

THE CASE OF FRANCISCO FERRER.

Halifax Chronicle.

To the Editor of The Chronicle:

Sir,—Much sympathy has been expressed for Francisco Ferrer, executed at Barcelona some three weeks ago, and the Government and the King of Spain have been vigorously condemned for not preventing his execution. The sympathy and condemnation are both, in my humble opinion, misplaced and are in most cases due to ignorance of the facts.

Ferrer was accused of complicity in the murder, arson and pillage which took place during the anarchistic outbreak at Barcelona in the middle of July last. As was to be expected, where a state of siege had been declared, the trial was before a court martial. A report of the trial given by a good authority is as follows:

"On Saturday morning, October 9th, the military court, consisting of Lieutenant Colonel Don Edoardo de Aguirre Lacalle and six captains, convened in the presence of two hundred reporters and about two hundred and fifty of the general public, as many as could crowd into the main hall of the Barcelona city prison. The competency of the court having been duly established and declared, the president summoned Ferrer. He entered, walking briskly, not harried, and seated himself at a table. Then followed the reading of the Summary of the case, that is, an account of the steps taken by the authorities in imprisoning the accused and in searching his house, of the depositions of witnesses and the answers of the accused to their testimony, and his statements when confronted by the same witnesses. During the period of twenty-eight days allowed by the military code for presenting testimony in favor of the accused, nobody had offered him any help. A captain of engineers, however, Don Francisco Galeoran, was appointed his counsel, and had eight days to prepare for the trial. During the reading of the Summary, Ferrer paid the closest attention, now shaking his head in dissent, now smiling ironically, but preserving throughout an exterior calmness. The testimony showed Ferrer's efforts to stir up men in the suburbs to join the rioters, and his instigation to burn the convents. Three witnesses testified to seeing him actually leading a group of rioters. The testimony and the documents found in his house were the ground of the prosecutor's address to the court which was dispassionate, well-reasoned, and moderate in tone. Counsel for the defense followed with a brilliant and eloquent plea. Ferrer was then asked whether he had anything to say in his own behalf. His few remarks, in slow, uncertain tones, produced an unfavorable impression on the throng in the court room, as was seen in their faces. The session was then declared at an end and the public filed out in a quiet and orderly way."

Four days later Ferrer was shot in the fortress of Montjuich. It will be observed that there was no secrecy nor any undue haste in the conduct of the trial and that sentence was not passed for three months after the committing of the offense for which it was imposed.

The London Saturday Review of October the 16th contained a long editorial on the trial and execution of Ferrer which I shall not quote. I give, however, the reference to those events contained in the "Notes of the Week" of the same number, which indicated the view taken by the editor:

"Senor Ferrer has paid the extreme penalty for his mischief making, mischief that meant, as he knew very well it must, loss of life. He who attempts to upset the existing order by violent revolution must expect to forfeit his life if he fails. He appears to have been fairly and fully tried. The demonstrations of sympathy and indignation on the continent are misplaced. It is significant that those demonstrations in Paris took the form of violent attacks with bloodshed, on the police. Evidently it is thought that the most fitting tribute to Senor Ferrer's memory is an outbreak against common order. The French Government have been commendably prompt in putting down rioters. In Spain itself public opinion evidently regards the execution as necessary. This should satisfy foreigners whom the matter concerns for less than the Spanish."

This view is strengthened by the fact that General De Lugo, Minister of War in the new Liberal Cabinet, in an interview last week said that Ferrer had been proved guilty on evidence and had been legally and judicially condemned.

British subjects—looking at the suspensions of the ordinary methods of trial, under the "Crimes Act," that have taken place in Ireland as a result of offences infinitely less shocking than those committed at Barcelona in July last, and at the line of action deemed necessary in India, by such a lover of freedom as Lord Morley, to prevent crimes much less flagrant and unhuman than those of Ferrer and his associates should be disposed to agree with the Saturday Review and slow to find serious fault with the course adopted by the Government of Spain.

When we leave the conduct of the Spanish Ministry out of the question and consider that of Senor Ferrer, do we find anything to excite sympathy in the bosom of the average man? He was an atheist and anarchist, the avowed foe of all religion, of the existing social system, of all authority and of all law; and the Modern Schools which are held up to our admiration were schools which he had established—some ninety in number—in different parts of Spain for the purpose of instilling his own doctrines into the minds of the rising generation. Authority for my statements as to schools and doctrines is to be found in a recent article in the New York Times, the writer of which apparently began with the intention of glorifying Ferrer and incidentally threw enough light on his subject to enable his readers to get a fairly correct and distinct view of it.

Speaking of the Modern Schools the Times writer says: "Instead of merely teaching the branches of education in a secular fashion, without prejudice to any religion, Ferrer sought to develop the minds of his pupils in such a way that neither Church nor state could have any hold on them. He taught them to despise both Church and State." Of his way of speaking, the writer tells us that "there was nothing voluble or excitable about his manner. . . . Nevertheless the Anarchists ranked him amongst the most convincing of their speakers." Again: "Some of Ferrer's teachings, as quoted from his books, are as savage attacks on the existing order as ever penned by Kropotkin or Reclus."

"Assassination is no part of the creed, although Kropotkin and the rest, Ferrer included, admit that revolution will doubtless be necessary when the time comes for a change."

In the Spectator of the sixteenth of October one finds Ferrer's own description of the object of the Modern Schools: "To make children reflect upon the lies of religion, of Government, of patriotism, of justice, of politics, and of militarism, and to prepare their brains for the social revolution."

