

CHAPTER 45

Return to Spain - Seville - A Hoary Persecutor - Manchegan Prophetess - Antonio's Dream.

On the 31st of December, 1838, I again visited Spain for the third time.¹ After staying a day or two at Cadiz I repaired to Seville, from which place I proposed starting for Madrid with the mail post. Here I tarried about a fortnight, enjoying the delicious climate of this terrestrial Paradise, and the balmy breezes of the Andalusian winter, even as I had done two years previously.² Before leaving Seville, I visited the bookseller, my correspondent³, who informed me that seventy-six copies of the hundred Testaments entrusted to his care had been placed in embargo by the government last summer, and that they were at the present time in the possession of the ecclesiastical governor, whereupon I determined to visit this functionary also, with the view of making inquiries concerning the property.



45.1 Cardinal Torquemada, quintessential example of a Grand Inquisitor.

¹ On 14 December 1838, after lengthy deliberations, the General Committee of the Bible Society resolved to send Borrow back to Spain one last time, to wrap up his affairs [Darlow, 379f]. So on 21 December he took a coach from London to Falmouth to catch the steamboat *Thames*, which sailed on the 23rd and put into Lisbon harbour on the 29th [Fraser, *Hasfeld*, 31f; Knapp I : 300]. In the few spare hours before the ship sailed for Cádiz, Borrow met Judah Lib, an Ashkenazi Jew born in Poland but living in Jerusalem, whom he was to meet again eight months later in Gibraltar (see chapter 52 below) and Tangiers [Fraser, in: *GBB* 28, 11f; Robertson, *Portugal*, 20; Knapp, I : 300f; Hopkins, in *GBB* II : 6]. The boat reached Cádiz on 31 December.

² He went by steamer up the Guadalquivir from Cadiz to Seville, where he tarried for 11 days, held back either by depression, illness or love for Seville [Missler, *Daring Game*, 179]. On 12 January 1839 he wrote to Brandram: 'I reached Cadiz in safety, after crossing the Bay of Biscay in rather boisterous weather. I have been in Seville about a week, part of which time I have been rather indisposed with an old complaint; this night at ten o'clock I leave, with the letter-courier, for Madrid, whither I hope to arrive in something less than four days. I should have started before now, had an opportunity presented itself. I have been much occupied since coming here in writing to my friends in Spain apprising them of my arrival, amongst others to Sir George Villiers' [Darlow, 380].

³ The bookseller was called Caro y Cartaya [Missler, *Daring Game*, 56f, 61, 169, 174].

He lived in a large house in the Pajaria, or straw-market.⁴ He was a very old man, between seventy and eighty, and, like the generality of those who wear the sacerdotal habit in this city, was a fierce persecuting Papist. I imagine that he scarcely believed his ears when his two grand-nephews, beautiful black-haired boys who were playing in the court-yard, ran to inform him that an Englishman was waiting to speak with him, as it is probable that I was the first heretic who ever ventured into his habitation. I found him in a vaulted room, seated on a lofty chair, with two sinister-looking secretaries, also in sacerdotal habits, employed in writing at a table before him. He brought powerfully to my mind the grim old inquisitor who persuaded Philip the Second to slay his own son as an enemy to the church.⁵

He rose as I entered, and gazed upon me with a countenance dark with suspicion and dissatisfaction. He at last condescended to point me to a sofa, and I proceeded to state to him my business. He became much agitated when I mentioned the Testaments to him; but I no sooner spoke of the Bible Society and told him who I was, than he could contain himself no longer: with a stammering tongue, and with eyes flashing fire like hot coals, he proceeded to rail against the society and myself, saying that the aims of the first were atrocious, and that, as to myself, he was surprised that, being once lodged in the prison of Madrid, I had ever been permitted to quit it; adding, that it was disgraceful in the government to allow a person of my character to roam about an innocent and peaceful country, corrupting the minds of the ignorant and unsuspecting. Far from allowing myself to be disconcerted by his rude behaviour, I replied to him with all possible politeness, and assured him that in this instance he had no reason to alarm himself, as my sole motive in claiming the books in question, was to avail myself of an opportunity which at present presented itself, of sending them out of the country, which, indeed, I had been commanded to do by an official notice.⁶ But nothing would soothe him, and he informed me that he should not deliver up the books on any condition, save by a positive order of the government. As the matter was by no means an affair of consequence, I thought it wise not to persist, and also prudent to take my leave before he requested me. I was followed even down into the street by his niece and grand-nephews, who, during the whole of the conversation, had listened at the door of the apartment and heard every word.

