

HERETICS!

For those who don't remember the Inquisition, which most experts estimate took the lives of between 50 and 120 million people, a common form of punishment for a transgressor was to be burned alive in a ceremony called the "auto de fe." This was one of the most sacred and celebrated festivals of the Church: the burning of heretics.

For more information on the Inquisition, SCROLL DOWN:



A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE INQUISITION

Previous to the reign of Constantine, or to the union of Church and State, heresy and spiritual offenses were punished by excommunications only; but shortly after his death capital punishments were added. Theodosius is generally allowed to have been the first of the Roman Emperors who pronounced heresy to be a capital crime. But the inquisitors at that time did not belong to the clerical order, they were laymen appointed by Roman prefects. Priscillian, the Spanish heretic, was put to death about 385. Justinian in 529 enacted penal laws against heretics, and as centuries rolled onward, the proceedings against them were marked by increasing severity. It was not, however, as we have just seen, until the thirteenth century that the court of Inquisition was established by canon-law. Then it became a criminal tribunal, charged with the detection, prosecution, and punishment of heresy, apostasy, and other crimes against the established faith.

Whether Dominic or Innocent is to have the credit of the invention, it evidently had its origin in the Albigensian war. The papal legate discovered that the open slaughter of heretics would never accomplish their utter extermination. This difficulty led to the creation of a new fraternity, called the order of the Holy Faith; the members of which

were bound by solemn oaths to employ their utmost powers for the repression of free inquiry in matters of religion and for maintaining the unity of the faith, for the destruction of all heretics and for the rooting out of all heresy from the homes, the hearts, and the souls of men. But it was reserved for Gregory IX., in the Council of Toulouse, to fix the establishment of the Inquisition in the form of a tribunal, and at the same time to give it positive laws.

This terrible tribunal was gradually introduced into the Italian states, into France, Spain, and other countries; but into the British islands it never was allowed to force its way. In France and Italy it required strenuous and persevering efforts to organize and establish it; Germany successfully resisted a permanent Inquisition; in Spain, however, though it met with some opposition at first, it speedily gained a footing, and in time attained a magnitude which, from a variety of causes, it never reached in any other country. Gradually the authority of the inquisitors was extended, and they were called upon to pronounce judgment, not only upon the words and actions, but even upon the thoughts and intentions of the accused. During the fourteenth century, its progress was steady, whilst its rigor and energy were continually on the increase. But it was not till the close of the fifteenth century; when Isabella, wife of Ferdinand of Arragon, had ascended the throne of Castile, and when the different kingdoms of Spain — Castile, Navarre, Arragon, and Portugal — were united under these sovereigns, that the Inquisition became general in the country, and assumed that form which it retained until the period of its dissolution in 1808. ¹

THE INTERNAL PROCEEDINGS OF THE INQUISITION

Under this head, as all know now, the darkest deeds, the most irresponsible tyranny and inhuman cruelties that ever blackened the annals of mankind, might be written; but lengthy details, however painfully interesting, would be out of place in our "Short Papers;" so we will content ourselves with a few brief statements and extracts. No tribunal, we may safely affirm, so regardless of justice, humanity, and every sacred relationship in life, ever existed in the dominions of heathenism or Mahometanism.

When a man was slightly suspected of heresy, spies, called the Familiars of the Inquisition, were employed narrowly to watch him, with the view of discovering the least possible excuse for handing him over to the tribunal of the Holy Office. The man may have been a good Catholic, for Llorente assures us that nine-tenths of the prisoners were true to the Catholic faith; but, perhaps, he was suspected of holding liberal opinions, or he may have shown in conversation that he knew more of theology than the illiterate monks, or differed with them on some point of doctrine. Any of these things would be enough to create suspicion; for nothing was more to be dreaded than new light or truth; he was now marked and denounced by the familiars.

At midnight a knock is heard, the suspected man is ordered to accompany the messengers of the Holy Office. His wife and family know what that means; their distress is great; they must now take a last farewell of the beloved husband and the beloved father. Not a word of entreaty or of remonstrance dare be breathed. Thus suddenly and

unexpectedly this frightful institution pounced upon its victims. Wives gave up their husbands, husbands their wives, parents their children, and masters their servants, without a question or a murmur. Terror constituted the great element of its power. No man, from the monarch to the slave, knew when the knock might come to his door. An impenetrable secrecy characterized all the proceedings of this institution. This feeling of insecurity and the workings of the imagination lent their aid to exaggerate the fearful reality.

