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Signs of the Times

STRIFE AND RELIGION IN MEXICO

ONLY those who have lived in Mexico can appreciate the evil state of the country and people. One word explains much of the moral, political, and physical distress in which they are found—the word *ignorance*. The vast majority of the Mexicans are ignorant of God, ignorant of Christian ideals, ignorant of the best method of civilized government, ignorant of the highest intellectual culture. They have been governed by a despotic hand; the Roman Catholic Church has never taught them to think for themselves, or to understand the highest truths; honesty and morality have not been inculcated as rules of life; the large majority have been kept in poverty and subjection. For these reasons, the Mexicans can not appreciate the high motives that have actuated the American Government in refusing to recognize a usurper like Huerta as president of our neighboring republic, nor can they understand any but a selfish reason for wishing to enter upon or to avoid a war.

One of the most important factors in the conflicts in all Latin-American countries is the religious question. Conservatives *vs.* Radicals, Federalists *vs.* Constitutionalists also divide along the line of Clericals *vs.* Liberals.

On the clerical side are found the land baron and the priest, who are interested in keeping the common people (peasants or peons) in a position of subordination and ignorance. These religious and political autocrats fear that the exercise of the right of private judgment and higher education will produce personal independence and a revolt from the dictation of despotism—religious and political.

On the other hand, the Liberals recognize that the deplorable condition of the country is due to lack of education, to the low condition of the priesthood, and to the spirit of oppression and intolerance. Liberals often go to extremes in heaping ridicule on the church, and in accusing all religions of being obsolete relics of a former age. Sometimes, however, they favor Protestantism as the

The editors seek to preserve accuracy and to manifest the spirit of Christ in the pages of this REVIEW, but do not acknowledge responsibility for opinions expressed, nor for positions taken by contributors of signed articles in these pages.—EDITORS.

Ibiya—A West African Pastor

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For Fifty Years a Missionary of the Presbyterian Board in West Africa



AMONG the thousands of native Christians with whom I was associated during my life in equatorial West Africa were many men and women who lived beautiful lives. They held their quiet way in the midst of evil that stalks more openly than it dares in Christian lands, and were pure and upright, even tho they were without many of the "Means of Grace" by which men are aided in civilized lands. A few of these men were called into prominence, because of their natural abilities. One whose memory I revere became the able, devoted, and efficient pastor of a native church. His name was Ibiya, of Corisco.

From the very beginning of the Presbyterian Mission in West Africa the missionaries worked to raise up a native ministry; but no formal arrangements were made; there was no regular curriculum; no stated school; no designated teacher. Each missionary, from among the employees of his station, or the school assistants, found some one whom he adopted as a *protégé*, and to whom he gave special instruction. The training was irregular, as to time, because of the missionary's many other duties. When I joined the mission, on Corisco Island, in September, 1861, each missionary had his special *protégé*, some of whom

had been ordained as ruling elders, or were teachers, candidates, and evangelists. The irregular teaching made the ordination of some of them only a far-off possibility, and their education in English attracted European traders, who offered them positions as clerks at wages far beyond what the mission could ever give. These were powerful seductions, to which most of them yielded. In their new positions the compulsory (in those days) handling of rum, even if they did not drink it, and the almost inevitable Sunday work, broke their good resolutions to maintain Christian characters, and they sadly drifted away. Ibiya was one of those who resisted all such seductions.

In the early history of the church of Corisco, the missionaries, almost of necessity, exercised the functions of both preaching and ruling elders. There was but one church organization on the island, located at the central station, Evangasimba, of which Rev. J. L. Mackey was pastor. At the northern and southern ends of the island, Elongo and Ugobi, were chapels in which regular Sunday services were held, and the pastors, Messrs. Clemens and Dettler, also were ruling elders in the Evangasimba church.*

When I arrived in 1861, Mr. Ibiya was an elder in the Evangasimba

*This holding of ruling elderships by the missionaries finally became an evil, resulting in the abuse of power.

church. He had been sent as an evangelist to a point, Mbangwe, on the northern shore of Corisco Bay, about eighteen miles from the island. He was married to an unusually bright young woman, who had been educated in Mrs. Mackey's Girls' School. Ibiya had already shown that he had completely risen above native superstitions and heathen practises, among which was a secret society for men. The object of this society was the government, especially, of women, and the settlement of tribal disputes. Knowing that their commands simply as *men* would not be obeyed, the members shrouded themselves with secrecy and oaths, and a claim that the society's decrees were dictated by a spirit, Ukuku. Denial of this belief, or exposure of its secrets, was followed by instant death. All young men were initiated into this society, and when any became a Christian, tho the Church required him to leave the society, it did not require a revelation of its secrets. So complete had been Ibiya's break from heathenism, however, that, of his own accord, he felt he ought to expose the falsity of Ukuku. His life was saved only by the prompt intervention of Messrs. Clemens and Mackey, who had been accorded, by the Benga tribe, positions equal to that of chieftainship. Ibiya was advised not unnecessarily to antagonize the heathen element, and yielded to the missionaries' advice. Something was, I think, lost, in the moral effect of his brave action.

