

THE FRIARS OF THE WEST INDIES.

WILL the friars and their work in the New World be properly represented, either at Chicago, Genoa, Madrid, Huelva, or wherever else the festivities of the four hundredth anniversary of the discovery of America are going to be celebrated?

Will the religious orders, whether Franciscans or Dominicans, Augustinians or Jesuits, receive the credit which belongs to them in the work of civilizing the newly-discovered countries from the banks of the St. Lawrence to the mouth of La Plata?

Will friars and monks and monastic institutions be commemorated at those quadri-centennial displays, such as they have been in the New World—not only as pioneers and missionaries, but as strong elements of civilization, indefatigable educators of the people, strenuous opponents of oppression, and undaunted advocates of liberty and justice?

The work of the monks in Europe, wonderful as it is for magnitude, variety, and utmost importance in every respect, differs in many things from their work in America. In Europe the monastic orders had to save, and did save, all that could be saved, of the structure of ancient civilization, wrecked and demolished by the irresistible wave of barbarism. They had, besides, to clear, as they did clear, almost the whole area of central and northern Europe, and deliver, as they did, to agriculture what thus far had been covered with impenetrable forests, or consisted principally of impassable swamps and marshes. They had to copy manuscripts; to preserve the writings of the philosophers, orators, poets, historians, scientists, etc., who had flourished before the invasion of the northern barbarians, and which were hidden among the ruins of the Roman Empire; to cultivate the lands; to make roads and bridges;¹ they had to keep inns or hotels along the roads in order to give hospitality to the wayfarer; they had to perform police duties on the highways and on the sea, as in the case of the military orders; they had to do, in fine, many other things, independent of their own religious duties and general work of charity, which the peculiar circumstances of the times and localities had rendered necessary.

In Spain, to which when speaking of the New World we have to turn our eyes with all deference, the work of monks and mo-

¹ There was an order especially established for this purpose, the Bridge-builder Brothers—*Fratres Pontifices*.

nastic institutions had to be, and it was, especially diversified. "To the monks," says Doctor Don Francisco Martinez Marina,¹ "the Spanish nation owes not only the preservation of agriculture, but innumerable precious documents, chronicles, and materials for her history, without which very little or nothing could now be known of the important events of those days. They also occupied themselves in copying books, deeds, decisions of the councils, collections of old laws, whether secular or ecclesiastical, and in many other labors of the same character and importance. Spain owes to Vigila and his disciples, Sarracino and Garcia, monks at Alvela, in 976, the famous 'Vigilanus Codex,' also called 'Alvendensis.' She owes, also, to Velasco and his disciple, Sisebrito, the not less celebrated 'Emilianensis Codex,' now preserved at San Millan de la Cogulla. Both works are very well known in the history of Spanish literature, and are entitled to the great celebrity which they enjoy in the world of letters."

The same learned author says: "The convents of Spain were asylums of religion, piety, learning, and public instruction, even in the most calamitous times. It is well known that the schools were in the cathedrals and in the convents. All the books of the time, and all records, either of private transactions or of public acts, were kept and preserved in the cloisters and in the sacristies. The abstemious and laborious life of the monks allowed them to have always at hand abundant means to attend to the necessities of the poor and to exercise the virtue of hospitality. They spent their time in teaching, in preaching, in writing, in copying all kinds of books, in tilling the fields and otherwise promoting agriculture, which at that time, owing to the general unsettled condition of things, and the state of almost perpetual war, was a pursuit in which only monks could engage with any kind of safety as well as perseverance and intelligence. To them, and to them only, it was due that a most extensive portion of the face of the world should cease to be a wilderness. They, especially the lay brothers, who used to be numerous, cut down the trees, cleared away the bushes, improved the ground, dug ditches and canals whenever necessary, built dams across the rivers, and acted with such energy that, in comparatively short time, they succeeded in converting entire regions abandoned and unsettled, absolutely impenetrable in some places, fit only to be, as they were, the domicile of wild beasts, into fertile lands, fruitful fields, smiling meadows, and luxuriant orchards and groves."

In addition to all this work, physical, intellectual, moral, and

¹ *Ensayo Historico Critico sobre la Legislacion y Principales Cuerpos Legales de los Reinos de Leon y Castilla.* Madrid. 1834. (Critical and Historical Essay on the Legislation and Principal Collections of Laws of the Kingdoms of Leon and Castile.)

religious, the Spanish monks were called to perform, owing to the necessities of the times in their country, and therefore to an extent perhaps greater than their brethren anywhere else, the duty attended with more difficulties and dangers than at any other subsequent time, of protecting the lives of pilgrims, and travellers generally, and attending to their comfort and welfare. Through those admirable organizations, so full of interest and romance, known to history under the name of Spanish Military Orders, namely, the Knights of Alcantara, Montesa, Santiago, and San Juan de Jerusalem—strange combinations of monasticism and chivalry, standing monuments of the pliability and adaptability of Catholic faith to all the necessities of society—such services were rendered in this line as to make their remembrance eternal. Besides ensuring, by their presence, the lives of the travellers, as well as the property of travellers, those knight-brothers had hospitals and inns where shelter and attention were given to all who needed it; and in this way, while performing a work of charity, and fulfilling a moral and religious duty, they also promoted trade between the different sections of the country, and contributed to increase the national wealth and prosperity.

Nor was this wonderful work of the religious orders confined to the land alone. The noble orders which, under the invocation of *Nuestra Señora de la Merced*, were founded by Pedro Nolasco and Juan de Mata for the redemption of captives—as well as the knights of Malta and others—performed the same duty on the high seas, and more especially on the Mediterranean. While the well-equipped and always dreaded galleys of those orders kept the pirates at safe distance, or punished their boldness, when the occasion presented itself, the knight-fathers of La Merced attended on their part to the ransom of the captives made by the same pirates and their restitution to their homes. The United States of America owe to one branch of this order, which was established in Paris in the latter part of the last century, the freedom of no less than two hundred of their citizens, who had languished in captivity under the Dey of Algiers, from 1785 to 1795.¹

In America, owing to her own peculiar conditions, and to the epoch of her discovery, the religious orders were not called to do all the work which they had done elsewhere, or to do it through the same channels and methods. They had before them a large and vast field, but this field in most respects was exclusively American. They had to encounter difficulties and evils, which at

¹ The writer of this paper had the pleasure and the honor to publish an article on this subject in the number of September 22, 1883, of the *Washington Catholic*, under the title of "The Mathurin Fathers: A Chapter of American History."

least in their own especial form had never at any time before presented themselves. They had no classical literature to save, or to restore. They had not to infuse new life into a civilization, otherwise magnificent, but which had been prostrated by its vices, nor were they called to moderate and smooth the fury of the barbarians. But they had to deal with the *mita*¹ and with the *repartimientos*² and with many other abominations which the Spaniards invented in the New World. They had to deal with men of iron, bold, uneducated, tyrannical beyond description, and who on account of the distance from the mother country, and the peculiar circumstances in which they found themselves, were almost all-powerful. They had also to undertake, even within the limits of the purely missionary work, a task of extreme difficulty and unprecedented hardship, with tribes and nations of various customs and languages, always under the spur of tyranny, and hating in most cases, and with abundant reason, all that came from Spain.³ But they were equal to their task: they saw at once all the difficulties and responsibilities which the circumstances of the times and places devolved upon them; they grasped the situation fully, and recognized without difficulty what Divine Providence demanded from them. And although most of the work which they had to do was new and unexpected, and had peculiar difficulties and drawbacks, they did it so well, and so nobly, and so courageously, as to excite our unbounded admiration and praise, even if considered only in the light of those standards most commonly accepted in the present days.

