

## *Woman as a Smuggler, and Woman as a Detective* by Fanny Howell

As a love of bargains is supposed to be characteristic of woman, it is not to be wondered at that she, more than her traveling *confrère*, man, is fretted by the high tariff which is so serious a drawback to her foreign economies; or that, owing to the shrewdness of the sex, their natural aversion to being outwitted, and the convenience of their dress, smuggling among women has become one of the accomplishments of travel.

To follow the fashions of a people so utterly unlike ourselves as the French seems weak indeed; nevertheless, such is the perfection of Parisian manufactures that the American woman who has money will have Parisian goods.

Bridal *trousseaux* are now brought from Paris at a less cost, even when the duties are paid, than what they can possibly be provided for here; while the money saved in supplies for one family, in the gay season of the watering-place or city, amply covers all expenses, even if the purchases are fairly "returned" and valued.

What a triumph, then, to a shrewd woman, when by preferment, influence, or stratagem a complete Parisian outfit finds its way from Paris to Fifth Avenue without a single tax or levy!

As it is, nearly every *modiste* conducting business on the parlor floor of her hired house either goes or sends abroad every summer; and one can easily conjecture that, with private buyers, small dealers, fashionable *modistes*, and steerage travelers, "searching passengers" is a work of no little importance and delicacy.

The generous deference always yielded to women gave them a sort of tacit protection long after the government knew that many valuables came into the country concealed in the drapery of feminine attire.

Nothing official, however, was suggested as a plan of defeat, until, in the month of June, 1861, after great deliberation between the Department at Washington and the Collector of the Port, four lady-examiners were appointed and designated as "Special Aids to the Revenue Service," with a remuneration of five hundred dollars a year. The plan was at once found efficacious, and, the duties having become more or less absorbing and important, the pay was soon increased to a *per diem* salary of two dollars and fifty cents; and on the first of January, 1867, two more "special aids" were appointed, making six in all, and the official name was then changed to that of "Inspectress."

As a further stimulant to a vigilance which the government acknowledged to be of the highest importance, it was arranged that the Inspectress should receive, in addition to her *per-diem* pay, one quarter of the appraised value of every seizure she made.

At present, two of these female officials are stationed at Jersey City and Hoboken, for the Cunard, Bremen, Hamburg, and White Star lines. Two remain at piers forty-five and fifty, for the convenience of the French and Inman lines; one at piers forty-six and forty-seven, for the

Williams and Guion and the National Steamers; and one at the Barge Office for independent steamers and the very frequent service of Castle Garden.

There are seven lines of steamers besides the French and those of the Cunard line, upon which duties are required of the lady examiners. Of these, the French and Cunard steamers, generally speaking, fetch and carry the *élite* of the traveling world. Invalids, however, often choose the steamers of the Williams and Guion line, as the family accommodations are excellent, and the state-rooms, which are off from the upper dining saloon, are light and commodious.

The National, the Glasgow, the German, the White Star, the Williams and Guion, and all of the Cunard steamers, except the Scotia and the Russia, accommodate steerage travelers. During the press of summer travel, however, from July to September, there are certain steamers of several lines that carry only cabin passengers; and at these times extra steamers are run every week by the Cunard line, as long as travel warrants.

It may be interesting here to state, that the steamers of the Inman line bring from six to eleven hundred passengers at a trip; the Glasgow less, the Williams and Guion less, the German from three to seven hundred, while the National often numbers on her passenger list as many as fourteen hundred persons.

Since the war in France, very respectable people of the upper classes in that country are found among the steerage passengers. They prefer their money to the extra comfort procured by state-room accommodations. It often happens, too, that, once *en voyage*, they are able to obtain the room of one of the lower officers, and having their little stock of coffee, tea, potted meats, and biscuit, they maintain themselves comfortably, and enjoy tolerable seclusion.

As soon as a steamer is telegraphed from Sandy Hook the Inspectresses concerned are notified, and officers are detailed by the superintendent of the Inspector's force at the barge office, to examine the baggage of the passengers. The steamer, having stopped a sufficient time at quarantine to receive a visit from the doctor, proceeds up the bay; the Cunard steamers, and those of the White Star and the Bremen and Hamburg lines, going to their docks at Jersey City, while nearly all the others drop anchor just abreast of the Battery in the North river. The baggage of the cabin passengers is removed before anything else, and placed in rows on the dock belonging to the vessel in question.

