

“YES, sir,” remarked the Hon. Daniel Smith, formerly of the American Consular Service, “a great many curious things happen to a consul. I could tell you experiences of mine that I rather calculate would astonish you some, provided, of course, that you were willing to believe them. For instance, I once stood a three weeks siege by thirty-two American old maids, and I can tell you I was pretty badly scared. If you care to hear the story I don’t mind telling it to you, though as a general thing I am careful not to speak of it to my fellow countrymen.

“Along in 1886 I was the American consul at Aragua, a town in the south of Spain about a hundred miles from the coast. The place didn’t need an American consul any more than a cow needs a bicycle, for it had no trade with America, and no American tourist ever dreamed of stopping there.

“However, the President was a personal friend of mine, and he wanted to do me a good turn, so he appointed me consul at Aragna, with a salary just about large enough to keep me from starvation. I was mightily pleased with the appointment until I got to Aragua and found what a lonesome, dead-and-alive place it was. It had about ten thousand inhabitants, and, with the exception of the chief of police and two or three priests, there wasn’t a soul in the whole town that a sensible man could talk with for half an hour. The chief of police was a capital fellow, who had been in New York and could talk considerable English.

He and I were pretty thick, and he was always ready to do anything that I asked him to do. Then good old Don Diego, a priest that had made up his mind to convert me to the Roman Catholic Church, did his level best to make himself agreeable, and if it hadn’t been that all the voters in my section of Iowa were Protestants, I should have felt like turning Catholic just to oblige him. I forgot to say that I could speak Spanish middling well. That was the reason why the President sent me to Spain. He said it would be a novelty for a consul to speak the language of the country to which he was sent, and he wanted to see how the experiment would work.

“One of the first things that an American consul in Europe finds out is that it swarms with American tramps. Two or three times a week a ragged, dirty scoundrel would come to my office and demand help on the ground that he was an American citizen. Usually he was a German, or a Russian, or a Polish Jew, who said that he had been naturalised in America and had lost his papers. I suppose that ninety-nine times in a hundred the fellow lied, and was no more an American citizen than the King of Spain himself; but I didn’t dare to take the chances that he was an impostor and treat him as such. Once I did brace up and tell a man who could only speak a few words of English, and who said that he had left his papers in his boarding-house, that he was a fraud. He burst into tears, and after fumbling at his pocket produced a lot of dirty papers

among which was a naturalisation certificate, signed by the clerk of a New York court who was an old friend of mine. I begged the man's pardon and lent him five dollars on the spot, but a year afterwards I saw a New

York paper containing an account of the brutal and outrageous treatment that an American citizen had received at the hands of the American consul at Aragua. That was a lesson to me, and after that I never disputed any man's assertion that he was an American citizen, knowing that if he really were a naturalised American he might have a friend in Congress who would denounce me as a man unfit to hold office, and would either have me turned out or have my consulate abolished.



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"Of course, I couldn't give money to all this army of tramps, but I furnished them with railroad tickets to the nearest seaport. The chief of police had authority to send all rogues and vagabonds out of the province, and whenever I sent a tramp to him, with the request that he would give the man a third class ticket and send him on his way, the chief would do it as a matter of course. This would have been all right had it not been that the American consul at Avilas, the seaport to which I sent my tramps, grew indignant, and before I had been a month in Aragua wrote to me accusing me of sending him all the tramps in Spain, and promising to make it lively for me if I didn't quit it. This made me mad, and after that I told every tramp who came to me to go straight

to the consul at Avilas, who was a very rich man and would be certain to give him money. It was hard on the consul, I admit, for he was at the end of the railroad, and he couldn't pass the tramps on to another consul as I had done. He had to keep them from starving until he could send them away on the next steamer that came into port, and his actual outlay in buying steamer tickets and in boarding the tramps must have amounted to at least half his salary. He couldn't complain to the Government, for if he did he would have been accused of unwillingness to help Americans in distress, so the only thing he could do was to write me abusive letters. The more letters he wrote the more tramps I sent him. Word got round among all the tramps in Europe that by calling on me they could get an

introduction to the consul at Avilas, which would be worth having, and consequently, before I had been six months in office my average weekly shipment of tramps was about trebled.

