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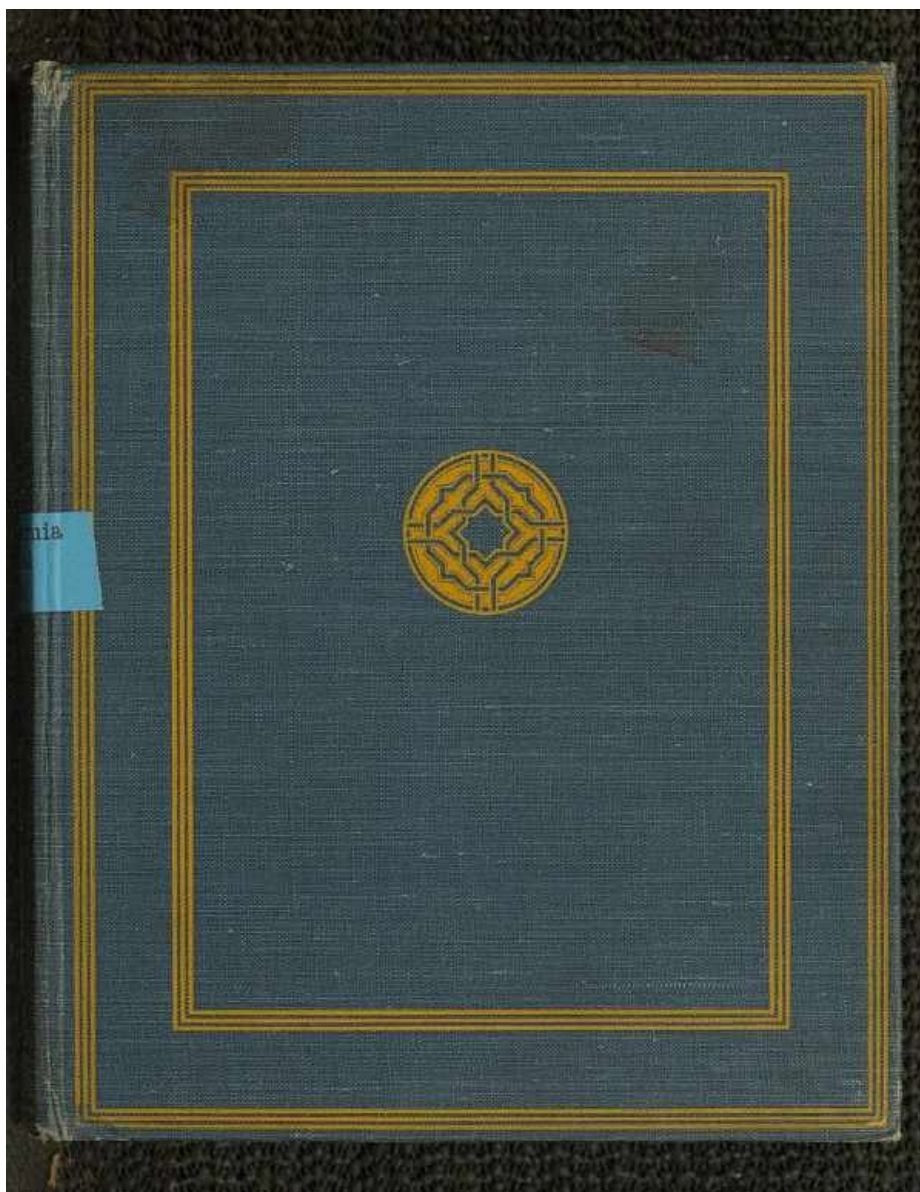
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POOR FOLK IN SPAIN

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

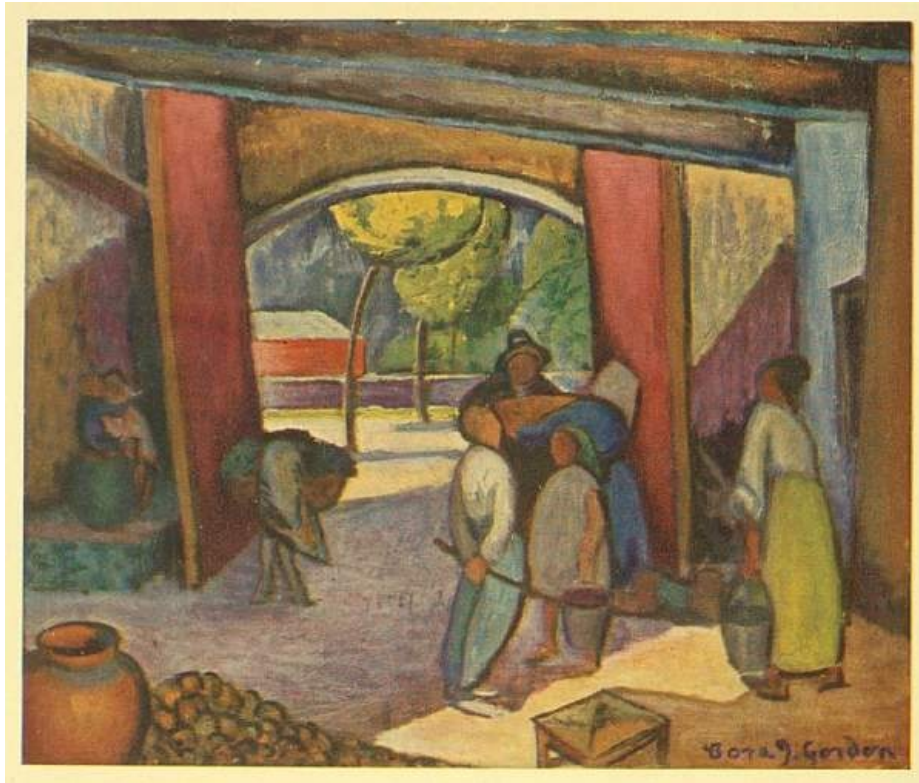
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POOR FOLK IN SPAIN

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LONDON

We had tasted of Spain before ever we had crossed her frontiers. Indeed, perhaps Spain is the easiest country to obtain samples from without the fatigue of travelling. The Spaniard carries his atmosphere with him: wherever he goes he re-creates in his immediate surroundings more than a hint of his national existence. The Englishman abroad may be English—more brutally and uncompromisingly English than the Spaniard is Spanish—yet he does not carry England with him. He does not, that is, re-create England to the extent of making her seem quite real abroad; there she appears alien, remote, somewhat out of place. So, too, neither the Russian, the German, the Dane, the Portuguese, the Italian, nor the American can carry with him the flavour of his homeland in an essence sufficiently concentrated to withstand the insidious infiltration of a foreign atmosphere. To some extent the Scandinavian countries, Norway and Sweden, have this power; but Spain is thus gifted in the greatest measure. These three countries seem to possess a national unconsciousness which fends them off from too close a contact with lands which are foreign to them; perhaps one might almost accuse them of a lack of sensitiveness in certain aspects....

However, be the reason what it may, we had gathered some experience of Spain in Paris before, and in London during the war. What we had tasted we had liked, and so when in our low-ceilinged attic refuge in London we gazed out upon a sky covered with flat cloud, as though with a dirty blanket, and wondered how we might escape in order to seek for our original selves—if they were not irretrievably lost—we thought of Spain. I think that we went to Spain to look for something that the war had taken from us. It was as though the low ceiling of our room, and the low-lying sky, shut us in with something which was not altogether true; indeed, we feel that many years must pass before the dissipation of this curious sensation of unreality which the war had stamped on to every one, except the most callous.

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It is now clear that peace is the normal condition of the human race. In the olden days this was not the case, but the tendency has been changing, and to-day we increase our powers during times of peace, and our powers fall from us during the disorganizations of war. The artist, who is the barometer of social change, was attuned to peace. In peace he exercises important functions. But with the sudden outbreak of war the whole foundation of his being was suddenly torn away. When war broke out Art for the artist seemed almost meaningless. In the face of a human catastrophe who could paint pictures? Nero may have fiddled while Rome was burning, but it must have been a poor meaningless tune that he played, some popular jingle, a Roman variation of "Ta-ra-ra-Boom-de-Ay." We had come at last to a peace which still carried on its breezes all the poisons of war, and we, at least, felt an imperative need of escape to some place where the war had not been; to some place where perchance life had carried on a not too distorted existence since 1914.

Spain drew us to her more than did Scandinavia. Romance certainly had a finger in it; the sun perhaps two fingers—for we are undoubted sun-worshippers; the music of Spain, which had attracted us in Paris, causing Jan to abandon the banjo for the guitar, added an appeal; and I think an exhibition of Spanish landscapes by Wyndham Tryon at the Twenty-One Galleries settled the matter. We had been in Majorca before the war, and this combined with our experience of Spaniards in Paris had fixed in our minds a belief in a simplicity and courtliness of the Spanish people which we hoped would be very soothing. Finally, two houses were offered by a friend rent free for the whole of the summer, together with introductions which would smooth the way. We then packed up painting materials, stamped clothes into a trunk, worried a strangely assorted collection of packages down our narrow and twisted staircase into a cab, and so—hey, for the Sun, southward!

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Perhaps the reader should be warned that this is not properly a book about Spain in the true sense of the word; it is a book about ourselves. We are inclined to doubt if, in the true sense of the word, a book can ever be written about a country. Curiously enough the native scarcely perceives his country at all as long as he is living in it. When he travels he may come to a clearer vision, but then scarcely perceives with truth the country in which he is travelling. We might say that by travelling he makes out of the foreign land a sort of inverted image of his home. What he relishes abroad is probably what is lacking, what he dislikes abroad is perhaps more perfect in his own country. And thus his vision of abroad makes, as it were, a mould, and, if one could pour into it a substance which would reproduce the exact reverse as one makes a cast, one might procure a fairly faithful image of his unconscious judgment of his own land. So perhaps if this book could be turned inside out it might be found that, after all, stripped of its unessentials, we have been writing a book, not about Spain, but about England. Indeed, we have been writing about England already—romance, sun, an interesting national music, the guitar, and national unconsciousness are not assets to be found here in any overwhelming quantities. We must then deny that we are trying to write a book of any authority; we do not even assert that our facts are correct, even though they are as we saw them; we admit a mental astigmatism which we cannot avoid and which may have twisted actual happenings or hearings as much as optical astigmatism may twist a straight line

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CHAPTER II

JESUS PEREZ

Jesus Perez took us to Spain in spirit while we were still in Paris. We were off to Spain to paint, that being the normal course of our lives, but in addition Jan had formed a fixed resolution that happen what might he was not coming home without having bought a good Spanish guitar by the best guitar-maker he could find, while I wished to buy a Spanish lute. Arias and Ramirez, the two best modern *luthiers* in Madrid, both had recently died; we had, however, the address of the widow of Ramirez, who carried on her husband's business, but faintly in Jan's mind a cloud hung over the lady's name. He did not trust her. Not she, but Ramirez had made those superfine instruments. So we were overjoyed to meet Perez upon the Boulevard Montparnasse soon after our arrival in Paris. Perez was a friend of ours from the times before the war. He was almost a mystery man. Native of Malaga, self-styled painter—though he never showed his work—nobody could tell how he had managed to make a living during fifteen years of apparently unproductive existence. It is true that one summer he had disappeared from the quarter, returning late in November browned by the sun, and had explained that he had been smuggling in the Pyrenees; but that event was an exception, and for some months subsequently Perez was obviously well off as a result of his risky enterprises. Normally, he survived like so many others in the Quartier Montparnasse, drawing sufficient nourishment (supplemented very obviously by borrowing) from mysterious sources. But while most of his confrères in penury had no talents, not even the talent for painting, Perez did know the guitar. Rumour said that he was one of the best amateur players of the Jota Aragonesa in Spain. Rumour may have exaggerated without detracting from the real quality of Perez's exquisite gift.

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We saw a Perez very much polished up by so many years of war. He wore a clean straw hat, new clothes of the latest cut, a waistcoat of check with ornamental buttons, patent leather boots with a lacquer which flung back the rays of the June sun, and heavy owlish eyeglasses of tortoise-shell fastened with a broad black ribbon. Indeed, so transformed was he, that it was he who recognized us; and for some moments we stood trying to pierce through the new respectability, as though it were through a disguise.

Seated together at the "Rotonde" we exchanged some petty items of news. Perez had but recently returned from Spain; he had held a small exhibition, he said, which had provided funds; pictures were selling well in Spain.... He was delighted to hear of our plan, and thereupon wrote for us an introduction to a painter, a friend, who lived in Madrid. "Un homme très serviable," he said, manufacturing a French word out of one Spanish. Jan then asked his question. "A good guitar-maker in Spain," said Perez, pinching his lower lip between finger and thumb. He shook his head slowly.

"A good guitar-maker," repeated Perez. "In Madrid, eh? Frankly, no, I do not know of one at the moment. And you are going away at once. Tomorrow. Well, this afternoon I am free, that is good. The best guitar-maker at the moment lives here, here in Paris. His name is Ramirez. Yes, a relative of that other Ramirez. He has found a new form for the guitar. More fine, more powerful. Each one like a genuine *Torres*. You come with me. I will show you one or two that he made from an old piano which he pulled to pieces for the wood. Exquisite! And if you like them, together we will seek out Ramirez and he will make you one. He is very busy, oh, excessively busy, but he will make you one because he is an old friend of mine."

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So the hot afternoon found us sweating up the slopes of Montmartre.

"First," said Perez, "I will take you to the house of a friend who possesses two of Ramirez' guitars. One is one of those made from the old piano. It is marvellous!"

But when we reached the street he could not remember the number. It was four years, he explained, since last he had been there.

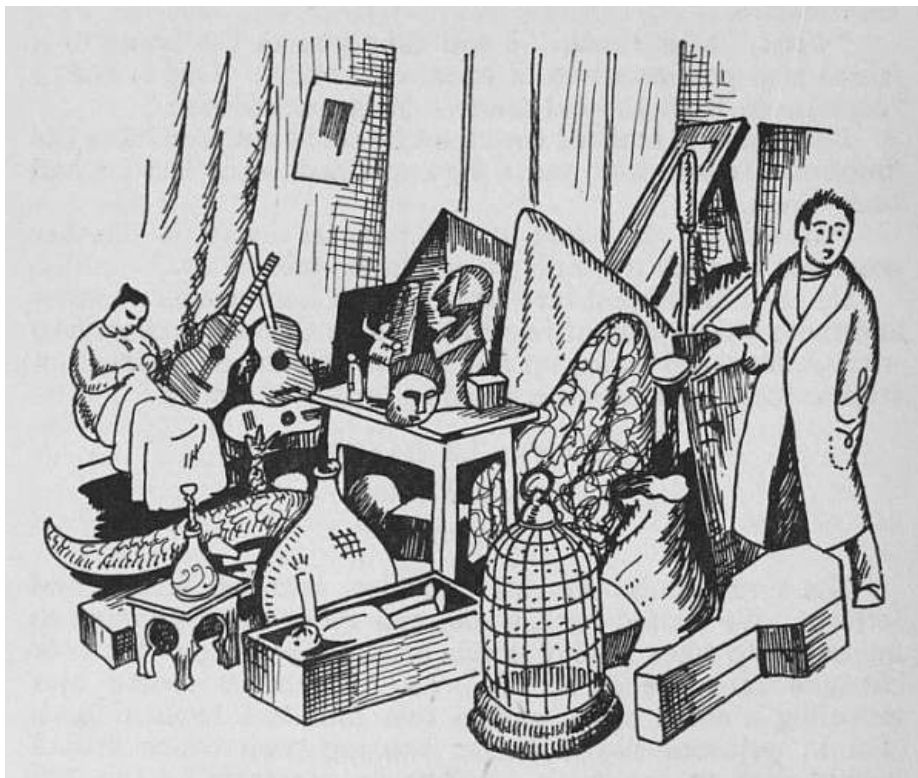
"However," he went on, "not far away is another possessor of such a guitar; possibly he will be in."

Up the hill we went into streets which became more narrow and more steep, until at length he led us through a courtyard with pinkwashed walls, up five flights of polished stairs, to a studio door upon which a visiting card was pinned:

AUGUSTE LA BRANCHE
Artiste Peintre
Aquafortist

The door, under Perez's knuckles, sounded hollow and forlorn. We waited for a while, and Perez was beginning to finger his lip when a faint shuffle on the other side of the door changed into the noise of locks. The door swung ajar revealing a small man, with a thin face and tousled head, clad in pyjamas and a Jaeger dressing-gown which trailed behind him on the floor. Failing to penetrate to the real Perez, as we also had failed, he blinked inquiringly at us. A moment of confused explanation ended with a warm hand-shake. Perez explained our presence and our purpose; with protestations of apology for his *négligé* M. La Branche led us into his studio.

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From the card upon his door we must presume that M. La Branche was both painter and etcher, and pictures hanging from the walls, and an etching press almost buried beneath a mound of tossed draperies, were evidences of the fact. But where he found space either to paint or to etch was a puzzle. The large studio was crammed with bric-à-brac. Indian tables, Chinese tables, wicker chairs, lacquer stools, screens, figures in armour, large vases, birdcages and innumerable articles strewn the floor, across which narrow lines of bare parquet showed like channels upon the chart of an estuary. Over the chairs were heaped draperies, on the tables smaller bric-à-brac crowded together. Upon a sofa thrust to one side sat a woman methodically sewing at the hem of a long sheet. She took no notice of us, nor of M. La Branche, but continued her sewing, careful, however, not to swing her arm too wide for fear of banging into several guitars and other musical instruments, which almost disputed possession of the sofa with her.

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Having cleared a table and sufficient chairs, M. La Branche gave us *thé anglais*, by the usual complex French method. Then from amongst his guitars he selected that made by Ramirez, and sitting down began to play. It is strange how a man's personality appears in everything he does. M. La Branche in his paintings was an expert painter rather than an artist; his etchings, large colour plates, showed a similar skill with the burin. His music was of the same nature. Everything that a practiced player should do, he did; his nimble fingers raced up and down the frets, his tempo and his modulations were impeccable, yet he did not make music. But we had not come with the intention of hearing music, but of hearing the qualities and power of the guitar, and this was, perhaps, more ably shown by the technicalities of M. La Branche than it might have been in the hands of a more artistic though less able musician.

The shop of Ramirez, the luthier, was down the hill, and to this, thoroughly satisfied about the excellence of his instruments, we went, Perez grumbling to us in undertones.

"That fellow La Branche—he does not play Spanish music. No—he comes from Toulouse. That explains it. It is the talent of the South of France, all on the top, all lively and excitable and showing off—that is how it is. Now I tell you, Monsieur and Madame Gordon, just because of that the Frenchman never will be able to understand our music. You English are nearer to us. You, when you have acquired ability, will play our music with much more insight and much more sensibility than that La Branche."

This comforted us exceedingly, for one day in wrath Modigliani, the Italian painter, had said that it was mere impertinence for an Englishman to think that he could understand the subtleties of the music of Spain.

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Ramirez almost makes his guitars out in the street. His workshop was about ten feet square with a door six feet wide. Here was a piece of pure Spain, though we could not recognize it (at the moment having no data), ten feet square, thrust bodily into the lower floor of a French house. The only light came in from the door, but the door was nearly as broad as the room. Almost blocking up the entrance, Ramirez, a burly, blue-jowled Spaniard, with something of the physical construction of a boxer, was working at delicate shavings of wood. Behind him the wall was hung with templates, cut from white wood, of the parts of the instruments he was making, guitars and lauds and bandurrias, strange instruments which Europe, outside of Spain, scarcely knows. On a shelf at the back of the small shop were heaped unfinished bandurrias bound with string, for the glue to become hardened in them. The workshop of Ramirez was not what we had expected. One is, I think, justified in expecting a neatness, a delicacy, about the place where fine musical instruments are made. Had Ramirez been a maker of chairs, or even of cartwheels, his workshop, though small, would have appeared appropriate; but that, from this rough place, could come out

"the most difficult of musical instruments to make" disturbed one's sense of suitability.

The greeting which Ramirez gave us touched with doubt the picture which we had conceived of the amiability of the Spaniard. There was no cordiality in him. Some of his aloofness cleared away when he had penetrated through the disguise of a dandy to the real Perez beneath, but he continued his occupation, and to the statement that we wished him to make a guitar for Jan he shrugged his fat shoulders. He declared that he had already too much work.

