

THE EXPULSION OF THE JESUITS

In the middle of the eighteenth century the famous Society of Jesus comprised about twenty thousand members. They could be found in all parts of the world. There was not a country, no matter how remote, or difficult of access, where the silent-footed Jesuit was not busily at work. The society possessed immense wealth; it controlled to a large extent the education of youths in many countries; among its members were the confessors of kings and princes; it exerted a powerful political influence in the civil administration of Catholic countries. The Jesuits were, in fact, at the height of their power and their fame when their downfall was decreed. The causes that brought this about were many and varied, but among them may be mentioned the accusation that the Jesuits converted their missionary stations into commercial centers and conducted bold speculations, more lucrative to their order than to their country. They were also accused of avoiding the payment of tithes by false representations of the conditions of their missions—a fact which the Franciscan friars first brought to the attention of Spanish royalty. The storm was long in brewing.

In France Madame de Pompadour assisted materially to expedite their downfall. She was their bitter enemy, a fact which, it has been observed, was perhaps more creditable to them than otherwise. Her hatred of them was no doubt due to the firmness with which the Jesuit confessor of Louis XV. refused the king absolution unless the Pompadour were dismissed from court. Nor did the society find so staunch an ally in Marie Therese as it might well have expected, for she had been educated by Jesuits and was one of their ardent admirers. Yet we find the Austrian empress writing to the youthful Marie Antoinette, her daughter, this cautious advice:

There is one thing more I would mention and this concerns the Jesuits. Do not engage in conversation either for or against them. You may quote me as saying that I did not wish you to speak of them either favorably or unfavorably; that you know and esteem them, that they have done much good in my countries that I should be sorry to lose them but if the court of Rome thinks it right to abolish this order I should make no objection. [*Correspondence Secrete entre Marie Therese et le Cte De Mercy-Argenteau*. Vol. I, pp. 5-6.]

As a matter of fact, the sagacity of the queen could not but recognize the menace to the states in the Jesuits' thirst for power, and in the manifold strifes and disturbances of which they were the cause.

But strangely enough, it was in the Spanish Peninsula, where their dominion seemed too firmly established ever to be uprooted, that the most powerful blow was dealt the order. Carlos III. of Spain issued a mandate for

the expulsion from his dominions in Europe, Asia, and America, of all the members of the Society of Jesus. It was further decreed that any Jesuit who should, without the king's express leave, return to Spanish dominions under any pretext whatever, even that of having resigned from the society and being absolved from the vows, would be treated as a proscrip, incurring, if a layman, the penalty of death, and, if a priest, that of confinement at the option of the ordinaries.

It was in the summer of 1767 that the Jesuits in New Spain learned of the calamity that had overtaken their order. They numbered in the provinces 678 members, of whom over half were natives of America, who had never been beyond the confines of their country. To be suddenly driven into exile, and without adequate means of support, to be deserted in this extremity by the Pope himself, who, fearing the burden of maintaining so many poverty stricken priests, forbade them to seek shelter in his dominions, was, indeed, a bitter hardship.

The carrying out of the king's mandate in the provinces of New Spain fell to the lot of the Marquis de Croix, who had been appointed viceroy the previous year. He was reputed an upright, able man, with a pronounced liking for the delicacies of the table and good wine, of which latter there was a remarkably fine supply in the viceregal cellar. That he was bold and swift of resource in emergencies, the following anecdote related of him, while he was still in Spain, will show. He had incurred the disapproval of the Inquisition and was summoned suddenly to appear before that dreaded tribunal. He obeyed the summons, but, as he was holding command at the time, he took the precaution of bringing with him a squad of soldiers and fourteen cannon. He stationed his men around the inquisitorial building, and gave orders that if more than fifteen minutes elapsed from the time he entered the building until he reappeared again, they were to fire upon and demolish the entire structure. The Inquisitors evidently deemed it prudent not to detain the doughty soldier. He was dismissed "*con muchas zalemas y carabanas.*"

It may be that he was not averse to complying to the letter with his royal master's commands in regard to the expulsion of the Jesuits from New Spain, for he appears to have done so in a most thorough manner. He invited the *audencia* to come to the palace for the purpose of conferring on confidential state matters of importance. It was an evening late in June when the meeting took place. The scene was not without a touch of the dramatic. Facing the *audencia*, De Croix produced a sealed package. He opened it; within was a second package, also sealed. Upon this was written, "Under

penalty of death you will not open this despatch till the 24th of June at nightfall." Within the package was the royal order for the expulsion of the Jesuits from the provinces, together with minute instructions concerning the methods to be employed in their arrest, even naming the men to whom this task should be given. A third envelope contained the following:

I invest you with my whole authority and royal power that you shall forthwith repair with an armed force to the houses of the Jesuits. You will seize the persons of all of them and despatch them within twenty-four hours as prisoners to the port of Vera Cruz, where they will be embarked on vessels provided for that purpose. At the very moment of such arrest you will cause to be sealed the records of said houses and the papers of such persons, without allowing them to remove anything but their prayer books and such garments as are absolutely necessary for the journey. If after the embarkation there should be found in that district a single Jesuit even if ill or dying you shall suffer the penalty of death. *Yo el Rey*. [Bancroft, *History of Mexico*, Vol. III. p. 439]

If the viceroy required an incentive to do his work thoroughly, he undoubtedly received it in the last clause of this royal mandate. De Croix decided to act at daybreak the following morning. Rumors of what was to occur reached the populace. Great indignation was everywhere expressed. The masses were disposed actively to assist the padres in fighting arrest. Whatever may have been the reputation of the Jesuits in Europe, or the dislike and distrust entertained for them there, in New Spain they appeared to have possessed the sympathy of the people. But the viceroy was prepared to meet any outbreak on the part of the populace. He stationed soldiers at street corners where the arrests had been made. The Jesuits were kept imprisoned in their houses until preparations were completed for their deportation. The people were told to disperse quietly and "that they were born to obey and hold their peace," a piece of information that had the effect of exasperating them to the extent of secretly planning a revolt against Spain, but its premature disclosure caused the revolt to be crushed before it was fully ripe.

June 28, the Jesuits were placed in coaches and with a strong guard to accompany them sent to Vera Cruz. The people flocked, weeping, around their carriages to say farewell. In some of the towns through which they passed their entry resembled a triumphant procession. The crowds that gathered to do them honor were so dense that the soldiers were frequently obliged to use the butt end of their muskets to force an opening for the coaches. When they finally arrived in Vera Cruz they had to wait before

embarking until their Jesuit brothers from more distant lying provinces joined them. While they were detained here, thirty-two of their number died.

But it was in Baja California, that the order of expulsion occasioned the greatest hardship and sorrow among the Jesuits, and excited the greatest interest among the officials in Spain. In 1697 the Jesuits had received the royal consent to enter that country at their own risk and expense; the king was not disposed to lend financial assistance to the occupation of a barren, unattractive peninsula. Yet the necessity of establishing a post in California for the protection of the Manila trade had always been apparent to the government. The plundering cruises of the English were of alarming frequency. The Jesuits therefore, in undertaking the occupancy of the country and the subjugation of the natives, rendered a great service to the Spanish government, whose own attempts in this direction had invariably resulted in failures. Under the direction of the celebrated Father Kino, the Jesuits went enthusiastically to work to raise money to enter and establish themselves in the peninsula. The first recorded contribution was \$20,000 from Don Juan Caballero y Ozio, and enormous sums from the Marquis de Villa Puente, one of Spain's great philanthropists, who, during his lifetime, gave away unostentatiously his entire wealth in the cause of his country, Christianity, and charity. From these and other private sources the Society of Jesus received such generous contributions that the famous *fondo piadoso de California* was established. This fund was of great service in later years to the Franciscans in Upper California.

The policy of the Jesuits in Baja California, had always been a more or less exclusive one. This gave rise to fantastic stories of immense wealth found in the peninsula and jealously guarded by the fathers. Exaggerated reports of the extent and richness of the pearl fisheries on the coast were freely circulated. The fact that California had supplied the Spanish crown with its richest pearls lent credence to the reports. Indeed, from the first settlement of Baja California, to the time of the expulsion of the fathers, the greatest troubles the Jesuits had to contend with were primarily due to the finding of pearls on the coast of the barren peninsula, and the subsequent traffic in them. Adventurers flocked over from the mainland in quest of these greatly prized gems; they had the Indians dive for them, voluntarily if they would, if not, under compulsion. The Indians waxed angry at this treatment, then belligerent. All this gave the padres unending trouble, even frequently endangering their lives. On the other hand, the adventurers carried away complaints against the Jesuits because of the obstacles they put in the way of the pearl traffic.

Father Venegas long ago wrote:

The many violences committed by the adventurers to satiate if possible their covetous temper have occasioned reciprocal complaints; nor will they ever cease while the desire of riches, that bane of society, predominates in the human breast.

The Spaniards' greed of gain in the New World had not materially changed since the days when Cortes told the Aztec chief that "the Spaniards were troubled with a disease of the heart for which gold was a specific remedy."