"Do you remember the wreck of the steamer *Morning Light*, off Avilas, in the year 1887? Well, it don't matter whether you do or not. The fact is that the steamer was wrecked, though only four men were drowned. Among the passengers was a personally conducted party of thirty-two American female school-teachers, all of whom were unmarried and over forty years of age. The conductor of the party was one of the men who were drowned, and as the steamer went down in the middle of the night in the biggest kind of a hurry, the school-teachers hadn't time to save anything except the clothes they stood in. I don't suppose there was ten dollars in the whole party, and of course the moment they got ashore they went to the consul for assistance.

"When those thirty-two old maids marched into the consul's office and told him that they hadn't any money, and that they wanted him to send them to Paris, he saw his way. The women afterwards told me that he was as smiling and pleasant as a man could possibly be, and I don't doubt it. He

understood that his chance to get even with me had come at last, and he lost no time in improving it. The next day, about eleven o'clock in the morning, the whole gang of women came into my office and demanded second class railroad tickets to Paris and money enough to feed them on the way. One of the women, who acted as spokeswoman for the rest at such times as they would give her a chance to speak, handed me a letter from the consul at Avilas, in which he said that he had great pleasure in turning over to me his distressed fellow countrywomen, knowing that I always helped Americans in difficulty, and that I would be only too happy to help these deserving ladies. He went on to say that the women had been shipwrecked and had lost all their money, but that he had assured them that I would furnish them with everything they might want. When I read the letter I knew that there was big trouble ahead for me, and I didn't need to read the postscript which said, 'Who's ahead on the tramp game now?' He was a coarse sort of chap, but he had a fair idea of a joke.

"Well! after I had read the letter I asked, in my coolest and most dignified way, 'Ladies! what can I have the pleasure of doing for you?'

"'What we want,' said the spokeswoman,

from home, and so we shan't want but a couple of dollars or so for each of us, just for our necessary expenses on the road.'

"'But, my dear madam!' said I, 'tickets to Paris for all of you would cost about nine hundred dollars, and my salary is only seven hundred and fifty dollars a year. You must see that I can't possibly incur any such expense, no matter how anxious I am to help you.'

"'We know well,' said the woman, 'that you are a millionaire, and are just stopping here to amuse yourself. The consul at Avilas told us all about you and said that you furnished railroad tickets to Americans nearly every day in the year.'

"'The consul was joking,' I replied. 'I have no income except my salary, and I could no more send you to Paris than I could buy up the Spanish monarchy. I am ready to take any amount of trouble to assist you, but as for supplying you with railroad tickets and money, the thing is clean impossible.'

"'Very well, sir!' said the spokeswoman, 'we have been sent to you by an American consul, who may be supposed to know his



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'is lodgings for the night and second class railroad tickets to Paris. The consul at Avilas said that it would be your pleasure as well as your duty to do this for us. When we get to Paris we can get money

duty, and who is a gentleman, even if some others that I could name are not. He assured us that it was your bounden duty to help us, and I can tell you that we don't intend to allow you to shirk that duty on

any pretence whatever. What else are you here for, except to help Americans who need help? Do you mean to say that the Government pays you to stay here and enjoy yourself? We shall go to the best hotel in this town and take rooms, telling the landlord to send the bill to you. We shall stay there till you give us our railroad tickets, no matter how long it may be. More than that, if we don't get the tickets very soon we shall report you to the President when we get back to America, and you will be properly punished for refusing to help American ladies.' Then she turned to the other women and asked if they approved of what she had said. They all did approve of it with such enthusiasm that they kissed her then and there and scowled at me as if I had been the worst criminal in Spain.

"If they had been men I should have ordered them out of the office, and should have sent for the police if they refused to go. But being women what could I do? I told them over and over again that I could not pay either hotel bills or railroad fares, but it made no sort of impression on them. They talked to me until they were tired, and then they filed out of the room, and I watched them from my window on their way to the hotel, which was in the same street as my office. I saw them go in, and as they did not come out again I knew that they must have found rooms. Of course I did not believe that they could compel me by law to pay their bills, but all the same the hotel keeper would be sure to look to me for payment, and would make an intolerable lot of trouble when he found that I would not pay.

