

Rey L. Pratt and the Mexican Mission

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I enjoy my work [in Mexico]. True it is I have seen some horrible things during my stay there. For months in the City of Mexico we awakened every morning to the music of cannons. Day after day we saw houses and even people burning in the streets. And yet I am ready to go back and stay as long as the servants of the Lord shall desire it.¹

Rey Lucero Pratt said this of revolution-ridden Mexico in the October 1913 general conference, showing at once the spirit in which he led the Mexican Mission through its most critical quarter century and why his name is still linked inseparably to the success of the Church in Latin America.

When Elder Pratt was called to labor in the Mexican Mission in 1906, he found it a small and struggling operation. It had been first opened in 1879, just a month after he was born, but due to political problems and a shortage of missionaries it had been closed down from 1889 to 1901. During that period, the only contact southern Mexican converts had with the Church was an occasional visitor from the Mormon colonies in Chihuahua and Sonora, in the capital for some business reason. This obviously was not sufficient guidance to support a young and essentially foreign institution, and it deteriorated badly. Many of the Saints slipped away from Church doctrines and practices, some whole branches falling into apostasy.

Even after the mission was reopened, its new president, Ammon Tenney, served for over a year as its only elder. Three years later his successor, Hyrum Harris, noted that the mission was growing but that "the people are very weak and full of

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¹Rey L. Pratt, *Conference Report of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, April 1913, p. 47.

transgressions.”² By 1906 there were still fewer than twenty missionaries who with the members of the Church there, now over 400 in number, were yet in the process of putting branch organizations into functioning order.

One of the principal reasons for this confusion and struggle was a lack of stability in the leadership of the mission. Mexicans have a psychological commitment to a system of *personalismo* whose antecedents date back to pre-Columbian times. Hugh M. Hamill, Jr. summarizes the thinking of many scholars in saying that the common people had developed an attitude of submission to authority under the Aztec Empire, then accepted its replacement by a paternalistic Spanish hierarchy that laid “the foundations for the social order which would evolve through the next several centuries.”³ This is an order in which personalities take precedence over organizational structure and often over principle. The leader becomes “the personification or incarnation of authority, where he who governs acts with an extraordinary charismatic moral ascendancy over his people: advising them, guiding them, leading them paternally.”⁴ In spite of the 1928 declaration of President Calles that archaic personalist rule had been replaced by the government of law, the guidelines and fixed procedures of an “establishment” simply do not mean much in the Mexican tradition.

The Mexican Saints, most of them recent converts, needed strength and continuity in their leadership—a man in whom they could place a complete trust. On 29 September 1907 they had their leader when Rey Pratt was set apart as president of the mission. He was never released.

The choice was a wise one. Although Pratt was born in Salt Lake City, he had grown up in Mexico. His father, Helaman Pratt, had been with the epic 1875-76 expedition that explored and proselyted in Mexico, and later he had served there as missionary and mission president. In 1887 the family was called to settle in Colonia Dublán, one of the LDS colonies in Chihuahua.

Thus at the age of nine, Rey became a pioneer. He later spoke of “those things that I had to do as a boy, for I went into

²Hyrum Harris to Heber J. Grant, 16 November 1905, as published in the *Millennial Star* 67:779.

³Hugh M. Hamill, Jr., *Dictatorship in Spanish America* (New York: Knopf, 1966), p. 19.

⁴Fernando N. A. Cusvillas, “A Case for Caudillaje” in *ibid.*, p. 205.

a new land and had to make fences, build ditch, kill snakes, ride the cattle range, and do many things that neither I nor my children are called upon to do now."⁵ The Pratts were closer to the local Mexicans than many of the other colonists were, and Rey learned to speak Spanish like a native. Perhaps even more importantly, he also grew to understand the history and culture of the Mexican people.

At the same time he learned a standard for religious and secular living. In 1898 young Mary (May) Stark, visiting in Dublán, was impressed that "everyone in the colonies lived their religion to the letter."⁶ She was especially impressed by Rey Pratt and they were married in 1900, eventually becoming the parents of thirteen children. The young couple settled on a ranch outside Dublán, isolated from the bustle of an industrializing world. They lived in a log house under a big oak tree, cooked over a fireplace, raised beef and dairy cattle, hunted deer and turkeys, and rode their ponies over the range together. At the time of the mission call, they were making plans to expand their herd and install an electric generator.⁷ For years they had dreamed of returning to that idyllic setting when the mission was over, but that time never came.

