

To one of the large seaports in Spain where I was staying, came a body of some hundreds of these unhappy men and boys, most of them political prisoners, some whose crimes were of the ordinary type—robbery, assault, arson, murder, &c.

They were all habited in Cuban soldier's dress; that is, the dress of the Spanish soldier in Cuba, the "Cuban Volunteer," who is just now so famous. This dress consists of a checked light-blue blouse, with or without red facings; black trousers, with red stripe; and a small black cloth cap, with a red tassel: it is like a prisoner's dress, and very unsoldierlike. Men of all ages, ranks, sizes, &c., were here, guarded down to the vessel on which they were to embark for military service in Cuba.

It was my fortune to fall in with a gentleman who had accompanied a ship-load of some eight hundred or more of these misguided men to Cuba, and he thus briefly describes his voyage. I could follow them no further than dry land, and I was anxious to follow them much further.

I think the account given me by my friend will interest some English readers. Let me tell the conversation in a simple way as it occurred.

I said, "What are they all going to do when they get to Cuba?"

"Why," said he, "they will be drafted off, ten into each company of Volunteers, to fight the Cuban insurgents."

"But," I said, "how about their age: some are boys, some old men?"

"Well, a great many, perhaps five out of every ten, will die, owing to the climate and bad living; a good many will desert, and a good many will be back again

in Spain in three months' time. I have seen men land in Spain three months after they have gone out under sentence of some years."

He explained that their relations often sent them money; on the receipt of which some deserted and settled in the island, some returned to their native land.

I then inquired what sort of men they were, these prisoners, as a rule. He said, "All sorts; many Carlists—and under this head are numbered all who are taken with arms in their hands in the northern provinces; many priests, who wear the common dress of the Cuban soldier, but are allowed sometimes on board to wear private dress; many Cantonales, and many Intransigentes; some robbers and murderers. As to the priests, they are all Carlistas at heart throughout Spain; so we pity those few that are laid hold of! Many are simply ignorant, misguided peasants, who can't read or write: they are stirred up by the priests to fight, and so they do fight."

"Now, look here," said another passenger to me. "In one batch there were two or three boys about twelve or fifteen years of age. I said to one of these lads, 'Are you a Carlista?'—'I don't know.'—'Had you arms, a gun in your hand?' The boy laughed, 'Si Señor, pero, sin gatillo,' *i.e.*, 'Yes, sir, I had, but without a trigger.'"

When a strong body of these prisoners are put on board a Government steamer, they are unmanacled, and have plenty of liberty; they are in fact, though against their will, soldiers, off to fight the battles of their country (with what heart?) against her Cuban foes! But, though unmanacled, plenty of means are at hand—as, indeed, is simply necessary, when a crew of

thirty or forty men, with twenty soldiers, have to take charge of eight hundred prisoners—to put down any mutiny. First of all, two small cannon are placed on deck, ready, in case of a “rising,” simply to sweep every man and boy off the deck. “Would the gunners fire?” said I.

“I believe you; if they sent half the crew into the air, they would.”

Then the hose from the engine-room is pointed carefully towards the hold, where these poor creatures dwell; so that in case of a riot or mutiny there, boiling water might at once be brought to bear upon them. And if cold water, vigorously applied, often brings a fainting lady or a fanciful man to his senses, what effect must not boiling water have upon Spanish political prisoners?

I inquired of my informant what these men did with themselves all the day. He told me that they employed their time in two ways. Firstly, in singing; secondly, in gambling. “Those two occupations,” said he, “make up their great amusements. The noise of their singing, when the departure of the sea-sickness has enabled them to sing, is something marvellous; they swarm upon deck, light their cigarros de papel, and sing their wild ditties, until you are almost deafened. I am always sorry when they aren’t sea-sick. As to gambling, all the money on board has changed hands a dozen times at least before the eighteen days’ steam to Cuba are over. Often a man loses his shirt and pants, and they have to supply him who are in care of the vessel.”

No one who knows anything of the Spanish love, or rather passion, for gambling, will be surprised at this; from the lord to the melon-seller, gambling is the

ruling passion, strong even on the convict-hulk or in death.

