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THE CHURCH OF ROME IN SPAIN.

“**B**EFORE Protestantism European civilisation had reached all the development that was possible for it; Protestantism “perverted the course of civilisation, and produced immense evils in “modern society; and the progress that has been made since Protestantism has been made, not by it, but in spite of it.”

Such is, in its author's own words, the “prevailing idea” of the chief work of the ablest clerical apologist that the Spanish Church has had since the apologetic era commenced. The “Catholicism and Protestantism compared” of Father J. L. Balmez has, in fact, been translated into many tongues, and is regarded as a classic of Catholic apologetics on the social value of religion. True, its circulation is mainly confined within the fold. The heretic or the unbeliever is quite content to have the condensed statement of its argument which Father Balmez has provided, and has little inclination to wade through the endless reams of poetic approximations to history which usually fill such works. But the book forces itself on one's attention with a pathetic interest when one considers the subject from the point of view of fact rather than theory, especially in the actual condition of civilisation. Its thesis was audacious even in 1847, even for Spain. A modern writer, who knows Spain well, has said that the Spaniard “is “too disgustingly ignorant to be hypocritical.” At all events Balmez was sincere; but a more unfortunate thesis he could not have framed, especially in the light of the later history of civilisation. England was the one great difficulty in the way of Balmez's argument, but it was, in his opinion, on the very eve of entire submission to Rome. The Romeward movement has practically ceased, yet England still forges ahead in the forefront of civilisation. Protestant Germany and the Protestant United States are her chief companions. Protestant Scandinavia, Denmark, Holland and Switzerland are equally progressive, if less conspicuous. Catholic Austria and Catholic Italy and Catholic Belgium pant and puff in the rear; and far, far behind labours the shrinking figure of Spain, “the most Catholic nation in the world.”

This is hardly the occasion to indulge in the facile and familiar practice of describing the ruin of Spain, but one cannot help wondering—so startling is the antithesis—whether in reality we may not be forced, not merely to abandon, but to reverse, the theory of Father Balmez. We need not stay to examine whether this utilitarian inquiry is or is not an elevated religious consideration. Most of our religious leaders to-day are of opinion that Christianity is an important factor in social progress, and that its influence on the present life of man is a reliable symptom of its healthy and vigorous cultivation. This is, in fact, the most practical aspect of the Roman question. Has this religion, that seeks so feverishly to displace all other forms of Christianity, an influence on social and political life? And is that influence on the side of progress, or the reverse? Apparently, one may prove anything in a volume of historical generalisations extending over 1,600 years. It seems more promising to take a concrete instance of national deterioration, and endeavour to trace the influence of the national Church in the catastrophe. A study of the condition of Spain is obviously one of the most practicable ways of approaching the subject. A few years ago a cultured Spanish priest said to a French visitor, M. R. Bazin: "To-day the Church of Spain is asleep. I am convinced that "that is the greatest and deepest evil of our country. Whenever it is "restored to intellectual culture the country will follow its lead and "recover its former splendour." Certainly on the face of it there seems to lie a strong indictment against the Spanish Church. How far is this supported by patient and impartial analysis?

Most of the French and German writers who have made a careful study of Spain have expressed a firm conviction that the Spaniard is by no means less gifted than his more prosperous neighbours. He has "inborn mental and moral qualities of a high order," as Dr. Dillon wrote in the *National Review* a few years ago, but they are pitifully undeveloped. One turns, therefore, with justice to those institutions which should see to the cultivation of his native faculties. The Church might, indeed, disclaim a responsibility for the educational defects of the country, but that it would, by that very disclaimer, go far towards destroying the claim of social usefulness which its apologists now invariably press. If there has been an almost total neglect of education, if no impulse has been given by the Church to that first condition of national prosperity, then at least all talk of the social beneficence of Catholicism must cease. And that there has been a gross and fatal neglect of education during the long period of the Church's supremacy in Spain is one of the most notorious features of its downfall. Of its 18,000,000 people about 12,000,000 can neither read nor write to-day; about one-third of the remainder can only do one or the other. One-third of the population of Madrid cannot read or write. Education was made "compulsory" in 1857, but we know something of the compulsion of Spanish law. By the year 1889 the percentage of illiterates

