

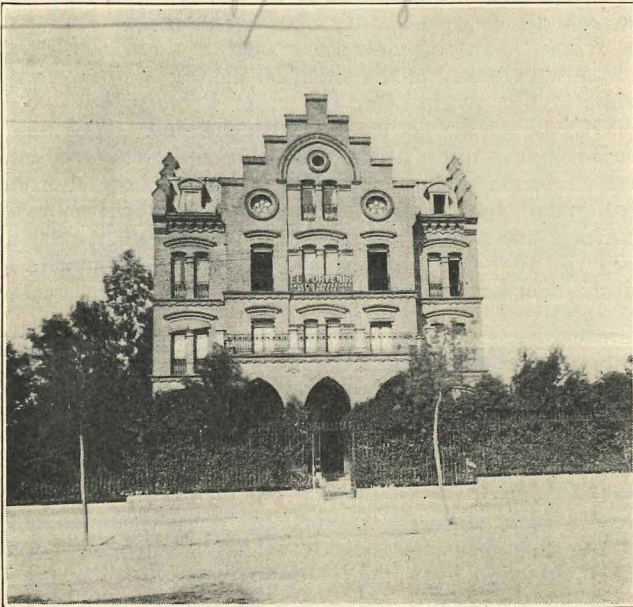
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THE RELIGIOUS SITUATION IN SPAIN

by

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Keller, Adolf / Religious sit in



THE FOREMOST EVANGELICAL SCHOOL IN SPAIN
The Interdenominational Seminary "El Porvenir" in Madrid

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THE RELIGIOUS SITUATION IN SPAIN

(NOTE: *Dr. Keller is the Director of the Central Bureau for Relief of the Evangelical Churches of Europe, whose headquarters are located in Geneva, Switzerland.*)

Nowhere more than in Spain is it so obvious that a people must be judged in the light of its own history, its own mentality and spiritual structure, and not from a point of view lying outside these considerations. For instance, the man who looked at the situation merely to discover what chances the present state of flux might offer for either Protestantism or communistic atheism, would come to altogether false conclusions. And any attempt to answer the new religious quest of the Spanish people with foreign or denominational religious propaganda would simply reveal how thoroughly inadequate and antiquated such a shortsighted and narrow policy is. For the moment, therefore, one can merely ask what needs the Spanish people feels out of its own spiritual condition, what religious requirements are brought out in its search for a new spiritual form, and what answers can be given to such questioning.

Next to Russia, Spain is the greatest intellectual riddle of Europe, and without doubt is more deeply shaken in its whole psychology, and wider circles of its population have been stirred than even among the Russians. We were accustomed to regard the Spanish people as the ultra Catholic. Here the State endowed the Church with the fullest backing of the secular arm. Here is the home of the Inquisition, the birthplace of Loyola, the cradle of that theology which, since the Council of Trent, stamped official Roman theology and church polity permanently as anti-Protestant. And today, in this self-same country, churches and monasteries are burning, the Jesuit order is dissolved, clericalism attains only 59 seats out of 400 in Parliament, a communistic-atheistic conviction is able to penetrate, not only a thin stratum of leaders but the people itself, and wins an easy victory over the masses, uprooted as they are from their age-long religious traditions.

But as yet, everything is in such ferment, as yet the revolution has so little found either its intellectual or social form, or even an ideology of its own, that for the time being, one must forego generalizations and stick to the facts themselves in all their contradictoriness, approaching their meaning and interpretation cautiously. This fact must also be reckoned with, that the Spanish revolution is not working out in a straight line but in contrasts, so that today's swerve to the radical left may be compensated for by a corresponding shove to the right, unless this natural striving after an equilibrium is brushed aside by a communistic onslaught.

I.

The chief forces in this struggle are the old clericalism, which draws its strength from the "vis inertiae" of its former rule, communism, which gets its stimulus from bolshevistic world propaganda as well as the discontent of the masses with the achievements of the revolution to date, and finally a strong socialistic and radical stratum, which is furnishing the leadership and which wants to unite Spain with the present-day science and culture of western Europe by means of economic, social, and educational reforms.