The disinterested motives of these Jesuit missionaries is fully shown by a law, which, after great difficulty, they succeeded in having passed. It prohibited inhabitants of California, including themselves and those under their control, not only from diving for pearls but from trafficking in them. While the law did not interfere with the rights of those who came over from the mainland to fish for pearls, it served as an excellent object lesson to the Indians, and taught them that the padres were not amongst them for reasons covetous or selfish. The conduct of the Jesuit missionaries in Baja California, was, throughout, worthy of deepest admiration.

While they bent all their energies towards Christianizing the natives and teaching them the useful arts of civilization, they did not forget the interests of science and learning. Whatever would further human knowledge in their observation, they noted and chronicled. One hundred years after their expulsion, all that was accurately known of the geography, natural history, geology, and climatic conditions of the barren land was gathered from the documents of these scholarly and industrious men.

Nevertheless their rule in California was based on principles which can be regarded only as pernicious in the extreme. It was not beneficial for any society, not even the most barbaric, to be subject to the rule of a class of men who have despotic power over life and liberty and who are responsible to no one for their actions. Yet such was the character of the Jesuit sway in Baja California. The Indians in the missions had no rights, privileges, or justice, save such as the fathers chose to give them. Their condition differed in no respect from that of African slaves, except that their Jesuit masters were, in the main, conscientious, pure minded, pious men. To realize more

fully the extent of the Jesuit power in California, it is only necessary to add that the soldiers forming the mission guards were enlisted at the expense of the fathers. To be sure, the enlistment was in the king's name, and the soldiers were considered to be in the royal army, but as they were dependent upon the Jesuits for their pay and could be discharged by them for disobedience of orders and also were under command of an officer chosen by the fathers, it may be said that the little army in the peninsula was entirely controlled by the missionaries, who practically owned the barren country and its miserable natives.

When the Jesuits were expelled from California it was believed that they had discovered rich mines from which they derived immense wealth. The king, it was said, expected to amass four millions of dollars from the spoliation of the padres. Instead of four millions, however, less than one hundred was found in their coffers. This fact caused not a little spicy amusement to some of the worthy fathers when they left California. As a matter of fact, the country's resources in every particular were slight. The soil was so poor the fathers had trouble raising crops sufficient for the needs of their neophytes and themselves. In many of the missions the little garden patches on rocky hillsides had been made only after infinite toil, the earth having been transported by hand from places where there was soil but no water.

Don Gaspar de Portola was appointed to the newly made office of governor of California in order that he should personally superintend the expulsion.

Retaining undoubtedly a vivid remembrance of Jesuit conduct in Paraguay in 1753, the Spanish government took precautions, the extent of which would otherwise appear not only excessive but even ludicrous. Portola was given command of fifty soldiers to expel fifteen Jesuit missionaries. He was ordered to observe the greatest secrecy regarding his movements, to effect a speedy and stealthy landing in the peninsula, and, by taking the Jesuits unawares, take them unprepared. It was feared by the authorities that the fathers would offer resistance and arm their neophytes. But the greatest fear was lest the Jesuits, receiving timely warning of the fate in store for them, would hide the treasures they were confidently believed to possess.

Portola reached Loreto in December, 1768. He was amazed to find so barren a country—a country which has been aptly described as "a mountain chain, the bald, rocky, barren ridges of which alone have risen above or are not yet sunken beneath the waters of the ocean and gulf."