had only been lowered from 80 per cent. to 68.1 per cent. of the population, and it is not much lower to-day. The State cannot enforce it for want of funds. It pays elementary teachers from £10 to £20 per year (while a first-class *torero* may make £15,000 in a year), and in places not more than £5. The *Revista Christiana* of January 13th, 1883, gave a case from the province of Valencia where the teachers appointed were unable to read. The people are expected to make voluntary additions to the salary, as was done in the Roman Empire, but they have no perception of the value of education. Last year but one a case was given in the Madrid papers where a schoolmaster canvassed a district, and found only three families out of 100 willing to pay for education. Travellers who have been in close touch with the people, like Borrow ("The Bible in Spain") or Luffmann ("A Vagabond in Spain") describe a condition of appalling and pathetic ignorance. It is a condition that is not unfavourable to the perpetuation of the Church's control. Largely owing to it Protestant and Rationalist reformers can be represented as the moral scum of humanity; such relics as the body of St. James or "the hair of the Virgin" retain their lucrative attractiveness; indulgences can be handed over for specific sums of money, yet not "sold"; and a hundred other peculiarities of mediæval life may continue. On the other hand it leaves the nation at the mercy of a corrupt political machine. Half a million people really control and administer Spain, and these have a present or prospective financial interest in its administration. The elections are still what J. R. Lowell described them in 1877—"a sham."

Nor does the secondary education of the country greatly benefit the few who attain to it. The education of the clergy is grossly inadequate, but even that given in the secular colleges is totally unsuited to the needs of the age. Dr. Dillon credits the "educated" class with "a monumental ignorance of contemporary history and modern languages." One could indeed draw here a very curious parallel with decaying Rome. Towards the close of the fourth century the vast masses of the Empire were entirely indifferent to its administration, and the group of high-minded senators that gathered about Symmachus and Prætextatus frittered away their time in elaborate letter-writing and the cult of rhetoric. So in modern Spain the art of talking seems to be the chief preoccupation of politicians, and proficiency in that art the first condition of success. An entire reform of the educational system is one of the most crying needs; a reform of primary education that the people may be stimulated to take an intelligent interest in Church and State, and a reform of secondary and university education so that merchants and politicians may rise to a proper sense of their national and international duties. To that reform the Church of Spain is, to say the least, totally indifferent. Whilst its clerical writers search the annals of the Middle Ages for proofs of the stimulus it gives to education, it waits in sullen and apprehensive silence until outside

pressure shall have opened the eyes of the nation. And there can be no question that its silence is the strongest encouragement the people have to remain in their ignorance.

Another great obstacle to the productive and reconstructive impulse that is needed to-day in Spain is the wide-spread disinclination for work. Here, it is true, one must distinguish. There are provinces, especially in the North, where the people are forced to work, and work hard, to procure the slenderest means of subsistence. Luffmann found peasants working from ten to sixteen hours a day all the year round for 5 pesetas (about 3 shillings) per week. Usually, however, the Spaniard has little of the energy that the race of modern life exacts. The mineral resources of his country are described by all experts as "vast and very varied." The soil is, in general, capable of yielding rich return, as it did under the Romans, the Jews, and the Moors. But he leaves it to French and Germans to work his silver and lead mines—whilst he looks on and curses volubly—and, with the remains of the noble enterprise of the Moors before his eyes everywhere, he will make no sustained and scientific effort to develop his agricultural resources. Luffmann, in fact, at the close of his long and interesting travel in Spain, declared that it is "not more law, but more individual effort, that is wanting in Spain. The people have lost their self-respect. There is no longer any honour in labour or any dishonour in laziness and indifference to probity and justice." Where the moral education to cure this is to come from in a country like Spain, if not from the Church, it is difficult to say. Elsewhere, in fact, the Church talks grandiloquently of its consecration of labour, its advance upon the pagan contempt for manual work; there it has had to face hostile organisations of workers. In Spain it fails to give the faintest breath of inspiration. Nay, there are parts of its teaching and its practice which encourage idleness. It is largely due to the perverse ecclesiastical blessing of alms-giving, as such, that "begging has attained an appalling development in Spain," as Maxime Descamps says. One of the latest saints added to the roll of the canonised, in the full light of the nineteenth century, was a professional beggar and a deliberate cultivator of personal uncleanness. The mendicant orders flaunt their idleness before the people. The profession of begging is almost consecrated by the clergy. A German lady tells (in Mrs. Bates's "Spanish Highways and Byways") how, when a professional beggar asked her for alms, and she humanely offered him an opportunity of earning the money by carrying her box, he "folded his cloak about him with hidalgo dignity, saying: 'Madame, I am a beggar, not a labourer.'" Children are deliberately maimed, and their parents pretend to have all kinds of afflictions, to procure greater charity. Foreigners who have been long resident in Spain tell me they have known fairly prosperous men to ask alms in the open street owing to its religious respectability. The clergy lend their churches occasionally for the indiscriminate

