

Church Reform in Spain and Portugal.

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TWENTIETH-CENTURY Europe presents no more extraordinary spectacle than the Kingdom of Spain and the Republic of Portugal. Both nations have traditional connection with Ultramontanism that marked them off as strongly from the development of the modern State as the Pyrenees divide them from France. In their comparative isolation, they dwelt in the temper of the Medievalism and opposed by the dead weight of custom the introduction of ideas and ideals familiar to the other peoples of Western Europe. It seemed hopeless to bring about changes which every thinking foreigner believed to be necessary. Caciquism—or the rule of the local “boss”—and the autocracy of the priest opposed an impregnable barrier to progress. A shrug of the shoulder ended debate, and it was impossible to make a Mayor or a Town Councillor realize that his duty lay in the improvement of the condition of the people and the spread of enlightenment. “Things have always been as they are, and there is no reason why change should come in my day,” was the burden of his comment on suggestions. He knew, too, that he had no security of tenure—that he would be moved from his post when the exigencies of the central Government made it desirable; and with the Government changing and the Church remaining still, he saw no reason why he should do anything to aid progress.

This represents the state of mind of the average public man in the Peninsula in the last decade of the nineteenth century. The ignorance of the populace was, as it still is, appalling. The latest figures of immigration to the United States are a comment on the low state of intellectual culture in Portugal. Of 38,122 Portuguese immigrants over fourteen, 68·2 per cent.

could neither read nor write. The Spaniards had only 14·5 per cent. without these accomplishments, a much lower percentage than at home, and easily explained by the fact that only the educated emigrants go to the States. The others settle in South America.

The schoolmaster was a despised person, and many jokes were made at his expense. The writer has been in a district where the inhabitants boldly struck against being burdened with any school, and successfully fought against masters being sent to them. That is now passing, and in both lands there is an increased desire for enlightenment; and although much may not have been done, there has certainly been a new spirit abroad among the rulers that will remove the reproach of illiteracy when it has had time to bear fruit.

Spain has made marvellous progress under the present King. In every large city works of reform have been undertaken. Cesspools are giving place to main drainage, excellent water-supplies are being installed, and improvements in the streets are removing the old houses, untouched for centuries. The picturesque is disappearing, and it must be admitted that vandalism is seen in some of the clearances. Historic houses are pulled down that might easily have been retained, and town engineers in a hurry are more zealous to reach their end in the quickest way than to preserve relics of the past. On the whole the progress has been wisely directed, and in every way Spanish cities are more comfortable resting-places for the European traveller than they were twenty years ago. Spain is being Europeanized in outward appearance. Its literature is echoing the thoughts of other nations, and even the villages are learning the benefits of co-operative agriculture and the value of electric light. When Spain awakes from its slumber, a new, great power will come into being, for it has the greatest reserve of any European State in the manhood of its peasantry. Hard-working and honest, loyal to friends and intelligent, they are the material out of which great States are built.

Progress in industry and education has been accompanied

by the development of political ideals in accordance with modern conceptions of individual liberty. Every department of Spanish life has been influenced. Conscription can no longer be avoided by the well-to-do, and the burden of supplying military service is not now the duty of the poorer classes alone. Public opinion is beginning to exist and to make itself felt in the highest circles. The King has shown himself a friend of progress, and those who are behind the scenes say that he learned political wisdom from his intercourse with King Edward VII. Last year a conscience clause was passed, which enables non-Roman Catholics to absent themselves from Roman Catholic teaching in the schools. Evangelical pupils in the training colleges are no longer exposed to the danger of losing the fruit of their studies through unfair treatment with the acquiescence of the State. The Government has intervened for the protection of colporteurs of the Bible Society in the discharge of their legitimate duty, and Evangelicals are able to hold their services in buildings that have notices showing the object to which they are devoted. Advertisements of the Bible Society and of Evangelical meetings are published in the Press, and the general acceptance by all but the extreme Ultramontane party of these concessions is a testimony of the public attitude towards these changes.

