

## CORRESPONDENCE.

## WASHINGTON LETTER.

Washington, D. C., Dec. 16th, 1897.—Few people have any idea of the amount of work which devolves upon a member of Congress. The popular impression is of a pampered and idle individual, who is paid a fat salary for making a spectacular show of himself in the Congressional amphitheater, for saying aye and nay at his party's call, distributing a few seeds and documents, and perhaps delivering one or two spread-eagle speeches in course of a session. The salary attached, to say nothing of the perquisites, is considered by the masses as much more than equivalent for the services performed and many are of the opinion that the honor of the position, coupled with its influence in securing positions for friends and political adherents, is compensation enough, and that no salary should be required.

To be sure, the fortunate M. C. has honors showered upon him and many emoluments outside his regular hire as a servant of the people, but he earns his \$5,000 a year, every cent of it. The hod-carrier would "kick" with vigor if compelled to labor more than eight hours per diem, or ten at the most; but the national legislator's hours average eighteen out of the twenty-four—if indeed his work is ever done, for his busy brain goes on milling schemes and political problems, even in the Land of Dreams. Let us follow a member through his usual day and see how he spends the time. He rises at eight o'clock—which is very early in Washington, where night is turned into day and the hours, de regeur, for social pleasure begin at nine p. m., and continue into the wee sma' hours of the morning. Long before he is out of bed, cards have been coming in, and visitors waiting to see him. His valet—if he is rich enough to indulge in such an appendage, or a servant of his hotel or boarding-house—raps discreetly on his door when the pressure becomes too great to be longer withstood; and at once the sleepy M. C. is in harness and his working day begins. Perhaps the first word he hears is "Lady to see you, sah; been waitin' since sebben er'clock, sah." So he dresses in haste, but of course with the care which his position demands, and descends breakfastless, to the parlor, where his tormentors await him. He finds them grouped near the door—a jealous-looking party, each glaring at the others as who should say, "He is the member from my district," and every one of them plainly feels, if he, or she, does not say it in words, a claim on the Congressman's services because his, or her, relatives voted for him. Here is a widow in weeds and woe, whose pension for the long-ago services of her husband, Uncle Samuel, should increase, in order to add sugar to the bread and butter; or whose boy must be appointed as page in the Capitol; or who is herself, an applicant for something easy to do in the pay of the government. There is the good-looking young woman, fashionably attired, and confidently smiling—or rather, there may be dozens of her every day. She has come up from his district, expecting to be put right into the treasury at a salary of a thousand a year, and she wants to consult him as to which particular place he would better get for her; or she brings him a letter from some forgotten acquaintance residing a thousand miles from his district, asking him to "please put her into one of the departments." As if those coveted places were to be had for the asking!

How little people outside of Washington seem to understand that for every vacancy, actual or prospective, there are hundreds of applications: that Congress, as a body, egged on by eager constituents, are perpetually clamoring at the doors of the departments for places which they know cannot be obtained; and that civil service has added a thousand fold to the difficulties in the way! Another caller may be a veteran member of the G. A. R. who thinks he has been illegally discharged from government employ and wants to get back again. Others are college friends, or army comrades, who desire a personal introduction to the President. Others are merely constituents who are in town for a few days and feel fairly entitled to the service of the M. C. in "showing them around," for didn't they vote for him? Sadder than all, and not least numerous, are the applicants for charity—men and women who came here to urge claims of appointments, which they have failed to get, whose money and hopes have both disappeared, and now entirely destitute, they must be fed and sent home at the Congressman's expense. Disposing of all these, without once mislaying his temper, the M. C. gets his breakfast, taking his letters with him to read and "digest" along with the chops and eggs. First, of course, the home letters, from wife and children, if they are not with him at Washington—and comparatively few Congressmen can afford to keep them in this most expensive city; from his aged parents, breathing pride in their distinguished son, which he vows in his secret heart to deserve; and perhaps the devoted wife, who is patiently bearing all the home burdens while her lord is away, has guided the baby's hand in some scrawlings across the page, which actually bring tears to the eyes of the polished man of the world. Right here let me enter my emphatic protest against the impression which prevails in the rural district anent the immortality of the average Congressman. Why should a hitherto respectable citizen, whom his friends and neighbors have trusted well enough to elect as their representative, suddenly lose all sense of moral obligation when he comes to Washington? "When you are in Rome, do as the Romans," is a wise old saw; but the Romans themselves may be decent people. This is not the "wickedest city," as many suppose, not by a very great deal! The searchlight of publicity is turned too full upon its high places to admit of shady doings, and people's minds are occupied by things of far greater importance. I am aware that the foregoing statement sounds a good deal like the placard which the good deacon posted in his melon patch—"Boys, let these melons alone. They ain't ripe, and God sees you;"—but there is truth in it, nevertheless.

