

## A SPANISH JESUIT ASTRONOMER

While the ignorance and obscurantism of the clergy of Spain (remarks the Boston *Sacred Heart Review*) are still favorite subjects of editorial comment in the secular press of the world, it is interesting to note that a Spanish priest—what is more, a Spanish Jesuit—has been in this country, taking an active part in the session, on Mount Wilson, California, of the International Union of Co-operation in Solar Research. This priest, Father Cirera, still a comparatively young man, is founder and director of the most complete astrophysical and meteorological observatory in the world—the observatory at Tortosa, Spain.

William H. Knight, writing in the Los Angeles *Sunday Times*, says of this notable Spanish astronomer:

The story of Father Cirera (for he writes S.J. after his name), like that of all men who are notable for achievement, has elements of romance. Born in a hamlet on the banks of the beautiful Ebro River in 1864, educated for the priesthood, but with a mind of scientific bent, at the early age of twenty-four, he was intrusted with a mission to the Philippine Islands, and at once established at Manila, under the Spanish Government, a station for meteorological and magnetic observation.

While engaged in that work during the six years from 1888 to 1894, he conducted magnetic observations covering the entire group of islands, and published many magnetic maps of great value to navigators in those waters. It was there that he first observed what he believed was some physical connection between solar storms and atmospheric disturbances on the earth.

Impressed with the importance of pursuing these investigations under more favorable conditions, he returned to Spain and projected a bold plan for establishing a comprehensive cosmic-physical observatory, for solar, magnetic, electrical, meteorological, and seismological investigations.

In order to carry out this ambitious scheme he needed not only Government sanction, but large financial aid from private sources. Fortunately he enlisted the hearty interest of an old friend—a Spaniard of great wealth living in Paris—Señor Pedro Gil Moreno de Mora, son of a noted banker, and young Cirera was encouraged to proceed with his scientific enterprise and provide a suitable and adequate physical equipment for the purpose.

The next step of the young astronomer was to inform himself thoroughly of the best methods, instruments, and conditions necessary for producing the best results. Accordingly, he spent four years in visiting and studying the various features of the principal observatories of Europe, taking ample notes with a view to selecting and combining those features that would be most useful and efficient for his purpose.

Securing an extensive tract of land in an eligible location, he constructed around a park-like enclosure a series of buildings, of striking architecture, yet each perfectly adapted for a special department of astronomical work or physical investigation. They were completed in 1907, and during the last three years Director Cirera has been doing important work in solar and terrestrial physics.

At the sessions of the International Solar Union, Cirera has been placed on the most important committees, and his views are solicited and deferred to by the most prominent members of that body.

Personally, Director Cirera is a genial, whole-souled gentleman, with keen eyes, rapid utterance, a quick grasp of scientific problems, enthusiastic in his work, and certain of a career which will be closely watched by his fellow-astronomers.

## THE CHURCH IN RUSSIA

The Catholic Church in Russia numbers at the present day something over twelve million members (says an exchange). Poland—Russian Poland—counts for a very large figure in the total; there are a few dioceses scattered throughout the southern provinces, in Little Russia principally; in this region too there are the contingents of the Georgian communities, practising the Oriental rite.

The Catholics, in accordance with the autocratic principle of Tsarism—namely, one sovereign, one tongue, one Church—are looked upon askance by the Governments, municipal as well as provincial. If it cannot be said that the Church is actively persecuted, there prevails a system of negative persecution (such as boycott) which is applied to all clergy who evince much energy in carrying on the apostolate.

The only condition on which a Catholic is relieved of his disability or excluded from this negative proscription arises in the case in which he agrees to consider his Catholicity negatively. Should he display devotional zeal, or a disposition to organise, or even fraternise, with his fellow religionists, he becomes at once a suspect, is registered (even though Russian) as a foreigner, and is placed from the point of view of the Censor outside the pale.

In Russian Poland the preacher is forbidden to preach in Polish. In Russia the Catholic preacher is forbidden to preach in Russian! The reason given is that the orthodox community might understand and allow themselves to

be seduced. And since the conversion of an orthodox Russian is a State offence, the chance of proselytism is not encouraging or hopeful.

