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CASTRO THE RIDDLE OF AMERICAN REPUBLICS



Cipriano Castro

A Close Range Study of the Man and His Ambitions

This greed for gold has been the most potent factor in maintaining the richest country in South America in an almost uninterrupted carnival of conspiracy, revolution and civil war. The bravery and political ignorance of its untutored people have been ruthlessly exploited that financiers might enhance the value of their concessions or escape compliance with accepted contracts.

More than any of his predecessors, the present President of Venezuela, Cipriano Castro, has grappled the situation, and incidentally quite a number of corporations, by the throat and is choking it and them into something approaching order and decency.

Meanwhile he has restored internal peace, thrown the mantle of oblivion as well as may be over a fratricidal past, and upheld, single handed against the great Powers of the world, a flag that at one time floated over the greater portion of the South American continent.

Indeed, Castro is one of the few really remarkable men that the tropical regions of the new

world have produced, and though political economists may stand aghast at his methods of administration, statesmen acknowledge his diplomatic skill, and even his bitterest enemies pay tribute to his personal courage and military genius.

In judging the work of Castro it must not be forgotten that when Bolivar wrested Venezuela from the dominion of Spain, ninety-nine per cent. of its inhabitants were plunged in the darkest depths of slavery and ignorance. They neither understood nor could they use the magnificent constitution with which he endowed them. And as the bulk of their descendants have made little effort to fit themselves for self government, despotism is the only alternative to political anarchy.

The best class of Venezuelans recognize, therefore, that the iron hand of a sincere and patriotic despot, who can maintain the peace so essential to the welfare of their country, is preferable to government by a horde of corrupt and greedy officials. The following is a sketch of the life, aims and idiosyncrasies of the present chief who has forced himself upon their choice.

By Henry N. Hall

CIPRIANO CASTRO is a little man, scarce five feet four, whose power is not to be measured by his size. The story of how he fought his way up from a lone pulperia on the slopes of the Andes to the Presidency of Venezuela reads more like a legend of the ages of chivalry than as a matter-of-fact episode in contemporary history.

He is today the riddle of American republics, and the complexity of his character is such that only by a close-range study of his acts and ambitions can his curiously warped mentality be properly understood.

It would not be difficult to draw a

parallel between Castro and Napoleon. The Venezuelan despot, like the French Emperor, is of lowly origin. He is alike ignorant of fear and of restraint; equally stubborn and shrewd. Throughout his career he has been served by fate to an extent that almost warrants his oft-repeated assertion that he is a man of Destiny. His attitude toward the press and toward the fair sex are exactly those of the Corsican adventurer, whom, curiously enough, he resembles, even in size.

Fully alive to the influence that the daily papers exercise over the public, he is liberal to a degree with those that support his cause; but should they for a moment cease to tinkle the cymbals of laudation, he unrelentingly suppresses them.

In his retreats at Los Teques and Maracay, the diversions of Castro from the cares of state are not such as would appeal to Mrs. Grundy; and though he never abuses the gifts of Bacchus, he is an ardent devotee of Terpsichore, and worships at the shrine of Venus with untiring fervor.

Castro combines the cunning of a savage with the simplicity of a child; the all-conquering enthusiasm of a Christian martyr with the sensuality of a Roman Emperor; the unspeakable bravery of a Samurai with a

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