Thus grounded in language, culture, and the goals to be pursued, Pratt was the right man to lead the Mexican Mission through the most turbulent years of that nation's history. The story of his presidency is a succession of seemingly crushing difficulties which he had to overcome that the mission might succeed. In the words of his daughter, "It just seems like they were tried in fire such as you can't believe."⁸

From the first President Pratt was beset by knotty organizational problems. In a unique and somewhat cumbersome arrangement, the mission was set up under the Juárez Stake which was comprized of the colonies in the North. At least until 1912 the members were considered part of the stake, and the mission reported both to the stake presidency and to the General Authorities of the Church.

There was also a question of authority, since Pratt presided over the mission for four years as an elder. During this time

⁵*Conference Report*, October 1928, p. 21.

⁶Mary S. Pratt, unpublished MS, p. 4, Church Archives, Church Historical Department.

⁷Rey L. Pratt, *Diary*, vol. 1. This quotation is included in an appendix to the diary, apparently written by Mrs. Pratt. Church Archives.

⁸Mary Pratt Parish, recorded interview, 5 June 1973, Church Archives.

he ordained at least one seventy, Manuel C. Naegle, saying that, "my calling as president gives me that authority."⁹ The procedure was irregular but the ordination was evidently accepted as valid by the Church.

Pratt had to contend with Church bureaucracy. He would come back from Salt Lake City almost in tears, having failed to get needed support because of a condescending and vaguely suspicious attitude toward "things Spanish and Catholic."¹⁰ Apparently the brethren were reluctant to allocate much of the scant available resources to an area they believed to have little potential. This attitude changed rapidly, largely due to Pratt's efforts.

Elder Ernest Young recalls from personal observation that Pratt "visited the sick a good deal."¹¹ Indeed, sickness harassed the mission. Typhoid was common, two elders having died from it in the 1880s. In 1904 Apostle Abraham O. Woodruff and his wife, while visiting Mexico, both contracted smallpox and died. Pratt's year-old daughter Mary came down with a severe case of smallpox in 1909, but survived. His son, Carl Lee, survived scarlet fever in 1911, but died of "intestinal infection" in 1925 when attending school in Mexico City. Others had cases, some serious, of malaria, pneumonia, and influenza. Pratt himself nearly died of typhoid in 1909, and was incapacitated for several months. The next year he was down with appendicitis, then in 1913 with influenza.

In spite of these hindrances during its early years, the mission continued to grow. The missionary force was increased, giving President Pratt an office staff and allowing expansion into new areas. Conversions accelerated, more than doubling the membership in his first six years, and several new branches were organized.

EXODUS

The Revolution of 1910-1911 seemed not to cause a great stir in Mexico City, at least as far as the mission was concerned. In small towns outside the capital it was another matter. The power struggle surrounding the abdication of President Porfirio Díaz in May 1911 brought fighting close to home. A battle in Cuautla, Morelos, left one Mormon home scarred by

⁹W. Ernest Young, recorded interview, 23 February 1973, Church Archives.

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹Ibid.

hundreds of bullets, the trembling family inside counting the marks of 150 which came through one door.¹² The missionaries did not dare travel in outlying areas, nor the members to hold meetings after dark.¹³

The inauguration of President Francisco Madero calmed the countryside. In September, though, there was a renewal of activity south of the capital due to what the mission record refers to as "depredations" by Zapata, "the southern bandit,"¹⁴ but few regarded this as being of a revolutionary character. Fewer still thought of the overthrow of Díaz as more than a coup d'état, or of the relative peace as a calm before the storm. Even a protest march of 15,000 people shouting "Down with the clergy and the Catholic party!" was misread by the missionaries, who thought the social revolution was a protestant religious revival.¹⁵