⁴ Today's Calle Zaragoza.

⁵ This inquisitor was Cardinal Diego de Espinosa, member of the commission which investigated Prince Don Carlos for acts of treason. The prince died in 1568, probably from natural causes; but ever since there have been conspiracy theories that King Philip had his heir assassinated by poison or in some other gruesome manner.

⁶ This was, frankly speaking, a lie. Over the next year, Borrow simply ploughed back into his sales effort any lot of confiscated books which he managed to pry loose from the authorities. Only in a few, symbolic cases did he export some books from the country so as to show he was obeying the law. Ultimately, this dubious behaviour enabled Borrow to sell close to another 1,000 copies of the Scio New Testament in 1839. [Missler, *Daring Game*, 122-129.]

In passing through La Mancha, we staid for four hours at Manzanares, a large village. I was standing in the market-place conversing with a curate, when a frightful ragged object presented itself; it was a girl about eighteen or nineteen, perfectly blind, a white film being spread over her huge staring eyes. Her countenance was as yellow as that of a Mulatto. I thought at first that she was a Gypsy, and addressing myself to her, inquired in Gitano if she were of that race; she understood me, but shaking her head, replied, that she was something better than a Gitana, and could speak something better than that jargon of witches; whereupon she commenced asking me several questions in exceedingly good Latin. I was of course very much surprised, but summoning all my Latinity, I called her Manchegan Prophetess, and expressing my admiration for her learning, begged to be informed by what means she became possessed of it. I must here observe that a crowd instantly gathered around us, who, though they understood not one word of our discourse, at every sentence of the girl shouted applause, proud in the possession of a prophetess who could answer the Englishman.⁷

She informed me that she was born blind, and that a Jesuit priest had taken compassion on her when she was a child, and had taught her the holy language, in order that the attention and hearts of Christians might be more easily turned towards her. I soon discovered that he had taught her something more than Latin, for upon telling her that I was an Englishman, she said that she had always loved Britain, which was once the nursery of saints and sages, for example Bede and Alcuin, Columba and Thomas of Canterbury; but she added those times had gone by since the re-appearance of Semiramis (Elizabeth)⁸. Her Latin was truly excellent, and when I, like a genuine Goth,

⁷ This ‘Manchegan Prophetess’ was Francisca Díaz-Carralero Rodelgo (1816-1894). The success of *The Bible in Spain* was to propel her to fame throughout the world of letters and travel, under the more common name of *La Ciega de Manzanares*, the Blind Poetess of Manzanares. She was visited and described, in quick succession, by such celebrities as Théophile Gautier [Voyage, chapter 11], John Bowring, Adolphe Desbarrolles, Eugène Giraud, Charles Davillier and Gustave Doré. Her ability to improvise pious verse on any theme required was notorious; even though better classicists – and sourer elitists - than Borrow observed that her spoken Latin, far from being ‘truly excellent’, was rather primitive. Davillier, in his book *Travel around Spain* (1874) remarked that it could barely qualify as dog Latin, and that ‘in spite of my best intentions, I could hardly find anything in her phrases bearing any analogy to the language of Tacitus and Cicero’. A few samples of her impromptu verses, recited during the spell in the late 1850s when she was boarding in Madrid’s Deaf and Dumb Asylum, were recorded by Bowring in volume 1, page 525, of *Once a Week* of 17 December 1859. Around 1870 William Knapp, Borrow’s first biographer, still met *La Ciega* at the Manzanares train-station, where she entertained travellers in exchange for alms. When asked about Borrow she replied that she well ‘remembered the “*Inglés rubio*”, the blond Englishman, and recognized that to him she owed much of her celebrity, and not a few of the pesetas she received’ [Knapp, I : 349]. Manzanares, which is a modest town, has rather lavishly shown its gratitude. In the late 20th century, the town dedicated a statue, a street, a cultural centre and a poetry prize to its famous daughter. [Fernández de Castro, 52ff; and - by the same author – ‘The Blind Beggar Woman of Manzanares’, in: *GBB* 33, 34-44.]