¹ Under the institution called "The Mita," every Indian, under fifty years of age and above eighteen, was compelled to do service in the mines, without more compensation than fifty cents a day. Each district had to furnish, according to its population, a certain number of *mitayos*, who were taken to the different mining localities, and were there distributed among the miners by the authorities. They had to leave their families, and to abandon at once all hope of freedom, or relief. Father Acosta, one of the most reliable and celebrated historians of South America, states that out of each five Indians, impressed in this way by the *Mita*, four invariably perished in the first year of their service. The fact is, and nobody can doubt its authenticity, that the *Mita* killed eight millions of Indians in Peru alone. Viceroy Marquis of Cañete, in the preface of his ordinance to regulate the work at the mines, states that these unfortunate creatures were often compelled "to work the twenty-four hours, without eating or sleeping,"—and Viceroy Don Luis Velasco, his successor, directed the mining work to be made "from sunrise to sunset," *de sol à sol*, "with two hours of rest between both limits."

² The *Repartimientos* were the distributions of Indians among the Spanish colonists and settlers, for the cultivation of their lands, the working of their mines, or even their simple domestic service. They were another form of slavery, against which the religious orders, especially the Dominicans, struggled unrelentingly and uncompromisingly.

³ Many instances are recorded in the history of those days in America of Indians refusing baptism for the express purpose of avoiding going to heaven, lest they might again meet with their heartless oppressors. (See Father Coll's *Colon and La Rabida*, page 294).

Will the quadri-centennial celebrations of the discovery of America by Christopher Columbus pay, in the proper measure and with the magnificence becoming to its magnitude, the debt of gratitude which America owes to the monastic orders? Will they give the place of honor which is due to them, to those humble Franciscans, who established the first school in America; or to those learned Dominicans, who established Universities and centres of learning wherever they went, and who, better than that, never hesitated to raise their voices against despotic governors and heartless conquerors, and to defend the oppressed natives, without a particle of fear, and without admitting truce or compromise; or to those skillful physicians, sons of St. John of God, who studied medicine and founded hospitals, and attended the sick gratuitously, and restored to the dignity of the ministerial or sacerdotal character which belongs to it a profession which among the Romans was exercised by slaves, and which now, here, in the midst of so much boasted progress, is little less in many cases than a mere mercenary trade; or to those Mathurin Fathers, through whose action in the latter part of the last century, as has been said, so many American citizens were restored to liberty?

Jubilees and periodical celebrations of events of recognized importance, are not modern inventions. Man and his concerns are so ephemeral, and the necessity for him to pay a hearty tribute of thanksgiving for all that involves the idea of preservation, is so clearly impressed on his mind, that festivities of this kind have always been in use. And if, recently, the said festivities, centennials especially, have become fashionable, and so frequent indeed as to render their enumeration difficult, no well-disposed mind can be brought to object to them.

Much less objection could, under any circumstances, be made to the present Columbian celebrations, because of the immense importance of the event for the commemoration of which they are intended. Although Columbus never dreamed of the existence of the New World which he discovered, and although he never intended anything else than to find a new route to the East Indies, which was the great commercial problem of his age, especially after Constantinople fell into the hands of the Turks in 1453, there is not the slightest doubt that the discovery of America marked an entirely new era in the life of the human race, and has to be considered, as most historians do consider it, the clearest and greatest landmark between the Middle Ages and what are called Modern Times.

Hence, when the prelate who now graces the arch-episcopal throne of Genoa informed our Holy Father the Pope that the authorities of that city,—one of the many which claim the honor

of being the native place of the illustrious discoverer, now exalted everywhere as an immortal genius, but when living and when offering his services to the proud republic, looked upon as no more than a "sailor in rags who promised worlds," *nudo nocchier prometitor di mondi*,—had come to the conclusion of celebrating with unusual pomp the four hundredth anniversary of the landing of Columbus in the New World, the answer of Leo XIII., approving of the project and giving to it his sanction, was prompt and emphatic.

Our great Pontiff said in his reply, January 10, 1891, that the idea of making the said celebration was in all respects worthy of praise, but that particular care should be taken to cause the festivities to be perfectly in keeping with the character of Columbus and with the genuine spirit which animated him.

Columbus, above all, was a fervent, sincere Catholic. He was a member of the third order of St. Francis, and, according to the testimony of Bartolomé de las Casas, who knew him personally, "he frequently walked about dressed as a Capuchin." Anything, therefore, which might be said or done in his honor, if inconsistent with that religious spirit or at variance with it, would be entirely inappropriate.

"Whosoever should look," says the Holy Father, "only to the material consequences of the discoveries of Columbus and to their temporal results, and pay them no more honors than those to be bestowed upon things which have nothing to do with Catholic faith, or are brilliant for no other reason than the genius or the perseverance of those who carried them to success, would do great injustice to the name and to the memory of the illustrious navigator. . . . We hope that this solemnity, as well as the example of Columbus himself, will prove instrumental in inflaming the minds of great numbers of people, and inducing them to make efforts to extend upon earth the kingdom of Christ."

Even without the authority of this explicit declaration of the Holy Father, the assertion can be made confidently that a celebration of the discovery of America, and a display or exhibit of American civilization, in which the work of the Catholic Church does not appear prominently represented and towering supreme above all other elements of social life, would be sadly defective and unworthy of the occasion. And if, as witnessed by the words of the Pope, no commemoration of Columbus and of his deeds can ever approach completion or truth, if the Church and her action and her influence are not made the principal feature of the festivities with which it will be solemnized, their inadequacy and deficiency will be still greater if the religious orders—those monks and friars, now so despised and persecuted wherever the Spanish

language is spoken and the so-called "liberal spirit" prevails—are not given the very first place of honor.

No student of history or lover of the human race, no matter what prejudices he may have imbibed against Catholic institutions and ideas, can fail to recognize the immense courage, the incredible self-denial and the beneficial action in America of that noble democratic militia of the Church, which so tirelessly and so unrelentingly interposed itself at all times between the oppressed natives and their heartless oppressors, and which did so much, and so bravely and so persistently, for the education and the welfare of the people among whom it was thrown. The history of the work of those friars in the New World, principally the Franciscans and the Dominicans, has not been written as yet, probably because it requires, besides the gifts of a Montalembert, a Chateaubriand, or a Joseph de Maistre, additional qualifications of thorough acquaintance with local facts, but, when written, it will be, we venture to say it, without the slightest hesitation, the greatest and the noblest monument which can ever be raised in honor of mankind.

From the very first days of the arrival of Columbus in the New World,¹ up to the period in the present century in which at the hypocritical cries of "reform and liberty," "equality and fraternity," the religious orders were swept away, as if by a furious hurricane, from the soil of Spain and Spanish America, in all about three centuries and a half,—monastic institutions and monastic influence formed in the Spanish empire, on both sides of the Atlantic, the broadest and perhaps the firmest and most substantial basis of the social structure.

¹ Father José Coll, a learned member of the order of St. Francis, maintains, in an interesting book just published at Madrid under the title of *Colón y la Rabida* (Columbus and La Rabida), that Columbus was accompanied in his first voyage by Franciscan fathers.

He also maintains, and seems to have proved beyond doubt, that Father Bernard Boil, or Boyle, or Buil, whom Pope Alexander VI., on June 25, 1493, appointed Vicar Apostolic of the Western Indies, was not a Benedictine, as generally believed, but a Franciscan friar. And he shows also by documents and arguments which admit of no contradiction, that Father Antonio Marchena, of the same Franciscan order, and two Franciscan lay brothers named Fr. Juan de la Duella, or Deledeulle, a Frenchman by birth, and Fr. Juan de Tisin, accompanied Columbus and Father Boyle and eight other Franciscan friars in his second voyage.

It is curious to see how historians and writers have succeeded in turning into one and the same person, under the name of Fray Juan Perez de Marchena, two entirely different individuals, Fray Juan Perez, the Superior of La Rabida, and Fray Antonio Marchena, a learned Franciscan, conversant with astronomy, both friends of Columbus.