"When my office hours were over I went to the hotel and found the landlord in the happiest possible frame of mind. Before I could say a word he overwhelmed me with thanks for sending him so many guests; and when I assured him that I was in no possible way responsible for the women, and that I did not believe that he would be able to collect any money from them, he smiled and said that he was perfectly willing to trust to my honour. He had been told by the ladies that I would pay their bill, and he should not think of annoying them about so small an affair. He knew that the Señor Consul was one of the noblest and most generous of men, and he refused for one single instant to tolerate the thought that such a man would bring an honest innkeeper and his family to the brink of ruin by refusing to pay a perfectly just bill. He kept on talk-

ing in this exasperating fashion until I wanted to knock his stupid head off, and for that matter would have done so had I been able to pay the consequent damages. Nothing that I could say had the slightest effect upon the miserable man, so I finally went back to my office and tried to relieve my mind by writing an unofficial letter to my colleague at Avilas which ought to have driven him wild with rage. But it didn't seem to trouble him in the least. He wrote back to me begging me not to excite myself, lest I should bring on an attack of fever, and asking me if he should send me three shipwrecked sailors who claimed to be Americans and whom I might like to add to my collection of female tramps. He added that it would hardly be worth while for me to write him any more letters, as he had just forwarded his resignation to Washington and had turned over his office to his vice-consul. When I read that letter I could see in every line of it how happy the scoundrel was at having put me in a hole, and I could have wrung his neck with pleasure.

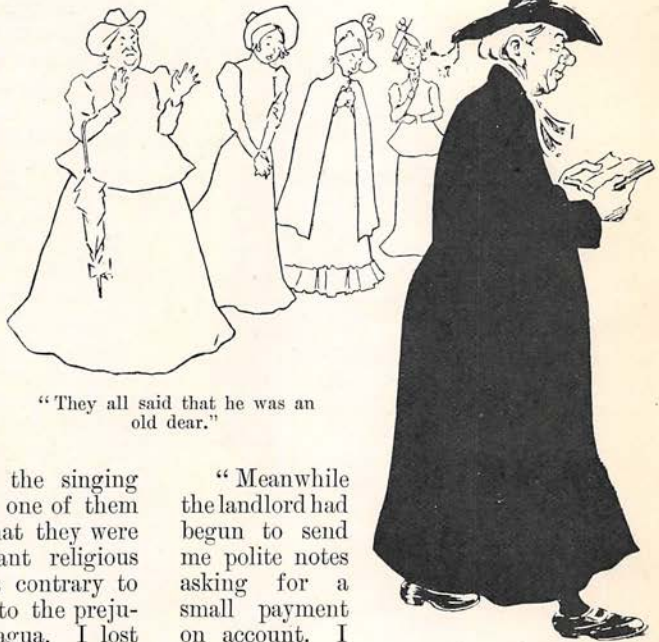
"For the next week those thirty-two women came to my office every morning and wanted to know when they would receive their railway tickets. I couldn't prevent them from entering the office, for they were American citizens, and I could not turn them out, for they were women. I tried smoking the worst tobacco I could buy, but they didn't seem to mind it a particle, although it made me half sick. I made a show of writing letters while they were in the room, but they would keep on talking about my heartless and brutal conduct, just the same as if they knew that I was listening to them. They worried me so much that I could neither work by day nor sleep by night. They said that the hotel was a very comfortable one, though they rather thought that it was expensive, and that they were ready to stay in Aragua all the winter in case I delayed to furnish them with railway tickets to Paris. There was not the least doubt that they would keep their word, and I foresaw that, unless the cholera should break out among them, they would ruin me financially and compel me to sneak out of Spain in disguise.

