary. Again on his way, his journey might be interrupted by a bureau chief signal, then a division chief signal. He and a half dozen others with him might find their lunch hour all used up in riding up and down with dignitaries of the department.

Becoming aware of this situation John Barton Payne wrote an epistle in his own fair hand which forbade any elevator operator to operate any differently for one passenger than for another, which he duly signed and ordered posted in the cars.

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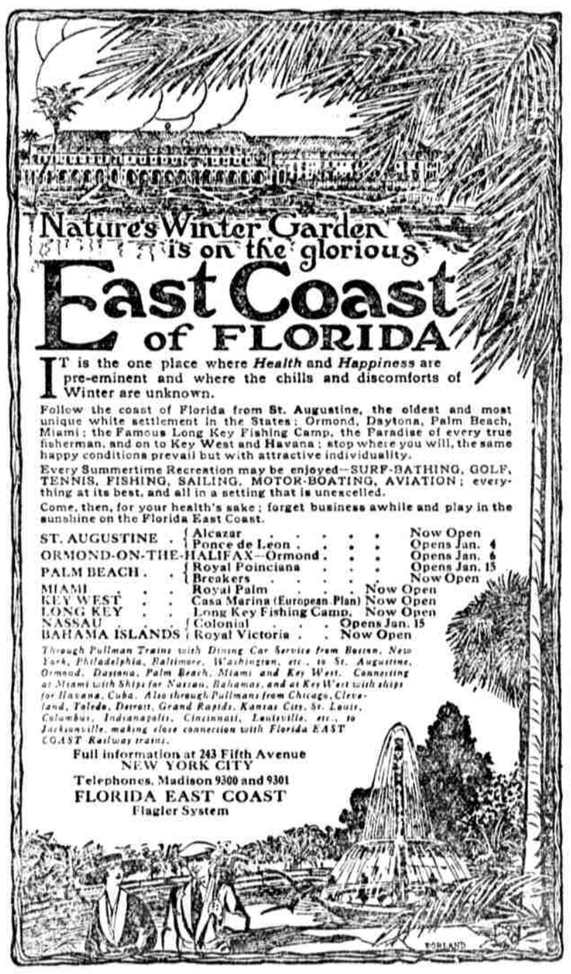

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