

Voltairine de Cleyre III: Inquisitors

Nobody asked but ...

I doubt if any other hope has the power to keep the fire alight as I saw it in 1897, when we met the Spanish exiles released from the fortress of Montjuich. Comparatively few persons in America ever knew the story of that torture, though we distributed fifty thousand copies of the letters smuggled from the prison, and some few newspapers did reprint them. They were the letters of men incarcerated on mere suspicion for the crime of an unknown person, and subjected to tortures the bare mention of which makes one shudder. Their nails were torn out, their heads compressed in metal caps, the most sensitive portions of the body twisted between guitar strings, their flesh burned with red hot irons; they had been fed on salt codfish after days of starvation, and refused water; Juan Ollé, a boy nineteen years old, had gone mad; another had confessed to something he had never done and knew nothing of. This is no horrible imagination. I who write have myself shaken some of those scarred hands.

Indiscriminately, four hundred people of all sorts of beliefs—Republicans, trade unionists, Socialists, Free Masons, as well as Anarchists—had been cast into dungeons and tortured in the infamous “zero.” Is it a wonder that most of them came out Anarchists? There were twenty-eight in the first lot that we met at Euston Station that August afternoon,—homeless wanderers in the whirlpool of London, released without trial after months of imprisonment, and ordered to leave Spain in forty-eight hours! They had left it, singing their prison songs; and still across their dark and sorrowful eyes one could see the eternal Maytime bloom. They drifted away to South America chiefly, where four or five new Anarchist papers have since arisen, and several colonizing experiments along Anarchist lines are being tried. So tyranny defeats itself, and the exile

becomes the seed-sower of the revolution. — Voltairine de Cleyre

— Kilgore Forelle