In September 1911, President Pratt traveled to Salt Lake City to see if the trickle of missionaries being assigned to Mexico could not be increased. There were also discussions of a plan to settle Mexican Mormons in colonies close to those of the American Saints, a scheme tried unsuccessfully in 1887 by his father. A little later he wrote an article for the *Improvement Era* telling an optimistic story of the Mexican Mission: "Prospects were never brighter for the spread of the gospel in this land, and we look forward to a bright and prosperous future for the Mexican Mission."¹⁶

But by the time this article was published in April 1912, the Revolution had broken out again. On the 16th of that month Pratt received a telegram from President Joseph F. Smith instructing him to use whatever precaution he thought proper for the protection of the missionaries and to act in harmony with the United States Embassy. Elders were registered with the embassy's protection committee and told not to stay away from their quarters overnight in case a quick recall should be necessary. In June, Pratt visited the branches in the state of Morelos, "this being the first trip into the country for several months on account of the revolution."¹⁷ He found the

¹²Mexican Mission Historical Report, MS, vol. A, pp. 368-69, 377. Church Archives.

¹³Arthur Haymore, "La Misión Mexicana," *Liabona* 8:767.

¹⁴Mexican Mission, vol. A, p. 432.

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶Rey L. Pratt, "History of the Mexican Mission," *Improvement Era* 15:498.

¹⁷Mexican Mission, vol. A, p. 432.

Saints generally safe and well, but often they had not been able to hold meetings and in some instances people had fled to Mexico City.

Still, the mission had always known difficulties and was unwilling to view this new hardship as especially onerous. For an item in the July *Liabona*, Pratt wrote that unsettled conditions were a hindrance to missionary work, but that the work continued and prospered.¹⁸ The village of Tepeitic, near Cuernavaca, was totally burned out and the members there scattered. But at the same time, the elders were opening up Puebla and establishing a branch in Cholula. As the fighting flared here and there, the missionaries were withdrawn from the southern lowlands in August, a new branch was organized near Toluca in September, and in November all of the elders and many of the Saints of the Toluca Valley retreated to Mexico City.¹⁹

From this time on, contact with the outlying branches was sporadic. Missionaries would pull out of a town for a few days, or a few months, while it served as a battleground, then return to it when the hostilities moved on. Since midsummer they had been aware that Zapata was a revolutionary, not a bandit, and that they were in the middle of a civil war.

By August the situation in the North, too, had deteriorated to such an extent that the Mormon colonists were leaving their homes for safety in the United States. On hearing this, Pratt went to the colonies and to El Paso to ascertain the colonists' state of affairs. It was indeed pitiable, and after consultation with President Smith and Apostle Anthony Ivins, he decided to release those missionaries whose parents, or perhaps their own children, were now refugees and in need.

In September, Pratt went to Utah to attend general conference and to talk with the General Authorities concerning the future of the mission. Only twelve missionaries now remained in central Mexico, and it was concluded that they might remain and continue their work as best they could. The October *Improvement Era* carried this news item:

Most of the Elders in the Mexican Mission have been released owing to the political troubles in that country which resulted in the Mexican exodus of the Latter-day Saints. The situation is still critical and it is not safe to return to the colonies.²⁰

¹⁸*Liabona* 10:78.

¹⁹Mexican Mission, vol. A, pp. 459-62.

²⁰*Improvement Era* 15:1141.

For three months there was a respite from major violence and the missionaries were again optimistic. However, at this time Félix Díaz and Victoriano Huerta were plotting their overthrow of the Madero government. On 13 February 1913 fighting exploded in Mexico City, the mission home itself being hit by many bullets. Pratt's daughter remembers her mother having to stay in the kitchen to cook where at least one stray shot narrowly missed her. The rest of the family and all of the elders stayed in the stairwell where they were protected by an extra wall, Pratt being armed with a baseball bat and others with knives and hatpins. They later picked up three unexploded artillery shells just outside the house.²¹

For eight days the battle raged in the city while Zapata's forces attacked the skeleton garrisons left in the countryside. On the 19th the fighting stopped after Madero's resignation and the missionaries spent the day "sightseeing" the aftermath. Pratt wrote, a detailed account of his observations:

Part of the city was found to be in a terrible condition from the effects of the battle, and the streets were in a horrible condition with dead men and horses, many of them being burned in the streets.²²

Throughout the Revolution the Church in general and American Mormons in particular maintained a very careful neutrality, never taking sides for or against any of the warring factions.²³ The Mexican Saints followed suit, on the advice of their leader, and very few were ever involved unless they were conscripted by one or another of the armies.

