

# OUR RESPONSIBILITY IN MEXICO

By THEODORE ROOSEVELT

## Reciting a Long List of Charges, Backed by Affidavits, Against the Soldiers of Carranza and Villa, Mr. Roosevelt Flatly Declares That the United States Is "Partially (and Guiltily) Responsible for Some of the Worst Acts Ever Committed Even in the Civil Wars of Mexico."

**A**n astonishing proof of the readiness of many persons to pay heed exclusively to words and not at all to deeds is supplied by the statement of the defenders of this Administration that President Wilson has "kept us out of war with Mexico" and has "avoided interference in Mexico." These are the words.

The deeds have been: first, an unbroken course of more or less furtive meddling in the internal affairs of Mexico carried to a pitch which imposes on this nation a grave responsibility for the wrongdoing of the victorious factions; and, second, the plunging of this country into what was really a futile and inglorious little war with Mexico, a war entered into with no adequate object, and abandoned without the achievement of any object whatever, adequate or inadequate.

To say that we did not go to war with Mexico is a mere play upon words. A quarter of the wars of history have been entered into and carried through without any preliminary declaration, of war and often without any declaration of war at all.

The seizure of the leading seaport city of another country, the engagement and defeat of the troops of that country, and the retention of the territory thus occupied for a number of months, constitute war; and denial that it is war can only serve to amuse the type of intellect which would assert that Germany has not been at war with Belgium because Germany never declared war on Belgium. President Wilson's war only resulted in the sacrifice of a score of American lives and a hundred or two of the lives of Mexicans; it was entirely purposeless, has served no good object, has achieved nothing, and has been abandoned by President Wilson without obtaining the object because of which it was nominally entered into; it can therefore rightly be stigmatized as a peculiarly unwise, ignoble and inefficient war; but it is war nevertheless.

This has been bad enough. But the general course of the Administration toward Mexico has been worse and even more productive of wide and far-reaching harm. Here again word-splitters may, if they desire, endeavor to show that the President did not "interfere" in Mexico; but if so they would be obliged to make a fine discrimination between interference and officious and mischievous intermeddling.

Whether it is said that President Wilson interfered in Mexico or merely that he meddled in Mexican affairs so as to produce much evil and no good and to make us responsible for the actions of a peculiarly lawless, ignorant, and bloodthirsty faction is of small importance. The distinction is one merely of words. The simple fact is that thanks to President Wilson's action—and at times his inaction has been the most effective and vicious form of action—this country has become partially (and guiltily) responsible for some of the worst acts ever committed even in the civil wars of Mexico.

When Mr. Wilson became President of the United States, Huerta was President of Mexico. On any theory of non-interference with the affairs of our neighbors, or any theory of avoiding war and of refusing to take sides with or become responsible for the deeds of blood-stained contending factions, it was the clear duty of President Wilson to accept Mr. Huerta as being President of Mexico.

Unless President Wilson was prepared actively to interfere in Mexico and to establish some sort of protectorate over it, he had no more business to pass judgment upon the methods of Mr. Huerta's selection (which had occurred prior to Mr. Wilson's advent to power) than Mexico would have had to refuse to recognize Mr. Hayes as President on the ground that it was not satisfied with his economic policy and moreover sympathized with Mr. Tilden's side of the controversy. And if President Wilson made up his mind to interfere in Mexico—for of course the most trenchant type of interference was refusal to recognize the Mexican President—he should have notified Foreign Powers of his proposed action in order to prevent so far as possible Huerta's recognition by them. President Wilson interfered in such feeble fashion as to accomplish the maximum of evil to us and to other foreigners and the Mexicans, and the minimum of good to anybody. He hit; but he hit softly. Now, no one should ever hit if it can be avoided, but never should any one "hit soft."

### Wilson's Definite Act of Interference

**W**HEN President Wilson refused to recognize Huerta he committed a definite act of interference of the most pronounced type. At the same time he and Mr. Bryan looked on with folded arms and without a protest of any kind while American citizens were murdered or robbed or shamefully maltreated in all parts of Mexico by the different sets of banditti who masqueraded as soldiers of the different factions. He maintained for a long time a friendly intercourse with one set of political adventurers through irregularly appointed diplomatic agents, and he adopted an openly offensive attitude toward the chief of another set, although he was then the de facto head of whatever Government Mexico had.