"Of course I had already gone to my friend the chief of police, and begged him to send the women out of the country. He said that he would do so with all the pleasure in the world, if I would certify that they were rogues and vagabonds. Without this certificate from me, however, he said

that he was powerless to act, for, inasmuch as the women were living at the best hotel in the town, and had every appearance of being perfectly respectable, he could not turn them out of the country without involving Spain in a quarrel with the United States and bringing certain ruin and disgrace upon himself. I had to admit that, although the thirty-two women were worse than the plagues of Egypt, I could not conscientiously certify that they were rogues and vagabonds, and thereupon the chief assured me that he was desolated, but that he really could not see his way to help me. I had permitted myself to count on his services in the matter, and when I found that he could give me no assistance, I went home feeling about as a man does who is condemned to death and has been refused a pardon.

"The next night, as I was passing the hotel, I heard singing. I ought to say that by this time I had pretty well given up going out of the house in the daytime, for fear of meeting either of the thirty-two women or some one of their creditors, and only ventured into the street at night. I stopped to listen to the singing, and then a brilliant idea struck me. The women were singing the most violent sort of revival hymns, and when the singing stopped for a bit I could hear one of them reading aloud. It was clear that they were having some sort of Protestant religious service, which, as I knew, was contrary to law and everlastingly contrary to the prejudices of the inhabitants of Aragua. I lost no time in going to Don Diego, the good old priest I have mentioned, and in telling him that thirty-two American female heretics of the deepest dye were holding a Protestant service at the hotel, and unless they were arrested would probably attempt to convert every man, woman, and child in the town. But there wasn't a grain of comfort to be got out of Don Diego. His good old face brightened up the moment he heard about the heretics, and he said that this was the opportunity he had dreamed of for years. He had always longed to convert some English or American women to the true faith, and now this glorious opportunity had been sent to him. He would not hear for a moment the suggestion that the women

ought to be arrested and sent out of Spain, but he insisted on going instantly to the hotel and converting the entire gang. And he did make the attempt; for the next week he was with those women about half the time, and they all said that he was an old dear. Naturally he didn't make the least progress in converting them, but they were so friendly with him that he felt sure he would gather them in before very long. The next time I saw him he was full of gratitude to me for having given him the opportunity to do such a glorious work for his Church, and he expressed the hope that I would not let the women leave town until he had baptised every one of them.



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"Meanwhile the landlord had begun to send me polite notes asking for a small payment on account. I answered the first one by reiterating my assurance that I would never pay a single peseta, but the succeeding notes were just as polite and cool as ever. The chief of police was of the opinion that, inasmuch as I had not given the landlord, on the day when he received the women, formal notice in writing that I would not be responsible for them, I might be held legally liable. At any rate, it was the chief's opinion that the landlord would swear that I had verbally promised to pay him, and that the court would probably give him a verdict for the full amount, besides damages and costs. When I complained to the chief that the women were openly violating the law by holding Protestant meetings at the hotel, and that the chances

were that they would convert Don Diego, which would be a terrible scandal, he agreed with me that this constituted a state of things which ought to justify the expulsion of the women from the country, but he said that he could take no action in such a matter except at the request of the Church, and that inasmuch as Don Diego was the particular pet of the archbishop, the latter would of course look at the affair through Don Diego's spectacles. I tell you, I just longed for the good old days of the Spanish Inquisition, and would have been willing to subscribe liberally for stakes and firewood for the benefit of those terrible women.



"Towards the end of a fortnight there was a fresh complication. One of the women began to make love to me. She said that if I would escort her to Paris she would cable for enough money to pay both our fares and to secure me against any loss that the rest of the women might put me to. Of course I couldn't consent to accepting such generosity, unless she were prepared to adopt me as her son, or I were intending to ask her to become my wife. However, she never lost courage. I don't mean to say she ever said or did anything that was unladylike, but she had made up her mind to marry me, and she followed me up with an unflinching deter-

mination to win. At last I had to pretend to have a fever, and to take to my bed, but this didn't pan out quite as I had expected. The woman insisted on coming to nurse me, and after I tried the experiment of pretending to be delirious, which didn't frighten her a particle, I had to insist that I was quite well again. As for the other women, they used to hold indignation meetings in my office, which was next to my bedroom. Of course I could hear every word they said, and as they said about twice as much as they ever ventured to say to my face, I didn't enjoy the meetings. I could stand being called brutal and miserly, but it was a little hard to lie on my bed and hear myself charged with being an habitual drunkard and the ugliest man in all Spain.

