

Mexico's Church-State Conflict Nears a Crisis

The Amendment to Close All Religious and Private Schools and Establish "Socialistic Education" Is About to Go Into Effect as American Catholic Hierarchy Protests

THE hundred-year conflict between Church and State in Mexico may come to its decisive battle after to-day (December 1), when Gen. Lazaro Cardenas will be sitting in the Presidential Chair as successor to Abelardo L. Rodriguez.

Hand-picked by former President Gen. Plutarco Elias Calles, who is described by *America*, New York Catholic weekly, as "the most notorious God-hater in the world to-day after Stalin" President Cardenas is known as a Communist and preacher of confiscation.

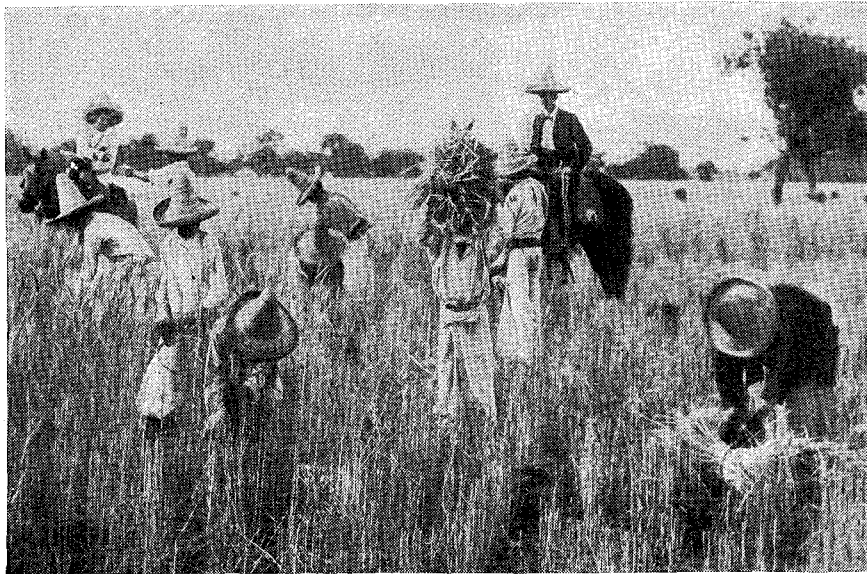
On the date of his inauguration, or soon thereafter, the Constitutional amendment to close all religious and private schools and establish "socialistic education" is expected to go into effect. Born of the desire to rid the country of religious influence, its ratification will be the final blow to the Catholic faith, principal religion of the people, which already has been despoiled by confiscation of its churches, the expulsion of Bishops, priests, and nuns from ten States, and by the closing of all but State schools. In the eyes of the faithful, the amendment will mean not only the destruction of the fruits of Christianity, but even of its very seed.

Protests From Americans

The desperate situation has aroused Catholic protest all over the United States. Speaking as American citizens, as well as Catholic clergy, the Hierarchy has appealed to the faithful that they seek, not armed intervention, but the intervention of prayer, and the power of example.

The neighboring tragedy moving swiftly to its dénouement is the more appalling to Christians because of the unremitting attacks on religion in Soviet Russia, where the executive committee of the League of Militant Atheists has launched a "Christmas campaign" against religion, and the crisis in Germany, where the struggle of the Evangelical Churches to save themselves from State coercion has aroused the sympathy of the world.

The hour is considered one of peril to the whole of Christianity, harassed as it has been by conflicting ideals and isms since the welter of spiritual despair which followed the World War.



Acme

They may never hear the Angelus again

The appeal of the Catholic Hierarchy recited the various hindrances which the Mexican Government has placed in the way of the Church, the effect of which will be its virtual destruction. "It is no interposition of our influence either as Bishops or as citizens," they said, "to reach those who possess political power anywhere on earth, and, least of all, in our own country, to the end that they should intervene with armed force in the internal affairs of Mexico for the protection of the Church."

Rather, they said, "We would wish on the part of the entire American public, of our great secular press, a fuller knowledge of the actual conditions in Mexico. All would then more fully realize that we are pleading not only the cause of the Catholic Church, but the cause of human freedom, and of human liberty, for all nations."