Nor is it less interesting to contemplate how many efforts have been made to create two Fathers Boyle, one a Benedictine and another a Franciscan, when the words of the papal commission, *dilecto filio Bernardo Boil, Ordinis Minorum*, ought to have settled the question.

Those friars, so often represented in our days, in the countries of Spanish origin, as an obstacle to progress, as the most earnest advocates of ignorance and abject submission, as the worst enemies of the people, have been nevertheless the first, in the order of time, and the most assiduous, if not the only ones, in all periods of history, in the work of educating the masses, of promoting science and literature, of struggling against unscrupulous governors and tyrants of all kinds and grades, of conquering oppression and of vindicating the rights of justice and liberty.

The fact cannot be denied, for instance, that the very first school,—a primary gratuitous school,—ever opened on the soil of the New World, was opened by a Franciscan friar, Fray Pedro de Sante, or, as others call him, de Sanda, who was a relative of Emperor Charles V., and had accompanied Cortés in his expedition to Mexico. He and Fray Juan de Tecto, and Fray Juan de Ayora, belonging also to the Seraphic order, were the first ecclesiastics, who ever set their feet on the Mexican territory.

In a letter written by Fray Pedro de Sante, to the Emperor, in 1523, he said: "I have undertaken to teach the children to read and write, and also to sing, . . . and in order to do so, a school house has been built on the grounds surrounding our house, with sufficient capacity to accommodate from five hundred to six hundred children, who meet there daily."

Eight years afterwards (1531) that very same friar established another school for girls of noble birth, whether natives (*de caciques*) or of mixed race.

He also, aided no doubt by his companions, established a hospital, an account of which he gave to the Emperor in the following words: "Near our house an infirmary has been founded for the benefit of the natives, . . . and this is of great assistance to us for their conversion to the Faith, because they see the charity which Christians are capable of practising, and are therefore incited to be converted, and to love us and talk with us."

Not contenting himself with teaching the ignorant, and attending the sick, he never suffered any opportunity to pass without urging the Emperor to apply a remedy to the evils which afflicted the natives, who were treated, as he said, "worse than if they were dogs." "For the love of God," he says in one of his letters, "may your Majesty be pleased to provide, that no one of these natives be reduced to slavery by any person, of whatever rank or condition. Command that this slavery cease, and that these people be allowed to be Christians; because even on Christmas day they are compelled to work."

Several years later the same friar wrote: "I have worked with the Indians day and night for more than thirty years, and I have

been with them constantly in a school near this chapel (St. Joseph, the first church ever built in Mexico), and I have taught them to sing and to play on some instrument, and to read and write, and the Christian doctrine, and I have always had them at my charge, and have taken particular care of them."

And this venerable and humble Franciscan friar, educator, benefactor and tribune, is no more than a prominent specimen of what all his colaborers as well of his own order, as of the other orders, always did in America. They were the only representatives in the new countries of the idea of justice, and appeared in all respects as the principal factors in the moral, intellectual, and social development of the aborigines.

When describing the work of destruction which Spain allowed to go on at the convent of La Rábida, so intimately connected with Columbus and the discovery of America, the Rev. Father Coll, who has been mentioned before, alludes to a palm tree, which now stands alone on these grounds, once so celebrated for their beauty and magnificence,¹ but now barren and deserted. He says that that tall tree, the only extant monument of a glory past beyond hope and beyond recovery, soars up to heaven, as if in search of a purer air, or as if anxious to refuse the sweetness of its fruits to the ingratitude of men. In imitation of this beautiful figure, and even at the risk of repetition, because the truth can never be repeated too often, the assertion can be made and reiterated confidently, that nothing to be done either at Genoa, or at Madrid, Chicago, or elsewhere, can properly illustrate the history of the civilization of Spanish America, if a monument towering above the other monuments of the exhibition, even as the palm tree of La Rábida towers above the desert which now surrounds it, is not raised in commemoration of the religious orders, in recognition of their services, and in expiation of the grave crimes which have been committed against them.

Few indications can be found, however, in these days of the "secularization" of all things (marriage included), that such a tribute of respect, no matter how just and due, will be paid. The probabilities are, on the contrary, that the friars will never once be mentioned in connection with Columbus and the civilization of the New World, without applying to them, as the most natural of

¹ "It is a shame to think of what has passed at La Rábida during the last half century. When the Franciscan fathers were forced to leave it, under the laws which suppressed the monastic orders, and expelled their members, the convent and the Church of La Rábida were allowed to be plundered. The archives and the library were pillaged. The tiles and the timber of the roof, the doors and the windows, even the bricks of the partitions and pavements, were torn down and carried away. The extensive orchards, and all the robust and splendid trees, which surrounded the convent, were made to disappear."—*Colon y la Rábida*, pp. 66, 67.

epithets, the adjective "superstitious," or without making against them the unfounded charges which brought upon them obloquy and persecution. It will not be surprising if some enraged "liberal," imitating the Yucatan orator who proclaimed in the Mexican Congress that "the smoke of the convent fire-places obscures the sun of liberty," may come and display his bitter opposition to the religious orders;—nor will it be impossible, either, that other statesmen, deeming themselves to abound in benevolence and impartiality, may adopt a middle course and maintain that friars and convents, although a thing of the past, inconsistent with the enlightenment of our times, had nevertheless their day, in which they did some good.

Not many years ago (1885) a book, which owing to the especial circumstances in which its author happened then to be found, obtained an immense circulation (in this country at least), described the venerable members of the religious orders in the following language: "The humble monk, with bowed head enveloped in sombre cowl, his scanty gown dyed and stiffened by reason of his abstinence from the sinful luxury of ablution; his body girt with a heavy rope, by way of showing that the beast was well in hand monastic aristocrats bound together by voluntary obedience to a set of rules involving renunciation of the world seeking to expiate former action by present lethargy, striving toward actual paralysis of all faculties which can connect the individual with the society."¹

If such a sturdy calumny as this can be uttered without the slightest provocation or foundation by a member of what the world has agreed to call the gentler sex, and in a country like this where the risk of endangering the Catholic vote is so keenly felt, and where full liberty of conscience and of expression allows truth to assert itself without difficulty, what shall we not hear from Freemasons of the 33d degree, either here or in Europe, or from other "unprejudiced and liberal-minded statesmen" on both sides of the Atlantic, in opposition to the idea of making Catholic monasticism the most prominent and the most honored feature of all festivities in commemoration of the four hundredth anniversary of the landing of Columbus in the New World?

It is unnecessary for the readers of this paper to be reminded of the severe and cruel persecution to which the religious houses have been subjected in Spain and all the countries of Spanish origin ever since 1837. That very same convent of La Rabida, a fac simile of which is to be built at Chicago on the grounds of the Columbian World's Fair, that convent which Spain ought to have

¹ George Elliot's *Poetry and Other Studies*, by Rose Elizabeth Cleveland. New York—London, 1886. Essay entitled "The Monastery," pp. 129, 130.

preserved for all time as a superb monument of national glory, only escaped demolition by a bold act of disobedience on the part of the local governor of Huelva. This official took upon himself not to comply with the royal order of August 5, 1851, by which he was directed to pull down the building and sell the material, and was bold enough to remonstrate against the royal commandment. "If we hurry so much," said that brave official in his representation to the government of Madrid, "in demolishing and obliterating these landmarks of our history, public opinion and history herself will take cognizance of our acts and deliver them justly to the reprobation of both foreigners and Spaniards."¹

This noble deed, supplemented by the timely arrival upon the spot of a French prince, the Duke of Montpensier, with his wife, the queen's sister, and with his mother, the widow of Louis Philippe of France, saved the famous house. The illustrious visitors started a subscription for the restoration of these venerable ruins, which they could not view without emotion; and their success was so complete, that on the 15th of April, 1855, they could attend in that church the solemn high mass with which the restoration was solemnized.