By his action in permitting the transmission of arms over the border President Wilson not only actively aided the insurrection but undoubtedly furnished it with the means essential to its triumph,

while at the same time his active interference prevented Huerta from organizing an effective resistance. His defenders allege that he could not properly have forbidden the transmission of arms to the revolutionaries across the border. The answer is that he did forbid it at intervals. He thereby showed that he was taking an active interest in the arming of the revolutionaries, that he permitted it when he chose to do so and stopped it intermittently whenever he thought it best to stop it, and was therefore entirely responsible for it.

The nominal rights which the contending factions championed, and the actual and hideous wrongs done by all of them, were in no sense our affair, save in so far as Americans and other foreigners were maltreated.

### United States Responsible for Victors' Misdeeds

**W**E may individually sympathize, as, for instance, I personally do, with the general purpose of the programme for division of the lands among the Mexican cultivators, announced by Carranza, Villa, and other revolutionary leaders; but this no more justified interference on our part than belief in the wisdom of the single tax for the United States by some foreign ruler would warrant his interference in the internal affairs of the United States. Moreover, nothing in the career of Carranza and Villa or in the conduct of the Mexican people at present justifies us in any certainty that this programme will in any real sense be put into effect.

However, the interference took place. By the course President Wilson pursued toward Huerta and by the course he pursued toward Villa and Carranza, he actively interfered in the internal affairs of Mexico. He actively sided with the factions which ultimately triumphed—and which immediately split into other factions which are now no less actively engaged in fighting one another.

Personally, I do not think that the Administration should have interfered in this manner. But one thing is certain. When the Administration did interfere, it was bound to accept the responsibility for its acts. It could not give any aid to the revolutionaries without accepting a corresponding share of responsibility for their deeds and misdeeds. It could not aid them because of their attitude on the land question without also assuming a corresponding share of responsibility for their attitude toward religion and toward the professors of religion.

The United States would have had no responsibility whatever for what was done to the Church by any faction which did not owe its triumph to action by the United States. But when the United States takes part in civil war in Mexico, as Messrs. Wilson and Bryan forced our Government to take part, this country has thereby made itself responsible for the frightful wrongdoing, for the terrible outrages committed by the victorious revolutionists on hundreds of the religious people of both sexes.

To avoid the chance of anything but wilful misrepresentation, let me emphasize my position. I hold that it was not our affair to interfere one way or the other in the purely internal affairs of Mexico, so far as they affected only Mexican citizens; because if the time came when such interference was absolutely required it could only be justified if it was thoroughgoing and effective.

Moreover, I hold that it was our clear duty to have interfered promptly and effectively on behalf of American citizens who were wronged, instead of behaving as President Wilson and Secretary Bryan actually did behave. To our disgrace as a nation, they forced American citizens to claim and accept from British and German officials and officers the protection which our own Government failed to give.

When we did interfere in Mexican internal affairs to aid one faction, we thereby made ourselves responsible for the deeds of that faction and we have no right to try to shirk that responsibility. Messrs. Wilson and Bryan have declined to interfere to protect the rights of Americans or of other foreigners in Mexico. But they have interfered as between the Mexicans themselves in the interest of one faction and with the result of placing that faction in power. They have therefore bound themselves to accept responsibility for the deeds and misdeeds of that faction.

Not long ago President Wilson, in a speech at Swarthmore, Penn., declared that "nowhere in this hemisphere can any Government endure which is stained by blood," and at Mobile that "we will never condone iniquity because it is most convenient to do so."

At the very time he uttered those lofty words the leaders and lieutenants of the faction which he was actively supporting were shooting their prisoners in cold blood by scores after each engagement, were torturing men reputed to be rich, were driving hundreds of peaceful people from their homes, were looting and defiling churches and treating ecclesiastics and religious women with every species of abominable infamy, from murder and rape down.

In other words, at the very time that the President was stating that "nowhere on this hemisphere can any Government endure which is stained by blood," he was actively engaged in helping install in power a Government, which was not only stained by blood but stained by much worse than blood. At the very time that he was announcing that he would "never condone iniquity because it

was convenient to do so," he was not merely condoning but openly assisting iniquity and installing into power a set of men whose actions were those of ferocious barbarians.

Remember that I am not engaged in defending the factional opponents of these victorious wrongdoers. There is no evidence sufficient to decide which of the many factions behaved worst. But there is ample material to decide that they all behaved atrociously. Apparently the Administration took the ground that inasmuch as Mr. Huerta and his followers were bad men, it was our duty to condone the evil committed by their opponents.