distribution of bread and wine and cigarettes to these social pests and parasites. Nor have the clergy a word to say against the other great Spanish escape from labour—gambling. The State is permitted without protest to draw £200,000 a year from the public lotteries. Lotteries in kind are sometimes held in the vestibules of the churches—so Diercks relates in his “*Moderne geistesleben Spaniens.*” Luffmann states that he found a gaming-room at Andujar in the upper storey of a convent; a foreigner who has lived many years in Spain told me of a monastery near his residence where the monks let their outhouses for even less reputable purposes.

Thus there is no more hope here than there was in the matter of education that the needful regenerative impulse will come from the Church. Once more the Church neglects an opportunity of rendering a service of inestimable value to the nation. An intelligent Spaniard shrewdly observed to M. Bazin that the radical cause of Spain's downfall was the enrichment of the country by Colonial plunder. The flood of American gold had demoralised its economic life. Even in quite recent years Spaniards made huge fortunes in the briefest space of service (corrupt administration) in Cuba or the Philippines. Now the state of the country urgently demands an industrial regeneration, and the Church has not a word to say about that “nobility of toil” which it preaches to the restive workers of France and Belgium and the United States.

On the other hand the Church of Spain is no less attentive than it has ever been to that side of life which the economist calls consumption. Education may be neglected; sanitation may be attended to so inadequately that Spain, with all its glories, retains one of the highest death-rates in the world; the Navy may be committed to the lumberyard; the spectre of bankruptcy may show its head above the Pyrenees; but the Church will not abate one centimo of its claim on the people. The editor of the *Revista Christiana* calculated some years ago that the Church of Spain spent 29,200,000 pesetas a year on incense and candles alone. Vast as the sum is, when we recollect what Spain spends on education and other secular purposes, it is only a tithe, though a significant tithe, of the economic parasitism of the Church. The peasant who earns three pesetas a day must pay that sum for a mass; even for a simple prayer, occupying a minute or two, over a sick child, he has to pay two or three pesetas, as well-informed residents have told me. According to the census of 1897 there were 72,077 priests, monks and nuns in the country. Large numbers of these priests have no regular spiritual charge, so disproportionate is their number. They are familiarly known as *saltatumbas*, for it is their practice to run from place to place where funerals are announced and masses for the dead are to be distributed. Travellers in Madrid hotels find them scanning the artistic death-notices in the papers as eagerly as our out-of-works run down the advertisement columns.

