

Castro of the Steel House and His Foibles

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AT THIS moment Cipriano Castro, self-crowned president of Venezuela, can say with more of truth than Louis XIV. of France said it: "I am the state." Castro is Venezuela. He has seen no part of the world outside of his own country, inside it he is absolute. The world's attention has been attracted to this South American republic, not by the possibility of a clash of arms between Venezuela and Colombia, nor by the so-called asphalt war, nor by the "On to Caracas" cry of the revolutionists, but by the man who is the cause of the noise which his country is making—Castro.

The president, or, to use the only title to which he yet has legal right, the dictator, works as silently as a servant in rubber shoes. He moves in the darkness, stealthily, as one whose intent may be challenged. He is a bit among the people. His movements have been reported to the nations, and hence the world is watching him. Just now he is preparing for the cry, "Halt!" his preparations being made with a view to at last seeing the world beyond Venezuela. For sooner or later he must follow one or another of his predecessors—Guzman Blanco, who died wealthy in Paris; Crepo, who was shot in battle; Andrade, who is now working for his living in Trinidad. It is not likely that he will depart as did his immediate predecessor, Andrade, who, having escaped through the back door of the palace as Castro and his soldiers crashed in at the front, fled to Barbados in Venezuela's only gunboat, and then, with infinite courtesy, sent the boat back to Castro with a note saying: "I return you the navy; you may need it yourself." Castro's aspirations lean rather to the Blanco method of exit and to a golden exile. Traitors in his own house tell of frequent shipments of gold sent abroad by the thrifty president. So when the people pounce upon him with a slight draft, as it were, demanding that he pay the penalty of his greed, he will not have to stop to look for his pocketbook; his wealth will have gone before him and he can fly on the instant.

Castro rules not with tongue or pen or

eyes of the ferret, mouth of cruelty. By temperament he is nervous, irritable, impatient, his excitability finding expression principally in his thumbs. Of government he has shown that he knows as much as a chief of bandits. By some he is called the Clown of Mira Flores, which needs explanation. In the heart of the capital city there is a palace of steel. The house is called Mira Flores and was the residence of Crepo when that fighting general was president. The steel extension was not built with the forethought of fire—it is earthquake proof. It has two rooms. Like compartments in a safe deposit vault, and in this strong box of a place the dictator spends most of his time. Also the Senora Castro. They come naturally by their fear of earthquakes. When the town of Caracas, years ago, was shaken from the may as a crumb from a tablecloth, Senora Castro was the only member of her family to escape the devastation. Castro himself stood on a hill outside the town and saw his abode crumble like a house of cards upon the heads of those within. Again last October the great Caracas earthquake, in the dead of the night, threw Castro from his bed. Then in his fright he jumped through a window to a paved court and broke his leg. The next day he moved from the Yellow House, the White House of Venezuela, to Mira Flores. And there, in the wing where walls, floor and ceiling are all of steel, the Castros eat and sleep. Incidentally the man who published the version in which the dictator was christened Clown of Mira Flores, one Dr. Pedro Mirarez, is at this moment languishing in the Rotunda, having been confined there since last April, when his poem first appeared—all this without trial and by the simple mandate of Castro's thumb.

That the steel house is bulletproof is an added point of merit in the dictator's eyes. That which Castro most fears is not earthquake, not nature, but humankind. Were he to camp on the summit of Vesuvius, the uncertainty of the prolongation of his career could not be greater than it is as the dictator of Venezuela. The country over which he rules is a volcano and Caracas is its crater. And when comes the



MIRA FLORES, PRESIDENT CASTRO'S RESIDENCE.

dictator sent an order for his captor to get Acosta into Caracas before the 29th that he, Castro, might have the pleasure of supervising the execution. Failing this, the order was to shoot Acosta on the 19th wherever he might be. When came the 19th the prisoner was still 200 by horse from the capital, and so Acosta, one of the brightest intellectuals and bravest soldiers in Venezuela, was made to kneel in the middle of the road, with his back to the firing squad, and thus was carried out another sentence pronounced by Castro's thumb.

To appreciate the importance of the date of this occurrence it is necessary to state that February 29 was the day on which Castro called his congress together, changed the constitution to suit his own purposes and declared himself no longer dictator, but constitutional president. The constitution forbids capital punishment. As dictator Castro might shoot Acostas by the score and his legal right to do so would only be a matter of dispute. But once he became the chief executive under the constitution such an act would be illegal beyond question and Castro, immune as dictator, would be subject to consequences as president.

