

## THE MISSION COMMUNES IN PARAGUAY.

(By PHAROS, in the *Lyttelton Times*.)

"But it is in the New World that the Jesuits have exhibited the most wonderful display of their abilities, and have contributed most effectually to the benefit of the human species. The conquerors of that unfortunate quarter of the Globe acted at first as if they had nothing in view but to plunder, to enslave, to exterminate. The Jesuits alone made humanity the object of their settling there."—Robertson "Life of Charles V."

"The Indians were undoubtedly far better off materially than our own workmen."—E. De Laveleye.

"L'établissement dans le Paraguay par les Jésuites Espagnols, paraît à quelques égards le triomphe de l'humanité."—Voltaire.

I HAVE headed this article with the foregoing extracts from authors chosen as not at all likely to be prejudiced in favour of the Jesuits. In Protestant countries, and, for the matter of that, in Catholic countries, too, there are numbers of readers likely to receive with suspicion, if not downright unbelief, anything written in praise of a Jesuit organisation. Everything done by this famous Order has been made the subject of venomous controversy. Amongst the rest their missions in Paraguay have not escaped. They have been accused of making their Indian converts labour in bands, little better treated than slave gangs, for the Order's benefit; of getting up kidnapping expeditions among the neighbouring tribes of free Indians; of keeping their converts in a state of childish ignorance; of aiming to build up a theocratic empire over the whole of South America. Above all, they are blamed because they did not elevate their Indians sufficiently in the scale of civilisation to enable their communities to hold their ground after the expulsion of their preceptors. Those who admit that they made thousands of gentle, peaceful, industrious villagers out of scattered forest tribes of shy, ferocious, savage hunters and fishermen, still complain that they did not do enough—that they did not raise these reclaimed savages to the level of the most intelligent, shrewd, independent of the educated, self-governing European races. For nothing less would have enabled the Missionary Communes of Paraguay to continue to prosper and progress under Spanish rule after the Jesuits had been driven out. But colonists, living as we do with missionary work going on near at hand, know what the task of civilising savages means. We are hardly likely to echo this last complaint. We are more likely to find it difficult to credit that the Jesuits managed to establish their many strangely organised, but certainly flourishing and contented communities in the midst of a wilderness of tropical barbarism. What will seem surprising to us is not what they left undone, but the fair and systematic structure which they succeeded in building up.

For several generations the Spaniards, who discovered Paraguay early in the sixteenth century, made little headway in its colonisation. They found the resistance of the Guarani Indians too tough, and their country too remote to reach easily, and clad much of it with impenetrable forest. Moreover, it offered no gold mines to tempt them on. Like the settlers, the Jesuit missionaries made, at first, slow progress. Marching into the woods and marshes, armed only with cross and breviary, hundreds of these brave men laid down their lives, slain by fevers or the Guarani arrows. But early in the seventeenth century the heads of the Order were happily able to obtain a great concession from the Spanish crown. This was the right of governing independently all mission establishments they might form in Paraguay. In order that they might labour undisturbed in the work of conversion, no other Europeans were to be allowed to interfere with their settlements. To pay the expenses of the mission work the Jesuits were to be allowed a monopoly of any trade they could create. In return they contracted to pay to Spain one golden crown a year for every Indian settled at their mission stations. It was stipulated that their converts were to be freemen, safe from slave hunters. Having thus bought off the Government wolves and shut out the private ones—the trader and slave dealer—the missionaries bent to their work with an enthusiasm and systematic energy which soon produced great results. In 1605 they first collected together their scattered converts into a fixed settlement called Loretto. The plenty and comfort enjoyed by the settlers there soon had its effect in attracting the savages of the forest round, who, like all their kind, were exposed to periodical seasons of miserable want and starvation. In canoes rowed by their disciples, the monks passed up the innumerable rivers and streams of their wild, well-watered, luxuriantly beautiful land. Often the psalms and hymns sung by the crews drew the Indian hunters and fishermen to the river bank, and made the beginning of peaceful intercourse. By degrees the kind and gentle demeanour of the preachers won the confidence of the savages. Gradually station after station was set up in the same fashion as Loretto until the whole of Paraguay, and the region to the South, still known as the Province of "Missions," were sprinkled with well-built, busy, pleasant-looking townships. Before its expulsion from the country in 1767 the Order had thus reclaimed and partially civilised many tribes, so that the population of their stations has been variously estimated at from one hundred and fifty thousand to ten times that number of docile, industrious, contented Indians. Robertson says loosely, "some hundred thousand." Mr. Gifford Pallgrave, in the charming article on Paraguay in his "Ulysses," says, "certainly not more than 170,000." The fullest account of the Missions I have seen (a French one) estimates the Mission Indians at 100,000 families.

