



History of the Catholic Church in Mexico

By MANUEL GOMEZ.

CHAPTER III.

The Church and Political Progress.
LAST week I made it clear that the catholic church in Mexico has always been a political institution. In the present chapter we shall see what the political role of the church has been in the historic forward movements of the Mexican people. "Revolutionary Fathers" Excommunicated.

The struggle for national independence from Spain may be said to date from the year 1810. On midnight of September 16, 1810, Miguel Hidalgo, everywhere known as the father of Mexican independence, issued the famous "grito de Dolores" from the little church where he was parish priest. Hidalgo gathered a fervent band of revolutionists about him and led a prolonged struggle for independence. The revolt was finally put down. Hidalgo was executed. The catholic church, which was tied hand and glove to the forces of Spanish privilege in Mexico, co-operated with Spain by excommunicating this great leader, who is today revered by the entire Mexican people. Hidalgo was not the only revolutionary leader excommunicated by the church. Another of the fathers of Mexican liberty who met the same fate was the warrior priest, Jose Maria Morelos.

Thus we see in the very beginning of Mexico's struggles what afterwards became a characteristic feature of them: the lower clergy—poor priests, exploited by the upper strata of the catholic hierarchy—aligned with the people against the church, revealing deep divisions within catholicism which must assist the process of eventual decentralization and destruction of the entire hierarchical organization.

Mexico finally achieved its independence in 1821. An important factor in the success of the revolution was the defection of Iturbide, commander of the Spanish forces, who had his own ulterior motives for going over to the Mexican side. One must understand this to appreciate the role of the church at that period and in the period following.

A tremendous upheaval had taken place in Spain. King Ferdinand had been pushed aside by the triumphant liberal congress, which immediately put thru a series of reforms in Spanish law.

Immediately the reactionary forces in Mexico, and in other Spanish colonies, began to look with considerable favor on the idea of separtion from Spain. The new movement in Mexico gathered great momentum, now assisted with particular zeal by religious orders whose suppression had been decreed thruout the Spanish empire by the liberal congress of Spain. In Mexico City the very backbone of the revolutionary conspiracy was the Order of Jesuits; while in Vera-Cruz Father Fra Jose de San Ignacio exhibited extraordinary activity in organizing all the influential people in his district under the banner of the revolution, in obtaining supplies of money, and in lauding Iturbide as the "savior of religion and liberator of the fatherland."

"Red, Green and White."

The church joined the revolution belatedly in order to win a new stronghold. No thought of republicanism entered its mind. It proceeded with a definite conscious program aimed to strangle the new republic at its very birth.

On February 24, 1821, Iturbide, with the sanction of his clerical sycophants, issued a manifesto, known in Mexican history as the "Plan de Iguala," which proclaimed the following principles:

1. Establishment of the Roman catholic apostolic religion as the na-

tional religion, without toleration for any other.

2. Absolute independence for Mexico.

3. Establishment of a monarchical form of government, "tempered by a constitution suitable to the country."

4. Summoning of Ferdinand VII, or some member of his family, or of some other royal family, to the throne of Mexico, to reign as emperor and establish a dynasty.

5. Establishment of a Junta to carry on the government until the meeting of the Cortez.

6. Said Junta to rule in virtue of an oath of allegiance to the king until the duties of the government should be assumed by the monarch in person.

8. That in the event of Ferdinand VII being unwilling to accept the throne of Mexico, the Junta to continue the functions of government until such time as a suitable ruler be chosen.

9. The government to support and maintain the "three warrantees": independence, unity, religion, symbolized in the national flag, by the colors, red, green and white.

13. Maintenance of the present institution of property.

14. Endorsement and protection of all ecclesiastical "fueros," privileges and possessions.

In addition to the articles quoted, there were a number dealing with the constitution of the army and judiciary, but I have sufficiently indicated the drift of the document. The semi-feudal despotism of church and big land owners is affirmed as the dominant force of the nation.

The First Mexican Empire.

The church did not succeed in finding a European monarch for Mexico. Whereupon it gave support to the overweening aspirations of Iturbide. On the night of August 13, 1822, the new-born republic received a mortal stab in the back. By a well-planned coup d'etat, Iturbide was suddenly proclaimed emperor, and a sergeant of the army was sent with his company parading thru the streets of Mexico City shouting: "Long Live Augustin I, Emperor of Mexico!" Iturbide, the arch-traitor—who betrayed first his own Spanish employer, and then the Mexican republic, which he had helped to establish—was solemnly crowned by the representative of the pope in Mexico. Shortly thereafter congress was dissolved.

Thruout the succeeding years the struggle raged between liberals and conservatives—the latter, the party of the big land owners, being consistently supported by the church. Iturbide's ephemeral empire had fallen before the end of 1822, but the struggle against reaction was rooted deep in the economics of Mexico's social system, and could not be ended so simply.

The Church and "la Reforma."

After the establishment of Mexican independence, the next great upheaval that marked the forward march of Mexico was the so-called Ayutla revolution, sometimes known as the war of the Reform. Here again we see the church standing squarely in the roadway of progress, pushing the other way.