In the last group,—which is again politically split into several factions, but none the less unanimously oriented in the will to build up a democratic republic,—is a large part of the leading Spanish intelligentsia. By means of accelerated legislation they seek legal security above all for the agrarian reform, religious freedom, lay education, and the unity of the State, against communistic-anarchistic, clerical, and Catalonian (Separatist) attacks. They deserve the gratitude of the entire civilized world, and of Protestantism in particular, for their championship of freedom of faith and conscience.

The government must not simply be made responsible for the burning of monasteries and churches, even if it is true that these fiery beacons were probably not unwelcome. Two hundred monasteries are said to have been burned at once, seven of them in Madrid alone. The gaping windows, the blackened walls, the sight of the empty, deserted halls, gives the stranger an uncanny feeling that here is a hate which halts at no extremes. The people themselves take it very calmly, however. In Madrid, I talked with Spaniards who, like myself, were peering through the boarded-up doors of the Jesuit monastery "Arte y Uffizios", and later I discussed the incidents with professors and with socialists. Unanimously, they were regarded as a protest by the most radical communistic elements against the hesitating attitude of the government on the matter of the separation of Church and State, and as hostility not so much against the church itself as against the wealth and power of the church, and above all, against the Jesuits.

Far more significant than the fires (there are still some 5,000 monasteries in Spain!) is the dissolution of the Jesuit Order, through which the government hopes to strike at the wealth of the "Dead Hand", and at the same time undermine clerical power in the field of education. The little white slips which are pasted over the doors of the Jesuit schools, "closed by order of the government," mean far more to the initiated than the spectacles of incendiarism, because they reveal the determination of the Minister of Education, Del Rios, a pioneer of religious freedom, to give Spain the 20,000 schools which it lacks.

In spite of intense opposition to clericalism, I found in conversations with intellectuals, and with socialists also, not only no hostility toward religion, but not even against the Roman Catholic Church. At bottom, they would like to see it reformed, to confine its activities to its real task of raising the religious and ethical standards of the people, and to see it liberated from all pretensions to secular power. To what degree this attitude is significant for Protestantism also, we shall see at once. The utterances of the important intellectual leaders are surprisingly clear in this respect, whether based on personal convictions or on consideration of the religious convictions prevailing among the people. The Spanish Premier, Azana, has translated into Spanish

that famous book of Borrow, "The Bible in Spain." This evangelical book fought for the liberation of the Bible in Spain and for religious freedom. Azana makes no bones about the fact that he has made this book available to his people not merely because of its aesthetic qualities, but because of its forceful liberalism.

Yet more significant in forming an opinion of the religious orientation of the present leaders is a book by Luis de Zulueta, the present Minister of Foreign Affairs, and head of the Spanish delegation at the Disarmament Conference in Geneva. Its title is: "The Prayer of The Unbeliever, Essays on The Religious Problem." In this "Prayer of an Unbeliever" we are met with such earnest religious seeking, such sorrow over the decay of true religion, such a love of Jesus, and such piety,—a secularized piety in the best sense,—that this book of an unbeliever becomes a veritable cry of belief, (I believe, Lord, help Thou mine unbelief!), a sacrifice on the altar of the Unknown God. The book is an unusual testimony of the religious need of modern people with its homesickness, its restlessness, its consciousness of the God in whom its author does not believe. It deserves to be made available by a good translation, not only as a description of the religious quest of liberated Spain, but as a human document of our times. One cannot read unmoved the way in which the author describes his religious seeking: "I seek Thee, Lord, and find Thee not;" how he seeks God in the mystical experience and religious traditions of his people, "in the inwardness of my own spirit, in the secret depths of my consciousness", in history, in the life of Jesus, in nature, "in the peace of my hearth, under the honest poverty of my roof, with my hands on the heads of my sons." Where is God? "He is not here," is the conclusion. But on his desk, visible to all, lies the Bible, and no one who looks into the grave and profound face can believe that it is simply an uncommon bibliophilic ornament on the table of an official and a politician. One can understand that this man, though he is a Catholic and reveals an emotional sense of belief, was unacceptable to the Vatican when he was proposed as ambassador to Rome. In one of the essays of his book he places Jesus in the Cabinet meeting, and lets Him, as the "Unknown Proletarian," cast a mournful look on the assemblage when he hears that "to protect wealth" is proclaimed as the foremost duty. He cries out: "Why do you call me Master, and obey me not?" and is promptly hustled out of the hall because of "disorderly conduct" while the grandees of Spain, the senators, and all the nine Cabinet members kiss the episcopal ring of the archbishop. "Must have been an anarchist," says one. "I do not know that man," says the prelate. And "in the distance a cock was heard crowing."

