

A HISTORIOGRAPHICAL STUDY OF NINETEENTH AND TWENTIETH
CENTURY LITERATURE ON THE PROTESTANT REFORMATION
IN SIXTEENTH-CENTURY SPAIN

by 45

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HISTORIOGRAPHICAL ESSAY

Nearly 300 years after the famed autos de fe of the sixteenth-century Spanish Inquisition, there was a flurry of interest in Europe about this institution--its historical setting, methods, procedures, and victims. Possibly this interest could be attributed to the spread of the concepts of the freedom of thought and ideas of liberty and equality which were present in Europe after the French Revolution of 1789. In any case, numerous books were produced on the Inquisition with a lesser number on a related historical development, the initial appearance of Spanish Protestantism. Through a study of those books and the ones of the twentieth century, the author has attempted to describe historiographical trends in works on the Spanish Protestant Reformation.

Because of the interrelationship of the appearance of the Protestant faith in Spain and the Spanish Inquisition, it is necessary to define as accurately as possible the subject of this paper. Much of this report was concerned with the Inquisition, but only as it pertained to the development of Protestantism.

It must be realized that although there were many who suffered from inquisitorial action in sixteenth-century

Spain, only a minority of the heresy cases could be accurately labeled as pertaining to Protestants. Most of the cases were trials of Jews or Moors. Of those which were classified as Protestants, it was found that before the middle of the sixteenth century, they primarily consisted of "unconscious" heretics¹--of men who, prior to the condemnation of Martin Luther, would have been reckoned orthodox. Included in this group were admirers of Desiderius Erasmus, the Dutch Reformer. But these men were Roman Catholics, who really had no thought of wandering from the faith, but who fell under suspicion and were consequently persecuted. Mysticism and Illuminism began their development in Spain about this same time and furnished another source for accusations of Lutheranism because of their tendency to cast aside the observances of sacerdotalism and to bring the sinner into direct relationship with God. But none of the above-mentioned groups actually could be called Protestants, and they demand separate consideration.

It was not until close to the middle of the sixteenth century that men could be found who knowingly and consciously had embraced certain doctrines of the Reformation. It is to these men that the term Protestant applies and about whom this study is concerned.

¹Henry C. Lea, A History of the Inquisition of Spain, III, (New York, 1907), 412.