Just as Hidalgo is the great hero of Mexico's independence struggle, so Benito Juarez is the hero of the "la Reforma," the first modern revolution to sweep aside the semi-feudal privileges standing in the way of capitalism. No other figure in Mexican history, not even Hidalgo, is revered in the republic south of the Rio Grande as universally as Juarez. His statue

A PEEK EACH WEEK AT MOTION PICTURES

MARE NOSTRUM

HERE is "another of those things." A picture splendidly acted, beautifully photographed, most capably directed—all for a story that is so damnably punk it is an insult to even the intelligence of a jack-rabbit. And more, it comes a whole eight years too-late for its purpose. We advise every worker to see it (showing at the Roosevelt Theatre in Chicago) for its many good features and to see what hysterical war propaganda really looks like in normal times.

"Mare Nostrum" is a rank propaganda story written by that rank propagandist Blasco Ibanez, for the Allies during the world war. And a vicious bit of propaganda it is. The "sacred cause" of the Great Powers is glorified, and the Germans vilified and pictured as head-shaven brutes. The story deals with a sea captain in the Mediterranean and his love for a beautiful spy, espionage, and submarine warfare impresses one quite vividly and dramatically and of course is pictured at the expense of the Germans only. On this one theme are wasted all the splendid things we mentioned.

Antonio Moreno gives a most creditable performance very ably assisted by Alice Terry, who is not only a blond but very much an actress. Three hundred pound Hughie Mack occupies a prominent role and a lot of space. The balance of the cast is composed entirely of foreign actors (including Germans whom it vilifies) speaking volumes for the "foreign invasion" of American films, a subject deserving of special notice. Read these names of the cast: Fernand Mailly, Mlle. Kithnou, Michael Brantford, Frederick Mariotti, Mme. Paquerette, Andre von Engelman, Rosita Ramirez, Uni Apollon, Alex Nova, and Kada-Abd-el Kader.

On seeing this picture one cannot avoid a comparison with "The Big Parade," another "war picture." The former is at least an approach to an honest portrayal of war, brilliantly done, artistically satisfying; "Mare Nostrum" is a dishonest bit of fake for gullibles the most ably done. Why such a medium was chosen for the lavish expenditure of both money and talent, at this time particularly, is indeed a mystery (After all the Germans may not be "our" next "enemy"). Rex Ingram who has many notable productions to his credit has also most



ANTONIO MORENO

is in every city. A full-blooded Zapotec Indian by birth, he personified the essentially native character of the revolutionary movement.

During all the years of his prominence Juarez was anathematized by the catholic church. The church helped to raise armies against him and stopped at nothing, not even foreign intervention, to strike at the cause of which he was leader.

The liberal pro-capitalist revolution swept the country. The clerical dicta-

capably wasted his ability as director on it.

To convince yourself how motion pictures are chosen to herd the worker into slaughter, or to see how it is done if you are already convinced—see this picture. The lesson and many good features it has of the picture are worth the price of admission.

W.C.

CHICAGO'S PAUL ASH—A MUSICAL BARNUM

CAN you imagine a crowd that will wind around a theater for two blocks, patiently waiting for an hour and a half "to see the show?" For three days in succession this sight greeted us at the Oriental Theater as early in the evening as 6 p. m., and it took exactly four attempts on our part to see the performance without waiting. And we had to miss supper to do it!

It wasn't the movie. "Senor Daredevil," the picture showing last week would never pass the censorship of the most gullible galoot who goes to the theater. Paul Ash does it! Paul Ash of the waving, long hair and the flare of Barnum. There is something quite remarkable about this self-styled "Rajah of Jazz." He has contrived to weld a performance that gets down to his audience, that gets under its skin and that becomes a habit that brings them back week after week with clock-like regularity and in increasing numbers.

His performance is often vulgar. A downright, broad and "common" vulgarity that is reminiscent of the old burlesque show. He resorts to the rankest kind of sob stuff and slapstick. He monopolizes the stage. Even when another performer is doing his or her "specialty" Paul has his own little spot-light. He dominates and is part of every move that is made at all times and everything that "goes over" only adds to Paul's particular glory.

Paul Ash is all these things and more—and I know it! And I'm hanged if I don't make an effort each week to crash the gate to get in before the half-mile line that gathers every evening to pay tribute to his low-down genius. With the intelligence of the born showman, Paul Ash has combined the music of his excellent jazz orchestra with scenery, variety and surprises. And the usually mediocre performers who fill his bill really look to good advantage. Not that Paul does not include occasional really good "bits." On the program, which is changed every week, a dancer, a singer, or perhaps a member of his own orchestra will surprise you with something that is truly clever. That's part of a Paul Ash show. But that's not all.

The secret of this musical Barnum is not pure charlatanism, nor even ability. Paul Ash has discovered the secret of making the audience take part in his show. He's personal. When he talks to his audience—it's to an old acquaintance. When he tells them something new—it's something "special" for his audience. They sing with him and for him. They meet every Sunday morning in a Paul Ash Club to get acquainted. He lets them laugh at his hair. He lets his performers poke fun at him on the stage—within limits that don't endanger his prestige. He laughs, he sings, he dances and he plays—and they pay to see Paul Ash—the one and only Paul Ash—and his performers who are styled the "Little Hot Ashes." They sure are. And so's their old man!

W. C.

tor-president, Santa Ana—that arch-fend of Mexican history—undertook "to scatter the sacrilegious enemies of the Lord," but he was forced to flee the country, nevermore to return.

The three years of bitter war led to the presidency of Juarez. The reform laws and the constitution of 1857 were the signposts of the new era.

(To be continued in the next issue of this Magazine.)