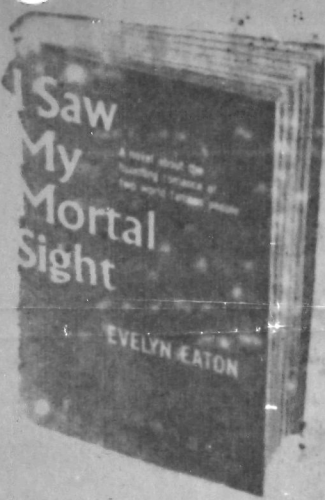


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In Some Corner of a Foreign Field

DIPLOMAT. By Charles W. Thayer.
Foreword by Sir Harold Nicolson.
299 pp. New York: Harper & Bros.
\$4.50.

By HERBERT FEIS

I HAVE often heard observant men try to figure out what qualities make the superior diplomat. None ever thought that he really knew, or that there was one magic prescription. This was not because the art was mysterious or its ways secret. It was because the art was complex and the circumstances and turns of history affecting the performance infinitely variable.

How different both in nature and in their ways, for example, were three of the most able foreign service diplomats I ever saw at work:

Joseph Grew, open, steady, conscientious, trusted by foreign governments, with ardor under restraint for the finest of purposes—a model for his colleagues. Yet he probably considers his last ten-year mission as Ambassador to Japan a failure—for he could not prevent the war from coming.

Jefferson Caffery, short-spoken, almost inarticulate, selective in his foreign contacts, never confiding; a representative who thought he could always tell the Department of State and the President everything they needed to know in one hundred words at most, at times of his own choosing. But he did well with his every assignment in the field.

George Messersmith, school-masterish, precise, of solid, missionary convictions. His talk and his long, crammed reports would have been a bore had they not been so thoroughly informative. Yet he too managed to advance the cause of his country more effectively than most, and to enlist the support of his governing colleagues in Washington more steadfastly than most.

THESE reflections have been aroused by Charles Thayer's instructive and enjoyable ramble through the world of diplomacy and diplomats. With lively anecdote and bright comment he illuminates the history and nature of this difficult art, the tasks and traits of its practitioners, diplomatic and consular practices, intelligence work, and life in the American foreign service. The author writes from many years of experience as a career diplomat, having resigned from the Foreign Service in 1953. Throughout the book his perception and wit serve good sense. Here are some examples:

On the varieties of diplomats: "The Soviet type is taciturn, unscrupulous, and icily humorless in negotiation."

On the repetition of public statements given out at the

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end of international conferences: "Full agreement" but no published agreements means doubtful; "substantial agreement" means disagreement in at least some important fields; "full exchange of views resulted" means no agreement at all."

On the uses of speech and silence: "In diplomacy as elsewhere no question is indiscreet, though the answer may well be. However, in professional diplomatic circles, questions on delicate subjects are by convention considered 'indiscreet.'"

On the roisterous early activities of the Office of Strategic Services: "The objection to the neophytes from O. S. S. was not that spying was immoral or undiplomatic but that successful espionage is for experts not in Central Asian archeology or history but in espionage."

Were Mr. Thayer writing of today, rather than yesterday,

Just Friends

REPRESENTATION is the term used to describe a diplomat's efforts to demonstrate through his personality, manners, hospitality and erudition the admirable qualities of his country and thus the advantage of maintaining close friendly relations with it. While the wise diplomat seeks to win for his country the admiration and respect of others, he will not waste his time trying to inspire the deeper emotion of affection. International love is a fiction the search for which has frequently ended in embittered frustration.
—"Diplomat."

episodes of a recent visit might well magnetize his wit. Students of history have long since concluded that there was not, and could not be, any "new" method or trick or trait of diplomacy. Can they be sure now? True, many a memoir tells of evenings when diplomats entertained with, or were entertained by, dancing girls. But perhaps Khrushchev has introduced a new talent. Will the Foreign Service Institute find it advisable to have a course in that cavorting exercise, that new stance of diplomacy, the "Can-Can?"

One of Mr. Thayer's aphorisms ought to be supplemented. "High policy," he writes, "is made not by diplomats but by rulers, elected representatives of governments and their senior advisers, and are put into practice by diplomats." However, any good diplomat is under a compulsion as well as a duty to try to influence policy. Not always, but as often as he sees an effective chance, or concludes that his government is making a grave error. This has been recognized when career foreign service officers are made Under Secretaries of State and put in charge of other influential posts in the State Department.

A chapter that particularly recommends itself tells of the vicissitudes of the permanent Foreign Service during the past thirty years. This is just and well informed. It is appreciative of the conscientious labors almost all its members perform, and of the mistreatment and frustration they have had to endure at times, without being aggrieved. It does not deny the value of some persons from outside life who have been given choice diplomatic posts without having undergone the rigors of experience, even of a few whose appointments were rewards for domestic political support.

With similar individuality of judgment the author discusses the reasons why it is often hard to turn a lawyer into a good diplomat. And the reasons for doubting whether experts in educational organization are qualified to give guidance in the always trying question of how to improve the diplomatic service. In this connection he comments: "Both in its composition and in its recommendations the Wriston* committee* provided evidence of a less than complete comprehension of the true role of diplomacy."

MR. THAYER does not—as have other friends and admirers of the professional service—maintain that negotiations conducted confidentially between kindred members of kindred foreign service organizations is always the best way to deal with an international situation. It may be, when heads of government and Secretaries of State are willing to confer the needed responsibility and authority to such agents. It is the least perilous mode of diplomacy.

He recognizes that the personal diplomacy of Secretaries of State may at times be necessary to achieve a result not possible in more ordinary ways, and that conference diplomacy may be required for great issues and occasions; and that even "Parliamentary diplomacy" (the United Nations), though hardest to manage, should not be wholly condemned. There is a leniency in his comments on these other varieties of diplomatic methods that is commendable; if less than enthusiastic.

On matters such as this, the book is a stimulus to thought and an aid to judgment. It is as well an elucidating manual of the daily tasks and activities of both senior and junior officials in the diplomatic and consular services. Candidates for these services can learn much from it. All who read it will enter the doors of our embassies and consulates with greater understanding of what is going on in their many rooms; and of the lives and problems of those at work within them.

*A committee, led by Dr. Henry M. Wriston (then president of Brown University), which attempted to simplify testing procedures in the selection of diplomatic personnel.