

Corcoran and Cohen, "The Gold Dust Twins"

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Washington, D. C.

UNDER the vaulted dimness of a threatening night sky on June 27, 1936, Franklin Delano Roosevelt stepped into a glare of blinding light to accept the renomination for the presidency of the United States that the Democratic national convention had voted by acclamation.

From out of more than 100,000 throats surged a pulsating ovation that was like the thunderous beating of an angry sea on a rocky coast. At the speakers' rostrum on the color-splashed platform, which groaned under the weight of party notables, the President waved his right hand in acknowledgment of the reverberating salute from the thronged multitude in the vastness of Philadelphia's Franklin field.

His face was pale but lit by his characteristic grin. At length he raised his hand in command of attention. Slowly the tumultuous cacophony ebbed into silence. An expectant hush hung over the open-air amphitheater. And then in mellifluous accents came:

"My friends . . ."

In a few crisp sentences he was well launched into an outline of the political philosophy on which he staked his bid for reelection. Loud speakers carried his voice to the far reaches of the athletic field, and the radio carried it to the nation and to the world.

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Nowhere were the militant tones more closely followed than from beside a modest radio in an apartment at 1610 K street, N. W., Washington, a brisk walk from the White House and but a few steps from the site of "the little green house on K street" which achieved notoriety in the scandals of the Harding era.

Two men bent their ears toward the radio's loud-speaker. One was short and plump. His belt was just beginning to cut into a bulging waistline. His bright eyes were narrowed to slits over jolly jowls. The other, pale and slightly taller, with a student's stoop, blinked wide-open myopic eyes behind scholarly lenses.

Back in Philadelphia President Roosevelt was well into his peroration. His audience was whipped into a frenzy of political enthusiasm.

From the apartment's radio came:

"Government can err, Presidents do make mistakes, but the immortal Dante tells us that divine justice weighs the sins of the cold-blooded and the sins of the warm-hearted in different scales."

The eyes of the chubby man popped open. His glance met that of his companion. Both smiled the quiet smile of men sharing a secret. The smiles still were there a few moments later when in firm tones America's first radio voice concluded with, "I am enlisted for the duration of the war." And the loud-speaker vibrated under the strain of the roars of applause that followed.

The chubby man had well earned his smile. Years before he had piloted the late great Oliver Wendell Holmes through "The Divine Comedy" as certainly as Virgil piloted Dante through hell and purgatory and Beatrice through heaven, by reading its measured lines aloud to the Supreme court justice. From that reading he gleaned the idea for the line for the acceptance speech.

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Dante scholars have concluded that the President in his address was only paraphrasing the great Italian poet, however, when he spoke of the "sins of the cold-blooded and the sins of the warm-hearted," since they have been unable to find a quotation in "The Divine Comedy" such as that. The closest they have come to finding the thought of the quotation are in lines in the eleventh canto of the "Inferno," which can only loosely be interpreted as conveying the idea of

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the President's words. The lines, as translated by Longfellow, are:

*Why wanders so
Thine intellect from that which
it is wont?
Or, sooth, thy mind, where is it
elsewhere looking?
Hast thou no recollection of
those words
With which thine Ethics thor-
oughly discusses
The dispositions three, that
Heaven abides not,—
Incontinence, and Malice, and in-
sane
Bestiality? and how Incontinence
Less God offendeth, and less
blame attracts?
If thou regardst this conclusion
well,
And to thy mind recallest thou
they are
That up outside are undergoing
penance,
Clearly wilt thou perceive why
from these felons
They separated are, and why less
wroth
Justice divine doth smite them
with its hammer.*

How much more the chubby man contributed remains one of the two secrets of the acceptance speech. The other, which concerns the events immediate to its delivery, was revealed under the confessional seal of "off the record" in the cabin of a schooner yacht on a gloomy, fog-bound Sunday afternoon in a Nova Scotian harbor. It will be given to



(Associated Press photo.)
" . . . the immortal Dante tells us that divine justice weighs the sins of the cold-blooded and the sins of the warm-hearted in different scales." President Roosevelt delivering acceptance speech in Philadelphia, June 27, 1936.

the world eventually, probably in the President's memoirs, but the secret of the speech itself probably will never be pierced.

