

SOUTH AMERICAN REPUBLICS

THE POSITION OF THE CHURCH.

We have seen how Peru has reintroduced religious instruction into all the national schools (writes Mr A. Hilliard Atteridge in the *Month*). In the neighboring Republic of Chili the Church is in a most flourishing condition, and exercises an ever-growing influence. Its clergy has long borne a high reputation for learning, zeal, and discipline. When I met the Vicar-General of Santiago a few weeks ago in London he told me that the course of studies had now been extended, so that in the seminaries three years are given to philosophy and five to theology. Such a programme shows that there is no lack of vocations, otherwise so long a time could not be given to the formation of the clergy, in a country where there is an ever-increasing need of workers in the parishes as more and more of the people come under the direct influence of the Church. There are still certain difficulties in Chili arising from the Liberal legislation of past years, and the fact that in the Republic the Government has considerable powers of interference in Church questions. But the zeal of priests and people on the one hand and the liberally attituded successive Presidents on the other make the position a very favorable one.

Chili.

Chili possesses not only a numerous and highly educated secular clergy, but many houses of the Religious Orders, some of them very old. It was the expelled order of the Carmelites, for example, of France, and, besides them, are the solid ranks of nuns, an ever-increasing number of the laity taking an active part in Catholic work. Chili is, like Uruguay, Belgium, and the Catholic provinces of Germany, in the fruitful operation of energy and vigor. The churches are crowded at Mass, after Mass, and the large congregations in which the men, often a number of the women, take part in the services, are a beautiful sight. A devotion to the Holy Sacrament is the chief Catholic virtue of the people. Some parishes have one Mass on one year, 1912, and 1913, and many of eight days. In the last year, 1914, the number of these retreats. In the archdiocese of Santiago, from the number of men who were present was 14,276. At Talca the number was over 5000.

In every town and city there are numerous confraternities of men and women devoted to religious and charitable work. Besides the Confraternity of the Virgin of the Pill there are other organizations for the same object, often with records going back to olden days. A recent development has been the formation of social associations for improving the dwellings of the workers. These pay a small rate of interest on their capital, but their object is not money-making, but social and philanthropic work done with a Catholic ideal. In Santiago they have substituted blocks of modern up-to-date dwellings for the old houses, in which hundreds of workers and their families lived in a miserable condition. The progress of the workers is further promoted by numerous associations of the workmen themselves, which combine the advantages of a religious confraternity, an insurance society, and a club. In connection with these there are several night schools and work shops for general and technical education. The hospitals are mostly served by nuns. The hospices for the aged take the place of our English workhouses. Catholic temperance societies have been founded, pledging their members to abstinence from spirits of all kinds. Finally, the missions to the Indian tribes are being yearly extended with the help of societies founded for this special purpose.

Argentina.

In Argentina the difficulties are greater. Lay education is the system of the public schools, and the rapid opening up of vast tracts of new country, the enormous immigration, and the rapid extension of the capital have made it difficult to provide a sufficiency of priests for huge parishes and for new centres of popu-

lation. But even here there is progress. Nominally Catholic, the Government is largely controlled by the doctrinaire Liberal party. But the Liberalism that is dominant in Argentine politics is not of the persecuting type. Thus, for instance, though the national schools are organized on the secular system, there is complete freedom for Catholic schools, and the Government pays a subvention to the Salesian technical schools and model farms. Only a few years ago, when the Masonic lodges petitioned to be granted the right of constituting themselves into a legally-recognized corporation, with the power of holding property, the petition was rejected, the decree notifying the rejection, stating, amongst other reasons, that Freemasonry was hostile to the Catholic Church, which the Republic, by its Constitution, was bound to defend, and that it had for one of its objects the suppression of the Catholic schools, an object opposed to the Argentine Constitution, which guarantees the freedom of teaching.

An incident like this is enough to show how widely the Liberalism of Argentina differs from that of France or Portugal. The real weakness of the Church in the Republic arises from the indifference of so many of the men, nominal Catholics, who are only seen in a church on some great occasion. There is, however, a large and increasing body of men who are really zealous Catholics, but there are far too many of the 'slackers.' The situation is, in fact, very much what it was in France before the present revival began. But in Argentina the solid Catholic zeal of the women does something to make up for the slackness of so many of the men. One such testimony to their worth in the most unexpected place. Thus, for instance, Mr John Foster Fraser, in his recently published work, 'The Amazing Argentina, after describing Buenos Ayres as 'the most important city in the world,' tells us, only five pages further on, that the Argentine women are 'above reproach,' and that, thanks to their active influence in the theatres of Buenos Ayres, 'plays with the faintest hint of suggestiveness are at once barred.'

And among the men the revival of religion has begun. In the two Salesian churches of Buenos Ayres alone there were over 4000 Communions of men. The Most Confraternity of the Blessed Sacrament is rapidly increasing its numbers. There are several active associations of charity and the union of Catholic women and men is gaining large numbers of recruits each year. A number of Catholic politicians have placed themselves in the front rank of the social reform movement. If the Catholic deputies in the National Congress the Republic owes the initiation of several measures for improving the position of the workers. Thus to this group Argentina owes the enactment of the law abolishing the Sunday rest, and for regulating the work of women and children in the factories. It was a Catholic deputy, Dr Cantilo, who carried through the law for the organization of a Ministry of Labor; another Catholic, Dr Bas, was the author of the legislation establishing free employment agencies; and yet a third, Dr Caffratta, introduced and carried through the laws for the regulation of the drink traffic and for the improvement of workmen's dwellings. The teaching of Leo XIII. and Pius X. has fallen on fertile soil in Argentina, and the Church is publicly associated in the popular mind with this series of reforms.

In some of the Republics there is a civil marriage law, but this affects the Catholic only as it does in England, the law requiring the witnessing and registration of the marriage before the civil official as supplementary to the religious ceremony. Divorce is allowed by law in several of the Republics, but in every such case the Catholic tradition has secured that this divorce is only a legal separation. While both parties are alive the re-marriage of either of them is a breach of the law, and the contract is of no effect.

On St. Patrick's Day his Lordship Bishop Phelan was given an enthusiastic welcome home at Sale. A procession escorted his Lordship to the Cathedral, where the 'Te Deum' was sung. On the following Saturday night he was presented with addresses from the clergy and the laity in the Cathedral.