⁸ Semiramis, the mythical Assyrian warrior queen, often portrayed as an example of lustfulness and illicit assumption of male prerogatives. Hence the use of the name for Queen Elizabeth I, who was not much appreciated by Catholic Spain.

spoke of Anglia and Terra Vandalica (Andalusia), she corrected me by saying, that in her language those places were called Britannia and Terra Betica. When we had finished our discourse, a gathering was made for the prophetess, the very poorest contributing something.⁹



45.2 *La Ciega de Manzanares* (by an unknown artist)

After travelling four days and nights, we arrived at Madrid, without having experienced the slightest accident, though it is but just to observe, and always with gratitude to the Almighty, that the next mail was stopped. A singular incident befell me immediately after my arrival; on entering the arch of the posada called La Reyna¹⁰, where I intended to put up, I found myself encircled in a person's arms, and on turning round in amazement, beheld my Greek servant, Antonio. He was haggard and ill-dressed, and his eyes seemed starting from their sockets.

⁹ In his letter of 25 January 1839, from which this episode is copied, Borrow added at the end: 'What wonderful people are the Jesuits! When shall we hear of an English rector instructing a beggar girl in the language of Cicero?' [Darlow, 386.] It was a tremendous gaffe to write such a thing to an 'English rector' like Brandram, whose personality was large and disillusion with George Borrow growing quickly. Brandram took the remark personal, and in his reply said he liked neither the remark nor the name given to the beggar girl, which forced Borrow to back down and apologize. [Darlow 387; Knapp, I : 313f]

¹⁰ Borrow arrived in Madrid on 16 or 17 January 1839 [Knapp, I : 303; Jenkins, 284]. In the early 1830s, the *Posada de la Reina* in Madrid was in the Calle de San Miguel (which disappeared below the Gran Vía in the early 20th century), near the corner of Calle Alcalá, and seems to have been a rather cheap pension, not the upmarket kind of hotel where Borrow usually stayed [Mesonero, 87; *Diario de Madrid* n° 277 of 3 October 1816, p. 406]]. It was, however, the place where a number of stage coaches stopped, so it probably was convenient for Borrow to lodge here until he could move back in with Maria Diaz.

As soon as we were alone he informed that since my departure he had undergone great misery and destitution, having, during the whole period, been unable to find a master in need of his services, so that he was brought nearly to the verge of desperation; but that on the night immediately preceding my arrival he had a dream, in which he saw me, mounted on a black horse, ride up to the gate of the posada, and that on that account he had been waiting there during the greater part of the day. I do not pretend to offer an opinion concerning this narrative, which is beyond the reach of my philosophy, and shall content myself with observing that only two individuals in Madrid were aware of my arrival in Spain.¹¹ I was very glad to receive him again into my service, as, notwithstanding his faults, he had in many instances proved of no slight assistance to me in my wanderings and biblical labours.

I was soon settled in my former lodgings, when one my first cares was to pay a visit to Lord Clarendon¹². Amongst other things, he informed me that he had received an official notice from the government, stating the seizure of the New Testaments at Ocana, the circumstances relating to which I have described on a former occasion, and informing him that unless steps were instantly taken to remove them from the country, they would be destroyed at Toledo, to which place they had been conveyed. I replied that I should give myself no trouble about the matter; and that if the authorities of Toledo, civil or ecclesiastic, determined upon burning these books, my only hope was that they would commit them to the flames with all possible publicity, as by so doing they would but manifest their own hellish rancour and their hostility to the word of God.

Being eager to resume my labours, I had no sooner arrived at Madrid than I wrote to Lopez at Villa Seca, for the purpose of learning whether he was inclined to cooperate in the work, as on former occasions. In reply, he informed me that he was busily employed in his agricultural pursuits: to supply his place, however, he sent over an elderly villager, Victoriano Lopez by name, a distant relation of his own.

What is a missionary in the heart of Spain without a horse? Which consideration induced me now to purchase an Arabian of high caste, which had been brought from Algiers by an officer of the French legion. The name of this steed, the best I believe that ever issued from the desert, was Sidi Habismilk.¹³

¹¹ In his letter to Brandram of 25 January 1839, Borrow specifies that ‘one of them [was] Lord Clarendon (late Sir George Villiers)’ [Darlow, 383]. The other one is never identified.

¹² Sir George Villiers succeeded to the title Lord Clarendon on 22 December 1838 [Burke, footnote to 626].

¹³ The name of this splendid horse, which was to accompany Borrow to England later on, has various interpretations. Some prefer ‘My Lord King of the Desert’, others ‘My Lord Sustainer of the Kingdom’ [Jenkins 285], while Knapp [I : 303], following Borrow himself, sticks to ‘My Lord Mustard’! If the latter is true, one does wonder what strange character named the poor animal... [See also Mervyn Jones, ‘Borrow and Horses (2)’, in: *GBB* 15, 35ff]