It is known that Charles Michelson, Democratic gadfly, submitted a suggested draft of an acceptance speech. This found a speedy and certain haven in a White House wastebasket. The publicity chief of the Democratic national committee, who has written thousands of speeches but never delivered one, wrote one too many in that draft. The President tossed it aside because it was redolent with all the bile the wiry Charles had poured into the thousands of speeches he wrote for ranting against the Republican party.

The Rev. Stanley High, whose political coat, like Joseph's, has many colors, dropped a hint here and there that he could tell a

good deal about it but for certain things. These ambiguous hints had much to do with High's getting fat sums for articles on the national scene which professed to have background in association with the White House as the administration's religious publicist. They had everything to do with his being dropped by President Roosevelt in a denunciation of "so-called official spokesmen." It is doubtful whether he held the fate of a comma in the Philadelphia speech.

Judge Samuel I. Rosenman of the Supreme court of New York, who was counsel to the President during his days as governor of New York, read the speech before delivery and may have offered a hint or two. Rosenman, a deceptively quiet, chunky, and slow and soft spoken man of unassuming appearance, is now engaged in editing the President's official papers.

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Except for the chubby man of the K street apartment there is no positive evidence that any one contributed anything to the acceptance speech but Mr. Roosevelt. It is likely that he contributed nothing more than the bit of Dante, because the President showed more pride of authorship in that speech than any other, from personal observation, even including his "forgotten man" speech before the 1932 Democratic convention at Chicago.

The handiwork of the Dante reader can be traced in many another address. There are the numerous quotations from Justice Holmes and others. In the recent address at Roanoke Island, North Carolina, the long quotation from Thomas Babington Macaulay, the English historian and statesman, was attributed to his fertile memory.

or thinks of them, they are all that is left of the brain trust. The term has been bandied about and applied to so many persons who had the presidential ear for scarcely more than a few moments that it has come to mean little in Washington. However, it can be safely said that "the Gold Dust Twins" are more of a brain trust than any of those who strutted in the title in a few headlines and left the official scene with the blessings or curses of the administration ringing in their ears—but left always for a heavy slice of the capital of capitalists they badgered and berated in their official capacities.

Whether or not Tom and Ben are any more sincere than those who stopped making America



Benjamin Cohen, studious "lawyer's lawyer," the other half of the present brain trust. (Photo © Harris-Ewing.)

in Washington. It is today so common that it detracts but little from the speaker and adds but little prestige to the author. In this respect capital oratory is like the motion pictures—the sole credit for a good or bad performance goes to the actors. Now and then the director may get a bow, but the author never unless he be safely dead—like Dante.

Ghosts have been known to claim an entire address for contributing less than a Corcoran gave at Philadelphia. And there is much jealousy among the ghosts.

If Corcoran has had no part in a speech or message, as he had no part in the message which accompanied the court packing proposal, he is likely to tell you, "It stinks"—he cultivates slang and cursing in what appears to be forced camaraderie. But his oaths have no explosion in them.