The passengers, being subsequently landed by a small steamer, form in line, and present their "declarations," which in blank form have been provided previously by the purser of the steamer.

In these declarations they specify the contents of their trunks and boxes, generally designating it as "wearing apparel, etc."

Appended to this printed "Passengers' baggage declaration" is a notice specifying what is and what is not dutiable, with the condition on which baggage will be detained or confiscated; and this paper, being rendered into French, English, and Spanish, is intended to leave no loop-hole of escape. The declaration, proper, is prepared in the form of an oath, it being left discretionary with the revenue officer to strictly administer it.

The baggage declaration having been presented to the deputy surveyor in charge, he details an officer to examine the trunks, and if he finds anything dutiable, such as silks, or any fabrics in the piece, these are carried to the office on the dock, which, for the time being, becomes a Custom House. If a passenger denies having anything dutiable, the goods, if discovered, are confiscated. If, however, the traveler does not deny having taxable property, and the examiner can discover the secret, duties can be exacted, but under no circumstances can the goods be seized. This rule applies, also, to personal examination by the Inspectress.

The Custom House proper includes the Collector's office, the Naval office, the Surveyor's, and the Appraiser's office; and therefore to legalize a Custom House *pro tem.* upon the dock, an entry clerk from the Collector's office, a Naval office clerk, and an Appraiser from head-quarters are with the Deputy surveyor on the dock.

The Appraiser's duty is to determine the specific quality and value of all dutiable articles found in the trunks; the Collector's entry clerk makes up the duties, and the Naval officer certifies the entry clerk's figures—a proceeding that reminds the uninitiated of the three boys who ran away on Sunday to go fishing, and only "Jim" got whipped, because the rest "helped Jim."

The entry clerk is the only official who is allowed to receive duties on the dock. On his return to the Custom House proper he makes up a regular entry, in the same form as the business importer, and pays the duties received thereon into the office of the cashier.

The steerage passengers on some of the lines are landed on the dock, their baggage deposited there also, and officers detailed for the examination, in the same manner as that of the cabin passengers. After their "trunks," which are generally nondescript affairs of domestic make, have been "passed," these passengers are transferred, with their luggage, to a large barge in the service of the steamer, and taken to Castle Garden. For them, as also for the cabin passengers, an Inspectress remains on the dock, and nearby has a room provided for the convenience of searching female passengers, as not a steamer arrives but that in her office, as well as in that on the other end of the dock, provided for the examination of men, it is found necessary to subject many to this sharp surveillance.

That the government is none too severe, is amply shown by the often amusing, but frequently very disagreeable experience of the official Inspectress. Her business demands keenness of sight, a certain intuitive knowledge of human nature, and a quiet courage underlying great civility of speech. It is a well-attested fact in the mental history of woman, that she who carries a dangerous secret steps with greatest consciousness; and hence it often happens that the studied caution of the female smuggler leads to her sure betrayal.

As for the nationality of female smugglers, German women are the most frequent breakers of the law. They even smuggle articles and fabrics that are worthless, and in the most ludicrous ways try to evade their tariff duties. Nevertheless, when discovered, they stolidly resign their confiscated treasures, and are by no means as mortified at having been caught smuggling as they are hurt by their financial losses.

Frenchwomen, on the contrary, are often overwhelmed with shame, and if they ever beg for their forfeited riches, pledge them all as *gages d'amour*. The Swedish woman cannot be made to see why her articles are *never* to be restored, but as she is no adept at smuggling, her experience is scarcely worth recounting. The Irish, however, quarrel bitterly in giving up their smugglings, and think the act of confiscation is nothing short of robbery. They neither yield their persons nor their hidden treasures until actually forced to do so.

But all these plain-spoken people are easy to get along with, compared to the American or English woman, who, by counterfeiting ill-health, excessive obesity, or a dashing extreme of *tournure*, *chignon*, etc., and by a haughty mien, attempts to deceive and overwhelm the modest Inspectress.

