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Subject: "Gómez, Dictator of Venezuela, refusing us
to enter Venezuela".

We arrived in Curaçao by steamer in, I believe, April 1916, having left some weeks before our first post at Fort Erie, Canada. We were not in the war but we were getting closer to it. Our government was collaborating with the allied governments in the matter of the control of fuel and exports and imports. Curaçao had been settled in the middle of 1500 by Portuguese Jews. I will in another memorandum speak of the island and of the reasons why I was sent there. In that memorandum I shall speak of the really considerable importance which Curaçao had in the war picture already. This memorandum has to deal with a curious development which took place during our stay there.

Almost immediately after our arrival I found that there were hundreds of Venezuelan refugees in Curaçao. Gómez had been dictator of Venezuela for years and was going strong. He was an absolute dictator and had as complete control over his country as I think any dictator in Latin America ever ~~exercised~~ before or since. Almost every day, by schooner or by ferry steamer from Venezuela, there arrived in Curaçao new refugees. Some of these were men who had occupied important positions immediately around Gómez in the government. As is well known he was absolutely ruthless in dealing with those who were not in complete agreement with him or who in any way aroused his displeasure or suspicion. Many of those who fell out of favor were put into the prisons in La Guaira and Puerto Cabello and in Caracas. Some times for no reason at all after having been in jail for several years some of these men were released and permitted to leave for Curaçao. Most of those, of course, who were put into the prisons died in due course.

As I have already said when we arrived in Curaçao there were hundreds of these Venezuelan refugees living on the island and, of course, in the town of Willemstad. There was no way in which they could gain

their livelihood because no one would employ them for fear of incurring the displeasure of Gómez. Although Curaçao was a Dutch island, most of the people living there of any consideration, had business of one kind or another with Venezuela and they knew that if they in any way were kind to or employed any of these refugees there were all sorts of retaliatory measures which Gómez could use against them. Curaçao was less than a hundred miles off the coast of Venezuela. Gómez had his people in Curaçao so that he knew just what was happening there among the refugees. These people, of course, no matter what their wealth and position in Venezuela might have been, always had to leave either in a hurry and always without money. Most of the people in Curaçao for fear of retaliation were even afraid to give food and shelter to these refugees. Most of them lived in misery and distress and many of them suffered for food.

It was not long after our arrival that I wished to undertake Spanish lessons and wished to do so through conversation, and I found there was a distinguished refugee there by the name of Castillo who had been Minister of Hacienda under Gómez and who had written a number of quite interesting books. I asked him to give me Spanish lessons. He agreed to do it but said that he would not take any compensation. The only arrangement that we could work out was that he came to the house either for lunch or dinner every day and I had an hour or so conversation with him in Spanish before or after lunch or dinner. He got one good meal a day. For me it was a wonderful arrangement because he was a man of very fine culture and had read very widely. It made the learning of Spanish a pleasure.

As I became more and more aware of the unhappy situation of many of these refugees, I spoke to some of the Dutch officials and

asked if they saw any objection to my trying to find a way to give some food, at least once a day to some of these refugees. My salary was at the time two thousand dollars a year. At that time there were no allowances given to foreign service officers for a house or for representation, no allowances of any kind. We had a little income of our own which we used to supplement my salary. I found that it was quite impossible to try to do anything in the way of interesting people to help these refugees, much as they wanted to do so. There is no doubt that they would have suffered retaliations in their business. I, therefore, with the approval of the Governor of the island, made an arrangement with the head of the prison that he would give any refugees whose name I gave to him a good meal in the middle of the day. Curaçao is a tropical island with a very good climate because of the trade winds which blow except, as I recall, two weeks of the year. The prison was a rather open and airy place; it wasn't too bad a place for the refugees to get a good meal every day. At the end of the month I would be furnished an account of the number of meals served by the prison authorities. It wasn't easy for my wife and I to make this sacrifice but I have never regretted it. Most of the refugees who benefited by these meals had no idea who was providing them.

Early in ^a(1917) I received orders to proceed to Antwerp, Belgium, where I was to be the number two man in the Consulate General. As we had not been able to go to Venezuela during our several years' stay on Curaçao, we decided that we would take the steamer which plied between New York and La Guaira, Venezuela, when it stopped at Curaçao on its way to La Guaira. The steamer usually remained in La Guaira for three days while it was unloading and loading, and then went North from La Guaira. I told the Venezuelan consul that I was planning to do this

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with my wife and that we would spend the several days that we were in port in La Guaira for the most part in Caracas. We had been quite friendly during my stay on the island and he was a very pleasant and cultured gentleman. He expressed great pleasure that my wife and I would be visiting his country and particularly the capital before we returned to the United States. It is only an overnight's trip from Curaçao to La Guaira. When the ship anchored in the harbor of La Guaira the following day, the captain was with us on the deck and he said that there was a Customs boat arriving which indicated that it had the chief of the Customs aboard and that he was probably coming aboard to meet us. In fact, he did board the steamer. He engaged my wife and me in conversation, expressed his pleasure that we were visiting his country and the capital, and said that all facilities would be given us. Nothing happened for an hour but pleasant conversation. The passengers became very restive, they wanted to go ashore, and nothing seemed to happen until we had gone ashore. The captain became restive. Finally the Customs officer began to tell us, pointing to a village on one side of La Guaira, that there was a very serious epidemic of influenza there. He pointed to a village on the other side of La Guaira and said that influenza was even more serious there. When we said that we were not disturbed about this, he began to tell us that the epidemic in Caracas was even more serious. For several days there had not been sufficient wood available to make coffins for the dead and they were being buried in sheets in the cemetery. When Mrs. Messersmith and I continued to show our interest in going ashore and to Caracas, he finally bluntly told me that we could not go ashore. When he couldn't persuade us he had to tell us bluntly that we could not go ashore. For three days we lay in the harbor of La Guaira sweltering in the sun. Gómez had had his revenge on the one man in Curaçao who had dared to be kind to the Venezuelan refugees on the island. I found that he had given the orders that we were not to be permitted to land.