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MANUEL MATAMOROS.

THE SPANISH REFORMER.

BY THE REV. F. BATE, D.D.

I HAVE before me as I write a document of historic importance and of particular interest at this present moment when the eyes of most of the world are turned towards the unhappy country of Spain, where is being waged a civil war that will have some considerable influence upon the question of liberty of conscience in the peninsula. If freedom should come at last to Spain, and its people be allowed to worship as they will, the result will be a bringing to fruition of the work and labours, sometimes done faithfully even unto death, of a long line of Spanish witnesses for the Truth.

Among those who suffered for conscience sake in the nineteenth century stands out the name of Matamoros. The document before me is an original form of the petition to the Queen of Spain, expressing the hopes and prayers of thirty thousand French women in favour of Matamoros and his companions in captivity. It is dated 1863 and is worded as follows :

“ Votre Majesté sera peut-être surprise de la démarche que nous osons faire aujourd’hui, et nous devons tout premièrement la supplier très humblement de pardonner ce qui pourrait lui paraître une singulière témérité.

“ Mais ce sont des femmes qui s’adressent au cœur de la Reine pour la conjurer d’écouter ce qu’elles viennent lui dire en faveur de quelques-uns de ses sujets qui souffrent et qui prient dans les cachots destinés aux plus grands criminels.

“ Matamoros et Alhama ont été condamnés à huit et neuf ans de présides. Leurs familles sont plongées dans le deuil et dans la misère.

“ Ils souffrent et sont en danger de mort, tant le châtiment sévère. Leurs compagnons de captivité sont menacés d’une condamnation semblable.

“ Ils avaient cru pouvoir, sans crime, lire l’Évangile tel que la bonté de Dieu nous l’a conservé à travers les siècles, et ils ne s’assemblaient que pour s’exhorter mutuellement à mettre cette loi divine en pratique.

“ Ils sont les fidèles serviteurs de Votre Majesté : dans leur prison, ils prient pour la Reine et pour leur pays.

“ En France, en Angleterre, en tout pays de l’Europe, les Espagnols trouvent la liberté de servir Dieu selon leur conscience. Votre Majesté n’est-elle pas heureuse qu’il en soit ainsi ?

“ Nous venons supplier la Reine de faire cesser les souffrances de ces pauvres prisonniers, et, par un acte de sa royale clémence, de rendre la joie au cœur de la mère de Matamoros, de la nombreuse famille d’Alhama.

“ Nos prières se joignent à celles des prisonniers pour obtenir du Dieu des miséricordes, de Celui qui règne au ciel et qui répand ses grâces sur la terre, qu’il daigne accorder à Votre Majesté et à son beau royaume les plus précieuses bénédictions.”

It was almost the climax of a story which begins with one who was intimately associated with the growth in the nineteenth century of Protestantism in Spain, Francisco de Paula Ruet. Ruet was born and reared in the Roman Catholic Church, his father being a colonel of a regiment in Cantabria. His future was greatly

influenced when he decided, his father having died, to follow the stage for a livelihood. In the course of his preparation for that profession he found himself before he was twenty in Italy where he paid almost a chance visit to a Waldensian Church. It is fairly certain that his attendance at the service that day was not as a seeker after truth but merely as one who was curiously interested. Whatever were the motives with which he entered the church, the service and the sermon marked the turning-point of his life. He purchased a copy of the New Testament and after some instruction was received into the Waldensian Church. Meanwhile in Spain one of the many revolutions, that of 1855, led to a short-lived grant of religious freedom. Taking advantage of the liberty granted to non-Roman Catholics, Ruet returned to preach the Gospel which he had now known for ten years. In Barcelona he attracted great audiences, but his activities were quickly brought to an end. Three times he was arrested and twice released, probably on account of his family connections. By the time of his third arrest the political pendulum had swung back. He was brought before the Bishop's Ecclesiastical Court, imprisoned for some months, and finally condemned by the court to death at the stake as a heretic. Fortunately the zeal of the Bishop for the inquisition methods of torture and murder exceeded his power. Even Spain could hardly be expected to tolerate a renewal of Inquisition fires. Ruet was freed from death but sentenced to life-long banishment. He was set ashore at Gibraltar, where he immediately prosecuted his work as an evangelist and where he received ordination as a minister in the Waldensian Church. Gibraltar was sufficiently close to the borders of Spain and there was sufficient intercommunication between the two places to allow the small Waldensian Church to become a centre radiating evangelical and protestant influence, and so to quicken the growing revolt in many minds against the autocracy and tyranny of the Roman Church. It was through Ruet that Matamoros was brought into the Protestant fold.