Seventy-eight members of the Hierarchy, including three Cardinals, nine Archbishops, and sixty-six Bishops, took part in the meeting of the National Catholic Welfare Conference, in Washington, at which the appeal was issued. In the statement was a thinly veiled reprimand for Ambassador Josephus Daniels for a speech interpreted by many Catholics as an indorsement of the Mexican program for eliminating religious training from the schools.

A few days later an appeal to all American Catholics, Protestants, and Jews to "express their horror at the outrages that are being done to religion in Mexico," was made by the Rev. Wilfrid Parsons, editor of *America*. He, too, criticized Ambassador Daniels, and also Raymond Moley, editor of *Today*, for "repeated attempts to persuade General Calles, political boss of Mexico, and the Mexican people that our Government stands behind him."

Father Parsons told his audience that the Mexican Government's policy was not anti-Catholic, but "anti-God," and that the aim of the program was to drive all religion from the country.

Within a year, according to an interview with Archbishop Pascual Diaz by Harold B. Hinton of the *New York Times*, the Mexican Government has seized more than 150 churches and expelled from their dioceses the Bishops and priests of ten States.

In two States every church has been closed, and in some States only one priest is allowed for every 100,000 Catholics.

Under the Constitution, all churches have become the property of the nation, and this has been extended to cover confiscation of even private homes in which a priest celebrates a mass or performs a baptism or any other act of private worship. On top of this warrants charging them with sedition have been issued for the arrest of the exiled Archbishop Leopoldo Ruiz y Flores, Apostolic Delegate to Mexico, and Monsignor Jose de Manrique y Zarate should they again set foot on Mexican soil.

Catholics Conciliatory

The Constitutional amendment which is moving swiftly to ratification provides that schools may not be maintained by private individuals or corporations, that all schools must give "socialistic education," and that all teachers shall be appointed by the State.

In spite of these hindrances, the Catholic Church has maintained a conciliatory attitude, and Mr. Hinton quoted a Catholic spokesman in Mexico as saying that his coreligionists would not object to abolition of parochial schools provided the "socialistic education" did not deny the existence of God, or fail to stress the family and home as the bases of national life.

Whether Washington can help informally in mediating the difficulties between the Church and State in Mexico is open to question. The conditions which facilitated the friendly offices of the late Dwight W. Morrow, Ambassador to Mexico, in effecting a reconciliation are said to be lacking now.

(*"Religion and Social Service"* continued on page 22)

The Thunderbolt of Broadway

"The Children's Hour," an Adult, Intelligent Study of a Satanic Child, Moves Its New York Audiences to Vast Respect for a Courageous Dramatist

HERE is a play to wring the heart and fire respect, an adult, steadfast play so conspicuously fine and intelligent that, beside it, much of the theater's present crop becomes shoddy and futile. This is the first play of this erratic season in which power, intellect, and a glowing sense for theater combine for a terrifying and ennobling experience. The new play is "The Children's Hour," a first play by Miss Lillian Hellman, and overnight, by the force of its own stature, it has become the most important play in New York.

Here is a play that shines with integrity. It is, definitely, the first play of the season in which for two whole, consuming acts the First Audience sat completely silent, held taut by the richness and reality of the tragedy which it describes.

In "The Children's Hour" there is conspicuous and magic correlation between the author, the producer, and the cast. It is evident that each contributed a positive majesty of sincerity to it and that all three together determined to make this a play to command the appreciation of its audiences.

Once more Herman Shumlin brings to the theater vivid testimony that he is a man of profound talents, liquid, engrossing talents in which sensitivity and deep understanding are the gifts made eagerly to a play which might easily have withered without them. His thoughtful treatment and skilled direction, together with Miss Hellman's abiding honesty, construct a production in which the theater, these times, and the audiences may enrich themselves.

Age and Youth

By the author's own evaluation, this is the tragedy of considerate age for impetuous youth, youth in which there is headlong disregard for the rights of others. The bleak story is of two finely-reared young women, heads of a private school for girls, whose characters are wrecked and whose enterprise is destroyed by a satanic child, a poisonous young viper whose whole, disordered life is devoted to cruelty, falsehood, and appalling mischief. An orphan, under the guardianship of an indulgent grandmother, she makes the days of her schoolmates hideous with horrible deeds of evil. She traps them in childish thefts and, thereafter, enslaves them through threats of exposure. She takes their money, the pitiful little allowances sent by their parents, and she bullies them when they revolt and refuse further to be hurt by her.

