

THE JESUITS IN PARAGUAY

In a recent letter (writes the London correspondent of the *Melbourne Advocate*) reference was made to Mrs. Marion Mulhall's remarkably interesting book on the government of Paraguay by the Jesuits. The romantic story is told again—this time by a gentleman, Mr. W. H. Koebel—in a handsome new book entitled *In Jesuit Land*. Mr. Koebel, who has recently returned from a prolonged tour of Paraguay, is full of praise and admiration for the work done by the Jesuits among the Indian tribes, both as Christian missionaries and secular administrators. Their system of government, he says, was drawn up with a degree of care and thought that has never been fully or adequately appreciated. It was 'a form of government that was undoubtedly responsible for astonishingly successful results.' It was peculiarly suitable to the temperament of the people to whom it was applied. It was purely socialistic, and the division of labor and property was elaborated in a fashion that left no room for the pauper. Practically without exception the laws of the nations and tribes of South America before the coming of the Europeans were of a roughly socialistic character. What the Jesuits did in Paraguay was to elevate and sublimate the socialism of the Indian tribes, directing it into the wisest channels, and stamping upon it the impress of

The Gospel of Christ.

They showed what Christian Socialism could accomplish under wise administration and favorable conditions. From this point of view the expulsion of the Jesuits from Paraguay was a calamity to the whole world, depriving humanity at large of a striking object-lesson in genuine Christian Socialism. Nobody benefited by hunting the sons of St. Ignatius out of the country. There were no successors to carry on their beneficent work, and in the course of a generation or two many of the Indians had relapsed into their primitive barbarism. The stately churches, the well-tilled farms, and the hives of mechanical industry were left to ruin and decay. Mr. Koebel gives a sad and distressing description of this once fair and flourishing 'Jesuit Land' as he saw it a few months ago:—'While civil and international wars raged, the Jesuit towns and settlements were utterly neglected. But all the while the sub-tropical vegetation was creeping back to reconquer the spots that had been wrested from its glades; little by little the open stretches of the fields lost their smoothness, until in the end they lay lost and obscured beneath a triumphant tangle of vegetation. In the course of years the spots that had resounded to the laughter and labor and hymns of the converts became dense, impenetrable jungle. The town buildings held out longest, but in the end their fate was similar, for they suffered from the destructive power of man as well as that of Nature. The walls once loosened and crumbling, chance dwellers in the neighborhood availed themselves of the conveniently-cut stones. Thus the reed framework of a rough rancho became fortified by fragments of intricately-carved masonry, and a capital that had been poised proudly on high would stand in the midst of a lowly mud hut. The whole region is now devastated, and all is tangled woodland where once solemn processions moved with glittering lights and fragrant incense along the crowded aisles.' In describing the ruins of one of the finest churches erected by the Jesuits in Paraguay, Mr. Koebel records

This Remarkable Occurrence—

At one point in the masonry is a niche that holds the remnants of a worn and mutilated statue. Armless and headless, it is an object that retains very little contour or symmetry of any kind. It once stood for a figure of the Virgin, and was laden, so they say, with bracelets and rich ornaments of gold and silver. Hence the mutilation of the stone, for the treasure was to be wrenched away by no other means when the day of spoliation came. Curiously enough, the broken statue is still surrounded by as great a wealth of blossom as it could ever have known in the days when it reposed in the hush of the walled and roofed interior,

and when the garlands of cut blooms were brought in to encircle it. The flowers have banked their glowing masses of color in a strangely ordered fashion to right and left, lighting up the sad tints of the battered figure. Were there more folks in the neighborhood the thing would doubtless give rise to some talk of a miracle. As it is, Nature is doing her kindly work quite unapplauded.'

It is a pleasure to note the very friendly and sympathetic reviews of this book that have appeared in the London papers during the past week. Evidently the old-time English prejudices and misapprehensions concerning Jesuits are being rapidly dissipated. They were born in ignorance, and in this, as in other matters, education and enlightenment have been dispelling the darkness and showing up the absurdities and the malevolent fibs manufactured in bygone centuries and too credulously accepted by succeeding generations. The *Daily Telegraph*, for instance, which devotes a column to the book, starts its notice by making fun of the old-time Protestant Jesuit bogey and those 'well-meaning but excitable persons' who once went into tantrums and hysterics at the mere mention of the word 'Jesuit.' The verdict of the *Daily Telegraph* upon the book is that its perusal will 'leave in the minds of all unprejudiced readers

A Sense of Deep Sympathy

with the dispossessed and civilising Jesuit communities in Paraguay.' What were the motives that prompted the destruction of this singularly interesting experiment in Christian Socialism and the expulsion of its Jesuit authors and administrators? There were several, but perhaps most powerful was the one emphasised by the *Daily Telegraph*:—'The jealousy that dogged their success.' Envy and jealousy gave currency to all sorts of lies and slanders. One of them was that the Jesuits exploited the labor of the Indians in working the gold mines, and that in this way they amassed immense hoards of treasure. That slander has persisted down to the present day, and it was only a few weeks ago that an expedition left Europe to 'search for the Jesuits' buried treasure in Paraguay.' They will not find it, for the simple reason that it isn't there, and never was.

Catholic social action in Spain is being pushed forward rapidly. Obeying the inspiration and letter of Pope Pius X. in 1909, Cardinal Aguirre, Archbishop of Toledo, founded the National Organisation of Catholic Action. Under this, and sustained and guided by the hierarchy are Diocesan Councils, which work through diocesan and parochial associations. The development of these is very remarkable. Their purpose is to protect the people against social danger of every kind, to draw the careless to the churches, to promote the teaching of Catechism and works of beneficence. They are combining and utilising the pious and charitable organisations existing in each parish. The director of one of these parochial associations said, the other day, at one of their annual meetings in Madrid, 'Whoever says that we Catholics of Spain are not organised makes a statement that is no longer true.' The rapidity with which social works advance is illustrated by the success of Padre Nevares, S.J., and Senor Monedero in their agricultural enterprises in the province of Valencia. In a few months they formed twenty syndicates with Raffeisen banks, and enrolled 10,000 agricultural laborers in the Catholic Agrarian Federation.

'The Church and Socialism'

THE QUESTION OF THE HOUR.

(Published by A.C.T.S.)

By J. A. SCOTT, M.A., LL.B., Editor of *New Zealand Tablet*.

A Queensland priest writes: 'In my opinion you have struck just the right attitude.'

Says the *Melbourne Advocate*: 'The theme is one of the most important of our day to Catholics, and the pamphlet well deserves to be read and preserved by every member of the Church.'