Manuel Matamoros was nine years younger than Ruet and was also the son of an army officer. At the age of fifteen he was sent to a military school with the idea of making soldiering his profession. Utterly disliking the life and atmosphere, he left before completing his military training and made his way to Gibraltar, where he was brought into contact with Ruet. That meeting sealed Matamoros' destiny. He laboured incessantly as a successor to the early apostles, itinerating throughout Spain, preaching the Gospel that had brought to him life, hope, and peace. Nobody will ever be able to estimate the extent of the harvest of which he sowed the seed, but he was warring against a Church whose position was almost impregnable and whose persecuting zeal remained undiminished.

In 1860 he was arrested and imprisoned in Barcelona. The spirit and temper of the man may be judged from the following letter, which from his prison cell he addressed to an English well-wisher. Imprisonment could not limit the fiery zeal of Matamoros.

PRISON, BARCELONA,
17th October, 1860.

"On the 9th instant, at seven o'clock in the morning, I was arrested for the single crime of being a Christian, and loving my fellow-men so well as to desire that they also should know the Lord Jesus, by whom alone they can be saved. A charge laid against me in Granada induced the Civil Governor of that city to send a telegraphic order to the Governor of this place for my arrest, and also for the minute examination of my house, etc.

"After a most rigorous and tyrannical search, there was found in my possession a packet of letters and papers from several places in Spain, and certain other documents which compromised me to a considerable degree. I was brought to this prison, and kept for eight days in a sad and terribly solitary confinement.

"After two examinations before the whole tribunal, I was relieved from my solitude, that is to say, I am now confined with criminals! I gave my answers without confessing anything but my own faith, so as not to involve others—that faith which shall save me when the one supreme Judge shall sit upon His throne.

"At this stage of my examination a singular episode occurred. The magistrates believed that I should deny my faith, that the sight of the enemies of Christ and my tyrants should overwhelm me; but they were mistaken. The questions and answers were as follows: *Ques.* Do you profess the Catholic Apostolic Roman Faith? and if not, what religion do you profess? *Ans.* My religion is that of Jesus Christ, my rule of faith is the Word of God or Holy Bible, which without a word altered, curtailed, or added, is the basis of my belief, and in this I am confirmed by the last few sentences of the Apocalypse, and the many distinct charges of the apostles in their Epistles. The Roman Catholic and Apostolic Church, not being based upon these principles, I do not believe in her dogmas; still less, do I obey her in practice. The tribunal appeared astonished at these words, and the judge said to me, 'Do you know what you are saying?' 'Yes, sir,' I replied in a firm voice, 'I cannot deny it; I have put my hand to the plough, and I dare not look back.' The judge was silent, and the tribunal rose.

"Nothing, dear brother, alarms me for myself, but I do grieve over the arrests which have been made, both before and since mine took place, in various parts of Andalusia. Oh! they will injure worthy Christian people, honoured fathers and virtuous sons! Alas! this oversets my tranquillity of mind and I shall not recover it for many days.

"And again, my dear old Mother with my two little brothers are left alone in this strange town. Thus, my position is very trying; I suffer, yes, I suffer much. Our mission, my dear friend, is not and has not been to separate believers from the Church of Rome; it has been to bring souls out of Roman darkness, and from atheism or indifference to the knowledge of Christ; to gather together intelligent and evangelical congregations—in a word to form churches worthy of God and of the world. As you will easily imagine, my spirit is not at rest, and I cannot to-day write you at length upon these topics, but I promise to do so shortly, and give you explicit details. . . . Although my imprisonment threatens to be a long one, that is, of some months' duration, yet I can labour here also, for the brethren visit me; and from this spot I can give you full information. The work in Barcelona has not suffered in the slightest degree, for all depends upon me, and I would sooner die than cause anyone to suffer. In Andalusia they have received a fearful blow; but time will obliterate their panic, and all will go on as before. The seed sown has been abundant and good, and the enmity of Christ's foes is impotent. God is on our side. . . . Counsel and consolation from Christian friends is a necessary of life to me now . . .

"Your brother in Christ,
"MANUEL MATAMOROS."