But apart from the persecutions, which have been frequent, the fact will remain, that while the name of Columbus will be hailed and extolled in all possible tones—a little too late, perhaps—and while the magnitude and far-reaching importance of his achievement will be lauded and proclaimed in divers ways, little will be said, and that little possibly disparagingly, of the fraternal society of Saint Francis, to the Third Order of which the great navigator belonged, and that the Dominicans will be mentioned, only, if mentioned at all, as apostles of intolerance and religious persecution. Jews, Freemasons and freethinkers, who now prevail in the councils of government in the so-called Latin nations of the world, have no sympathy, undoubtedly, with the spirit and the work of the religious orders.

We may be sure that we shall listen to a great number of passionate outbursts of rhetoric, and contemplate not a small display of self-glorification, ill disguised under the name of patriotism, and intended to make up for centuries of oblivion and ingratitude; but while wealth and power and all the creations of science and art, and all the elements of material civilization will be called into requisition to make this somewhat tardy recognition brilliant, the humble men who encouraged the great sailor, and were so efficiently instrumental in the work he accomplished for the glory of God and the benefit of mankind, and who afterwards opened schools, and founded universities, and established hospitals, and

¹ *Colon and La Rabida*, p. 71.

heroically defended the natives, and indelibly impressed their religious character on the civilization of Spanish America, will be either forgotten entirely or given a place in accordance with the anti-religious spirit which is now prevailing.

Were it not for these circumstances and others which are nearly related to them, it would be scarcely comprehensible that the really hearty and spontaneous¹ commemoration of the discovery of the New World should be made in these United States, the American nation which, least of all, has had immediate relations with Columbus and his voyages, and which has had the least share in the ideas and principles which actuated the illustrious Genoese, a nation in which the Spanish element has ever been comparatively insignificant, and where Catholicity, although flourishing and always on the increase, is still in the minority.

The sons of St. Francis of Assisi were the first ecclesiastics who came to the New World. According to the "General Chronicle of the Order of Our-Father St. Francis" *Chronica general de la Orden de Nuestro Padre San Francisco*, "Seraphic Tree" (*Arbol Seráfico*), printed in Barcelona in 1703, the work of Father Gonzaga, "*De origine Seraphicæ Religionis Franciscanæ*," the "True Treasures of the Indies" (*Tesoros verdaderos de las Indias*), printed in Rome in 1681, and many other authorities quoted by Father Coll, Franciscan friars came with Columbus when (these are the *ipsissima verba* of the "Chronicle")² "Columbus embarked on the 3d of August, 1492." But even if, as contended by some, no ecclesiastic, whether regular or secular, came with him on his first voyage, no doubt can be entertained that ecclesiastics accompanied him on the second, and that the Franciscans were the first who exercised in the West Indies the functions of the Apostolate, the first who built a church in the New World³ and had a con-

¹ Father Coll, who wrote in 1891, while acknowledging that "the Spanish government had an ocean of projects for the celebration of the quadri-centennial," . . . complains that "three long years had been allowed to pass without having reached as yet any practical result" He says: "We are told day after day that these projects will be carried out; but we know well enough how much reliance is to be put on words, and until we see them substantiated by subsequent facts, we shall be unable to bestow much credence upon them."—*Colón y la Rábida*, page 82.

² Father Coll, *Colón y la Rábida*, page 220.

³ "Soon after Columbus had taken possession of the island (Santo Domingo, or La Española), Fray Juan Perez, who came with Columbus and had done so much in furtherance of his projects, and was the first priest who arrived here (*Joannes Piretius primo in istam insulam ingressus*), built a cabin, which he roofed with branches of trees, where he said Mass and deposited the Blessed Sacrament; hence this was the first church built in the Western Indies: *et hæc prima Occidentalium omnium Indiarum ecclesia est.*"—*Crónica General de la Orden*, etc. Father Coll, *Colón y la Rábida*, pp. 220, 236, etc.

vent,¹ and a duly constituted province,² and that the first Bishop on this side of the Atlantic belonged to their order.³

The popularity of the sons of Saint Francis in the newly-discovered countries grew to such an extent and with such rapidity as to cause the Catholic kings, in spite of their piety, and of the general feeling of the period, to put some check to it. King Ferdinand, in 1506, issued a decree by which he forbade any new convent of St. Francis to be established in America, unless at a distance of at least five leagues (fifteen miles) from one already in existence.

The charge has often been ignorantly made against the Franciscan friars of having done nothing, or very little, in favor of science and intellectual development. No better answer could be given to this slander than by pointing to a book, printed in Tuscany, in the city of Prado, in 1888, under the title of "An Attempt towards a Franciscan Bibliography on Geographical, Historical and Ethnographical Subjects" (*Saggio di bibliografia geografica, storica, etnografica San Francescana*), by Father Marcellino da Civezza, of the same order. This admirable book is a catalogue, by order of authors, of all the writings on Geography, History and Ethnography, whose authors were Franciscan friars, and consists of more than 624 pages⁴ with over 750 names. They comprise books in Spanish, French, Italian, Portuguese, English, German, Turkish, Latin, Greek, Chinese, Japanese, Arabic, Siamese, and several languages of the American Indians⁵; and among them may be

¹ Columbus founded for the Franciscans their first convent in America, in the city of Santo Domingo, in 1493. Ovando completed it in 1502. *Cœnobium autem . . . in civitate S. Dominici tumultuaria opera erectum, ac deinde à Christophero Columbo firmiori Europœorum structura inchoatum, Ovandus absolvit.* (Wadding, *Annals of the Order of Saint Francis*.)—Father Coll, *Colón y la Rábida*, p. 240.

² The province of Santa Cruz, *Sanctæ Crucis in insulis*, was the name of this first religious province in the New World. It was created "on the eve of Pentecost, 1520," and Father Pedro de Mekia was the first provincial.—Father Coll, *Colón y la Rábida*, p. 258.

³ The episcopal See of Santo Domingo was created on the 8th of August, 1611, and Fray Garcia de Padilla, a Franciscan, was appointed to fill it.

⁴ The number of pages is not given definitely because the copy which the writer of this paper has seen, sent to Mr. Wm. E. Curtis of this city (Washington) by Rev. Father Anacleto, O.S.F., of Boston, Mass., reaches only the name *Vega* (Fray Manuel de la Vega) on page 624. Father Vega's name is 750 in the catalogue.

⁵ There is a Spanish, Latin and Japanese Dictionary, by Fray Diego de Llagas,—a Japanese Grammar (in Spanish), by Father Rodriguez,—a Chinese and Spanish Dictionary, by Fray Miguel Rocca— a Spanish, Latin and Arabic Dictionary, by Fray Francisco Cañat (edition of Madrid in 3 vols., 1787),—a Turkish Italian and Italian Turkish Dictionary, by Fray Arcangelo de Carradori, 1650,—a Chinese, French and Latin Dictionary, by Father Barile de Gemona, Paris, 1813,—a Spanish Siamese Dictionary, by Fray Francisco Hermona de San Buenaventura,—a Spanish Anamese Dictionary, by the same author,—a Dictionary of the Mexican language, by Fray Francisco de Salecdo,—a Dictionary of the language of Yucatan, by Fray Andres de

seen the famous letter of Fray Pedro de Ganda, or Gante, from San Francisco of Mexico, February 15, 1552, to the Emperor Charles V, "denouncing the lamentable condition to which the Indians had been reduced on account of the personal services required from them;" the not less remarkable communication of Fray Juan de Mansilla to King Phillip II, "making his majesty acquainted with the abuses which prevailed in Vera Cruz, and suggesting some remedy to the same," dated at Xalapa, May 24, 1562; the invaluable "Report submitted by Fray Carlos Delgado to Rev. Father Ximeno on the execrable tyranny exercised by the governors and *alcaldes mayores* against the Indians;" a manuscript in folio, now in the Royal Library at Madrid; the "Advertencias importantes" (Important Suggestions) of Fray Juan de Silva, addressed "to His Majesty and to the Council of the Indies, in 1631"; and many other books and pamphlets which will show that those humble servants of God had very much at heart the welfare of the people, and did not hesitate to raise their voices in their defence and in earnest condemnation of their oppressors of whatever rank or position.