Still, in those unstable times there were bound to be eruptions affecting even the most pacifistic neutralists. In May four brethren from Cuautla were mistakenly accused of Zapatistic sympathies and drafted into the federal army. Pratt strenuously interceded on their behalf, but they were taken anyway, and one of them shortly died of illness. In June a brother was falsely denounced as a Zapatista and with no chance for a hearing was executed on the spot. In July some Mormon girls in Tecalco were threatened with rape, and while Pratt was arranging for their safety he found another sister accused of pro-Zapata activity. She was shipped off to slave

²¹Parrish interview.

²²Mexican Mission, vol. A, pp. 473-74.

²³Brigham H. Roberts, *A Comprehensive History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Provo: BYU Press, 1965), 6:265.

labor in Quintana Roó, in spite of all he could do.²⁴ In August Brother Pérez of San Vicente received an anonymous letter warning him to renounce Mormonism and get rid of the elders or be killed along with them and his family. Pratt took the letter to the governor of the State of Mexico with the result that armed guards stood nightly watch at the Pérez home until the danger passed.²⁵

The missionaries themselves were never molested in their work, either by political factions or bandits.²⁶ Nevertheless, the First Presidency of the Church recognized the potential danger and authorized Pratt to leave with his family and the remaining seven elders, should conditions warrant it. Pratt still refused to admit he was licked, so rather than abandon Mexico altogether, he decided to move the missionaries to Vera Cruz and await developments there.

While they were arranging this move, packing and appointing local brethren to take over the leadership of the branches, etc., the mission was advised by the Consul General to evacuate all United States nationals. Taking this as an order from the State Department, the Pratts and the elders hurried their preparations and left for Vera Cruz the next day. On 5 September they boarded the American steamer *Mexico* with the other refugees, and the country was again left with no direct contact with the Church.²⁷

EXILE

In September 1913, with the Revolution nearing its peak, there were over 1600 Latter-day Saints in Mexico, some 1150 of them in the area of the capital. With a few scattered exceptions in the colonies, these were "all natives and mostly Indians,"²⁸ without much leadership experience of their own and without their shepherd.

That shepherd was like a tiger in a cage. At the October general conference of the Church he said,

I have the spirit of that mission running through my veins to such an extent that it is almost impossible for me to talk

²⁴Mexican Mission, vol. B, pp. 8-16.

²⁵Ibid., pp. 22-23.

²⁶*Deseret Evening News*, 17 September 1913.

²⁷Mexican Mission, vol. B, pp. 28-29.

²⁸*Deseret Evening News*, 17 September 1913.

to the people here except I speak in regard to the Mexican Mission.²⁹

He affirmed that the day of the Mexican Indians had come and that he was ready to go back and continue the work under any conditions.

At a meeting for mission presidents following the close of conference Pratt offered to return to Mexico alone and do what he could to hold the Church there together for the interim. The First Presidency and the Council of the Twelve discussed the matter, decided that he should not go back, and instructed him to guide the mission by correspondence until the situation settled down.³⁰ This he did, devoting himself almost exclusively to the task for the next twenty months—sending letters of encouragement and instruction to the Mexican Saints.

The reports he received were alternately heartening and distressing. The Mexican Saints, along with many other people, often went hungry. Some were reduced to scavenging in the streets and eating perhaps once in twenty-four hours. Some of the men had been conscripted into military service, were ill-clothed and poorly paid, their families left to fend for themselves. In 1916 Pratt received a pathetic letter from Señora de Monroy of San Marcos, whose son Rafael had been left in charge of the little branch there, telling of the execution of Rafael and his counselor by a Villista detachment for refusing to renounce Mormonism.³¹ In spite of such hardships, these humble people remained faithful. They kept the branches running with the long-range instructions from Pratt, and they scrupulously saved a tenth of their income for tithing, even when it meant going without food.³²

During his enforced exile, Pratt wrote much and spoke often to American Mormon audiences. He was recognized as having a more profound grasp of the Mexican scene than anyone else in the Church, and he felt it important that everyone gain some understanding. His style helped. Said his daughter, "He was an old-time orator. He wasn't this kind that

²⁹*Conference Report*, April 1913, p. 47. The *Conference Report* and the *Deseret Evening News* are at wide variance on the wording of this talk, but they agree on its substance.