Castro's own soldiers love him not. "He took away our thin uniforms," they say, "and dressed us up in cloth uniforms and caps, like French soldiers. Besides, he seldom pays us. So he is glad when we desert, simply putting new men in our places." The officers of Castro's army, however, make no complaint. For every time the dictator uses the military as the instrument for making a golden haul the officers get the drippings. To illustrate: Last fall the soldiers reported that three rich Caracas merchants were hoarding gold within their homes. The dictator ordered that each of these men be taxed \$50,000 for the "support of the government." The merchants refused to pay. Castro turned them over to certain army officers, who, having made them prisoners, kept them tied to stakes facing the sun all day and facing an electric light as fiercely bright as the sun all night. Half blinded and almost crazed by their sufferings, they at last yielded and paid the "tax."

Another case was not quite so profitable either to Castro or his military staff. A German merchant arrived in Caracas and proceeded to collect bills payable to the amount of \$12,000 in cash. Castro not only forbade the German to take the money out of the country, but demanded that it be paid over for "government support." The man was arrested and tortured until he understood that it was his money or his life, and so led the soldiers to the place where the treasure was hidden. A few weeks later one of the Kaiser's cruisers put in at La Guayra, the captain hurried over to Caracas and demanded not only the \$12,000, but the punishment of the officers who had maltreated a German subject. Castro, livid of face, liquidated on the spot, and the guilty members of his staff are still in Maracaibo prison.

Castro has not a single friend among the foreign representatives in Caracas. All the members of the diplomatic corps, on behalf of countrymen who have interests in Ven-

ezuela, watch Castro with suspicious, untrusting eyes. For the dictator has more than once openly asserted that, if he could, he would annul all concessions of land granted to foreigners by his predecessors, and sell the same over again to others. He actually did annul concessions enjoyed by the various Orinoco River companies—all American concerns. But he has not yet succeeded in selling these over again.

For the sum of \$40,000, however, he granted a concession of a part of an American asphalt company's mines in the state of Bermudez. But the mines thus disposed of belong to the asphalt company, both by right of a concession of many years' standing and by purchase in fee simple. Hence Castro had sold property which an American corporation owned outright. This, in a nutshell, was the cause of the asphalt war. In the first days of this industrial fight, the then United States minister, Mr. Leomis, in a formal conference with Castro, suggested that Venezuelans should protect American interests in their country in order to encourage the investment of American capital in the development of Venezuelan industries. Mr. Leomis concluded with the statement that Castro's attitude toward the asphalt company was opposed to the policy just outlined, and was calculated to antagonize Yankee capital. To

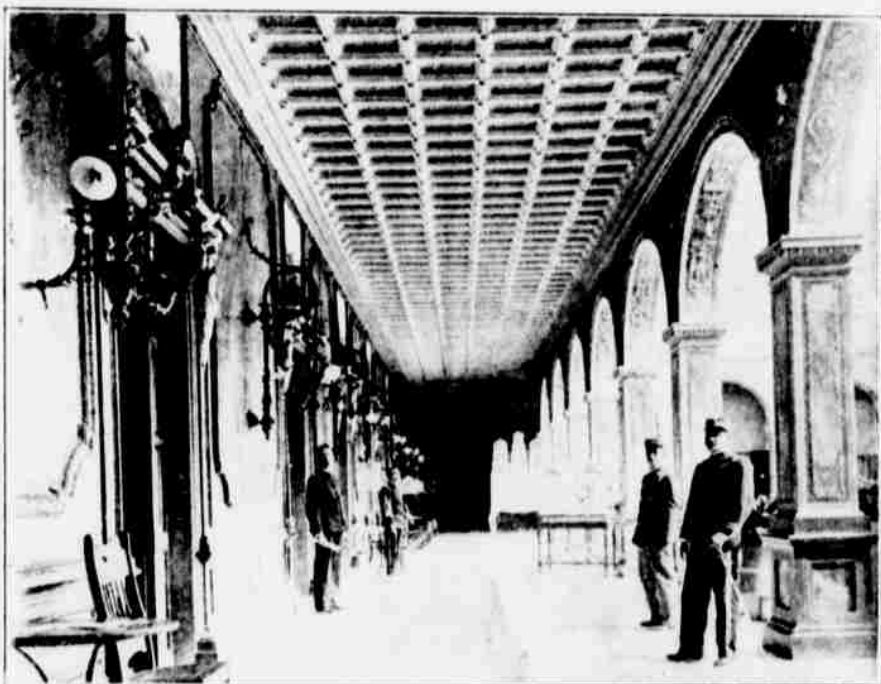
which Castro, in his reply, gave this token of international courtesy:

"Well, Mr. Leomis, those American asphalt people are getting very excited. Take them to a saloon and give them some ice cream to cool them off."

