

Borrow George

A Supplementary Chapter to the Bible in Spain



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Содержание

PREFATORY NOTE	5
A SUPPLEMENTARY CHAPTER TO THE BIBLE IN SPAIN	7
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	10

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PREFATORY NOTE

In 1845 Richard Ford published his *Hand-Book for Travellers in Spain and Readers at Home* [2 Vols. 8vo.], a work which still commands attention, and the compilation of which is said to have occupied its author for more than sixteen years. In conformity with the wish of Ford (who had himself favourably reviewed *The Bible in Spain*) Borrow undertook to produce a study of the *Hand-Book* for *The Quarterly Review*. The following Essay was the result.

But the Essay, brilliant as it is, was not a 'Review.' Not until page 6 of the suppressed edition (p. 25 of the present edition) is reached is the *Hand-Book* even mentioned, and but little concerning it appears thereafter. Lockhart, then editing the *Quarterly*, proposed to render it more suitable for the purpose for which it had been intended by himself interpolating a series of extracts from Ford's volumes. But Borrow would tolerate no interference with his work, and promptly withdrew the Essay, which had meanwhile been set up in type. The following letter, addressed by Lockhart to Ford, sufficiently explains the position:

London,
June 13th, 1845.

Dear Ford,

'El Gitano' sent me a paper on the "Hand-Book" which I read with delight. It seemed just another capital chapter of his "Bible in Spain," and I thought, as there was hardly a word of 'review,' and no extract giving the least notion of the peculiar merits and style of the "Hand-Book," that I could easily (as is my constant custom) supply the humbler part myself, and so present at once a fair review of the work, and a lively specimen of our friend's vein of eloquence in exordio.

But, behold! he will not allow any tampering.. I now write to condole with you; for I am very sensible, after all, that you run a great risk in having your book committed to hands far less competent for treating it or any other book of Spanish interest than Borrow's would have been.. but I consider that, after all, in the case of a new author, it is the first duty of "The Quarterly Review" to introduce that author fully and fairly to the public.

Ever Yours Truly,
J. G. Lockhart.

The action of Lockhart in seeking to amend his Essay excited Borrow's keenest indignation, and induced him to produce the following amusing squib: —

Would it not be more dignified
To run up debts on every side,
And then to pay your debts refuse,
Than write for rascally Reviews?
And lectures give to great and small,
In pot-house, theatre, and town-hall,
Wearing your brains by night and day
To win the means to pay your way?
I vow by him who reigns in [hell],

It would be more respectable!

This squib was never printed by Borrow. I chanced to light upon it recently in a packet of his as yet unpublished verse.

The Essay itself is far too interesting, and far too characteristic of its author, to be permitted to remain any longer inaccessible; hence the present reprint. The original is a folio pamphlet, extending to twelve numbered pages. Of this pamphlet no more than two copies would appear to have been struck off, and both are fortunately extant to-day. One of these was formerly in the possession of Dr. William J. Knapp, and is now the property of the Hispanic Society of New York. The second example is in my own library. This was Borrow's own copy, and is freely corrected in his handwriting throughout. From this copy the present edition has been printed, and in preparing it the whole of the corrections and additions made by Borrow to the text of the original pamphlet have been adopted.

A reduced facsimile of the last page of the pamphlet serves as frontispiece to the present volume.

T. J. W.

A SUPPLEMENTARY CHAPTER TO THE BIBLE IN SPAIN

Does Gibraltar, viewing the horrors which are continually taking place in Spain, and which, notwithstanding their frequent grotesqueness, have drawn down upon that country the indignation of the entire civilized world, never congratulate herself on her severance from the peninsula, for severed she is morally and physically? Who knows what is passing in the bosom of the old Rock? Yet on observing the menacing look which she casts upon Spain across the neutral ground, we have thought that provided she could speak it would be something after the following fashion: —