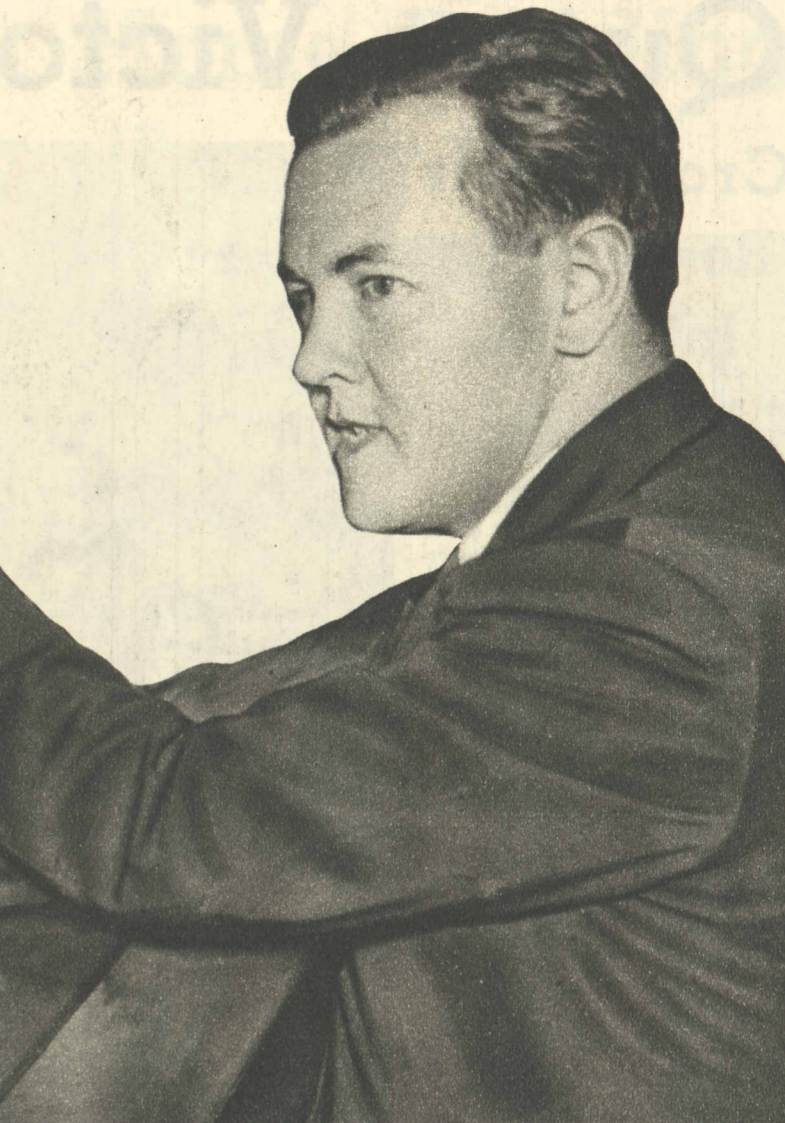
He can tell you the same thing in iambic pentameter and paraphrase Shakespeare with "O, the message is rank; it smells to high heaven." Or he could give it in classic Greek, which he also read aloud to the late Justice Holmes.

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"Tommy the Cork" is admittedly the No. 1 ghost writer, if not the No. 1 brain trust. That title, if such an exists, he shares with Ben Cohen. Tommy himself will claim nothing more for ghost writing than preparation of "technical material." But his preparation is more apt to come out of the presidential mouth than the vast amount of such material behind every White House speech. And he always knows what's in every presidential speech well in advance of delivery.

When Mr. Roosevelt sits down to write a speech, and because he prefers to use a historical springboard to dive into his economic philosophy, he has at his hand a digest of the place to be visited or the occasion to be commemorated to refresh his memory, which, judging from the stacks of histories in his libra-

ry, should be considerable.



(Associated Press photo.)
Thomas Gardiner Corcoran—"Tommy the Cork," Washington's No. 1 ghost writer and 50 per cent of the "brain trust" for the administration.

ries, should be considerable. This is prepared by the White House staff.

Other data is submitted, when requested, by various government departments. If the speech is to be largely financial the treasury will submit figures and facts; if it concerns world trade the state and commerce departments offer material. Often several agencies pour in material.

