

"THESE ARE THEY WHICH FOLLOW THE LAMB"

EMINENT
MISSIONARY WOMEN

BY

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INTRODUCTORY NOTES BY

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MELINDA RANKIN

MISS RANKIN'S *Twenty Years among the Mexicans* is a thrilling missionary story. I have been stirred as I have read the book, and more deeply stirred as I heard Miss Rankin relate the story in the quiet of my own home. She was a remarkable woman, combining great strength and independence, womanly tenderness and religious devotion, and was a power in any position. Born among the hills of New England, she found her life work in the sunny land of the Aztecs. She never shrank from duty or from danger in all the varied and trying experiences that came to her, and in writing up some of these experiences she says, "I tell them because I hope to prove by actual facts which have occurred in one woman's life that our divine Master has still work for woman to do in his kingdom on earth."

She had unlimited faith in woman and in her power to bring things to pass. "Had I yielded to public sentiment," she said, "I should have settled down in my New England home; but when Christ took possession of my heart I submitted myself and all my possibilities to him, and was filled with a desire to make known the blessed Gospel, and I went out to do the Master's

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work, and felt no proscription because I was a woman." After her consecration she was subjected to a series of trials which she believed were sent to prove the depth and sincerity of her motives, but she came through these years of waiting and preparation refined and purified for the work God had for her.

About the year 1840 a call was made for missionary teachers to go to the Mississippi Valley. European immigration brought great numbers of Roman Catholics into that portion of the country, and American Protestantism made appeals for counteracting influences. To this call Miss Rankin responded, and went as far as Kentucky, where she remained for a short time, establishing schools, then pushed her way on to Mississippi. The sunny South charmed her, and among its delightful scenes she fain would have made her permanent residence; but she was not seeking her own pleasure; she was about her Master's business, and this merely became to her an observatory whence she looked to the regions beyond.

At the close of the war between Mexico and the United States, through officers and soldiers returning home, she learned much of the Mexican people, and their condition under a tyrannical priesthood, and her sympathy became so enlisted that she immediately wrote articles for

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the papers, hoping thus to awaken an interest among the churches and missionary societies, but her appeals met with no response. “God helping me, I will go to Mexico myself,” said she, and she carried out her determination.

But Mexico then was in a very unsettled state and she could not enter; besides, the laws at that time positively forbade the introduction of Protestant Christianity in any form, so to Texas she went, and settled at Brownsville, on the American side of the Rio Grande, opposite Matamoras, Mexico. The outlook was not pleasant. With difficulty she found shelter, for there were no hotels. She succeeded in renting two rooms—one for a bedroom, the other for a school. She had no furniture, but her wants were simple and were soon supplied, “For,” she says, “a Mexican woman brought me a cot, an American sent me a pillow, and a German woman said she would cook my meals; and so I went to my humble cot with profound feelings of gratitude.”

The very next day she opened a school for Mexican girls, as there was a large population of Mexicans in the city. This prospered beyond her expectations, and she was encouraged by the following little incident: A mother of one of the little girls came to her door one day, bringing her saint, as she called it; said she had

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prayed to it all her life and it had never done her any good, and wanted to know if she might exchange it for a Bible. "Indeed, I was so well pleased," said Miss Rankin, "that I gave her two Bibles, as she had a friend over in Matamoras that wanted one." This was the beginning.

God's word she felt to be above all human law, and while to carry Bibles into Mexico was a direct violation of the laws of the country, she maintained that no earthly power had a right to withhold this book from the people, and so she devoted her energies to getting the Spanish Bible across the river.

"Better send bullets and gunpowder to Mexico than Bibles," said one (a minister) to her when she was pleading for help. But she found opportunities for sending hundreds of Bibles and hundreds of thousands of pages of tracts furnished her by the American Bible and Tract Societies. Mexicans came to her house earnestly soliciting a copy of the book. Orders came to her from Monterey and places in the interior for dozens of Bibles, and with money to pay for them. A Protestant portrait painter carried great quantities of books for her into the country. "The Mexicans take your books to turn them over to the priests to be burned," said a friend to her; but in several instances she was

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told that they hid their books, and “only read them at night when the priests were not about.” She wrote home for help, but was told that a Christian colporteur speaking the Spanish language could not be found; so, getting assistance for her school, she started out as the agent of the American and Foreign Christian Union, and the work received a new impulse.

