



WEEKLY

# Philatelic Gossip



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## A THOUSAND NIGHTS OF TORTURE

**F**ROM a dank, vermin-infested South American dungeon a modern Monte Cristo turned up very much alive the other day in the restful lounge of the dignified Phi Gamma Delta Club in midtown Manhattan. As 34-year-old, American-educated Juan Leguia recited the harrowing experiences of a thousand nights of torture in that medieval Peruvian prison, history raced back three centuries to the cruelties of the Spanish Inquisition. His story all but matches the ferocious tales of Pizarro's terrifying treatment of the Incas.

Dressed modestly in a well-fitting blue serge suit, this quiet man from the past calmly unfolded the heart-rending drama of three years of almost unbelievable suffering.

"It may sound fantastic, but I assure you it is not," Leguia began. "I endured three years of terrible torture, which, sitting here as we are, you can hardly imagine. The Inquisition could have been no worse. I will tell you what happened, without the varnish."

### THROWN IN PRISON WITH FATHER

In Prefacing his story Leguia told that an army junta in 1930 seized control of the government in Peru. The first act of the revolutionists was to toss the white-mustached, paternal President Augusto B. Leguia and his son into the Lima penitentiary, a dour and forbidding relic of earlier violent regimés.

They put us together into a narrow cell. There was no decent ventilation. No heat. No daylight. No toilet facilities. When I took a bath I bathed like a horse. I stood up in the middle of the cell and poured a bucket of cold water over my head and shivered until it dried."

This scion of an ancient Spanish family glanced at a portrait above the paneled fireplace. Calvin Coolidge, who knew the rigors of a stern New England beginning, looked down unflinchingly.

"Our beds were full of vermin. Sweat dripped eternally from the

slimy walls. The floors were filthy. Rats slithered through the darkness. There were continual draughts of chilling, fetid air. My father was not well and after months of this sort of thing . . . we were never once allowed out of our tiny cell . . . he took sick.

"I pleaded for a doctor. None came for weeks. Finally, through the effort of Dr. Eugene McCornack, an American surgeon and a great friend of my father, they told my 70-year-old father they would have to operate in that hell-hole."

Young Leguia clutched the arm of the chair and leaned forward, intent.

His black eyes glinted with anger.

"What do you think they told that suffering man? . . . 'You will be operated upon here!' It was unspeakable! The man who had never harmed a flea, who was uni-



Augusto B. Leguia

versally known for his kindness and gentleness, was to undergo a delicate operation in that stinking hell!

### SURGEONS FEARED TO TRY

"What could I do? I told my father it was the only way out and if he died the crime would be forever upon the heads of his assassins. He agreed."

". . . And they operated there . . . in that place?" asked the shocked reporter.

"No! Those Peruvian surgeons—whom my father had himself helped to educate—never came. They didn't have the nerve. Instead, they left him to suffer.

"Finally, Dr. McCornack gained access to the prison and began to treat my father. He could only partially alleviate his suffering. It was intense. The doctor had to work over my father with those guards standing all around him so that no word could pass between Dr. McCornack, my father or myself.

"They always stood there watching his agony; jeering at his pain.

"At last he grew worse and took pneumonia. Then, only through the heroic efforts of Dr. McCornack, was he removed to a ramshackle naval barracks. The night I helped carry him on his cot from that prison was the last time I saw my father. In the awful agony of his suffering he leaped from the cot and would not permit me to carry him away.

"As he went away in the ambulance several hundred people stood reverently by and as if by a signal shouted 'Viva Leguia!'

"Then . . . your father . . ."

Leguia's eyes gazed wistfully into the fire.

"He died shortly after that. I didn't see him. They wouldn't let me attend the funeral."

"Then they let you go?"

"No, indeed, they didn't. I went back to the jug, this time to solitary confinement. They put me in an even dirtier, deeper and damper hole. There were no lights. They gave me eight candles a week. I lit them only long enough to examine my food. I cooked most of it myself, to help pass the time. Often what was sent to me was either stolen or poisoned.

### DRESSED FOR DUNGEON DINNER

"I tested it with the silver. If the silver was stained I went hungry. And that was often. But they couldn't break my spirit. I even dressed for dinner. Tails and all, every night . . ."

A dyspeptic, bald-headed alumnus in the distant corner flipped the page of a red-backed adventure magazine and yawned. Leguia went on.

"One morning they came to tell me I was to be shot on the morrow. 'That's fine,' I said. 'I need a little diversion. Is it to be in the morning, at noon or in the evening?' They wanted to know why I was so particular. Because, I explained, if it is in the morning I will wear striped trousers and a morning coat. If it is at noon I will wear my business suit and if it is in the evening I will wear

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