

MEXICO

That age is past which saw Roman emperors and vast multitudes assembled in the Roman amphitheatres to watch the Christians, their fellow beings, torn limb from limb by savage beasts. The age when followers of Christ were subjected to the most ignominious tortures, when Christ's ambassadors were forced to take refuge in the bowels of the earth for fear of the human beasts who roared for their blood, yes, that age of religious persecution is thought and firmly believed by the enlightened and democratic people of this twentieth century to be a thing of the past, a system of tyranny which existed in those barbarous times, and which has no place in this era of religious tolerance.

At first sight we might say that such is the case, that the injustice of those former days has been dead and buried for centuries. The spirit of Democracy, we maintain, has made itself felt throughout the civilized world, and as a result we have liberty of thought and freedom of religion. But stop! Is there no exception to this general rule? Is there no state which is acting as Pagan Rome? Yes, we must confess that the spectre of ancient persecution once again has raised its frightful form in our very midst; again we find in an apparently civilized country the revival of customs of pagan antiquity.

The Emperors of Rome were enforcing the constitution of the eternal City, when they allowed the Christians to be torn to pieces. Philip of Spain was carrying out the Spanish Constitution when, during the Inquisition, he condemned heretics and nonbelievers to torture or to death. Another Domitian, another Philip has arisen who claims he is merely enforcing the constitution; Plutarco Calles, the Red Dictator of Mexico, now seeks to blot out the faith of love—Christianity.

The procreation of Bolshevism in Red Russia a number of years ago was viewed with apprehension and fear by the powers of the world. Their fear that it should form the nucleus of great evils and crimes seems well grounded as recent events have proved. For several years this red germ was seen to grow and develop, and now, so to speak, we find that it has grown to lusty manhood and that its offspring is of the same vile essence as that of the parent. The offshoots of Bolshevism, its infamous doc-

trines, were, as we know, at first confined chiefly to Eurasia, but, sad to relate, they have in recent years secured passage to this New World, and their baneful influence has already made its arrival known in turbulent Mexico, where the motto seems to be: "Destroy Christianity at all costs."

To treat in detail the situation in Mexico would involve a gigantic task; so, in this short article we shall confine ourselves to a few facts relating to the persecution of the Church by the Mexican Government under the despot Calles, and incidentally, to outline the true position of the Mexican people and particularly of the Clergy at the present moment.

Does it not seem strange, that in a country more than ninety percent Catholic, the Church should be persecuted? The answer may be readily seen if we consider how the anti-Catholic faction now in control of Mexican affairs obtained its power. The government of Mexico is not a legally constituted body. It is the work of Bolshevism and the overthrow of the legitimate authority by armed force. Calles himself is not legally the president according to the Mexican Constitution, for, among the qualifications for president as set forth in the Constitution, we read the following: "He shall not have taken part, directly or indirectly, in an uprising, riot or military coup." Yet we find that Calles was one of the leaders in the revolt in which Carranzas was defeated and overthrown in 1920. Therefore, Calles by this act is not qualified to act in the capacity of President of the Mexican Republic, and consequently his laws and orders are illegal.

Now what are the religious laws which this self-constituted administration is attempting to enforce? Are they just? Are they in conformity with human reason and with the Divine Law? They are many, but there are nine cardinal restrictions, which deserve our special attention, and having considered them, we can answer the questions. "The Church is forbidden to own Church real estate or mortgages, to own church buildings or any other buildings. The clergy of any Church must not possess invested funds; they must not maintain convents or religious houses. The clergy are forbidden to conduct primary schools, direct or administer charitable institutions. They must not hold religious ceremonies outside a church, and may not clothe their ministers with a garb indicative of their calling. Clergymen may not vote, hold

office, or assemble for political purposes. Before a new church is opened, permission must be obtained. The legislature determines the number of clergymen for each parish; and finally, only native born Mexicans may act as clergymen in Mexico."

The Calles government defends itself on the pretext that it is enforcing the constitution, but it is not a just constitution, and the whole band of Bolshevists and Revolutionists, who control by the sword, are hated by the Mexican people. The tyrants, few in number, but well armed, hold the great mass of peasants, who have no arms, in a state of subjection. But no matter how Calles and his band strive to hide their base motive under the guise of carrying out the Constitution, they are nevertheless engaged in the work of persecution. The Calles faction is attempting to destroy religion, to blot out the name of God from the country, and they know how to begin their hideous work; they are attacking the roots of faith and morals; they are attempting to blot out religion from the schools, and if they succeed, then the rising generation will grow up utterly lacking in religious principles; they will have drifted back to paganism. But no, you will say, such a condition shall never exist, for Christ has said that "The gates of hell shall not prevail against it."

A constitution in the correct sense conveys to us the idea of laws which are in conformity with human reason, laws which guarantee the natural rights of man. No person can justly obey laws which are morally impossible, and of such a kind are the present Mexican Religious Laws. "Human law is law only by virtue of its accordance with right reason," says the great Doctor of the Church, St. Thomas Aquinas, "and thus it is manifest that it flows from the eternal law. And, in so far as it deviates from right reason, it is called an unjust law; in such a case it is no law at all, but rather a species of violence." Will anyone claim that the laws of Mexico are just? They cannot if they understand the fundamental qualities of a law. Are these religious laws possible, not only physically but morally? They are certainly not. Neither are they honest or useful, for the Mexican religious laws tend toward the destruction of religion, and this is a bad end; they are therefore lacking in the quality of honesty. Again, they have not the quality of usefulness; for they are not for the common good, which is the es-

sential and primary end of a law. We may conclude then that the Mexican religious laws are not laws at all but unlawful decrees made by tyrants and Bolshevists for the destruction of Christ's Church in Mexico. The Church, moreover, has always taught the faithful to obey all just laws. She is the advocate of peace and order. What would be the result if the Mexican Bishops of the Catholic Church were to call the people to arms in defense of their faith? The Reds would not last long, for it would be a nation, almost 15,000,000 against a handful, scarcely 100,000. But the Prince of Peace did not teach such principles, and so the Clergy will not incite the people to rebel, but, remembering their Christian principles, they will do all in their power to prevent the Mexican people from breaking into open rebellion. The only other means at their disposal, and the most powerful, is prayer. Already the whole Catholic world, at the word of the Sovereign Pontiff, is earnestly praying for the persecuted brethren in Mexico.