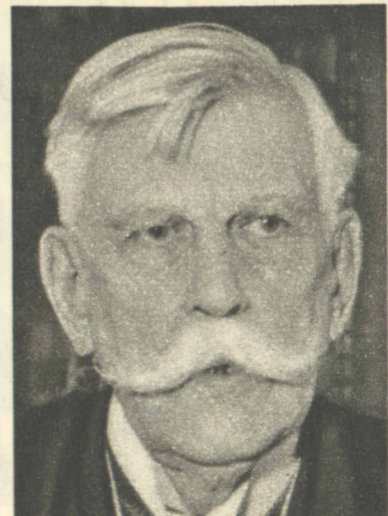
From this and his own ideas the President composes most of his speeches, according to the White House. Now and then, it is admitted, some one may submit a suggested draft, not with the idea that it is to be used in its entirety, but to serve as an outline or to offer some suggestions.

This is borne out by observations of the President. Aboard trains, at temporary executive offices, and at the White House a speech is signaled by the summoning of Miss Marguerite Le Hand and Miss Grace Tully, personal secretaries, to his side. They have been seen transcribing their notes and turning them over to mimeograph operators for the preparation of press copies of the address. The writing of the speech may take several days and follows a general pattern.

Sometimes ghosts like Tommy may put their hand in before or after dictation. In the latter event there is a rewriting. Often some one like White House Secretary Stephen T. Early, or perhaps Justice Rosenman, is present at the dictation and interjects a suggestion or correction, in which case he meets with stubborn opposition and must prove his point. This jealousy of his work is the most convincing evidence that most of the President's speeches are his own work.

It is when the President wants a striking phrase that Tommy comes into play. If he can't make one up or redress an old one, Tommy can always dig up an apt quotation. And at times he can do a good job of drafting. It is generally believed that, if he did not write the fireside chat in which the President defended his court plan, Tommy wrote the draft from which it was taken.

In addition to being a presidential ghost writer, Tommy the



(Acme photo.)
The late Oliver Wendell Holmes, to whom Corcoran read Dante.

Cork turned on what he jocularly calls "the heat of reason" on many a balky member of congress in his capacity of White House lobbyist. He drafts legislation and originates programs. And he plays the accordion.

It was his ability to play the accordion rather than his other accomplishments that brought him to President Roosevelt. Early in the administration Corcoran was invited to an informal scrambled eggs Sunday supper. He dragged along his folding music box.

During the course of the evening he was called upon for a song. The President, who likes nothing better than to lift his voice in a sea chanty, a ballad, or a native Hawaiian melody, was enchanted by the merry legal minstrel, just as Oliver Wendell Holmes had been before him.

That was the beginning of a warm and close friendship—a friendship that has been all the closer because Tommy, to give him his due, shuns the limelight and fits nearer than any brain trust predecessor the presidential hunger for "men with a passion for anonymity."

Into this friendship, or rather to presidential attention, Tommy dragged Cohen, who plays the piano. Tommy also plays the piano. And he can strum the guitar.

Before this meeting Tommy was an official nobody. He was on the legal staff of the RFC, a post he still holds. He was, in fact, an object of suspicion, because he was a holdover from the Hoover administration.

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Corcoran was born in Pawtucket, R. I., on Dec. 29, 1900. He went to Brown university and later to the Harvard law school. In undergraduate days he went in for athletics and drama. He was graduated from Harvard with high honors and after a year of postgraduate work won the coveted job of serving for a year as secretary to Justice Holmes.

Even after surrendering his job to another honor graduate at the end of his year, Corcoran maintained his contact with the justice. For seven years he went once a week to the jurist's home to read aloud to him—often in the Greek. He was at the justice's bedside in his last illness.

Corcoran had four years with a New York corporation law firm. During those days he ran, according to reports, a shoe-string to a paper fortune of a half million dollars and saw even the shoe-string disappear. From the market he went to the RFC as assistant counsel in the firm belief that every one should change his job at least once in five years to avoid going stale.

He always has been interested in physical fitness. During his school days he achieved the reputation of being a "wild Irishman" on athletic fields. He kept hardened by working as a lumberjack, telephone lineman, and

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