Sit in your hotel window in any large town in Spain, and you will hear, as regularly as chime of hour, the everlasting sing-song cry of the lottery-ticket seller down the street, "Quatro mil reales por una peseta;" i.e., 4,000 reals (a real is twopence-halfpenny) for one peseta, i.e., tenpence.

Go to one of the annual fairs in the interior, and at every street corner will be found a kind of rough *rouge-et-noir* going on, with a ring of gitanos, fruit-sellers, miners, and nondescripts staking their all on a turn of the wheel.

The Spanish laws, in theory, are excellent; every merchant vessel, above a certain tonnage, must carry her clergyman and her doctor. So on Sundays and feast-days there is a regular Misa, or Church service on deck.

"But," said my informant, "as to the doctors of these ships, they are no good at all. I have been often superior to them on a sudden emergency."

This may be true of the class of men they obtain for ships' surgeons, but it is only fair to the Spanish doctors to say that I have, more than once, found their prescriptions exceedingly beneficial, and noticed great acumen in their remarks and deductions. But, amongst the ordinary class of doctors in the interior, it is simply the old story of—"If he is ill, bleed him." And, in many towns of the interior, the doctors are "Barbers and Bleeders," or "Dentists and Bleeders." This inscription over the doors is constant in the interior. Sometimes there are three bleeders, "Sangradores," in one street. "Dentista y Sangrador," is very common. "What must we do?"—"Bleed him, of course!"

When the crew have brought their prisoners safe to land at some port in Cuba, they are received by an escort, and drafted into the different regiments, ten of these prisoners being allotted to each company of one hundred.

I asked my informant what was his opinion of the priests on board the vessels. He shook his head. "I haven't any opinion at all,—they are so ignorant. Ask one where London is, and he will say, 'In Inglaterra,' but what part of Inglaterra he will not know. Besides, they are many of them of very bulldog countenance—much like prize-fighters in face."

It may be so, I say once more, among the especial class of priests who are engaged for service on boardship; but my observation of the majority has not led me to exactly the same conclusion as my friend. The priests are ignorant of many modern topics, but well up in Latin, legends, &c. They keep aloof from the world in which we all live and move and have our being.

Most of these vessels get safe to Cuba. Spanish sailors are, as a rule, I have been told by an English sea-faring man, *very* cautious, even to timidity, "and first-rate navigators," said he.

When one has seen such a sight as I have just described, many feelings press into one's mind. These are not robbers or murderers; they are mistaken and misguided men, who have, at least, some elements of nobleness and greatness in them, the development of which has brought them to their present unhappy position. They have no education to brace them, they have no religion to guide them. Like all their countrymen, they believe in one thing, and that is, the need of their own individual interference in the politics

of their country. They see around them sorrow, and wrong, and distress ; they look, and in vain, for any master-spirit to redress their wrongs ; and so they take upon themselves the task. There is something to admire in this.

You will say, "Yes ; but their life is a mistake—it is wasted." It is true. But what is the life of most of us ? Is it not often, like theirs, a mistake—one long succession of battles nobly fought, but seldom won ? of high aims and great failures ? while he who aims the highest falls the most terribly, simply because he had mounted the ladder higher than others—simply because he aimed so high, his fall is so tremendous ! Mediocrity and indifference escape all this !

CHAPTER XXII.

DECAY OF FAITH IN SPAIN.

“MY religion has broken down.” Such was the hopeless sentiment—a sentiment rendered doubly mournful by the simplicity of the language, and the position of the speaker—expressed to me a few nights since by a poor Spanish boatman. It was uttered in answer to my question why he was absent from his cathedral, the bells of which had just been clanging for evening service.

“My religion has broken down !”

The train of thought which these bitter words led to, urged me to throw together into a connected form the many observations I had already jotted down as to the state of religious feeling in Spain ; and I could not help reflecting, as I turned over page after page of my journal, and came upon the entries relating to this especial subject, with how much truth might both the educated and uneducated Spaniard of to-day say, with the poor boatman, “My religion has broken down !”

This self-imposed task is a dispiriting one ; for I cannot, to be candid, write of the vitality and living work of the Church in my present country, but rather of its lifelessness and stagnation—not of the growth and progress of faith, but, alas ! of its rapid and visible decay.