For some years past a committee of young men, acting in conjunction with Bishop Cabrera, of the Spanish Reformed Church, and Señor Tornos, the honoured head of the Presbyterian Church, have been conducting an agitation in favour of religious liberty throughout the country. The attendances at the great public meetings and the enthusiasm evoked have been a revelation of latent sympathy with their ideals. Men supposed to be hostile to Evangelical Christianity have openly expressed their goodwill, and the entire propaganda has been kept free from politics. The Evangelical community, small in numbers, has discovered among its laymen a body of leaders whose public utterances have commanded the respect of opponents and have won applause from crowded audiences. There is a new spirit

abroad, and this new spirit has to be considered by the responsible ministers of the nation.

The army has been freed from its rules that made the lot of an Evangelical conscript intolerable when he had to serve under Ultramontane officers. It must be said to the credit of many commanders that they arranged before the law was changed for their men to avoid coming into conflict with observances that wounded their conscience. This, however, depended on the tolerant spirit of the officer, not on the protection of the law. In the navy the old harsh regulations still exist, and in consequence Colonel Labrador, an efficient officer of the Marine Artillery, whose son died in the African campaign, was charged with disobedience to orders through refusing to attend Mass before a court martial at which he was ordered to preside. He had asked to be excused from this duty, but his superior officers were inexorable. He was arrested and tried by court martial, which inflicted on him the minimum punishment—six months' imprisonment. Immediately knowledge of his conviction reached the Conservative Government he was given a free pardon, and a promise has been made by both political parties that the obnoxious regulation will be removed from the Naval Code, which will be brought into correspondence with the Army Orders. It is a remarkable fact that the Evangelical leaders have been consulted by Cabinet Ministers who were deliberating on the changes necessary to give religious freedom to the servants of the Crown. This in itself is an outstanding proof of the changed attitude of the nation towards men who have endured hardness as good soldiers of Christ.

It is one thing to possess liberty; it is another matter to use it to the best advantage, and the Spanish reformers are alive to their responsibilities. No instance of abuse of the new régime has come to our notice. The prudence of the leaders has been reflected by the loyalty of the members, who have responded to the call for increased service. Their spirit may be seen by the following incidents :

1. The Christian Endeavour movement has taken unexpected root in Spain. Its growth has been steady, and it has given the young people of the congregations an opportunity of working together for their own spiritual advance and the good of their fellow - countrymen. They have organized cottage services, and have undertaken tract distribution. The day of the tract still lives in Spain. Books are few, and the people have not that surfeit of literature that has crowded it out in Great Britain. Well-written tracts are eagerly read, and when questions are asked the way is open for a gift of the New Testament. During recent Lents in Madrid public meetings on religious problems have been held, and the addresses delivered by the Endeavourers have attracted attention through their careful preparation and grasp of great principles. In former times Bishop Cabrera held confirmations in Madrid every alternate year. Now he holds an annual confirmation, and the greater number of those confirmed have been won through the Christian Endeavour Society. During the current month Dr. Clark will hold the National Convention in Barcelona, and one of the largest halls in the city has been engaged for the occasion.

2. In Salamanca, the late Minister, Señor Jimenez, built for the most part, at his own and the congregation's cost, a school and parochial hall. Shortly after its opening he died suddenly, and was buried amid signs of universal respect. His widow, who had no private means, continued to work for the Reformed Church on a salary of £43 a year, and her influence among the women and children of the "Little Rome" of Spain is very great. Two of her nieces, whose husbands occupy commercial positions in Asia, promised to send her £40 a year. She at once resigned her salary and asked that it might be devoted to those who needed it. Her sole income is derived from the generosity of her nieces. In this respect she is typical of the members of the Reformed Church, who know by experience that it is more blessed to give than to receive. In their poverty they contribute to the support of their Church and to the necessities of their brethren in distress.

3. The goodwill of all the Spanish Evangelicals to one another is an outstanding feature of their work. Many branches of the Church are at work. They live in cities side by side in glad co-operation. They have every month a joint prayer-meeting held in one another's building, and their brotherly union is most encouraging. Lately a Spanish branch of the Evangelical Alliance was formed, and it would have been in existence long ago but for the feeling that it was unnecessary. Now that the movement grows and many new problems arise, it was thought advisable to have a central body that could consult on common action and unite into one the scattered forces of Evangelicalism.