³⁰Mexican Mission, vol. B, pp. 31-32.

³¹Jesús Mera de Monroy to Rey L. Pratt, 27 August 1915.

³²Rey L. Pratt, "Review of Mission Labor Among the Lamanites," *Liabona* 14:294-95.

got up and took you logically from one point to another, he just got up there and pounded the pulpit. But people listened to him."³³

He always spoke highly of the Indian people. His talks and writings constantly refer to Book of Mormon prophecies on the birthright of the Lamanites. In an especially incisive article for the *Young Woman's Journal* in 1914 and in a series for the *Improvement Era* in 1928, he interpreted the Revolution and other signs of the times as heralding the day of that birthright.³⁴ The Lamanites were ready to assume a position of leadership, and it was the duty of the Church to train them and place them there. He often chided the press and public opinion for their prejudiced view of the Indians, especially of those in Mexico, and declared to Church members that their missionary sons, far from working among the savages, were living among a courteous and gentle people. He openly admitted that his own prejudice ran against the Spanish and other European conquerors whose influence on native Mexicans had been one of corruption rather than enlightenment.

For two years, from 1913 to 1914, Pratt was only partially active in Mexican Mission affairs, until the Church called him to a different kind of mission. There were LDS missionaries in all of the states along the Mexican border, but they spoke only English; no one had ever worked with the many Mexican and Spanish-American residents in these areas. In June 1915 Pratt was asked to open a mission among these people.

It was an odd arrangement. The new field of labor, to open first in Colorado and New Mexico, came under the auspices and direction of the Western States Mission. At the same time, Pratt still presided over the Mexican Mission which was a separate entity.

The new mission was soon going strong, but he continued to worry about the old one. By autumn of 1917 the civil war in Mexico had wound down to a level where people could return to their homes and settle down to a more normal life style. Cutting through red tape at the border, Pratt went back to Mexico after an absence of four years.

His record of the train ride from Laredo to Mexico City describes a long panorama of destruction and hunger. The

³³Parrish interview.

³⁴Rey L. Pratt, "Book of Mormon Prophecies and the Mexican Situation," *Young Woman's Journal* 25:529. Pratt, "The Gospel to the Lamanites," *Improvement Era* 16:497, 577, 686, 796, 1021.

capital and surrounding area were in better shape than he had expected, but the people still suffered from a scarcity of just about everything, including food.³⁵ In spite of this and other problems in the wake of war, the Church and its members were in remarkably good condition. During his month-long visit, Pratt found nearly all of the branches functioning according to the instructions he had sent. Through keeping in touch with the man they had come to regard almost as a father-figure, the Saints had remained faithful; their own organizational abilities and even their numbers had gradually increased.

In the following spring Pratt made another trip, again visiting the branches. The main purpose of this trip, however, was to initiate a program of bringing Mexican Saints to Zion. Arrangements had been made for fifty families to work for the Church-controlled Utah-Idaho Sugar Company. As it turned out, the incompatibilities between Mexican and United States immigration laws were insurmountable and the project had to be scrapped.³⁶ Perhaps the failure was partly due to Pratt's difficulty in getting along with Mexican officials. His sister recalls that he always had trouble with customs inspectors and showed little patience with Latin bureaucracy.³⁷ This probably had something to do with his anti-Spanish bias as well.

Back in Salt Lake City for April conference, Pratt met with the Church officials who together decided to separate the Spanish-speaking people from the English-speaking missions. Accordingly, in May jurisdiction of all Spanish-speaking branches and missionaries was transferred to the Mexican Mission.³⁸ Pratt also expanded the proselyting into Texas. In November 1918 the mission headquarters was moved from Manassa, Colorado to El Paso, Texas, this being a more central location as missionaries moved into the Rio Grande border towns, and across the river into Mexico itself.

