

CHAPTER 47

Termination of our Rural Labours - Alarm of the Clergy - A New Experiment - Success at Madrid - Goblin-Alguazil - Staff of Office - The Corregidor - An Explanation - The Pope in England - New Testament expounded - Works of Luther.

We proceeded in our task of distributing the Scriptures with various success, until the middle of March, when I determined upon starting for Talavera, for the purpose of seeing what it was possible to accomplish in that town and the neighbourhood.¹ I accordingly bent my course in that direction, accompanied by Antonio and Victoriano. On our way thither we stopped at Naval Carnero², a large village five leagues to the west of Madrid, where I remained three days, sending forth Victoriano to the circumjacent hamlets with small cargoes of Testaments. Providence, however, which had hitherto so remarkably favoured us in these rural excursions, now withdrew from us its support, and brought them to a sudden termination; for in whatever place the sacred writings were offered for sale, they were forthwith seized by persons who appeared to be upon the watch; which events compelled me to alter my intention of proceeding to Talavera and to return forthwith to Madrid.³

I subsequently learned that our proceedings on the other side of Madrid having caused alarm amongst the heads of the clergy, they had made a formal complaint to the government, who immediately sent orders to all the alcaldes of the villages, great and small, in New Castile, to seize the New Testament wherever it might be exposed for sale; but at the same time enjoining them to be particularly careful not to detain or maltreat the person or persons who might be attempting to vend it. An exact description of myself accompanied these orders, and the authorities both civil and military were exhorted to be on their guard against me and my arts and machinations; for, I as the document stated, was to-day in one place, and to-morrow at twenty leagues' distance.

¹ In reality Borrow had been planning a far more magnificent expedition, which he described in a letter to Usoz of 22 February 1839 [Knapp, II : 288]. It was to take him once again across the Guadarrama mountains to Ciudad Rodrigo and the Portuguese border, then to Plasencia and Extremadura, and back to Madrid by way of Andalusia and La Mancha, stopping over on the way in the mysterious Batueca Valley to investigate its famous forgotten race and the unknown language spoken there (see footnote 13 of chapter 11 above). As he did not get beyond Navalcarnero, he never had a chance to reach the Batueca valley, and in his 1845 review of Richard Ford's *Hand-Book* still mentions it as one of the great enigmas of Spain.

² Not the middle of March, but the first week of that month, seeing that Borrow wrote a long letter to Brandram from Navalcarnero on 4 March 1839 [Darlow, 391-398]. The town made a good base for distribution. According to Hughes [Overland, vol. 2, chapter 10, p. 150] it had 3,800 inhabitants in spacious houses, with an agriculture based on grapes and wine for Madrid. For the sales and confiscations around Navalcarnero, see Missler, *Daring Game*, 96f.

³ Borrow was back in Madrid on 9 March 1839 [Darlow, 399]. Somewhat surprisingly, he makes no mention of the partial solar eclipse which was visible in Spain in the afternoon of 15 March 1839. [*Guia de forasteros en Madrid para el año 1839*, page 5.]

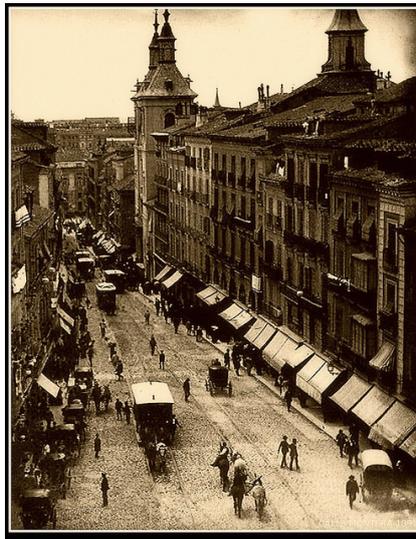
I was not much discouraged by this blow, which indeed did not come entirely unexpected. I, however, determined to change the sphere of action, and not expose the sacred volume to seizure at every step which I should take to circulate it. In my late attempts, I had directed my attention exclusively to the villages and small towns, in which it was quite easy for the government to frustrate my efforts by means of circulars to the local authorities, who would of course be on the alert, and whose vigilance it would be impossible to baffle as every novelty which occurs in a small place is forthwith bruited about. But the case would be widely different amongst the crowds of the capital, where I could pursue my labours with comparative secrecy. My present plan was to abandon the rural districts, and to offer the sacred volume at Madrid, from house to house, at the same low price as in the country. This plan I forthwith put into execution.