That the Reds are doing everything possible to choke the seeds of faith before they can germinate is evident when we reflect on the law regarding clergymen who are not Mexicans. Only clergymen of Mexican blood can teach religion in Mexico, declares the "Constitution." Again these so-called laws forbid the Church to possess seminaries for the training of a native clergy. Soon, Calles and his henchmen hope, the Church will cease to exist, for the foreign clergy will be barred from the country, and a native clergy will be impossible under the present regulations. Yet with a suave manner, Plutarco Calles and his confreres assure the world that they are democratic, that they are not engaged in persecution, no, they are merely "enforcing the Constitution."

Before proceeding further, let us stop and find out just what the Church has done for Mexico and her people, and then we may view with horror the brutal treatment which is being meted out to the Religion that has been, and continues to be, the loving Mother of the Mexican Republic.

When Spanish soldiers first set foot in Yucatan, they found there a very low and degenerate form of civilization. Cortes, in his writings, declared that cannibalism was prevalent and that in their religious ceremonies the Aztecs offered human sacrifices to their gods. Yet at one

time, as recent excavations of monuments and temples have proved, there was an advanced civilization, but this had been destroyed centuries before Cortes and his warriors began their conquests.

The work of Christianizing and uplifting the savage people was at once begun by the Spanish clergy whom Cortes sent from Spain. As early as 1570, history relates, there were fifty-one Franciscan missions in the Archdiocese of Mexico, and there was, moreover, a school in each mission; yet a learned University Professor, who has written a discourse on Mexico, states that it was not till 1867 that a system of education was begun in Mexico. The progress of education among the Indians, from that year, 1570, under the guidance of Catholic priests and friars was wonderful. At first small schools, later colleges and universities for the education of Mexican Indians, rose among the ancient ruins. Soon we find Indian professors taking their places in the universities, Indian clergy occupying high Church positions, Indian statesmen as powers in civil life, and, as a result, an enlightened and educated people. But education is not the only bequest for which the Mexican people have to thank the clergy; they must remember them for numerous other benefits received at their hands. The social uplift can, in a large measure, be attributed to the untiring and strenuous efforts of the clergy in their struggle to better the social conditions of their country. The clergy have established hospitals, homes for the poor and infirm, orphanages for the care of homeless children. These and many other works of mercy will always remain as monuments to their piety and zeal for their beloved people.

Have you ever wondered at the number of geniuses that have come from among the Mexican Indians? What a vast difference between them and the North American Indian! Yes, Mexico has truly produced many great men, men who would still be deep in idolatry, if it were not that the Church reached out her saving hand, and raised them from the mire of paganism and cannibalism, to the solid foundation of Christianity.

Bishop Francis Clement Kelley, an authority on the Mexican Question, and a former Prince Edward Islander, writes thus in comparing the work of England and Spain in their colonization in America: "Let us be fair; Spain preserved where we destroyed. With a constantly dim-

inishing Indian population, wards of the State, having schools and colleges for all who wish to enter them, what one of our Indians has ever shown the governmental and military genius of a Diaz, the intelligent bravery of a Mejia, the surgical ability of a Urritia, the philosophical knowledge of a Munguia, the science of a Carrillo y Azcona, the theological training of an Alarcon, the poetic fire of an Estagnol, the legal and journalistic career of Sanchez Santos, the artistic talents of Panduro and Velasquez? Indians? Yes, all Indians. Name those of ours whose genius has made such marks on the history of our country. Sitting Bull? Geronimo? Alas! such a beginning speaks bad for an ending. Yet, the Indians of Mexico have produced men of letters, artists, statesmen, soldiers, scientists, learned bishops and priests,—men of genius."

Again a question presents itself. Why is it, if the Church has done so much for education, that eighty percent of the Mexicans at the present time are illiterate? That question is easily answered. Seventy years ago the government took the task of education wholly upon itself and refused to let the clergy have anything to do in that department. Even before 1857 the authorities had interfered with the Church in regard to education. The Jesuits were expelled from Mexico in 1767, and from that time we find education slowly disappearing. The University founded by Catholics in 1553 was the first university on the continent. In 1883 Gomez Farias closed the university. It was reopened but finally closed by Juarez in 1861. Throughout the length and breadth of Mexico schools and colleges flourished for three centuries, and to whom is the credit due? It is to the Church which is now undergoing persecution. Indeed, an English author has written that at the beginning of the 19th century, Mexico had proportionally more colleges and more students in them, as well as less illiteracy, than even Great Britain. Then troubles began in Mexico. The Church was despoiled of her possessions, her churches were seized, her schools and colleges closed, her convents and houses of charity dispensed with. The government then established their system of education and we see the result of their seventy years' work—more than 80 percent of the Mexican people are illiterate.

The schools established by the government are rapid-