

## PUTUMAYO AND PARAGUAY

### RISE AND FALL OF AN INDIAN MISSION

The publication by Sir Roger Casement, British Commissioner, of the terrible brutalities inflicted by the officials of a rubber company on the Indians in the Putumayo district of Peru, was promptly followed by the statement (writes the Rev. M. Kenny, S.J., in *America*) that religion alone could supply the remedy and only Catholic missionaries could exercise religious influence on the Indians. Accordingly an appeal has been made to the benevolent for sufficient funds to establish and maintain Catholic missions in Putumayo. It is a striking coincidence, that early in 1911, more than a year before Sir Roger Casement had issued his report, Pope Pius X. had also sent a Commissioner, Father Genocchi, of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, to inquire into the condition of the Indians, not merely in Peru, but in all the States of South America, and his account not only confirms the British Commissioner's, but shows that the outrages cover a still wider area. His formal report has not been published, but a letter, dated February 11, contained this passage: 'The search for rubber, which is here called black gold, has given rise to worse abuses in these districts than in the Congo. In some parts of South America, in spite of the laws, the most shameful slavery prevails, with massacres, sales, atrocious tortures, and every other iniquity of which brutalised and degenerate man is capable when free from the control of law. The Catholic Missions, the only barrier to the wholesale destruction of the Indians, are lacking where they are most urgently needed. For this the Holy Father wishes to make provision, and the idea is worthy of the highest praise.'

#### Pius X. Issues An Encyclical.

His Holiness had, in fact, done so before the Putumayo outrages were given to the world. No sooner had Father Genocchi returned to Rome and made his report in person, than Pius X. embodied its contents in an encyclical to the Archbishops and Bishops of South America, directing them to bend all their energies—by their personal exertions, through religious organisations, and by co-operation with the various States in any movement for the protection of the Indians—to the correction of abuses, and the promotion of the moral and social betterment of that oppressed and much neglected people. Sir Roger Casement and his fellow-commissioners looked for reform to the same sources, for they 'regard the Roman Catholic mission as the sole feasible step that can be taken by those interested on humanitarian grounds in the welfare of the Indians.' That non-Catholics should so conclude has shocked some good people among us; but it will astonish no one who is acquainted with the historical associations of that locality. These should be known to a wide circle of non-Catholic as well as Catholic readers.

Stretching south of Putumayo and east of the Peruvian mountains lay the famous Paraguay Reductions, embracing most of the immense territory of the present Argentine Republic, the greater part of Brazil, much of Uruguay, and the present Republic of Paraguay, in fact, as Muratori described it in 1750, 'the whole interior of South America'; and how the Jesuits established throughout these wide regions in the sixteenth century and maintained for two hundred years the happiest and most flourishing colonies of Christian Indians that the world has witnessed, has been sung by Southey, described historically by Cunninghame Graham (*A Vanished Arcadia*) and the Anglican Bishop Ingraham Kip (*Old Jesuit Missions*), and spoken of with eloquent eulogy by Macaulay and many other non-Catholic writers. The most charming as well as authoritative *History of the Abipones*, by Father Dobrizhoffer, S.J., himself a laborious Paraguayan missionary, who writes of what he saw and wrought, was published in English by Murray (London, 1822), but is unfortunately out of print, as is also the celebrated Muratori's *Relation of the Missions of Paraguay*, wrote originally in Italian and now done into English. The

translator withholds his name, being motivated only by the 'hope that those who sincerely desire the progress and glory of religion will peruse it with real pleasure, and those who read purely to be informed may find something that will satisfy their curiosity.' The hope would still be realised by readers of Muratori and Dobrizhoffer, and the publisher who will provide them the gratification should profit by his enterprise.

#### The First Reduction of Loreto

was formally established in 1610, but for fifty years previously the district from the Amazon to the furthest limits of Patagonia was traversed by Jesuit missionaries, who, under the jurisdiction of the Bishops of Peru, had established many populous if somewhat migratory Christian settlements among the nomadic, barbarous, and often cannibal aborigines. In 1550, they had landed in Brazil, of which Father Joseph Anchieta, the Xavier of South America, became soon the 'Apostle and Thaumaturgus.' A companion for ten years in his astoundingly extensive and perilous travels, and the first fruit of his training, was Father Thomas Field, who joined him in 1577, and by whom he was sent to Tucuman and Paraguay. Father Field appears to have been the first to penetrate the Chaco and learn the language of the Guaranis, and of all the Paraguay tribes. Sometimes he was accompanied by Fathers Solani, Grao, de Ortega, or another, but in every missionary expedition, covering hundreds of leagues through barbarous and hostile lands, we always find his name. We read in the 'Annual Letters' of the Society of Jesus for 1592, that 'Fathers de Ortega and Thomas Filde converted more than two thousand of the Guaranis,' and, 1594, 'Fathers Thomas Filde and de Ortega have a residence established at Villa Rica (in the province of Guayra) whence they go out in missions to give spiritual help to innumerable peoples.' They converted ten thousand Ibirayara cannibals, from whom they rescued many prisoners who were being fattened for consumption, and their next expedition resulted in 3500 baptisms. In every place they evangelised they erected a church with the aid of their converts, and commenced the domestication of the Indians, in which they had notable success at Villa Rica. This was the seed of the Reductions.

#### The Missionaries Were Picked Men

from all the nations of Europe, but the hardships were great, and they soon died, some of fever, some at the hands of the natives, and early in 1605 Father Field was the only Jesuit left in Paraguay. However, he was joined the same year by Fathers Cataldino and Maceto, and later by Father Torres, the Provincial, and fifteen others. Already they were a prey to calumny for refusing to lend themselves to the exploitation or enslavement of the Indians, and Father Valdivia, who had for this reason been expelled from Santiago, was sent to Madrid to secure the authority of the King for the protection and isolation of the Indians. In 1608, Philip III. issued letters patent to the Society of Jesus for the conversion of the Indians, and in 1610, on the soil cultivated by Fathers Field and de Ortega, the Reduction of Loreto was established among the Guaranis on the banks of the Paranapane. Thither the Indians flocked in such numbers that a second, San Ignacio, was soon found necessary, and then a third, till they grew to thirty-one, comprising 200,000 souls, virtuous, prosperous, and happy.

Jesuit volunteers poured in from Europe to meet the growing needs, and these were quickly made ready for the work by Father Field, who, in his seventieth year, after five decades of gigantic toil, devoted himself to teaching the new recruits the language and habits of the natives and the secrets of missionary life. The Indians named him 'the man without vices,' but he was also adorned with apostolic virtues, and 'is more fit, perhaps,' says Father Hogan, S.J. (*Distinguished Irishmen of the Sixteenth Century*) 'than any other Irishman of nearly a thousand years to take rank with the early missionaries on the Continent of Europe.' He is variously written Filde and del Campo, and Graham makes him 'a Scotchman,' but he was born in Limerick, in 1549, of Dr. William Field and Joanna Creagh, studied philosophy and theology in Paris and Louvain,