

South America— Land of Plenty

The Monsignor L. G. Ligutti of Des Moines, director of the National Catholic Rural Life Conference, recently flew to Colombia for the first international conference of this sort on South American soil. From one of his forthright letters captioned "Andean Notes—Personal and Non-Official," we have lifted a few paragraphs, without having asked his permission. This may not be strict protocol, but we hope he won't mind.—Ed.

"IT'S true here as elsewhere. The more God puts into a piece of ground, the less it is used. Haiti is no bigger than Vermont, with a population of 3,000,000, 90 per cent rural, and 98 per cent very poor. Practically all are descendants of African slaves. Haiti is one-third of Hispaniola. The other two-thirds is taken up by the Dominican Republic. Columbus discovered it in December, 1492. It became a French colony at the end of the 17th century. The importation of African slaves from all over Africa and their subsequent sufferings and death by the thousands furnishes no boastful record for Christianity. It was early in 1800 before independence was achieved, but turmoils have been the order of the day, with U. S. Marines ruling for all practical purposes from 1915 to 1934. We are so prone to forget history and overlook what others term U. S. imperialism and "big stick" policy. We wonder at the terrifically high illiteracy rate on the island. We are amazed at the unproductivity of its agriculture, at the low income of its farmers (approximately \$20 a year), at the Voodoo practices . . .

A Profusion of Flowers

"Agricultural production is varied. It's a tropical country—sea level, and up to 10,000 feet mountains, with steep slopes, small valleys, heavy rainfall or hardly any at all. Some of the most delicious fruits are grown—like the creamy Kashima or the pulpy apple like Kaimi, mangoes, coconuts, bananas, excellent coffee; in the French days, grapes; sugar cane at sea level . . . and everywhere a profusion of flowers.

"There is an American chap by the name of Lee, formerly with United Fruit. He runs a 35 acre nursery, chiefly flowers but also vegetables and fruits. Most assuredly, it's the roughest mountainside, rocky and submarginal, but he is a real producer of quality stuff. As we walked among the little beds I remarked, "It's not God's fault if good things are not produced for human consumption." Step across his property line and there is nothing but wiry grass and unsightly undergrowth, or else erosion."

Conference Won Confidence

At the conference which delighted the village of Manizales, Colombia, in January, Bishop Larrain of Chile told 408 delegates from 25 countries there could be no true "Christian order" while immense land holdings remained in the hands of a few individuals when vast multitudes were deprived of almost everything. This address was widely commented upon abroad and was hailed as "a new approach of the church in Latin America toward problems of the working man," according to a report to The New York Times.

Bishop Larrain presented the view of the Church as championing private ownership when it evolves as a natural consequence of work and when it is "an efficacious means to insure the dignity of man and progress of the human being." He pointed out that Marxism cries, "No

proprietors," but the Church answers, "Everybody a proprietor."

This important spokesman endorsed the principle of profit sharing as a means to avoid antagonisms between capital and labor, and said "The social doctrine of the church makes it imperative for Christians all over the world to prevent suffering and insecurity among workers."

Heartening to people of all faiths should be his summation: "Spiritual redemption means to proclaim not only in doctrine but in practice the defense of the dignity of man, the defense of the dignity of Christians, and the defense of justice and truth."