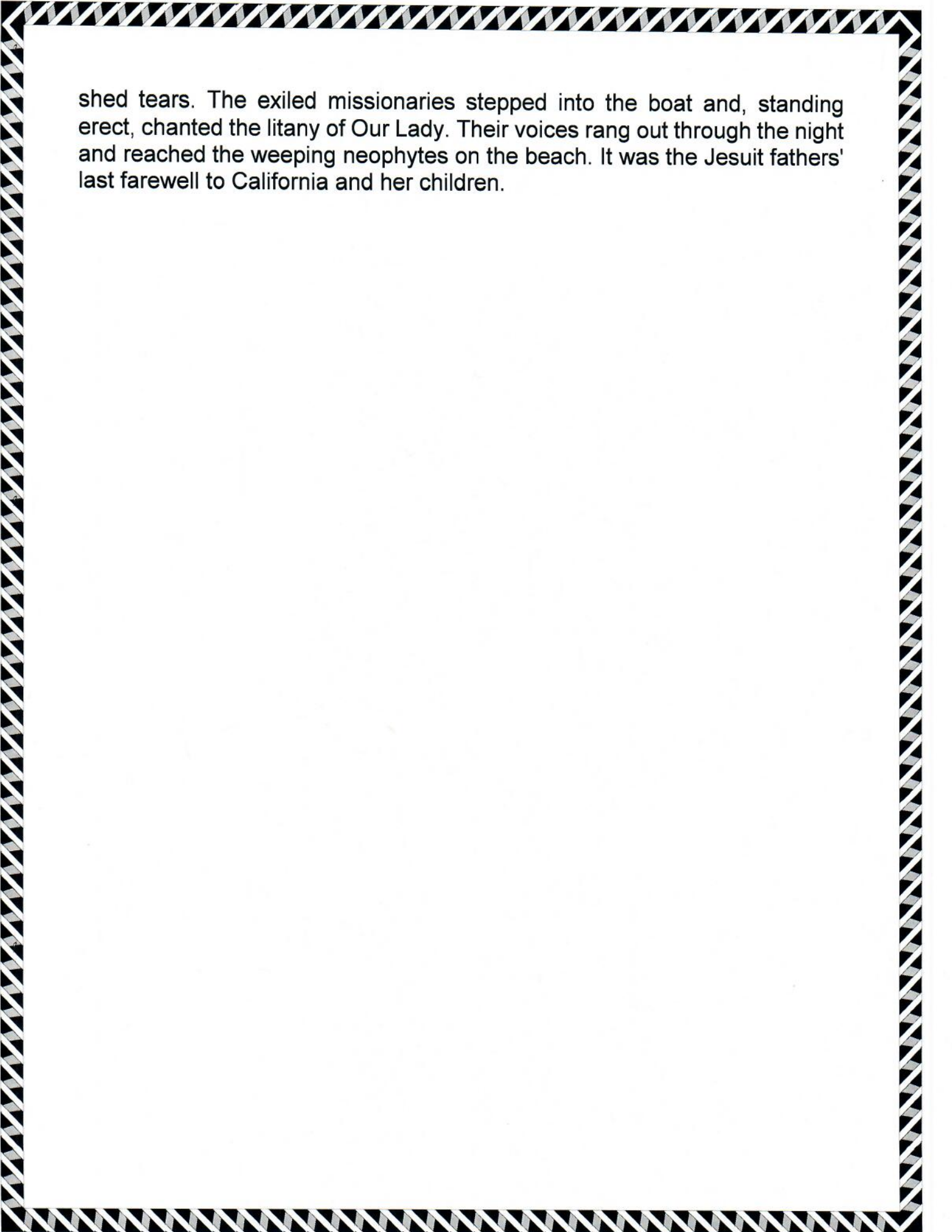
In this peninsula, extending about seven hundred miles from its southern extremity to the point where it joins upper California, there was not a river, unless the few small rivulets, flushed in the rainy seasons, could be so called. "Nothing was so common in (Baja) California, as rocks and thorn bushes, nothing so rare as moisture, wood and cool shade."

After examining the reported wealthy mines in the peninsula and discovering that they were not worth the working, Portola became not only convinced of the absurdity of the romantic tales of hidden wealth, but also of the disinterested motives which had actuated the Jesuit fathers in this land.

He addressed a letter to the president of the missions, inclosing the order of expulsion. No resistance was offered. At each mission the Jesuits bade farewell to their neophytes, and with heavy hearts departed for Loreto. They were often accompanied long distances on their way by the weeping Indians. One of the fathers who had spent seventeen years of his life in mission work in the peninsula wrote afterwards, "Not only did I weep then, but throughout the journey, and even now as I write the tears stand in my eyes."

The affection of the padres and neophytes for one another was doubtless perfectly sincere. The Indians were fed, cared for, and protected by a little band of men whose sole desire was to bring them into the fold of the church and keep them there for their souls' salvation. For over half a century they had labored faithfully in this dreary land. Many of them had grown old in their missions, and when they left, they experienced the heartaches of those who leave their homes forever.

When the fathers arrived at Loreto, the order of expulsion was read to them. They said a farewell prayer for their Indians and for themselves; then under cover of the night, to avoid a demonstration, they marched with bowed heads and heavy hearts to the beach. But in spite of this precaution, a crowd of neophytes had assembled. With cries and lamentations they kissed the friendly hands that had toiled for them so many years. They besought the padres not to desert them. The scene was a touching one. Even the governor



shed tears. The exiled missionaries stepped into the boat and, standing erect, chanted the litany of Our Lady. Their voices rang out through the night and reached the weeping neophytes on the beach. It was the Jesuit fathers' last farewell to California and her children.