The very same difficulties which Columbus himself had to encounter on the part of Father Boyle, and the other Franciscans who wrote against him to the Spanish Court prove the zeal of those friars on behalf of the people. Columbus, with all his merits, and with all his virtues, was no more than a man, and a man who did not shun doing some things which the sons of Saint Francis could in no manner approve or countenance. He claimed that, owing to his extraordinary position, his acts could not be judged in the same light and by the same standard of justice as those of the rest of men.¹ And when he displayed so much severity in punishing sedition, or reduced the natives to slavery and made gifts of those unfortunate creatures to his friends or admirers,² no true servant

Avendano,—a Grand Dictionary of the Maya language of Yucatan, by Fray Antonio de Ciudad Real.—a Chilean Spanish and Spanish Chilean Dictionary, by Fray Antonio Hernandez Calzada,—a translation of the Gospels in the Tarasco language of Mexico, etc.

¹ In a letter addressed by Columbus to Doña Juana de la Torre, he said: "I must be judged, not as a governor sent to a province the government of which is regularly administered, and in which the laws in existence can be enforced, but as a Captain, conqueror of a warlike nation, different from us in religion and habits, and whose members live scattered through the forests, or sheltered in the mountains."

² Columbus made a present of three hundred Indians to some friends of his who had assisted him in the fitting out of the vessels which brought him to the New World. These unfortunate beings were carried to Spain as slaves. As soon as Queen Isabella heard of this strange gift, she exclaimed with indignation: "*With what right does Columbus dispose of my subjects? Who has given him authority to show his liberality in this way?*" And she ordered at once under penalty of death, that the 300 Indians and all others who might then be found in Spain should be immediately restored to liberty.

of Christ could in conscience fail to disapprove of it. Religious orders are too near to God on the one side and too near the masses of the people on the other, to admit of a compromise or temporization with tyranny.

Much has been said and written in condemnation, not only of Father Boyle, but also of the four Franciscan friars, who came with Bobadilla in 1500, and wrote those famous letters in which Columbus is alluded to as Pharaoh, and in which it was requested that no man from Genoa should ever be allowed to come to the New World. But the very bitterness and earnestness of their condemnation of the state of things which they found at La Española, is the best and the most conclusive proof of the zeal of those Fathers for justice, of their abhorrence of tyranny, no matter by whom it was exercised, or for what reasons it was resorted to, and of their love towards the people whom they were sent to Christianize. They were missionaries, apostles, evangelizers, not government functionaries or agents and assistants of the temporal rulers and abettors of their excesses.

A striking proof of this commendable spirit can be found in the letter which Fray Antonio de Toledo wrote from Santiago de Cuba, on November 12, 1534, to Emperor Charles V., explaining why he had refused to accompany Manuel de Rojas, the governor of the island, to a certain distribution of Indians which had taken place in those days in Bayamo. "I excused myself," says the Franciscan friar, "from going with governor Manuel de Rojas to the city of Bayamo in order to be present at a distribution of Indians, for the simple reason that our rule forbids us such business. *No par otra razon sino porque nuestra regla nos prohibe estas negociaciones.*"

Bobadilla brought with him to Santo Domingo, or La Española, in 1500, four Franciscan friars,¹ and in 1502, when Ovando landed at this island, he came accompanied by thirteen members of the same religious order.² Subsequently they began to come so frequently, and in such numbers, and spread themselves so widely through the islands and about the continent, that as has been stated, the number of their houses, at such an early period as 1506, attracted the attention of King Ferdinand and induced him to take measures to restrict their increase. Whether it was because of

¹ These friars were Fray Francisco Ruiz, Fray Juan Trasierra, Fray Juan Deleuille, and Fray Juan de Robles.

² They were Fray Alonzo del Espinar, Fray Bartolome Ternegano, Fray Antonio de Carrion, Fray Francisco de Portugal, Fray Antonio de los Martires, Fray Moseo de Zafra, Fray Pedro and Fray Alonso de Hornachuelos, Fray Bartolomé de Sevilla, Fray Juan de la Ninojosa, Fray Juan de Escalante, Fray Juan and Fray Pedro, or Pierre, called the Frenchmen on account of their nationality.

some feature of the Seraphic order, which rendered it peculiarly attractive to the people among whom it worked with so much zeal and self-denial,¹ or because of the opinion, more or less firmly rooted in all the sons of St. Francis, that the privilege of the Christianization and civilization of America belonged to them, exclusively,—the fact is that their convents, some of them magnificent specimens of architectural skill, some others simple houses of more or less modest appearance, can be found everywhere upon the soil of the New World, strewn like precious jewels all over its surface. Few of those buildings are now devoted to the purposes for which they were erected; whilst the desecrated majority still remain, protesting with mute eloquence against the folly and ingratitude of men.

It is well known, that in the year 1494, while Columbus was cruising along the southern coast of the island of Cuba, he caused his people to land at a convenient spot near the mouth of the Iatibonico River, and had the holy sacrifice of the Mass offered up there,—for the first time in the island,—on the 6th of July.² It is also well known that when Diego Velazquez came afterwards, with his three hundred followers, to settle in Cuba (1511), one of his companions was the afterwards celebrated Apostle of the Indies, Fray Bartolomé de las Casas, who had already entered the order of St. Dominic. But we have no record of the exact date on which the sons of St. Francis set their feet for the first time on the privileged shores of the Queen of the Antilles. There is abundant proof, however, that in 1532, there was already a convent of that order in the city of Santiago de Cuba; and that both in that convent and in all others subsequently established, the indefatigable inmates consecrated themselves wholly to the defense of the people, the alleviation of their sufferings, the enlightenment of their minds, and the redemption of their souls from vice.

We have seen already, how and for what reason Fray Antonio de Toledo had refused in 1534, to accompany Governor de Rojas on his trip to Bayamo. And we shall have only to glance at the records of those days in Cuba, to find everywhere the most abund-

¹ The extreme degree of poverty to which these venerable friars were reduced, is shown by a letter of Fray Diego Sarmiento, then the Bishop of Cuba, dated at Bayamo, April 20, 1556, in which he describes "the calamities and miseries which had befallen the island," and says: "sometimes we have been unable to say Mass, because we had no wine." *Ha faltado el sacrificio de la misa algunas veces, por falta de vino.*

² The first Mass in Havana was said in 1519. This event is commemorated by a monument called *El Templete* (the little temple) raised on the spot. The exact date has never been ascertained.

The first mass in Central America was said at Caxina, now Truxillo, Honduras, on Sunday the 14th of August, 1502, and was attended by Columbus.

ant testimony of the beneficent and civilizing influence of the friars.

The Spanish conquerors of Cuba, and those who afterwards came to settle in the country, were for the most part exceedingly rude and ignorant. The records of the city councils abundantly testify that aldermen, and many other people of social prominence or standing, were unable to write their names; that the friars "taught the people gratuitously how to read and write, and instructed them in the Christian doctrine and in arithmetic, and in serving Mass, and inspired in them the holy love and fear of God, and respect and obedience to their parents, and imparted to them the knowledge of all virtues, principally humility, which is like the foundation and basis of the spiritual building"; and that they, as a Spanish writer of our days aptly puts it, "dispelled that very darkness which ignorance has charged them with having fostered and endeavored to preserve."

