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CHRISTIAN LITERATURE IN SPAIN AND LATIN AMERICA.

BY JUAN ORTS GONZALEZ.

ONE of the greatest changes produced by the Republic has been to awaken the desire in the Spanish people for reading serious books, especially among the middle and labour classes. The Republic has discouraged very much bull-fights, lotteries and books of fiction. Republican leaders have said to the common people: "Spain was the most backward country in Europe, because it was a country with few schools and with few readers of good books. Every Spaniard who wishes to see better days for Spain ought to be willing to ask for more schools, and to read more and better books." And the Spanish people have taken to heart the advice of the Republican leaders. You cannot visit any Public Library to-day without seeing that every seat is taken and some are reading standing up because there is no more room for sitting, and this is all the more astonishing because the Republic has established more than 400 new Public Libraries.

Also, you will find all the Public Schools overcrowded in spite of the fact that the Republic has, in the last three years, opened more than 13,000 new schools. Another surprise that will strike every foreigner, and even Spaniard, is that books of fiction are not in demand, only books about sociology, history, philosophy and so forth. These form the majority of books which you will see in the hands of readers. Another fact which ought to be taken into consideration by every author who wishes his works to be read is, that the Spanish mind to-day is a very questioning one. The Spaniard has been cheated so much by bad authors and has been misled for so long by political as well as religious leaders that he does not take anything for granted; he wants to examine facts and reasons and form his own judgment and opinion. This, although a very encouraging sign, is at the same time a great handicap, because Marxists and Communists have, since the beginning of the Republic, inundated the mind of the worker (and I am speaking particularly of the masses) with atheistic literature, and such literature has been taken by the ignorant labouring classes as the most scientific and final. To me, looking from the standpoint both of religion and science, the greatest hope for succeeding in arousing religious interest is, not only by showing that the type of Marxism and Communism in Russia is anti-religious, but also anti-scientific. But we shall speak later in this paper about these points.

We cannot speak of general types of books for all Spaniards for the simple reason that there are a great many different types of Spaniards, and therefore they have different needs to be met by books. Let me give briefly a classification of the problem as

I see it. First of all, let us divide the whole of Spain into two groups, Catholics and non-Catholics—I do not want to say anti-Catholics because then many will not be included in these two groups. The Catholics can be divided into three classes, loyal, indifferent and nominal. Loyal Catholics are very few in Spain. I do not think I exaggerate when I say that less than 10 per cent. are men and less than 40 per cent. are women. For these we can do very little, because every pamphlet or book about religion which has not at the beginning these words, "With the approval of the Roman Catholic ecclesiastical authorities," it will be considered a sin to read. No religious book can be written even in defence of the Roman Catholic Church, and no religious book can be read in defence of the Roman Catholic Church without committing a mortal sin if it lacks the approval in print of the Roman Catholic authorities.

The indifferent Catholics are those who go to Church only at such times as Holy Week and Christmas and now and then to hear a special sermon, or to accompany friends at baptisms, marriages, funerals and so forth, which always take place in the Church. They, with the nominal Catholics, constitute the majority, probably more than 70 per cent. men and more than 40 per cent. women. The difference I make between nominal and indifferent Catholics is, that the former scarcely visit the Church, some of them never going to a service for years. This large group of indifferent and nominal Catholics is usually liberal-minded. They will welcome any book which may happen to interest them whether it has the approval of the Roman Catholic authorities or not. For the majority of them the prohibition of the Roman Catholic authorities will stimulate them to read the books.

Among the non-Catholics, the first group to consider is the anti-Catholic. This group does not consist of many intellectuals but of a very large part of the labour classes. The majority of them are not only aggressive anti-Catholics, but aggressive against any form of positive religion, no matter whether that religion is Catholic, Protestant or Jewish. A point of interest to authors about this class is that, while they claim to be scientific, they are anti-Catholic and anti-religious because they are convinced that true science repudiates every type of religion. Then comes a small group, but a very representative one, of Theosophists. A larger group, but of a very low type of culture, are the Spiritists. A very special group, probably less than two or three hundred in the whole of Spain, are real believers without any Church whatever. Some belonging to this group have been in the past, and are to-day, the most influential leaders in education and literature. Here are some of them: Azcarate, Gines de los Rios (both dead), Unamuno, Zuleta and Fernando de los Rios. Then the Protestants and their sympathisers.

This classification is very far from being complete, but for our purpose it represents, I think, quite correctly the intellectual and spiritual needs which have to be met by books. For all of the first

three groups the most important thing is to write books in which Christianity is presented in its primitive purity. The true religious soul of Spain is such, that in its conception of the present life and the life to come, and about the divine inspiration of the Bible, and particularly of the Gospels, writings without an ecclesiastical or theological setting will appeal to them. I have not time to enlarge on this point, but my book, *El Destino de los Pueblos Ibericos*, gives reasons and facts to prove this.

