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Apocryphal Conversations

McKinley; Sagasta

Sagasta.—Senor Presidente, you are very good, and you will find that Spain is not unreasonable. I have instructed my Peace Commissioners to concede quite a number of the demands that yours will probably make.

McKinley.—And the others?

Sag.—Why, of course, senor, a demand that is not conceded is refused.

McK.—But if my commissioners have the incivility to insist?

Sag.—In that case Spain knows how to defend her honor.

McK.—How, for example?

Sag.—If need be, with the naked breasts of her sons!

McK.—My good but garlicky friend, you err widely. The thing which there may be a dispute about is not Spanish honor, but Spanish soil.

Sag.—In every square foot of which, senor Porco—I mean Presidente—Spanish honor is rooted.

McK.—Sir, I shall consult my Secretary of Agriculture as to the desirability of annexing land which produces a crop like that. But this is your day to be dull: can you really suppose that in permitting you to have . . . a conquered country and must accept such terms of peace as its conquerors choose to impose. The commission exists only because we are willing to spare a defeated people the humiliation of naked surrender. Terms of peace are commonly embodied in a “treaty,” which having the form and appearance of a mutual agreement gives them a certain sanctity and permanence. You must pass under the yoke, but we have wreathed it with flowers. You must swallow the pill, but we have sugar-coated it “to the Queen’s taste.” It is odd that you should believe your commissioners endowed with any voice but that of assent. However—these matters may be debated, there is but one deciding power—the will of the American Executive.

Sag.—Senor, you forget. Supreme over all there is God!

McK.—Oh, I don’t know, He’s not the only—

Sag.—Holy cats!

Miles; Gomez

Miles.—There you are, my patriot friend—free as a bird!

Gomez.—Yes, general, a thousand thanks to you and your noble country But general, my soldiers—they starve.

M.—How so?

G.—While the war was on we could get an honest living by pillage and plunder of the Spaniards and their friends. Now there is, you say, an armistice. That means—

M.—That you must disband and go to work.

G.—What! Before peace is definitely established?

M.—O, yes, the American army will maintain order during the armistice and manage the war if peace negotiations fail.

G.—In other words, Cuba is to have no army of her own, but is to rely altogether upon you. You offer us the independence of a dependency.

M.—That is rather better than what you had before we came.

G.—That depends; it is better if you govern better than the Spaniards did; but in any case it falls something short of perfection when considered from my point of view. Granting that it is good, yet appreciation of excellence is a work of the intellect, and general, an empty stomach has no brains. The matter stands this way: you make a war in order to assist us, and you make an armistice without consulting us. To yourselves the armistice means rest and fat feeding; to us, with no subsistence department, famine. We lived on the enemy; while leisurely arranging a peace to suit yourselves you deprive us of an enemy on whom to live. Well, you are consistent. In the Philippines you aided an oppressed people and for your services in setting them free you propose taking their best island for yourselves and handing back the others to the oppressors. In Hawaii you annex one hundred thousand people, of whom only three thousand wanted annexation. That looked black, indeed, but only until Senator Cullom had invented a justification. “The United States deals only with governments,” says he, “not with individuals”—which is magnificent! Here in Cuba you promised protection to the reconcentrados, assistance to the insurgents. You starved your protégés by a blockade, your allies by an armistice.

M.—We will feed you—you have only to ask.

G.—And that would be Cuban “independence.”

Gage; Maguire; Greenway

Gage.—I am told that you think me the worst dressed man in California.

Greenway.—On the contrary, I think there are men in California who dress even worse than you do. I may have said that a man who wears a turn-down collar ought to be shot.

Gage.—What is the matter with a turn-down collar?

Green.—Nothing. I did not say the collar ought to be shot.

Gage.—I understand that you are the leader of Society in San Francisco.

Green.—And you in Los Angeles?

Gage.—God forbid! I have not leisure to “dress the part.”

Green.—It requires, for example, no more time to wear a standing collar than a turn-down one, and ill-fitting clothes are put on as early and taken off as late as those that fit well.

Gage.—Fewer good men dress well than ill.

Green.—Fewer can afford to. You can.

Gage.—To dress well, I am told, is no light and easy matter; it requires a certain gift and considerable study.

Green.—To govern California is no light and easy matter. If you lack sense and diligence I shall not vote for you.

Gage.—You have not been asked to vote for me.

Green.—Many times by your supporters; all the time by your candidacy.

Gage.—As to my collar, was not the turn-down collar once almost universally worn? Do not fashions change?

Green.—Some do; but not the fashion of being I the fashion.

Gage.—Who are the arbiters in the matter of good or ill dressing.

Green.—Naturally, those whose customs in respect of dress are most unlike those of the slovenly savage—those who, leading the advance out of barbarism, are at the farthest remove from it. (Enter Maguire.)

Gage.—Is my distinguished opponent, Judge Maguire, guiltless in this matter? He doesn't look a dude.

Green.—I decline to answer.

Gage.—Well, thank Heaven, to dress ill, even if able to dress well, is at least not immoral.

Green.—It is needlessly disagreeable, therefore immoral. You have no right to offend our sensibilities.

Gage.—Whose sensibilities?

Maguire (who for five minutes has been vigorously dusting his hair, brushing his coat and rebuttoning his waist coat more symmetrically).—Mine.