The Franciscan convents of the island of Cuba, so far as the knowledge of the writer goes, were eight: one at Santiago de Cuba, which was the first, founded sometime before 1534; another at Havana, established in 1574; a third at Bayamo, founded in 1582; the fourth at Puerto Principe, established in 1599; a fifth at Trinidad, founded in 1713; the sixth at Santo Espiritu, established in 1716; the seventh at Guanabacoa founded in 1722; and the eighth at Villa Clara, or Santa Clara, established in 1730.

The Convent of St. Francis, at Santiago de Cuba, had very humble beginnings. Governor Manuel de Rojas, in a letter addressed by him to the emperor, dated February 27, 1535, says: "In this monastery there are only six or seven friars, and the oldest of them is a man thirty years of age. We should like to have four more sent here, and among them some one of more authority." And Fray Francisco de Avila, the head of the convent, in a letter which he wrote to the emperor, on July 8, 1532, says: "I came here, on the 6th of November, 1531, in company with Vadillo and another friar of my order. He and I came by order of our provincial at Santo Domingo de la Española. The city council here gave us, with much pleasure, the ground on which the monastery is to be erected, as your majesty commanded. Up to the present we have only built the church and one thatch-roofed house, which we, the four of our order who are now here, have chosen for our residence."

But not many years were required to change this state of things. That thatched-roofed house of 1531 soon became one of the most imposing buildings of the city, with many rooms and spacious cloisters and courts.¹ In 1841 the government, in pursuance of

¹ The church has three spacious naves and a front of elegant architecture. Admittance to the church is obtained, in this front part, through three large doors.

the decree of suppression of the religious orders and confiscation of their property, took possession of this convent,¹ and destined it to be used for a barrack. As such it is still used for the forces of artillery and infantry which garrison the city. As if nature itself wished to join in the protest which must be raised at all times against such acts of spoliation, an earthquake in 1852 caused the tower of the church to fall down. No attempt has been made ever since to rebuild it.

The Convent of Havana, the second of the order in Cuba, was a magnificent edifice. A slab, which can still be seen above the central door of the front part of the church, contained the following inscription: *Non est in toto sanctior orbe locus*. Nevertheless, the Spanish government has been using that church, ever since 1854, as a magazine for the custom-house. The convent itself, where St. Francis Solanus occupied a room, embraces an area perhaps twice as large as the treasury of the United States in Washington city. It was turned over to the civil authorities to be used for the custody of all kinds of old documents and papers (*Archivo General de la isla*), and for the accommodation of many officials who are furnished there by the government with commodious lodgings.

This noble building, which is considered the best of its class on the island, is admirably situated upon the very shore of the bay of Havana. The church, annexed to it and at present desecrated, as we have said, has a vaulted stone roof, supported by two parallel rows of substantial columns, forming three spacious naves. The middle one is about 222 feet long by 32 feet wide, while the two lateral naves measure about 177 feet in length and 14 feet in width. The ceiling of the church is very high, and the tower, which is the highest monument built in Cuba, is crowned by a statue of St. Helene.

According to an historian of the last century, there were always in that house from seventy to eighty friars, who occupied themselves, besides performing their religious duties, in the teaching of Latin, theology, philosophy and other branches. This teaching was always gratuitous, and regularly and systematically imparted. The Franciscan fathers of Havana had a regular *maestro* of grammar, a *lector* on philosophy, three professors or tutors (*catedráticos*) of the same science, or rather of some special branches thereof, and teachers of other sciences, mathematics included; and this teaching department of the convent, frequented by a great number of pupils, and imparting education gratuitously (as has been stated and ought to be constantly called to the attention of all

¹ When the convent was taken possession of by the civil authorities in 1841, it was inhabited by twelve friars ordained *in sacris*, and by a number of lay brothers.

those who have interest in educational matters), was under the control and supervision of a prefect of studies, called the *Regente General de Estudios*.

At the earnest request of the citizens of Havana, authority was given to this convent to confer the degree of bachelor both in philosophy and theology; and the studies made there were granted the same official character and validity as those made in any regularly authorized educational establishment of the Spanish monarchy.

As has been stated elsewhere, St. Francis Solano, before going to Peru, where he died, had been one of the inmates of this historical house, and his room was kept for a long time and shown to visitors as a very interesting curiosity.

The storm of "reform" has swept away all that could be removed from this venerable institution which gave to Cuba many men of high rank in science as well as in virtue; but the social structure of the country does not seem to have derived, as yet, the benefit which was expected from the "liberal" measures which scattered to the four winds both the fathers themselves and their property, without sparing their library or even the statues of the saints and other ornaments of the church.¹

The convent of Bayamo, founded by Fray Francisco Adan, with donations in money and materials of all kind which he secured from the citizens of that locality,² can claim the glory of having been the first educational establishment in the island of Cuba. Captain Francisco de Parada made, in 1571, a donation of seventy thousand dollars for the establishment and support of a free primary school, which was entrusted to the Franciscans and attained a great success. The building of this convent is now occupied by some offices of the government.

The convent of Puerto Principe, which belongs also to the sixteenth century—the first century of Cuban history,—was founded by Fray Francisco Amado with funds supplied in part by Diego Sifontes in 1587, and by many other persons, whose names were more or less conspicuously recorded upon the walls of the Church. The old records show that in the immediate neighborhood of this convent there were no more than 180 houses, all of them inhabited by poor people. This convent has the glory of having had among its most active members, the celebrated Father Fray

¹ The writer of the present paper remembers well, although these events took place in the days of his boyhood, the scandal caused in Havana by the breaking and sale for fuel of the statues of the saints, altars, ornaments, etc., of the church of St. Francis.

² All the lime used for the construction of this building was supplied gratuitously by Captain Alonso, one of the citizens of Bayamo.

José de la Cruz Espí, also called Father Valencia, from the place of his birth, still remembered as one of the greatest benefactors of Puerto Principe and its district, and held by popular opinion, even when he was living, to be a Saint. This noble Franciscan who died on May 2, 1838, was highly instrumental in the founding of many great works of charity, and especially the Orphan Asylum (*Casa de Beneficencia*) of Puerto Principe, in which all the poor girls of the city could find shelter and education.¹ When the establishments of beneficence became civil institutions, and the government took charge of this asylum, the first thing which was done was to sell the building. The records of the time show that the government received \$15,084.62½, as proceeds of that sale; but they fail to give any account of the subsequent disposition of the money, much less can it be shown that it was used in any way for the benefit of the poor, unless it were under the theory, often heard in the mouth of some patriotic Spanish statesmen, that the state itself is the first pauper to be relieved.

The convents of Saint Francis, at Trinidad and Santo Espiritu, which are two cities not very far distant from each other, were comparatively small houses. The former never had more than six or seven inmates, whether priests or lay brothers, while the latter, in the days of its greatest prosperity, had only nine friars ordained *in sacris*, and three lay brothers. The convent of Trinidad was built exclusively at the expense of Don Gerónimo de Fuentes and his wife, residents of that city; and the convent of Santo Espiritu by contributions of all kinds from many people.

The great convent of Saint Francis of Guanabacoa, now occupied by the sons of St. Joseph Calasactius, and used by them as a first class educational establishment, with a certain degree of official authority, as far as the validity of the studies and the degree of Bachelor of arts, or sciences, is concerned, was founded in the early part of the eighteenth century "to aid the Church in satisfying the spiritual needs of the people, and attending to the education of the youth." This house, always spoken of by the historians of the country as a "centre of learning as well as of all virtues" (*depósito de la sabiduría y de todas las virtudes*), magnificently built, with extensive gardens and orchards attached to it, and of course a very handsome church, was from the beginning a regular primary school, for all people, rich or poor, white or colored, and never failed to excite, besides great reverence, profound sympathy and gratitude. The government did not dare to close it, but decided to keep it as a kind of refuge for the members of the order, expelled from the other convents, who were unable

¹ A gentleman of Puerto Principe named Don Lorenzo de Mirando y Agnitero, contributed for this purpose \$22,000.

either from age, or other circumstances (there were two insane in their number), to take care of themselves.