47.1 Plaza of Navalcarnero

Having an extensive acquaintance amongst the lower orders, I selected eight intelligent individuals to co-operate with me, amongst whom were five women. All these I supplied with Testaments, and then sent them forth to all the parishes in Madrid. The result of their efforts more than answered my expectations. In less than fifteen days after my return from Naval Carnero, nearly six hundred copies of the life and words of Him of Nazareth had been sold in the streets and alleys of Madrid; a fact which I hope I may be permitted to mention with gladness and with decent triumph in the Lord.

One of the richest streets is the Calle Montera, where reside the principal merchants and shopkeepers of Madrid. It is, in fact, the street of commerce, in which respect, and in being a favourite promenade, it corresponds with the far-famed "Nefsky" of Saint Petersburg. Every house in this street was supplied with its Testament, and the same might be said with respect to the Puerto del Sol. Nay, in some instances, every individual in the house, man and child, man-servant and maid-servant, was furnished with a copy. My Greek, Antonio, made wonderful exertions in this quarter; and it is but justice to say that, but for his instrumentality, on many occasions, I might have been by no means able to give so favourable an account of the spread of "the Bible in Spain." There was a time when I was in the habit of saying "dark Madrid," an expression which, I thank God, I could now drop. It were scarcely just to call a city, "dark," in which thirteen hundred Testaments at least were in circulation, and in daily use.



47.2 *The Calle de Montera*

It was now that I turned to account a supply of Bibles which I had received from Barcelona, in sheets, at the commencement of the preceding year. The demand for the entire Scriptures was great; indeed far greater than I could answer, as the books were disposed of faster than they could be bound by the man whom I employed for that purpose. Eight-and-twenty copies were bespoke and paid for before delivery. Many of these Bibles found their way into the best houses in Madrid. The Marquis of -⁴ had a large family, but every individual of it, old and young, was in possession of a Bible, and likewise a Testament, which, strange to say, were recommended by the chaplain of the house. One of my most zealous agents in the propagation of the Bible was an ecclesiastic.⁵ He never walked out without carrying one beneath his gown, which he offered to the first person he met whom he thought likely to purchase. Another excellent

⁴ In his letter to Brandram of 20 March 1839 Borrow identifies this person as his old friend the Marquis of Santa Coloma [Darlow, 402].

⁵ Unless it concerns the 'renegade priest' Pascual Marin y Candado [Darlow, 290-295 & 335; Jenkins, 225ff], Borrow never recorded the name of this worthy ecclesiastic anywhere.

assistant was an elderly gentleman of Navarre, enormously rich, who was continually purchasing copies on his own account, which he, as I was told, sent into his native province, for distribution amongst his friends and the poor.⁶

On a certain night I had retired to rest rather more early than usual, being slightly indisposed. I soon fell asleep, and had continued so for some hours, when I was suddenly aroused by the opening of the door of the small apartment in which I lay. I started up, and beheld Maria Diaz, with a lamp in her hand, enter the room. I observed that her features, which were in general peculiarly calm and placid, wore a somewhat startled expression. "What is the hour, and what brings you here?" I demanded.

"Señor," said she, closing the door, and coming up to the bed-side. "It is close upon midnight; but a messenger belonging to the police has just entered the house and demanded to see you. I told him that it was impossible, for that your worship was in bed. Whereupon he sneezed in my face, and said that he would see you if you were in your coffin. He has all the look of a goblin, and has thrown me into a tremor. I am far from being a timid person, as you are aware, Don Jorge; but I confess that I never cast my eyes on these wretches of the police, but my heart dies away within me! I know them but too well, and what they are capable of."