To reach these classes, books ought, first of all, to have an imprint which is not ecclesiastical. Secondly, the terminology or vocabulary ought not to be theological; ecclesiastical garb and theological dress are abhorrent to them. Thirdly, in substance and style they ought to be as perfect as possible. Anglo-Saxons care more for facts and good reasoning than for beautiful words and eloquent style, but Spaniards and Latin Americans, although recently they are changing and acquiring the Anglo-Saxon point of view, require a high standard in the choice of words and in style.

For anti-Catholics and unbelievers the appeal ought to be made on the basis of the last word in science, quoting the testimonies of the best scholars in science—no other authority will have any appeal to this type; moreover, the titles of the books ought to be of a challenging nature. Let me illustrate what I mean. I am preparing now a book entitled *The Credulity of Unbelievers*. I hope also to prepare pamphlets such as, *Why it has been rightly said that religion is opium to the masses, Ecclesiasticism is the source of Unbelief, Believers who are practically Atheists, Unbelievers who practically live as Believers*. For the common people I am preparing a book entitled *Religion within the Reach of All*.

For all types of Roman Catholics, we have to write pamphlets and books presenting our doctrines in an appealing way. The ignorance of Roman Catholics on the subject of Protestantism is appalling. For the loyal Roman Catholics, we have to write in such a way that they may see that we believe in all the great and fundamental truths in which they believe; and we must demonstrate the fact that our difference from themselves lies in our belief in Christ not only as the Founder of the Christian Church but as superior to her, in His sacrifice as sufficient and complete and His intercession as supreme, and that these beliefs are founded on the Gospel and Apostolic History. In all books and pamphlets prepared for loyal Roman Catholics, we should aim not to persuade them to give up what they have, but to look more and more exclusively to Christ and His Gospel.

For the Protestants, we need above all more and better devotional and preaching literature. It is almost a tragedy that, having so much good devotional and preaching literature in the works of some of the Spanish reformers and mystics, scarcely any use has been made of it by Spanish Protestants. To me, it is very significant that the only two missionaries who have benefited by the use of such literature have been Rev. H. G. Smith of England, and Dr. John A. Mackay formerly of Scotland but now of New York.

The former told me: "Next to the Bible, *La Guía de Pecadores* of Friar Luis de Granada is my favourite book for preaching material"; and the latter reveals his appreciation of that literature in his splendid book, *The Other Spanish Christ*. I am glad that the Religious Tract Society, London, is considering the publication of *The 110 Considerations of Juan Valdes*, which is a real treasure for preachers and spiritually-minded men.

We ought also to publish pamphlets and books about personal work, self-support, and similar subjects. Above all, we ought to publish literature which will demonstrate to Spaniards and Latin Americans that what Germans, Englishmen and others did in the sixteenth century they can do to-day. I am gathering facts and reasons, and making notes about them, for a book dealing with that subject, and hope to interest some Latin American to help me with it, in order that the book may appeal to both Spaniards and Latin Americans.

PREPARATION, PRESENTATION, AND DISTRIBUTION.

As much as possible, all religious literature ought to be prepared by nationals, either of Spain or of Latin America. Only exceptional religious books ought to be translated; and even those should be freely translated or well adapted to the Spanish and Latin American mind. To-day, if we take into account Latin America as well as Spain, there are a great many who could prepare leaflets, pamphlets and good books. Of course, they will need some help and leisure to enable them to do this. The best writers are usually overcrowded with other work, and are without the necessary secretarial help for the preparation of manuscripts. If a well-planned and comprehensive programme could be arranged and made known to all the missionary boards and national leaders of Spain and Latin America, requesting their co-operation by means of whatever books, pamphlets or leaflets each one could prepare, in a very short time we could have abundant and satisfactory literature. Since leaving my position as official translator of Spanish books in the Committee on Co-operation in Latin America, which is made up of about forty-five Boards having work in Latin America, and going to Spain where I hope to live and work for many years, I have been thinking about and planning such a programme of literature.

PRESENTATION.

So far, the Protestant religious books available in both Spain and Latin America have been lacking in the matter of good presentation. Paper, binding and printing have been poor and unattractive; and such presentation is a greater handicap because the Spanish and Latin American people are very fond of art and beauty. When one knows and can compare the Protestant literature with other literary publications, it can easily be seen how deficient is our presentation. Also, we have to avoid anything redolent of ecclesiasticism in our titles or imprint.