The most noted Spanish thinker of today, José Ortega y Gasset, who has also taken active part in the religious debates, goes even farther in the fight against clericalism, without manifesting the same depth of religious feeling. He sees the spiritual values of the free personality threatened alike by the clerical ambition, and by the "upheaval of the masses," which the present government also has to fear,—the red flood of the untrained populace inimical to intellectuality, greedy for power, whose religious superstition is only a step removed from complete unbelief, just as was the case formerly with the "black flood" which drowned all liberal aspirations. He says it time and again,—and in this connection his usual rhetorical style momentarily disappears,—that he, too, cannot conceive of the reconstruction of his people on other than a Christian—ethical basis.

It is not easy for these leaders to talk about religion, since they do not know any other than the clericalism they have cast aside, and since they see in Protestantism rather a system of humanistic ethics than positive Christianity. In the last analysis, however, we are dealing not with a name, but with a cause. What Unamuno calls "el sentimiento tragico de la vida," which may be freely rendered "the human tragedy," is at bottom merely the expression of the peculiar religious condition of the uprooted individual of today, who knows that he has become homeless in his present religious world and must seek another. Madariga, too, the present Spanish ambassador in Paris, in his book: "Espana," speaks of "that deep and religious pessimism which is fundamentally the natural attitude of the Spanish soul."

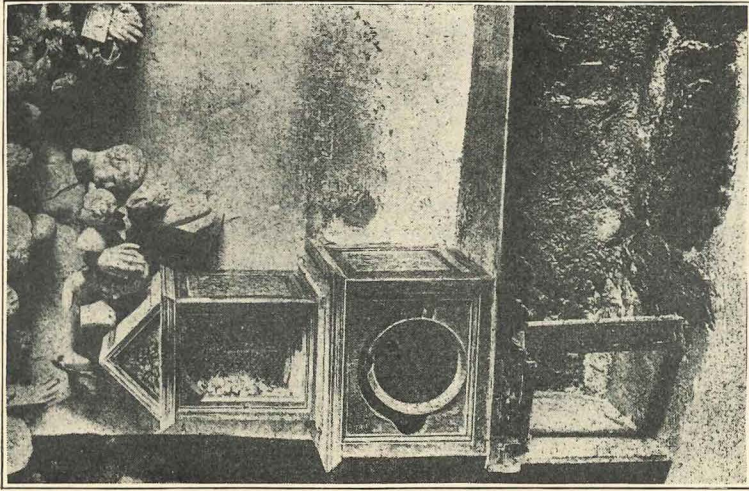
Protestantism in Spain, being a small structure confessionally much split up, cannot expect to step into the vacuum or gap in the religious quest of the leaders. These are finding it easier to associate themselves with western spiritual thinking through a new, religiously oriented humanism, such as Ernest Robert Curtius is just now recommending as the proper "initiative" against a threatening barbarism. Perhaps Erasmus is now coming into his own, a fact of which Del Rios or Marranon, who dub themselves "Erasmians," are fully conscious.

Another line leads from Sanz del Rios, a pupil of Krause, the German disciple of Kant, direct to Kant himself, and shows how in this intellectual giant the germs can be found for all and everything,—even for the ideology of a revolution!

