

# WHAT IT MEANS TO INSPECT AN INCOMING STEAMER

## How the Government Enforces the Tariff Law and the Measures It Takes to Prevent Smuggling.

A PLAIN American citizen who had never done such a thing before went on one of the docks last week and watched the customs inspectors go through the baggage of returning travelers. He went because there has been so much printed lately about the customs inspection that, never having been to Europe and never expecting to go, his curiosity had been stirred by what he read of the things that happen to those who do. He wanted to see for himself.

What he saw was a very odd story. It has been told countless times to the great army of readers who, like this sightseer, have never made a European trip, and they constitute the majority of the American people. The newspaper comic verses and cartoons about it, and the American citizen supposed that he was thoroughly familiar with it.

He supposed so until he saw it. And then he found that he had never known anything about it at all. He found that you have to see it to know anything about it. He did not see anything that he had not read about a hundred times, and yet it was all perfectly new. He wishes every home-staying American citizen could see it—every home-staying citizen who thinks he knows all about it.

For when we read about it we read about the United States Government enforcing the tariff law. But when you see it you don't see the Government enforcing the tariff law. You see a man—not the Government, but a man—take a woman's trunk, open it, and in the presence of several hundred people—anybody who cares to look—paw through it and dig up all the intimate personal decorations that are in it and scrutinize them and hold them up and squint at them, and ask her all kinds of questions about them. You see her, embarrassed, anxious, flustered, answering his questions and feebly flinching every time he lays one of them down and resumes his pawing through the rest of the intimate belongings.

When you look at this, it does not seem to you at all as if you were looking at something you had read of a thousand times in newspaper articles and jokes and cartoon captions. It seems as if you were looking at something the United States Government enforcing the tariff law. You see a man going through a woman's clothes. And you see the woman suffering.

The plain American citizen who saw this had always thought that the emphasis laid on the woman feature was an example of the satirist's genius for exaggeration. He supposed that women really didn't figure much in the inquisition—that is, unless they were suspected smugglers. He thought that the incoming American had to stand the gaff and that the incoming American didn't suffer any real personal discomfort.

But it wasn't so. Everywhere that he looked he saw women—women in all stages of explanation, from the eager to the despairing, all of them watching strange men plow through things that were never meant to be shown except to husbands and other people who had known them a long time, and none of them looking as if they felt very different from suspected malefactors in the Women's Court.

And it jarred. The American citizen

Yes, your wife doesn't suffer any more than the street walker.

In fact, not so much. For the inspectors are more respectful to her than the police court men are to the street walker. You have that much satisfaction.

At the beginning and before anybody had gotten off the boat—in fact, before the boat had tied up at the dock—there was a menacing look about the tremendous horde of men who were gathered around in blue uniforms waiting for their prey. Wherever you looked you saw them; they were lined up against railings, with folded arms or standing around in groups telling each other stories.

And they were good fellows, too. They were not like the hard-faced heeled who in many city offices and disgrace the administrative parts of the courts in New York. If you have been to the Naturalization Bureau, for instance, and seen the plugs who are employed by the Supreme Court of the State of New York to guide intending Americans through the mazes of naturalization and have got the idea that this is the type of man who serves the self-ruling democracy of America, you should see the intelligent and decent fellows who, in the main—there are some exceptions—make up Uncle Sam's Customs Service, and change your mind.

In other words, if you have to have your clothes searched and if you have to be

uniform to inspect a ship?" he asked innocently.

But the man who knew all about it hushed him. "It takes more," he said, and waved his hand. The American citizen looked, and saw forty or fifty men in uniform slouched up against a rail. The man who knew all about it hushed him and pointed to another background. There were fifty or sixty more.

"How many of them are there?" asked the American citizen awestruck.

"Two hundred and twenty-five to-day," said the man who knew all about it.

"How are they divided?" asked the American citizen.

"Well," said the man who knew all about it, "there are 170 inspectors. There are 20 Acting Deputy Collectors. There are 35 Appraisers. There are 20 customs watchmen. There are a dozen miscellaneous employees."

"What are they?" asked the American citizen.

"Well," said the man who knew all about it, "they include inspectors"—he said inspectors, though you might as well say stenographers or postesses—entry clerks, deputy surveyors, and so on."

