
This is a retrospective work on the famous Mexican anarchist. The first 68 pages consist of a three-chapter essay by B. Cano Ruiz, preceded by a very short editorial introduction. The other 152 pages comprise forty-two letters Ricardo Flores Magón wrote in 1920–1922 to Ellen White, a youthful idealistic American admirer, at the end of his life in Leavenworth prison.

As the editors indicate, the Ellen White letters are the outstanding contribution of the book. More than half a century ago the Grupo Cultural Ricardo Flores Magón published selections from them in its small paperback volumes. Here are the letters intact. The original handwritten English facsimiles are printed, immediately followed by Proudhon Carbó’s translation into Spanish. Slightly hampering is that on some pages the print of the handwriting is insufficiently clear, so that Carbó’s skill as a translator cannot be judged throughout.

The prison martyr is at his very best in these letters. Many may not be aware that Flores Magón wrote exceedingly well in English. One can gain some idea of how eloquently he could write in Spanish from observing how impressively he wrote in a second language. The only limitation is an occasional excessive floridity. In spirit, Flores Magón was a true romantic. His love of nature approximated that of earlier kindred souls such as Shelley or Chateaubriand. In tone, he is kindly and generous, then wry and analytical. Moments of depression created by his condition creep in, but he was also still capable of soaring hopes. None of the hatreds characteristic of his out-of-prison polemics obtrude.

As for the Cano Ruiz chapters, they add little. The first one on utopian influences in Mexico prior to Flores Magón has some merit. The material in the two chapters dealing directly with him can be found elsewhere. They show the usual anarchist insistence on excluding comparison and perspective from assessment of their hero. The writer totally ignores the by-now considerable non-Mexican scholarship on Flores Magón. Even the Ellen White letters might have gained by an additional dimension. Today prison literature is a flourishing subject. A very interesting theme indeed would be to assess Flores Magón’s letters in relation to the literary efforts of other famous prisoners, past and present.

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Praxedis Guerrero, anarchist and PLM revolutionary, was buried in 1935 at Casas Grandes as a benemérito of Chihuahua twenty-five years after his death at the battle of Janos. A formidable field commander, his death removed what would have been a significant military rival for Francisco Madero whom he saw as a “bourgeois capitalist,” “terrateniente,” and “hacendado.” The heir to the fortune of a wealthy provincial landowning family, Guerrero forsook his promising university career and became a revolutionary with Ricardo Flores Magón.

He supported the concept of direct action, the use of violence to overthrow