



Gen. P.G.T. Beauregard, CSA, who fired on Fort Sumter, was one of several Catholic Confederate leaders.

The treatment endured in prison by Davis — a gentleman, a hero of the Mexican War, one-time son-in-

law of a U.S. President (Zachary Taylor), a U.S. Secretary of War and U.S. Senator from Mississippi prior to becoming President of the C.S.A. — ill bespoke those who imprisoned him. It was clearly calculated to break him as a man. For instance, guards were posted around the clock *inside* his cell in order to deprive him of all privacy, including even at the times every day when nature required that he take care of the most private needs of all.

As unchivalrous and plain indecent as was the treatment meted out to him by his vindictive jailers, President Davis was not without solace during confinement. A rosary sent by some sisters in Savannah reached him. More notably, comfort was extended by the Vicar of Christ himself, Ven. Pope Pius IX. It took the form of a crown of thorns woven by the pope with his own hands and

VARINA'S CONSOLATION

Mrs. Davis also suffered, and also — like the President — received comfort from a Catholic direction. Stranded with her children in Georgia when the fighting was over, her husband imprisoned, destitute, she would later write a friend: “No institution of my own Church offered to teach my children. One day three Sisters of Charity came to see me and brought me five gold dollars, all the money they had. They almost forced me to take the money, but I did not. They then offered to take my children to their school in the neighborhood of Savannah, where the air was cool and they could be comfortably cared for during the summer months.”

It could not be learned for this writing if the sisters who helped Mrs. Davis were the same ones who sent a rosary to her imprisoned husband, but it would not be surprising if they were. Catholic charity, when it is truly itself, is always designed to uplift souls as well as furnish practical help.

THE PROBLEM OF SLAVERY

In pages like these meant to show that Catholics, though a minority, were an integral part of the Old South, that some of them held high positions in the Confederacy, and that their Faith exercised an influence in the region that it did not in the North, it would be intellectually dishonest to dodge the subject of slavery. Obviously there were Catholics among the minority of white Southerners who owned slaves. To be fair to them, however, most understood — as did many slave-holders who were not Catholic — that the slave trade was evil.

The Church understood it. When the Faith was first brought to the Western Hemisphere, and that was first of all to the part of it now known as Latin America, she did everything possible to prevent the enslavement of indigenous peoples, and she largely succeeded. Then, when the Spanish, soon followed by the French, brought the Faith to North America, there was no effort to enslave Native Americans. The effort was to baptize and civilize them, to include them as full-fledged beneficiaries of the expansion of Christendom that was the great European colonizing enterprise of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Only as the English became increasingly dominant in North America and after they began the import of laborers from Africa did slavery become a problem.

A problem it was, but contrary to popular notions nowadays, it was the South that first began to grapple with it even as it was the same region that first met and has most successfully overcome the challenges posed by the rise of the civil rights movement in this century. Thus it was that in 1831, thirty years before the outbreak of the War Between the States and at a time when slavery was still legal in Massachusetts, its abolition failed in Virginia by just one vote in the state legislature.

More to the point of these lines, there was never any Catholic effort, *qua* Catholic, to defend slavery. We have said there was no Catholic bishop in the South who failed to support the Confederacy. It is equally true that they did not preach

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a portrait of the pontiff autographed with the words from Scripture, “If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.”

These items, the crown and the portrait, were sent to the Confederate President when he was still in prison and they may be viewed today at a museum in New Orleans. The portrait is an etching. The crown,

with thorns about two inches long, is such that it is hard to see how the pope could have fashioned it without hurting himself.

Why did this pope who is a Venerable of the Church — the very one who promulgated the dogma of the Immaculate Conception, published to the world the famous *Syllabus of Errors*, and presided over the Vatican Council that solemnly defined the dogma of papal infallibility — seek