

# The Spanish Inquisition

Both painters and writers have made generous use of the Spanish Inquisition for lying propaganda. In order that fair-minded people may know the truth, the following paragraphs are submitted for consideration. They come from the pen of a non-Catholic writer, Eliza Atkins Stone.

THERE is, perhaps, no historical question more deeply overlaid with prejudice, fallacy, one may even say superstition; none as to which popular conceptions are farther removed from the facts as scholars know them.

But why, one immediately inquires,—why this widespread and long-standing delusion? The reasons are chiefly three, to wit:

First: At the time when Protestantism was fighting for its life, it found no more effective rallying cry for its forces than—*The Spanish Inquisition!* Of this, accordingly, it made the most, lavishing upon the Catholic tribunal all that wealth of lurid invective for which the early reformers are so justly famous. No exaggeration was too wild,

## NO CALUMNY TOO BLACK

for the purpose of these enthusiasts; and they succeeded in coloring not only the thought of their own time, but the thought of Protestant countries from that day to this, concerning the object of their attacks.

For, to come to our second reason, the authorities of the Holy Office in Spain, far from striving to neutralize the efforts of the opposition, rather played into its hands. In some parts of Europe, Protestantism might make head by maligning Catholic institutions; in the Peninsula, where Catholicism was still so strongly entrenched, a terrorizing policy was the most effective one for repelling Protestantism. Extravagant notions as to the horrors of the Inquisition might inflame the northern masses to revolt; in the south such notions would tend to keep the masses quiet; wherefore Spanish statesmen and ecclesiastics, engrossed by their own immediate problem, and earnestly believing it their duty to preserve the Peninsula, at almost any cost, from invasion by the doctrine producing such turmoil elsewhere, were quite content that the Inquisition should be a bogey "to fearen babes withal"; that the common people should cherish ideas, exaggerated as might be, of the terrors awaiting apostates.

A third reason for misconceptions as to the Holy Office is this. Nearly all modern Protestant chronicles of the Inquisition are

### POISONED

at the source, being chiefly drawn from a work now regarded by scholars, Protestant and Catholic alike, as utterly untrustworthy. The author of this work—one Llorente, a Spaniard—was a functionary of the Inquisition. Being discharged for misconduct, he proceeded to write a “history” of the tribunal, calumniating it in every possible way; first having destroyed records which might have disproved his assertions and to which he alone had access. In the absence of these records, it was for a long time impossible absolutely to confute him; but within the last half century facts have come to light which directly

### GIVE THE LIE

to a great number of his statements, and so discredit all the rest; his character, too, is shown to have been such that it alone should bar him from the witness-stand; and, moreover, the investigations of historians are tending more and more strongly every decade to put his testimony out of court on collateral grounds. Let a black mark go into all our mental note-books against the name Llorente.

(After a discussion of the Inquisition in France, the writer goes on to speak of the Inquisition in Spain.)

Now, then, coming at last to our chief concern, we turn our mental telescopes upon Spain in the final quarter of the fifteenth century. . . . The new Inquisitors, mark, were not, like the officials of the early Inquisition, representatives of papal authority, appointed mediately or immediately by the Holy Father. Ecclesiastics they were, to be sure; but ecclesiastics chosen by the Crown, responsible to the Crown, removable at pleasure of the Crown. Tribunals of the new order were speedily set up all over the kingdom; but hardly had they gone into operation before loud complaints were heard from the Vatican. His Holiness protested that the bull had been procured upon a very imperfect setting forth of the royal intent; that he had been betrayed into concessions “at variance with the spirit of the Fathers.” He had contemplated merely a revival of the Mediæval Inquisition; here was a tribunal embracing essential departures from its predecessor, and of these departures Sixtus thoroughly disapproved.

From this time forward the history of the Holy Office in Spain is one of the ceaseless disputes between the civil and the eccle-

siastical powers. The Popes were continually remonstrating, pleading, exhorting, threatening; to all which the sovereigns commonly gave small heed. Many eminent chroniclers indeed, Catholic and Protestant both, will have it that the tribunal is henceforth

### A POLITICAL ONE

pure and simple; but with this view other exalted authorities, both Protestant and Catholic, vehemently take issue. A fair putting of the case is perhaps this: The machinery of the Spanish Inquisition was mainly ecclesiastical; the Vatican had more or less voice in its management; but on the lever was always not the papal but

### THE ROYAL HAND

This much at least is beyond question, the tribunal was peculiar to Spain; it began its career under the definite censure of the Holy See; and the latter, from whatever motives, invariably and strongly inclined to clemency.

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Certainly no one at this time of day is going to defend torture *per se*; but we are bound to consider that there has been a complete *bouleversement* of public opinion on this point; that while torture was employed by the Inquisition, it was likewise a routine feature of criminal proceedings the Continent over.

### IN ENGLAND, TOO

as Hallam has it, "the rack seldom stood idle in the Tower during the latter part of Elizabeth's reign"; nor were it and its gruesome fellows permitted to rust in the hands of the early Stuarts,—that is to say, torture was high in English favor throughout the period during which the Holy Office most frequently resorted to it. The records of the Star Chamber and of other royal tribunals in England—which, be it remembered, were, like the Inquisition, *secret* courts—have never been thoroughly gone over; but such reports of them as we have go far to justify the apologists of the Inquisition in challenging comparison, as they do, with English as well as Continental practice in this regard.

As has been said, the Inquisition code sanctioned torture only when guilt was considered practically proven. Moreover, it could be administered only after the accused had exhausted all his means of defence; the tribunal was bound to hear every one of

his witnesses, even though these must be fetched from the ends of the earth. There could be but one application of torture in each case, and this must take place in the presence of several exalted functionaries, civil and ecclesiastic, who were to stand by, not according to the popular notion, to gloat over the agonies of the sufferer, but to see that instructions for the dread ordeal were not exceeded. After the first fifty years or so of the tribunal's existence, local courts were not permitted to use torture at all; the power was vested in the bishop of the diocese, acting jointly with the Inquisitor-General and his council.

A word here concerning

### THE DUNGEONS

of the Inquisition. Like the prisons of the past in general, most of them were, no doubt, in outrageous violation of what we—thank Heaven!—call common humanity; but—and this is the sole point with which we have to do—there exists no scintilla of evidence that they were ever one whit more dreadful than their contemporaries.

In summing up the whole matter of Inquisition procedure, we cannot do better than to note the words of a certain distinguished

### PROTESTANT THEOLOGIAN

who thus neatly puts the case: "The Inquisition applied methods that we have rejected to the detection and punishment of what we have ceased to consider crimes." And those methods, those conceptions, were fully in accord with the spirit of the age. There you have it in a nutshell.

### N. B.

The *Encyclopædia Britannica* says:

"*The Spanish Inquisition was a department of the royal government.*"—Eleventh Edition, Vol. XXV., p. 550.

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This pamphlet is summarized from "A Brief for the Spanish Inquisition, published by The Ave Maria, Notre Dame, Ind.

For a complete and scholarly discussion of the question, see "The Spanish Inquisition," by E. Vacandard. Translated by B. L. Conway. Pp. xiv+195. Paper, 60 cents.

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