When we turn to Portugal we find a nation small and of mixed origin passing through a period of transition. The monarchy fell through its own inherent weaknesses. Its passing was unwept by the majority, and it fell like an over-ripe fruit. No one expected its overthrow at the moment of its disappearance, but everyone knew that Portugal could not continue much longer on its downward career under the monarchical system. The Republican rulers who came into power expelled the religious orders, and at once showed themselves hostile to Roman Catholicism and, it must be added, to religion generally. The Roman priests, whatever may be said of the way in which they exercised their power, were representatives of the central administration throughout the land. They had more authority than anyone else in rural villages, and their sway was almost absolute. The coming of the Republic meant the loss of their power and the measures adopted in favour of Civil Registration ; the Separation of Church and State and Divorce shook to the very foundation the influence of the priesthood. The Law of Separation was framed in the epoch of revolution, and its articles are still in force. Its tone is anti-clerical, and the policy it sustains is calculated to press very hardly upon all religious bodies, irrespective of their attachment to, or dissent from, the Church of Rome. Its enactments prohibit the sale of any building used for religious purposes without the consent

of the Government, make it possible for the Government to acquire churches at a price fixed by itself, cause new churches erected to revert to the State at the expiration of ninety-nine years, make it illegal to hold religious services between sunset and sunrise, and order that one-third of all receipts in support of religious worship shall be devoted to objects of charity. Other clauses prevent the ministers of religion from taking any part in the *Societes cultuelles* which manage the affairs of the Church, and make it impossible for foreigners to take part in services without the previous consent of local authorities.

In the law the British and other foreign Churches are brought under the control of the State, and are made subject to the provisions of the Act, but the protests of the Foreign Offices of European Powers compelled the Government to amend the law in so far as foreign Churches are concerned. Anti-religious legislation directed against the teaching of religion in the schools evoked much bitter feeling. The national schools have as their motto, "No God and no Religion," and it is made a penal offence for young children to be taught religion in the public elementary schools. The law even forbids the teaching of Christianity in private schools during school hours. By a strange interpretation of the law any place where religious instruction is given is considered a church. Accordingly the Evangelical schools have been compelled to give religious teaching in their churches to avoid penalties that attach to the teaching in schools, but if in a mission-room religious services are held as well as schools, then the instruction may be given in these rooms. As the mission-rooms are generally rooms in large houses, they manage to evade many of the disabilities imposed by law. It has to be acknowledged that the authorities have done their best to avoid putting into operation the harsh articles of the law in the case of Evangelical schools, and as for the holding of services during prohibited hours, and the assistance of foreigners at services, permission has never been refused by the local authorities.

The law is now under discussion in the Portuguese

Chambers, and last March a deputation, headed by the President of the Lusitanian Church, accompanied by two non-episcopal ministers, was received in a most friendly fashion by the two Houses. Their petition praying for amendment in the law was listened to with the greatest respect, and the chairmen thanked them for their assistance and ordered that their formal petition should be published in the Parliamentary proceedings. This is a marked advance on anything that has taken place in the Portuguese Parliament, and it is hoped that the amendments to the law will grant relief from the oppressive provisions.

Much has been said and written concerning the condition of Portuguese prisons and the arbitrary character of the proceedings against Royalist and Syndicalist prisoners. No one who knows the state of Portuguese prisons was surprised by the accounts given, but the Republic cannot be blamed for the insanitary surroundings and inhuman treatment of the suspected persons—they were a legacy from the past. Political prejudice has always been sufficient to secure unfavourable discrimination, and the Republic has a record very little, if in any way, worse than the monarchy. It has, however, added to its system a certain amount of conflict between high principles on paper and cruel partiality in practice. Now that an amnesty has been proclaimed and carried out, it is to be hoped that the Government will avoid the repetition of actions that have brought universal discredit on its proceedings. Portugal is far from settled. The poverty of the majority of its population, the bitter disappointment from the failure of the Republic to fulfil aspirations, and the local anarchy caused by a sudden change of institutions, are still working dissension and discontent. No one knows the financial condition of the nation, and as it lives largely, through the influence of a rate of exchange, in excess of the real value of currency, it requires skilled management to bring it through its troubles.

