

CATHOLIC SPAIN

IN the minds of many the recent events in Spain must have raised an uneasy doubt as to the boasted Catholicity of that country. Crowds look on apathetically whilst a relatively small band of ruffians pillage and burn and desecrate those things most sacred to a Christian and a Catholic. For the outburst did not limit itself to a mere schoolboy prank, in undoubtedly bad taste, for the annoyance of the more militant elements of the clerical party; but from such beginnings it spread to an inexplicable fury against all Catholic beneficent institutions, and assumed in churches and chapels the proportions of classic and revolting sacrilege.

Can this, then, be a Catholic country, where such things are suffered without protest, where the people look on apathetically and see the benefactors of their children ejected and the most sacred Mysteries of their religion profaned? The answer, like most answers, requires a careful use of distinctions.

We should not, I think, brush aside too hastily the opinion of many Catholics that the danger of ' Catholic ' countries, the disadvantage which always accompanies an officially Catholic State nowadays, is that of a ' Clericalism ' leading inevitably to Anticlericalism. This ' Clericalism,' it is held, right in theory and within its limits—for it upholds the Catholic principle of complete sovereignty for the Church within her own domain and in spheres which directly concern her divine mission—this more secondary aspect of revealed Religion is too often abused, leading to formalism, and decay of deep spiritual life amongst the people. Men who might otherwise have been good Catholics are driven into the camp of anticlericalism. Their ideality is often no worse than a virulent and

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unbalanced distortion of a mentality that might well find its place within the Church. To this fundamentally moderate mentality is added, owing to lack of real education, a whole farrago of definitely un-Christian and un-Catholic philosophies picked up by bearded 'intellectuals' on their travels round Europe, and putting an unmeasurable distance between two camps much less opposed in fundamentals than is imagined.

Whatever truth there is in this view of things, in Spain a state of affairs that would easily lend support to it could be seen almost in its 'reductio ad absurdum.' On the whole, the clerical party received with complete intransigence all manifestations of non-clerical culture in the intellectual sphere, made life complicated and religion unnecessarily irksome in the social sphere.

Moreover, what there was in the way of truly Catholic social action, along the lines of *Rerum Novarum*, was only in embryonic form, and had not reached the mass of the nation. This, again, many felt, was due to the fact that it was labelled 'Clerical' and 'bien pensant,' resolutely at war with any and all other social organisations, instead of being put forward as the simple, humane, Christian, and universal thing that it was.

Spanish Catholicism, so fine in many aspects, had become provincial, narrow, more selfishly concerned in keeping its own external privileges than in opening its arms as wide as the Church of Christ to all that might extend His Kingdom amongst men to-day.

Whatever may be said of the improvement in religious teaching and understanding, the fact remains that the great majority of Spaniards, in all social classes, are abnormally deficient in their perception of the Catholic Faith and of what it should mean to them. These facts are only too readily admitted by

an eminent Canon of Burgos, in an article written since the late events. There has been too much mechanical religion, he says, the practice of image-visiting, excellent in itself, had in Spain become the preclusion (because the substitution) of the profounder conception and habit of prayer; it had ceased to be the mere accompaniment or even the 'modus procedendi.' Similarly with the Mass, there was too much of the materialistic attitude of treating it, says the Canon, as little more than an insurance policy against hell-fire; and even, with many, as the mere vehicle of civil honour and auspice. Moreover, the intensely individualistic Spanish nature has run unchecked in its isolation of religion from social responsibility, and, though charitable institutions have been among the brighter spots on Spain's record, the study of social principles and their intelligent application have gone the way of other intended reforms in the country. The old regime of petty bureaucracy and laissez faire which disgusted all patriotic Spaniards—and, most of all, King Alfonso—called for a radical cure in every walk of life. The King, to the best of his ability, attempted to end this state of affairs and to bring Spain up to the level of culture and social reform—and above all of citizenship—required by her great traditions and her greater possibilities. The result was the Dictatorship, which itself indirectly increased the trouble in attacking it by abnormal methods, and with an unpopular fettering of legitimate liberty. This in its turn has brought about a violent reaction and the fall of the Monarchy. The King has suffered for the faults of the old decrepit ministries and for the decadence of the aristocracy, whom he sought in vain to urge along the paths of social responsibility and rectitude. The element which now appears on the Spanish stage is composed of all that go-ahead section of the country comprised under the generic term of 'intellectuals.'