"Those two instruments, for instance," he said, pointing to two unfinished guitars elaborately ornamented standing in a corner, "I have already been nine months over those, and have not had time to finish them. It is true they are exhibition instruments, for shops, and therefore have little if any interest for me."

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Perez led him on with compliments, thawing away his frostiness gradually with Jan's admiration for the guitar of M. La Branche. Suddenly Ramirez put down his tools.

"Look here," he said, "I'll make the Señor a guitar. Three hundred francs is the price, and it will be finished in three months."

The bargain concluded, Ramirez picked up one of the unfinished instruments. He handed it to Jan, exhorting him to explore with a finger the exquisite workmanship of its interior. He rapped on the belly with his knuckle, and at the sound of its deep musical boom he smiled for the first time. Ramirez, having thawed, did not freeze up again. He began explaining the novel shape of his instrument, a shape which had been worked out for him by a mathematical philosopher. He said that the guitar was the most difficult of musical instruments to make, requiring a volume of tone which had to be produced from strings easy to pluck and finger. A problem very difficult to solve.

"And the guitar I made for you," he said, turning to Perez, "you gave it to S——?"

"Yes," said Perez.

"See here," said Ramirez, turning to us, "I make a guitar, an excellent one, one of my best. This fellow comes to see me, he hears the instrument. He says to me, 'Ramirez, keep that guitar for me, and I will at once go to work in a French munition factory, and I will work like a slave, and every week I will send you money until the guitar is paid for.' And I agree. And he goes and makes aeroplanes, and does honest work for the first time in his life, I believe, and every week he sends money to me. And the week it is all paid up he stops work and goes off with the guitar. And he is crazy about the instrument. And he goes back to Spain and then he hears S—— playing. He is so enraptured by the wonderful playing of the man, that he runs home, fetches his guitar, and thrusts it into S——'s hands, exclaiming: 'Here is an instrument worthy of you. It is too good for me, for I am a mere bungler beside you.' And so he gives away the guitar that he has laboured for. Ah yes, you villain, I have heard of you."

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As we went down the hill, Perez tried to explain away this generosity so characteristic of his impulsive nature.

"It is not as though I would have played on the instrument again after having heard S—— touch it. Every time that I wished to play I would have thought, 'Ah yes, but if only *he* were playing it and not I.' And I had to give it to him, or perhaps I would never have been able to play again."

He asked us to come that evening to a certain small café in the Rue Campagne Premier; some other Spaniards were to come also and there was to be playing and singing. We were to come after the legal closing time, and we were to thump on the shutters.

In the night, in the dark, we rapped upon the rusty iron shutters, and one by one, like conspirators, were admitted into the dimly-lit café. It was a small place, characteristic of Paris, a combination of *buvette* with zinc bar, and cheap restaurant with marble-topped tables. Five years ago a good meal could be bought here for less than a franc. Behind the bar bottles and glass vats reached up to the ceiling; upon the dirty, green, oil-painted walls, cheap almanacs and trivial popular prints hung, together with excellent drawings and sketches, presented to Madame by her clients. One by one the *invités* slipped in. Madame and her two girl waitresses laughed and giggled at the kitchen door, while the *patron*, grey-moustached, hollow-eyed and cadaverous, uncorked the bottles of wine behind the bar.

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Here again for several hours the Spaniards re-created Spain. Perez is a player of temperament. Half of his skill and art he appears to suck from his audience. Thus at first he plays but indifferently well; but any music will rouse a crowd of Spaniards. To the growing excitement Perez responds, playing the better for it, thus creating more enthusiasm, and these interchanges continue, until he reaches the limit of his ability. But he is so sensitive to his audience that one indifferent person can take the edge off all his power. This night there was no one unresponsive. The playing of Perez became more and more brilliant. With his nails he rasped deep chords from his responsive instrument; to and fro he beat the strings in the remorseless rhythm of Jota Aragonesa. In the dimly lit café the dark figures and the sallow faces of the Spaniards were crowded about him in an irregular circle. "Olé! Olé!" they cried, and clapped their hands in time with the music. The air within the café throbbed and pulsed with the music. "Mais, c'est très bien," exclaimed Madame at intervals from her corner. "C'est très amusant, hein?" Two of the younger men were murmuring to the waitresses and were making them titter.

"Come," exclaimed Perez at last, "enough of this piece playing. Let us have a song. Vamos! who will sing?"

But something, possibly my presence, deterred the Spaniards from singing. They were shy as a

group of schoolboys. One at last began to chant in a high quavering falsetto, but before the first half of his *copla* was ended he broke down into a laugh of hysterical shyness.

"Why then," cried Perez, "I'll have to sing myself, and Heaven knows I've got no voice."

The Spaniard believes that any singing is better than no singing. One of his chief pursuits in life is that of happiness—"allègre" he calls it. This *allègre* is produced not by perfect results but by evidence of good intentions. He would rather have a bad player who plays from his heart than a good player who plays for his pocket. Any singing, then, so long as it is of the right nature, will suffice, no matter what its musical effect. Perez's singing had *allègre*, but no music. He lowed like a calf, rising up into strange throaty hoarseness like a barrow merchant who has been crying his goods all day, and descending into dim growls of deep notes. But even he at last tired; and after Madame had been yawning for some while, after the last bottle of wine had been drained of its last drops, we slipped out one by one into the moonlit streets of Paris and said our farewells on the Boulevard

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CHAPTER III

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THE FRONTIER

I wonder what Charlemagne would have done if one had whisked him down from Paris to the Spanish Frontier in something under twenty hours? Probably the hero would have been paralysed with terror during the journey and would have revenged himself upon the magician by means of a little stake party.

But what would have been magic and miracle to Charlemagne remains in one's mind as a jumble—the interior of a second-class carriage; antimacassars; an adolescent who ate lusciously a basket of peaches, thereby reminding us that French peaches ripen early in June; intrusive knees and superfluous legs; an obese man who pinched my knee in his sleep, probably from habit; touches of indigestion which made one fidget, and in the dawn a little excitement roused by observing the turpentine tapping operations at work on the pine-trees by the side of the railroad—cemented together by the thick atmosphere of a summer's night enclosed between shut windows.

It is a strange fact that the more perfect do we make travelling, the more tedious does it become—I wonder whether the same may not apply to almost all progress in civilization.

The most primitive aspect of travel is that of walking, and even upon the most tedious of walks the exercise itself seldom degenerates into definite boredom, one is never far away from one's fellow men, yet even if one is quite alone the mere fact of walking is an occupation which cannot be despised; of riding similar things may be said. Coaching may have had its inconveniences, yet a coach drive cannot have been lacking in definite interest. One was in very close contact with one's fellow passengers, coaching made as strange bedfellows as any adversity, and the journey was seldom so short that one could enjoy a sort of snuffy insulation from one's fellows—mutual discomforts, even mutual terrors of footpads made a definite bond of humanity.

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It is true that in all these primitive processes the act of getting from here to there is prolonged—perhaps extremely prolonged—but mere duration is not tedium. If the act itself is interesting and vivid then the act itself is worth while. To-day the act of travelling by a fast train is scarcely worth while—the traveller can almost count it out as so much time lost out of life. I fear that when the aeroplane is perfected journeys will be performed in a tedium absolutely unrelieved, and those patients who have to undertake journeys would be advised to take a mild anæsthetic at the beginning.

What is missing to-day from the act of travelling—and what lacks from much modern civilization—is the expectation of the unexpected; the sense of adventure, the true sauce of life.

Now to have the true sense of adventure it is not necessary that one should always be expecting to meet a lion round the corner. Any little thing will do, anything not before experienced, anything that will give the imagination that extra fillip of interest which will convince it that the world will always remain a Fortunatus purse of new things to learn, anything that will make positive the fact that the act of living is also the act of growing,—anything of this nature will contribute to the sense of adventure.

But the trend of civilization to-day is that all these little interests are being quietly but very effectively crushed: we fling them beneath the wheels of railway trains and into the cogs of factories, with the result that only those experiences which are too large for us to fling thus are allowed to flourish. We have, in fact, almost cleared away the little things and left only the big. Now, if we turn the corner, either there is nothing at all or, in one case out of a hundred, we find the lion. In our railway travelling to-day, either nothing happens or there is a railway accident; but we have turned so many corners in our lives which led to the mere blankness of more empty road, that the possibility of the lion has almost faded from our minds—and so the sense of adventure in little, the true sense of adventure, is in danger of atrophy.

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Some day, I feel sure that this sense of adventure will take a revenge on the civilization which would destroy it. We kill off birds and caterpillars flourish. Some worm lies near the heart of things ready to gnaw at the right moment. I fear that never will they apply "preservation laws" to

the sense of adventure, or we, as adventurers, properly appreciated, should be in receipt of a scholarship or of a civil list pension.

We were too dazed by the drug of twenty hours of tedium and sleeplessness to suck any adventure from the passage through the French Customs House at Hendaye. But this experience roused us so that we were quite mentally awake by the time that we reached Irun. Here a problem confronted us.

We had in our large leather trunk a good many yards of government canvas, several pounds' worth of paints, and ten pounds in weight of preparation for turning the government canvas into material for painting upon. We had heard that the Spanish customs were very strict; very strict in theory, that is.

"But if they worry you, bribe them a bit," had said a friend. Were these things contraband? If so, how much was one to bribe, and how was one to do it? There are plenty of men with nerve enough to try to tip Charon for his trip over the Styx, but Jan is not one of these.

Now for a man of Jan's kind to attempt a delicate piece of palmed bribing often results in things worse than if he had left well alone. Ten to one there is a fumble and the coin drops to the floor beneath the nose of the chief bug-a-bug. So, fingering two unpleasantly warm five-peseta pieces in his pocket, he prayed fervently to kind Opportunity to step in.

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To his prayer the goddess answered. We had brought with us from our Paris studio a mosquito curtain which once before had been used in Majorca. As our baggage was packed in London we had, rather than undo straps and locks, tied this mosquito curtain, wrapped in clean brown paper, on to the outside of our suit-case. Upon this the authorities flung themselves.

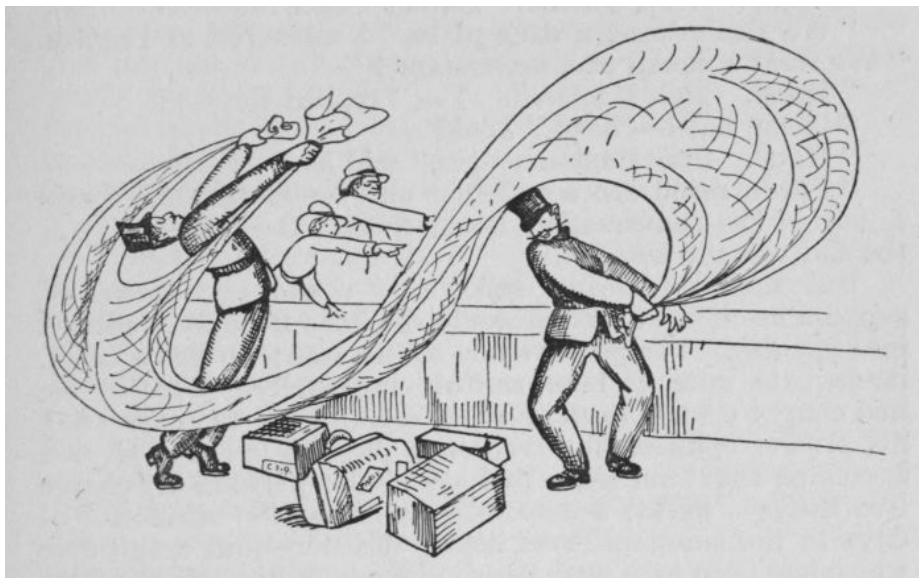
"Hi!" they cried. "You will pay duty on this, it is new."

Two gendarmes and a clerk tore off the paper, pitched the mosquito curtain into a pair of scales, weighed it and wrote out the bill. All the while we had been clamouring, with a sudden memory from Hugo: "Antigua, antigua, antigua...."

This clamour became suddenly effective as soon as the officials had nothing to do than to collect the money. Instead of cash we gave them a chorus of "Antigua, antigua." The clerk and the two gendarmes then began what seemed to be an impromptu imitation of Miss Loie Fuller in her celebrated skirt dancing—mosquito curtain whirled this way and that in voluptuous curves. They were looking for evidence. Suddenly I pointed out a spot where perchance some full-blooded mosquito had come to a sudden death in 1913, when the world was yet at peace. The mosquito curtain was refolded, the bill torn up. They were quite peremptory with the rest of our luggage; so Jan dropped the two warm five-peseta pieces back into his pocket.

However much one may be in a country, one never feels that one *is* in the country until the door leading out of the customs house has been passed. So we never really thought of ourselves as being in Spain until we stepped on to the platform where the train for Madrid was standing. With a bitter shock, we realized that it was a chill day and raining. We had come all the way from England, hunting the sun, to be greeted in June by a day which would fit, both in temperature and atmosphere, the tail-end of a March at home.

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Of those minor adventures which make life so valuable, some of the finest flowers amongst them which may be picked are the delicate first impressions of a new country. These impressions have a flavour all their own; they are usually compressed within the space of one hour or so, and once experienced they never return. New impressions indeed one may gather by the score, but those first, fine savourings of the new can never be retasted.

We had expected so much from Spain. We had hoped at the first moment to open out our arms to her sun, to satiate our colour sense with the blueness of her skies—we were received instead with this grey, gloomy weather. How can one describe the revulsion? It would be an exaggeration to say that it was as though we had touched a corpse where we had expected to find a living man, but the revulsion was of this nature though perhaps less poignant.

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I left Jan to finish with the larger luggage and, securing the aid of a porter, set out to look for an hotel. At the exit of the station I was accosted by a sallow man with a large, peaked jockey cap pulled down over a thin face.

He said: "Hey, Señora! Hotel? Spik Engleesh. Yes."

"We don't want a dear place," I answered in English. "We want a cheap one, understand?"

"Hotel. Spik Engleesh. Yes," replied the tout.

"Cheap hotel—cheap," I said.

"Hotel. Spik Engleesh—yes," said he.

"Puede usted recomendarme una fonda barata?" said I, out of the conversation book, though the "*barata*"^[1] at the end was my own.

But the tout turned sulky and would not answer—I suppose he thought his fee would diminish if he were enticed into Spanish. The porter stood on one side; he was a small, inadequate man and he sniffed continually. Whether he had caught cold from the rain, or whether he was expressing his private opinion of travellers, I did not learn. Jan was arranging about our trunk and a hold-all; I had in my charge two thermos flasks, a camera, two rucksacks—memories of days in the German Tyrol before the war—and a suit-case which had been with us in Serbia and which still bore the faint traces of a painted red cross, but the cat had for the last two years been sharpening her claws upon it and the leather now looked something like "Teddy Bear" material. These I distributed between the porter and the tout, and, trusting to Providence and my own powers of observation, we entered Irun.

Where was the queer magic which lies in the first impressions of a new land, the dreamlike quality, the unreality which almost puts one's feet for a moment into Fairyland? Spain had played a nasty trick upon us; the grey sky and the low-lying cloud and the drizzling rain had nothing of Fairyland for us. With head held low against the drizzle one was conscious of nothing but a wall on the right hand and of dirty pavement beneath the feet.

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The tout led me into the first house we reached. There, was a narrow passage which passed by a room of a dingy whiteness; but the tout showed me on, up some stumbly stairs and through a spring door. We came into a dark room in which, by means of the light filtering through the slats of the closed shutters, could be seen the dim outlines of a bed and of a tin wash-hand-stand.

"Ocho pesetas," said the tout.

"Por todo," I answered.

"Todo—todo—comida y toda," protested the tout. I had been waiting for this moment. In the conversation book which I had been studying was a phrase which had caught my fancy; it meant "no extras," but it was much more beautiful. The time had come.

"No hay extraordinario?" said I sternly.

"No, Señora, no," said the tout, spreading out his hands.

The matter having been thus settled, he took me downstairs again; and, in the dingy white diningroom, introduced me to a plump woman, the proprietress. I was ravenously hungry; the tables were laid. I asked:

"What time is lunch?"

"At two, Señora."

I was dismayed. It was now eleven o'clock—we had eaten little since the night before.

"But," I stammered, "I am hungry. Tengo hambre." My memory shuffled with conversation-book sentences and faint recollections of Majorca, but could find nothing about the minutiae of food.

"Tengo hambre," I repeated desperately. Suddenly inspiration came to me. I made motions of beating up an omelet and clucked like a hen that has laid an egg.

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For a moment there was a silence, a positive kind of silence, which is much more still than mere absence of noise. Then a roar of laughter went up. The fat hostess shook like a jelly, the tout guffawed behind a restraining hand—he had not yet received his tip—while an old woman who had been sitting in one of the darker corners, went off:

"Ck! Ck! Ck! He! He! He! Ck! Ck! Ck! He! He! He!"

At this moment Jan arrived, having deposited the bigger luggage and having been informed that the train to Avila, our first stopping-place, went out at 8 a.m. I led him along the dark passage and upstairs. He flung wide the shutters. The window looked into a deep, triangular well at the bottom of which was a floor of stamped earth, a washtub and a hen-coop. Windows of all sizes pierced the walls at irregular intervals and across the well were stretched ropes, from some of which flapped pieces of damp linen or underclothes. In the light of the open window the room was dingy. We wondered if there were bugs in it, for we had been cautioned against these insects.

But the room did not smell buggy; it had a peculiar smell of its own. The strong characteristics of odours need more attention than novelists give them. For instance, I remember that German mistresses had a faint vinegary scent, but French governesses an odour like trunks which had been suddenly opened.

This room had an austere smell. It smelt, I don't know how, Roman Catholic: not of incense nor of

censers, but of a flavour which, by some combination of circumstances, we have associated with Roman Catholicism in bulk. The bedroom door was largely panelled with tinted glass; it had a very flimsy lock, but we did not fear that we would be murdered or burgled in our bed.

The omelet was ready when we came down. The diningroom had two doors, one leading to the kitchen, one up some steps and into the street. There was a broad stretch of window and almost all the other walls of the room were covered with big mirrors.

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About five grim people, mostly clad in black—including the old lady—sat in the room and stared at us as we ate. We could not avoid this disconcerting gaze—look where we would we either caught a human eye or else, what was worse, we were fascinated by a long procession of eyes passing away into the dim mysteries of reflection and re-reflection of the mirrors. We had to choose between the gaze of one real old lady or of twenty-five reflected old ladies, of one callow youth or of twenty-five youths diminishing towards the infinite. The audience stared at us as we ate our omelet, watched the fruit—apricots, cherries and hard pears—with which we finished the meal, and noted each sip of coffee. At last, unable to bear any longer the embarrassment of this mechanically intensified curiosity, we took refuge in our bedroom and lay down. We then noted that the bed was too small, all the rest of the furniture, on the contrary, being much too big.

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We rested till lunch. The omelet and the fruit had but filled some of the minor vacancies within us and we were ready again on the stroke of two. Once more we faced the Spanish stare and all the reflected repetitions of it. A fair number of persons lunched at the hotel. As they came in the women sat themselves directly at the table, but the men without exception went to the far corner where, suspended against the wall, was a small tin reservoir with a minute tap and beneath it a tiny basin. Each man rinsed his hands in the infinitesimal trickle, before he sat down to dinner. Why the men and women made this distinction we could not guess. It seemed to be a custom and not to be dependent upon whether the hands were dirty or not. Even if the hands had been dirty the small amount of water used would not have cleaned them.

In the centre of the dining table were white, porous vessels containing drinking water. The water oozes through the porous clay and appears on the outside of the vessel as a faint sweat. This layer of moisture evaporates and keeps all the water in the vessel at several degrees cooler than the surrounding atmosphere.