Diercks, in his "Moderne geistesleben Spaniens," gives some very curious ways of getting clerical income in Spain—such as, by (with the permission of the Vatican) saying a few masses for the price of many, by taking over large sums originally collected for philanthropic purposes, and so on; but there are normal sources of ecclesiastical revenue in Spain which seem to escape the notice of travellers. Few in England are aware that the Church of Rome continues in Spain, in the twentieth century, the outrageous practice of the sale of indulgences, against which the conscience of Europe protested so vehemently four centuries ago. I say deliberately the "sale" of indulgences, for the subterfuge by which the Church seeks to evade the charge is hardly less discreditable than the fact. I have two of these precious documents, or *bulas*, before me. They were bought by a friend in Madrid in the year of grace 1901, and they bear that date. A conspicuous bill in the window of an ordinary bookseller's shop announced that *bulas* were to be had within, and my friend went in and asked for some. He is clearly not a Spaniard, presumably a heretic; but no questions were asked. For the sum of 75 centimos (nominally 7½d.)—the sum being stated very conspicuously on the top of the *bula*—he was handed a much-besealed and imposingly-phrased document which promised him a "plenary indulgence" on the usual conditions. A further 7½d. secured a *bula* which granted him permission to eat meat on the days of Lent. Both documents talk magniloquently of the Crusades in which Spain took so glorious a part. The Spaniards helped rather by money than by personal service, and the Holy Father rewarded them with these spiritual privileges. Very soon the transaction became uncommonly like a sale. No alms—*limosna*, as the *bula* calls your payment—no indulgence; pay your 75 centimos, and the document is handed over in a very business-like way. Moreover, you are told expressly on your *bula* (though 80 or 90 per cent. of the people who buy them cannot read them) that this "alms" does not go to the poor but to the promotion of "the splendour of the Church." In an unlucky hour the Holy Father tried to extend this lucrative business to Germany; in Spain it continues to our own day, and the Spaniard, vaguely conceiving it to be a unique privilege (as it is) of his country, is inflamed to yet greater attachment to the beneficent Roman See.

Until half a century ago the spoils of this lucrative industry were openly divided between Spain and the Vatican, a "Commissary-General of Crusades" proceeding each year to open the glorious distributor with great flourish of trumpets. The Vatican has more important interests at stake to-day. With an eye to its admirers in England and the States it refrains from explicit share in the commerce. The Archbishop of Toledo issues every January a vast number of these *bulas* the cost of printing being the merest fraction of a centimo for each Bishop, priests, and booksellers levy their commission for distributing them. The bulk of the proceeds goes to the Archbishop of Toledo

what proportion goes on to Rome one cannot say to-day. But an enormous sum must be derived from this commerce. Clearly, few will refuse 75 centimos for a dispensation from the fast, or for that *ne plus ultra* of spiritual privilege to the ignorant Catholic, a plenary indulgence. One may enjoy the *fiesta* very liberally, provided one retains 7½d. for a *bula*. The wealthier Catholics, moreover, give fancy prices for these precious documents. The total revenue must be very considerable.

A year or two ago a foreign Catholic stumbled upon this practice in Spain, and the horrified, simple Englishman denounced it at once to the Vatican. It took many and ingenious letters to induce the oracle to speak, and in the end came an unsigned message to the effect that any priest would explain to him how there was no "sale" whatever in the proceeding. The Vatican is perfectly well acquainted with this infamous traffic, and probably makes considerable profit out of it. In any case it is one of the chief and most discreditable sources of revenue to the Spanish Church. Every priest knows how little the "plenary indulgence" really means—and how much the peasant thinks it means. And poor Spain finds a blessed privilege in the traffic that lit the flame of rebellion in Germany, and that the Church is keenly intent upon concealing from the educated Romanists of England and the States.

Hardly more creditable is the encouragement which the Church gives to the most extravagant display in public worship. Whilst money grows scarcer and scarcer, and a score of high public functions are neglected from poverty, the Church clings with pitiful tenacity to its immense treasures, and encourages peasant and noble to add incessantly to them. The wardrobe of the Virgin (or her statue) at Toledo represents an incalculable sum. One robe alone bears "85,000 large pearls and as many sapphires, amethysts, and diamonds" (Mrs. Bates). Her crown is worth £5,000, her bracelets £2,000. The Queen-mother and other wealthy folk add continually to this appalling waste of capital. In times of public destitution St. Ambrose and St. Augustine melted down and sold the few sacred vessels of their basilicas. The Spanish Church continues to hoard up these useless and barbaric treasures in face of an impending national calamity. The people are taught to think that the mother of Christ, whom the Church of Rome is holding up as the ideal woman in England, is a kind of Oriental princess who delights in this barbaric display, and that her delight increases in proportion to the sacrifice involved. Did Queen Christina show the faintest trace of the temper they attribute to the mother of Christ, the third person of the Spanish Trinity (in many of the children's prayers), there would be a revolution to-morrow. Besides these miraculous and other statues and their extravagant wardrobes there are relics innumerable and fantastic in costly shrines, worn with the costly kisses of millions of worshippers. At Carpio, Luffmann