A Congressman's mail represents a great deal of his hardest labor. It is not all received at his residence, but the bulk of it goes to the Capitol Post Office, and is piled upon his desk by a page. The wise M. C. answers all his letters. If a veteran member of the House, he may get from seventy-five to one hundred a day, on all manner of topics, from the greatest affairs of state to the drivellings of political cranks. If he is a Grand Army man, a great many of his correspondents request him to look up claims and use his influence in forwarding settlements. Scores every day, are applications for office—some of them strong appeals for worthy persons, from mutual friends

and endorsed by weightiest influence. Should he visit the departments and attend personally to all these requests, that alone would assume his entire time. And then the requests made for seeds, and maps and public documents, and goodness knows what! Occasionally a constituent writes to say that he has invented a wonderful thing and that he understands that it costs about \$75 to get a patent; as he is a little "short" just now, he desires "his" member to advance the money and secure the patent, and he will repay him richly from the enormous profits he expects to reap. And probably next day a big box—express charges unpaid—is unloaded at the M. C.'s door and becomes a regular white elephant on his hands. Other writers, plenty of them, are grumbling about their post master and want him removed forthwith; and no end of them desire books printed and mailed at government expense. Now and then a man, who would perhaps refuse the earth as a free gift, mentions the titles of books enough to fill an express car, and winds up by adding, "and all the other government publications." Besides the letters are bushels of newspapers, most of them containing articles marked for his inspection, to ignore one of which might cost him his re-election. Then there are baskets full of public documents, and pamphlets on all conceivable subjects. Semi-lunatics present visionary schemes for righting all human wrongs, and persons interested in private bills flood him with circulars. He is invited to banquets and receptions galore; asked to remit good sized checks for tickets (enclosed) to entertainments given for charitable purposes, which he cannot attend; and among the sterner stuff are scented billet-doux from female admirers whose greatest fault is ineffable silliness and a few which are practically bids for "favors" about which the least said the better.

Usually the member hurries to the Capitol as early as 10 a. m., although, as everybody knows, the session of Congress do not begin till 12 o'clock. If he is on some important committee, he must attend all its sessions with unfailing regularity, and also the sessions of the sub-committees to which he is assigned. On the way to his committee-room, to take part in discussing some pending bill of national consequence, he is waylaid at every step by the importunities of visitors. He is buttonholed by delegations, urging him to use his influence toward changing the tariff schedule, or to exert it against a bill believed to be damaging to the commercial interests of the city they represent; he is urged to favor this measure or to oppose that. A friend begs him to urge upon the committee on claims some personal bill; another wants him to see the committee on military affairs and use his influence on behalf of some soldier wrongfully disgraced. Another tells a harrowing tale of a poor woman who has lost her place in the department and must have it back right away before the wolf at the door devour her flock. Another insists that a bridge must be built across the creek at Podunk and demands that the member gives the measure his personal attention. Others merely want to cajole out of him his views on the Cuban question, or civil service, or the annexation of Hawaii; newspaper men waylay him numerously for interviews; and the "scarlet woman," with painted cheeks and luring eyes, presents her card to him on one pretext or another.

The meeting in the committee-room lasts till high noon—when the Speaker calls the House to order, and like the school-boy with "shining morning face," he must be at his desk to answer roll-call—and he has to run the