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Between mouthfuls of soup and wedges of beef the diners were watching us. As soon as the meal was over we fled into the streets of Irun. One cannot call Irun Spanish. It is abominably French, though France is pleasant in its own place. The café in the little plaza is French, with a French *terrasse*, French side screens of ugly ironwork and glass, and faces a square full of shady trees between which one sees modern fortifications of French appearance. So we sat sipping coffee and we said to ourselves: "Forget that you are in Spain. Put off your excitement. Don't waste your sensations with false sentiment"

Nor did the fact that all the wording on the shops was Spanish, nor even the sight of a building of pure modern Spanish architecture rouse us from our cloudy resignation. The building which

towered into some six stories by the side of the railway was of a maroon brick. The lower story, including the entrance door, was decorated with *appliqué* in the design which the French used to call "l'art nouveau," and which now is confined almost exclusively to the iron work on boulevard cafés. It is marked by exaggerated curves. The whole bottom story of this building was sculptured in this fantastic fashion; in order to fit in with the decorations the front door was wider at the top than it was at the bottom, while the windows were of every variety of shape, squashed curves, dilated hearts, indented circles and so on. Above this story the building rose gravely brick save for the corners, which were decorated with bathroom tiles of bad glaze upon which flowers had been painted; roses, violets and pansies: the top story, however, was part Gothic, part Egyptian, with a unifying intermixture of more bathroom tiles.

A munition millionaire went to an art dealer saying he wanted a picture, but he didn't mind what sort of a picture it was provided it looked expensive. We imagined that the architect of this house had received a similar order. Later on we were undeceived.

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A yellow tram went by bearing the name "Fuentarabia." Having heard eulogies of this place, we decided to go. We reached the terminus of the tramway and the conductor told us we were there. Since then we have met so many people who were in ecstasies about the beauties of Fuentarabia, about its pure Spanish character, etc., etc., that we are still wondering if we went to Fuentarabia after all

FOOTNOTES:

[1] Cheap.

CHAPTER IV

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MEDINA DEL CAMPO

If civilization were without a flaw, the happy civilized traveller could pass through and circumambulate a foreign country yet never come into closer contact with the inhabitants than that transmitted through a Cook's interpreter. So that if you want to learn anything about a country, either you must put a sprag into the wheels of this civilization or you must let Opportunity do it for you. Opportunity is a very complaisant goddess: give her an inch and the ell at least is offered to you. She smiled upon us when we decided to stay the night at Irun; once more she smiled when the porter told us that the train to Avila left about eight o'clock, so we humped the two rucksacks and the suit-case from the inn to the station, got our trunk and hold-all from the baggage office and went to buy our tickets. Then we realized what Opportunity had been up to. The ticket clerk refused to give us tickets to Avila.

"Why not?"

"The train does not go through Avila, it goes to Madrid by the other branch through Segovia. The train by Avila goes at four."

"Where, then, does it branch off?"

"At Medina del Campo."

"Then give us tickets to Avila and we will wait at Medina del Campo."

But the authorities did not approve of this novel idea. It seemed that the through-ticket system had not become the custom in Spain. We must then take tickets to Medina or wait in Irun till the proper, respectable Avila train should go, so to the astonishment of the booking clerk we said:

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"All right, give us tickets for Medina."



I do not believe that any pleasure traveller had stopped at Medina before we did. That is the impression we received, both from the behaviour of the porters at Irun and of those at Medina itself.

The scenery from the railway was, as scenery always is, fascinating because of one's elevation and the scope of one's view, tiring because of its continuous movement. We passed through mountains worthy of Scotland, very Scotch in colour, and at last came out upon the big plain of Valladolid.

While we were streaming across this and the mountains were fading slowly into a distant blue the luncheon-car waiter announced his joyful news. We had heard that living in Spain was going to be dear, so, with some trepidation, we decided to take that train luncheon—for our financial position did not encourage extravagance. The whole trip was, in theory, to come within the limits of Jan's war gratuity—about £120. We had calculated the railway travelling as £50 in all; this gave us £70 for all other expenses, including the purchase of the musical instruments upon which we had set our minds, and we hoped to stay for four or five months. Yet in spite of the need for economy luncheon called us if only as an experience.

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The meal cost us about three and fourpence apiece: it was a complicated affair of many courses—even in a Soho restaurant the same would have come to about ten shillings, so that the spirit of economy in us was cheered and inspired. Of our fellow passengers we remember nobody save a gigantic priest who waddled slowly along the corridors, carrying, suspended on a plump finger, a very small cage in which, like a mediæval captive in a "little ease," was a canary almost as large as its prison.

Medina station looked like an exaggerated cart-shed on a farm; two long walls and a roof of corrugated iron—there were no platforms, only one broad pavement along one of the walls. A small bookstall was against the wall and further along the pavement a booth of jewellery. This booth had glass windows and "Precio Fijo"^[2]—"No bargaining," in other words—was painted across the glass in white letters.

Why Spaniards, *en route*, should have mad desires to purchase jewellery, we have not learned, but these jewellery booths are common on Spanish stations. The jewellers seem to detest bargaining, for these words always appear on the windows. I suppose the fact that the purchaser of jewellery

has got to catch a train may give him some occult advantage over the seller. One may imagine him slamming his last offer down on the counter and sprinting off with the coveted trinket to the train, while the defrauded merchant is struggling with the door-handle of his booth—so "No Bargaining" is painted up, very white and very positive.

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As we had nine hours to wait, there was no need to hurry, so we allowed the crowd to drift out of the platform before we began to see about the disposal of our luggage. Stumbling about in Hugo Spanish we discovered that, owing to the receipt that had been given us at Irun, our big trunk would look after itself until claimed, but that there was no luggage office or other facility for getting rid of our smaller baggage. We, however, insinuated understanding into the head of a porter, who thereupon led us to a door amongst other doors in the wall labelled "Fonda." We came into a huge hall. Across one end stretched a majestic bar four feet high, of elaborately carved wood, upon the top of which were vases of fruits, tiers of bottles and glittering machines for the manufacture of drink. Three long tables were in the room, two spread simply with coffee-

cups. The third table occupied the full length of the middle of the room. It seemed spread for some Lord Mayor's banquet. Snowy napery was covered along the centre with huge cut-glass dishes, stacked with fruit, alternated with palms flanked by champagne bottles and white and red wine bottles. Fully fifty places were laid, each place having seven or eight plates stacked upon it while the cutlery sparkled on either hand. A cadaverous, unshaven waiter lounged about amongst this magnificence and lazily flicked at the flies with his napkin.

This huge, deserted room, expectant of so many guests, made one think of the introduction to a fairy story: one could have sat the mad hatter, the dormouse and the March hare down there, but one could never imagine that fifty passengers could in sober earnestness crowd to have supper at Medina del Campo upon the same day. No, rather here was one flutter of the dying pomp and majesty of Spain.

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We placed our bags in a corner of the pretentious room and went from the station to look for the town. It was nowhere to be seen. A white road deep in dust gleamed beneath the afternoon sun and led away across the ochreous plain, but, of town, not a sign. Yet the white road was the only road; Medina must be somewhere, so off we walked. The plain was not quite flat, it flowed away in undulations which appeared shallow, but which proved sufficiently deep to swallow up all signs of Medina del Campo at the distance of a mile.

First we came to a line of little brightly coloured hovels, square boxes, many of only one room, then to a church, an ancient Spanish-Gothic church surrounded by gloomy trees. Suddenly the road turned a corner and we were almost in the middle of the town. Medina was Spanish enough. Here was the plaza at the end of which towered a high cathedral decorated with colour and with carving. The plaza lay broad and shining beneath the sunlight; loungers sprawled in the shadows beneath the small, vivid green trees, and in the deep stone arcades which edged the open square the afternoon coffee-drinkers, clad in cool white, lolled at the café tables.

In the centre of the plaza was a fountain running with water, and about it came and went a continual procession of women bearing large, white amphoras upon their hips, children carrying smaller drinking vessels, and men wheeling long, barrow-like frameworks into which many amphoras were placed. The shops and cafés were painted in gay colours which were brilliant in the sun and which contrasted pleasantly with the crude—as though painted—green of the trees and the clear, soothing hue of the sky.

I know that historical things have happened at Medina del Campo, but we are not going to retail second-hand history. To us, as living beings, it is far more important that we bought our first oily, almondy Spanish cakes here than that Santa Teresa (who started off at the age of ten years to be martyred by the Moors) founded a convent in the town.

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Medina is a dead place and must be typical of Spain. It has a market, a plaza and a few ragged fringes of streets more than half full of collapsing houses, and in this gay-looking remnant of past glory are at least three enormous churches with monasteries in attendance. But even the churches are falling into ruin and the storks' nests are clustered flat on the belfries, while Hymen's debt collectors, clapping their beaks, gaze down from aloft into the empty roadways.

Sunset had played out a colour symphony in orange major by the time we had arrived back at the station where we asked for a meal; but the cadaverous, blue-jowled waiter had not laid covers for fifty in order that intrusive strangers might push in and demand food at whatever hour they chose.

"Supper," he said with some dignity and disgust at our ignorance, "is at eight."

So out we went on to the pavement platform, found a lattice seat and ate the cakes we had bought. They were like treacly macaroons, so oily that the paper in which they had been wrapped was soaked through, but it was with pure almond oil and the cakes were delicious. Lunch had been eaten at twelve and in trains one never eats quite at one's ease; hunger had gripped us when eight o'clock struck by the station clock. We took our seats at the long table before those piles of plates. A quarter-past eight went by, half-past eight was approaching. One by one about six or seven persons sauntered into the room and seated themselves, distant from each other in comparison with the size of the table as are the planets in the solar system. Nearest to us, our Mars, as it were, was a very fat commercial man, his face showing the hue of the ruddy planet. Our Venus was represented by a pale young priest, his long wrists projecting far from the sleeves of his cassock. Mercury looked appropriately enough like one who was always travelling; Saturn was covered with rings—he must have been one of the customers of the "precio fijo" booths—the other planets were lost amongst cumulus of fruit and cirrus of palm.

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The waiter became active. Balancing a large soup tureen, he ladled a thin, greenish soup into the upper plate. We then understood that we would have to eat our way down through the pile of plates, each plate a course. Mars rushed at his soup in such a wild manner that we felt it was a good thing indeed that the soup-plate was thus raised so near to his mouth or fully the half of the soup would have drenched his waistcoat.

Alice again was recalled to my mind. I remembered her dismay during her regal banquet when the dishes once introduced to her were whisked away from under her nose, for every time I laid down my knife and fork to speak to Jan my plate was seized and carried off by the cadaverous waiter. No sooner was I introduced to a new Spanish dish than it was wrested from me. Twice this had occurred. On the third occasion I lay in wait: as the waiter swooped for my plate I seized it. There was a momentary struggle, but I had two hands to his one; he retired with a look of astonishment on his face. Gradually I became aware of the fact that Mars never loosed his knife and fork until he had cleared his plate. He held both firmly in his two red hands. If he drank—

which he did with gusto, throwing his head back, washing the wine, which had a queer tarry taste, about the inside of his mouth, almost cleaning his teeth with it—he held his fork sceptre-wise as if to say to the waiter, "Touch that last corner of beefsteak at your peril." When he had quite finished the course, when he had mopped up all the remnants with a piece of bread, then and then only did he lay down both knife and fork. Unconsciously I had been giving a signal to the waiter.

After the beefsteak we had a surprise. One has been so long accustomed to the French custom in gastronomy, that one almost forgets that courses are not arranged in an immutable order. Once indeed I did make a bet in Paris that I would eat a meal in the inverse direction, beginning with the coffee and sweets and ending with the soup—which, by the way, proved very hard to swallow—but the mere fact that one could bet about it proves how fixed one imagines the laws of food progression to be. At Medina del Campo, after the beefsteak, which was about the third item on the menu, the waiter brought us fried fish, thereby proving that gastronomic progression is not so unalterable as is usually imagined. The fish looked like very small plaice, but they had a strange flavour which we had never before tasted. That the fish had been packed for several days in rotting hay seemed the nearest description and explanation, and we would have clung to this idea if the salad had not also had a perceptible tang of this unpleasant taste. We asked the waiter what the flavour was, but our Spanish broke down under the strain, and the waiter said "Claro"^[3] and went away.

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For some weeks afterwards the word "Claro" became our bugbear. The Spaniard gets little amusement from hearing his language spoken by foreigners. If the unfortunate foreigner does not get pronunciation, accent and intonation perfect the Spaniard says "Claro," in reality meaning "I can't make head or tail of what you are talking about." Both laziness and courtesy make the Spaniard say "Claro," and often the poor foreigner is quite delighted with his progress in the language—the people tell him that everything he says is perfectly clear, hooray; he thinks that he must have an unsuspected gift for languages—until one day he asks the way to somewhere and receives the usual answer, "Claro."

The Redonda Mesa,^[4] which would I think be the Spanish for a "square meal," cost us again four pesetas, and it was an even better three and eightpenn'orth than we had been given on the train. The meal finished, the planets held a public tooth-picking competition for a while, then one by one they resumed their normal orbits and passed from our sight.

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We, with the processes of digestion heavy upon us, went back to the seat in the ill-lit station. Three more hours we had to wait for the train to Avila, so we sat in the mild night watching the only engine at Medina—an engine which looked like an immediate descendant of Stevenson's Rocket—push trucks very slowly to and fro. This engine, though it made a lot of spasmodic noise, did not destroy, it only interrupted, the intense silence which lay over the country-side. The platform was quite deserted. Presently two small boys came along. One had a red tin of tobacco which he offered to Jan; Jan shook his head but did not answer. They then tried to talk to us, but we knew better than to expose our imperfect Castilian to two small boys—so we kept silence. At last they said we were "misteriosos" and went away.

A luggage train steamed in. At the tail end of the train were three third-class carriages, and from these carriages, as well as from the waggons, poured out a mob of wild-looking men. They were dark brown, unshaven, covered with broad tattered straw hats, clothed in rough and ragged fustian and carried blankets of many coloured stripes. Huge bundles, sacks and strange implements were slung upon their backs. As they crowded in beneath the dim lamp at the station exit one could almost have sworn that all the figures from Millet's pictures had come to life. A smell of the soil and of labour and of sweat went up from them. These men were peasants from Galicia; they had come in third-class carriages, in goods waggons, travelling probably for two or three days, attached to luggage trains, across the country to the harvesting. One by one they passed out, their voices trailed away into the night towards Medina, and once more the silence came back.

Time wears itself out in the end. The train to Avila, when it came, was fairly empty, so we could lay ourselves out at full length and rest, disturbed, however, by the continual fear that we might overshoot our destination.

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It was pitchy night when we clambered down from the train at Avila. The large barn of a station was lit by but three minute lamps and the glow from the fonda door. In the semi-darkness the passengers moved about like ghosts, each intent on his own business. It was two o'clock in the morning, so before exploring we again put our baggage in a corner of the fonda; where also we found the one waiter presiding over a banquet laid for fifty non-existent guests. Speaking as little of the language as we did, it seemed impossible to go exploring a foreign town in the dead of night for a hotel which would probably be shut when we found it. So, feeling somewhat like Leon Berthelini and his wife in Stevenson's story, we sat down on a seat in the station to await the dawn.

The temperature of the night was almost perfect; there was a hint of chill in our faces which, however, did not penetrate through the clothing. For awhile porters moved about arranging luggage, then one by one the three lights were extinguished and the station was left to darkness. One porter clambered into a carriage which was standing on a siding; as he did not come out again nor pass down on the other side we imagine he went to bed in it. We were tempted to follow his example, but feared the train might move off unexpectedly and carry us to some remote part of Spain before we could wake up. One can tempt opportunity too far.

But the seat was hard. If, like Berthelini, we had had a guitar we might have performed miracles with it similar to his, but we had left our guitars in England. So Jan went exploring. Outside the station he found a small omnibus, its horses eating hay out of nose-bags. Hearing faint voices he discovered a sort of dimly lit underground bar annexed to the fonda, in which the driver of the omnibus and a friend were drinking spirits, while the tired waiter lounged yawning behind the counter. Our ignorance of Spanish prevented us from thrusting ourselves into their company: but we waited for the driver to attend to his horses and in halting Hugo we asked him at what hour the omnibus went to the hotel. He replied "In the morning" and went back to his drinking.

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The eau-de-nil of dawn found us on the edge of shivering, but the day warmed rapidly. A train thundered into the station pouring out its cascade of passengers. Gathering up our packages and tipping the waiter fifty centimes, we found a new omnibus which was labelled "Hotel Jardin" and took our seats inside. Dawn was over by the time we reached the hotel, though it was but four o'clock. We had a confused impression of great buff battlements overhanging the buildings, of a few stunted bushes, of one or two girls in black, of a huge room which was to be our bedroom and then—bed—sleep

FOOTNOTES:

- [2] Fixed prices.
- [3] "That is clear."
- [4] Round table.

CHAPTER V

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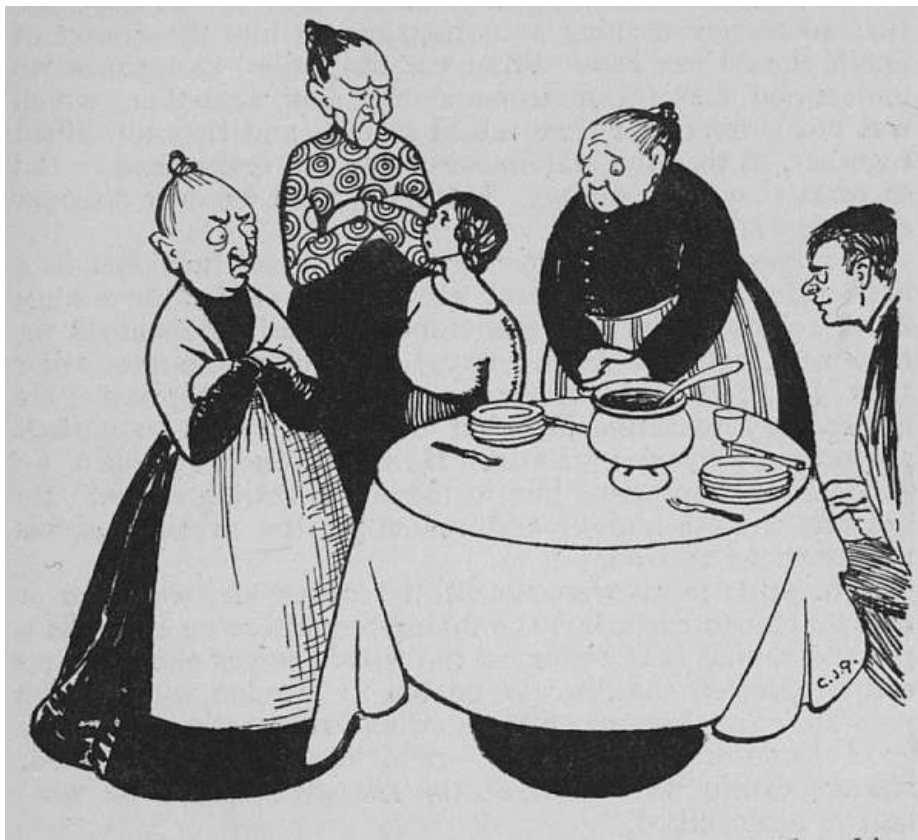
AVILA

Borrow has a description of an inn in Galicia in which a whole family occupies but one bedroom while the servant sleeps across the door. Our bedroom in the Hôtel del Jardin was quite large enough for any family other than, perhaps, a French Canadian, which sometimes runs, we have heard, into twenties and thirties. The walls were painted a pinky-mauve stucco, decorated with a broad olive-green ribbon of colour making a complete oblong or frame on each wall about eighteen inches within the edges of the wall, top, bottom and sides.

This method of making, as it were, a separate frame of each wall, was novel and rather pleasant. It is a common practice in Spanish wall decoration and is probably Moorish in origin. The hotel was full of dark corridors leading to huge bedrooms: it had a broad veranda upstairs full of large wicker chairs, bottoms up, while downstairs was a dining room with square tables and a small entrance hall in which sat the three old ladies.

With one of the old ladies we had bargained in a sleepy way upon our arrival. She had conceded us the room with full *pension* (no extraordinarios) for eight pesetas a day, but in general the three old ladies sat in the entrada together, giving a sense of black-frocked repose and of quiet dignity to the place. One was thin-faced, dried-up but energetically capable; one was large and motherly, while the third had no characteristics whatever and was ignored by every one.

