

A Visit to Spain.

By the Rev. Robert F. Elder, of Buenos Ayres.

DURING the Baptist Congress in Toronto I met the Rev. Ambrosio Celma, Pastor of the Baptist church at Barcelona, Spain. He suggested a visit to the Baptist churches of Spain. That seed thought brought forth fruit in the visit that my wife and I have just made to the mother country of Argentina.

We arrived at Barcelona on September 21st, and were warmly welcomed by Señor Celma and the Rev. Leroy David, who is Principal of the Baptist Bible Institute there. Mr. and Mrs. David provided generous hospitality for us during our stay.

Barcelona is a beautiful city, with mountains rising behind, the blue Mediterranean in front and the contrasts and harmony of colour in the city itself. At present it is a hive of activity, making preparations for the great Exhibition which is to be held next year. Beautiful Exhibition buildings are being erected on the slopes of Montjuich, from which is to be seen a wonderful panorama of the city, behind which Mount Tibidabo rises 1,600 feet above the sea, with the crags of Montserrat in the distance and on a clear day some peaks of the Pyrenees standing out against the horizon. Barcelona fairly won our hearts.

The Baptist church is in a central position, but without any sign or notice to indicate what it is. The services are conducted upstairs, a veritable "upper room." Formerly a school was conducted there, but it was closed as part of the retrenchment necessitated by the Southern Baptist deficit. We attended the Sunday School on Sunday morning, and spoke to a group of bright, intelligent-looking young people.

In the afternoon Mr. David took us to Sabadell, said to be the most industrial town in Catalonia. The young Pastor, Señor Antonio Almudevar, was already known to us by his poems, some of which we had used for recitations in Sunday School entertainments in Argentina. We went first to a well-attended meeting of the Young People's Society. It was a real privilege to speak to those fine young folk and afterwards preach to a good, warm-hearted congregation. When in response to an appeal two people gave an outward sign of an inward decision to accept Christ as Saviour, my heart was strangely stirred

because the Lord had used us to co-operate with the Pastor and his earnest people in winning some souls for Christ in Spain. The owner of the hall lived for some time in Argéntina and attended services conducted by Rev. Pablo Besson, but was not converted till after his return to Spain. After his conversion he built the hall, and arrangements are being made for the congregation to acquire it by instalments. The authorities allow this congregation to have a notice board outside. Most of the congregation came to the train with us when we were leaving, and they sang rousing hymns there till the train had left.

On Monday we took part in the opening of the new session of the Baptist Bible Institute. There was a good attendance of interested friends from the churches. Some seven promising young men are there to prepare themselves to be workers. The importance of this work cannot be calculated. The teachers find themselves handicapped by the poor schooling that the young fellows have had. The importance of higher education does not seem to have gripped even the Spanish evangelicals as it should. Mr. and Mrs. David are trying to impress this on them, but it is a pity that some of the evangelical schools had to be closed through lack of funds to carry on.

Rev. N. Bengtsson and Señor Pedro Franco (formerly a professor in a Roman Catholic Seminary before his conversion) are co-professors with Mr. David. It was our privilege to talk to the students each day during our stay, on some phase of the preacher's work.

A visit to the town of Tarrassa interested us greatly. Most of the other churches receive grants from the Foreign Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention. The Baptist church of Tarrassa is self-supporting. Some six years ago a work was started there by members of the Vila family. Their spiritual enterprise was blessed to such an extent that there were some 130 baptisms in five years. A gifted son of the family, Señor Samuel Vila, became Pastor. His father sold properties to help build a commodious and attractive church building, and thus inspired others to heroic self-sacrifice and generous giving. The architect and builder, Señor Jaime Pujol, was converted and baptised in Argentina, and had there imbibed some of the progressive ideas with which he inspired the others. The fine example of this church is stimulating others to attempt greater things and to aim at similar independence. We had a splendid meeting with these warm-hearted people, and again had the joy of seeing some decisions for Christ.

On the Thursday night we had a great time with Señor Celma in Barcelona, when lantern views of Argentina and the Baptist work there, were shown. Mr. Bengtsson is doing a very

important piece of work in the publication of evangelical literature.