'Whosoever converts an orthodox Russian to any other Christian belief shall be deprived of all civic rights; he shall also be, in certain cases, sent to Siberia.' So runs the law, which is as bad for other Churches as for the Catholic.

Naturally Russian Poland remains the classic land of persecution. Since the activity displayed by Leo XIII., however, in seeking to assuage the hardship of the faithful of his flock in Muscovy, the position of the Catholics has on the whole assumed a better relationship to the government. The Catholic bishoprics which had lain vacant for nearly a quarter of a century, have been filled; governmental inspection in monasteries and convents has become less inquisitorial, the liberty of the priest in the pulpit and in the classroom has become more respected. But this is but a concession to the native Catholicity of Poland.

In the Georgian regions it is far otherwise, and here the iron heel of Tsarism unfettered by law still shows its effects. Governor after governor has sought, by persecution and by decree and enactment to force the Catholic over to orthodoxy. Until 1845, the Capuchins had in the Georgian valleys a very flourishing mission. It subsided, despite the most outrageous kind of persecution, until the close of the last decade when it was done away with and the monks expelled in the most brutal manner. The Georgians must now supply their own ministers, for if they are not Russian subjects and not ordained in Russia, they are not allowed to exercise their priestly functions. On the other hand, the government of the Georgian provinces does all it possibly can to impede the recruiting of the Catholic clergy from among the native peoples. Nevertheless, the seminary of Saint Louis, at Pera, near Constantinople, always has its supply of Georgian priests from the homeland. They are, however, educated under great difficulties, and their presence is not supposed to be known to the Russian Ambassador at Constantinople.

Were the seminarists apprehended, they might be sent back to Russia as deserters. They manage, before the close of their theological studies to return surreptitiously to Russia where they are duly ordained.

The Tsars, says the reviewer, have endeavored to make of religion an instrument of despotism and misrule. In a large measure they have succeeded heretofore.

## WHAT SPANISH RELIGIOUS ARE DOING

A year book, recently published by the Spanish Ministry (says *America*), furnishes valuable information for those who see an economic scourge in the pretended excessively large number of houses of monks and nuns in Spain. It has been shown already that in proportion to its Catholic population Spain has fewer religious men and women than several other European countries; but we owe a vote of thanks to the compilers of the year book for telling us in detail just how many of those monks and nuns spend their time.

We are told, in the first place, that Spain has 606 provincial and municipal hospitals, all in charge of religious; only 422 of these hospitals, however, always have patients to be attended. The Sisters of Charity head the list with 253 institutions in their charge; the Sisters of Our Lady of Consolation follow with 24; the Carmelite Sisters have 19, and the Servants of Mary have 16.

'The services of the religious,' says the report, 'are gratuitous in 111 establishments and recompensed in 208; but the compensation is very moderate, consisting of 485 pesetas a year.' As a peseta is 20 cents in American money (or just 19.3 cents, to be exact), each religious receives for her service the handsome sum of 93.60 dollars, out of which she boards and clothes herself. Though the Government furnishes the house, it does not supply the hospital nuns with food or clothing.

The Little Sisters of the Poor maintain, without Government aid, 51 refuges for the aged poor, and shelter between men and women 5093 old people. A similar organization, known as the Sisters of the Aged and Abandoned, cares for 3596 of the same helpless class.

There are in different parts of Spain 50 free eating-houses under the control of the authorities, but in nearly every case administered, and that gratuitously, by monks and nuns, who prepare and serve the food that the authorities supply for the distressed poor. Nearly four and one-half million meals were served by them in 1908.

Finally, the year book mentions 22 reformatories and refuges in charge of religious, such as the Capuchin tertiaryaries in Madrid and elsewhere, the Sisters of the venerable Order of the Most Holy Trinity, the Oblates, and others.

To this rapid survey of the labor of the religious of Spain for the relief of poverty and bodily misery, we may add that in their various free schools of all kinds, from the kindergarten to commercial colleges and trade schools, including night schools for adults, these same 'excessively numerous' religious furnish without a cent of cost to the Government the benefits of an education to 133,991 persons.