

MAGAZINE

QUINCY SECTION

HOW A. K. CONEY SAVED THE LIFE OF PRESIDENT DIAZ

A. K. CONEY, the Consul General of Mexico at the port of San Francisco, is an American and his story hangs a tale. Perhaps not more than a dozen people know that this quiet, unassuming man once held the fate of the nation in his hands. It is not that he had it not been for his courage and nobility of character the history of our sister republic would read entirely different. For Diaz is Mexico, and it was Mr. Coney who preserved the life of the patriot, President and friend of the Liberal, at a time when the actual Government was in the hands of the usurper Lerdo, and Diaz was an exile with a bounty of \$50,000 on his head.

At that time Mr. Coney was purser of the American steamship City of Havana, which was plying from New York to New Orleans and Mexican ports. As she was leaving New Orleans one evening in June, 1878, a large, peculiar-looking man, plainly of Aztec lineage, came on board, accompanied by a dapper little American doctor. The Mexican, whose name appeared on the register Dr. de la Boza, immediately retired to his stateroom, and though his companion mingled freely with the other passengers and took his meals in the saloon, he did not appear on deck again till Tampico was reached, and then in a most shocking and unexpected manner. The Havana had been engaged to transport a regiment of soldiers from Tampico to Vera Cruz, but when the vessel arrived at the former port a terrific "norther" was blowing and only a few of the crew were able to get aboard. It was therefore necessary for the boat to wait till the storm abated in order to secure the rest of the troops. While the steward was busy assigning quarters to the new passengers the unknown stranger rushed out of his room with nothing on, dived overboard and set out to swim to some briars which were anchored about five miles away. But he had been seen and instantly the ship was started by the cry, "Man overboard!" A small boat was lowered and lowered, but owing to the high sea which was running at the time and the man's exceptional ability as a swimmer it was some time before the rescue party succeeded in picking him up.

"Who is he?" "What dire and awful necessity must it be to tempt a man to risk his life in that perilous sea?"

Both questions were soon answered, for when the boat came alongside one of the soldiers leaning over the rail cried out, "Mother of God, that is General Diaz!"

Continuing Mr. Coney said: "As soon as the excitement had somewhat subsided Mr. Manuel Gutierrez Zamora, the Mexican mail agent, came to me and said that the unhappy man who had just made such a desperate effort to leave the ship was General Porfirio Diaz, and that unless I would consent to aid him he would surely be captured by the troops, turned over to Lerdo and shot. My sympathies for the brave man were aroused, and I said I would do anything in the range of possibility. Zamora then led me to the general's room, introduced him and retired. When we were alone Diaz raised himself up in his berth and gave the halting sign of distress, showing that he was a brother Mason who needed help and asked assistance. He said that although he had suffered defeat at Teocac, the best people of Mexico were his friends and that if he could reach his friends he would be all right.

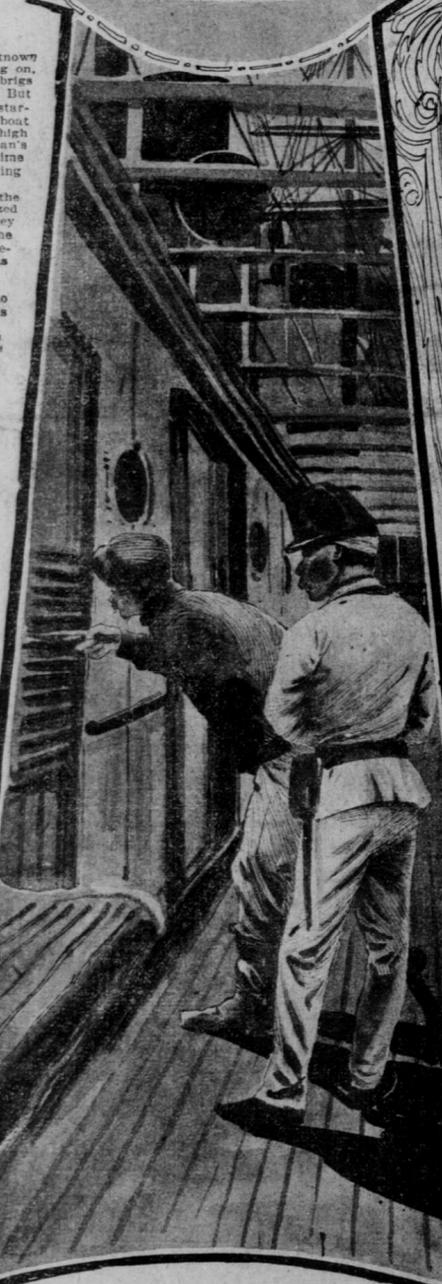
"Of course," he added, "if you help me and I am apprehended you will be considered a party to a crime and doubtless shot. Are you willing to take the risk?" I told him that I was.