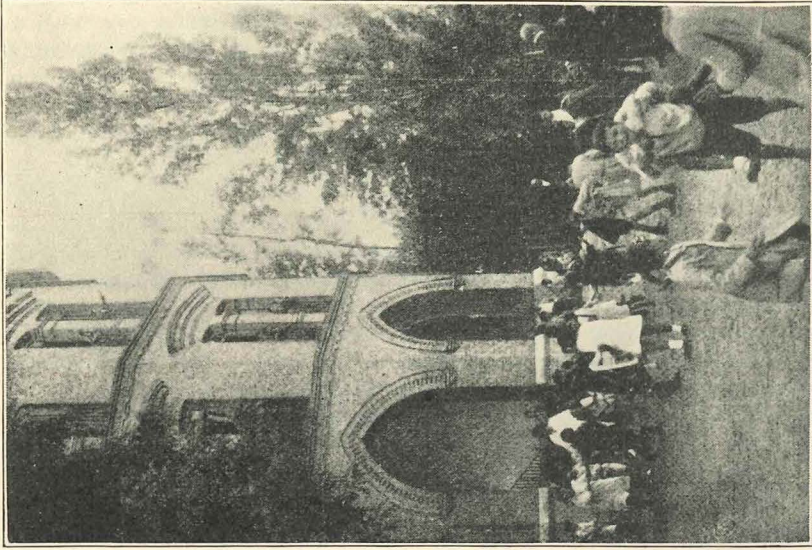
It is plain, therefore, that the radical and socialistic élite combats clericalism, the *political* church, and the Jesuit order, but not the Church, or religion as a spiritual, educational, and social power. The bulk of the socialists, the people, will not always be able to make this distinction, but neither can they readily get rid of the Catholic imprint, which, as Madariga and Maura say, belongs to the Spanish nature. I talked with a number of such socialists in Barcelona. Aside from their intellectual culture, the religious and social views of these men reminded one rather of British labor representatives than of German or French social democrats.

A word should be said also concerning clerical traditionalism and Spanish communism, in order to visualize the frame within which the fate of Protestantism in Spain is being determined. It suffices to say right here that both are strongly identified with the social interests of distinct classes. The class that had property and power took the step from monarchy to republic, from the church state to the religious state, on compulsion or not at all. Of communism it is said that it is a question of hunger, especially in Andalusia, where the wealth of great estates is contrasted with the poverty of the indigent and unemployed proletariat.





The Miraculous Pot of Nuria, in the Pyreness. The suppliant kneels to thrust his head into the circular opening.



THE OLD ORDER CHANGETH—

Children at recess in the spacious grounds of "El Porvenir". The high school students have a home-made swimming pool farther back.

II.

Has Spanish Protestantism a contribution to make toward this intellectual, religious and social quest and struggle of a nation for a new formula of living? And is such a contribution looked for, and in what form can it be rendered? These questions can only be put very cautiously and modestly. Not only because it will arouse antagonism to utilize the obvious defeat of a church as an opportunity for aggressive proselytizing, but because one must also stop to ask if the strength and the abilities for such an enterprise are present.

It should of course be said at the outset that Protestantism is by no means an exotic plant in Spain. The unforgotten names of Juan Valdez in the sixteenth century, of Constantín Ponte della Fuente, of Cazalla, Gil and Matamaro in the last century, show that one need not speak of the Spanish soul as necessarily "anima naturaliter romana," even if a strong kinship does exist. Anyone who sees in the museum the pale face of Philip II will realize what forces kept the Gospel from spreading in Spain. It is not very long ago that it was forbidden to Protestants to set up a little church fronting on a street, to make it recognizable as a church by means of spires, bells or even inscriptions. Pastor Fliedner's church in Madrid still looks as if it were a "hide-out" in a back alley, to which Protestantism in Spain was to be banned. It is less than two years ago since Carmen Padin went to prison because she said that according to the Bible, Mary had other children than Jesus. When King Gustav of Sweden visited Spain a few years ago, and was regaled with a speech by the Papal Nuntius, thanking him for the liberty which the Catholics in Sweden enjoyed, the King, in his answer, regretted that unfortunately he could not say the same of his co-religionists in Spain! Today, all this is past and gone, and Protestantism, in common with all religions, has received full freedom.

But the Spanish Protestants are a pathetically small group. With Pastor Fliedner I visited a number of congregations scattered through Estremadura, Andalusia and Catalonia. These rural parishes are a peculiar feature of present-day religious Spain. The majority of them were not founded by foreign missions but rose out of the glowing embers of the Gospel influences of other days.

Ybahernando in Estremadura is an example. The congregation meets in a vaulted room that looks like a cellar. The cross on the roof was mounted only a short while ago. Everything about it tells the story of oppression and struggle. The chapel cannot compare with the stately Catholic Church on whose lofty roof storks are nesting. But these people have the *Word* and know its exceeding worth. Even simple peasants and women. It is a sign of the new times that a circle of open and secret friends, drawn from the village middle class as well, is gradually aggregating round them. Thus a certain change in the social structure of these parishes is already becoming apparent. The mere fact that Protestants can become mayors, as in the case of Albricias in Alicante, shows the profound change which is coming about in the attitude toward the religious question.