Father R. H. Tierney of New York City, an entirely responsible man, informs me that when (in company with two other gentlemen whose names he gives me) he called upon Mr. Bryan to bring to his attention the abominable outrages committed on certain nuns by the followers of Carranza and Villa, Mr. Bryan informed Father Tierney that he had information that "the followers of Huerta had committed similar outrages on two American women from Iowa!"

Apparently Mr. Bryan believed this disposed of the situation and relieved the revolutionaries of blame.

Surely, it ought not to be necessary to say that if the facts as thus stated to Mr. Bryan were true, (and if there was any doubt immediate investigation as to their truth by the Government was demanded,) then the way to get justice was not by treating one infamy as wiping out the other, but by exacting the sternest retribution for both and effectively providing against the repetition of either.

Even assuming for the moment that the attitude of the Administration had not so committed the Government that it was its duty to interfere on behalf of the nuns thus outraged, Mr. Bryan's statement to Father Tierney shows almost incredible callousness on his part to the most dreadful type of suffering, to acts far worse than the mere murder of any man.

It seems literally impossible that any representative of the American Government in high office could fail to be stirred to his depths by such wrong, or could have failed to insist on the immediate and condign punishment of the wrongdoers and on the amplest safeguarding against all possible repetition of the wrong. Apparently the only way in which it occurred to Mr. Bryan to take any action against the faction whose adherents had perpetrated these hideous wrongs on the two American women was by encouraging another faction which he must have known in advance and certainly did know after the event would commit and had committed wrongs equally hideous.

I have before me a copy of El Heraldito de Toluca of Sept. 13 last. It contains a manifesto on behalf of the victorious revolutionaries of the party of Messrs. Carranza and Villa, dealing with the "conditions under which the Roman Worship will have to be practiced." (I translate into English.) Among the preambles are the following:

1. That the ministers of the Catholic Worship circulate doctrines which are not in accordance with the principles of the true Christ; 2, that on account of the learning that these ministers have acquired they cannot in the minds of those who possess equal or greater learning (but who differ from them in opinion) pass as sincere believers in the doctrines they preach, and that they thereby exploit the ignorance of the ignorant masses; 3, that inasmuch as this conduct harms people by frightening them with the fear of eternal punishment and thereby tends to make them subservient to the priesthood, and that inasmuch as all kinds of people from workmen to capitalists give too much money to the churches and because of various other similar facts, the decree in question is promulgated.

### We Should Protest Against Anti-Clerical Oppression

**T**HIS decree includes the forbidding "of any sermons which will encourage fanaticism;" the proscribing of any fasts or similar practices; the prohibition of any money being paid for christenings, marriages, or other matters; the prohibition of the soliciting of contributions, (that is, the passing of the plate); the prohibition of celebration of masses for the dead or the celebration of more than two masses a week; the prohibition of confession, and with this object in view the closing of the churches excepting once a week at the hour of the masses; and, finally, the prohibition of more than one priest living in Toluca and the requirement that he, when he walks in the streets, shall be dressed absolutely as a civilian without anything in his costume revealing the fact that he is a minister. In order to be permitted to exercise the functions thus limited the priest is required to affix his signature of acceptance to the foregoing regulations.

Now, in various South American countries there have been bitter contests between the Clericals and the anti-Clericals, and again and again the extremists of each side have taken positions which in the eyes of sensible Americans of all religious creeds are intolerable. There are in our own country individuals who sincerely believe that the Masons or the Knights of Columbus, or the members of the Junior Order of American Mechanics, or the Catholic Church, or the Methodist Church, or

\*This sentence has been read to Father Tierney, who states that it describes the interview with exactness. The original of the affidavits herein quoted are in the possession of Father Tierney, 59 East Eighty-third Street, New York City, and Father Kelley, and will be shown by them to any reputable person.

the Ethical Culture Society, represent what is all wrong.

There are sincere men in the United States who by argument desire to convince their fellows belonging to any one of the bodies above mentioned (and to any one of many others) that they are mistaken, either when they go to church or when they do not go to church, when they "preach sermons of a fanatical type" or inveigh against "sermons of a fanatical type," when they put money in the plate to help support a church or when they refuse to support a church, when they join secret societies or sit on the mourners' bench or practice confession. According to our ideas, all men have an absolute right to favor or oppose any of these practices. But, according to our ideas, no men have any right to endeavor to make the Government either favor or oppose them. According to our ideas, we should emphatically disapprove of any action in any Spanish-American country which is designed to oppress either Catholics or Protestants, either Masons or anti-Masons, either Liberals or Clericals, or to interfere with religious liberty, whether by intolerance exercised for or against any religious creed or by people who do or do not believe in any religious creed.