"We then began to devise a plan of escape. An American man of war was approaching and I proposed to ask her captain to take him on board." But Diaz, who knew somewhat more of international law and the position occupied by the United States to his own Government, had no hopes of help from that source. However, with the rashness of youth still upon me, I insisted upon trying. He consented to my plan, and the captain positively refused to have anything to do with the matter. The idea of intervention by the American man-of-war was at an end. When I told Diaz he smiled and said that he at least was not disappointed. Meanwhile I tried to think of a better plan. The colonel of the regiment was among the officers who had succeeded in getting aboard that evening. He asked me to act as his interpreter in an interview with the captain of the ship. Of course, I consented and together we went to the passenger cabin. The colonel stated that the passenger was General Porfirio Diaz, the revolutionary leader, and not Dr. de la Boza, and demanded the captain to deliver him up to justice. The captain replied that he could not do so because the ship was flying the American flag and the passengers enjoyed all the privileges of being upon American soil; but that the man was booked for Turpan, and that he would forbid the purser issuing a ticket to any further point, and the colonel could arrest the man as he went ashore. The colonel then asked to be allowed to station sentries at the general's door. The captain consented, but I purposely made a mistake in translating and told him that he could not place sentries at the door, but that he could station an officer in the stern of the boat, where he could command a view of the room occupied by the general. This seemed satisfactory to the colonel and he withdrew.

