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Our Sad Need of Diplomats

HAVANA, NOV. 9.—One of the foreign consuls, a man who has been for many years and in many lands in the diplomatic service of his country, when asked his opinion of the American commissions here, answered at once that they are too big, too unwieldy: there are too many men. He gave it as his idea that the European governments found it far more satisfactory and expeditious to leave the most important negotiations in the hands of three or four men trained to the game, who would have only such subordinates as were needed for bare clerky duties, and practically carry everything in their own heads. He confessed that in a considerable experience at the London, Berlin and Vienna embassies of his country he had never succeeded in espying any such noble diplomatic caravans.

This seems partly true. For instance, the Evacuation Commission or, rather, the Commission-Appointed-to-Negotiate-and-Superintend-an-Evacuation-Which-at-Some-Future-Date-Is-More-or-Less-Likely-to-Take-Place,-Although-It-Must-Be-Said-There-Is-No -Direct-Evidence-at-Present-to-Prove-That -Said-Gentlemen-Might-Not-with-More-Comfort-Have-Remained-at-Home-and-There-Drawn-the-Salaries-Duly-Provided—this commission lives in a hotel, an entire hotel, the best hotel. Of course, the private citizen is naturally aggrieved at having the best hotel and restaurant wrested from him, even by a commission. This is especially true in a town like Havana, where the best is not startling. But, after all, when the Standard Oil Company comes to town, it consists of a man with a valise. People like Senator Manna walk about with an entire state in a waistcoat pocket, and plenty of men jingle counties and cities carelessly, like so many coins. Alone, Napoleon once settled a treaty by hurling a porcelain vase to the floor in fragments and declaring to the Austrian ambassador that his country would look that way if he did not instantly submit to the imperial terms. The great things of the world are invariably done by machines which do not require as housing an entire hotel.

One harrowing local phase of it is the absolute impossibility of getting familiar with all the faces of the commissioners and their suites. One will become quite convinced that one is well versed in the official countenances, when suddenly into some public place will come a bewildering string of colonels, majors and captains, all utterly new, and yet all obviously as important as the very devil. It makes one's head ache.

If I may be allowed to say so, I have already pointed out in the *Journal* that one of the principal Spanish ideas of cleverness and craft is a policy of stone-faced delay. Heaven knows what they suppose it accomplishes, but at any rate they adopt it.

An American business man, many years the agent here of an important New York firm, remarked to me today: "When I came here first I tried to hurry these people. If I called on some firm and they kept me waiting an hour, I used to kick like blazes. I'd say: 'Look here, I'm in a

hurry! My time is valuable! I can't wait here all day!' Then they would merely raise their shoulders in maddening indifference and say: 'Well, we are very sorry.'

"It took me a long time to find out that it was merely a ruse, a trick, because the fools worked it often enough when it was greatly to their advantage to bring off a deal with me."

For my part, I believe all this is a direct inheritance from ancient Moorish vendors of fruit, tobacco, rugs, water jars, brass trinkets. We are, in fact, dealing with a lot of peddlers.

Colonel Hecker's career here is highly amusing and instructive. "I want so-and-so. Have you got it? Yes? How much do you want for it? No—won't give it. Bang!—negotiations off!" While the peddler is just getting into shape to wheedle and dicker and snivel and bluff, Hecker is a mile away, dealing with another man. Hecker has greatly rumped them up here. He charges them like a wild bull and won't stand for a minute their little Mediterranean tricks. For his dock and other works he has got nearly everything he wants in a short time, and—so business men tell me—he paid only the just price. The Spaniards think he is a marvel. They expected to have a pie.

Before the war, when the American colony was leaving Havana in haste, the Spanish pilot who was taking a steamer out of the harbor addressed one of the American passengers. "Well, good-by. I'll see you again soon."

"See me again soon?" said the American in surprise. "How will you see me again?"

"Oh, I'll soon be over there," answered the pilot grimly, pointing into the north. "I'm going on board one of our warships."

The American laughed then. "Why, your warships can't move. They haven't any coal."

"Yes; but," answered the Spaniard, "there is plenty of coal at Key West."

"How are you going to get it?"

"We will go and take it," said the pilot, with a shine in his eye and disclosing his teeth.

Well, the amount of coal captured by the Spaniards at Key West turned out to be not enough to carry them far, and at the end of the war the American returned to Havana. Luck had it that he was spoken of a great deal about the harbor as the probable American appointee as captain of the port. This turned the pilot quite woolly with fright, and his teeth have been chattering ever since in the expectation that when the Americans come his head will be among the first to fall.

There are plenty of people here who are sorry that they were so mighty cocksure in the early days. The roots of their existence are fastened in Cuba even as that pilot's sole hold on the world is his knowledge of the waters of Havana. Many of them who gratuitously insulted Americans before the war and in the early stages of the conflict now sometimes find that these individual Americans are likely to be their governmental masters.

A good many are trying to get in out of the wet, and although revenge is usually foreign to an American character, the reversal of form is so pitifully bald and shameless that it goes against the northern stomach.

An extraordinary number of people are inquiring the whereabouts of Joseph A. Springer. He was consular agent here for over thirty-five years. He was the wheel horse of American diplomacy. In short, he was the consulate. He departed with Lee just previous to the war.

We, as a people, know as much about diplomacy as we do about hatching fighting cocks by holding eggs over a gas jet, but unconsciously and without any virtue of our own, we have reared in certain places men who perfectly understand the business which, by mandate of government, they are required to manipulate. These are invariably subordinate officers. The great

men, the high-steppers, they come for a time, lean heavily upon the shoulders of the wheel horses and then retire to oblivion or Congress. The wheel horse puts some liniment upon his shoulder and stands then ready to pull the next high-stepper out of a mudhole.

Meanwhile, he never, by any chance, gets the slightest credit for anything. The great man, the ambassador, or the minister, may go home with his very boots full of laurels, but the wheel horse in all probability gets flung into some adjacent abyss without anyone taking trouble to listen whether or no he hits a projecting ledge.

One familiar with our European affairs could cite unnumbered cases of the kind, but the case of Springer is point enough. On these commissions here is about everybody who ever officially sighted Cuba through a telescope. The young men who were under Springer's consular tutelage before the war are here, officially. Everybody is here but Springer. Springer has no influence. Heaven help Springer.

I often think of the fate of White, the first secretary of our embassy in London. He has pulled ambassadors through knotholes and up through cracks in the floor until he is prematurely gray, and at last he will be flung out somewhere to die—all same Springer.