Not long since, from off one of the Inman steamers, there came a magnificent gray-haired Cuban lady. Her patrician air was charming, her dress was faultless, and, if she had been a trifle less unnaturally rotund, she might have passed without suspicion. She was invited into the office of the Inspectress, and an official diagnosis made of her condition. She was found suffering from four *point Aguille* shawls, two *point appliqué* sacques, and a *rotonde*, or round mantle of Chantilly lace of great value. Nor was this all. Festooned upon her hoop-skirts were seven hundred yards of narrow lace which careful hands passed days in untangling. In the plaits of her dress were pinned collars of an exceptional quality of point lace, which took no more room, when rolled, and pinned against the seams, than a cocoon does against a leaf.

One will see that the success of the lady examiner is obtained only by the quickened senses that come from cultivation; and in no department of our civil government could more harm result from the rotary system of our service.

Women are frequently smugglers of fine laces, but rarely of jewels. On the *Italy*, however, some valuable jewels were recently seized, having been found quilted into an underskirt. A quiet-looking *frau*, recently landed from Bremen, had a double-quilted petticoat filled with Shetland shawls, caps, and stockings. Another on the *Westphalia* had a quantity of the finest silk bindings, two valuable watches, two silk dress patterns, two dozen silver spoons, a dozen silver forks, and eight pieces of silk galloon quilted into a skirt of serge. A companion on the same steamer had seventy-three bundles of sewing-silk and twenty-nine pairs of kid gloves secreted on her person;—scarcely concealed, however, as the foolish *Fraulein* had tied strong cords about her hips, and the smuggled articles were suspended in such a way that she was scarcely able to reach the dock.

The muff is a very ordinary cover for smuggled laces. An Englishwoman, recently landing from one of the Inman steamers, had the cotton removed from her muff, and its place filled with valuable laces. The muff was strapped to her person, where it stood for *embonpoint*.

In one petticoat of this lady were found gloves in quantity; in the facings of her dress, cigars; and in the voluminous gathers of a second petticoat were Meerscham pipes in sections.

A Frenchwoman, extravagantly dressed, and moving about suspiciously, was invited into the room of the Inspectress recently. Her petticoat proved to be nine yards of superior black velvet,

one selvedge being gathered into a waist-band, which also held a dress pattern of Ponson silk. The facing of the velvet petticoat, which was put on with the nicest care, was well padded with Chantilly laces, cunningly run together; and the ruffle on the bottom of this imperial under-garment consisted of five rows of rich Chantilly flouncing, caught together, quite likely, in the hope that it would be taken for one piece. An immense seizure of English open-faced watches has recently been made, upon the person of a well-appearing American woman, who had them neatly incased in the tucks of a heavy flannel petticoat.

Sometimes the German women seek to evade the tariff dues in the most awkward manner; as, witness the stupidity of hanging nine watch-chains about one's neck, with a valuable watch at the end of each chain. Frau Stumpf said she had been told that watches were worn by the passengers, and the officers did not take them.

A desperate-looking woman, coming on one of the English steamers lately, on being examined exhibited an amusing spectacle, with a silver cake-basket lashed to each hip, and two huge dress patterns festooned as "filling," there and thereabouts. On being examined, this woman, in terrible rage, drew a knife on the Inspectress.

Some of the smuggling expedients are, of course, extremely amusing. A *spirituelle* little Frenchwoman had on her husband's red flannel drawers, and these were tied in puffs, here and there.

On being "unpacked," there came forth a Bohemian glass toilet set, two dozen salt-cellars, three dozen silver spoons, three dozen silver forks, several little articles of *bijouterie* in bronze and crystal, and some fine Swiss wood-carvings; all of which were put up in the softest tissue-paper and paper-shavings, that they might not strike against each other. When the little body was unloaded, no one laughed more heartily than she.

