

revered because a strange evolution has identified it with the people in their sorrows and aspirations. It is the working men themselves who collect the dues for the priests, who run the Confraternities and Sodalities which meet monthly, and even weekly, to promote devotion, who talk to one quite simply of their creed, what it means to them in difficulty, and how they encourage each other in it. One of the most prosperous Sodalities consists of barmen, as they would be called in England, or "grocers' assistants," who labor in the composite public houses. Whatever may be true of France and Spain, of Portugal, there is no trace in Ireland that one can discover either of scepticism masquerading under the convenient cloak of Catholicism, or of a rift between the Roman Church and the people. The very difficulty of the Protestants is that the Catholics believe so intensely, and the grievances of Protestants, be they real or be they exaggerated, mean that, in the opinion of Unionists themselves, the Union has failed as a safeguard.'

Protestant Pleads for Justice to the Catholic Church

Although Mexico is overwhelmingly Catholic (remarks the *Sacred Heart Review*), there are on its statute books laws known as the 'Reform Laws' which are very unjust to the Catholic Church, laws which hinder and hamper the work of the Church in a manner that Catholics in the United States would consider bitterly tyrannical. The injustice of these laws is recognised by the editor of the *Mexican Herald*—a new England Protestant. In the September 13 issue of his paper this American editor, Mr. Guernsey, devotes nearly a column and a half of editorial space to a consideration of the Reform Laws. He writes:—

It must not be forgotten that the reform laws were the outcome of a long and bitter struggle, which excited the passions of the contending groups to a high degree, and it is, therefore, not surprising that some of the provisions of those laws bore the stamp of vindictiveness, and, calmly judged at the present time, must

be pronounced as harsh and tyrannical, not to say, in some cases, impracticable.

Such, for example, is the constitutional provision, which prohibits the establishment of religious Orders in Mexico. Says Article 5, in part, of the Federal Constitution: 'The State cannot permit the consummation of any contract, compact, or agreement entailing the impairment, the loss or irrevocable sacrifice of the liberty of the individual, whether for purposes of labor, education, or religious vow. The law, in consequence, does not recognise monastic Orders, nor can it permit their establishment, whatever be the name or object which it is sought to give them.'

It is perfectly right for the State to refuse to recognise religious vows in the sense of not permitting the law to enforce them. A statute to this effect was enacted in Mexico as early as 1833 under the auspices of no less a personage than the reactionary Santa Anna. But when the State goes beyond that point, and seeks to place a ban on the taking of religious vows, and consequently on the existence of the regular Orders of the Catholic Church, it is trespassing on the liberty of the individual and interfering in matters which in no wise concern it.

For the rest, the prohibition has proved wholly nugatory and is being violated every day in the year, as everyone can see, for communities of the regular clergy, bound by the three well-known vows of their institutes, exist in considerable number throughout the Republic, and there is no way of preventing it. In addition not a few of the female Orders have also houses in the chief cities.

Now a law, which is not and cannot be enforced, ought not to remain on the statute book, for its non-observance undermines the respect of the people for legislative enactments in general.

The too stringent prohibition of open-air religious exercises is another blemish of the reform laws. Art. 5 of the Law of December 14, 1874, says on this subject:

'No religious ceremony can be held publicly save in the interior of the churches, under penalty of its being stopped and its promoters being punished with a fine of from ten to two hundred pesos or with detention

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