### Affidavits of Atrocities Committed by Soldiers

**H**OLD that these should be our sympathies. But I emphatically hold that it is not the duty of this Government to try to make other countries act in accordance with these sympathies, and, above all, not the duty of the Government to help some other Government which acts against these great principles with which we sympathize. Messrs. Wilson and Bryan by their actions have assumed a certain undoubted responsibility for the behavior of the victorious faction in Mexico which has just taken the kind of stand indicated in the proclamation above quoted; a stand, of course, hostile to every principle of real religious liberty, a stand which if applied logically would mean that no minister of any church could in public wear a high-cut waistcoat or perhaps even a black frock-coat, and which would put a stop even to such commonplace actions as the passing of the plate in any church to encourage home missions.

But this attitude is only one of the offenses committed. Catholic schools almost everywhere in Mexico have been closed, institutions of learning sacked, and libraries and astronomical and other machinery destroyed, the priests and nuns expelled by hundreds, and some of the priests killed and some of the nuns outraged.

Archbishop Blenk of New Orleans, Father Tierney, editor of America; Father Kelley, President of the Catholic Church Extension Society; Mr. Petry, one of the directors of the Catholic Church Extension Society, and a Mexican bishop whose name I do not give because it might involve him in trouble, came to see me at my house; and in Chicago I saw other priests and refugees from Mexico, both priests, nuns, and lay brothers. The statements and affidavits, submitted to me in the original and copies of which I have before me as I write, set forth conditions which are literally appalling and for which, be it remembered, the actions of Messrs. Wilson and Bryan have made this country partly responsible.

For example, Archbishop Blenk submitted to me an affidavit by the prioress of the Barefooted Carmelite Nuns of the Convent of Queretaro. This sets forth from the personal knowledge of the prioress how the churches have been profaned by soldiers entering them on horseback, breaking statues, trampling on relics and scattering on the floor the Sacred Hosts and even throwing them into the horses' feed; how in some churches the revolutionaries have offered mock masses and have in other ways, some of them too repulsive and loathsome to mention, behaved precisely as the Red Terrorists of the French Revolution behaved in the churches of Paris; how, for example, St. Anthony's Church at Aguascalientes has been made into a legislative hall, and the Church of St. Joseph at Queretaro and the great convent of the Carmelites and the lyceum of the Christian Brothers all have been confiscated; how the church property has been sequestered and the archives burned and the men and women in the cloistered communities expelled without being allowed to take even an extra suit of clothes or a book of prayer.

The prioress states that she has herself seen in Mexico City nuns who have been victims of the passions of the revolutionary soldiers, and some whom she found in their own homes, others in hospitals and in maternity houses, who in consequence are about to be delivered of children. She deposes:

I have seen soldiers dressed up in chausseaux, stoles, mantles and cinctures, with copes and altar linen, and their women dressed up in albs, surplices, and corporals used as handkerchiefs.

She has seen the sacred vessels profaned in a thousand ways. She describes meeting seven nuns who had been outraged, who she directed to a maternity house, and who had abandoned themselves to utter despair, saying "that they were already damned and abandoned by God and they cursed the hour of their religious profession." She describes how she escaped from Queretaro with nuns who had been obliged to hide in private houses in order to escape being taken to the barracks by the soldiers. She describes how she had daily to beg the food necessary to sustain the twenty-four sisters with whom she escaped.

In Chicago I saw a French priest, Father Dominic Fournier, of the Congregation of the Passion, who had just escaped from Mexico with two young

Spanish students for the priesthood. He had escaped from the City of Toluca with nothing whatever, not even a rosary. He and the two novices described to me their experience in Toluca. The churches and religious houses were sacked and confiscated and the soldiers and their women indulged in orgies before and around the altars.

One of the lay brothers named Mariano Gonzales tried to save some of the things from the church. The revolutionists seized him and accused him of robbing the State. He was shot by a file of soldiers on Aug. 22 last and his dead body was left all day long in the court in which Father Fournier and the other priests and the two novices who spoke to me and their associates were confined. They were kept in prison sixteen days and then allowed to go with nothing but what they had on.