Then, passing through a wealth of vineyards, olive and orange groves, rice, pea-nuts and potato-fields, we came to Valencia.

From there we went at once by omnibus to Carlet, an old-time town with modern school equipment. There is a small but vigorous Baptist church there. The Pastor was in Argentina for some time before his conversion. As the people work on the farms until sunset, and then have to come to the town, for there the farmers live in the town, the meeting held on Saturday night was at 9-30. One elderly lady came with a glass of water under her shawl. Asked why, she said that sometimes she became sleepy, and took the glass of water so as to moisten her eyes. The church has secured a well-situated building site. Some of the members have joined their Pastor and have made all the bricks they will need for a modest building. They are going to build the foundations at once, and are hoping that money will come in for the carpentering work so as to be able to go on. A young man from this church has just entered the Bible Institute as a student.

We returned to Valencia on Sunday, and took part in a fine meeting of the Young People's Society first, and then a very fine service where there was real spiritual power and some more decisions for Christ. This church is part of the fruits of the work of Mr. J. Uhr, of the Swedish Baptist Mission. The present Pastor, Señor Ramón Lopez, had his preparation in colportage work at a very good theological seminary. He regrets that he has to spend so much time at business in order to support his family.

A Summer School was held in Valencia in August, and they had a great time. One outcome was the formation of the Baptist Convention of Spain. Señor Julio Nogal of Madrid is the first President.

Jativa was the next place visited, an attractive little town nestling at the foot of high hills. The Pastor has also spent some time in Argentina; some of his children were born there. He has worked as a colporteur. He is a deeply spiritual man, who quietly wins souls for Christ, more by personal work than by eloquent preaching. Their hall is in the third story of the building. The congregation reflected the simplicity, piety and earnestness of their Pastor, and was so responsive as to make it a joy to preach. He told us of a man who had bought a Bible and an evangelical book from a colporteur in Argentina, before returning to Spain. The reading of them had opened his eyes and made him stop going to confession. When he heard the

preaching of the Gospel he was converted, and now Señor Estebe holds meetings in the place where he lives, and others have been won for Christ.

Tuesday saw us in Alicante. The Pastor of the church there is a cultured man, Don Luis Ponzoa. He was known to us by his writings. To our great disappointment we did not meet him. He has been seriously ill, and was away convalescing. We were, however, delighted to find that Sergeant Zacariah Carles is able to take his military service and at the same time act as temporary Pastor of the church. He is a young man who studied in the Bible Institute. It speaks well for his tact and personality, that though the military authorities know that he is a Protestant preacher, who has asked to be excused from attendance at the Roman Catholic Mass, he has been made a sergeant and has permission to be off duty for the services in his church. A solid work has been done by Señor Ponzoa and his brave wife, and a good congregation listened to our message, in spite of a rainy night. We had been told that it scarcely ever rained in Alicante. There used to be a good school here as in Valencia and other parts, but it had to be closed because of retrenchment.

Albacete was the next place to be visited. The Pastor, Don Francisco Pais, has had experience in Cuba. He took us first to a meeting for women, where my wife told how in some Argentine churches the women organise in order to evangelise. Later we had a fine meeting in the good hall they have. This hall has been built specially by one of the members, who charges a moderate rent for it, and thus the difficulties experienced in some places are avoided.

To be in Madrid was the fulfilment of a long, long dream. There is a very enthusiastic, aggressive little Baptist church which meets in a hall that could scarcely be worse as far as ventilation, light and accommodation are concerned. It would not surprise me to hear that the authorities had prohibited meetings to be held in it. Señor Julio Nogal, who ministers to the church, worked for some years in Cuba. He tells me that if he had some 10,000 or 12,000 dollars he believes the congregation would find the rest. That would be a splendid investment for some of our Baptist friends. We ought to have a place that is more worthy of us in the capital of Spain, and have it quickly.

It had been arranged for me to speak at a united meeting in the Reformed church of Spain. At this meeting it was a great joy to meet sons of Juan B. Cabrera, Carlos Araujo, and J. Flidner, who were such valiant ministers of Jesus Christ a generation ago. Financial and time-limitations prevented us from visiting other churches.