The Church of Spain—of Spain in 1873 (I write of

what I have seen in the South and in the interior of Spain; in the North, I am told, ecclesiastical affairs wear a wholly different aspect),—is an institution which has lost its hold on the masses, both educated and uneducated. They do not look to its shelter for the offering of prayers, nor to its pulpit for instruction, nor to its minister for support and comfort. In literature, in intercourse with strangers, in thought and education, all around has moved; the Church moves not; she is left behind in the onward march: too proud to ask, to follow, or to learn, she stands alone; too proud to acknowledge, or too much wrapped in sublime slumber and dreams of her past glory, to recognize for a moment the fact that she is alone.

She writes her commands still, but none are bound to obey them; she proffers her advice, but her sons turn away unheeding. "We have heart and mind like you," they say; "we can think and act for ourselves. Away!" The picture that rises upon one's mind when one sees the decrees of Mother Church slighted, ridiculed, or ignored by her sons (though *not* by her pious daughters), is that of some aged officer long ago suspended for his age—to whom the rules and implements of modern strategy are wholly new and strange—suddenly aspiring to command on the field of modern warfare; he raises his hand with all his pristine dignity—he gives the word with all the decision of one accustomed to command. Too full of respect for his grey hairs, and his pristine courage, and his rank, those around him do not ridicule him, or tell him he is mistaken; they simply salute him courteously, and pass on ignoring his commands.

The decay of religious faith in Spain divides itself into three distinct heads. The first subject of inquiry

will naturally be, *What is the precise state of religious feeling existing at the present moment?* The second will be, *To what causes is the present state of things due?* And, lastly, *Whither is it tending; what will be the result in the future of the religious position of the present?*

To answer these questions fairly, fully, and without exaggeration, will be the object of the following remarks: what the writer will say will certainly be suggestive; it may, he trusts, be productive in England of much good. Anyhow, it cannot fail to be full of the deepest interest.

I. What is the precise state of religious feeling in Spain at the present day? Some few years ago it was the writer's privilege, when in London, to attend one or two of a set of lectures, very original and suggestive, given by the great Indian reformer, Cheshub Chunder Sen—lectures which ultimately fell into the writer's hand. Mr. Sen was, as the writer understood him, one who had advanced far beyond the creed of his countrymen—(Brahmees, if my remembrance serves me rightly, was the name by which he designated them),—one who, having become dissatisfied with the superstitions of the Brahmins, had gone hither and thither seeking for a creed. His words were very striking, full as they were of those Scriptures of which, as the writer believes, he had grasped a part—and but a part. "I," he said, in perfectly good English, "I was for many years a man without a creed; I and hundreds of my fellow-Brahmees could not accept or hold to our own religion, and I made trial first of other religious systems in India; but, thirsty as I was, I found none to give me drink; I was hungry, and they gave me no food. At last I read for myself,

and I read carefully, the New Testament, which you English deify. I re-read it with prayer ; I read it, before I embraced its teaching, on my knees. I rose up a different man. I believed in the One God, the true Father of all who trust in Him ; One who requires no sacrifice—nothing but the love of a true heart and sincerity.

“ I do not,” he went on, “ with yourselves, call my Saviour God, because He says, ‘ *I am the way* ’—the way, not the goal : thither I cannot follow you ; but I look up to Him as the only perfect Son of God.

“ Long time had I gone about, seeking rest, and finding none ; at last I had found rest to my soul—rest for which I thank my God daily.”

The words were evidently the utterance of a true, loyal, and religious soul, and of an inquiring and lofty mind ; as I understand them, the speaker’s position was that of the Unitarian Church ; he believed in one God, and in one perfect Son of God, sent by Him to be men’s guide and pattern, and there he stopped. Whether or no he went further, with Arianism, I cannot fairly remember. But it struck me at the time, that for a soul so devout and earnest the whole truth would be revealed ; the whole Evangelical faith, in all its fulness and blessedness, would be, I felt sure, finally grasped by his heart and soul.