Spanish Protestantism is faced with the temptation to exploit this situation politically. Anti-clerical speakers readily find a large audience right now. In one city the Alcalde himself gave the Protestant teacher the use of the

local bullfight arena, where he successfully refuted the clerical speaker, Gil Robles, to the applause of 3,000 spectators. But I was glad to hear Pastor Fliedner warn against such confessional politics and plead for quiet, spiritual work and concentration on the Gospel. Especially on the quaking ground of revolutionary Andalusia and Catalonia, Protestantism must not enter into an alliance with those elements who, in order to achieve their own sordid ends, would just as enthusiastically burn up the new republic as the Church. This realization does not hinder Protestantism from being sympathetic to the government which has at last brought it religious freedom.

But even among the liberal and socialistic leaders, who, as pointed out above, show a broad religious understanding, the battle against clericalism must not be confused with sympathy for Protestantism. In its deepest religious forces, the Protestant faith is scarcely known in that circle. The conscious prejudice of the people "no creen en Dios, no creen en la virgen," (he who doesn't believe in the Virgin, doesn't believe in God), may have left some after effects even here. The manner in which Protestantism was made known, gave it rather the appearance as rationalism, as ethics, as a social development, through which, however, it does at present attain a certain prestige above all through its social initiative. For the need of the people is boundless. Not only are schools lacking, but a comprehensive social policy and social welfare work.

It is especially in the field of education that Protestantism, weak as it is, has accomplished excellent work with very little money. All evangelical churches that work in Spain, have realized that the school belongs to the church. In Madrid alone, there are quite a number of evangelical churches. At the head, stands the seminary "El Porvenir", which is directed by George Fliedner. Some years ago, this important school was threatened with ruin by a mortgage being cancelled just before the end of the year. The American Committee of the Central Bureau for Relief took steps at once to try to get the money together. I was in New York at the time and had to sail without knowing if the effort was successful, but on Christmas Eve a cabled draft came, so that the European Office of the Bureau was enabled to telegraph \$11,000 to Madrid the same day,—the school was saved! Even when the State takes over the task of popular education, evangelical schools in Spain will by no means be superfluous. When you see the seriousness and enthusiasm of these classes, the shining eyes of the children, the devotion of the teachers, you know without being told what valuable forces are at work here.



III.

Without close cooperation of the Protestants in Spain, there is not only nothing to be gained but a small denominational profit, but the position of Protestantism itself will be uncertain and insignificant. In the forthcoming religious legislation, for instance, Protestantism must not appear as a pulverized mass of single parishes and sects, but as a firmly knit whole.

There is indeed a beginning of such a united front in the little Church Federation, which includes most of the churches and parishes, as well as the evangelical mission in Aragon, the work of the Frenchman, Cadier. This federation still has obstacles to overcome which impair its efficiency. The opposition comes less from the Protestants now working in Spain as from their foreign boards. The foreign countries, that are trying to help, are really hindering in this connection. Above all, the Southern Baptists of America and the "Plymouth Brethren" refuse all cooperative relationship with other denominations. To both, their little denominational interests seem more vital than a lasting evangelical impression on the Spanish people.

What awakening Spain needs is not a few little Protestant Churches, a denominational proselytism,—however necessary these may be for their own membership,—but a new spirit, the Gospel as a character-forming, personal



"CASA DE PAZ"

The "House of Peace" in Escorial is the summer home of the Evangelical orphans. Philip II lived there while the Escorial Palace was being built.

and social message, as an answer to the questions raised by the modern individual. It is threatened by ossification and formalism, and is seeking, as the Minister of Education, Fernando del Rios, said: "a new man, a new moral nature, symbolized in the principle of solidarity and mutuality." It is seeking above all, lay consciousness and lay ethics, spiritual freedom, and for their sake it affirms the spiritual obligations of Christian love and social justice. It wants to meet the life-giving God and not merely an ecclesiastical power for preserving His Word. This yearning for ethical and Christian laification of all life will not be so easy to put through in a people whose spiritual life was almost entirely clericalized. Protestantism must not allow itself to be put in the position of the gloating competitor who seizes the opportunity of profiting when his neighbor's business is going badly. It must be ready for service when the call comes, be it conscious or involuntary. It must be the Light and the Salt and recognize that it would be a great thing for Spain if the surviving Catholic Church, beside the reconstruction of its own life, adopts that from Protestantism which Central European Catholicism has visibly won out of its dispute with the Reformation. To the intellectually and religiously open-minded leaders who have broken with Rome, Protestantism can offer far more, and with far greater directness of approach. Not a church form, not a denominational consciousness, but a spiritualized tenor of life, a spiritual content, which has both depth and breadth. This stratum of intellectual leaders needs a bridge from the inherited religious, but no longer clerically formed, ethics to modern culture with all its problematics, and to a development of social responsibility which was unknown in their former monarchistic-hierarchical world.

