

15th April 1915

THE CHURCH ABROAD.

THE CHURCH IN PORTUGAL.

[From a Portuguese Correspondent.]

It is generally well known that since a Republic has been established in Portugal the democratic Government in power has not only disestablished the Church, but, while boasting that full religious liberty was conceded, not only persecuted the Bishops (exiling several from their Dioceses), but confiscated properties belonging to the Church. Not content with this, it also put impediments in the way of the free exercise of religion, prohibited banners or Christian emblems from being carried in the streets even at funerals, placed annoying restrictions upon the expenditure of the freewill offerings of the laity, and prohibited the ministers of any religion from taking any part in the direction of the Sociétés de Culte. Such a state of things was bound to cause a reaction. The great majority of Portuguese outside the city of Lisbon, where there are a majority of free-thinkers, are Catholics at heart, and even those who are opposed to the supremacy of Rome only seek a reform of the abuses and innovations of modern Rome, especially in Latin countries, but have no wish to alter Catholic doctrine or to abandon national traditions.

THE SOCIÉTÉS DE CULTÉ.

The present military Government has now reinstated the Bishops who had been persecuted and banished from their Dioceses, seeks to make a Concordat with the Pope, and endeavours to please the Roman Catholic hierarchy by suppressing a number of Sociétés de Culte under the plea that they were composed of non-Roman Catholics, although, according to Article 18 of the Law of Separation, whenever the majority of the parishioners in any parish are not Roman Catholics they may form a Société de Culte and legally claim the use of the Church edifices. The Sociétés de Culte of two important Lisbon churches—Da Graça and S. Vicente—have been extinguished, and the clergy (not in communion with Rome) ministering there have been removed, and the churches reopened with much rejoicing, and re-consecrated with great pomp and ceremony by the Cardinal Patriarch of Lisbon. A number of churches in the district of Oporto have also been taken out of the hands of the Sociétés de Culte, and placed under the care of the Confraternities. The Sociétés de Culte have never been accepted by the Roman Catholic Church, or by the majority of the nation, and if the Government had limited itself to extinguishing these Societies established under the Law of Separation and allowing the Confraternities of the Roman Catholic Church and the parochial vestries (not territorial) of the Lusitanian Church to take charge of the church edifices and of the direction of public worship in connection with the authorised ministers of religion, no harm whatever would result from the suppression of these Societies.

THE GOVERNMENT AND THE LUSITANIAN CHURCH.

But unfortunately the Government have not only suppressed the Sociétés de Culte, composed sometimes of freethinkers, but also have suspended the pensions conceded to independent clergy, and among others the pension of \$25 per month given hitherto to Father José do Nascimento Neves, the worthy priest of the parish of St. Bartholomew, in the township of Louvinha, who not only was warmly supported by the Société de Culte, but by the majority of the parishioners, members of the Catholic Apostolic Lusitanian Church. The Government have consented that a Jesuit priest should be put in charge of the large and important parish of Agnas Frias, near Chaves, against the wish of the Parish Vestry and of a large majority of the parishioners, who for several months closed their church edifices against him, and wished a married priest, independent of Rome, to be their pastor. Persecution has been beneficial to the Roman Catholic clergy in Portugal, many of whom are now more active and zealous than formerly, and read the Gospel of the day in the vulgar tongue during the celebration of Mass, and often preach in Portuguese.

THE CHURCH IN PORTUGAL.

SIR—I have lately received a number of letters—more than I am able to answer—from Bishops, priests, and laymen, from England, Switzerland, and America, asking for information concerning the state of the Church in Portugal, so I feel sure that the following, which I will make as short as possible, will be interesting to many of your readers.

There is a dark side and, thank God, also a bright side to the state of the Church in Portugal. It is unhappily true that the standard of morality among the Roman Catholic priests in Portugal is lower than would be tolerated in any country of Northern or Central Europe, and this has a baneful effect upon the laity and diminishes the influence of the clergy. The Portuguese peasants are generally superstitious and prone to follow idolatrous practices, to an extent hardly credible in Northern Europe, which are condemned by the Council of Trent, and certainly not authorised officially by the Roman Church, yet these practices are winked at, or passed over by a large body of the clergy, and even encouraged by some of them, much to the detriment of spiritual religion. The Law of Separation of the Churches from the State has confiscated Church property, except the church edifices, impoverished the clergy, greatly curtailed their influence, and, worse than all, prohibits them from taking part in the internal management of the churches. So many priests are suffering real want, if not starvation, and a considerable number of churches in poor parishes in the country districts are closed, and the number of these is likely to increase, much to the detriment of religion.

Now for the bright side. Although the

clergy are impoverished and their influence greatly curtailed by the withdrawal of the register of births, deaths, and marriages from their hands, yet certainly the majority, we are glad to say, are more active and zealous than they used to be. Most of the Bishops are doing all they can to keep open the churches in the poor parishes, and they have instructed all the parochial clergy always to read and to explain the Gospel of the day while celebrating Mass on Sundays and Church Festivals, and this is producing good results. The vernacular and the singing of hymns are used at special services, and in the Church Offices much more than formerly, and this edifies and pleases the laity. Mass, except in Lisbon (which is largely materialistic) and to some extent in a few large towns, is better attended than it used to be. Pamphlets with the Gospel of the day and spiritual instruction are distributed gratis at the church-doors, and this tends to please, also to interest the poorer class. Classes for the instruction of the young are regularly held by most of the parochial clergy twice a week, on Sundays before or after Mass, also on Thursdays, as this is a holiday in all the Government schools.

Modernism, which we read has increased in Italy, is hardly known in Portugal, yet it cannot be disputed that many of the clergy, with whom we are on friendly terms, and a large body of the laity, while firmly maintaining the whole of the Catholic Faith, are favourably disposed towards the reform of abuses, the removal of scandals, and the abolition of indulgences, advocate the marriage of the clergy and the use of the vernacular in the services of the Church. All this meets with the approval of the laity in general. A number of the clergy, certainly many dozens, and probably several hundreds, although it is difficult to say how many, have contracted marriage before the civil Registrars, so of course are no longer acknowledged by the Bishops; yet some of them, protected by the Government and supported by the laity, continue to hold their posts, to say Mass and administer the Sacraments.

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