Crossing the border was still a bit risky. In June 1919 Elders Abel Páez and Victor Hancock went over to do some tracting in and around Ciudad Juárez. They suddenly found themselves in the midst of a pitched battle between Villistas and federal troops and could not get back to El Paso. While waiting for a chance to reach the river safely, they had an

³⁵Mexican Mission, vol. B, p. 42.

³⁶Ibid., p. 52.

³⁷Amy Pratt Romney, recorded interview, 31 May 1973.

³⁸*Liabona* 15:766.

opportunity to interview Villista general Felipe Angeles, and Elder Páez spoke with Pancho Villa himself. Both of the generals expressed friendliness toward the Mormons and approval of the missionary work being done in Mexico.³⁹

The rewards outweighed the risks, however, and in October a branch of the Church was opened near Ciudad Juárez. This was the first new one in Mexico since the exodus and the first in the northern part of the country outside the colonies. In 1920, as the elders moved down into southern Texas, some were also sent to Chihuahua City and Monterrey, the first regularly assigned to the interior of the country since 1913.

By 1921 the civil war was effectively over and the time was ripe to reopen the mission in the South. The first of March saw Pratt, a pair of elders, and Church Historian Andrew Jenson on a train headed toward Mexico City. Again they reported much evidence of the war along the route, and some towns in ruins.

During the next few weeks ten more elders arrived and all of the old branches were visited. For some places (Cuautla, Morelos, which was Zapata's home town, for example) this was the first visit by American elders in nine years. Working as a team to reorganize and to gather history, Pratt and Brother Jenson made a comprehensive tour of the branches and the capital.⁴⁰

At the conference of the Juárez Stake in November 1921, the Chihuahua Mission, which had functioned under stake authority, was transferred to the Mexican Mission. The local Saints had always supplied the area with missionaries, but due to colonial attrition in the Revolution, this was no longer possible.⁴¹ Now Pratt's elders took over all of the branches in Mexico except those in the colonies themselves, and he assumed the presidency of all Spanish-speaking organizations in the Church.

Their number grew over the next three years as Pratt moved missionaries into Querétaro, León, Guaymas, and Baja California. In 1924 he opened up work among Spanish speakers in southern California for the first time and established a branch in Los Angeles.

³⁹Mexican Mission, vol. B, p. 60.

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 102.

⁴¹Ibid., pp. 156-57.

Mission headquarters remained in El Paso, but much of the time Pratt was on the go to administer his far-flung and expanding constituency. His daughter says that he was "conscientious about attending every conference," including those in his mission, those of the Juárez Stake, and the general conferences in Salt Lake City. "He wasn't home any more than four or five days at a time," and when he was, there was "no time for anything" as he was always busy translating and revising Church literature. Then he was off again to Zion's Printing and Publishing Company in Independence, Missouri, to Utah, or to some part of the mission.⁴²

A NEW CALLING, A NEW MISSION, AND NEW TROUBLES

In January 1925, Pratt was called to Salt Lake City and given an added responsibility. At the April conference he was sustained and set apart as one of the First Seven Presidents of the Seventy. Contrary to his expectations, he retained his duties as mission president and so was seldom able to meet with that council, but he did bring to it the experience of a professional missionary. The authority he was given enabled him to perform greater service in the mission field.

Since Parley P. Pratt's abortive attempt to establish a Chilean mission in 1852, there had been no Church representation whatever in South America. Now in September 1925 Pratt was called, together with Apostle Melvin J. Ballard and fellow Seventies president Rulon S. Wells, to open a mission there; and they went to Buenos Aires, Argentina in November.

Although he was engaged in his favorite activity, Pratt regarded the next few months as the hardest of his entire life. Proselyting met considerable resistance among the Argentines and mission progress was slow. The recent death of his son Carl Lee weighed upon his spirits. His wife wrote of illness and other family problems at home. He himself was sick and only semi-active for a long period.⁴³ Although he accomplished much on that trip and never regretted going, he was very happy to return home in September 1926.