"What are they doing?" asked the plain American, waving a hand at the mob of uniformed men—the size of two

registered himself wrong and to fix him up right, so that when he gets on the pier he won't be regarded as a criminal instead of what he is—a flustered lobster.

For instance, the incoming passenger has declared himself a resident, when in fact he is a non-resident; or he has stated that there is no woman of his name aboard. She's married, but he's forgotten to mention that. And the incoming sleuths note that on his declaration in blue pencil. That's all they do. Then they vanish.

"And the horror doesn't begin till the criminals—passengers, I mean—get aboard the pier?" asked the citizen, watching with fascinated gaze a man who was yanking a chemise out of a trunk before the eyes of its blushing owner.

"No," replied the man who knows. "And, in fact, the blue pencil mark on the declaration is a thing for the passenger's benefit. It protects him from the consequence of his own breaks. Later on he is put through a formal questioning and the error straightened out. The blue pencil mark and its subsequent verification makes straight the path which



Waiting for Their Prey—The Liner Is Coming In.



"Proving that They Have Not Committed the Crime of Perjury."

companies of regular infantry in the United States Army.

"Waiting for their prey," said the man who knew all about it. And the American citizen looked at those two companies of soldiers—civil soldiers, but all uniformed—and wondered. Wondered at the greatness of the American Republic and other things.

The American citizen looked over at the big ship just looming up over the dock and filled with tired travelers waiting to wave a greeting at the crowd assembled on the pier.

"What has happened to them at Quarantine?" he asked.

"Not a thing," the man who knew all about it hastened to explain to him. "At Quarantine nothing happens. You see, every steamer is stocked with blanket declarations. After the ship has been at sea some time these declarations are distributed among the passengers—distributed long enough in advance to give them from twenty-four to forty-eight hours in which to study them over and figure out what they want to declare."

"What happens to them then?" asked the American citizen.

"They are boarded at Quarantine," said the man who knows all about it, "by the Fifth Division of the Collector's office, headed by Deputy Collector Williams."

"Is that the inspection?" asked the American citizen, who, as will be clearly seen by those of you who have gone to Europe, knew nothing at all about it.

The man who knows laughed lightly. "Not a bit of it," he said. "Although every newspaper reader who hasn't gone abroad thinks the horror happens at Quarantine. All that happens there is that the Collector's men interview the purser, who has already taken up the declarations; and gets them from him. Of course, by that time the returning traveler knows what's in store for him, for he can see the customs officer in every corner poring over his declaration and trying to find out whether he has made a mistake in it or not."

"Cheerful for the passenger," said the citizen. "It makes him happy on his last day aboard ship to see blue-capped men reading his declaration wherever he turns."

"It ought to please him," returned the man who knows, curtly, "because it's in his interest. That whole proceeding is to help the passenger. The torture chamber comes later. The man who boards the ship is not trying to find out smuggled goods; he is trying to find out the places where the 'bull-headed' passenger has

like himself—and citizenesses—stopping at the desk to show their coupons. It was a breathlessly hot day, and they all sweat and panted and fanned themselves unavailingly with handkerchiefs or handbags or anything that came handy as they stood in the line.

"I see the Inspector's desk," said the American citizen, "but how about the first Inspector in line?"

"That's the thing," said the man who knows, ungrammatically. He pointed to one of the hundred uniformed men, who at that moment walked away with the passenger at the head of the line. They walked or rather jostled and pushed through a mob of several hundred people, all running frantically in different directions, and, after a short transaction at another desk, they stopped at a place where the letter "M" was glaringly printed on a long stanchion. The other stanchions had other letters printed on them.

"That woman's name, you see, begins with M," said the man who knows. "That crowd of uniformed men are the first ones waiting for their prey. The first one at the desk got the job of looking over her baggage."

"What did they stop at that other desk for?" asked the American citizen.

"That's the acknowledgment desk," said the encyclopedia. "She was taken there to acknowledge her signature to the declaration. Now, though I didn't hear the conversation on the way from the desk, I can tell you about what it was."

"You see, in the early part of the examination every chance is given to the passenger. There are a lot of chances that he may have made an honest mistake, and he gets every opportunity to rectify it. If the Inspector discovers that the passenger is laboring under any misunderstanding or misapprehension, it is his duty to bring the passenger to the Deputy Collector and give him a chance to make a correction."

