

THE BIBLE IN SPAIN.

CHAPTER I.

THE PROHIBITION.—GOSPEL PERSECUTED.—CHARGE OF SORCERY.
—OFALIA.

ABOUT the middle of January a swoop was made upon me by my enemies, in the shape of a peremptory prohibition from the political governor of Madrid to sell any more New Testaments. This measure by no means took me by surprise, as I had for some time previously been expecting something of the kind, on account of the political sentiments of the ministers then in power. I forthwith paid a visit to Sir George Villiers, informing him of what had occurred. He promised to do all he could to cause the prohibition to be withdrawn. Unfortunately at this time he had not much influence, having opposed with all his might the entrance of the moderado mi-

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nistry to power, and the nomination of Ofalia to the presidency of the cabinet. I, however, never lost confidence in the Almighty, in whose cause I was engaged.

Matters were going on very well before this check. The demand for Testaments was becoming considerable, so much so, that the clergy were alarmed, and this step was the consequence. But they had previously recourse to another, well worthy of them, they attempted to act upon my fears. One of the ruffians of Madrid, called Manolos, came up to me one night, in a dark street, and told me that unless I discontinued selling my "Jewish books," I should have a knife "*nailed in my heart*;" but I told him to go home, say his prayers, and tell his employers that I pitied them; whereupon he turned away with an oath. A few days after, I received an order to send two copies of the Testament to the office of the political governor, with which I complied, and in less than twenty-four hours an alguazil arrived at the shop with a notice prohibiting the farther sale of the work.

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Ch. I.] GOSPEL PERSECUTED. 3

One circumstance rejoiced me. Singular as it may appear, the authorities took no measures to cause my little despacho to be closed, and I received no prohibition respecting the sale of any work but the New Testament, and as the Gospel of Saint Luke, in Rommany and Basque, would within a short time be ready for delivery, I hoped to carry on matters in a small way till better times should arrive.

I was advised to erase from the shop windows the words “ Despacho of the British and Foreign Bible Society.” This, however, I refused to do. Those words had tended very much to call attention, which was my grand object. Had I attempted to conduct things in an underhand manner, I should, at the time of which I am speaking, scarcely have sold thirty copies in Madrid, instead of nearly three hundred. People who know me not, may be disposed to call me rash ; but I am far from being so, as I never adopt a venturous course when any other is open to me. I am not, however, a person to be terrified by any danger, when I see that braving it is the only way to achieve an object.

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The booksellers were unwilling to sell my work; I was compelled to establish a shop of my own. Every shop in Madrid has a name. What name could I give it but the true one? I was not ashamed of my cause or my colours. I hoisted them, and fought beneath them not without success.

The priestly party in Madrid, in the mean time, spared no effort to vilify me. They started a publication, called "The Friend of the Christian Religion," in which a stupid but furious attack upon me appeared, which I, however, treated with the contempt it deserved. But not satisfied with this, they endeavoured to incite the populace against me, by telling them that I was a sorcerer, and a companion of Gypsies and witches, and their agents even called me so in the streets. That I was an associate of Gypsies and fortune-tellers I do not deny. Why should I be ashamed of their company when my Master mingled with publicans and thieves? Many of the Gypsy race came frequently to visit me; received instruction, and heard parts of the Gospel read to them in their own language, and when

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Ch. I.]

CHARGE OF SORCERY.

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they were hungry and faint, I gave them to eat and drink. This might be deemed sorcery in Spain, but I am not without hope that it will be otherwise estimated in England, and had I perished at this period, I think there are some who would have been disposed to acknowledge that I had not lived altogether in vain, (always as an instrument of the "Most Highest,") having been permitted to turn one of the most valuable books of God into the speech of the most degraded of his creatures.

In the mean time I endeavoured to enter into negociations with the ministry, for the purpose of obtaining permission to sell the New Testament in Madrid, and the nullification of the prohibition. I experienced, however, great opposition, which I was unable to surmount. Several of the ultra-popish bishops, then resident in Madrid, had denounced the Bible, the Bible Society, and myself. Nevertheless, notwithstanding their powerful and united efforts, they were unable to effect their principal object, namely, my expulsion from Madrid and Spain. The Count Ofalia, notwithstanding he had permitted

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himself to be made the instrument, to a certain extent, of these people, would not consent to be pushed to such a length. Throughout this affair, I cannot find words sufficiently strong to do justice to the zeal and interest which Sir George Villiers displayed in the cause of the Testament. He had various interviews with Ofalia on the subject, and in these he expressed to him his sense of the injustice and tyranny which had been practised in this instance towards his countryman.