Accursed land! I hate thee; and, far from being a defence, will invariably prove a thorn in thy side, a source of humiliation and ignominy, a punishment for thy sorceries, thy abominations and idolatries – thy cruelty, thy cowardice and miserable pride; I will look on whilst thy navies are burnt in my many bays, and thy armies perish before my eternal walls – I will look on whilst thy revenues are defrauded and ruined, and thy commerce becomes a bye word and a laughing-stock, and I will exult the while and shout – ‘I am an instrument in the hand of the Lord, even I, the old volcanic hill – I have pertained to the Moor and the Briton – they have unfolded their banners from my heights, and I have been content – I have belonged solely to the irrational beings of nature, and no human hum invaded my solitudes; the eagle nestled on my airy crags, and the tortoise and the sea-calf dreamed in my watery caverns undisturbed; even then I was content, for I was aloof from Spain and her sons. The days of my shame were those when I was clasped in her embraces and was polluted by her crimes; when I was a forced partaker in her bad faith, soul-subduing tyranny, and degrading fanaticism; when I heard only her bragging tongue, and was redolent of nought but the breath of her smoke-loving borrachos; when I was a prison for her convicts and a garrison for her rabble soldiery – Spain, accursed land, I hate thee: may I, like my African neighbour, become a house and a retreat only for vile baboons rather than the viler Spaniard. May I sink beneath the billows, which is my foretold fate, ere I become again a parcel of Spain – accursed land, I hate thee, and so long as I can uphold my brow will still look menacingly on Spain.’

Strong language this, it will perhaps be observed – but when the rocks speak strong language may be expected, and it is no slight matter which will set stones a-speaking. Surely, if ever there was a time for Gibraltar to speak, it is the present, and we leave it to our readers to determine whether the above is not a real voice from Gibraltar heard by ourselves one moonlight night at Algeziras, as with our hands in our pockets we stood on the pier, staring across the bay in the direction of the rock.

‘Poor Spain, unfortunate Spain!’ we have frequently heard Spaniards exclaim. Were it worth while asking the Spaniard a reason for anything he says or does, we should be tempted to ask him why he apostrophizes his country in this manner. If she is wretched and miserable and bleeding, has she anything but what she richly deserves, and has brought down upon her own head? By Spain we of course mean the Spanish nation – for as for the country, it is so much impassible matter, so much rock and sand, chalk and clay – with which we have for the moment nothing to do. It has pleased her to play an arrant jade’s part, the part of a *mula falsa*, a vicious mule, and now, and not for the first time, the brute has been chastised – there she lies on the road amidst the dust, the blood running from her nose. Did our readers ever peruse the book of the adventures of the Squire Marcos de Obregon?¹ No! How should our readers have perused the scarce book of the life and adventures of Obregon? never mind! we to whom it has been given to hear the voice of Gibraltar whilst standing on the pier of Algeziras one moonlight evening, with our hands in our pockets, jingling the cuartos which they contained, have read with considerable edification the adventures of the said Marcos, and will tell

¹ Relaciones de la vida del Escudero Marcos de Obregon.

the reader a story out of the book of his life. So it came to pass that in one of his journeys the Señor de Obregon found himself on the back of a mule, which, to use his own expression, had the devil in her body, a regular jade, which would neither allow herself to be shod or saddled without making all the resistance in her power – was in the habit of flinging herself down whenever she came to a sandy place, and rolling over with her heels in the air. An old muleteer, who observed her performing this last prank, took pity on her rider, and said, “Gentleman student, I wish to give you a piece of advice with respect to that animal” – and then he gave Marcos the piece of advice, which Marcos received with the respect due to a man of the muleteer’s experience, and proceeded on his way. Coming to a sandy place shortly after, he felt that the mule was, as usual, about to give way to her *penchant*, whereupon, without saying a word to any body, he followed the advice of the muleteer and with a halter which he held in his hand struck with all fury the jade between the two ears. Down fell the mule in the dust, and, rolling on her side, turned up the whites of her eyes. ‘And as I stood by looking at her,’ said Marcos, ‘I was almost sorry that I had struck her so hard, seeing how she turned up the whites of her eyes. At length, however, I took a luncheon of bread, and steeping it in wine from my bota, I thrust it between her jaws, and thus revived her; and I assure you that from that moment she never played any tricks with me, but behaved both formally and genteelly under all circumstances, but especially when going over sandy ground. I am told, however, that as soon as I parted with her she fell into her old pranks, refusing to be shod or saddled – rushing up against walls and scarifying the leg of her rider, and flinging herself down in all sandy places.’ Now we say, without the slightest regard to contradiction, knowing that no one save a Spaniard will contradict us, that Spain has invariably proved herself just such a jade as the mule of the cavalier De Obregon: with a kind and merciful rider what will she not do? Look at her, how she refuses to be bridled or shod – how she scarifies the poor man’s leg against rude walls, how ill she behaves in sandy places, and how occasionally diving her head between her fore-legs and kicking up behind she causes him to perform a somersault in the air to the no small discomposure of his Spanish gravity; but let her once catch a Tartar who will give her the garrote right well between the ears, and she can behave as well as any body. One of the best of her riders was Charles the First. How the brute lay floundering in the dust on the plains of Villalar, turning up the whites of her eyes, the blood streaming thick from her dishonest nose! There she lay, the Fleming staring at her, with the garrote in his hand. That’s right, Fleming! give it her again – and withhold the *sopa* till the very last extremity.