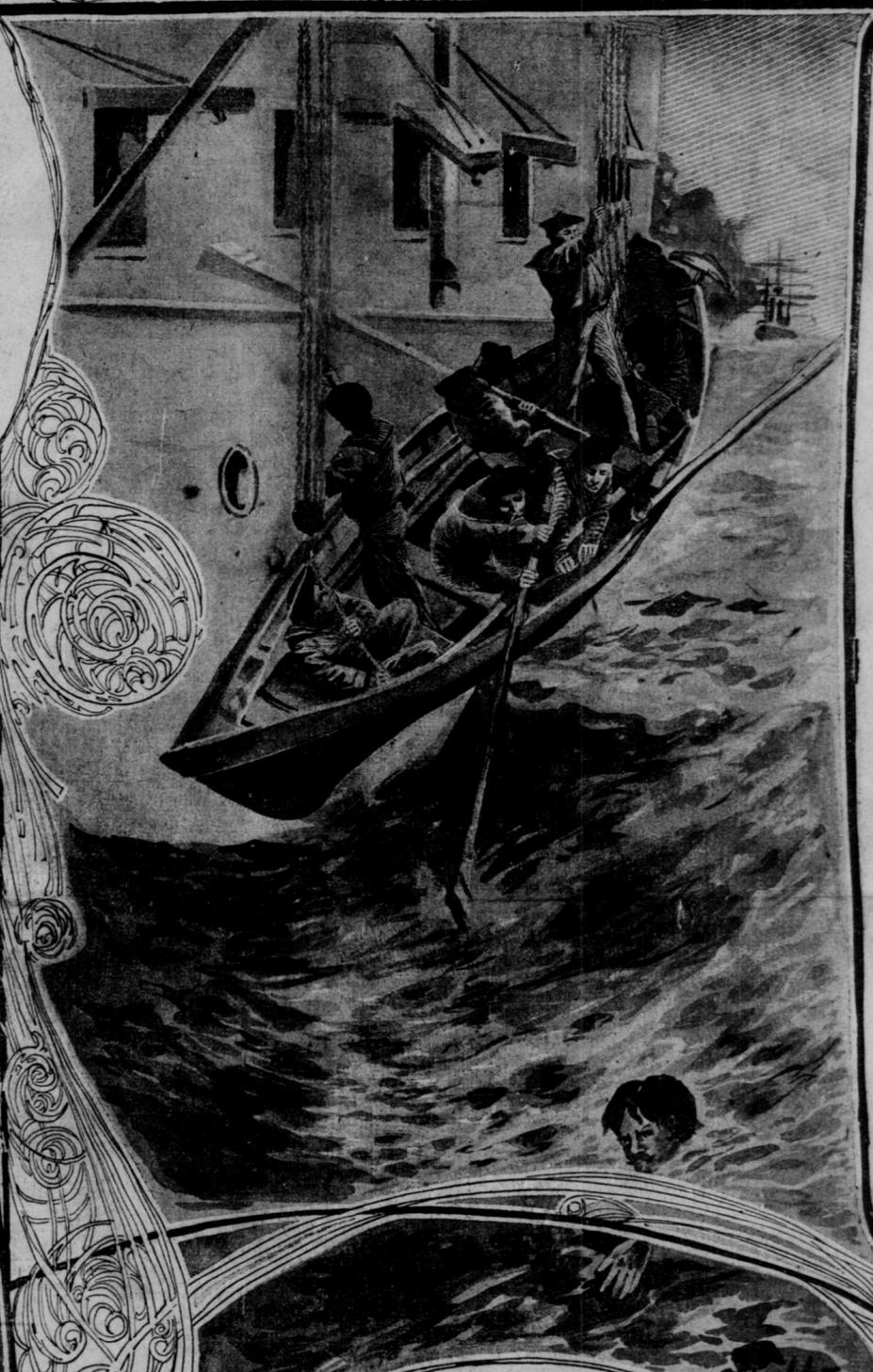
"The captain gave the strict orders not to allow any one to interfere with the man in question. I told Diaz the result of this interview and he said, 'Well, what are you going to do now?' I replied that



PHOTO BY FABER
A. K. CONEY, CONSUL GENERAL, MEXICO



THE SOLDIERS WOULD RUN THEIR BAYONETS THROUGH THE LATTICE BLINDS OF THE CLOSET.



"THE BOAT WAS QUICKLY LOWERED AFTER HIM."

man supposed to be General Diaz had jumped overboard with life preserver. The officers came at once to my room and wanted to speak to me. I told the cabin boy, who was their spokesman, to get the door and let the officers in. I pretended to be greatly surprised at the story and said I didn't think the man had done anything so rash; that I believed he must be hiding somewhere on the ship, and if they would wait while I searched I would help them search the ship thoroughly. They waited and I made my good good. There was not a nook or cranny in the hold which I did not make those officers look into. When we had finished they were completely worn out and satisfied that I had nothing to do with the escape of the "crazy doctor."

"It took three days to reach Vera Cruz, and the greatest difficulty during that time was to get enough food for the prisoner in the wardrobe. I had never been in the habit of having meals served in my room, and consequently did not dare to do so now. All Diaz got to eat these three days was what I could slip into my pocket unnoticed at table. But starvation was not the only hardship or danger to be endured. The soldiers would run their bayonets through the lattice blinds of the closet to see if they could steal some of my clothes, and Diaz was in imminent danger of losing an eye by the process, the space being too small to permit dodging freely. But he never complained or expressed the least fear or impatience. It was usually 11 o'clock at night before it was safe for him to come out of the closet, and he was thus compelled to stay in a cramped position for at least fifteen hours without rest. I kept guard while he slept till daybreak, then undressed and went to bed for an hour before the ship was astir.