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I do not think we realized that these three old ladies were the proprietresses until the second or third day at lunch-time. We had been given our seats at a table by the waiter; suddenly we found the three old ladies had surrounded us and were glowering down at us. We were rising to our feet but they peremptorily commanded us to stay where we were, breaking the rising tide of their wrath upon the waiter. Then, for the first time, we realized how completely we were married in Spain. In France, for instance, married people are "les époux," plural, separate; in England they are a "married couple," which still recognizes a duality though perhaps less definitely than does France; but in Spain we were "un matrimonio," indissolubly wedded into one in the language, and into a masculine one at that. Somehow I always felt that we ought to be wheeled in on casters: it was improper that so stately a thing as a matrimonio like the Queen of Spain should use legs. From the old ladies' annoyance we understood that the matrimonio had done something which was not correct, but they talked so fast, and they all talked together, so that the matrimonio could not make head or tail of what they were saying. Nor indeed did we ever discover our misdemeanour.

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For our six and eightpence a day we had breakfast in a little side room. This meal was of *café au lait* in a huge bowl, rolls and butter. Sometimes we had companions for this meal. On the second day I was some minutes earlier than Jan. At the table was a young peasant priest. He ignored my tentative bow but began muttering to himself protective prayers in Latin. However, once I looked up suddenly and surprised him in the act of staring at me. He quickly crossed himself and redoubled the urgency of his protestations to God.

The other meals were excellently cooked and with four or five courses to each, but the diningroom bore on its walls a placard saying that owing to the rise of prices the management regretted that it was unable to provide wine at the *pension*. So there was an extraordinario after all—and a very good extraordinario it was too—red Rioja wine with the faint, strange exotic taste in it of the tar with which the wine barrels are caulked.

You know the queer old drawings one finds in ancient books: towns like handboxes with the walls round a perfect circle, and peaked houses all comfortably packed inside, and soldiers' heads sticking out of the battlemented towers? Well, Avila is like that. You may stand on the opposite hillside and see the full circle of her walls with never a breach in it, with towers at every two hundred yards or so, and you can gaze down into her houses, fitted neatly within the handbox, and wonder if the old manuscripts were quite as exaggerated as one often supposed. From this hillside one might imagine that Avila has never changed from the days when the monks drew their primitive pictures. The walls top the hill-side and one sees nothing of the modern Avila which has spread beyond those great frowning gateways facing the plaza, but even the modern part of Avila which has oozed out beyond the walls is not overwhelmingly modern. There are none of the exquisite specimens of Spanish bad taste like that we found in Irun. The plaza is surrounded by coloured houses and arcades much as is that of Medina; the sun-blinds of the two large cafés are tattered and weather-beaten; the peasants stare at strangers with an unspoilt curiosity.

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The habit of rushing about towns, of penetrating into every gloomy interior, ecclesiastical or otherwise, which seems to be decently penetrable, is a modern convention to which we do not subscribe. There are two aspects to every place, the living and the dead, and we prefer the former. There is this advantage in our attitude, that one does not have to seek out the living, it flows quite easily and naturally by, and one does not remain an open-mouthed spectator with a

jackdaw brain, but incorporates oneself with it. We did not go into the cathedral, nor into any convent, nor did we climb up the towers or into the walls: we sat at the café drinking in both coffee and Spain.

Of costume, as Spain is so often painted, there was little; the peasant men wore tall, flat-brimmed hats and broad, blue sashes about their stomachs; the women shawls and woven leggings; the mules and donkeys had trappings of bright-coloured woolwork and often saddlebags with fine woven coloured patterns on them. String-soled sandals were the footwear of the men and of the soldiers: string-soled shoes, *alpagatas*, were worn by the women and children. The town was moderately alive until eleven o'clock. Very early in the morning the peasants came into the market with their mules or donkeys, then gradually a quiet settled down, a quiet which lasted till the evening. After six o'clock Avila awoke, the business men left their shops, the officers their cantonments. The cadets and youths gathered in the plaza to flirt with the girls who, dressed in gay cottons, paraded to and fro in small giggling and swaying groups. Booths selling cool drinks and ices opened at the corners of the plaza, while wandering sweetmeat merchants sold fried almonds and sugared nuts. There was no woman with a lace mantilla and a high comb, nor any one with a flat hat, embroidered shawl and cigarette; so the cigar boxes are liars.

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As one sits at the café table in Spain, life is, perhaps, presented to one in an aspect almost too crude. Lazarus lay at the rich man's gates exhibiting his sores, and the Spanish beggar follows his example. Spain needs no Charles Lamb to write of the decay of beggars. Decayed indeed they are, but not in that sense of which Lamb wrote: in tattered and unspeakable rags they pursue their trade from the Asturias to Cadiz. No dishonour attaches to beggary in Spain. A Spaniard was horrified when Jan told him that begging was not permitted in England.

"What, then, can those do who are unable or unwilling to work?" he asked.

A humble though probably verminous official refuge is provided for the beggar in each town, and, as he tells his clients, "God repays" his small extortions. The Spaniard is accustomed to his beggars, he does not nag at his conscience about them, but it harrows the unaccustomed heart of the Englishman who, taking his modest coffee or *Blanco y negro* after supper, finds a procession of misery thrusting importunate hands into his moment of quiet luxury. The Spanish beggar has no tenderness for one's sensibility. Each has the motto, "If you have tears prepare to shed them now." Naturally we were their quarry. They presented us with a series of specimens worthy of a hospital museum. We hardened our hearts, as we were afraid of consequences, but after two days, when the beggars, disappointed with us, relaxed their exertions, we gave or withheld alms with the outward serenity of a Spaniard, but feeling inwardly brutal whenever we refused to give a dole.

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Dirty, half-naked children dodged about the café pillars, hiding from the waiter's eyes. They stared wistfully at the small, square packets of beet sugar which the waiter brought with the coffee, and if a lump were left over they would creep up and in a cringing whine ask for it. Boys slightly older usually begged for a *perra chica* or for a cigarette. Their voices would be pathetic enough almost to break one's heart—they would say they had not eaten for three days—but if the refusal was decisive they would suddenly change their tones and shout out gaily to a comrade or run away whistling, or turn a few cartwheels down the gutter.

In Avila, too, we encountered the money problem. We had been told that the Spaniard calculates his cash in pesetas and centimos, the peseta being worth normally tenpence in English money and the ten-centimo piece about one penny. So far this had worked fairly well, we had been on the travellers' route and the peculiarity of travellers had been catered for; but here we found a new system of coinage.

"How much is that?" I asked a woman in the market, pointing to some object.

"That," she replied, "is worth six 'little bitches.'"

"Six what?" I exclaimed.

"Well, three 'fat dogs,' if you prefer."

"Three 'fat dogs'?"

"Yes, or one 'royal' and one 'little bitch.'"

"But I cannot understand. What is a 'royal'?"

"Oh, don't you know? Why, twenty 'royals' make a 'hard one.'"

At last we worried it out. The little bitch (*perra chica*) is five centimos, or one halfpenny. The fat dog (*perro gordo*) is the ten-centimo piece; these are both so called because of the lion on the back, though why the sex should be changed we do not know. The royal (*real*) is twenty-five centimos or twopence-halfpenny, the "hard one" (*duro*) is a five-peseta piece. The peseta is ignored. Nobody except an ignorant foreigner calculates in pesetas. The Spaniard, who often cannot write, does staggering sums in mental arithmetic, reducing thirty-two "little bitches" or seventeen "royals" almost instantly into the equivalent in minted coin.

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We had come to Spain for the several reasons mentioned in Chapter I. We had found the freedom: it was as though some oppressing weight were lifted from off us, as though an attack of mental asthma had been relieved. But on the whole we felt that we had been defrauded in other respects. The weather, except for the afternoon at Medina, had been very cloudy and at times almost cold. We had heard no guitar during our week in Spain. One day a man with a primitive clarinet, accompanied by a man with a side drum, had wandered about the town making a queer music which had given us thrills of unexpected delight. But Jan does not play the clarinet. He had

made up his mind about guitars, and guitars he would have. The last night which we were to spend in Avila, he said:

"See here, Jo, we'll go out and we'll walk up and down, through and round this town, till we hear a guitar playing. Then we will walk in and explain. I'm sure the people, whoever they may be, will not mind, but I am going to hear Spanish music."

After supper we set out again. We walked the town from the top to the bottom. Not a whisper of guitar or of any other music. We bisected the town from left to right—still silence except for the dim sounds of normal evening life. We went out into the little garden which was beyond the walls and, leaning on the parapet, stretched our ears over the small suburb beneath. The cries of a wailing child or two, of a scolding woman and the shouts of an angry man answered us; of music not a note. We walked round the walls and were about to return in disappointment to the hotel, when Jan said "Hush!"

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We listened. Barely audible, from below on the hill-side, came the faint tinkle of a guitar. We looked out across the dark country. The hill sloped steeply from our feet and rose again in planes of blue blackness to the distant mountains. Almost in the bottom of the valley we saw a square of light from an open door. The sound came from this direction. Cautiously we crept down the hill, which was steep, pebbly and without paths. As we came down, the noise grew louder.

There was a small drinking house or venta by the roadside; near to it, drawn up on a grassy spot beneath some big trees, were gipsy caravans and booths, and as we passed by we could see, dimly white, the blanketed shapes of the gipsies as they lay on the grass asleep under the stars. From the venta came the sounds of music.

After a momentary hesitation we went in. The room, lit by one dim lamp, was crowded with gipsies and workmen. It was long in shape and an alcove almost opposite to the door was partitioned off as a bar. At one end was a table upon which three gipsies with dark, lined Spanish faces were sitting, and the audience had formed itself into rough, concentric semicircles spreading down the length of the room. Most of the men were swarthy with the sun, clad in the roughest of clothes, some with tall hats on, others with striped blankets flung over their shoulders. The inn looked like what the average traveller would describe as a nest of brigands.

We murmured a bashful "buenos noches," bowed to the company and crept into the background. A few returned our greeting, but with delicacy of feeling the majority took no overt notice of our presence.

The man on the table who held the guitar began to thrum on the instrument. A tall gipsy, whose face was drawn into clear, almost prismatic shapes, and who might have stepped out of an etching by Goya, put his stick into a corner, slipped off his blanket and, standing in the open space before the table, began a stamping dance, snapping his fingers in time with the rhythm. A workman standing near to us said:

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"That man does not play the guitar very well, the other one plays better."

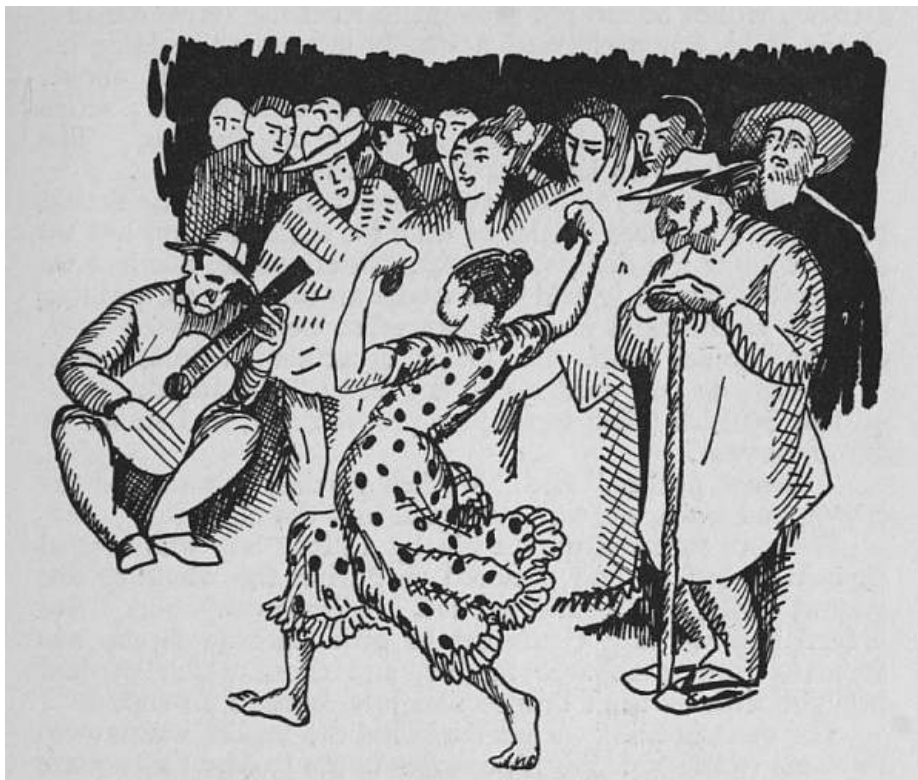
He went out and in a short while returned with his wife, a laughing woman whom he placed next to me. There was no drinking of wine. The alcarraza, an unglazed, bottle shaped drinking vessel, full of water, was handed about. It has a small spout, and from this the Spaniard pours a fine stream of water into his mouth. But beware, incautious traveller—ten to one you will drench yourself.

Though the audience apparently took no notice of our presence, in reality they were extremely conscious of us. One by one, as if by accident, gipsy women clad in red cottons came into the already crowded room. Soon a girl was urged to dance. She demurred, giggling. At last she was pushed into the open space, and with a gesture of resignation she began to dance. We are not judges of Spanish dancing: we had been looking for atmosphere, and had plunged into the thick of it. This was no café in Madrid or Seville got up for the entertainment of the traveller. This was the true, natural, romantic Spain. Opportunity again had blessed her disciples. One of the women pushed her way out of the door, and in a short while returned, dragging with her a child about nine years old. The little girl's face was frowning and angered, the sleep from which she had been roused still hung heavy on her eyelids.

"Aha!" exclaimed the audience. "She dances well."

The man who was reputed the better player roused himself from the table and sat down on a chair. They put castanets into the child's hands. The man struck a few chords and slowly the music formed itself into the rhythm of a Spanish measure.

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Relaxing none of her angry, sleepy expression, the child danced wonderfully. The castanets clashed and fluttered beneath her fingers, her skirts swirled this way and that, her feet beat the floor in time with the pulsation of the guitar. The audience shouted encouragement at her. With a wild series of movements, the dance at last came to an end.

"Brava! Brava!" cried the gypsies.

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"One day that girl will be worth much money," said a man, with approval in his voice.

Then the best male dancer took the floor. With true artistic instinct he did not attempt to rival the active dancing of the child, but performed a stately movement, holding his arms above his head, and slowly turning himself about. When he sat down an old man of seventy or so began a series of senile caperings, thumping his stick on the floor. The audience rolled with laughter at the ancient buffoon.

For some while Jan had been wondering whether he should pay for two or three bottles of wine for the company, but we did not know the delicacies of Spanish etiquette, nor had we sufficient language in which to make an inquiry, so, pushing my way to the child who had danced so well, I pressed a few coppers into her hand. She looked up at me in astonishment.

"What do you want me to do, then?" she asked.

Our Spanish failed to shape a proper reply, so I smiled at her as answer.

"Buenos noches," and "Muchos gracias," we said to the crowd, and made our way out again into the night.

We were followed up the hill by a gypsy boy who begged cigarettes, but he had pestered us during the whole of our stay at Avila, and we did not feel kindly towards him. Nor indeed had we any cigarettes to give, because Spain was suffering from a tobacco famine, and those which we had brought with us from France had just come to an end.

The next morning we left the Hôtel del Jardin, which owes its name to the fact that it possesses in the front a tiny square of earth on which grow five bushes and a small tree. We were bound for Madrid

CHAPTER VI

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MADRID

Madrid Station was the usual dark barn into which the trains ran and where they rested, as the diligences rest beneath the barn of the coaching inn. One descended the steps of the carriage into gloom; found a dim porter whom one would never recognize again; made one's way amongst the towering, sniffling black Pargantua of locomotives; was fought for by an excited mob of cabmen, amongst whom one remained passive until a cabman dowered with more character than his fellows had managed to attract one's notice; and finally we were packed into a small, four-square omnibus, our luggage on the top, the driver and his tout on the box. A police official in a grey uniform halted us. He asked our names, our destination and warned us not to pay the driver more than five pesetas for the trip, including the luggage.

To-day was Sunday. We had, indeed, on getting up at Avila imagined it to be Saturday. We were leaving Avila expressly on a Saturday in order to be in Madrid for the great Sunday bullfight, for practically all bullfighting in Spain is reserved as a mild sport for Sunday afternoon, or for other days of Church festival. Unfortunately, we had learned on the train that it was not Saturday but Sunday. Somehow, we had mislaid a day. We had presented ourselves with a Wednesday or a Thursday or a Friday too many, and now Sunday had gone bang and the bullfight with it.

But in consequence our entry into Madrid had some of the dignity of a royal procession. We plunged, a shabby omnibus, into the flood of carriages which parade the parks of Madrid on bullfight occasions. There were doubtless ladies with high combs placed in their raven hair; with lustrous eyes glowing from the deep caverns of their eye sockets; with a waxy and sensuous flower hanging from their full-blooded lips; clad in mystery-lending mantilla and gorgeous shawl, over which the Orient has burst a splendour of silken blossom. There were, no doubt, such spectacles to see; there must have been; all the artists who paint Spain cannot lie. Yet I confess that we did not see them. Though we are beginning to be suspicious of Spanish painters, we will not assert that no such ladies drove in procession, tempting the lounging Spaniard with glances from eyes of melting jet.

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We did not see them because the whole flood of carriages was plunged in a strange golden haze. Dusk had fallen and overhead signs of daylight showed purplish through the fog, but lower down it was quite dark, and through this haze of orange-gold particles, which drifted in the air as golden particles drift in a chemical solution, the lamps of the carriages threw long searchlights, arresting strange silhouettes of the coach-borne crowd, so that we made our first acquaintance with the people of Madrid merely as black shadows against a radiance of gold. It was, indeed, somewhat a prophetic introduction. These black shadows against the gold may stand as a figure for Spain. We think of Spain as the land of the last romance, whereas the Spaniard's real romance is money and the gaining of it. But this is a mixing of secondary and primary impressions. Before our eyes Madrid rolled forward, gloating in an aureate solution, accompanied by the shouts of coachmen and the blaring from aristocratic and impatient motor-cars. We sat looking out of the black windows of the omnibus with much of that childish delight which a shadowgraph theatre gives. In time, however, we began to cough. After a while longer we began to realize that this haze so exquisite in the lamplight was dust—dust.

We rolled along, manufacturing our halo as we went, until, coming out of the press of carriages into cobbled and ill-lit streets, our glory fell away from us and we rocked on, reflecting on this apt illustration of the old French proverb concerning beauty and suffering. Gradually we decided that we could have dispensed with this weird introduction to Madrid in order to have spared our throats.

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Our friend Jesus Perez had given us an address appropriately enough in the Place of the Angel. But there were three *pensions* in the same building and he had not discriminated. So I, leaving Jan to look after the bus, went to explore, and knocking at random was brought face to face with an old lady who had not a trace of the angelic in her constitution. While she was grumpily and wilfully misunderstanding me, insisting that the Señor for whom I was looking did not live there, a crowd of well-fed persons sifted from the dining-room and stood in a circle staring at me with cold-eyed curiosity. As they stared they all picked their teeth. At last I forced understanding on her and she told me in a surly voice that her *pension* was full. The other two *pensions* were full also. It was explained to me that Madrid was suffering from congestion, that never had such a season been experienced.

So I retreated from the stairs and we held a council of distress in the street. The driver of the bus, who did not indeed look like a very competent judge, said that he knew of a good *pension*. By a series of manoeuvres, about as complicated as the turning of a large ship in a small river, he got his bus reversed and we set off again the way we had come. But once more we met a refusal, backed by wide-eyed staring and public tooth-picking.

We had the address of an hotel, as a last resource indeed, for it was somewhat beyond our means, costing seventeen pesetas a day *en pension*. So in despair we made our way to it, wondering whether the congestion had spread from the eight peseta boarding-houses to the seventeen-peseta hotels, and whether our first night in Madrid was to be spent in the bus. We came back into the garishly lit main streets of Madrid and at last the bus halted. There was no hotel front, and we plunged between two shops along a passage from which photographs of the beauties of Madrid showed exquisite sets of teeth from the showcases of a society photographer. A narrow, twisting staircase—the lift was out of order—spiralled us up to a sumptuous hotel decorated with mirrors and white paint arranged with a Permanic taste. Rooms were to be had, and so we resigned ourselves to luxury for a few days.