“Every Bible going into Mexico pleads for religious liberty,” she said, and religious liberty came very slowly; but while she was watching the struggle severe domestic troubles came upon her. Her sister, who had taken care of the seminary, was taken ill and died, and she herself was stricken with yellow fever and her life despaired of. But faithful Mexican women tenderly and lovingly cared for her, and she recovered. Then the civil war came, and she was driven from her school because she was not in sympathy with the Confederacy. She did not, however, relinquish her hold readily, but waited until three peremptory orders were sent, the last with the intimation that force would be used if she did not vacate at once. Confiscation of all her property was urged, but the receiver, a Roman Catholic, would not allow it, saying, “It was bad enough for *men* to be *afflicted* with the horrors of war, and he could not take from a *woman* her necessary articles of furniture.”

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Thus driven out, she found shelter in Matamoras, and here she commenced her direct missionary labors for Mexicans on Mexican soil. But difficulties presented themselves, and often she would spend whole nights in prayer.

She made a decision to go to Monterey, which on account of its commercial interest was one of the most important cities, with a population of about forty thousand, and was the center of strong Romish influences and power; and in this place this lone woman, after three months of careful and prayerful consideration, decided to establish the first Protestant mission in Mexico. She rented house after house, each of which she had to abandon as soon as the priests found she was teaching the Bible. Feeling the need of a chapel and school buildings for successfully carrying on this work, she visited home and secured several thousand dollars, with which she bought land and erected the necessary buildings. In the meantime converts were multiplying, and some of them were selected by Miss Rankin to go to the adjoining towns and villages within a circle of one hundred miles to preach Christ, who returned at the end of a month with reports of kind receptions. They went from house to house and from ranch to ranch.

Then Zacatecas, distant some three hundred miles, was selected as another center, and in

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two years a church was erected by the Mexicans, which in 1872, with one hundred and seventy members, was made over to and occupied by the Presbyterian Board. The work spread on all sides. In one place the Bible readers wrote to Miss Rankin, “We can scarcely get time to eat or sleep, so anxious are the people to hear God’s word.” Mexicans themselves, after obtaining some knowledge of the Bible, would organize “societies” for the purpose of mutual instruction.

But in 1871 came disturbances again, and upon every available spot of her house was written in large letters, “Death to the Protestants.” The mission followers were in constant apprehension of assault. Bloody battles were fought not far from Monterey, and mounted soldiers entered the town and came to her home demanding “her money or her life.” She said to these desperadoes: “I am alone and unprotected. You will not harm a helpless lady.” She gave them food to appease their hunger, and they left, robbing, destroying other property, and shooting down numbers on the street.

After a time order was restored, and the mission work which had been checked was again prosecuted with great success. But all these cares and responsibilities told upon Miss Rankin’s health, and she found it necessary to leave

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Mexico. "I had entertained the hope," she said, "of dying on the field, with the Mexican people, with them to rise in the morning of the resurrection as a testimony that I had desired their salvation." It was a tremendous struggle for her to give up the work. "Never did the trophies of Christ's love appear so precious as when I felt I must tear myself away."

She had developed the work until it assumed proportions which required ordained ministers. This fact and failing health were indications that her work in Mexico was done. Missionaries of Protestant denominations came forward, saying, "We will take Mexico for Christ." In 1872 she returned home and made over her work to the American Board. For twenty years she had toiled, wept, suffered, prayed, and relinquishing her hold cost a severe struggle. "I passed a night of meditation and prayer over it," she says, "but about the fourth watch appeared One who in other scenes of trial had come walking upon the sea of trouble and calmed my anxious heart."

This done, she occasionally visited the churches, interesting the people in Mexico, then retired to her home in Bloomington, Ill., where, on December 7, 1888, in her seventy-seventh year, she passed to her home above.