

Fifty Missionary Heroes

Every Boy and Girl Should Know

By
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“These Heroes of the former days
Deserved and gained their never-fading bays.”

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MELINDA RANKIN

The First Protestant Missionary to Mexico (1812-1888)

HAVE you ever heard the date "1812" mentioned as an important one in history? There was war in our country then, and when you study history, you find some generals



mentioned who became famous. But in that year a baby was born among the hills of New England, who helped to bring peace to many, even in the midst of wars and troubles. It was Melinda Rankin, who found her life-work

in the sunny land of the Aztecs in old Mexico, the land of adobe huts and degraded people.

She said of herself, in later years of life, that when she gave her heart to the Lord Jesus she was filled with a desire to tell others about Him where His name was not known. She could not settle down in comfort and quietness in her New England home. But it was not till she was twenty-eight that her first chance came. Then there came a call for missionary teachers to go to the Mississippi Valley. Miss Rankin responded, and went first to Kentucky and then on to Mississippi.

When the war between our country and Mexico was over, the soldiers coming home told much of the Mexican people, how ignorant and priest-ridden they were. Hearing these things, Miss Rankin was much stirred up. She wrote articles for the papers, and tried to rouse an interest among churches and missionary societies. She did not succeed very well. No one seemed ready to go to the needy field. At last she exclaimed, "God helping me, I will go myself."

But Mexico was in a lawless state. It was positively dangerous for Protestants to go there, for they were forbidden by the government to bring Christianity in any form whatever. As Miss Rankin could not get into Mexico, she decided to get as near to it as she could. She went to Texas, and settled down at Brownsville, on the Rio Grande River, just opposite Matamoras, Mexico.

Not a hotel was to be found, and it was hard to find shelter of any sort. Miss Rankin never once thought of giving up. The boys would say that she was "a plucky sort." Finally she found two rooms which she was allowed to rent. She took one for a bedroom and the other for a schoolroom. But she had no furnishings whatever. She was taken care of and her wants supplied, though not luxuriously. She wrote, "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 feelings of profound gratitude."

There were many Mexicans in the city of Browns-

ville, and when a school was opened, the day after Miss Rankin found rooms, the Mexican girls came to her in numbers that really surprised her. It was very encouraging.

One day a Mexican mother came to her, bringing "her saint" as she called it.

"I have prayed to this all my life," she said, "and it has never done me any good. May I change it for a Bible?"

Miss Rankin was so pleased that she gave her two Bibles, because the woman said, "I have a friend over in Matamoras that wants a Book too." This was the first Bible that the missionary got across the border, but it was not the last. This little beginning made her think deeply about going on. If only she could get God's Word across the river into the country, it would be the best possible thing. There was a law against it, but Miss Rankin thought that no power on earth had a right to keep out the Bible. She decided to give herself to the work of getting it across the river.

"You'd better send bullets and gunpowder to Mexico instead of Bibles," said a man on this side, who had little faith. But the missionary did not think so, and did not take his advice. Somehow she found means to send over hundreds of Bibles, and hundreds of thousands of pages of tracts, which the American Bible Society, and Tract Society, furnished to the intrepid distributor. For you may know that it took dauntless courage to do it.

Mexicans came over to the missionary's door, asking for God's Book. Orders for books, with money

in payment, came from Monterey, and other towns. A Protestant portrait painter helped on the work by carrying over with him great quantities.

Not being able to get a Christian colporteur speaking Spanish, she herself went out as agent for the American and Foreign Christian Union, with great success. Her school was left with her sister. But troubles came. The sister died. Miss Rankin was stricken with yellow fever, and was near death. Mexican women nursed her lovingly, and she recovered. But the Civil War in our land came on, and the missionary was driven out of Texas. She went across the river, and her work on Mexican soil began.

In Monterey, with 40,000 people, she founded the First Protestant Mission, under difficulties and dangers uncounted. She was driven from house to house, but came back home and collected money for buildings for the Mission. Converts multiplied, and went themselves from house to house, and from ranch to ranch, teaching others. The work spread. Some Bible readers wrote, "We can hardly get time to eat or sleep, so anxious are the people for God's Word."

In 1871, through disturbances and battles, she was kept safe, but next year returned home, where, after telling her story often, she passed away, in 1888, aged seventy-six. It was she who said, "The word discouragement is not in the dictionary of the kingdom of heaven." A church of one hundred and seventy Mexican members was handed over to the Presbyterian Board of Missions when she left Mexico.