Neither rank, nor age, nor sex, afforded any defense against its watchful vigilance and its pitiless severity. The prisoner, the helpless victim, is now within the gates of the Inquisition; and few who ever entered there left it absolved and acquitted; not more, it is said, than one in a thousand. Certain forms were gone through as to the question of the alleged guilt of the accused, but all were a gross mockery of justice. "The court sat in profound secrecy; no advocate might appear before the tribunal; no witness was confronted with the accused; who were the informers, what the charges, except the vague charge of heresy, no one knew. The suspected heretic was first summoned to declare on oath that he would speak the truth, the whole truth, of all persons living or dead, with himself, or like himself, on suspicion of heresy, or Waldensianism. If he refused, he was cast into a dungeon, the most dismal, the most foul, the most noisome, in those dreary ages.

No falsehood was too false, no craft too crafty, no trick too base, for this deliberate, systematic, moral torture which was to wring further confession against himself, denunciation against others. It was the deliberate object to break the spirit; the prisoner's food was to be slowly, gradually, diminished till body and soul were prostrate. He was then to be left in darkness, solitude, and silence." The next part of the procedure of the Holy Office in these secret prisons was the application of bodily torture. The helpless victim was charged with the culpable concealment and denial of the truth. In vain did he affirm that he had answered every question fully and honestly to the utmost extent of his knowledge; he was urged to confess if ever he had entertained an evil thought in his heart against the church, or the Holy Office, or anything else they chose to name. No matter what answer he gave, he was denounced as an obstinate heretic. After some hypocritical expressions as to their love for his soul, and their sincere desire to deliver him from error, that he might obtain salvation, a vast apparatus of torturing instruments were shown to him; the rack must now be applied to make him confess his sin.

THE APPLICATION OF TORTURE

Were it not that truth and impartial history demand that the real nature of the papacy should be told, we would much rather not describe, even in the briefest way, those scenes of torture; but few of our young readers in these peaceful times have any idea of the cruel character of popery, and of its thirst for the blood of God's saints. And that nature, let it be remembered, is unchanged. As late as 1820, which may be said to be our own day, when the Inquisition was thrown open in Madrid by the orders of the Cortes, twenty-one prisoners were found in it: not one of them knew the name of the city

in which he was; some had been confined for three years, some a longer period, and not one knew perfectly the nature of the crime of which he was accused. One of these persons was to have suffered death the following day by the Pendulum. This method of torture is thus described. The condemned is fastened in a groove, upon a table, on his back, suspended above him is a pendulum, the edge of which is sharp, and it is so constructed as to become longer with every movement. The victim sees this implement of destruction swinging to and fro above him, and every moment the keen edge approaches nearer and nearer; at length it cuts the skin of his face, and gradually cuts through his head, until life is extinct." This was a punishment of the Secret Tribunal in 1820, and may be so today in some places in Spain and Italy!

The penances and punishments to which the accused were subjected, in order to obtain such a confession as the inquisitors desired, were many and various; the rack was usually the first. The naked arms, to which a small hard cord was fastened, were turned behind the back, heavy weights were tied to the feet; and then the sufferer was drawn up by the action of a pulley to the height of the place he was in. Having been kept suspended for some time, he was suddenly let down with a jerk to within a little distance of the floor; this done several times, the joints of the arms were dislocated, whilst the cord, by which he was suspended, cut through the skin and flesh, and penetrated to the bone; and by means of the weights appended to the feet, the whole frame was violently strained. This species of torture was continued for an hour and sometimes longer, according to the pleasure of the inquisitors present, and to what the strength of the sufferer seemed capable of enduring. The torture by fire was equally painful. The prisoner being extended on the floor, the soles of his feet were rubbed with lard, and placed near the fire, until, writhing in agony, he was ready to confess what his tormentors required. A second time the judges doomed their victims to the same torture, to make them own the motives and intentions of their hearts for their confessed conduct or sayings; and a third time, that they might reveal their accomplices or abettors.