I have seen the original of and have in my possession a translation of a letter written on Oct. 24 by a young girl of Toluca to her pastor who had been exiled. She described how the Bishop had been heavily fined and exiled. She describes how the clubs of boys and girls for whom she had been working had been broken up, but how some of the boys to whom they used to give breakfast on Sunday mornings still occasionally come to see them; and she asks advice how to keep these clubs of the poor together. But the dreadful and pathetic part of the letter is contained in the following sentence:

Now I will ask you a question. Suppose some one falls into the power of the Zapatistas. Would it be better for her to take her own life rather than allow them to do their will and what they are accustomed to do? As I never thought such a thing could happen, I did not ask you before about it, but now I see it quite possible. If we had not our good God in Whom we trust, I think we would give way to despair.

In other words, this girl who had been engaged in charitable work in connection with the Church asks her pastor whether she is permitted to commit suicide in order to avoid the outrages to which so many hundreds of Mexican women, so many scores of nuns, have been exposed in the last few months. I cannot imagine any man of whatever creed—or of no creed—reading this letter without his blood tingling with horror and anger; and we Americans should bear in mind the fact that the actions of President Wilson and Secretary Bryan in supporting the Villistas have made us partly responsible for such outrages.

I have been given and shown letters from refugees in Galveston, in Corpus Christi, in San Antonio and Havana. These refugees include seven Archbishops, six Bishops, some hundreds of priests, and at least three hundred nuns. Most of these Bishops and priests had been put in jail or in the penitentiary or otherwise confined and maltreated. Two-thirds of the institutions of higher learning in Mexico have been confiscated and more or less completely destroyed, and a large part of the ordinary educational institutions have been treated in similar fashion.

Many of the affidavits before me recite tortures so dreadful that I am unwilling to put them in print. It would be tedious to recite all the facts set forth in these affidavits. For instance, there is one, by Daniel R. Lowere, a priest of the diocese of Guadalajara, the son of an American father, and librarian of the Seminary and Professor of Chemistry. He describes what took place in Guadalajara. On July 21, about one hundred priests from the city and country round about were put in the jail, while the cathedral was used as a barracks.

### Murder and Torture by Mexican Rebels

**I**N the affidavit of Canon José María Vela of the Cathedral of Zacatecas, he sets forth how the Constitutionists shot a priest named Velarde, how twenty-three priests were gathered together and under the orders of General Villa required to produce one million pesos within twenty-four hours, under penalty of being shot. A committee of the priests went out through the city begging from house to house and accepting even pennies from the children. A girl was forcibly violated by one of the soldiers in the room adjoining that in which these priests were kept. Finally, the citizens raised a couple of hundred thousand pesos and the priests were released and allowed to flee without any of their belongings. Seventeen of the fleeing priests are now in El Paso and their names are given in the document and those of some of them signed to an accompanying document.

In an affidavit by the Rev. Michael Kubicza of the Society of Jesus, whose father was a Hungarian physician, he describes how he was tortured in order to make him give up money. A soldier nicknamed Baca, in the presence of Colonel Fierro, put a horsehair rope around his neck and choked him until he became unconscious. When he came to, Baca fired a revolver near his head and commanded him to give up and tell him where the Jesuit treasures were buried. On answering that there were none he was again choked until he was unconscious, and this was repeated a third time. The affidavit describes at length some of the sufferings of the priests in fleeing.

All kinds of other affidavits have been submitted to me, dealing with torture and murder, as, for example, the killing of Father Alba, the parish priest of Cabra, the killing of the parish priest and vicar at Tula, the killing of the chaplain and rector and Vice President of the Christian Brothers College, &c., &c.

The one feature in the events narrated to me and set forth in the affidavits to me which can give any American the least satisfaction is the statement of the kindness with which the unfortunate refugees had been treated in Vera Cruz by the officers and men of the army and navy, particular mention being made of Gen. Funston.

What I have above stated is but a small part of the immense mass of facts available to the President and Mr. Bryan, had they cared to examine them. They relate to outrages on Catholics. This is merely because the enormous majority of the religious people of Mexico are Catholics. I should set them forth just as minutely if they had been inflicted by Catholics on Freethinkers or Protestants or Masons—I am myself both a Protestant and a Mason. Even if we had no responsibility for them, I nevertheless fail to see how any American could read the account of them without a feeling of burning indignation. As things actually are, shame must be mingled with our indignation; for the action of the President and Mr. Bryan has been such as to make this country partly responsible for the frightful wrongs that have been committed.

(Copyright, 1914, by the Wheeler Syndicate, Inc.)