found on exhibition one of those interesting relics of the Virgin (a lock of her hair) which were so common in the Middle Ages; phials of her milk are no longer exhibited, though in one church a picture represents her deftly shooting a stream from her breast into the open mouth of a saint who kneels before her. The people are encouraged, too, to squander vast sums on religious pageants and processions. In so far as there is a sincere religious feeling in these displays one can only regret the barbaric notion of the higher powers which it involves. As a rule, however, there is little real religion in them. I have had some stage-experience of them in Belgium. At Seville, where the most famous processions take place, a priest assured M. Bazin ("Terre d'Espagne") that more than half the *ménages* in the town were "free unions." Cordova, on the verge of bankruptcy, supports 600 priests (Luffmann)—to 55,000 people—and a proportionate display. Add the immense sales of "relics," water in which real relics have been dipped or washed, medals, charms, bullet-proof prayers, scapulars, agnus-deis, and similar rubbish, and you will have some idea of the share the clergy have in Spain's economic consumption. And these, remember, are additional to the fees for baptisms, masses, funerals, marriages, and other functions, with which we are more familiar.

From this sorry outlay on superstition one passes naturally to a consideration of the second ulcer of Spain, the bull-fight. With the financial aspect of this question I have nothing to do. I should be the last to expect the priest to point out to a man the folly of spending his last peseta on such a spectacle. The *espadas* give very generously to the Church from their £10,000 to £15,000 a year. The *toreros* in general are good Catholics. A chapel is attached to the ring, that they may pray before entering the arena, and a priest is in readiness to give the sacraments. The clergy are always paid to bless a new *plaza* with great pomp. However, we have every right to put to the Church a few questions on the subject of the cruelty of the bull-fight. Lowell, in a diplomatic document, described the fight as "a shocking and brutalising spectacle," and I have read twenty English, French, and German writers without meeting a different opinion. The work of the *picador* is hopelessly repulsive. Before the *matador* approaches the bull for the fatal stroke three or four of these horsemen must face it. They buy up old and worn horses, blindfold them, and plant them square in front of the bull to be gored and disembowelled, in order to wear down his strength. *El Liberal* stated in its issue of November 9th, 1901, that there had been 532 first-class *corridas* in Spain during the preceding eight months, at which 3,058 bulls had been killed. That would involve the goring and disembowelling of at least 10,000 of these poor blindfolded horses. In former days the horsemen showed their skill in evading the bull; now their sole function is to receive his shock. And the fever excited by these "sports" is not a whit less than the famous circus-fever of the later Romans. A dozen journals are

devoted exclusively to bull-fighting; almost every journal in Spain devotes its best columns to a description of the Sunday's *corrida*. The successful *matador* is the idol of the town, and has been known to save a fortune of 3,000,000 pesetas. The Infanta Isabella receives him in audience, and the king presents him with gold cigarette-cases. Cordova, the impoverished city of 600 priests, has ten schools of the noble art.

But behind the brilliant stage of these first-class *corridas* lies a sordid and repulsive world of minor displays. It is here that one begins to see fully the horrible influence of the great fights. The poorer classes, that cannot find the two or three pesetas for the cheapest seat in the great *plaza*, and the smaller towns, must have their share in the national sport. They buy old and infirm or blind bulls, bull-calves, and even cows, and turn them loose in the barricaded market-place or cross-roads. Then with knives and sticks and crude *banderillas* these amateur toreros play their game. If the animal does not prove lively enough they break their wine-bottles and gash it and tear its eyes out with the jagged bottoms. Young fellows at holiday time will buy such animals, and amuse their sweethearts with an amateur and brutal *corrida*. Sometimes the animal—a cow, or calf, or bull with horns cut off—is made to run between two rows of grinning Spaniards with long knives. Nay, even the children (whose fondest game is playing at bull-fight) are allowed to enter the arena with their knives and sticks in the shows which Arabs and Gypsies take about the country, and in which some cheap or diseased calf is turned loose. Laws have been passed against some of these displays, but they are little observed. One excellent law prohibits the holding of bull-fights in "any town or village where the schoolmasters have not been paid." The *alcalde* of a small town not far from Madrid attempted to enforce this, but the infuriated people dragged the schoolmaster (the *alcalde* not being forthcoming) to the *plaza* and baited him, sticking *banderillas* in his neck, and so on.

