Friday, January 25, 1929.

Report of the Newspaper Conference.

I made my recommendation in my Message about the cruiser bill. If any one wants to see my views in relation to it in extended form they will find them there.

I recommended that the time limit that was in the bill should be taken out. Of course, that is not because I don't want to build the cruisers and build them right away, but I don't think it is good law in relation to the budget. The experts can not see in advance just what our income is going to be and what commitments therefore ought to be made. I have considerable doubt whether Congress can. I say that with the feeling that if we had a plentiful supply of money I shouldn't object to having a good deal of money expended on cruisers right away. One reason for not undertaking to build them all at once, I mean all in one year, would be the question of replacements. It wouldn't be a good financial arrangement to have a large part of our cruiser fleet becoming obsolete at the same time. It would be better to have it maturing, if you want to state it that way, part of it at a time, in order that it may be more economically replaced.

So far as I know it is a very good idea of the Interstate Commerce Commission to direct Commissioner Porter to prepare a plan for the unification of railroads. The law required that of the Commission ever since I have been President. I suppose they have done something about it, but they have also recommended nearly each year that part of the law be repealed. One of the troubles with the Interstate Commerce Commission is to my mind the difficulty of getting any action out of it. The United States Government had a very sorry experience in that respect. There was pending before the board a case to fix the amount which would be paid for the transportation
of the United States mails. It took three years to determine it and when it was finally determined we were told that we owed the railroads $45,000,000 for previous services. Of course, I have refused to recognize the validity of a decision of that kind and have refused to make payment. I suppose it will go to the Court of Claims to be decided whether the Commission has the right to make a retroactive finding. The question wouldn't have arisen if there had been a decision made within what seems to me is a reasonable time. While I think on the whole we have a good Commission and they function very well, I think their position would be greatly strengthened and their services would be of much greater value if they could make a decision promptly and expeditiously.

Press man: We never had the valuation of railroads yet, have we?

President: Well, they never can have that. They might just as well hunt for a will-o-the-wisp. I think that is said to have cost about $100,000,000, and of course it can never be completed because as soon as one phase of it is completed why it is necessary to go back and complete some other phase. I think the Commission has done as well as they could on that. Then as soon as it began to turn out that the proponents of valuation had been wrong, of course the proponents didn't press for it, and nobody else was greatly interested in it. Now, I suppose the Commission will say in answer to all these things that they couldn't make their decisions faster because they didn't have a larger force to spend more money. That is the standard reply of any department. If I ask them to buy paper or pins they always send back word that they have known for a long period of years they have been in need of paper and pins, but the budget has prevented their having them.

I haven't seen just what suggestion Senator Borah has made relative to an
international conference to codify maritime law, particularly the laws of sea water. I am of the offhand impression that that would be theoretically a fine thing to do. As a practical matter I wonder just what chance there would ever be to get any Senate to ratify a codification of any kind of laws. I think any one that knows our Senate knows that such a ratification would be impossible. The maritime laws relative to sea warfare, of course relate almost entirely to the rights of neutrals in time of war, and all the developments of the last war would seem to indicate that in future war neutrals are probably not going to be accorded much of any right. Whether anything could be done by international agreement to clarify that or not, I don't know. It is a matter that I have thought of some and talked over some with the State Department. There never has seemed to be any time that it was feasible to call a conference on it. We have some work progressing in the Pan American Conference for the codification of international law, and I think that is going on very well. But the difficulty about that will be in ever securing approval of it by the Senate.

I am appointing Brigadier General Charles H. Bridges to be The Adjutant General with the rank of Major General of course, and I am appointing Colonel Archibald Campbell to be the Assistant Adjutant General with the rank of Brigadier General.

A delegation came in, yesterday I think it was, to invite me to go to Versailles. I don't see at the present time how it would be possible for me to go.

I am expecting to attend the George Washington University celebration on the 22nd of February, where I may make a short address, and where Mrs. Coolidge and I have been invited to attend. I think they are proposing to confer a degree upon Mrs. Coolidge and me, and we are intending to go.

Mr. Sanders: They are commencement exercises.

President: Yes, commencement exercises.