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Luxury indeed it was. For our eight pesetas a day in Avila we had had as much as we wanted. Here it was in proportion. We were expected to eat our seventeen pesetas' worth a day. Course followed course until, more than replete, we had to wave away almost the whole of the second half of this truly Roman repast. The waiters were aghast. What? Not eat seventeen pesetas worth when one had paid for it? Incredible! We gazed about at our fellow diners and saw that we were unique. But then as a rule our fellow diners surpassed us as much in girth as in appetite; they had "excellent accommodations." Your true Spaniard adores his dinner. There is a general superstition that love is the Spaniard's prime passion. But I doubt it. For the once that we have been asked what we think of Spanish beauty, we have been twenty times questioned about our judgment of Spanish cooking.

Madrid at night. How much has one not dreamed of southern romance beneath skies of

ultramarine? But Madrid seems just like any other large European city. It is Paris without the wit, Munich without the music. We talk, of course, of first impressions. The first impressions of a town are rarely national. Collective humanity is collective humanity everywhere; has the same needs and devises the same methods of satisfying them. Some needs Madrid supplies more blatantly than is done in other places. The Latin is indifferent to noise and the Spaniard is the most hardened of the Latin races. There seems to be no curb on the cries of the street vendors. The consequence is that each shouts out his wares in competition with his fellows; the louder the yell the more the custom. The peculiar qualities of Spanish singing further stimulate to a point of mordant acidity the Iberian voice. For a person of sensitive hearing Madrid is intolerable: newspaper men, flower-merchants, toothpick-sellers, and above all the lottery ticket vendors, scream their wares with nerve-racking persistency; added to which, to make pandemonium complete, the cab-drivers and their touts bellow and shout, while the horns of the motor-cars are the most discordant that we have ever heard.

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As the night progressed from a stifling heat to a comparative coolness the noise seemed to increase. At two o'clock in the morning we thought, surely, it had reached its limit. And to some extent it had. One thanks Heaven sometimes that the human machine runs down; and we, when the "sweet sister of death" laid her hands upon newspaper and lottery ticket sellers, sent a thanksgiving up towards the stars, a thanksgiving the more sincere at the moment because it was silent. The diminution of noise went on steadily until about three, and we imagined that Madrid was going to sleep. It was, however, but a ruse of the subtle city. As is well known, one can become used to a persistent or regularly repeated noise, for Jan used to sleep sweetly close to the stamp battery of a mine, the din of which was so deafening that the voice was inaudible, even at the loudest shout; and dwellers near a railway line are but little disturbed by the nightly trains. Madrid knew that in time we would become accustomed to the human babel, in spite of its strident note; so she substituted a fictitious silence torn into strips by the sudden passage of motors which had taken advantage of the clearness of the streets to put on full speed and also to cut off the silencer. Irregularly these motors went by about one every five minutes. Each silence was about long enough to let us reach the edge over which one tumbles into sleep, and each roaring passage of a car jerked us back into disgusted wakefulness. We arose to a very early breakfast, wishing we had Mr. G. K. Chesterton at hand so that we could enter into an argument with him about the beauties of liberty.

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To retrace our steps for a moment, it was just about at the hither side of the noise climax, that is, about 2.20 in the morning, that we got back to our hotel. We found the street door shut and locked, and no bell could we find to pull. We thumped on the door, but only a hollow, drum-like echoing answered us. We were dismayed. We had got up early at Avila, a train journey and discoveries in Madrid had worn us out, and on the other side of this locked door our bed tempted us; for we were not then aware that sleep was forbidden to us whether we got in or stayed in the street. It seemed strange in Madrid, wide awake and noisy, that our hotel should have locked up so early and should have shut us out. Despairingly again we drummed on the door. We awakened sympathy in a passer-by. A few words explained our plight. He whistled, and we presently saw a man with a lantern in his hand and with an official cap on his head coming towards us. Our helper explained and the official unlocked the door, let us in, and locked the door behind us.

This wandering latchkey is the equivalent to our old night-watchman. Amongst his duties is that of chanting out the hours of the night as they pass—for the benefit of the sleepless—to which he adds the condition of the weather. Since fully ninety-five per cent. of the Spanish nocturnes are Whistlerian blue, he has earned the title of *El Sereno*, or the serene. There is an advantage in this custom—one cannot forget one's latchkey. The worst evil which can happen to one is that one's latchkey may forget itself: but Spain is on the whole a sober country.

A big town reveals its flavour but by degrees. Madrid, whatever its real character may be, had hidden herself behind a veil—a veil of dust. That golden aura which had enveloped our first vision was not a permanent characteristic of the town. The dust hung in the air, rising higher than the houses. From the outskirts, maybe one would have seen Madrid as it were enclosed in a dome of dust. We marvelled that people could live in such an atmosphere.

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We had noticed that, in addition to its dustiness, Madrid was suffering from a dreadful shortage of water. It was, of course, July, and one might expect some famine on the high and arid tableland of Spain, but we wondered that so great a city could have arisen with so meagre a water supply. At street corners queues of tired women and children waited for hot hours with buckets, pails, jugs and amphoras. Soldiers with a hose pipe from which trickled a paltry stream of water filled the vessels one by one. There was gaiety and bad temper, giggling and quarrelling amongst the women.

"This," said we, "is a primitive city."

In the public gardens water-carts were standing, and crowds of men were baling water up from the decorative ponds.

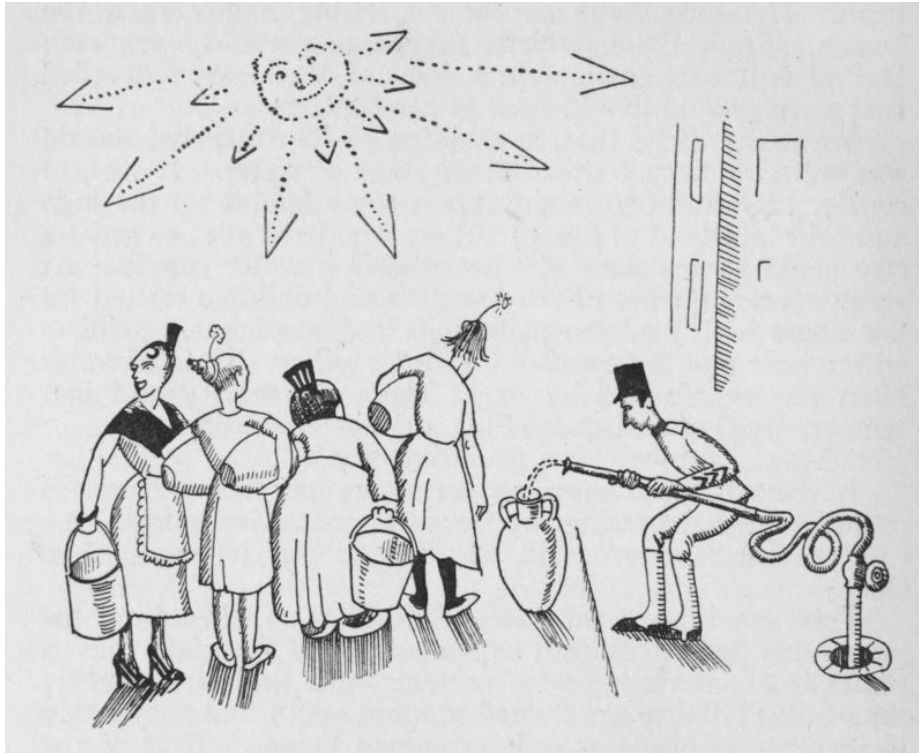
"A real famine," said we, "could not be worse than this."

This was in fact the case. Madrid is supplied from the mountains by an ancient aqueduct. The Spaniard has a principle of interfering with nothing until the last moment; the ideals of liberty are carried so far in Spain that they apply to inanimate objects as well as human beings. Thus, if the aqueduct wishes to break, it is allowed to do so. Panic ensues. The government is criticized, but words hurt nobody. The aqueduct had given way a few days before our arrival. Had it not been for the generosity of a nobleman who turned a private water supply into the conduits of

Madrid, we would have found not calamity but catastrophe.

Madrid was unsavoury enough. The breakdown of the water-supply entails also the failure of the drainage system. In a land of wine one might dispense with water as a mere drink; but to dispense with flushed drains in a semi-tropical climate is impossible.

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One late afternoon we were in our bedroom, having taken advantage of the quiet which reigns from one p.m. till five, (for we got no other sleep during our stay), we heard a faint strange murmur which seemed to be drawing nearer. We went to the balcony and looked out. The sound was coming from the direction of the Puerto del Sol, the sun's gate, the torrid centre of Madrid so well named. The sound drew nearer. Soon it shaped itself into a word murmur from thousands of throats:

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"Agua, agua, agua."

The word passed us and fled down the streets, sweeping before the hesitating trickle which crept along the gutters. With the word a communal shiver of delight ran through the town, like a sort of physical earthquake. Before six o'clock the road men were dragging their hoses about the street, and the rising damp was dragging the dust out of the air

CHAPTER VII

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A HOT NIGHT

(This Chapter should be omitted by Prudes)

The expense of an omnibus is not necessary to the experienced traveller. A Spanish friend took us to a bureau of town porters in Madrid, and we gave instructions to a dark-faced man in a shabby uniform, who promised to see all our baggage to the station in good time for the evening train to Murcia. Señor Don Mateo Bartolommeo was the name of the porter, for he gave us his visiting card, on which was his professional and private address, and a deep black mourning border like that on one's grandmother's envelopes.

The preliminaries to travelling in Spain are lengthy. The ticket office opens fifteen or twenty minutes before the train leaves, but the passengers arrive an hour before, so that there is always a long queue waiting at the ticket office. One can buy either tickets for the journey or tickets for the thousand or more kilometres. The latter are a great saving if one does much travelling, but they entail further delay at the booking office, for verifying, tearing off, stamping, and so forth. Then with one's tickets one goes to the luggage bureau, where the van luggage is weighed, overweight charged, and a long slip receipt given. The luggage is then presumed to travel to the journey's end and should be forthcoming on the production by the passenger of the receipt. This is not invariably the case; but of that we will tell in its place. The wealthy traveller does not undergo all this fatigue. He shows a porter the luggage for the van, tells him the station to which he wishes to travel, gives him the money to pay for ticket and luggage, and bothers his head no more about it. The Spanish porter is unusually honest. You can give him two or three hundred pesetas to buy tickets with, and a few minutes before the train starts up he runs with the tickets, the luggage receipt, and the exact change.

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We, however, wanted to experience everything; we did not wish to spend our small capital on

exorbitant tips, so I, leaving Jan to see to the tickets and heavy luggage, argued my way past the ticket collector, who is supposed to let nobody on to the platform without a ticket, found an empty carriage, appropriated seats, and sat on the step waiting for the porter to bring up the smaller luggage. An old lady in black, with a huge handbox and a birdcage, accompanied by three hatless girls dressed in purple silk, all carrying at least four parcels apiece, filled up my compartment, and I thought: "We are going to have a stuffy time of it."

The train was full of talk. In the corridors the people chattered at the top of their voices like a rookery. Presently, conversing in shrill tones, the old lady and her three daughters swooped back into the carriage, and with much rustling of silk dragged all their parcels to some other part of the train. A young officer, carrying about six packages, took one of the vacated places, and marked his seat by unbuckling his sword, which he placed in the corner. An old man, rather run to stomach, took the seat opposite the soldier. He then stood in the doorway, wedging his stomach into the opening, so that nobody else should enter. The time drew closer to the departure of the train.

The noise increased a hundredfold. Three girls rushed along the corridor and unceremoniously butted the old gentleman in the waistcoat. The corridor was filled with a confused crowd of people, who handed in large hat-boxes, brightly striped, square cardboard boxes, small suit-cases with gilt locks, and a huge doll. The carriage was filled with a strong smell of scent. There was giggling and the kissing of adieux. The escort then retreated down the corridor and the three girls set to arranging themselves for the journey. One of the girls was very dark, her face like old ivory, her eyes large caverns of gloom, and her mouth painted a brilliant scarlet; one was fair with a long face and grey eyes, very excitable in manner, talking a high-pitched Spanish with a queer intonation; the third was bigger than either of her companions, yet less remarkable. One could easily have imagined her dressed in cowgirl's costume, performing in a travelling Buffalo Bill show. All three had bobbed hair, though that of the second girl was an elaborate *coiffure* of short hair rather than a mere bob.

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The dark girl picked up the soldier's sword and tossed it into the luggage rack. The cowgirl pushed the stout old man's suit-case out of his corner and took his seat. The old man but grinned and guffawed, seeming pleased rather than angry. The soldier stood in the corridor and glowered at the dark girl through the glass. He offered no objection to the robbery of his seat, but it was evident what were his thoughts. The second girl flung herself down on the seat next to Jan, blew out a long sigh and exclaimed: "Aie, que calor, que calor."

It was indeed hot. All day long the sun had been beating down into Madrid. The Puerto del Sol had been more like the "Puerto del Infierno." The little trickles of water which the repaired aqueduct had afforded to Madrid had done little to mitigate the dull reverberant heat of the still air. Even now that the night had come the air was yet quivering, and came into the lungs like half-warmed water.

The girls got down their dainty suit-cases from the rack, opened them, burrowing amongst tawdry finery, manicure sets, powder-boxes and other articles of toilet use, found boxes of cigarettes. To do this, the cowgirl placed her suit-case on the seat and, standing, bent over it. The stout old man, with a giggle, leant forward and gave the girl a resounding smack with his open palm upon that part of her which was nearest to him. The officer, through the glass, frowned and pursed up his lips. The girl next to Jan caught my eye, smiled at me, and winked.

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"Aie, que calor!" she exclaimed, blowing cigarette smoke into the air.

The train dragged itself out of the station and started southward through the night.

The girl who was sitting next to Jan broke out into unexpected French.

"Mon Dieu! Qu'il fait chaud!" she exclaimed, as though Spanish would not properly express the quality of the heat.

"But," said Jan to her, "you speak French very well."

"Well," she retorted, "I ought to, seeing that I am French."

Suddenly she came to a resolution. She stood up and again took down her suit-case. She took from it a wrapper of tinted muslin. Slowly then she began to take off her clothes. Her silk dress she folded up very neatly and laid along the little rack which is set just below the ordinary one. Then she slipped off her petticoat and camisole, and put on the muslin wrapper.

"That is better," she exclaimed; folded up her discarded underwear, put it into the suit-case, which she then replaced on the rack.

She then began on her *coiffure*. She detached a series of little curls from over her ears, and twisting the wires on which they were made into hooks, she suspended them from the netting of the rack, where over her head they swung to and fro with the movement of the train.

"Maintenant," she said, "on est plus à son aise. Besides," she added, with the instinct of true French economy, "it does so spoil one's clothes if one takes a long railway journey in them."

The act had been performed with naturalness, and in view of the heat of the night we could not help envying the French girl for her good sense in making the long journey as comfortable as possible.

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She began to tell Jan the story of her life. "Mother was a nuisance," she said; "she made life a little bit of hell at home. Well, one day we had a fine old flare-up. I told mother that she could go to the devil if she liked, and I just packed up and ran away. I came down to Madrid, and on the

whole I haven't done so badly. I send mother about eight hundred pesetas a month. Most of that she'll keep for me, and I'll have a nice little sum to start business with when I get back. Of course one can't keep up a quarrel with one's mother for ever. *Hein!*"

Jan asked her how long she had been in Spain.

"Four months," she answered.

"You speak very good Spanish," said Jan.

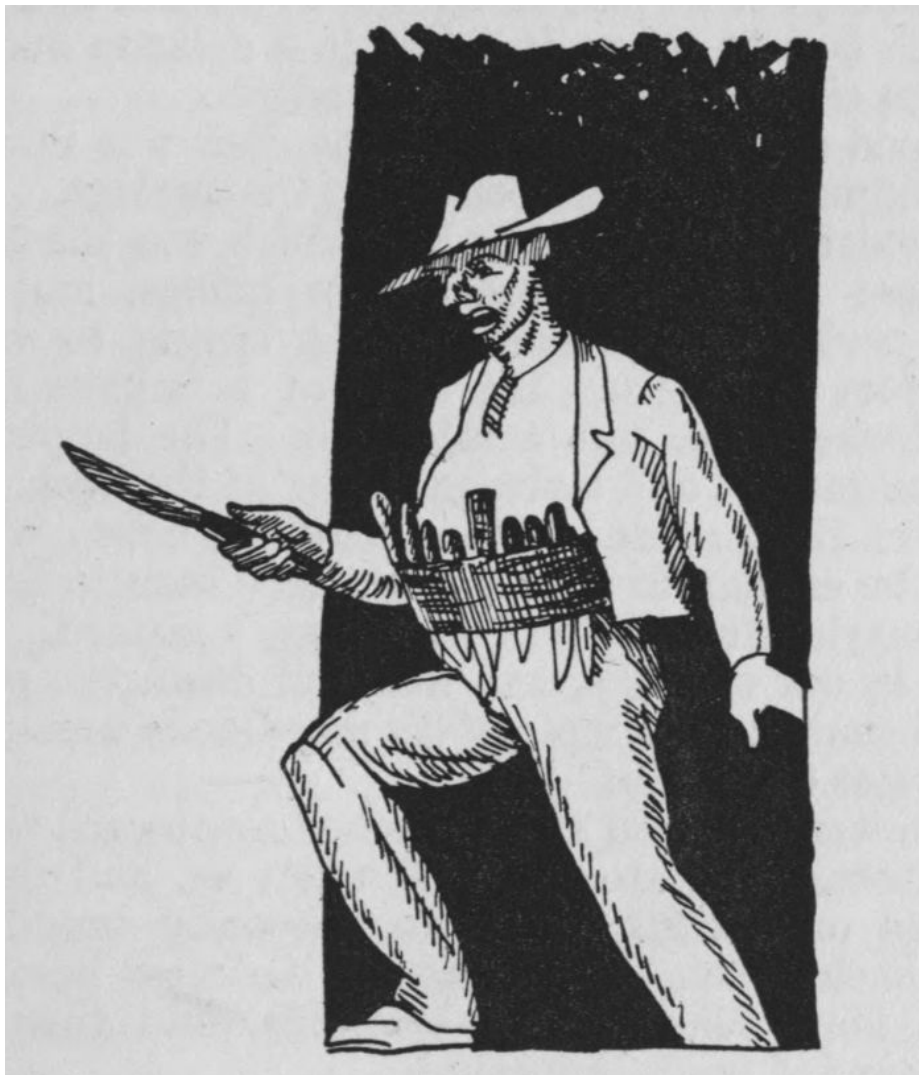
"Oh," she answered, with a touch of desperation in her voice, "one can't be all day doing nothing. It's a distraction learning something new."

"Where are you going now?" asked Jan.

"We are all going to Carthagena," said the French girl. "We'll be down there all the summer. There are English there too, I have heard—sailors. I like sailors. You see, I had to get away from Madrid. I had a friend, and one day while I was out he stole all my spare money, and all my clothes, which he took to the pawnshop. And that left me stranded. Then I heard these two girls were going to Carthagena, to a place, so I said, 'I'll come too,' and here I am. Anyway one has to be somewhere, and I adore knocking about. It's life, isn't it?"

The dark girl was merely a selfish, pretty animal. She curled up on the officer's seat like a black cat. She then slyly prodded the poor little stout man with her high heels, so that he gradually moved up towards me, leaving me little room in which to sit, while the dark girl could stretch out at her ease. The other girl sat in her corner, saying little, smoking cigarette after cigarette. She seemed to be one of those stolid creatures who drop through life, taking good and bad without change of face or of manner. She might have been rather South German than Spanish. In contrast with these two the French girl was simple and attractive. One noted, too, that she had a fine streak of unselfishness in her character; she even talked without bitterness of the man who had robbed her.

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Young men drifted along the corridors and stared in at the girls. One man, who looked well off, dressed in a tweed sporting coat, came in and made friends. He gave them cigarettes and drinks of brandy from a flask. At about one o'clock in the morning, one of the cardboard boxes was opened and disclosed a large pie, which was divided. The stout old gentleman had a piece, so did "Tweeds." Some was offered to us, but we had dined well at Madrid and did not feel hungry. But to refuse in Spain is a delicate matter, so we gave them cigarettes to indicate goodwill.