Elder Ibiya showed his protest against custom, also, in another way. Rich polygamists had so bought up young girls in the marriage-market, that some Christian young men ac-

tually could not obtain wives. For them, marriage is indispensable. (I never knew, in the mission, an unmarried native woman, and but one voluntary male celibate!) The mission, therefore, paid the "dowry" price for a number of school-girls, and, as their guardians, allowed desirable Christian young men to choose each a wife from these, in case the young woman also assented. Mr. Ibiya had obtained his wife in this way; but her parents' cupidity was aroused, and they demanded that he should pay them for their daughter. Thereupon he advised the mission to give away no more wives, but to require the Christian young men to repay, from their wages, the "dowry" that the mission had given. This advice was followed for some years until abuses caused the entire plan to be abandoned. By that time, also, the church law had come into operation to the effect that Christian parents should not "sell" their daughters into marriage.

With an appreciation of the industrial side of Christianity greater than was then understood by his missionary teachers, Ibiya, on his own suggestion, inaugurated an agricultural community at Mbangwe, where Christians and others wishing to emerge into civilization might escape from rum and other temptations of trade. A large tract of land was secured and diligently planted with cacao and palm trees and rubber vines, and here the settlers might work and escape from the inevitable dishonest debts of the traders' "trust" system. Natives were obliged to carry their own products to the white man, and were forced to take rum in payment. To such a plan no ob-

jection would now be raised by the mission, but in those days the reformer Ibiya was criticized by his white teachers for "commercializing" himself, consequently this helpful plan was abandoned.

Many years after Ibiya was licensed as a preacher, and when, because of deaths and removals to America, the Presbytery of Corisco was about to be without a quorum, Mr. Ibiya was ordained to the ministry, on April 5, 1870, in order to save the organic life of the Presbytery.

The location of the mission on an island had been with the ideal thought that the ocean would be free from the malaria of the mainland; the three stations, Ugobi, for a Benga Boys' School; Evangasimba, for the church and a girls' school, and Elongo, for a mainland boys' school, would relieve the sense of isolation and afford comforting companionship. The educated Christian boys would be expected to go as evangelists to the mainland. But the plan failed. The island proved as malarial as the mainland; the Benga young men were not safe among the other tribes; and the mainland boys, when they returned to their homes, were "prophets without honor." So the plan was abandoned. Ugobi's Benga school was combined with Elongo; later, Evangasimba was transferred to Benita; leaving only Mr. and Mrs. De Heer at the one station, Elongo. Their removal, later, to Benita, was hastened by an act of Mr. Ibiya's. Mr. De Heer had preached an earnest sermon, urging the Bengas to more active work, rebuking them for seeming to depend on white aid, and closing by

saying: "What will you do if I should go away?" Just what he intended by that I do not know. But, Mr. Ibiya, in his prompt, bold, and somewhat curt manner, took it as "a dare" and replied: "Go away, and we Bengas will take care of ourselves!" Not long after, in 1877, Mr. De Heer did remove to Benita, and Mr. Ibiya was appointed in charge of the Corisco church and school, and carried them on successfully.

Mr. Ibiya had four sons and a daughter. One of the older sons, who was wayward, and had fallen into drinking habits, was found dead in a ravine not far from his Mbangwe home. All that was known was that he had been drinking with an employee of the Spanish Administrator on Elobi Island, and had gone on a journey with the latter to the mainland. That employee testified that the young man was drunk, and had fallen into the ravine. In his fatherly sorrow, Mr. Ibiya did not believe that, and charged the employee with having killed his son. When the Administrator acquitted his employee, Mr. Ibiya wrote him an indignant letter, and the Spaniard punished him by exiling him to prison on the island of Fernando Po. The mission appointed me to write a respectful letter there to the Governor, who paroled Mr. Ibiya; and the pastor then diligently used his liberty in evangelistic itinerations on that island. A year later he was released.

After Mr. Ibiya's death, the Corisco affairs were carried on by natives from Benita, until his youngest son, Bodumba, completed his theological course; and since his ordination, he has continued his father's work.