"After the Inspector reaches the baggage he opens and inspects it, and if necessary he calls another officer, described as an examiner, who represents the Appraiser. He ought to be called a translator."

"Why?" asked the innocent bystander. "Because it is his duty to translate the dutiable articles into the language of the tariff. You may talk all the languages of Europe without knowing a word of tariff. The law tells what certain things are, and the declaration has got to correspond to the definition. It may astonish

you to discover that something is described as 'wearing apparel,' which you had no notion of wearing; but that's tariffese.

"After the Inspector has finished his search he takes the passenger to the office of the entry clerk, who computes duties and passes anything that is entitled to free entry. When the duty has been paid the inspector places a stamp on the various articles, and the passenger summons a porter or expressman and has his baggage brought out. At the gate the customs watchman cancels the stamp, and he is free again—he leaves court acquitted of the charge that he's a perjurer. And that's virtually what he has been doing all the time—proving beyond reasonable doubt that when he made his declaration he was not committing the crime of perjury."

"So it takes two, or maybe three, men to go over every bunch of baggage?" asked the inquisitive citizen.

"Oh, no," said the encyclopedia. "The great majority of passengers never see anybody but the inspector and the man at the acknowledgment desk. They don't, you see, bring in enough articles to call for an appraiser. Making the acknowledgment is a merely formal affair, and you might say that the average passenger has nothing to do with anybody but the inspector."

The American citizen took a look at the army of Federal officers who were honeycombing the dock. There seemed to be no end to them. Some wore caps, some straw hats, and nearly all of them badges. The man who knows saw his look and interpreted.

"There are 170 inspectors working on this inspection," he said. "They are headed by John Rasczkiewicz. That's the man, that clean-cut, square-chinned, fine-looking fellow. If you talk to him you'll see that he has the unusual combination of the velvet voice and the strong hand. It's needed when you're dealing with people who, even if they are potential criminals, are otherwise respectable. If every inspector was like Rasczkiewicz no one would ever complain; and, as a matter of fact, most of them are, within their limitations."

"You mean," said the American citizen, getting hot, "that janissaries are pretty good fellows?"

"I mean exactly that," affirmed the man who knows. "If your sensibilities are stirred by what you see on this dock, charge them up to the law that makes janissaries—not to the janissaries. They are as courteous, and sensible, and kind-

ly a lot of men as I suppose you could get in a similar position. Compared with the employes of a city or State they shine, as Federal employes always do shine when they are contrasted with State or city men. It may grouch you to see a woman opening her handbag and explaining its contents to a man she's never seen before, but the man is right. It's the law that's put her in that nervous posture that's responsible. And you made the law; the janissary didn't."

"How often do they call an appraiser?" asked the citizen.

"When the goods are worth more than \$500," answered the man. "At present they proceed on the theory that one inspector should be allotted to every five every ten second-class. There is a fine distinction drawn now between first and second-class passengers; as far as the customs people are concerned, it's like inspecting two different ships. Come over here and let me introduce you to Rasczkiewicz, and he'll tell you what they are trying to do."

Rasczkiewicz is a straightforward, mainly plain, chaps in address, and with a direct and steadfast eye.

"What were you trying to do," said he, "is to abolish delay. We are trying to reach such a stage of perfection that we shall finish the examination as soon as the last piece of baggage is put off the vessel."

This may not seem very portentous in type, but if you had been there and seen the mass of trunks being swung on the dock, and the slow-paced, tired, born-tired-in-fact, employes of the steamship company sluggishly and dispiritedly moving them forward you would have thought Rasczkiewicz an optimist.

"We have made some extraordinary records lately," he went on. "We have made a record of passing 500 passengers in fifty-five minutes. Our goal is to handle all first-class cabin passengers in thirty minutes, and while we haven't got there yet we think it's in sight. We have to depend largely on the co-operation of the steamship people."

He made no criticism of the steamship people, but it was not possible to look at their tortoiselike employes without feeling that he was up against a pretty large qualification.

"How many people make erroneous declarations?" asked the citizen.

"Ranges from 11 to 30 per cent.," answered Rasczkiewicz. "But a good deal of it is due to honest error. The people who deliberately design to smuggle average 15 per cent."