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We stopped at a dark station. The door was flung open and a tall sunburned man clambered into the carriage. He had around his waist a broad leather belt which was stuck full of knives. These implements were clasp knives, and varied from small pocket knives and pruning knives to

veritable weapons a foot in length. He was not a famous brigand, though he looked one, but a salesman. The larger knives had a circular ratchet and a strong spring at the back, so that upon opening they made a blood-curdling noise, which in itself would be enough to induce any angry man to finish the matter by burying the blade in his enemy's gizzard. He did no business in our carriage, and went off down the platform opening and shutting a sample of his murderous wares, crying out: "Navajos! Navajos!"

The train went on, and as we reached southward the night became warmer. The stout old man left us, and the black girl stretched out at full length, occasionally prodding me with her French heels. Presently the darkness became less opaque. A faint silhouette of low hills, and then a dim reflection from flat lands, appeared.

We stopped at another station; an unimportant wayside station with a small house for booking-office and a drinking-booth in a lean-to alongside.

"I must have a drink," exclaimed "Tweeds." "Who will come with me?"

Neither the black girl nor the cowgirl would move. We had still lemonade in our Thermos flasks. So the French girl, in her muslin *peignoir*, and "Tweeds" clambered down the carriage steps and disappeared through the door of the fonda. [Pg 67]

Disappeared is the right word. Without warning, the train began to move. It gathered speed and clattered away southward. We never saw "Tweeds" or the French girl again. In the thinnest of *négligés* she was left stranded upon the wayside station, to which no other train would come for at least twelve hours, and possibly not for twenty-four.

The day broke, and we pounded along through a dusty arid country. There was green in the bottom of the valley, but from the roads rose high columns of dust, while the plastered villages of box-like houses near the railroad were dried up and dust-coated. Dust blew in through the carriage windows and settled thick upon the curls which, still swinging and bobbing from the netting of the rack, were fast leaving their mistress behind. At first her companions had been anxious; now they were laughing.

"But," they said, "we wonder if she knows where to come for her things when she does arrive?"

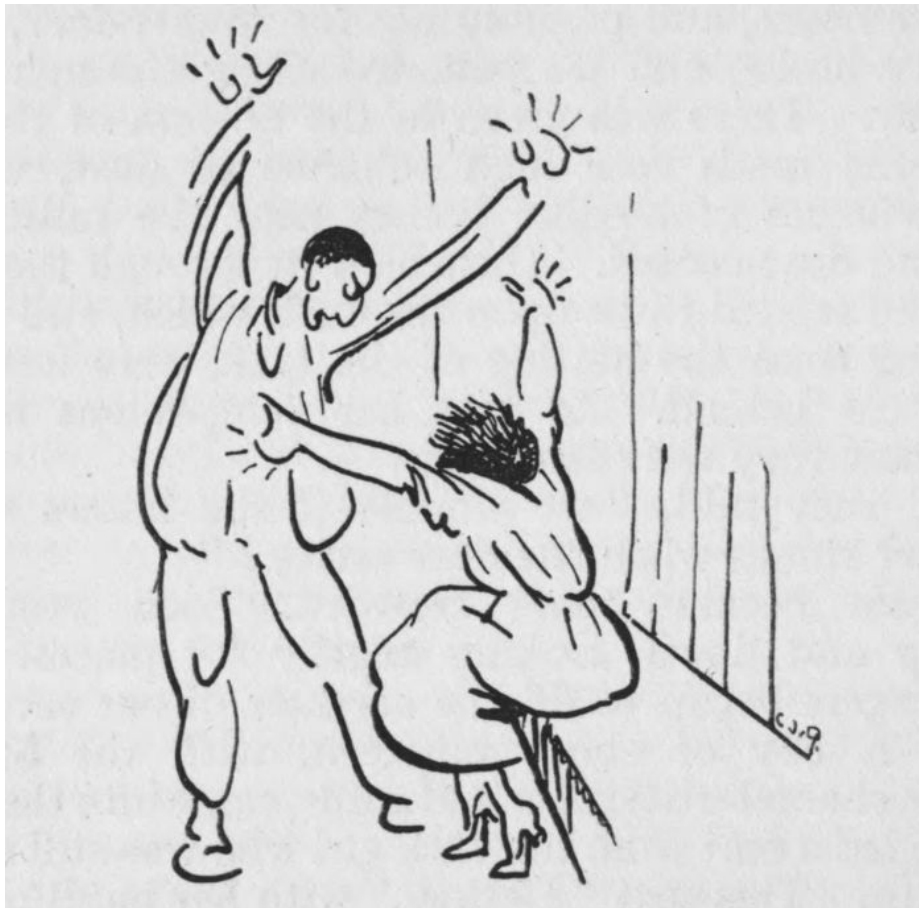
The train became more crowded. Soon people were running up and down, looking angrily for places. Third-class passengers began to fill the corridor of our second-class carriage. A boy of about nineteen, with the half-angry intense face characteristic of some Latins, came into the carriage and demanded a seat from the dark girl who was still stretched at full length. This seat "Darkey," with her habitual selfishness, refused to give up. Suddenly, we were in the middle of a full-fledged Spanish row.

To us it had a comic side. It was not what we would have called a row, as much as a furious debate. Of course with our slight acquaintance with Spanish we missed the finer points of the varied arguments.

"Darkey" began by saying that she was keeping the seat for a friend who was somewhere else. This was to some extent true; the French girl was somewhere else, though there was little likelihood of her claiming the seat. [Pg 68]

The boy retorted that if she was somewhere else she probably had another seat.

This argument went to and fro, increasing in acerbity. Each of the quarrellers listened in silence to what the other had to say, making no attempt to interrupt, though the voices grew hoarse with anger.



Presently "Darkey" was telling the boy that he was a wretched third-class passenger anyhow, and that he had no right in a second-class carriage, and even if the seat were free he wasn't going to have it.

The boy retorted by saying that anybody could see what she was, and that her mother was probably sorry that she had ever been born, etc., etc.

No English quarrel could have gone to half the length that this proceeded. We were waiting to see either the boy jump into the carriage and shake the life out of "Darkey," or to see "Darkey" spring, like the young tiger-cat she was, at the boy and scratch his face. But nothing happened. The crowded corridor listened with delight to the progress of the quarrel.

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The train stopped at a station. "Darkey" had sat up to pulverize the impertinent youth with some evil retort. The carriage door on the opposite side opened, and a placid, middle-aged peasant woman, followed by an ancient peasant man, stepped into the carriage, and before "Darkey" had well discovered what was happening had squashed down in the disputed seat, left vacant by the removal of "Darkey's" feet. The woman grinned at us all and sat nursing a large basket on her lap.

Then the quarrel slowly died down. After a while the boy went away. However, he came back again whenever he had thought of something good, and barked it round the corner of the door at "Darkey," who, usually taken by surprise, could find nothing to retort before he had lost himself again in the crowd.

The peasant woman smiled at us all, and, opening her basket, handed to each of us a large peach. She selected one especially big for "Darkey," presumably as refreshment after the tiring argument.

The day became hotter and hotter. The dust gathered more thickly on to the French girl's poor little curls. When the train stopped, children ran up and down beside the carriages, selling water at the price of "one little bitch" the glass. We were now in the province of Murcia, and the scenery put on the characteristic appearance of that province, tall bare hills of an ochreous mauve, sloping down into a flat, irrigated, fertile valley. The division between mountain and valley, between the "desert and the strown" was as sharp as though drawn with the full brush of a Japanese. On the mountains were dead remnants of Saracen castles, of dismantled Spanish robber fortresses, and the white or coloured buildings of monasteries which still lived sparkling in the sun

CHAPTER VIII

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MURCIA—FIRST IMPRESSIONS

One has a right to expect that the station which is the finish of a long and tiring journey should

be both a terminus and have a quality all of its own. Our egoism makes it seem at that moment the most important place in the world. But Murcia (pronounced locally Mouthia) had only a big ugly barn of a station like many through which we had already passed, and even lacked a Precia Fijo jewellery shop. All we could see of the town, on emerging, was a few houses and a line of small trees which appeared as though they had been in a blizzard of whole-meal flour, so thick was the dust. Over this buff landscape quivered the blue sky.

In front of us were one or two cranky omnibuses and many green-hooded two-wheeled carts. These carts were Oriental in appearance and had the most distinctive appearance we had yet noted in Spain. They were gaily painted, and the hoods bulged with the generous curves of a Russian cupola. Inside they were lined with soiled red velvet, and the driver sat outside of this magnificence on a seat hanging over one of the tall wheels. Into one of these we were squeezed in company with two grinning travellers, and started off, soon plunging into the shadow of an avenue of lime trees, behind the grey trunks of which cowered insignificant little houses painted in colours which once had been bright.



The more communicative of our fellow travellers said it was indeed the hottest day of the year. It was hot, but we were not oppressed by it, and found out in time that the Spaniard always seemed to suffer from the heat more than we did. Our endeavours to be agreeable in imperfect Spanish worked up the traveller to a discussion on languages, and to a eulogy on ourselves for taking the trouble to learn. We said that we were artists. He answered:

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"Ah, yes, that explains it. Poor people, of course, are forced to learn languages."

We drove across a stone bridge, almost in collision with a bright blue tram-car. A momentary glimpse was given to us of a muddy river running between deep embankments; and we drew up before a square barrack of red brick pierced by a regiment of balconied windows. The proprietor, oily like a cheerful slug, waved his fingers close to us, and drew back his hand in delicate jerks as though we were rare and brittle china. He preceded us into an Alhambra-like central hall, led us carefully up a stone staircase to a wide balcony, opened a door into a palatial bedroom with a flourish; and demanded fifteen pesetas "sin extraordinario." Intuition told us that this was not a case of "Precio Fijo," and we reduced him gently to eleven pesetas before we accepted the bargain. Then, to take off the raw edge left by the chaffering, Jan said:

"I don't suppose you get many foreigners here, Señor?"

"Si, si!" returned the hotelkeeper, anxious for the reputation of his caravanserai. "We get quite a lot. Oh, yes, quite a lot. Why, only last year we had two French people, un matrimonio; and this year you have come."

The maid was in appearance and behaviour like an india-rubber ball, and the conviction was firmly fixed in her mind either that we couldn't speak Spanish or that she could not understand if

we did. So she grunted, bounced at us and smiled with her mouth wide open like a dog, hoping that by this means she was translating a Spanish welcome into an English one. With difficulty we dissuaded her from these antics and persuaded her to speak, but she turned her words—which were already dialect—into baby talk; and the less we understood the louder she shouted.

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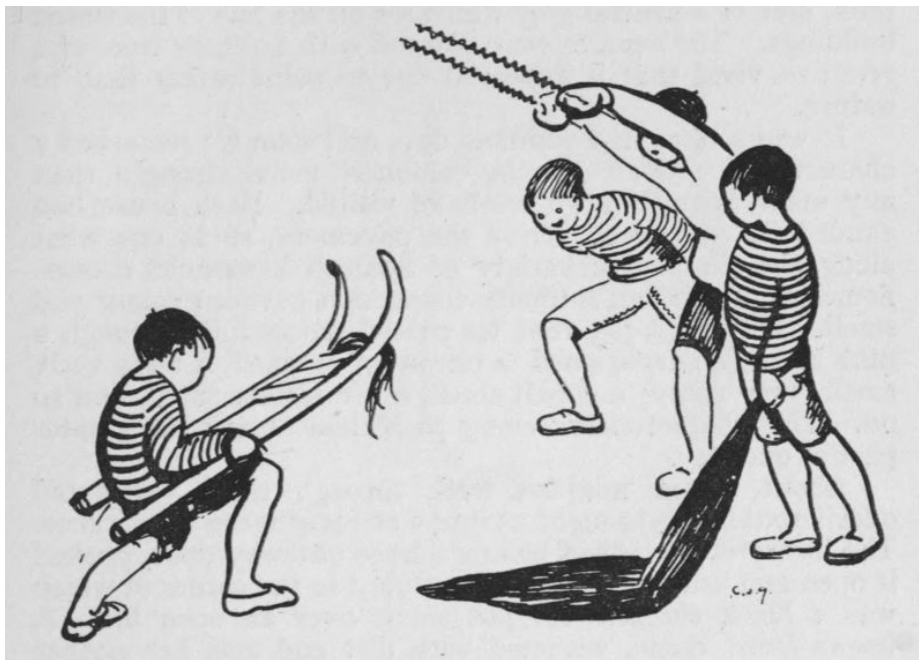
However, she was a kindly creature and succeeded in cheering our spirits, which were flagging, for we were very tired and almost ill, having barely recovered from a severe attack of influenza before leaving London. We washed off the thick dust and went downstairs into the large cool hall. The central quadrangle had once probably been open to the sky, but now was covered, five stories up, by a glass roof, beneath which sackcloth curtains stretched on wires shut out the sun. There were comfortable wicker chairs all about, and the hall was decorated with four solemn plaster busts, one in each corner. We were curious to find out who were thus honoured in a southern Spanish hotel. One was of Sorolla, a popular Valencian painter, one was of a woman, a poetess. The other two we did not know, but think they represented contemporary literature and architecture. Imagine finding in an English hotel hall busts of Brangwyn, Mrs. Meynell, Conan Doyle and Lutyens.

The hall was cool. We ordered coffee and buttered toast. But the butter was rancid, for we had crossed the geographical line, almost as important as the equator, below which butter is not, and oil must take its place.

Four children, making a lot of noise over it, were in the hall, playing a game peculiarly Spanish. The smallest boy, who always had the dirty work to do, carried flat in front of him a board, to the end of which were fixed a pair of bull's horns. He dashed these at his comrades in short straight rushes. Two of the other boys carried pieces of red cloth which they waved in front of the bull. The fourth boy carried a pair of toy banderillas, straight sticks, covered with tinted paper and pointed with a nail. As the bull rushed the "banarillero" dabbed his sticks into a piece of cork. Then they decided that the bull was to die. One of the cloak-wavers took a toy sword which he triumphantly stuck into the cork. With a moan the small boy sank on to the floor. His companions seized his heels and dragged him round the tiled floor of the hall. The game seemed to us a little tedious; later on we were to learn how like to actual bullfighting it was.

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The hotel interpreter, for whom we had inquired, now came in. He spoke in French:



"What can I do for you?"

We wished to find a gipsy guitar-player named Blas, and we had been told that the interpreter knew his house. We feared that he might be in Madrid, where he sometimes played in the Flamenco cafés; but the interpreter said that he was in Murcia, and that we could look for him at once.

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From the cool hall we stepped into the blazing sun of midday Spain, crossed an open space so dazzling that it hurt the eyes, and entered a maze of narrow, tall streets. Jan and I moved along in single file, clinging to the narrow margins of shadow which edged the houses, while the interpreter with a mere uniform cap on his head stalked imperturbably in the sunlight. Across squares we hurried as rapidly as possible to the shadow on the opposite side. The houses were orange, pink, blue or a neutral grey which set off the hue of the tinted buildings. The squares were planted with feathery trees of a green so vivid that it appeared due to paint rather than to nature.

It was a clear and windless day, and soon we remarked a characteristic which Murcia exhibited more strongly than any other Spanish town we have visited. Each house had exuded its own smell across the pavement, so as one went along one sampled a variety of Spanish household odours. Some people find an intimate connection between colour and smell. We might say that we passed successfully through a pink smell, a purple smell, a citron green smell, a terra verte smell (very nasty), a cobalt smell, a raw sienna smell, and so on. This characteristic clung to Murcia during

the greater part of our stay.

About fifteen minutes' walk through these variegated odoriferous layers brought us into a street of mean appearance. The interpreter stopped before a large gateway door, pushed it open and ushered us into a courtyard in the corner of which was a black earthenware pot astew over an open fire. A brown-faced crone, withered with dirt and age, her clothes ragged, her feet shod in burst alpagatas, asked us what had brought us there.

"Where is Blas?" said the interpreter.

With an unctuous gesture the old gipsy crone spread out her hands, and turning to a doorway shouted out some words. Gipsy women young and old came from the house. They were dark, dirty and tousled, clad in draggled greys or vermilion, many carrying brown babies astraddle on the hip. With gestures, almost Indian in subservience, they crowded about us, looking at us with ill-disguised curiosity. The interpreter repeated his question.

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"Blas," said a young, beautiful, though depressed-looking woman, "is not in the house."



"The English Señor will speak to him," commanded the interpreter. "Send him to the hotel when he comes home."

Then our friend the interpreter determined to earn a large tip, and calculating on our ignorance brought us back by the longest route, past all the principal buildings of the town; thereby quadrupling the journey through the baking streets. Our desires, however, were fixed on home. We were staggering beneath the heat. Had the interpreter but known it, his tip would have been increased by celerity; but, stung by our apathy over public monuments, he took us into a courtyard to look at some gigantic tomatoes gleaming in the shade, and ran us across the street to examine a skein of fine white catgut, dyed orange at the tips, which a workman was carrying. He explained that this was for medical operations and for fishing lines, which was a local industry.

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Lunch was ready when we got back, a prolonged and delicious lunch for those in health, but we could eat little of it. Black olives were in a dish on the table; and the fruit included large ripe figs, peaches, pears and apricots. A curious fact we had noted was that much of the fruit did not ripen properly. Either it was unripe or else had begun to rot in the centre. The sun was too strong to allow it to reach the stage of exquisite ripeness which the more temperate climate of England encourages. The waiter was dismayed by our lack of appetite. He urged us repeatedly to further gastronomic efforts, and holding dishes beneath our noses stirred up the contents with a fork. At last he made us a special salad which was not on the menu. The other occupants of the long white restaurant were all fat men who swallowed course after course in spite of the heat. We looked at them and thought: "No wonder there are so many plump people in Spain."

After coffee in the large hall, we went to our bedroom for a rest. The windows of our room looked southwards, over the muddy river. Immediately beneath was a road on which was a wayside stall of bottles and old ironwork, an ice-cream vendor, a boy roasting coffee on a stove, turning a handle round and round while the coffee beans rustled in the heated iron globe, sending up a

delicious smell to our windows. A row of covered carriages, tartanas, waited beneath the shadows of the riverside trees. All along the opposite bank were two-storied mills, and beyond them the town stretched out in a wedge of flat roofs bursting up into church towers. Green market gardens came up to the edge of the town, and covered the valley to the base of the hills with a dense growth of flat and flourishing green which one had not expected thus far south in Spain.

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We were awakened from our siesta by the spherical maid who mouthed and pantomimed that a Señor was waiting for us in the hall. Luis Garay, a young painter and lithographer to whom our friend had written about us, had come at the earliest opportunity. He was slim, sallow, almost dapper, with dark frank eyes, and we took a liking to him at once. Together we went outside the hotel and sat at a table in the open place facing the principal promenade of Murcia. The river was on the right-hand side, and on the left was a line of tall buildings, some cafés, others municipal. The heat attacked one in waves, it seemed as palpable as though it possessed substance. When we took our seats the plaza was empty because the siesta was not yet over, but after four o'clock had passed gradually the life of the town blossomed out.

The army of beggars attacked us; in monotonous undertones they moaned their woes.

"Hermanito, una limosna qui Dios se la pagara,"^[5] they whined.

To those who seemed unworthy Luis answered, "Dios le ayude."^[6]

How exquisite is the courtesy of the Spaniard even to a beggar. Our manners have not this fine habitual touch—after the international occupation of Scutari the beggars of the town had learned two English phrases; one was "G'arn," the other "Git away." It is true that under this harsh exterior the Englishman may hide a soft heart; he may be like the schoolmaster who feels the caning more poignantly than does the schoolboy; indeed many a man puts a deliberately rough exterior on to mask the flabbiness of his sentimental nature; and the Spaniard, for all his courtesy, may have the harder nature. Yet the courtesy which recognizes a common level of humanity is a precious thing. It may be that by refusing alms with respect one may be preserving in the beggar finer qualities than would be generated by giving with contempt. A Spaniard once said, "I like a beggar to say 'Hermanito, alms which God will repay.' It is naïf and simple. It has a beauty for which one willingly pays a copper. But when a beggar whines that he has eaten nothing for three days, it is offensive. It is an insult to give a man a halfpenny who has eaten nothing for three days; and one cannot afford to give him the price of a square meal; and anyhow one knows that he is lying."