Out of these people the Jesuits set themselves to work to form a Christian Republic. Each settlement or "Reduction" was organised as a perfect community of fellow-labourers, managing its own affairs under the direction of two missionaries. Policemen, soldiers, officers, magistrates, registrars, foremen, inspectors, all were educated Indians, elected to their posts by the general body of the inhabitants, but only out of a limited number of candidates nominated by the two fathers. Two schools were set up in each township, one for teaching reading and writing, the other for dancing, singing, and orchestral music. Great attention was paid to these latter arts at which the Guarani was most apt, and which were considered both to brighten and soften their natures, the Jesuits and Shakespeare being here in accord. On

passing childhood the mass of the people were destined for manual labour, either in their own family allotments, or in the public plantations and storehouses, or, in the case of those with a turn for mechanics, in the communal workshops. The women remaining at home spun, wove, and attended to household duties. Specially bright and promising children were, however, reserved for something higher than handicrafts; they were given a complete course of education in a sort of seminary—"as Plato advises," says the monkish historian. There they learned something of science and literature, and were subjected to a rigid moral discipline. These pupils furnished the settlements with magistrates and officers, or were admitted into the Church's service. Early marriages were encouraged. Morality was as severely insisted upon as industry. But crime of any kind was almost unknown. The punishments were of the lightest; a first offence was met by a private admonition; a second by some public mark of disgrace; a third by a slight flogging—an extreme very seldom resorted to. Private property and trade were forbidden. In the centre of every commune, in addition to the church, the schools, an inn for travellers and the priests' house, was a commercial store to which the produce of the district found its way. Thence the necessaries of life were distributed regularly to each family. From this store the sick, the aged, the destitute, the officials, and the missionaries were all fed. The surplus went to meet seasons of famine, or was exported to provide the tribute to Spain and other expenses. No public treasure was amassed. At the expulsion of the Jesuit Fathers only £2000 in cash was found by the Spaniards on seizing their establishments. Daily labour and attendance at church services were, of course, compulsory on all inhabitants. The numerous saints' days and Church festivals provided plenty of holidays. Religious processions, with music and solemn dances, were arranged with much care and artistic taste. The churches—large, and of massive stone—were adorned with pictures divided by frames of green, living creepers framed up the walls. A long, white sacque was the simple dress of the women; a shorter tunic that of the men. A purple dress was the reward and mark of distinguished merit.

Compare this system with the hideous cruelties inflicted on the Peruvians; the awful fate of the West Indian Caribs, the speed of whose extermination was the only mercy vouchsafed to them; or the infernal horrors of the Middle Passage—the trade then encouraged by every maritime Power in Europe. Where in the wide world, except in Paraguay, was the white man kind, or the brown or black man happy beneath his rule, during those dreary seventeenth and eighteenth centuries?

Life was not without colour or amusement at the missions. Nor was it always placid. Those were the days of slavery and slave-hunting. The surrounding Spanish and Portuguese often looked with a covetous eye on such valuable chattels as the skillful, hard-working mission Indians. They ventured to try raiding expeditions among them. But the Fathers, arming and drilling their converts and providing them with muskets and cannon, taught the slave-hunters that the quiet, loyal Guarani were as good at fighting as at music and dancing—a truth which the five years' war against Dictator Lopez has amply proved again within our own generation. For obvious reasons the missionaries made the most stringent rules against intercourse between their people and the outside Europeans. No white visitor might stay more than three days at a mission. The natives were never allowed to speak Spanish, though the seminary pupils learned to read and write it. Their own soft and musical tongue, the Guarani dialect, was reduced to writing and made the language of Paraguay. It still holds that place in spite of the large Spanish element now mingled with the Indians. Other traces of the Jesuits' teaching are, perhaps, still to be found in the fondness of the modern Paraguayans and Guarani for music, dancing, and flowers, in their conspicuous personal cleanliness and skill in the arrangement of drapery, in their cheerful, agreeable manners, and in a freedom from crime and violence not common among other American half-breeds. "Crime is rare in Paraguay," writes one recent traveller. Another paints bright, almost rapturous, pictures of bands of white-robed, smiling, neat, Guarani women, with their fine figures and erect carriage, bearing baskets of golden oranges to the schooners anchored at the river-side towns. He describes to us one of the old Jesuit Missions still inhabited, though not by the Fathers or their flock—these vanished more than a century ago. But still three sides of the square are bordered by the comfortable stone dwelling-houses, each opening at the back on its garden, and in front on the common verandah or cloister, which surrounds the square and shelters foot-passengers from the direct rays of the tropical sun. Under this children play and women sit and gossip in the cool air of the evening after the day's work is done. Still in the centre rise the battered belfry and church—battered like everything else in Paraguay now. And in other parts—in the remoter country where the fields of the old Communes have lapsed into jungle, marsh, and tall forest—the traveller sometimes stumbles upon the ruined walls of a deserted pile, overgrown with bushes and lianas, and tenanted by bats, snakes, and wild birds. This, he is told, is one of the Jesuit churches. In it he sees evidence of what the Christian Communes were and what they effected. And he sees comment upon the men who destroyed them, and, ruling in the Jesuits' stead, have failed where they succeeded, and fallen back where they advanced.

John Burns, the London labour leader, describes a certain crowd of alleged workmen as "a lot of gaol-birds who go out in the morning to look for work and pray God they may not find it."

The idea that a city like Hartford should have become nearly half Catholic in population within three or four scores of years is wonderful. Half a century ago a Catholic was a "rara avis" in Connecticut, and in the rural regions they would have examined him to discover the horns upon his head. We have changed all that. The Puritan race is dying out, and it is being replaced by the vigorous Irish and the fertile French Canadians, whose family virtues make them multiply and increase, just as the opposite vices are slaying the older stock.