"Pooh," said I, "be under no apprehension, let him come in, I fear him not, whether he be alguazil or hobgoblin.⁷ Stand, however, at the doorway, that you may be a witness of what takes place, as it is more than probable that he comes at this unreasonable hour to create a disturbance, that he may have an opportunity of making an unfavourable report to his principals, like the fellow on the former occasion."

The hostess left the apartment, and I heard her say a word or two to some one in the passage, whereupon there was a loud sneeze, and in a moment after a singular figure appeared at the doorway. It was that of a very old man, with long white hair, which escaped from beneath the eaves of an exceedingly high-peaked hat. He stooped considerably, and moved along with a shambling gait. I could not see much of his face, which, as the landlady stood behind him with the lamp, was consequently in deep shadow. I could observe, however, that his eyes sparkled like those of a ferret. He advanced to the foot of the bed, in which I was still lying, wondering what this strange visit could mean; and there he stood gazing at me for a minute, at least, without uttering a syllable. Suddenly, however, he protruded a spare skinny hand from the cloak in which it had hitherto been enveloped, and pointed with a short staff, tipped with metal, in the direction of my face, as if he were commencing an exorcism. He appeared to be about to speak, but his words, if he intended any, were stifled in their birth by a sudden sternutation which escaped him, and which was so violent that the hostess started back, exclaiming, "Ave Maria purissima!" and nearly dropped the lamp in her alarm.

⁶ The name of the Navarrese gentleman is likewise unknown.

⁷ A rare example of a Borrovian *jeu-de-mots*. Burke [footnote to 644] points out that Borrow would have used the word '*Duende*' here, i.e. a class of naughty spirits somewhat like elves, who may be evil or good-natured, depending on their role and personality. However, in thieves' slang the word also signified the watch or the night patrol, i.e. forces of the law.

"My good person," said I, "what do you mean by this foolish hobgoblinry? If you have anything to communicate do so at once, and go about your business. I am unwell, and you are depriving me of my repose."

"By the virtue of this staff," said the old man, "and the authority which it gives me to do and say that which is convenient, I do command, order, and summon you to appear to-morrow, at the eleventh hour at the office of my lord the corregidor of this village of Madrid, in order that, standing before him humbly, and with befitting reverence, you may listen to whatever he may have to say, or if necessary, may yield yourself up to receive the castigation of any crimes which you may have committed, whether trivial or enormous. TENEZ, COMPERE," he added, in most villainous French, "VOILA MON AFFAIRE; VOILA CE QUE JE VIENS VOUS DIRE."

Thereupon he glared at me for a moment, nodded his head twice, and replacing his staff beneath his cloak, shambled out of the room, and with a valedictory sneeze in the passage left the house.

Precisely at eleven on the following day, I attended at the office of the corregidor. He was not the individual whose anger I had incurred on a former occasion, and who had thought proper to imprison me, but another person, I believe a Catalan, whose name I have also forgotten.⁸ Indeed, these civil employments were at this period given to-day and taken away to-morrow, so that the person who held one of them for a month might consider himself a functionary of long standing. I was not kept waiting a moment, but as soon as I had announced myself, was forthwith ushered into the presence of the corregidor, a good-looking, portly, and well-dressed personage, seemingly about fifty. He was writing at a desk when I entered, but almost immediately arose and came towards me. He looked me full in the face, and I, nothing abashed, kept my eyes fixed upon his. He had, perhaps, expected a less independent bearing, and that I should have quaked and crouched before him; but now, conceiving himself bearded in his own den, his old Spanish leaven was forthwith stirred up. He plucked his whiskers fiercely. "Escuchad," said he, casting upon me a ferocious glance, "I wish to ask you a question."

"Before I answer any question of your excellency," said I, "I shall take the liberty of putting one myself. What law or reason is there that I, a peaceable individual and a foreigner, should have my rest disturbed by DUENDES and hobgoblins sent at midnight to summon me to appear at public offices like a criminal?"