From another widely circulated paper, I take the following extract as showing still further, the nature of the instruction imparted in the Modern Schools: "The flag, a rag of different colors stuck at the end of a stick, is the symbol of tyranny and misery. Soldiers should use their weapons to kill those who armed them. When war is declared, every soldier should declare a strike. Every evil, every suffering, every injustice, is due to that stupid and brutal thing called 'native land.' In his Valencia School an emblematic picture represented anarchy with a blazing torch, standing near the ruins of a throne amid broken military weapons, a soldier's cap pierced by a dagger, a torn copy of the laws, and fragments of a cross."

I do not wish to trespass unduly on your space or on the patience of your readers and shall end by putting a case corresponding in the main to that of Ferrer.

Let us suppose that, when the troops were transferred from Halifax to Cape Breton last July, advance guard had been taken of their absence by anarchists and other revolutionists—of whom thank Providence, we have none in our city but who were numerous in Barcelona and its neighborhood—who had initiated a reign of terror; that several innocent people had been murdered; that Saint Paul's Church had been burned, and that the same fate had befallen the Ladies' College, the teachers in which had been violently assaulted and in some cases done to death. Let us further suppose that the troops, having been reinforced had succeeded in putting an end to the outbreak, that martial law had been proclaimed and remained in force while the miscreants were being hunted down; that amongst those brought to trial was one able and eloquent man, who for more than a score of years had been teaching anarchy by voice and pen and who had succeeded in establishing at various points throughout the Province schools in which hostility to God, to Canada, to property and to law and order generally had been carefully instilled into the minds of young Nova Scotians; that this man—a recognized leader among the revolutionaries—was shown to have been active during the outbreak and was known to have had intimate relations with the assassin who some months before had hurled a bomb at the Lieutenant Governor's carriage when His Honor was setting out for the Province Building to open the session of the Legislature. Would there in that case my dear brethren be warm expressions of sympathy with this leader of the forces of mischief, if after being duly tried and found guilty by a military tribunal, the death sentence was carried out?

L. G. POWELL.
Halifax, 5th Nov., 1909.

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POWER OF THE CONFESSIONAL.

An Irishman, who seems to have a "bad drop" in him somewhere, is at present vilifying, in English publications, the Church which nurtured him. He pleats out, as so many others of his stripe have done before, the confessional as one of the salient points of attack, and he hints at horrors in this connection. We Catholics are all familiar with insinuations of this kind; and while they may trouble some immature minds, the well-instructed Catholic takes them at their true valuation—which is exceedingly slight. Catholics who have been going to confession all their lives know that the confessional really is, and out of their years of happy spiritual experience they are able to reply to those who see, or affect to see, in the practice of confession a danger to morality. In a recent sermon at the Cathedral, Baltimore, Cardinal Gibbons spoke on confession and, after giving an account of the sacrament of penance, its establishment by our Divine Saviour, and its administration in the Church, he gave as follows his own personal experience:

"I may be permitted, dear brethren, to give the testimony of my own experience on the sanctifying influence of the sacrament of penance. Since my ordination, nearly a half century ago, I have been accustomed to hear confessions. I have, therefore had a fair opportunity of testing the value of this means of grace. And the impressions forced on my mind, far from being peculiar to myself, are shared by every Catholic clergyman throughout the world who is charged with the care of souls. And the testimony of a few experienced confessors, in my estimation, ought to have more weight in enabling men to judge of the moral tendencies of the sacred tribunal than the gratuitous assertion of a thousand individuals who have no personal experience of the confessional, but who draw on a heated imagination or on the pages of sensational novels for statements they advance."

I am persuaded that the confessional is one of the most powerful moral levers ever designed by a merciful God for raising man from the pool of despair and the mire of sin. It has more weight in withdrawing people from vice than even the pulpit. In public sermons we scatter the seed of the word of God; in the confessional we reap the harvest. In sermons, to use a military phrase we fire at random; in the confessional we take a sure aim. The words of the priest go home to the heart of the penitent."

ST. ANTHONY'S INDIAN SCHOOL.

An interesting ceremony took place at Kenora Indian boarding school on the 7th inst. It was the blessing and opening of a new chapel for this institution. In the absence of Rev. Father Magnum, Provincial of the Oblate Fathers in Manitoba, Rev. Father Cahill the acting Provincial and the founder of this school presided at the ceremony. The school has received during the summer an addition of 3600 feet, three stories high. This addition affords much needed accommodation, and adds considerably to the general appearance of the building. It has now a frontage of 108 feet and commands a beautiful view of the Lake of the Woods. The distance from Kenora docks is about a mile and a half. A new chapel measuring 30x30 feet has been provided in the addition recently erected. The school has a large hall, and was opened for service on Sunday morning. Besides the children numbering forty-six teachers, Father Cahill, the Mother General and Father Bouquet, O. M. I., the principal, were also present. Mother Pirie, assistant to the Mother General of Montreal, Mother Desjardins, Superior of the Grey Nuns in Manitoba, and Mother Carroll, Superior of the St. Albert Vicariate. After the blessing and singing of the Magnificat, Father Cahill presided at the altar and addressed the children in English and Indian alternately. He reminded them of the significance of the ceremony that was just performed and of their consequent obligations.

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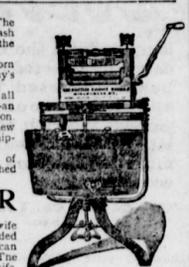
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