The outstanding fact in Evangelical reform is the opening up of the rural districts to the circulation of the Bible and

Evangelical effort. The evangelists and colporteurs are guaranteed freedom instead of almost certain incarceration in dungeons. They are able to preach freely and to circulate Bibles and religious literature. The will of the priest is no longer the law of the locality, and they find a people tired of infidelity and discontented with superstition, ready to hear their message. Rural Portugal is still religious at bottom. The wild excesses of the cities have not reached the distant and scattered villages. In the chief towns it is popular to be an infidel; in the country the school-teachers and their immediate friends are practically the only section avowedly unbelieving in all religion. At first many openly threw off all respect for creed; now they find their hearts empty, and look for enlightenment. In many villages groups of Bible-readers are to be found, and the evangelists have been welcomed as messengers of the good news of salvation through Christ alone. The Lusitanian Reformed Church has availed itself of its opportunities, and in north and south its workers have undertaken long and arduous journeys to preach Christ to their fellow-countrymen.

In the cities there is a much better feeling towards the Evangelicals. The schools are full and the churches are better attended. The Press takes notice of their services, and a leading Lisbon paper devoted a long series of articles to full descriptions of their worship and reports of their services. The ministers have stood outside politics, and have been earnest in their quiet, unassuming work, and their record of self-denying service has made itself felt among the rulers of the State. Senhor Figueiredo has conducted public correspondence with some of the most eminent men, and the references to him prove that he has won their cordial respect. The special fund collected by the Religious Tract Society has been used to provide good theological literature in Portuguese, and the Bible Society, in securing new and central offices, has brought the Scriptures under the notice of the people.

It is well known that the two small Churches are governed

by Synods consisting of lay and clerical members. Spain has its Bishop. Portugal has not yet elected a Bishop. Bishop Cabrera was consecrated by three Irish Bishops, and the indefatigable labours of the late Archbishop Plunket will never be forgotten in either country. In accordance with the Constitution of the Churches, the supreme authority is a Council of Bishops, and three Irish Bishops have always sat on the Councils. In Spain Bishop Cabrera is joined with them, and the powers of the Councils are clearly defined in their constitutions. Naturally, in Spain they have left in Bishop Cabrera's hands the powers inherent in his office, and he has discharged his duties with exemplary prudence and fatherly oversight. In Portugal, however, they have the responsibility of sanctioning all acts of general interest in the Church, and this involves an oversight over all legislation and over the choice of ministers and licensed preachers. The Bishops never interfere in internal arrangements, but they of necessity are bound to be satisfied that all chosen to exercise public ministry are fit and suitable persons. Otherwise they could not continue to stand before Christendom as sponsors for the Church.

In the past, when vacancies occurred in the Council, they were filled by the co-option of a brother Bishop who was approved by the National Synods. This was felt to be a weakness. There was no security that the vacancies would be filled, and the Bishops realized that the link was between them as individuals instead of between them as members of the House of Bishops of a fully organized and ancient Church. When Bishop Stack resigned through ill-health his positions on the Councils, the Irish House of Bishops consented to nominate to the vacancy, and their choice fell on the Bishop of Tuam, the honoured son of an honoured father. Dr. Plunket's name was received with gratitude by the leaders of the two Churches, and when their Synods meet there is no doubt that they will ratify with enthusiasm the nomination of the Irish House of Bishops, who sympathize with them in their struggle for primitive and apostolic Christianity in the presence of unbelief and superstition.

Both Churches are Evangelical and Protestant in their theological attitude. They are truly Catholic and Apostolic in their government and doctrine. They endeavour to restore the glories of the ancient Church before the domination of Rome, and they depend on the presence of God to enable them to discharge their sacred task. Their character cannot be better defined than in the words of a brilliant sketch of early Church History in Spain just published in volume form by Bishop Cabrera. The Bishop writes: "If the Bishops of Rome were content to-day with asserting the supposed right to govern, as they were content during the early centuries, and would leave to the Reformed Churches their independence, as they left it to the Spanish Church of that epoch, perhaps there would not be great difficulty in respecting them as Patriarchs of the West, and even of being in communion with them; and we say *perhaps*, for above all hierarchical and disciplinary considerations, to which we refer, is the doctrinal consideration, which never ought to be subordinated to any other, for it is the primary and the only consideration to which every other consideration must be subordinated." The Peninsular reformers, in their loyalty to the faith of the Gospel and in their attachment to the teaching of Holy Scripture, cannot accept the unlawful terms of communion imposed by the Church of Rome. For this reason they have abandoned that Church, have restored their ancient churches, and worship God as their forefathers worshipped Him before the Roman Liturgy was introduced and the purity of their faith was corrupted by the introduction of medieval errors and later superstitions.