DISTRIBUTION.

In this more than in any other aspect, our literature programme has been altogether deficient.

First of all, we ought to have in view distribution in Spanish-speaking countries as a whole. There are more than twenty of them, but the middle and cultured classes of all have an identical cultural soul and require the same type of literature, no matter what foreign critics and writers have said to the contrary. A university man from Bolivia thinks and speaks like a university man from Argentina or from Spain, reads almost the same books, and has identical views about individual and social life. Not long ago, an Oxford professor (whose name I do not now recall) wrote a history of Argentina, in which he states that the French influence there is very superficial (by some foreign critics, Argentina has been considered more French than Spanish), and that the real influence is altogether Spanish, as can be demonstrated by the best and most widely read books and authors. Only the uncultured Indians constitute a body by themselves; but even the cultured Indian is identical with the cultured Spaniard in his cultural background, and we ought to keep in mind that to-day there are a great many cultured Indians in Mexico, Chile and Peru. By cultured Indians, I mean university men.

Spain is the best centre for distribution. Books published in one or another of the Spanish republics will encounter prejudices which do not affect Spain. Besides, the cost of mailing is less from Spain than from many of the South American Republics. This opinion can be corroborated by the testimony of the best missionaries and nationals who are well acquainted with the selling of books in Latin America.

Our books so far have not reached outsiders in any considerable number because our way of announcing them is practically of no value. We have to publish our material and present it in such a way that it can be sent to the best newspapers and magazines for review and to the best booksellers for exhibition and sale. In this respect, Protestants have done almost nothing. Without some kind of publicity, we cannot expect good sales, no matter how good is our material. In this matter, also, I hope to render good service, when I secure competent Spanish stenographic help.

URGENCY.

The eagerness of the Spaniard to read—and of the Latin American also on a smaller scale—has enabled the Marxist and the atheist to flood Spain and Latin America with books advocating unbelief and communism. If we delay undertaking a greater campaign for the publication of more and better books, pamphlets and leaflets, we shall soon find the field fully occupied by bad literature which will make our task more difficult. To-day in both Spain and Latin America, the written word is more needed, more important and more influential than the spoken word. Often it is

difficult to gather a crowd to listen to a speaker ; but the written word can easily go everywhere and reach everybody. I believe that—great as is the need for good evangelists and lecturers, and I myself plan to preach and lecture and help others to do the same—without doubt the written word is to-day the most imperative need.

The foregoing has been written after witnessing the most awful revolutionary strike in Madrid, where I do not know how many were killed and wounded, both civilians and soldiers ; where I heard the sound of many bombs and innumerable rifle shots ; where two bullets passed through my own hotel room, fortunately without touching me, though in the room below a man was killed and a woman wounded, and on the floor above more than thirty bullets were afterwards found.

I am finishing this paper in Valencia, where from my own room I can see cannon and machine guns ready to be fired, and hundreds of soldiers and police marching about. And yet, I feel as sure as ever that religious freedom in Spain will continue, no matter what may be the final outcome of the present struggle ; that the monarchy is not likely to be restored ; and that we loyal evangelicals ought to aid in this great crisis by helping Spain to recover her lost Spanish religious soul. Oh ! may our friends in England help us to do this.

VALENCIA, SPAIN,

October 10, 1934.

[This paper is the property of the Rev. R. Mercer Wilson, the Religious Tract Society, London, acting on behalf of the author.]

THE LIFE OF T. R. MATTHEWS. By Thomas Wright. *C. J. Farncombe & Sons, Ltd.* £1 1s.

Many interesting sidelights are thrown upon contemporary life in this memoir of T. R. Matthews, a powerful Evangelical preacher, who was born in the Isle of Ely in 1795. The value of faithful testimony in dark days is illustrated by the lives of the Evangelical stalwarts. Matthews came under Simeon's influence at Cambridge. He was a friend of Edward Fitzgerald, upon whose brother John the mantle of Matthews fell. It is interesting to read that the first edition of Omar Khayyám did not sell at 2s. 6d. It was reduced to 1s. 3d. and ultimately to 1d. By good fortune Swinburne saw one. This led to the fame of Edward Fitzgerald's work. Matthews exercised a great influence, principally in the Home Counties. Many of his sayings are recorded. Here is one on "Bowling Naamans." He laments the fact the Church still had bowling Naamans—those who would conciliate the Church of Rome, adding, "and more will yet arise, alias Puseyites."

We commend this volume by Mr. Thomas Wright of "Cowper" fame to all who cherish the memory of our Evangelical forefathers. The facts connected with them are all too little known.