Even the course of justice is perverted as Castro wills. The dictator recently informed the attorney general that his legal arguments in the famous asphalt dispute ought to be in favor of the concessionaire's enemies. The attorney general, however, handed down an opinion in favor of the concessionaire. The upshot of the matter was that the attorney general was compelled to resign, and a lawyer who agreed to think with Castro's mind was appointed in his place.

The law of Venezuela commands the judge of the superior court in each federal district to inspect prisons, ascertain through the prisoners themselves how their cases are progressing, hear their complaints and provide remedies. The judge of the Caracas district has very recently not only complied with this law, but has made public the result of his investigations. He mentions facts proving that under Castro's government justice does not run in the path of law, that there are individuals in the prisons who were committed by Castro's agents instead of by the courts; that a number of newspaper men in the prisons have been waiting for months, and are still waiting, for trial, and that the most shocking abuses are practiced within the prison walls. Following up the publication of these revelations, the judge advised the lower judges to proceed at once with the delayed cases and to order the release of all prisoners unlawfully deprived of their liberty. His orders will not be carried out, for Castro has just thrown him into prison to share the fate of those whom he tried to help.

GILSON WILLETS.



ONE OF THE CORRIDORS IN MIRA FLORES.

sword, but with his thumb. As he moves that thumb, to the left, to the right, so is the law; as Simon said: "Thumbs up, thumbs down." One day last year, in the Prado, a man named Lopez fired a pistol point blank in Castro's face. By a miracle the bullet went astray. When the would-be assassin was brought before Castro, the dictator jerked his thumb toward the door and Lopez was thrown into that Black Hole of Caracas, the Rotunda. Recently, when the judge of the supreme court inspected the prison, none of the prison authorities could remember having seen Lopez after the first days of his incarceration. "Escaped," said the governor of the prison, but offered no proofs. The verdict of Caracas, when the judge told the tale, was "Murdered and buried in the jail." Perhaps Castro had jerked his thumb downward.

The dictator has the face of a tired man.

eruption the first victim will be Castro. A revolutionary army is mobilizing in the field. Colombian revolutionists are pouring over the border to lend a hand to their Venezuelan brothers, with the understanding that the attention will be reciprocated when Castro is overthrown and Colombia becomes the seat of war.

That Venezuela has a revolutionary party is, of course, not remarkable. The conservative element of one administration invariably becomes the revolutionary element of the next administration. But the particular discontented party which is now in the field has a special grudge against Castro. The dictator shot the revolutionist's leader, General Acosta. Now, in that country, where such leaders are as thick as tramps along a railroad, never before has one been punished by death. But Castro said: "If ever my soldiers capture Acosta he shall be shot!" So last February, when the revolutionist was taken in his lair, the

Latter Day Saints of Iowa

DOW CITY, Ia., Sept. 17.—To the Editor of The Bee: In your issue of the 15th inst. I notice an article over the signature of Norman W. Lawhorn entitled "Mormon Stronghold in Southwestern Iowa," which, in the main, is quite fair, though there are some serious errors therein which should be corrected in justice to our people, and, believing that you wish to treat all fairly and misrepresent none, I wish to state as follows: The name under which our church is incorporated is "The Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints," and, as the name signifies, we are disciples of Jesus Christ, though we believe that Joseph Smith, the seer, was called of God to do a special work. We are believers in

the Book of Mormon and the Doctrine and Covenants, but hold that they are only auxiliary to the bible; that the bible is the book of books and that it would be just as consistent to call us bibles as to call us Mormons.

Joseph Smith of Lamoni, Ia., is, as stated, the president of the church, but he is the only one now living through whom a revelation can come to the church that would be binding upon the body. When a revelation is received it is carefully and prayerfully examined by each and all the quorums of the church, and diligently compared with the teachings of the bible and all former revelations given to the church, and it must harmonize with them or it would not be received. After this is done it is submitted to the conference as a body, together with the decisions of the several

quorums, and when adopted by them it becomes a law to the church.

The ministers of our church have always proclaimed against polygamy and its kindred evils, both in public and in private, as its record will show. Lamoni is not Zion, but one of its stakes. The stakes at Independence, Mo., and Lamoni, Ia., were organized last spring soon after the adjournment of general conference, and the minutes of the whole procedure were published in our church papers last summer, and there is nothing more of vital importance to come out next spring.

Joseph Smith, the seer, never belonged to any church but that of the Latter Day Saints, though at one time in his youth he was favorably impressed with the teachings of the Methodists. Respectfully,
CHARLES E. BUTTERWORTH.



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