A Thief passes for a gentleman, when stealing has made him rich. — Thos. Fuller.

SPANISH MORALITY

Spain is knocking on the door of the U.S., for full recognition, and the UN, for membership. A little-noticed event last year ought to be brought up and settled before Spain gets anywhere.

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You hear Spain extolled as a "bulwark against European communism", because of the Franco rightist dictatorial positions, but communism would hardly go further than the actions in this particular incident.

There is in the large industrial city of Barcelona a public utility, the Barcelona Light, Power & Traction Co. It was built 20 years ago by investors and engineers of the U.S., England, Belgium and Canada, and it furnishes the city with street cars, electric power and lights.

When the Franco government came to power in 1937, it put a stop to money leaving the country. The BLPT Co. went on earning coupon payments for its bondholders and dividends for its stockholders, but these payments were not allowed to be sent out of Spain; so it deposited all payments in two banks in Barcelona and Madrid and notified all its investors that their earnings had been escrowed in these banks and perhaps some day could be paid to them.

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The richest citizen of Spain (and great Franco supporter) is Juan March, who in the last 20 years has been written up as a "tycoon" a "munitions merchant", a political power over western Europe and the Mediterranean. More than a year ago, March had three of his men buy up BLPT Co. bonds and appear before a country magistrate in Spain to ask that the company be declared bankrupt because its bondholders had not been paid in accordance with the bond terms.

That March could have induced the government to free the escrowed money to be sent to bondholders is almost too plain to mention. That the company was not insolvent, but had deposited in these special Spain accounts the money it had earned and was ready to pay its investors is obvious.
But the country magistrate, without calling on the company to present any evidence, at once declared the power company bankrupt and approved the formation of a "bondholders' committee" to take over the properties and monies. March was made head of this "committee". He has appropriated the properties of the Barcelona Power, Light & Traction Co., and has applied to the Spanish courts to take over $12 million dollars in one of the escrowed savings deposits and $15 million in the other. Every appearance is he will get them both.

The relative morality of March's brigandage is completely disclosed in a letter he sent the home office of the utility ownership in Canada, saying he was, in accordance with the laws of Spain, in possession of the company and would be glad to settle by turning back about two-fifths of the BPLT Co. to its real owners and keeping three-fifths of it.

England, Canada, Belgium, and I think the U.S. State Department have all protested this theft to the Spanish government. As we are not now represented by a minister or ambassador at Madrid, it is possible our protest went into the lower drawers of the Spanish bureaucracy. The only answer the foreign ministry of Spain has made is that "everything has been in accordance with the laws of this country".

The very least we can say of Russia, or her satellite countries, is that none of them has yet stolen any of our foreign property of this size or value. If Russia or a satellite had, we might even be talking here in America, about war to reclaim it.

M. R. HOWARD.