Meanwhile, back in Mexico, disaster had struck again. In order to prevent the Catholic church from regaining its former position of political dominance, the landmark Constitution of

⁴²Parrish interview.

⁴³Pratt, *Diary*, vol. 8.

1917 had placed tight restrictions upon ecclesiastical activity. An amendment dealing with the problem specified, among other things, that "To exercise within the territory of the Republic of Mexico the office of minister of any church, it is necessary to be a Mexican by birth," and "All religious ceremonies of public worship must always be under the direct supervision of the civil authorities."⁴⁴

Early in 1926 the government reacted to a pro-Catholic revolt with a stiff enforcement of these laws. It was aimed primarily at this "Cristero" movement, but of course it applied to all other churches as well. Kenneth Haymore, acting as provisional President of the mission in Pratt's absence, had no choice but to comply. By August all missionaries not born in Mexico were withdrawn to the United States.

Upon his return from South America Pratt found himself again directing the greater part of his mission by correspondence with local members. Work in Mexico was seriously handicapped, but he was optimistic. If the crackdown loosened the stranglehold of the Catholic church, he reasoned, the result should be greater religious freedom and growth in the mission.⁴⁵

Pratt told the 1927 October general conference of the Church that the mission in Mexico was struggling along with a skeleton crew of Mexican-born elders. The branches, some twenty of them, were being maintained in an operational, if not thriving condition, by the local priesthood holders.⁴⁶ It seems almost to have been a test of the members to see whether they were ready to give up some of the reliance on the paternalistic figure and handle things on their own.

By 1930 the Catholic church had capitulated to government demands and was functioning normally again. Hoping that this might mean a relaxation of restrictions, U.S. Ambassador J. Reuben Clark approached the government concerning foreign missionaries, but was unable to get permission for their return. At the same time, February and March, Pratt tried his own luck with local officials, north and south. Not only was he unsuccessful, but as he toured the branches he was prevented,

⁴⁴Pratt to B. H. Roberts, 9 December 1929, Church Archives. This letter includes a translation of those articles dealing with religious matters and a commentary on them.

⁴⁵Rey L. Pratt, "The Mexican Mission," *The Improvement Era* 31 (1928): 578-81.

⁴⁶*Conference Report*, April 1927, pp. 29-30.

as an alien minister, from speaking to the congregations during regular meetings.⁴⁷

In November and December he spent several weeks south of the border. He found the branches in good order, although still struggling under the restrictions. It was his last trip to Mexico.

Pratt spoke again in general conference on 6 April 1931. Inevitably, he talked optimistically about the Mexican Mission. The government of Mexico had recently interpreted the church control law to mean that religious services could be held only in buildings exclusively dedicated to that purpose. The Saints, who had been meeting in private homes or rented locales, had responded by building four chapels in and around Mexico City.⁴⁸ With spirit and initiative like that, they could not fail.

After the conference was over, on 9 April, Pratt entered the hospital to have a hernia corrected. It was not a serious operation, even for a man of fifty-three. But complications set in, and on the morning of 14 April 1931, Rey Pratt died.

Friends, relatives, General Authorities, and "several hundred" Mexican Saints, many from far away, packed the Assembly Hall on Temple Square for the funeral.⁴⁹ President Heber J. Grant, lifelong friend and confidant Apostle Anthony W. Ivins, and others of the Authorities who knew Pratt best spoke at the service. Their main theme was one of regret that he could not stay to see his work reach full fruition.

It is sad that he did not live a few years more. Although the restriction against foreign missionaries was imposed, to a greater or lesser degree, into the 1960s, native Mexicans carried on. Beginning in 1934 they were joined by a trickle of elders from the United States, and after World War II the few became a flood. The Mexican Mission that Rey Pratt left in 1931 has since been divided and redivided. In Mexico itself there were in 1974 five missions and eleven stakes. The greatest monument to Rey L. Pratt is the fact that there are now over 98,000 Mormons in Mexico, more than in any other country except the United States.⁵⁰

⁴⁷Mexican Mission, vol. B, 737-39.

⁴⁸*Deseret News*, 6 April 1931.

⁴⁹*Ibid.*, 17 April 1931.

⁵⁰*Church News*, 26 August 1972.