Where will this stratum find these medial agencies through which new, vivifying forces can be conducted to the Spanish people? We are not speaking here of the contacts with western European culture, as Certega y Casset, Unamuno, and Madariga have them but of the possible sources within the country itself. It is at this point that the Spanish evangelical schools, (foremost among them "El Porvenir"), the evangelical press, and evangelical literature will count for most. The working radius of all three is much restricted by the lack of interest in other countries, and on the other hand, foreign influence is greatly hindered by an increase of national feeling in these days. More and more, Spain must herself furnish the impetus for this work. None the less, there is still a field for the development of a "nursery" for native leadership. Up to the present time this leadership was all foreign—the Fliedner brothers, Cadier, Douglas, etc. Among the younger Spaniards trained by them, however, there are already several who, with some special tutoring, could develop the qualities of leadership needed for the future. There are such men as Don Adolfo Arango, Guittierrez, Don Salvador, Don Patricio Gomez.

The public press, which welcomes the introduction of religious freedom, is beginning already—an unheard of thing in the past—to notice the Protestant Church. The independent daily, "Heraldo de Madrid" as early as June 20th, 1929, brought out an objective and sympathetic article on "The Evangelical Churches of Madrid."

Protestantism in Spain cannot do without its interdenominational seminary. With increased support, it might even be developed much more strongly, its first objective being the training of leaders for the evangelical

churches and schools on a broader foundation and with higher general and theological education.

The best prospects of influencing an approachable class in Spain would probably be with literary work of a kind that would treat all the newly arisen problems in religion, sociology and science not on the basis of propaganda but from the view point of an evangelical consciousness. A beginning has already been made in a sense of pamphlets of an edifying and "apologetic" character. But tracts won't do it. Such material must have intellectual breadth and far-sightedness. This is the more necessary inasmuch as Spanish Catholicism has apparently little or no valuable literature which would count in the present spiritual struggle. The present offerings are mostly translations from German Catholic literature.

The religious enactments which are anticipated, will give free rein to all such efforts. Minister of Justice Albornoz recently published an outline of the forthcoming legislation in "El Sol" (April 7th). All religious privileges are abolished. Every religious communion is assured free exercise of its faith within the bounds of its buildings. Permission for processions must be applied for three days in advance. Important for Protestant work in Spain is the regulation that heads of religious bodies and institutions must be Span-



IN GEORGE BORROW'S FOOTSTEPS

Evangelical Bible colporteurs rest on the sun-baked plain of La Mancha.

iards. This requirement should spur Protestants to push more vigorously the training of native leaders. Neither the State, the province, nor the townships are permitted to grant financial support to religious bodies. The most important thing now is to put Spanish Protestantism into full possession of these liberal provisions and give it the chance to work freely after centuries of persecution or contemptuous tolerance in some obscure corner of public life. With a view to the future negotiations with the government in the execution of the new laws, a united representation of the Protestant Churches is absolutely essential, as well as stronger support and counsel from abroad replacing the out-worn tactics of competitive denominationalism. This rivalry between creeds is something foreign to Spain and hinders the strong growth of an indigenous Spanish Protestantism, which alone can wield a deciding influence in that country.

The Spanish workers know all this very well. Recently they formed a national committee and sent out an appeal to the evangelical Christians of Spain, asking especially for increased lay participation. "Religious freedom is no Reformation," says Fliedner, "but it does present an opportunity for such a movement far greater than could have been hoped for sixty years ago." An international committee for Spain, under the chairmanship of Dr. Cramer of Utrecht, is endeavoring to rally foreign aid for this work.

What is going on now in Spain can well claim the attention of all friends of freedom of creed and conscience and the interest of the whole Protestant world.

**NOTE: Pastors or instructors interested in a study
course on Spanish Protestantism should communicate
with the Secretary of the Central Bureau,**

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