"One of our principal difficulties," he continued, "is due to the fact that Congress divided passengers into residents and non-residents. And that's very important."

"How?" asked the American citizen.

"Of course, the American gets the benefit of it, but in what precise way?"

A smile flickered over Rasczkiewicz's face—an irrepressible and involuntary smile. "No," he said, "the American gets the worst of it. It was the apparent intention of Congress to enable aliens, coming here for short trips, to declare their personal effects clear of duty. 'Residents' are confined to the \$100 exemption, which applies to everything—personal effects or anything else."

"Now, are you a resident or a non-resident? If you are a son of the Mayflower it may be an easy question to answer, but a lot of the people who return here from Europe have no such short way to settle it. And even if you are a son of the Mayflower and spend part of your time abroad, how can you settle even in your own mind what your status is under the tariff law?"

"We have taken that to court time and again, and have got it partly cleared up, but we still await a decision on some of the fine points. The best decision we got was in the case of Mary Garden."

"Miss Garden really didn't know whether she was a resident or not. She came here every year and spent a good deal of time here, but she also went to Europe every year and spent a good deal of time there. Finally we got a decision that the length of time spent abroad had no bearing on the matter of establishing a residence. That eased our labors a good deal. But you can see from this illustration, that there is no question of crookedness; it's simply a question of understanding the law."

"A pretty fine lot of men," said the man who knows, as he and his friend mowed their way through the uniformed crowd hanging around for their prey.

"They are," agreed the American citizen. "If you've got to show your corner cover and your undershirt to strange men, it's a good thing that Uncle Sam uses more care in his selections of employes than Father Knickerbocker. But I must confess that I'm not enamored of the sight, and I can't help thinking that when our old friend the Future Historian writes up to her what the Future comes out of the twenty-fourth century He may even know—call us the dark Ages. We call the thirteenth century that, and we do it on similar grounds."

The American citizen, seeming wound up for a speech. The man who knows all about it looked worried about it. "Aldrich," he hastily interrupted, "re-



"Trying to Explain Her Necklace."

hadn't expected that it would jar, because he thought he knew all about it. It was a thrice-told story. It never had jarred him in the reading, but it jarred now.

There was a woman there trying to explain her necklace, and it was on her neck at the time. It was an innocent necklace, as the event showed, and she got through all right. But the eager, anxious way in which she tried to explain it to the doubtful inspector, the way he bent forward and studied it as it encircled her neck, the way she pointed to it and took it in her fingers and argued that it was worth what she said, her pitiful and earnest insistence that the whole thing did not make a pleasing picture to the American citizen. He had seen women trying to convince a police Magistrate that they were not respectable, when they probably were, and he had felt that the explanations they had to make and the proofs they had to submit jarred him. Now he saw a cultured and well-bred gentlewoman undergoing a similar experience and obviously undergoing quite similar emotions, and he discovered that you had to see a thing like that to be really jarred.

The inspectors are not rough or summary with these women—or with the men for that matter. Their instructions are to give the passenger every possible chance. But, then, neither are the Magistrates rough and summary—not all of them; and neither is the police Lieutenant always rough and summary when he takes the street-walker's pedigree, looking at her searchingly over his desk in the house with the green lights.

reated like a Women's Court except by the Government your husband elects, it is much better to be handled that way by the decent fellows who are employed under Collector Loeb than by the flannel-mouthed and speckled-faced hoodlums who in many cases serve the City and County of New York.

These are some of the things that surged through the mind of the plain American citizen as he watched the process. He had had a whole lot to do with human microbes from Italy and Hungary; he had seen them go up against the hard-featured grafters of the Supreme Court and wondered what sort of impressions of America they would carry away after they had been bullied by the heeled and "maced" by the grafters. Now he saw the better class of incoming Americans coming back and turning their women folks inside out for the benefit of men of a better grade, and he wondered what sort of impressions they would have.

But, pshaw! They won't have any. The impression will stay with the other class. And later on, when we hear of a great city in the Northwest going Socialist we will wonder why.

The plain American observer looked over the pier and saw no ship—for the ship hadn't come in yet—but men in uniform, with low-voiced caps, as far as he could see. First he saw about twenty of them grouped around a gangplank that did not lead to a ship, but was placed somewhere in the middle of a pier, and he thought that was all there was of them.

"Does it take a dozen of these men in