"The third Sunday after the arrival of the women we had our annual bullfight. I don't take very much stock in bullfights, but I suppose that there was no doubt that our annual bullfight laid over anything of the kind that could be seen in Spain, outside of Madrid, or, perhaps, Barcelona.

"When I first went to Spain I was terribly down on bullfighting, and one day, when the chief of police was sitting in my office and reading the last copy of the *New York Herald*, I told him that a nation where bullfights were permitted had no sort of right to claim to be civilised. He didn't attempt to contradict me, but presently he said—

"I see by this paper that you Americans have just had a great prizefight, in which one of the men was killed. Do you have many prizefights in your country?"

"I had to admit that we did go in for prizefighting pretty strong, but I explained that it was a manly pastime and had its advantages as well as its disadvantages. Then the chief read out an account of the lynching of four niggers that, according to the paper, had been burned alive by a mob of leading citizens somewhere in Missouri, and when he had finished reading he asked me if it was true, as the *Herald* mentioned, that there had been over a thousand cases of lynching in the States during the previous year? The statistics on the subject happened to be lying on my table at that identical moment, only by good luck the chief didn't know it. Still, I couldn't honestly deny that lynching was more or less common in America.

"I suppose there isn't any doubt about the Americans being a civilised nation, is there?" said the chief.

"Hold on! You stop just where you

are!' said I. 'I'll say no more about bullfights if you'll say nothing about prizefights and lynching.'

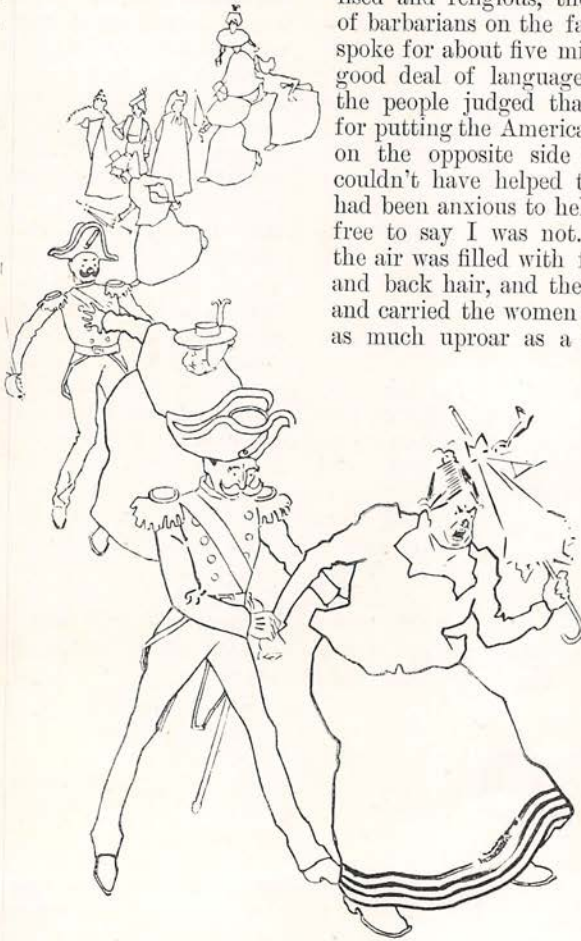
"Since then I have come to the conclusion that though the Spaniards do enjoy bullfights, they are not so very much worse than other people, after all.

"But I am forgetting my story. When Sunday came I went to the bullfight, feeling sure that the American women wouldn't be there, and that I should have a quiet and comfortable afternoon. But to my surprise there they were, occupying seats in the very front row and looking as severe and determined as if they were a lot of temperance crusaders engaged in raiding a rum shop. I knew, of course, that the price of their seats would be charged to me, but that didn't trouble me much. I had already made up my mind that I was bound to be ruined by those women, and it didn't make much difference to a ruined man whether his debts were large or small.