When cruelties failed to wring a confession, artifices and snares were resorted to. Persons were sent into the dungeons, pretending to be prisoners like themselves, who ventured to speak against the Inquisition, but only with the view of ensnaring others that they might witness against them. When the accused was held to be convicted, either by witnesses or by his own forced confession, he was sentenced according to the heinousness of his offense. It might be to death, to perpetual imprisonment, to the galleys, or to flogging. Those sentenced to death by fire were allowed to accumulate, that the sacrifice of a great number at once might produce a more striking and terrible effect.

THE AUTO DE FE

The cruel death by which the Inquisition closed the career of its victims was styled in Spain and Portugal as *AUTO DE FE*, or "Act of Faith," being regarded as a religious ceremony of peculiar solemnity; and to invest the act with greater sanctity, the cruel deed was always done on the Lord's day. The innocent victims of this papal barbarity were led forth in procession to the place of execution. They were dressed in the most

fantastic manner. On the caps and tunics of some were painted the flames of hell, and dragons and demons fanning them to keep them brisk for the heretics; and the Jesuits thundering in their ears that the fires before them were nothing to the fires of hell which they would have to endure for ever.

If any brave heart attempted to say a word for the Lord, or in defense of the truth for which he was about to suffer, his mouth was instantly gagged. The condemned were then chained to stakes. Any of the persons confessing that he was a true Catholic and wished to die in the Catholic faith, had the privilege of being strangled before he was burned; but those who refused to claim the privilege, were burnt alive, and reduced to ashes.

A quantity of furze, sometimes green, and pieces of wood were laid around the bottom of the stakes and set on fire. Their sufferings were indescribable. The lowest extremities of the body were sometimes actually roasted before the flames reached the vital parts. And this appalling spectacle was beheld by crowds of people of both sexes, and of all ages, with transports of joy; so demoralized were the people by Romanism. For upwards of four centuries the Auto de Fe was a national holiday in Spain, which its kings and queens, princes and princesses, witnessed in the pomp of royalty.

According to the calculations of Llorente, compiled from the records of the Inquisition, it appears that from the year 1481 to 1808 this tribunal condemned, in Spain alone, upwards of three hundred and forty one thousand persons. And if to this number be added all who suffered in other countries, then under the dominion of Spain, what would the total number be? Torquemada, on being made Inquisitor-general of Arragon in 1483, burned alive, to signalize his promotion to the Holy Office, no less than two thousand of the prisoners of the Inquisition. Sovereigns, princes, royal ladies, learned men magistrates, prelates, ministers of state, were boldly and fearlessly accused and tried by the Holy Office. But the Lord knows them all — He knows the sufferers, He knows the persecutors, He knows how to reward the one and how to judge the other. The dark deeds of those secret dungeons, the pitiful wail of the helpless sufferers, the cruel mockings of the unaccountable Dominicans, must all be revealed before that throne of inflexible justice, of overwhelming purity. The pope and his college of cardinals, the abbot and his fraternity of monks, the inquisitor-general and his gaolers, tormentors, and executioners, must all appear before "the great; white throne" — the judgment-seat of Christ.

There we leave these wicked men, thankful that we have not to judge them, and perfectly content with the Lord's decisions. Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?

He who rebuked His disciples for entertaining the thought of calling down fire on the Samaritans will judge them by His own standard. He then placed on record what should have been a guide to His people in all ages.

He rebuked the disciples, and said, "[Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of. For the Son of man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them.](#)" (Luke 9:55, 56.)

It may be necessary just to state here, that we do not consider all who suffered by the Inquisition to be martyrs, or even Christians. The crimes of which the inquisitors took cognizance were heresy in all its different forms; such as Judaism, Mahometanism, sorcery, polygamy, apostasy; besides, we have not the privilege of knowing the final testimony of the sufferers. It was quite different with the martyrs under the heathen emperors. At the same time, it is impossible not to be strongly moved with horror as well as compassion, in reading the histories of that dark and diabolical period.

The reader has now before him the commencement and the general character of the Inquisition; individual cases of its cruelty will come before us in the progress of our history. Next in order to be noticed, however briefly, are the new orders of monks which sprang out of the same memorable Albigensian war. *Miller's Church History*, Chapter 26, pgs 641-648.