The lecturer then went on to say that he and several hundreds of his fellow-countrymen, chiefly Indian barristers and men of the other learned professions, had formed a sort of religious confraternity, or club, on the religious foundation he had explained, called the Brahmo-Somaj, and that their tenets were fast gaining ground among the educated Brahmins ; that they were gathering daily disciples “ from the thousands” (I quote his

own words) "who are now in India going about, *having cast off their old faith, seeking for some faith on which to stay their soul.*"

The parallel between the religious state of the "thousands" here referred to and the "thousands" of Spain, among educated men, the writer conceives to be a very close one. Not for one moment does he intend to imply that the branch of the Catholic Church established in Spain—a church which has given to its sons and daughters a duly-ordained ministry, and Christian rites, and religious instruction, and in whose sublime churches the thousands of its faithful have made their hearts' desire known to their God, aye, and still make it known—is not one in which men may find all things necessary to salvation; but he says and means, because the fact is one patent to him, and freely conversed of in street, drawing-room, plaza, and casino, by Spanish gentlemen and others of the lower class (who are not too indifferent—alas! with most of these the thoughts soar not above the search for daily bread)—and it is simply this: that the case of the educated Spanish gentlemen, and especially of professional men, tradesmen, and literary men and artisans—the state of all, in a word, who travel, think, or read—is exactly analogous to the state of his fellow-countrymen described by Cheshub Chunder Sen.

Like them, they have unobtrusively but certainly cast aside the faith in which they were brought up, and having nothing sure, nothing established, nothing of a church, a public service, and the sympathy needed by mankind in its religious aspirations, which a church and assemblies foster, to which to cling, and on which to anchor their souls, they are simply going

about, seeking some one to lead them by the hand; some one whose talents and character give him a claim to be trusted, to guide and direct their minds and souls; some one to help them to rise—as they do wish, and long, and pray to rise—above the dead level of indifferentism, and the weary, meaningless round of daily life, daily work, or daily idleness; casino, politics, and cigarillo.

What, then, are the signs by which this state of religious feeling is betokened, and on what grounds is it justifiable to present so melancholy a view of religion?

I answer, one must be guided by four different signs of the times in forming an estimate: the tone of conversation in social circles; the statistics of church-going; the observation of various small facts in connexion with this great subject, all of which are small, it is true, but, like the eddying straw of our trite English proverb, “serve to show the course of the stream”; and, lastly, books and literature.

(a.) The decay of religious faith is shown by conversation in the social circles of Spain, especially among the more ardent of the Republicans.

There are three different names by which Republican Spain of the present day, in the districts from which I write, calls her sons, namely, *Ateos*, *Indiferentes* and *libres pensadores*; that is, Atheists, those indifferent to religion at all or undecided, and free-thinkers.

These are terms of daily use among us. A man, however, would never say of himself, “I am an *Ateo*,” although he *might* (and very frequently *does*) apply that “word without hope” to his friend’s state of mind. The “*El Credo*” of the *Ateo* is something of

this nature—a credo, if it can be called a credo at all, which has come into this country with freedom of French literature. A man reads little, prays little, thinks a good deal, and observes a good deal. He comes to the conclusion that *to sin* is according to nature (*muy natural*), and, therefore, that He who has proclaimed that *to sin* is worthy of blame, and shall be punished, cannot be the Author of Nature; for he reasons, “Why did God make it natural to me to sin, and yet say, ‘I will punish you if you sin’?” He goes further. He says, “I see Nature; I feel her power; I know in many things she is right. I do not see God; I do not feel his power. I see the poor oppressed; I see sin triumphant; I see the Church proclaim things in His name, as celibacy, clearly against Nature. Nature exists, as I can prove; I cannot prove that God exists; therefore, I believe that Nature is God; for Nature is stronger than any thing.” Such is the *Credo*, such the profession of hundreds of men of this belief, if it can be called a belief. They are sometimes known by the name of *Materialistas*, although this term implies something still more faithless. For instance, a *Materialista* would say, if his fellow-creature showed any deep penitence, any deep religious melancholy, “Oh! it is the work of Nature; bodily illness is diseasing his mind.” Some of the coarser forms would go even further; but of these it is not needful to speak.