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A recent article in 'Les Nouvelles Littéraires' was perhaps too ready to take these men at their own valuation as being the only ones who represented and really understood the country. The faults of the 'intellectuals' are as glaring as their qualities are conspicuous. They are deplorably lacking—not through their own fault often enough—in deep and broad religious education; many of them have definitely identified the Church with the mentality already referred to, and are no longer Catholics even in name. Others are blind to the sophisms and the dangers of the 'état laïque,' of 'liberté des cultes' in a country which knows no other religion than the Catholic, of secularism in the schools. They are all largely children, absurdly confident in their power to reform Spain and blind to the obtuseness and the insolvency of their scepticist programme. But they have, beneath it all, something of the vision of children, they see that the nation must be wakened up, and that education, in all spheres, and along modern lines, is the first of steps on that road. Further, they are alive to all humanitarian considerations, to the evils of war, and to the abuses of capitalism, to the need for better nursing and housing, and for prison reform. If these healthy tendencies can be harnessed to the one supreme element of Reality, the Catholic Church, then a real renaissance of Spain may be witnessed, with consequences incalculable for the rest of Europe, at this critical period of the world's affairs. But if the nightmare of a rotten regimen succeeds in remaining associated with the Church, as recent events have proved it to be, then Spain may go the way of Russia or of any other country where the young and vigorous forces of idealism are severed from the wise and divinely inspired principles of Catholicism.

When, then, the mobs burn convents and churches, nay, when they outrage sacred things, when they do

everything most calculated to shock the civilised as well as the Catholic sense, we must look, not at the material act alone; we must see further and ask, What has been intended? Against what was the fury of the mob directed? Was it not ultimately the sacred things of their faith that the people neglected to defend? Let the answer (together with the plea of Masonic and exotic inspiration) be the Spanish incendiaries' only apology. One who knows Spain can affirm that it was not the real Christ who was attacked, not the real Church, not the real Religion which the grace of God and the faithfulness of generations have preserved in the hearts of the Spanish people. Psychologically, deep down, the object of hatred and reaction was not the Thing itself, but that which had so long enwrapped it—the distorted and narrow view which the uneducated masses of every class had come to take of the Catholic Church, due partly at least to their lack of proper instruction. Catholicism as it really is, as it is known in Rome, in England, France and Germany, would not probably have met with such violence. But when zeal is uninformed by intelligence, when nature is reprehensible to the ministers of Grace, when religion becomes to be regarded chiefly as matters of rich confraternities and damask and gold, then those who have been duped or who see their higher ideals snubbed and scouted can hardly be blamed for feeling that not very much is lost in these deplorable excesses. There is not sufficient breadth of view to take in the fact that Catholicism is greater than they who abuse it; the reaction, as history abundantly proves, sweeps both away without mercy.

It is, then, to be devoutly hoped that the 'enfants terribles' who now govern Spain may acquire a wider and less sectarian view of the Catholic Church, may see deeper than the cheap rationalism and lay 'tolerance' which at present inspires them.

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Further, we must pray that the Father may 'draw them to acknowledge, in the Spanish religion, not merely, as they mostly admit, the ideal which is best suited to the Spanish temperament, but the veritable, objective, transcendent presence of the Son of God incarnate who has come to draw all men to Himself, and who is with His Church until the ending of the world.

But, that they may be able to do this, Christ must shine forth in His members, and the Spanish Church and people must develop more fully the sense of the Mystical Body, that profound social sense which is at the root of all true Christianity.

It may or may not be that a democratic form of government will ultimately suit Spain. What is necessary, there as everywhere else, is social reform; but this social reform will be worse than useless unless informed by the real Christian spirit, as indicated in detail by the Vicar of Christ in his recent Encyclical, the echo of that great social charter given to the world by another modern Pope.

When this living social Catholic Christianity has been kindled and set ablaze, then alone will disappear the misunderstandings of mere parties, the labels of 'clericals' and 'anticlericals,' the unnecessary widening of distances and disagreement beyond the boundaries of irrefragable principle. The Catholic Church in Spain will no longer be considered either the monopoly of social retrogression or the vague, all-embracing, naturalistic confederation that Liberals, according to their respective schools, would make her.

But it may cost Spain years of anguish and travail before the fusion and the right balance can be effected.

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