"The American women sat as still as if they were at a prayer meeting, until the first bull was led out. The Spaniards looked at them and wondered why people who had come to amuse themselves could wear such solemn faces; but, as a rule, Spaniards don't trouble themselves much about other people's affairs, and so long as the bullfight promised to pan out well the sour faces of the Americans did not disturb them. But when the women saw that the fight was about to begin, and that

a picador was advancing on the bull with a handful of darts, they rose up in a body and shrieked to him to let the poor beast alone. Both the bull and the man were a good deal astonished, but their astonishment was nothing to that of the spectators when the one American woman who could speak Spanish began to address them. She told them that they were brutes and cowards, and that although they might think themselves civilised and religious, they were the worst set of barbarians on the face of the earth. She spoke for about five minutes, and still had a good deal of language to get rid of, when the people judged that the time had come for putting the Americans out. I was sitting on the opposite side of the arena, and I couldn't have helped the women even if I had been anxious to help them, which I am free to say I was not. For a few minutes the air was filled with fragments of bonnets and back hair, and then the police came in and carried the women off to jail with about as much uproar as a first class revolution would have made.

"I was so savage at the way in which I had been treated that I resolved to let the women spend a night in the lock-up before taking measures to have them released. The prison was a middling comfortable one, and I knew that they could come to no harm by merely occupying it for a night. The next morning I overslept myself, and it was towards noon before I went to the chief of police with the intention of getting the women set at liberty. The chief



"Carried the women off to jail."

welcomed me with enthusiasm. He threw both his arms around me and kissed me on both cheeks, and congratulated me because, as he said, the American women were where they would never give me any more trouble.

"'You're very good,' I said, 'but I'm not rid of them yet. I can't allow them to stay in prison; and when they are released they'll continue to persecute me just as they have been doing.'

“‘My dear sir!’ replied the chief, ‘as you know, I am your most devoted friend, and it has been a terrible grief to me that I could not send those women out of Spain and so restore tranquility to your bosom. But I grieve no longer. The moment they dared to create a riot, and attack the national custom of bullfighting, my course was plain. They had proved themselves to be rogues and vagabonds by engaging in a public riot, and that made it possible for me to send them across the frontier. Of course I cannot interfere between you and the hotel keeper, or protect you against the manager of the bullfight, who claims damages to the amount of five thousand pesetas, and I am afraid you will have to pay the fines which the court inflicted this morning on the women, and which amount to about six thousand pesetas. Nevertheless, that is of little consequence, for I have the great joy of assuring you that the women left here for the French frontier four hours ago, and there is no possibility of their coming back again.’

“I thanked the chief for his kindness. There was no use in telling him that he had driven the last nail in my coffin. You see, it was absolutely certain that the women would complain to the Washington Government, and would represent that they had been illegally sent out of the country, and that I had refused to give them any help. There would be a tremendous row in the American newspapers, and even if it should prove possible to settle the affair without a war with Spain, nothing could save me from

being ignominiously turned out of office. Moreover, even if I should not be removed, it would be impossible for me to stay in Aragua, for I could not pay the claims that those women had run up against me, and my failure to pay would be followed eventually by a stab in the back.

“There was only one thing left for me to do. I went to my lodgings and wrote a letter of resignation to Washington, explaining that my health had suddenly given way. Then, as soon as it was dark, I shaved off my moustache, put a clean collar and tooth-brush in my pocket, and took the express train for Gibraltar, where I caught the steamer for New York. I kept out of sight in America until the uproar about the base insult to American ladies, and the cowardly conduct of a consul, had died away, and then I went to the Sandwich Islands and went into the sugar business. I never met one of the women after I left Spain, and I trust that I never will. As for the consul at Avilas, who dumped those thirty-two women on me, I wanted to meet him the worst way for several years, but now that the thing has become an old story I have got over my rage, and sometimes I find myself coming pretty near to admiring him for the way in which he got square with me. That man would have made a first class anarchist conspirator, if such had happened to be his path in life, for, considering what he did with those thirty-two women, he would have accomplished great things with dynamite bombs and infernal machines.”