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As well as the pitiful beggars there were the musical beggars. Two men came playing the guitar and laud. Another followed with a gramophone which he carried from his shoulder by a strap. Then came the barrel-organ. We had not noted its arrival. Suddenly the most appalling din broke out. Awhile ago in Paris M. Marinetti organized a futurist orchestra; one could imagine that it had been transported in miniature to Murcia. There were bangs and thumps and crashes of cymbals, and tattoos of drums, and tinkles of treble notes, and plonkings of base notes intermixed apparently without order, rhythm or tune. What a state the barrel must have been in! Once we presume that it played a tune, but now it was so decrepit that nothing as such was recognizable. It was dragged by a donkey and a cart and shepherded by a fat white dog which had been shaved, partly because of the heat, partly because of vermin. It was an indecent-looking dog, and the flesh stood out in rolls all round its joints. No sooner had this musical horror disappeared round the corner than another organ in an equal state of disrepair took its place.



A MURCIAN BEGGAR-WOMAN

"It is all right," Luis reassured us; "you have suffered the worst. There are only two in the town." [Pg 79]

A crowd of urchins carrying home-made boot-blackening boxes pestered us with offers of "Limpia botas." A man and a woman sauntered between the tables bellowing and screaming "Les numeros"; these were state lottery sellers.

Also there were sellers of local lotteries, which were promoted by the Church in aid of the disabled whom they employed to sell the tickets. Nuns, too, were amongst the beggars. There were boys selling newspapers; men selling meringues and pastry, others hawking fried almonds, very salt to excite thirst; children hunting between the legs of the tables and chairs for cast cigarette ends or straws discarded by the drinkers; a man peddling minor toilet articles—toothpicks, scent, powder, buttonhooks—and another with a basket of very odorous dried fish.

The smell of the fish banished our new-won universal brotherhood and we waved the fish vender away without courtesy. But an elegantly dressed young man sitting near accosted him and began to chaff him. But what was pretence to the dude was earnest to the salesman. He had some talent for selling and he pestered the dude for nearly half an hour, at the end of which the latter in self-defence and for the sake of peace bought a portion of the smelly commerce. Probably the fishmonger's total gain out of the transaction was a fraction of a penny. But the Spanish is not a wasteful nation. When the dude walked off home he took with him the fish wrapped in his newspaper.

At last we called the waiter by the Spanish custom of clapping the hands, paid for the drinks, and guided by Luis set out to visit the house which our friend had lent us for the summer. Habits of cleanliness were shown in the streets. Young girls were hard at work, each industriously brushing the dust from the sidewalk in front of her house, even though that sidewalk were itself of dried mud. To us it seemed that the story was being repeated of the old woman who tried to besom the tide out of her front door. [Pg 80]

Many of the householders had spread their sphere of influence even beyond the sidewalk, and had soaked their patch of road, turning the dust into viscous mud. The pavements were already beginning to be encumbered by chairs, and by groups of people sitting out in the cooling day.

The Paseo de Corveras is a one-sided street darkened by tall trees. On the other side stretch maize fields surrounding a small farm, and walled-in gardens filled with tall feathery date palms. The dates were already hanging in orange clusters beneath the sprouting heads of fronds. Luis took us to the house of Antonio Garrigos, who lived at No. 12.

Antonio was a handsome man of pure Spanish type, giving an impression of nervous vitality. He produced three keys, each of about a pound in weight and large as any key of a theatrical gaoler. The house key was of monstrous size, and he assured us that we would have to carry it with us wherever we went. Our friend's apartment at No. 26 was on the first floor and spread right across two humbler dwellings below. It was cool and roomy, filled with specimens of Spanish draperies, pottery and furniture, which he had collected during several years in Spain. At the back was a kitchen, with large earthen vessels for water, and Spanish grids for cooking on charcoal. The bed was big for one, but very small for two, so we suggested taking off the spring mattress and laying planks in its place. Antonio at once said that to-morrow he would get the planks in time for the night.

Then, feeling very tired but thoroughly pleased with our prospective house, and with the new acquaintances we had found, we walked back to the hotel, had a supper as liberal as the lunch, and went to bed

FOOTNOTES:

[5] "Little brother, alms which God Himself will repay."

[6] "God will help you."

CHAPTER IX

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MURCIA—SETTLING DOWN

By the time we left the hotel, which we did on the second day, the maid had reviewed her decision as to the state of our mentality. Receiving her tips she shook our hands warmly, asked where we were going and said that she would without fail call upon us. The tatterdemalion bootblack at the hotel door, who could never quite make up his mind whether he were bootblack or lottery-ticket seller—neglecting each business in favour of the other—helped us with our

luggage. He also on receipt of a tip inquired our future address and assured us that he would call upon us. The driver of the tartana told us that he would look us up one day to see how we were getting on; and another visit was promised by a ragged loungeur whom we called in to aid us in getting our luggage upstairs.

"Spain," we said, "seems to be a sociable country."

Don Antonio was waiting for us at his house, which was but a few doors away from our own. He introduced us to his wife, a buxom, jolly woman of about twenty-five; his sister, tall, elegant and dark, perhaps the most complete type of Spanish woman we had yet met; and his brother-in-law. Don Thomas, for such was the brother-in-law's name, was able to speak a portion of the American language, and often by his imperfect knowledge he would deepen our ignorance of what others were saying in Spanish.

Don Antonio had a small box factory. His house was two-storied, as were most of the houses in the Paseo. On the ground floor the front room, or entrada, was filled with wood, wood-working benches, and stacks of unfinished boxes; the kitchen behind was not exempt from business, for here Antonio made up his glues and pastes, while the whole top story was occupied by girls who covered the crude shells of the boxes with velvet and looking-glass and papier mâché adornments. Antonio and his wife were crowded into two small rooms, a bedroom in the front alongside of the entrada and a dining-room at the back parallel with the kitchen.

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Our planks were ready for us, but Antonio refused to be paid for them. He said that when we had finished with them he could make boxes out of them. We spent the afternoon in our flat unpacking and arranging the plank bed. The mattress was not broad enough to cover the planks which we put down, but we managed to find a padded sofa-covering which, laid alongside of the mattress, supplemented the inefficient breadth. As we had met neither mosquitoes nor net in the hotel, we left the mosquito-net in the trunk.

In the evening Luis Garay called for us. He led us through a maze of darkened streets, at one time skirting the tall, over-decorated rococo front of the cathedral, and brought us to a large doorway within which was a smaller door. Two sharp raps and the door swung wide mechanically, though a long rope tied to the latch and looping its way upstairs showed how it had been opened. Up wide white stone stairs we went, watched by an old, old man hanging over the balcony of the second floor. Luis said no word to him, nor he to Luis.

The chief keynote of Spanish interiors is whiteness. The room into which we came was white, and out of it was another white room set with dining-tables and decorated with a huge white filter. This was "Elias," where we could dine excellently for the sum of one peseta fifty centimos apiece.

Elias himself looked like a cheery monk painted by Dendy Sadler. Clad in a long white overall, he stood in the midst of his snowy tables and greeted us merrily.

Luis went away, having said good night, for he had an engagement. We ate omelet, beefsteak and fried potatoes, finishing with a plate of fruit, fixed by the multiple stare of the young men dining there. I was the only woman at Elias while we dined there, for Spanish women are home clinging folk, and even to the cafés they never go in large numbers.

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As the young men finished their meals, they went out. Each one as he passed through the door bowed and said something. It sounded like "Dobro Vetché," but "Dobro Vetché" is Serbian for good evening. We could not make out what the words were, so, as the Serbian seemed to be appropriate, we boldly answered it in return. Later on we discovered that they said "Buen Aproveche" with the first part of the sentence slurred over by habit. It means "May it do you good," and the customary sentence to say to any one who is dining. The correct answer is "Gracias."

We left Elias' very satisfied with our cheap discovery. Jan, who generally has a good head for locality, engaged to find his way back without a guide. But he turned the wrong way out of Elias' door. We wandered amongst deep darkened streets till suddenly we came out into one as narrow as the others, but laid with flat pavements, instead of rugged cobbles, and blazing with light. Through this we ran the gauntlet of Murcia. The street was crowded with hotels and cafés, both sides being lined with tables at which the evening drinkers were sitting. The street itself was filled with a flux and reflux of the youth and beauty, the "Hooventud, Bellitza and Looho,"^[7] of the town.

We came, especially I, upon them as a catastrophe. The light died out of their eyes, the smiles disappeared from their faces, mouths dropped open, fingers pointed, people grasped each other. It was similar to the moment when an elephant comes along in the village circus procession, and I was the elephant.

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During our first weeks in Murcia our appearance in the streets invariably caused excitement and shrieks of laughter among young girls and gossips. If we entered a shop the children crowded in with us to listen to our attempts at Spanish. This was not done with deliberate rudeness, but was more the result of unrestrained curiosity. This attitude was not very evident when we went for strolls with Luis: the presence of a fellow-townsmen seemed to have a calming influence. At last I found an effective weapon. With mock horror I stared at the feet and ankles of any young woman too malicious. Self-consciousness at once gripped her—almost invariably she hurried away to examine her shoes and wonder what was wrong with them.

Curiously enough we never became conscious of a case of incivility among the men. Even groups of lads at the difficult age which breeds larrikins in Australia were on the whole less offensive than in other countries. It seemed to us that if a Spanish woman were kind-hearted—and the

majority are so—she was the most kindly and charming of women, but if of a spiteful nature she took less pains to hide or curb it than do the women of more sophisticated countries.

The narrow street which we had discovered by accident was perhaps the most disconcerting part of the town, as it was full of cafés, and therefore of loungers; but we often had to go there for small necessities. There we had to go for smoked glasses because of the brilliance of the sun, for a parasol, and for a hatpin. The first two objects were easily found, but the last was difficult. Hats, even in Southern Spain, are worn only by the *crème de la crème* for great ceremonies, and the hatpins sold by the jewellers were intended for such occasions. They were decorated affairs with huge heads of complicated workmanship set with garish stones. Probably no other woman in the town wore a hat for normal use, so we gave up the search and Jan made out of hairpins something which served.

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We ran the gauntlet of the quizzing street and made our way home.

All along the streets the people had brought their chairs out of doors and were sitting on the pavements in the cool of the night. At Antonio's door we found a group of his family, almost invisible in the dark. We sat down with them. Presently Antonio said:

"I will go and fetch Don Luis, and he will play for us."

What then could be seen of Don Luis was a large nose, a check cap and a pair of gnarled hands which grasped his guitar in a capable manner. He sat down on a chair on the sidewalk and began to play.

"Curse it!" he exclaimed. "Do you know I used to play very well, but all this factory work ruins the fingers for playing. Mine are getting as stiff as if they had no joints in them."

Presently he was playing a jota and demanded that somebody should dance.

"Dance, dance!" he shouted. "Curse it! What's the good of playing if nobody dances?"

By this time most of the inhabitants of the houses near had gathered round, although almost hidden; but there were no young men. Antonio's sister danced a jota with a pretty girl. The jota is the most common of Spanish dances, as the waltz used to be with us. It has a *tempo* which fluctuates between three-four and two-four, the phrases being divided into two beats each or three bars of two beats each at the will of the player. The jota that evening appeared to be a very sedate kind of dance. When it was over the crowd urged us to dance something English. We asked Don Luis to play the jota again, and to it we danced a rather mad waltz which we had invented. The path upon which we danced was of dried mud, which is pounded into unusual shapes in the winter and dries in whatever shape it happens to be when the heat comes. It was full of lumps and holes, and the light was dim. In a moment we partially understood why Antonio's sister had been so sedate. But the brother-in-law informed us:

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"Say," he said, "my girl can dance wonderful. But 't'aint proper, in de town. Say, you see 'er in de country. Den she hop. She kick de window in wid 'er toe. Sure. Show you one day."

Murcia is a town of about 100,000 inhabitants and is the capital of its province, but it is hardly more than an overgrown village in spite of its cathedral, its bullring, its theatre and its cinema palace. Both at Avila and at Madrid they had said to us: "Aha, you are going to the town of the beautiful women!"

But the women of Murcia, with the exception of some lovely and filthy gipsies, were not unusually beautiful. They were thick-set and useful looking with muscular necks and ankles, and their eyes had a domesticated expression. Their clothes emphasized their defects. They indulged in pastel shades and frills which were used in fantastic ways. We have seen frills in spiral twisting around the frock from neck to hem, or a series of jaunty inverted frills round the hips, which gave to the wearer something of the appearance of one of those oleographs of a maiden half emerging from the calyx of a flower: or perpendicular frills which made the wearer resemble a cog-wheel.

We had ample opportunities of observing them from the windows of our house, at which we started our experimental sketches in Spain, but we had to sit back from the balcony because small crowds began to gather, and boys to shout. Antonio then said that he would take us to one of the big walled-in gardens where we could paint at our ease.

A huge gateway led into a courtyard which was completely covered by a vine pergola. The grapes hung in large bunches, though yet green. At one side of the courtyard was a low stall on which fruit and vegetables were for sale, and near an arched door a woman was washing clothes in a large basin of antique pattern. The garden was a rich mass of green. Huge trees of magnolia were covered with waxy white flowers and gave out a strong odour which scented the wide garden. Lemon trees and orange trees were ranged in rows; the lemons yellow on the trees or lying on the ground as thick as fallen apples after an autumn storm, the oranges still hard spheres of dark green. Along the edges of the paths stood up the tall palm trees with their golden clusters of unripe dates, or with their fronds tied up in a stiff spike, some mystery of palm cultivation. Fronds of palm, hacked from off the trees, lay about the ground, and we were surprised to find by experience that they possessed long, piercing and painful thorns.

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We painted for several days in this small paradise, but our conscience was accusing us. We had not come to Spain to paint gardens. One day we took our courage in our hands.

"It is market day," said we; "we will go and paint the market."

Peasant carts loaded with fruit and vegetables were crowding into the town; men clad in black cottons were dragging donkeys, upon the backs of which were panniers filled with saleable

provisions; women with umbrellas aloft against the sun carried baskets in their arms or heavy packages upon their hips. The market was spread in the sunlight behind the Hôtel Reina Victoria. Grain was for sale in broad, flat baskets, cheap cottons were on stalls; fruits—peaches, plums, and lemons—were mixed with tomatoes, berenginas, and red or green peppers. To one side of the market place was the fonda which had once been a monastery. This was for the travellers by road as the hotels were for travellers by rail. In a huge arched entrada carters and villagers were sitting at their ease. To one side was a kitchen in which could be seen large red earthen vessels which made one think of the last scene in "The Forty Thieves," and beyond the entrada was an open courtyard in which the high tilted road waggons were drawn up in rows.

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Skirting the fonda wall I found a corner which seemed secluded, and sitting down I began to paint an old woman and her fruit stall. One by one a few people gathered behind me. Blas, the gipsy musician, came up, greeted me, and added his solid presence to the spectators. A baker came out of his shop and watched. The crowd began to increase. Soon they were pressing all round, even in front, so that I could see nothing.

"I cannot paint if I cannot see," I exclaimed to Blas.

He and the baker set themselves one on each side and hustled an opening in the crowd.

"Atras, atras!" they shouted. "En la cola, en la cola."^[8]

But more and more people hurried up to see what was happening. Soon the crowd, despite the strenuous efforts of Blas and the baker, closed up again in front, and no efforts could keep an open vista.

Jan, who had been drawing in another part of the market, came up. He saw in the midst of a maelstrom of heads the extreme tip of my hat and worked his way through, to speaking distance. Brown-faced old women, with market baskets, men with turkeys hung in braces over their shoulders, young women with babies, gipsy men with tall hats and gig-whips, noisy boys, all smiling, friendly and curious, were peeping under my hat discussing the phenomenon.

We left the disappointed maelstrom, which changed its shape and followed us like a rivulet to a café, where they stood for a while gazing solemnly while we sipped iced coffee.

We then decided that sketching in the streets of Murcia was not to be thought of. Luis, to whom we confided this, said that he would find us balconies and roofs from which we could work, but we wanted to settle in some small village where we could know everybody in a day, and sketch where we liked, so Luis made arrangements to take us across the plain at the foot of the mountains to see some villages that might suit us

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FOOTNOTES:

[7] (Spelt phonetically.) These three words, meaning youth, beauty and luxury, are used in all Spanish theatre advertisements as especial attractions of the spectacle advertised.

[8] "Back, back! Get into queue, get into queue!"

CHAPTER X

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MURCIA—BLAS

Spain is the true home of the guitar. Only in Spain is the guitar—the most complete of solo instruments—heard in its true perfection. But even in Spain the cult of the guitar is dying out. Nowadays, at marriages, births or christenings the guitar is no longer inevitable, for the cheap German piano and the gramophone are ousting the national instrument. Jan had become enamoured of the guitar in Paris, some small progress he had made with the help of a friend; but one cannot get the true spirit of Spanish music at second hand. So Blas, the gipsy, was called in to give him instruction.

We had been told not to give Blas more than twenty pesetas a month, these to be full payment for a daily lesson. However, Blas proved to be more adept at bargaining than we were. He looked very Egyptian in the face, was very smart in a grey check suit, patent leather boots and straw hat, a strange contrast to the poverty of his home and the slatterns of women who were his family and relations. He came in rubbing his hands together, grinning with an expanse of strong, white teeth, and showing a sly expression in his curious eyes. He cringed to us.

He demanded two pesetas a lesson, or sixty pesetas a month. We held out that we had been told to offer him twenty. This, he answered, was impossible, quite impossible, out of the question. Some of his subserviency was immediately put into his pocket. Jan said that as he would be painting a good deal he would not want more than three lessons a week. Blas hummed and hawed and chewed the idea for a while. Then, with the air of one who is making a great concession, he said that since it was the Señor and since he appeared "muy sympatico" he would consent to take twenty-five pesetas, and that was his final offer. Jan agreed. Blas then added that he was reducing his terms solely because of the sympathetic nature of the Señor, and that he was by no means satisfied with the bargain, and that it was "muy poco." He then asked Jan if he had a guitar. Jan said that he was using the big white instrument made by Ramirez which our friend

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had left in his house. Blas answered that he possessed the brother of that instrument himself, and that it was a good one.

Only after he had gone did we realize that three lessons a week meant twelve lessons a month, and, at his original price, this would have amounted to twenty-four pesetas, and that Blas had wheedled out a peseta more than his original offer.

We do not like the bargaining system which is prevalent all over Spain, a habit from which, in spite of their stern notices, the "precio fijo" shops are not quite exempt. We are not registering this objection because Blas cozened us of a peseta; but it seems to us that the whole habit of chaffering inculcates a lack of generosity and lays a foundation of unfriendly relationships between people. No matter upon what friendly terms the bargaining is carried out, too much of an element of positive personal competition is brought in; but much bargaining is not carried on in a friendly way. It also necessitates a wholesale campaign of lying—appreciative and depreciative—on the part of both buyer and seller, and a certain amount of personal feeling on the side of the loser. Nor does the constant simulation of anger tend to make a person more pacific by habit. Curiously enough the most generous man is often the worst treated by the bargaining system. He offers a sum in excess of the real value in order to shorten the ordeal, and by doing so only excites the seller to greater cupidity. We have noted that the successful bargainer is treated with respect, while the other who cuts short the bargain by paying too much earns contempt.

