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A VISA TO EINSTEIN

The American Consul-General's office in Berlin has issued a visa to Prof. Albert Einstein and the distinguished scientist will make his projected visit to the United States. One may suspect that a sharp cable from Washington ended the controversy, causing Consul-General Messersmith to reverse his over-technical and bureaucratic attitude. The incident does not call for any excited condemnation of the consul-general, such as that being attempted by a group of New York women. It needs to be viewed, as Einstein himself doubtless views it, with relativity.

If accounts of Einstein's native country are correct, that land is even fuller of bureaucrats than this one, and it is the nature of bureaucrats to be fussy and filled with a sense of their own importance. They frequently manage to be absurd, as Messersmith was in this instance; but it can hardly be said that Messersmith was any more ridiculous than the average German minor official would be in similar circumstances—or French or English for that matter. No doubt Messersmith is a competent detail man, paying that meticulous attention to the minutiae which the letter of the law requires, and rightly requires in the majority of cases. Men of that type have their uses and their good points. When such a detail man certifies to an invoice, it is correct to the last fraction; when he reports on a commercial condition his description will be exact; and after all that is what a consul-general mainly is for.

To expect such officials to be equipped with imagination is to expect too much. Nor is it entirely fair to charge the consul-general with "ignorance." No man can know everything, and perhaps the consul-general's duties keep him so busy signing documents that he has no time to read the papers. Likewise, it is altogether possible, even probable, that in interrogating Prof. Einstein Messersmith was acting under strict instructions from some sixteenth undersecretary in some bureau in Washington and was not to blame at all.

The incident may serve a useful purpose if it proves to anybody what would happen if all business was put under government regulation, as some enthusiasts insist must be done.