Further, one must take account of the frightful indifference to animal suffering, which, in consequence of this national sport, is so conspicuous a feature of Spanish life. This is too notorious to need enlarging on. The treatment of birds, cats, dogs, horses, etc., is painful to witness; nor is the evil confined to the lower classes. A gentleman who has been long resident in Spain told me that he one day saw some ladies—ladies he had noticed to be particularly religious—fling a sick cat out into the road without further thought. He picked it up and carried it away to give it a painless death, and as he did so he heard the ladies laughing at him from the balcony above. On another occasion he saw a Spanish boy deliberately twisting the legs of a pup before his mother's eyes. When my informant protested, the mother told him to be off as he "was not a Catholic." But of story-telling there would be no end. The feature is sadly notorious.

Now, what do we find the Church doing in face of this colossal immorality, unconscious though it be? We find it not only maintaining a discreet silence, but blessing *plazas* and *matadors*, and even yielding its high place to them. When Lagartijo retired from the ring, the grand complimentary *corrida* was fixed for the festival of Corpus Christi and the *very hour* of the Church's great procession; and the clergy—so Major Hume states—postponed the religious solemnity. The clergy will give no assistance whatever to those few Spaniards who are nobly endeavouring to lessen the evil. They shrug their shoulders when appealed to, and say: "We are here to look after the souls of "men." One reformer approached a bishop on the subject. He had just contributed to some fund or other, and his lordship was smiling. But the episcopal face darkened when the reform was mentioned, and with a petulant "Would you rob the poor of our services?" the bishop closed the subject. It is frequently stated here that Leo XIII. has pronounced against the bull-fight, but Spaniards declare that he has only protested against the holding of *corridas* on the Church's great festivals. Even that restricted protest is totally disregarded in Spain, for the great religious festivals are the bloodiest days in the year. The truth is that, not only are the clergy lacking in courage, but they have not themselves a due perception of the moral aspect of the question. I turn to my manual of Moral Theology—one of the most approved of recent years, by Father Lehmkuhl, running to two huge quarto volumes—and I find only three or four lines devoted to cruelty, and they of the weakest description. The Church, in its cut and dried casuistry and perverse view of man's moral nature, has never classed cruelty as a sin. The simple Spanish woman who declared heresy to be a transgression infinitely worse than wringing a puppy's legs knew her theology well. The pious Spaniard will cross himself when he passes the grave of a Protestant, and bow to the ground for the smile of a distinguished *matador*.

Thus from the very land of Balmez comes the crushing disproof of his high-sounding thesis. The Church of Spain is totally incapable of giving to the country that regenerative moral and social impulse that alone can save it from further catastrophes. It is the Church of Rome in its native character, unstimulated by Protestant or Rationalist opposition. Here, where the Church of Rome has had transcendent power for centuries, where, in 1887, no less than 17,548,421 still described themselves as Catholics out of a total of 17,565,632, we have, in truth, the unalloyed religion of Rome. We have a religion that spends its force in securing the observance of forms and ceremonies; that clings to its vast treasures with miserly grasp while the peasantry starve and the national credit sinks lower and lower; that shrugs its shoulders at the impending ruin and continues to babble of Mary and relics and processions; that is utterly destitute of any spring of moral and social inspiration. Its clergy know little more than the peasants do of any

value, and their lives have, says Mrs. Bates, "as a class, been so open to reproach that even the finger-games and nonsense-songs of the little children, learned with their baby lisplings, mock priestly immorality;" whilst their elders, at their fairs and fiestas, make sport of their avarice and comfort. Their zeal is expended in struggling against Protestants and Rationalists who would give the inspiration they cannot give; in silencing by calumny and even imprisonment every Spaniard who dare oppose them. Clearly, if the Church of Rome as we know it has fairer features, it owes its greater sanity to the very organisations it seeks to displace, not to the mediæval traditions and the connection with Rome which are its sole characteristics. In Spain, the most Catholic country in the world, we see its native impotence as a source of social or moral inspiration.

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