⁸ Seeing his last name – Puig – the Corregidor of Madrid was indeed of Catalan stock. The 'hobgoblin' was sent out, it seems, when Borrow did not react to a summons published on the front page, in the very first column, of the *Diario de Madrid* of 13 March 1839, which read: '*El señor D. Jorje Borrow tendrá la bondad de presentarse en la secretaria de este gobierno político para entenderle de un asunto que le interesa. Madrid 11 de marzo de 1839. José Maria Puig*', i.e. 'Will Mr George Borrow please be so kind as to present himself at the secretariat of this civil government to be informed of an affair which concerns him.' Note that the summons is put in the most polite wording of which Spanish is able; something which stands in strange contrast with the words and attitude of the Corregidor which Borrow describes below.

"You do not speak the truth," shouted the corregidor; "the person sent to summon you was neither duende nor hobgoblin, but one of the most ancient and respectable officers of this casa, and so far from being dispatched at midnight, it wanted twenty-five minutes to that hour by my own watch when he left this office, and as your lodging is not distant, he must have arrived there at least ten minutes before midnight, so that you are by no means accurate, and are found wanting in regard to truth."

"A distinction without a difference," I replied. "For my own part, if I am to be disturbed in my sleep, it is of little consequence whether at midnight or ten minutes before that time; and with respect to your messenger, although he might not be a hobgoblin, he had all the appearance of one, and assuredly answered the purpose, by frightening the woman of the house almost into fits by his hideous grimaces and sneezing convulsions."

CORREGIDOR. - You are a - I know not what. Do you know that I have the power to imprison you?

MYSELF. - You have twenty alguazils at your beck and call, and have of course the power, and so had your predecessor, who nearly lost his situation by imprisoning me; but you know full well that you have not the right, as I am not under your jurisdiction, but that of the captain-general. If I have obeyed your summons, it was simply because I had a curiosity to know what you wanted with me, and from no other motive whatever. As for imprisoning me, I beg leave to assure you, that you have my full consent to do so; the most polite society in Madrid is to be found in the prison, and as I am at present compiling a vocabulary of the language of the Madrilenian thieves, I should have, in being imprisoned, an excellent opportunity of completing it. There is much to be learnt even in the prison, for, as the Gypsies say, "The dog that trots about finds a bone."⁹

CORREGIDOR. - Your words are not those of a Caballero. Do you forget where you are, and in whose presence? Is this a fitting place to talk of thieves and Gypsies in?

MYSELF. - Really I know of no place more fitting, unless it be the prison. But we are wasting time, and I am anxious to know for what I have been summoned; whether for crimes trivial or enormous, as the messenger said.

It was a long time before I could obtain the required information from the incensed corregidor; at last, however, it came. It appeared that a box of Testaments, which I had despatched to Naval Carnero, had been seized by the local authorities, and having been detained there for some time, was at last sent back to Madrid, intended as it now appeared, for the hands of the corregidor. One day as it was lying at the waggon-office, Antonio chanced to enter on some business of his own and recognised the box, which he instantly claimed as my property, and having paid the carriage, removed it to my warehouse. He had considered the matter as of so little importance, that he had not as yet mentioned it to me. The poor corregidor, however, had no doubt that it was a deep-laid scheme to plunder and insult him. And now, working himself up into almost a frenzy of excitement, he stamped on the ground, exclaiming, "QUE PICARDIA! QUE INFAMIA!"

⁹ Burke [footnote to 648]: in Romany the expression runs '*Chuquel sos pirela cocal terela.*'

The old system, thought I, of prejudging people and imputing to them motives and actions of which they never dreamed. I then told him frankly that I was entirely ignorant of the circumstance by which he had felt himself aggrieved; but that if upon inquiry I found that the chest had actually been removed by my servant from the office to which it had been forwarded, I would cause it forthwith to be restored, although it was my own property. "I have plenty more Testaments," said I, "and can afford to lose fifty or a hundred. I am a man of peace, and wish not to have any dispute with the authorities for the sake of an old chest and a cargo of books, whose united value would scarcely amount to forty dollars."