This type of child magnifies all discipline into the shape of injustice. Thus, when



Alfredo Valente

Katherine Emery and Anne Revere in a poignant scene from "The Children's Hour"

punished for a small fraud and threatened with further thwarting of her demoniac acts, she runs away and goes back to her grandmother. This old woman, consum-

mately fond of her troublesome charge, is moved first to send her back to school and discipline. Frightened by this, the little girl invents a monstrous accusation against her teachers. The grandmother first is contemptuous, but the sly, forceful brat becomes so hysterical that the old woman virtually is browbeaten into belief. As a result, she withdraws support from the school and, recklessly, telephones the story to mothers of the other pupils. These, too, are withdrawn and the helpless, despairing young women see their lives grow cold and cruel about them.

The grandmother refuses to listen to explanations, closes her doors to the teachers, envelops her sadistic child with maudlin safety. In all reasonableness, there has not been a more malevolent character in the

theater in years than this twelve-year-old marplot. Miss Hellman has poured into the making of the figure a resolute, unswerving honesty. And, in all reasonableness, there have not been in the theater in years any two characters more tragic than the two teachers whose lives are burned down around them by the evil of the wicked child. Ruined by slander, struck helpless by implacable gossip, they seize the only defense at hand—and they lose. They sue for libel and the cowardice of the key-witness completes their ruin.

The Misses Anne Revere and Katherine Emery play these two broken women tautly, humanly, and with an overwhelming sensitivity. Their performances are so absorbing and flawless that audiences sit before them tense, motionless, and silent, forced to complete attentiveness by what they are saying and the way they are saying it.

Scarcely less to be admired for performance, tho the character is unspeakable, is Miss Florence McGee in the rôle of the bullying, lying, venomous brat.

And, strangely, the bleakness and poignancy of the situation increase when, toward the close of the play, one of the teachers discloses that the child had had some measure of justice in her accusations. Here Miss Hellman set herself a difficult problem and solved it magnificently with the help of ten minutes of the most heart-breaking acting to be found in the theater.

This well may be the most important play of the entire season, tho six more months stretch away before the season ends. Certainly, it will be the most controversial. It must earn and merit the unchecked respect of every intelligent theatergoer.

("Letters and Art" continued on page 24)

The Ten Best Plays

(The plays in this list are the choice of this department, and are not necessarily the consensus. As more plays are produced, the list will be revised. The order of listing is alphabetical, and has no relation to merit.)

"Conversation Piece," bland words, music, and lyrics by Noël Coward, with an exceptional performance by the beloved Yvonne Printemps. At the 44th Street Theater.

"Judgment Day," Elmer Rice's violent melodrama about a European dictator and his fanatical supporters. At the Belasco Theater.

"Life Begins at 8:40," a large, opulent, sprawling musical revue studded with beautiful scenery, girls and clowns. At the Winter Garden.

"Merrily We Roll Along," a play in reverse, covering the years from 1934 to 1916 in the life of a dramatist. At the Music Box Theater.

"Personal Appearance," an impious, outrageous comedy debunking tours by film stars. The funniest show of the new season. At Henry Miller's Theater.

"Small Miracle," a melodrama, in the "Grand Hotel" technique, the action of which takes place in the lounge of a theater during the course of a play's performance. At the Golden Theater.

"The Children's Hour," poignant, intelligent tragedy of two school mistresses destroyed by the falsehoods of an evil child. The season's first play of real stature. At Maxine Elliott's Theater.

"The Distaff Side," a distinguished English play about the women in one family, and what happened to them. At the Booth Theater.

"The Farmer Takes a Wife," richly satisfying folk-play of the Erie Canal in the fifties at the time of the encroachment of the railroads. At the 46th Street Theater.

"The Great Waltz," a vast and costly operetta spending \$500,000 to prove that the elder Strauss was jealous of his son. At the Center Theater.

W. B.