Then there was Napoleon again, who made her taste the garrote; she was quiet enough under him, but he soon left her and went to ride other jades, and his place was filled by those who, though they had no liking for her, had not vigour enough to bring her down on her side. She is down, however, at present, if ever she was in her life – blood streaming from her nose amidst the dust, the whites of her eyes turned up very much, whilst staring at her with uplifted garrote stands Narvaez.

Yes, there lies Spain, and who can pity her? – she could kick off the kind and generous Espartero, who, though he had a stout garrote in his hand, and knew what kind of conditioned creature she was, forbore to strike her, to his own mighty cost and damage. She kicked off him, and took up – whom? a regular muleteer, neither more nor less. We have nothing further to say about him; he is at present in his proper calling, we bear him no ill-will, and only wish that God may speed him. But never shall we forget the behaviour of the jade some two years ago. O the yell that she set up, the true mulish yell – knowing all the time that she had nothing to fear from her rider, knowing that he would not strike her between the ears. ‘Come here, you scoundrel, and we will make a bell-clapper of your head, and of your bowels a string to hang it by’ – that was the cry of the Barcelonese, presently echoed in every town and village throughout Spain – and that cry was raised immediately after he had remitted the mulct which he had imposed on Barcelona for unprovoked rebellion. But the mule is quiet enough now; no such yell is heard now at Barcelona, or in any nook or corner of Spain. No, no – the Caballero was kicked out of the saddle, and the muleteer sprang up – There she lies, the brute! *Bien hecho, Narvaez*– Don’t spare the garrote nor the mule!

It is very possible that from certain passages which we have written above, some of our readers may come to the conclusion that we must be partisans either of Espartero or Narvaez, perhaps of both. In such case, however, they would do us wrong. Having occasion at present to speak of Spain, we could hardly omit taking some notice of what has been lately going on in the country, and of the two principal performers in the late *funcion*. We have not been inattentive observers of it; and have, moreover, some knowledge of the country; but any such feeling as partisanship we disclaim. Of Narvaez, the muleteer, we repeat that we have nothing more to say, his character is soon read. Of the caballero – of Espartero, we take this opportunity of observing that the opinion which we at first entertained of him, grounded on what we had heard, was anything but favourable. We thought him a grasping ambitious man; and, like many others in Spain, merely wishing for power for the lust thereof; but we were soon undeceived by his conduct when the reins of government fell into his hand. That he was ambitious we have no doubt; but his ambition was of the noble and generous kind; he wished to become the regenerator of his country – to heal her sores, and at the same time to reclaim her vices – to make her really strong and powerful – and, above all, independent of France. But all his efforts were foiled by the wilfulness of the animal – she observed his gentleness, which she mistook for fear, a common mistake with jades – gave a kick, and good bye to Espartero! There is, however, one blot in Espartero's career; we allude to it with pain, for in every other point we believe him to have been a noble and generous character; but his treatment of Cordova cannot be commended on any principle of honour or rectitude. Cordova was his friend and benefactor, to whom he was mainly indebted for his advancement in the army. Espartero was a brave soldier, with some talent for military matters. But when did either bravery or talent serve as credentials for advancement in the Spanish service? He would have remained at the present day a major or a colonel but for the friendship of Cordova, who, amongst other things, was a courtier, and who was raised to the command of the armies of Spain by a court intrigue – which command he resigned into the hands of Espartero when the revolution of the Granja and the downfall of his friends, the Moderados, compelled him to take refuge in France. The friendship of Cordova and Espartero had been so well known that for a long time it was considered that the latter was merely holding the command till his friend might deem it safe and prudent to return and resume it. Espartero, however, had conceived widely different views. After the return of Cordova to Spain he caused him to be exiled under some pretence or other. He doubtless feared him, and perhaps with reason; but the man had been his friend and benefactor, and to the relations which had once existed between them Cordova himself alludes in a manifesto which he printed at Badajoz when on his way to Portugal, and which contains passages of considerable pathos. Is there not something like retribution in the fact that Espartero is now himself in exile?

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