The position of the *Indiferente* is less defined, and more common. It is a state of heart and mind, this indifferentism, which, from many different causes, does not care at all for religion or feel its power; and yet would, and does, saunter into church on the proper days, and listen to the music, and to the sermon, if at all

a striking one. Here is one reason, which incidentally I may be pardoned for introducing, why the clergy of Spain have so completely lost their hold on the minds of *men*; their sermons never strike home, never fairly meet a doubt, seldom inculcate the moral teaching of Christ. An *Indiferente* often becomes indifferent from long continuance in sin or prayerlessness; still more often, from utter indecision of character. He is a man who reads, cursorily, the religious literature of France, of what is here designated the French Liberal School. He commences with a book read by all the educated Spaniards—'Vie de Jésus,' par Ernest Renan, or 'Les Apôtres,' by the same author. Doubts are instilled into his mind—a mind in all probability of very barren soil before; the weeds grow up and flourish. He has no one to advise him; he does not go deeply into the subject; he is too careless and too pusillanimous, and has too much love for his wife's feelings, and respect for his Church, to throw off the mask and openly say, "I do not hold the old El Credo"; so he goes on, and is called, and truly, one of the *Indiferentes*. Thousands are in this state of mind; like the disciples of the Brahma-Somaj, they are going about seeking rest, and finding none.

The third class of unorthodox Spaniard is perhaps the most common—the man who does not hesitate to call himself one of *los libres pensadores*, "the free-thinkers." This term, in England, is usually applied to one who has cast off much, or all, of his faith in God. Here, however, the term has no such meaning. It simply means one who chooses to think for himself, and embrace that creed which he believes best for his temporal and eternal welfare. Thousands of the educated sons of Republican Spain would think it no

discredit to themselves or others to say, "I am a free-thinker," or "He belongs to the free-thinkers," because the term, in Spain, conveys no idea at all of disbelief in a personal God and Father of us all: it simply denotes what is called in England Broad Churchism. And men say, truly enough, there is more religion where there is life, thought, inquiry, restlessness, than in the torpor of indifferentism, or the dead slumber of one who is too careless about religion to take any pains about it, and therefore gives a careless acquiescence to statements and doctrines about the truth of which he has taken no pains to inquire—the "belief" of one who has never *disbelieved*, simply because he has never really believed at all. This class of *libres pensadores* is composed chiefly of *educated Republicans*. This freedom of religious thought, which came in with the Republic—a sort of fierce reaction after the tight curb of Roman Catholicism in the Queen's time—is the *typo*, or type, of the modern statesman, orator, literary man of Spain. Although none of the three classes here alluded to are, strictly speaking, confined to the Republican ranks, yet they chiefly exist among the Republicans.

Having sought, with all candour, to explain the religious status of the three great bodies of educated Spaniards known in social circles as Atheists, Indifferents, and Free-thinkers, the writer of this review of Spanish religious feeling continues his description of the first and most superficial of those signs of the times by which the state of that religious feeling may fairly be appreciated:—*Conversation in the educated circles of Spain*.

And here, for a moment, I would pause. Those in England into whose hands these pages may fall, will

naturally complain, and with some apparent truth, "The writer keeps on speaking about educated men and Republicans, do not the masses of the poor enter into his account?" The question is a fair one, and shall be fairly answered. The answer is this. The population of Spain, by our last Government returns, was sixteen millions; and, by the same documents, twelve millions were returned as "unable either to read or to write." Surely one can only speak, when one speaks of the state of feeling in a nation on religious or political matters, of the opinions of those who can read or write at least a little. Were I to write of the state of religious feeling among the *uneducated* in the town of the interior, in the fishing-village of the coast, in the vineyard or the olive-press, I should merely sum it up in three words:—superstition, carelessness, blind discontent. Before the end of these volumes, a few words shall be devoted to the uneducated masses; but, be it remembered, wherever there is an absence of education, there is present blind and palpable imitation of others; and the poor rude, suffering fisherman or goat-herd has often said to me, when asked as to his religion, "I am an Evangelico"; and when pressed to explain, he would say merely the name of some Protestant church, or some popular leader of thought in his country, and add, with true Spanish pride, "He and I have common ground."

Recurring to my subject—the state of religious feeling as indicated by the conversation current in social circles—let me say, that never have I heard, and never again would I wish to hear, such utterances of utter unrest, utter—I was going to say—despair, as I daily and hourly hear now around me.