As to the convent of St. Francis in Villa Clara, or Santa Clara, which was the last one of this order founded in Cuba, whatever may be said in its praise scarcely shall meet the requirements of strict justice. It was founded at the request, and by the earnest efforts of Father Juan de Conyedo, a secular priest and benefactor, whose name is associated with the progress and welfare of that city, in which his memory is still kept in the highest veneration,¹ and was used partly as a hospital, and partly as a primary school under the name of "School of Our Lady of Sorrows," independently of the classes of Latin, Philosophy, and other branches, which were open free of cost to all those who cared to attend them.

When this convent and the Church attached to it were closed by the government in 1841, the authorities had to proceed in great haste to prevent any action on the part of the people. A well written and in all respects reliable history of Villa Clara² relates that the hurry of the authorities was such that "no more than one morning was needed to change completely the aspect of the temple, and remove to the storehouses of the government the five altars, the statues, ornaments, furniture, and everything else belonging to it." The whole building, convent and church together, has been used ever since 1849 as a barrack for the troops.

If the history of the sons of St. Francis of Assisi in the New World is as admirable and grand as has been more or less imperfectly outlined in the preceding pages, it does not eclipse, however, in the slightest manner, the brilliant career of the Dominicans.

They came to Santo Domingo, or La Española, if not as early as the Franciscans, at least early enough to allow them, in 1511, to boldly espouse the cause of the natives and denounce the injustice and cruelty of their oppressors. Fray Antonio Montesino, of the order of Preachers, had one day ascended the chair of the Holy Ghost, during a religious festivity of great solemnity, in 1511, which was attended by the second Admiral of the Indies, the royal officers, and the most important personages of the city of Santo Domingo; and, as if inspired by the occasion, or moved by the desire to seize the opportunity, which presented itself to speak to all those officials together, he devoted his sermon to the most earnest condemnation of the cruelties perpetrated against the natives, and to a strenuous exhortation to his audience to change their plan of government and to respect justice and morality.

¹ Father Conyedo was a native of Cuba, born in 1687. He died in 1761.

² *Memoria histórica de la villa de Santa Clara y su jurisdicción*, por Manuel Dionisio Gonzalez. Villa Clara, 1858.

The words of the Dominican priest did not arouse in his listeners any other feeling than anger and a thirst for revenge; and as soon as the Mass was over, the principal authorities proceeded in a body to the house of his order and said to the Superior that if Father Montesino did not withdraw his remarks and express his regret for having uttered them, the whole order would be expelled from the island. The Superior replied, as related by Quintano,¹ that the opinions of Father Montesino were, indeed, the opinions of all his brethren, but that, in order to avoid scandal, he should recommend him to speak with more moderation in whatever sermon he might preach in the future. But either the Superior did not do anything of the kind, or Father Montesino thought it was unworthy of his ministry and of the chair of truth to temporize in any manner, through human respect, with error and iniquity. And so it was, that when he again ascended the pulpit and addressed an audience, made still larger by the expectation of enjoying the apologies to be made by the good friar, the latter raised his voice still louder, reaffirmed, word by word, all that he had said, rebuked the officials, and maintained that by his action he was doing, not only his duty as a minister of the Almighty, but rendering a service, and a most important one, to the king himself.

And when the enraged authorities sent to Madrid their complaints, and the Dominicans were compelled to defend themselves before the Court, they sent, as their representative there, the same Father Montesino; who pleaded so energetically, and demonstrated so clearly the injustice of the slavery to which the natives were subjected, and the iniquities which were perpetrated upon them, that the king ordered him and the other Dominicans to return to America, in order that "through the example of their virtues, and the influence of their good doctrine, the fruit which was desired, namely, the salvation of souls, could be reaped."

But neither this heroic advocate of justice, nor his brethren and associates in the island of Santo Domingo, not less heroic than he, were an exception to the rule. History has recorded, in characters which neither time nor sophistry can obliterate, all that was done in that line, in regard to Cuba and other possessions of the Spanish crown, by Fray Bartolomé de Las Casas, the illustrious apostle of the Indies, and by every member of the Dominican order, in favor of the oppressed natives. Moved by his charity and his love of justice, Father Las Casas crossed the Atlantic seventeen times, and went to plead personally, in favor of the people whose protection had been entrusted to him.² Four times he had to go to Germany, where the

¹ *Vidas de Españoles Célèbres. Fray Bartolomé de las Casas.*

² Cardinal Jimenez Cisneros appointed Father Las Casas "Protector of the Indians," in 1516.

emperor happened to be, to meet him and present to him in person his arguments and his complaints. As fearless of persecution as of personal danger, he spoke the truth to the monarchs, defended it before the courts and councils, disputed with the learned, struggled with the powerful, and wrote immortal works, in the cause of outraged justice. Through his untiring efforts, the *Audiencias*¹ of America were established, and he himself accompanied to Santo Domingo the first court of this class organized for the New World.

The charge has been made—by those who think to be patriotic by compromising with injustice, or extenuating infamies, and trying to throw discredit on the acts of this great man—that his zeal in favor of the Indians was more in the nature of a hobby than in real hatred of slavery; and it has been said, and repeated, that owing to him and to his efforts African slavery was established in the New World. But the charge is false, as has been proved conclusively. When Father Las Casas wrote the memorial, upon which the whole structure of the charge rests, African slavery was already in existence in America. Chronology, with her inflexible finger, points at the respective dates, and contemptuously dismisses the imputation.

The order of St. Dominic, created in 1216, not to live in solitude and apart from the world, but “to be in constant and efficient contact with civil society, and to take charge of the study and propagation, through their apostolate, of the Divine science,” has had in America the great merit of having devoted itself entirely, not only to the defence of justice, but to the diffusion of learning in all its branches.

Superficial writers are always ready to refer to the Spanish Inquisition and make St. Dominic responsible, as well as the order he founded, for the blood and the sufferings which are charged to that Tribunal. The truth is that, as has been proved by Cantú and others, neither St. Dominic had any share at all in its establishment, nor was his order devised “to impose the faith, but to defend its liberty.” And so well established and recognized is this fact in Spain, that when the committee of the Cortes, which was appointed in 1812 to inquire into the advisability of suppressing the Tribunal of the Inquisition, made their report, which was accepted, in favor of the suppression, the explicit declaration was made that “St. Dominic did not use or advise to use other weapons against heresy than prayer, patience and instruction.”

¹ High Tribunals of Justice, with powers to interfere to a certain extent, and through certain forms of procedure, in the administration of the government. They often checked the tyranny of the Viceroys and Captain-Generals.

Be it as it may elsewhere, the fact is that neither in the island of Santo Domingo, nor in that of Cuba, the Dominican Fathers did more than to defend justice, educate the people and promote their happiness.

They came to Cuba, very few in number, from the neighboring island of Santo Domingo, in the early part of the sixteenth century. They were presided over by Fray Entierrez de Ampudia, who came as their superior, invested with the dignity of Vicar Apostolic for the whole island. When Pope Leo X. created the diocese of Cuba, in 1516, Fray Bernardino de Mera, a Dominican Father, was made the Bishop; but neither he nor his successor, a Franciscan born at Flanders and appointed in 1522, ever came to take possession of their See. Fray Miguel Ramirez de Salamanca, a native of Burgos, also a son of St. Dominic, was then appointed (1528), and he was actually the first Bishop in the island.