Ofalia had been moved by these remonstrances, and more than once promised to do all in his power to oblige Sir George; but then the bishops again beset him, and playing upon his political if not religious fears, prevented him from acting a just, honest, and honourable part. At the desire of Sir George Villiers, I drew up a brief account of the Bible Society, and an exposition of its views, especially in respect to Spain, which he presented with his own hand to the Count. I shall not trouble the reader by inserting this memorial, but content myself with observing, that I made no attempts to flatter and cajole, but

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Ch. I.]

OFALIA.

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expressed myself honestly and frankly, as a Christian ought. Ofalia, on reading it, said, "What a pity that this is a Protestant society, and that all its members are not Catholics."

A few days subsequently, to my great astonishment, he sent a message to me by a friend, requesting that I would send him a copy of my Gypsy Gospel. I may as well here state, that the fame of this work, though not yet published, had already spread like wildfire through Madrid, and every person was passionately eager to possess a copy; indeed, several grandees of Spain sent messages with similar requests, all of which I however denied. I instantly resolved to take advantage of this overture on the part of Count Ofalia, and to call on him myself. I therefore caused a copy of the Gospel to be handsomely bound, and proceeding to the palace, was instantly admitted to him. He was a dusky, diminutive person, between fifty and sixty years of age, with false hair and teeth, but exceedingly gentlemanly manners. He received me with great affability, and thanked me for my present; but on my proceeding to speak of the New Tes-

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tament, he told me that the subject was surrounded with difficulties, and that the great body of the clergy had taken up the matter against me; he conjured me, however, to be patient and peaceable, in which case he said he would endeavour to devise some plan to satisfy me. Amongst other things, he observed that the bishops hated a sectarian more than an Atheist. Whereupon I replied, that like the Pharisees of old, they cared more for the gold of the temple than the temple itself. Throughout the whole of our interview, he evidently laboured under great fear, and was continually looking behind and around him, seemingly in dread of being overheard, which brought to my mind an expression of a friend of mine, that if there be any truth in metempsychosis, the soul of Count Ofalia must have originally belonged to a mouse. We parted in kindness, and I went away, wondering by what strange chance this poor man had become prime minister of a country like Spain.

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CHAPTER II.

THE TWO GOSPELS. — THE ALGUAZIL. — THE WARRANT. — THE GOOD MARIA. — THE ARREST. — SENT TO PRISON. — REFLECTIONS. — THE RECEPTION. — THE PRISON ROOM. — REDRESS DEMANDED.

AT length the Gospel of Saint Luke in the Gypsy language was in a state of readiness. I therefore deposited a certain number of copies in the despacho, and announced them for sale. The Basque, which was by this time also printed, was likewise advertised. For this last work there was little demand. Not so, however, for the Gypsy Luke, of which I could have easily disposed of the whole edition in less than a fortnight. Long, however, before this period had expired, the clergy were up in arms. “Sorcery!” said one bishop. “There is more in this than we can dive into,” exclaimed a second. “He will convert all Spain by means of the Gypsy language,” cried a third. And then came the usual chorus on such occasions, of *Que infamia!* *Que picardia!*

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THE BIBLE IN SPAIN.

[Ch. II.]

At last, having consulted together, away they hurried to their tool the *corregidor*, or, according to the modern term, the *gefe politico* of Madrid. I have forgotten the name of this worthy, of whom I had myself no personal knowledge whatever. Judging from his actions, however, and from common report, I should say that he was a stupid wrong-headed creature, savage withal—a melange of *borrico*, mule, and wolf. Having an inveterate antipathy to all foreigners, he lent a willing ear to the complaint of my accusers, and forthwith gave orders to make a seizure of all the copies of the Gypsy Gospel which could be found in the *despacho*. The consequence was, that a numerous body of *alguazils* directed their steps to the *Calle del principe*; some thirty copies of the book in question were pounced upon, and about the same number of *Saint Luke* in *Basque*. With this spoil these satellites returned in triumph to the *gefatura politica*, where they divided the copies of the Gypsy volume amongst themselves, selling subsequently the greater number at a large price, the book being in the greatest demand, and thus becoming unin-