He looked at me for a moment, as if in doubt of my sincerity, then, again plucking his whiskers, he forthwith proceeded to attack me in another quarter: "PERO QUE INFAMIA, QUE PICARDIA! to come into Spain for the purpose of overturning the religion of the country. What would you say if the Spaniards were to go to England and attempt to overturn the Lutheranism established there?"

"They would be most heartily welcome," I replied; "more especially if they would attempt to do so by circulating the Bible, the book of Christians, even as the English are doing in Spain. But your excellency is not perhaps aware that the Pope has a fair field and fair play in England, and is permitted to make as many converts from Lutheranism every day in the week as are disposed to go over to him. He cannot boast, however, of much success; the people are too fond of light to embrace darkness, and would smile at the idea of exchanging their gospel privileges for the superstitious ceremonies and observances of the church of Rome."

On my repeating my promise that the books and chest should be forthwith restored, the corregidor declared himself satisfied, and all of a sudden became excessively polite and condescending: he even went so far as to say that he left it entirely with myself, whether to return the books or not; "and," continued he, "before you go, I wish to tell you that my private opinion is, that it is highly advisable in all countries to allow full and perfect tolerance in religious matters, and to permit every religious system to stand or fall according to its own merits."

Such were the concluding words of the corregidor of Madrid, which, whether they expressed his private opinion or not, were certainly grounded on sense and reason. I saluted him respectfully and retired, and forthwith performed my promise with regard to the books; and thus terminated this affair.



47.3 Santa Cruz in the 19th century

It almost appeared to me at this time, that a religious reform was commencing in Spain; indeed, matters had of late come to my knowledge, which, had they been prophesied only a year before, I should have experienced much difficulty in believing.

The reader will be surprised when I state that in two churches of Madrid the New Testament was regularly expounded every Sunday evening by the respective curates, to about twenty children who attended, and who were all provided with copies of the Society's edition of Madrid, 1837.¹⁰ The churches which I allude to, were those of San Gines and Santa Cruz.¹¹ Now I humbly conceive that this fact alone is more than equivalent to all the expense which the Society had incurred in the efforts which it had been making to introduce the Gospel into Spain; but be this as it may, I am certain that it amply recompensed me for all the anxiety and unhappiness which I had undergone. I now felt that whenever I should be compelled to discontinue my labours in the Peninsula, I should retire without the slightest murmur, my heart being filled with gratitude to the Lord for having permitted me, useless vessel as I was, to see at least some of the seed springing up, which during two years I had been casting on the stony ground of the interior of Spain.



47.4 San Gines

¹⁰ I.e. Borrow's own edition of the Scio New Testament.

¹¹ Burke [footnote to 650]: respectively in the Calle del Arenal and in the Calle Concepción Jerónima. The church of Santa Cruz was demolished in the course of the 19th century.

When I recollected the difficulties which had encompassed our path, I could sometimes hardly credit all that the Almighty had permitted us to accomplish within the last year. A large edition of the New Testament had been almost entirely disposed of in the very centre of Spain, in spite of the opposition and the furious cry of the sanguinary priesthood and the edicts of a deceitful government, and a spirit of religious inquiry excited, which I had fervent hope would sooner or later lead to blessed and most important results. Till of late the name most abhorred and dreaded in these parts of Spain, was that of Martin Luther, who was in general considered as a species of demon, a cousin-german to Belial and Beelzebub, who, under the guise of a man, wrote and preached blasphemy against the Highest; yet, now strange to say, this once abominated personage was spoken of with no slight degree of respect. People with Bibles in their hands not unfrequently visited me, inquiring with much earnestness, and with no slight degree of simplicity, for the writings of the great Doctor Martin, whom, indeed, some supposed to be still alive.

It will be as well here to observe, that of all the names connected with the Reformation, that of Luther is the only one known in Spain; and let me add, that no controversial writings but his are likely to be esteemed as possessing the slightest weight or authority, however great their intrinsic merit may be. The common description of tracts, written with the view of exposing the errors of popery, are therefore not calculated to prove of much benefit in Spain, though it is probable that much good might be accomplished by well-executed translations of judicious selections from the works of Luther.