Neither good looks, gray hairs, nor natural complexions form criterions by which to judge of the honesty of steamer travelers, nowadays. Not long since a lady, arriving on one of the favorite French steamers, was observed to bring a small box from the steamer to the dock. From this she took a velvet sacque, putting in its place an ordinary-looking Paisley shawl, which was evidently worn, and which she had at first thrown about her shoulders. Her trunks were examined, but nothing dutiable was discovered. After the officers had finished their duties, the lady traveler returned her sacque to the box, and again put on her shawl. She was then requested to show the sacque, which proved to be a costly and elegant Paris-made garment, having the "ticket" still appended to the lining. The lady was then invited into the office of the Inspectress, and on her person were found laces of great value sewed into the artificial rotundities of her figure, not to mention a silk dress pattern as drapery *en panier*. Inside of the very ordinary Paisley shawl, so carelessly thrown about her shoulders, was found an India shawl of a quality so uncommonly fine that it would have escaped the vigilance of anybody but one woman put upon the track of another.

Since the great demand for false hair, not a few attempts have been made by German women to smuggle the precious commodity into this land of braids and frizzes—quilting lengthwise among the paddings of their Bohemian stuff petticoats switches and curls in quantities. In addition to a

valuable smuggle of these, a ponderous *Frau*, on the *Allemania* one day, exhibited to the Inspectress, after much skirmishing, four dozen silver forks and as many spoons, a quantity of zephyr wool, and five silk dress patterns stowed away in the voluminous breadths of a Bohemian petticoat.

Indeed, the petticoat is the German woman's favorite depository. It is at all times a thick, unwieldy stuff garment; patch after patch is added to it, till it becomes a piece of ugly mosaic-work. The cunning *Fraus* know how to utilize its peculiarities, and many a time, in ripping up the corner of a most irregular, practical-looking patch, it is found to be a cover for sewing-silks, gloves, laces, and even silver ware.

That the work of examining women smugglers and defeating their purposes by confiscation is successfully carried on, nobody doubts. Of those who, by means of favor at court, receive their Parisian novelties with no acknowledgment to the tariff, nothing being known, nothing can be said. That it is done is, perhaps, probable; yet that there are those who do their duty, unconstrained, may be inferred from the fact that forty-one thousand and thirteen dollars and ninety-one cents were collected, during 1871, upon passengers' baggage duly examined.

There was a time in the history of female smuggling when not one, but many of the lady passengers would be found too ill to leave the steamer when she first touched dock. By this subterfuge, many a treasure found its way to shore without a levied duty, as the time selected for making little *sorties* was when the Inspectors had finished examining baggage, and there were no keen-eyed "Special Aids" about.

By the help of a trifling *douceur* here and there the gentle invalid would find her way to the gates, and little or no notice would be taken of her departure, "be the same more or less."

Nowadays, however, the Government never leaves a steamer unguarded. On her first arrival in port, the two officers who are to discharge her cargo are placed aboard; these remain until sundown, when the Night Inspectors, formerly called Night Watchmen, take charge of the steamer, one being placed on the vessel, and the other on the dock nearby.

These are relieved at midnight by two others, and they, in turn, are relieved at sunrise by the two discharging Inspectors. This surveillance is maintained until the steamer casts off her lines and swings out into the stream.

Upon the slightest suspicion of irregularity the government searches a steamer, when the Deputy Surveyor and as many Inspectors as he chooses to have detailed for the service faithfully explore every nook and crevice of the suspected vessel. Smuggling upon the person, however, is the kind that requires the greatest vigilance; and if the dress of woman becomes much more intricate, or if her desires for foreign finery increase, the Government will have to open a school for the regular training of detectives.

The keenest senses are not a bit too keen for this service, nor is the most unflinching courage too severe; and these, even, are sometimes put to the test, as in a late instance where a man, disguised as a woman, caused the Inspectress to shrink from her duty, and dared the appealed-to

officer to do his. But courage conquered bravado and exposed the crime. The individual in question was a heavy smuggler of diamonds, pearls, and emeralds, and under various disguises had successfully defied the government for a long time.

Such cases are, of course, exceptional, and for ordinary female smuggling the present system of examination by Inspectresses seems to be sufficient. The details run smoothly; the position is filled with faithfulness and good-nature; and the plan has been the means of saving large sums of money to the country. Great credit, meantime, is due to the Government officers of 1861, who assumed the responsibility of establishing this, now one of the most important branches of the Revenue Service.

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