"For divers and sundry reasons I knew that a lady passenger, a Mexicana, knew that Diaz was hidden in my room. I told him my suspicion, and he agreed that we must find out how much she knew and where she stood. I went to her stateroom and found her lying in her berth smoking a cigarette. I entered, closed the door and locked it; but she gave no sign. Then I

the last time. After reensuring the part he was to play, he asked for a piece of paper and began to write. When I asked him what he was doing he said, 'I can do as much for you as that colonel.' I took the paper and tore it into bits and told him that the colonel was only doing his duty, but that he, Diaz, had no right to insult me; that I would not risk my life for money. His eyes filled with tears and throwing his arms about my neck he said that we were brothers.

"We were now ready. I opened the door and began abusing him in Spanish. He followed, using the slouching gait of the boatman. When we reached the foot of the stairs the lighterman asked, 'Where is the box of arms?' I pointed to the general. The man sprang forward, raised the general's hat and recognized him by the tuft of white hair on his forehead. The lighterman was overwhelmed with fear and begged me to hide his friend in the machinery and promised to come for him at night. I knew that within three hours a cordon of soldiers would guard the boat and that no one could leave unnoticed and insisted upon his following out the original plan. Diaz was the embodiment of nerve and carried out the stratagem exactly as planned.

"Meanwhile the soldiers were being disembarked and in spite of the colonel's command the rumor that General Diaz was on board spread. The chief of police and all the officers of the port searched the ship thoroughly. I turned over all the general's effects to them except a gold chain which he wished me to give his wife as a proof that what a sound Mexican he was. By the by, this chain I wear to this very day. Mrs. Diaz gave it to me as a token of her gratitude because it was the most cherished heirloom in the family. Diaz got ashore safely, made his way to Oaxaca on foot, organized an army and defeated the forces of Lerdo at Teocac. He wrote Mr. Coney a letter from this battlefield and invited him to come to Mexico. Mr. Coney accepted and the reception he received was worthy a king. The friendship between these two brother Masons has never been broken.

A WIFE'S YEAR OF SILENCE.

"The conduct demanded of a newly married Armenian woman will strike Americans as very singular indeed," said Antranig Abgharian, a young Armenian whose book, "The Turk and the Land of Haig," has recently been published. "She utters never a word except when alone with her husband, until after the birth of her first child. Then she is allowed to talk to her child. A little later she is permitted to converse with her mother-in-law; still later her own mother may again hear her voice, and before a great while she will speak in whispers to the young girls of her household. She must not leave the house during the first year of her married life, except to attend church. Her discipline as a bride terminates after six years, but she will never again open her lips to a man unless he be her kinsman. Young girls are allowed to have a liberty of conduct that is in striking contrast. They chatter freely and cheerfully with whom they please.

"The Armenian woman differs radically from her Turkish sisters. Neither seclusion, nor polygamy, nor divorce darkens her present or threatens her future. She is not educated with her brothers, however, as American girls. I remember how puzzled I was when I entered an American college and saw girls seated among the boys in the classroom.

"John," I said to my neighbor, 'what are the girls here for, to make the room look pretty?'"

"It seemed incredible that any one could think a girl capable of learning along with her brother. It is considered a disgrace likewise for a man to walk publicly with a woman, even though she be his sister. She may entertain men callers, and of course, her face is never covered, like a Turkish woman's, but her mother or some other female relative is always present. They attend the same entertainments and church, but may not sit together. The woman's seats in church are partitioned off and are in the rear.

"While among many old Armenian families parents contract for the marriage of their children while they are in their infancy, in the majority of cases the young people are permitted to make their own selections, though always with the consent of their parents. Elopements, therefore, are unknown. The marriage is sacred in Armenia, and death only can break it. If a person has an uncongenial companion he must endure it with the same kind of patience he would endure a sore head, which, though he may try to cure, he will hardly cut off.

"With Turkish women their only end in this world is marriage. Accordingly girls are from their infancy rocked to sleep by their mothers with lullabies of future husbands, handsome, courageous and wealthy. The regular age for marriage is from 12 to 15 years, but unusual wealth or physical attraction call for earlier contracts. Generally speaking, parents are pleased if they see a chance of betrothing their daughter at 8 or 9, or at any rate before they reach 12 years.