Delivered from jail in Barcelona he itinerated again preaching

the same Gospel of light and love. In 1862 he and several of his friends and supporters were arrested and imprisoned with felons and criminals at Granada. After several months they were brought to trial and were condemned to as much as nine years at the galleys. Times, however, were altered; knowledge was more easily and freely dispersed and other countries were interested in these attempts to revive the Inquisition. From every free country in Europe protests arose. Monster petitions were prepared and signed in vast numbers. As we have said, a petition from the women of France comprised thirty thousand names. The Evangelical Alliance organised an important deputation with a view to seeking an interview with Queen Isabella in order to voice the disgust of free nations against this attempt to shackle the thoughts and minds of Christian workers, the effect of whose work could only be for the enlightenment and uplift of the people to whom they preached. The Queen refused to receive the deputation, but public opinion secured the commutation of the sentence to that of banishment. Matamoros and his friends were set free. Matamoros himself chose Switzerland as his new home, but his experiences in prison had seriously undermined his health. He had always been a man of delicate physique. Privation and suffering caused him to develop tuberculosis, of which he died a very few years after his banishment.

Queen Isabella was herself soon to know what banishment meant. In 1868 a revolution in Spain drove her from the throne. The new government granted in 1868 a limited measure of religious freedom. Theoretically all were given liberty of conscience and of worship, but attached to the grant was a clause so phrased that any individual magistrate could, while observing the law, find opportunity to tyrannise and persecute.

Later still in 1876 the Spanish government granted personal religious liberty, but publicity and propaganda were forbidden to any but Roman Catholics. In 1910 the King was compelled by the Canalejas ministry to issue an ordinance repealing the restrictions imposed by the constitution of 1866 and to allow a fuller degree of religious liberty, but violent protests from the clergy and the Vatican led to the dropping of these proposals. Once again in 1923, on the eve of the dictatorship, a further attempt to secure equal religious liberty was made, but again it was defeated on account of the opposition of the Church. Under General Primo de Rivera and his successor the Roman Catholic authorities were given a still freer hand to persecute and to suppress.

One case among others may be quoted as typical of the savage intolerance that existed until the fall of the monarchy in 1931 when the Church of Spain ceased to control the secular arm. In October, 1927, a poor Protestant widow, a mother of several children, was arrested and brought before the tribunal because she had ventured to say to her neighbours that the Virgin Mary had borne other children after the birth of Our Lord. On the charge of being blasphemous she was sent to penal servitude for two years and

was actually imprisoned. The Supreme Court confirmed the sentence on appeal, but so many protests were made and feeling was so intense that she was released in the following July. Even that was not the end of her suffering. One of the conditions attached to her liberty was that for some months she was forbidden to return to her home: she must live at least twenty-five miles away. One can understand the feeling that induced an eminent son of the Roman Catholic Church, the Count de Montalembert, to say after his visit to Spain in 1865: "If you want to know what exclusive Catholicism has done to one of the greatest and most heroic nations on earth, then go to Spain."

Whatever may be the result of the present conflict in Spain it must be the prayer of all lovers of freedom and of those who for centuries have enjoyed the liberty to worship as they please, that there may be opening up for the people of Spain a new era; that the heavy hand of persecution may be removed; that the people may be free to read the Word of God as they will and to worship as they are led by the Spirit; that they may know the Truth that shall make them free.

If that does eventuate the present generation of Spaniards will owe an immense debt of gratitude to pioneers such as Matamoros who, at the risk of health and life and fortune, fought the battle of liberty of conscience and stood steadfast for the freedom that is in Christ.

THIRTY SHORT SERMONS. By the Rev. L. W. Jackson, B.A.
Thynne & Co. 2s. and 2s. 6d.

One wonders to what extent sermons are read in these days. That such reading has limits is obvious. Preaching involves effort on the part of the hearer as well as the preacher. From this point of view, preaching might be termed a partnership of effort. When reading sermons one misses the personal element which makes listening a joy. The personality of the preacher, the emphasis given on certain points, inflexions of the voice, pleading, warning, and declamation. Yet this present volume of "short sermons" has a particularly pleasing charm of its own. None of them attempt at exposition of the fundamental doctrines of the Faith. They might be classed as words of comfort. Those who originally heard them could not justly complain, as is sometimes the case, that they were sent away with nothing to think about. The author knows his Bible well; he also knows the book of Nature. Further, he knows human needs and Christ's ability to supply them. Anyone who happens to dip into these pages will find helpful reading on every hand.

The hard-pressed Christian Minister laden with preaching and pastoral work will find many useful pegs therein. Yet for him, the usefulness of the book is limited by the absence of an index which certainly would have enhanced the value of the work.

E. H.