The friars of this order did not succeed in having any convent built in Cuba until the year 1578, when, thanks to the generous assistance of several citizens, and pre-eminently of the Count and Countess of Casa Bayona, whose portraits not long ago could yet be seen hanging on the walls of the sacristy, the monumental building which stands near the Palace of the Captain-General, at Havana, was erected for them.

This noble edifice, in which Saint Luis Beltran occupied a room, while on his way to Spain, has been memorable in the history of Cuba, because of its intimate connection with the intellectual progress of the country. At the earnest request of Fray Diego Romero, one of the priests of this house, supplemented by the action of the City Council of Havana, and of other persons and corporations, the "Royal and Pontifical University of St. Jerome," was established at that convent in 1721, and entrusted to the Dominican Fathers. This University was given the same rank and prerogatives as the University of Alcalá de Henares, which had been Cardinal Cisneros' pet, and soon developed into a seat of learning of great celebrity. In 1761 it had three chairs of theology, one of philosophy,—one of what was called "the Aristotelic text," another of what was called "the Master of Sentences,"—three of civil law, two of canon law, four of medicine, and two of mathematics.

Subsequently to that date, new classes were established, in which all branches were taught, and as well and thoroughly as in any contemporary establishment of Europe; and as the teaching was gratuitous¹ and the doors of the classes were open to all, the

¹ The matriculation fee required of the students of the University was merely nominal *fifteen cents (real y medio)*. The graduation fee, in the degree of doctor, consisted in a pair of gloves and a silk handkerchief for each member of the Faculty.

institution became extremely popular, and constituted before long one of the most important factors in the civilization of the country.

In addition to their University labors, many of the priests devoted themselves, gratuitously also, to the teaching of Latin, and Logics, and even Moral Theology, with the book of Father Laraga as text, at extra hours and in their own rooms; and in this way they prepared many a young man for admission either to the University, or to the Seminary for priests attached to the Cathedral, and made their name and their remembrance still more imperishable.

Even after the suppression of the religious orders, these venerable men retained their habits of imparting knowledge to the youth; and the writer of this paper is happy to have a further opportunity at this moment to renew his debt of admiration and gratitude to that noble son of St. Dominic, Fray Ambrosio Herrera, who, while at the convent of Guanabacoa, where he had been sent after the secularization of the University and the suppression of the religious orders, opened in his room a class of Latin and devoted himself from 7 to 9 in the morning, and 7 to 9 in the evening, to the instruction of about twenty or twenty-five boys, who loved him dearly. Neither one cent nor a present did he ever accept; and a portion of his breakfast was regularly distributed among his pupils.

This convent of Havana, in which there were sometimes fifty priests, and even more, became to some extent the real centre of the order in Spanish America. It was, indeed, one of the noblest, grandest and most beneficial institutions of its kind ever founded this side of the Atlantic. And when the University was taken out of the hands of the friars and turned over to the government and made a secular institution, and the matriculation fees were increased from 15 cents to \$25 in Philosophy and \$102 in Law, Medicine, Pharmacy and Theology, the people received a blow which the course of time has not been sufficient as yet to remove entirely from their memory.

There was also a Dominican convent at the city of Bayamo, and another at the city of Santo Espiritu. The former was founded in 1742 and the latter in 1746. Neither of them was a large establishment; but the latter was especially beneficial, on account of a hospital of charity which was attached to it, under the invocation of Jesus of Nazareth.

The convent of Dominicans at Guanabacoa, founded in 1758, was in the order of time the fourth and the last house which those excellent Fathers possessed in Cuba. It was also their last place of refuge. The building is immense, and the church attached to it, and consecrated under the advocacy of *Nuestra Señora de*

la Candelaria, is one of the largest and handsomest of the island. The religious festivities which were celebrated there on Candlemas day, the "novena" which preceded it, and the subsequent "octava," accompanied as they were always with public rejoicings of all kinds, and a fair where money circulated profusely, aided to increase the fame and the material prosperity of the town.

When the British besieged Havana in 1762, and took possession of Guanabacoa, they established their headquarters at this convent. But the outrageous manner in which they conducted themselves, especially in the church, drew upon them such an amount of hatred, that indeed their worst enemies and the most persistent and uncompromising were the citizens of that town.¹ The remembrance of some of these outrages is still fresh in the minds of the people, and has been transmitted faithfully from generation to generation.²

Besides the houses of the Dominicans and Franciscans, others were established profusely both in the Spanish West Indies, and on the Main land, or *Terra firma*, as it was called.

In Cuba, for instance, according to the statement published by order of the government, in pursuance of the decrees of secularization, on December 7, 1841, the number of the convents then in existence, and of their inmates, was as follows :

Order of St. Dominic : the four convents just mentioned with a total of 34 priests and 14 lay brothers.

Order of St. Francis : eight convents as described, with a total of 74 priests and many lay brothers.

Order of St. Augustin : one convent at Havana, with 8 priests and 4 lay brothers. They had classes of Latin and Philosophy.

Order of Our Lady of Mercy : two convents, one at Havana, and another at Puerto Principe, with a total of 27 priests and 2 lay brothers.

Order of Capuchins : one convent at Havana, with only 3 priests.

¹ The name of Jose Antonio Gomez, one of the aldermen of the town became famous in the history of this war for his bold attacks against the British, and his successful leadership, in that locality. The British were so hated, that the people of Guanabacoa did not hesitate to poison the milk and even the water which they furnished them.

² Tradition has preserved among many other outrages perpetrated at the Church, the two following : The soldiers took from its place a picture of Our Lord, which still in the time of the writer of this paper was preserved in a very rich massive frame of silver, and placed it on the pulpit, as in the attitude of preaching, an act which was accompanied with all kinds of jests and irreverence. They also discovered that a statue of St. Francis Xavier, which was in an upper niche, on the sanctuary, had a valuable ring on one of the fingers. To pull down the statue, and get possession of the ring, they tried to lasso to it amidst laughter and mockery, by means of a rope. A historian relates that when the statue fell, it struck the head of the one who pulled the rope, and instantly killed him.

Order of Bethlehemites: two convents—one at Havana, with 3 priests and 10 lay brothers, and one at Santiago de Cuba with 2 priests. The Bethlehemites of Havana had a magnificent hospital for convalescents,—absolutely gratuitous, and also the largest primary school ever remembered in Cuba.¹ They taught gratuitously, to poor and rich, negro and white, noble and plebeian—because the school was open to all, and the prejudice of race, was never felt in Cuba as it is here, even now,—all the primary branches of instruction, that is, reading and writing, arithmetic and Christian doctrine. Those who showed superior talent or industry, received extra lessons of a more advanced character. They all were provided, gratuitously also, with pens and paper, and ink, and catechisms and readers if unable to buy them.

Order of St. John of God: two convents, one at Havana with 2 priests and 11 lay brothers, and one at Puerto Principe with 1 priest and 2 lay brothers. The members of this order were regular physicians, and had a charity hospital attached to their convents.

However imperfect the foregoing sketch may be considered,—and certainly no illusion is entertained by its author that it is an adequate presentation of the subject—it shows abundantly that the religious orders have a most brilliant history of their own in the New World, and that it is proper for Catholics as well as for just men in general to remember it with pride, and have it duly recognized in the approaching festivities.

In regard to the Jesuits, whatever might be said or done in grateful remembrance of their work in this hemisphere, north and south of the equator, would certainly fall short of the requirements of strict justice. Although they arrived in America at a later period than the Franciscans and the Dominicans, their missionary and educational labors were not less glorious and successful. The name of the Society of Jesus is preserved with veneration by the people from the remotest end of South America to the farthest northern extremity of Canada. And one who should ever attempt to write the history of the New World without giving that Order the credit due to it as a principal factor of American civilization, would be far from fulfilling his duty as a historian.

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¹ The average attendance was 500.