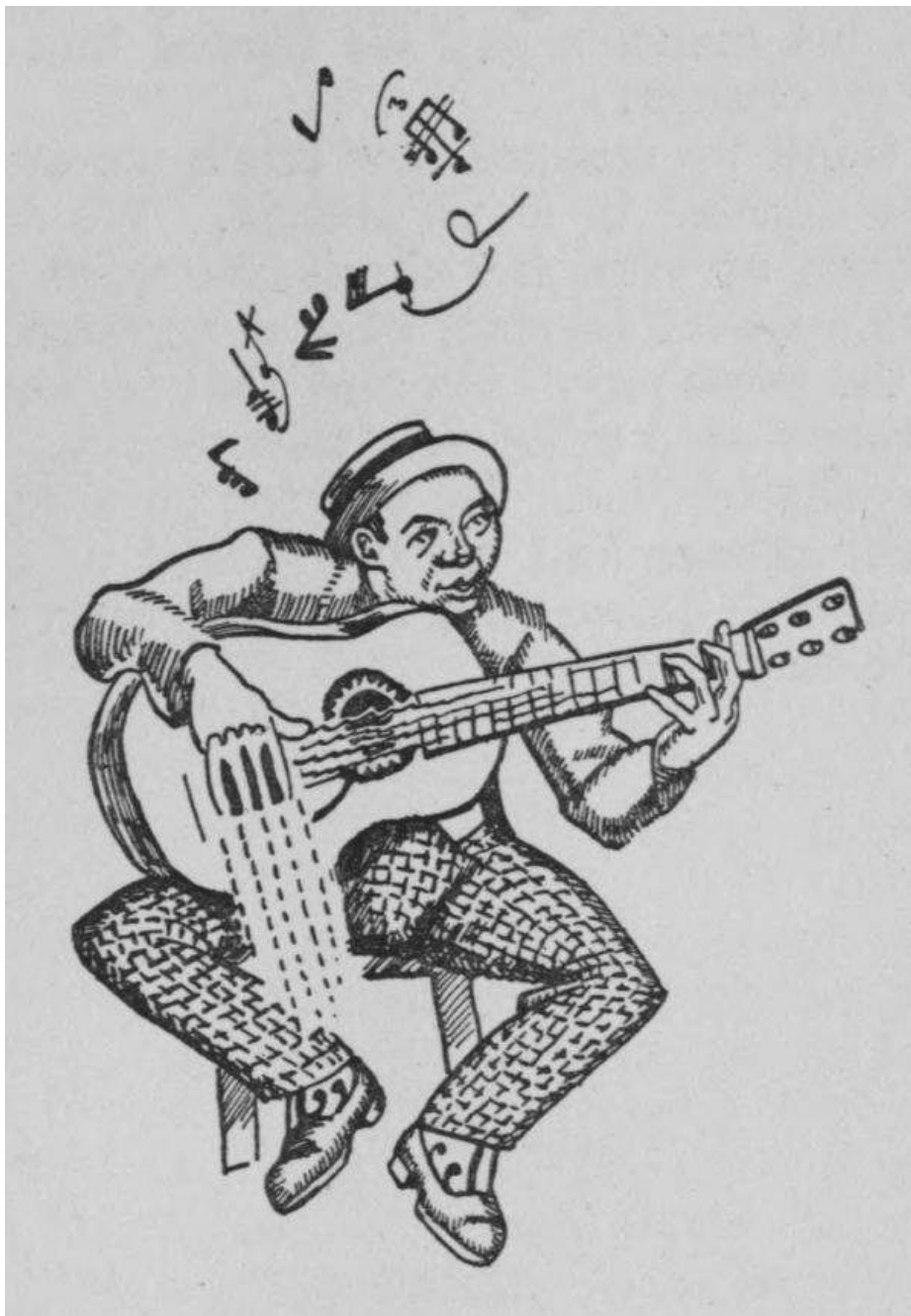
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Blas came to our house at about twelve o'clock. He was a true musician and lived—as far as we could discover—for but two things, music and drink. He had seemed to understand our Spanish well enough to get the better of the bargain, but he had forgotten this. He, like the maid, had a fixed idea that Jan could not speak Spanish. He grinned, and made strange noises, but never tried to explain anything by means of words. One cannot say that he was a good teacher. All that he could do was to play a piece over and over again, and trust you to get it by ear. Now and again he would grasp Jan's fingers and try to force them into the necessary positions. He was even incapable of playing his tunes slowly. If Jan wished to analyse a movement which came in the middle of a melody Blas had to begin at the beginning. Sometimes Jan was almost in despair, but he worked hard and in the end drew a profit out of Blas's inadequate instruction.

Spanish guitar music is unlike the music of Europe. It has a strange primitive character depending for its marvellous rhythmic properties upon a rhythm of phrase more than upon the rhythm of the bar division. The form is simple, a passage played with the back of the nails across the strings, called the "Rasgueado," a passage like a refrain or chorus, "the Paseo," in reality the introduction of the dance or melody, and the melodies proper called "Falsetas." The rhythmic structure which does not correspond to the bar division of the music is usually emphasized by drum taps made upon the sound board of the guitar with the nail of the second finger.

Blas considered it his duty to teach Jan two falsetas on each visit.

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But if he was a bad teacher, he was a fine player. Resting his chin on the great guitar as if the passage of the vibrations through his body were a source of pleasure, he crouched, looking like something between a bullfrog and a Cheshire cat.

Then with supple fingers he played, drawing delicious melodies; or rasping with his nails he beat out complex harmonies that seemed to vie with an orchestra in richness of sound.

When he came to a falseta, he would throw up his negroid eyes like a Greco saint, he would kiss his hand, and, as likely as not, spit on the floor to emphasize his delight. [Pg 94]

Before he left the house he always tried to get an advance upon his salary. After all, to him we were only *Busné* to be fleeced if possible. But when his indebtedness amounted to the whole of his month's pay we fended him off by saying that we had no change.

I do not think we realized how much we were overpaying Blas until we decided to leave Murcia. We found a house, as you will hear, at Verdolay about five miles away. When he heard that we were leaving, Blas volunteered to come out as usual for the same pay. He said that he would cheerfully walk the distance—ten miles—for that money. But we were getting rather shy of Blas. He was too persistent a borrower for our slender means and we had heard of other teachers who were cheaper. So we took this opportunity and dropped him as a pilot to the guitar

CHAPTER XI

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MURCIA—THE ALPAGATA SHOP

Save upon feast days, and with the exception of the nobility, who are few, and of the merchants, who have to be worldly commonplace, alpagatas, or string-soled shoes, are the footwear of the

Spanish nation. If you dodge the big towns you may go for days and never see a boot. The agricultural labourer, the artisan, the beggar, the soldier, the engine-driver, the porters all wear either the alpagata or, in the summer, its cooler brother, the string-soled sandal. In Spain boots are not meant for real wear, you swagger around the town in boots, and have them cleaned four or five times a day. At a café a horde of bootblacks precipitate themselves towards you to renew the lustre—possibly dimmed by the all-prevalent dust—of those foot ornaments. The young man who goes to meet his *novia* removes his alpagatas, and puts on boots highly polished and with check tops; the young maiden who is sitting out with her *novio* has placed her alpagatas in the corner and stretches high-heeled shoes across the pavement. But for all-day-up-and-down use the alpagata wins every time; the baby wears alpagatas, and its grandmother wears a larger variant; there are white alpagatas, brown alpagatas, grey alpagatas, black alpagatas for those in mourning—a very important ceremony in Spain—and there are the elaborate, almost Eastern, alpagatas, entirely of esparto grass, the making of which occupies the time when the goatherd is not yelling at his goats. Even the horsemen, the caballeros, often wear alpagatas. It is true that one cannot strap a spur on to an alpagata, but on the whole spurs are little used in Spain. If the rider wishes his horse or donkey to mend his pace, he thumps the animal with a thick cudgel at about the place where St. Dunstan kicked the devil.

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The alpagata is also a cheap form of footwear. Those which we were wearing cost three pesetas, say 2s. 9d. They should last two months. We were therefore spending 1s. 4-1/2d. a month each on shoes. A little arithmetic will show this as 16s. 6d. a year. To-day boots alone cost more than this in repairs, not counting the first cost. For children, of course, they are unrivalled, as the life of the alpagata almost fits the growth of the infant, which is spared the torture one remembers in childhood of boots which were too good to throw away and yet too small to wear with ease. But to taste the full romantic flavour of the alpagata, it should have been bought in the true alpagata shop. If you are in Spain don't go to the boot-shop. It does sell alpagatas, but it ought not to do so. In Spain the boot-seller should be classed with the jeweller. He sells ornaments. The boot merchant who sells alpagatas in Spain is as bad as the jeweller here who sells umbrellas. Go to the shop which sells things for the road, for that picturesque, coloured, moving life of Spain. The doorway of this fascinating shop is piled up with bales of a rough cloth of an exquisite hyacinthine blue, or of a strange yellow, which is seen to perfection only in the alpagata shop or in El Greco's pictures. This cloth is used for lining horse-collars and saddles. Above these beautiful bales are collars of white leather, heavy with small cone-shaped bells of copper, for the goats, larger collars of brown leather, either with small bells in rows, like a lady's pearl collar, or with one large bell pendant, for the oxen. Within are large coronet-shaped semicircles of leather and coloured woolwork, red, yellow, black, white, for the oxen's foreheads, long ribbons of coloured woolwork for the donkeys' harness, and fringes of brightly coloured wool netting, ending in tassels, like that which decorated the under edge of our grandmothers' sofas, to hang across the donkey's chest or down his nose. Muzzles for goats and for donkeys are here too. There is harness also in the shop, Gargantuan-looking harness studded with nails, so broad in its facets of leather that when the horse has his face inside it he looks not unlike an ancient knight in his armour. Only his eyes and his mouth are visible, and often indeed not the latter, for it may be guarded by a piece of leather work not unlike the tongue of a brogue shoe.

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Talking of shoes brings us back to the alpagata. A man will be working at a table like a butcher's block. Deftly he cuts the rope, bending it around an iron peg into the shape of the sole, then with a long awl he pierces it through and through, sewing it with great rapidity, and almost hey presto! as it were, a pair of soles are finished. Women who sit almost on the edge of the street, chattering and gossiping—often with the passers-by—are making the uppers of stout canvas. They spring from work to serve you with a gracious kindness, and seeing that you are English they probably with the same gracious kindness clap an extra fifty centimos on to the price. If only we had such an alpagata shop in London what a rush there would be to purchase.

Your old alpagatas you leave behind you. What happens to them is to us a mystery. Old boots are the nuisance of the London dust heaps, the terror of the errant mongrel. Yorick, who, Sam Weller assures us, is the only person who has ever seen a dead donkey, may also in his travels have seen an extinct alpagata, but his "Sentimental Journey" is unfinished and we shall never know

CHAPTER XII

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MURCIA—BRAVO TORO

Along cool colonnades of raw-coloured brick, up a staircase arched with concrete, and out through a sort of concrete culvert which spouted humanity, we came into the huge round amphitheatre of the bullring. Owing to Spanish dilatoriness, we were later than we had intended, and in consequence were unable to get seats within the coveted shadow which lay over half the great enclosure; but, thank goodness, the sky was mottled with clouds which tempered both the heat and the glare of the Spanish afternoon. We were in the cheapest seats, having disdained to go skywards into the boxes, for we had come to taste the full flavour of an average bullfight as a popular spectacle, and we wished it as pure as possible. So we had bought purple tickets for two pesetas and a white one for me at half price; at the same time repelling the persistence of a feminine hawker, who pressed upon us large flabby looking paper bags of mysterious content which we imagined to be some form of refreshment. The seats of the bullring were of flat stone

rising tier upon tier, and we chose our places low down to get a good view, yet as near as possible to the slowly creeping shadow; only one row of stone seats and two rows of chairs of iron lattice separated us from the arena itself. The chairs were empty, so I asked Luis if they were reserved for some special purpose. "No," he answered, "but the bull may leap out of the ring." Those chairs would entangle him, but it is uncomfortable if you happen to be sitting there, so they are not very popular." As the edge of the arena was guarded by a palisade of stout planking about five feet high, through which were cut narrow gaps—bolt-holes—for the toreadors, and the seats were separated from this palisade by a passage some six feet wide, the lowest seats being set some ten feet above the floor, I felt that the risk of finding an enraged bull in one's lap was rather remote.

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The culverts spouted Spanish humanity: soldiers in greenish khaki; women in black, white or colours dominated by a very popular pink; peasants in blue blouses and sandals; bourgeoisie in straw hats and drill; youths in caps of exaggerated English cut. Immediately below us two small children, mothered by a third aged about eleven, all three exceedingly unkempt, rather dirty, and possibly verminous, took their seats, and, recognizing that I was a stranger, advised me in hoarse whispers all through the progress of the spectacle. In spite of her obvious poverty the eldest girl wore a large tortoise-shell comb of elaborate pattern in a carefully arranged *coiffure*. Numberless children seemed to have attended the spectacle thus, as the small Londoners go to the cinema. At this moment the ring itself was full of them, some playing football, a game very popular—there is even a Spanish periodical called *Free-Kick*—others giving imitation exhibitions of bullfighting, more or less like that played by the children in the hotel. When the imitation bull, stabbed to death, was dragged around the ring, the real spectators cheered loudly. We wondered what the bull's mother would say about the state of his pants.

This was no Mantilla day, nor day of fiesta. It was just an ordinary Sunday afternoon diversion in this provincial town. We took our first dose of bullfight in this place for a reason. Essentially a popular sport should be judged as a sport of the people: not by its highest exponents, but by its average. An intelligent foreigner would not get the truest impression of what cricket means to England at Lord's or at the Oval; but on some village green at an inter-parochial contest.

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The horrors of bullfighting began with a band, the age of the bandsmen varying between fourteen and seventy years. The band marched around the ring playing music as out of tune as the new age is with the old. The ring emptied of children, and two horsemen superbly mounted dashed across the arena to demand from the President the key of the bull-pen. This was followed by a general parade of the toreros. Alas, for romance! Their gilt was somewhat tarnished, most of their cloaks worn and faded; usually the only part of the costume which seemed to have retained its original brilliance was the coloured seat of the tight trousers, which I suppose comes in for very little wear and tear. The picadors with their nail-headed lances seemed veritable Don Quixotes on their more than Rosinante steeds: poor beasts doomed to the knackers anyhow. The procession ended with two cart-horses and a yoke destined to drag the slaughtered bulls from the ring.

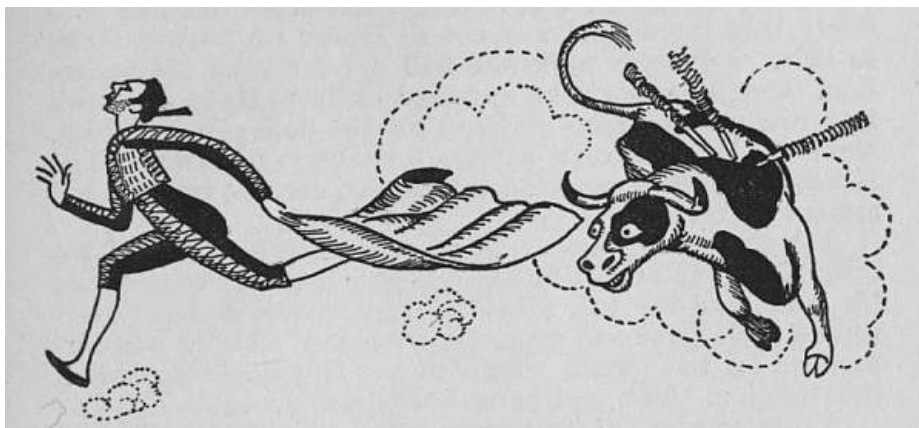
There was a pause. Luis said in a low murmur:

"Doesn't your heart beat? Isn't this moment exciting?"

He spoke truly. Around the huge oval all eyes were concentrated on the red door of the bull-pen: the very air seemed rarefied and electric. For me, I think this was the most tense moment of the day: that moment before anything had happened. A bugle call cut the silence. The red door swung open and with a peculiar rolling gallop the bull dashed into the arena.

"Now," I thought, "this terrible bullfight, about which so much has been written, so much discussed, has indeed begun."

The bullfights of our imagination are spectacles of sun and colour—of madness stained with cruelty; the cruelty perhaps partly condoned by the fierceness of the bull, by a sort of wild frenzy of sport which seems in some part to excuse the murderous instinct of man.



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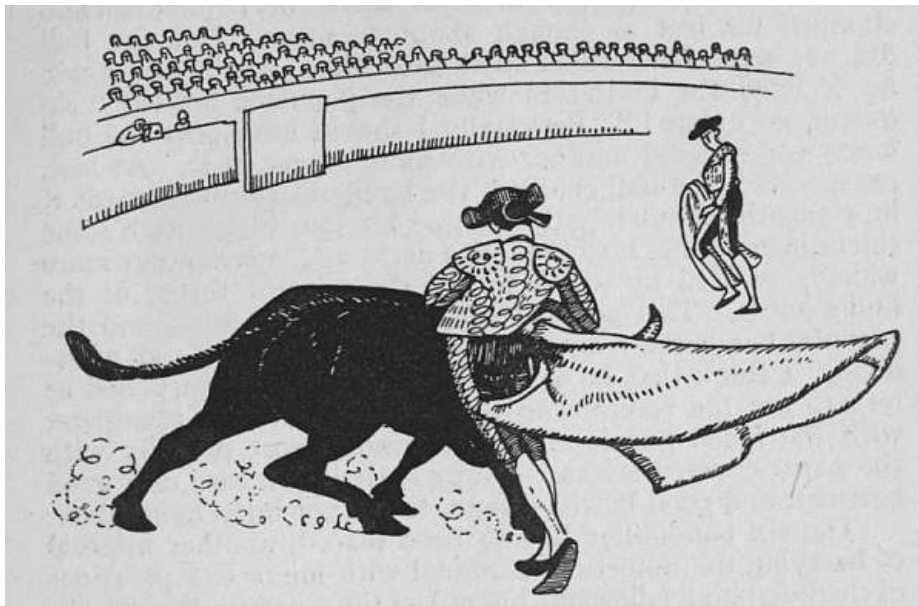
The bull, a coloured rosette nailed to its shoulder, reached the centre of the ring, and then, for me, half the anticipated interest of the fight vanished. We had expected a wild and furious gallop around the arena; a bull lusting to kill or be killed; mad charges at the toreros, who would elude it with quick baffling passes of the cloaks, wild dashes at the unfortunate horses, the riders of which would at least make some pretence of manoeuvring before the furious bull was allowed to

fling horse and rider into the air. But no! The bull slowed up, halted and looked to this side and that. It was obviously perplexed. One could almost imagine a crease of puzzlement between its eyes. What was all this; where the sierras of its youth; into what strange place had it come? And now began a taunting of the unwilling bull. The toreros flapped their faded cloaks at it, but whenever the bull was tempted to charge the man ran for safety and crammed himself through one of the bolt-holes in the palisade—once a torero scampering for life reached an opening at the same instant as a companion. For a moment there was a flurry, but both men contrived to push through before the bull was able to reach them. The first impression of the fight was of a certain power and some magnificence on the part of the bull, and of degradation on the part of the toreros—one thought of the shorn Sampson taunted by the Philistines. In this contest the men seemed somehow ignoble in comparison with the animals. The next act of the drama made this feeling no better. The picador was led out on his blindfolded and skeleton-like steed by a little man in a red shirt, who from behind the horse's head held out, like a policeman regulating the traffic, a protesting hand at the bull, as if to imply that the animal was not to charge till he was ready to bolt. For some while the bull did not take the invitation, though whenever he appeared likely to do so the small man dropped the reins and ran for the paling, from which, however, he took care never to be very far away. The picador himself is not in great danger, for his trousers are armour plated.

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By this time the audience was shouting out: "No quiere!"^[9] but at last the bull charged, the picador thrust his lance, and the bull with a great thrust of its head overturned both horse and man. Immediately the bull was surrounded by the toreros who with flapping cloaks distracted its attention. Man and horse were lifted up again.

Large numbers of Spaniards do not like bullfighting, but a great many Spaniards who do not in principle object to bullfighting do object to the horse-slaughter. One, cutting to the roots of the truth, said it was "not æsthetic." He was right. There should be a strong sense of the æsthetic in sport—it is a thing more subtle than mere "fair play," and when this sense of the æsthetic is ignored the sport becomes brutality. This horse-slaughter more than oversteps the line of the æsthetic, so for us did the bolt-holes provided for the toreros. For us bullfighting would begin to be a serious sport if the men and the bull stood on the same conditions.



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One picador, who by means of his lance kept the bull off from his horse, received a round of well-earned applause. The bugle sounded once more and the picadors were led out of the ring. There followed another rather dull interval of cloak-flapping. One of the matadors, however, gave an exhibition of passes which made the bull charge repeatedly within a foot or so of the man's body, during which the torero did not move his feet. When the bull, baffled and panting with exhaustion at his fruitless tosses, paused, the torero went upon one knee before the animal. The spectators shrieked applause and flung their hats into the ring. But this exhibition was very different from the usual cloak-flapping followed by a scamper for the bolt-hole: nor, indeed, was it shown often.

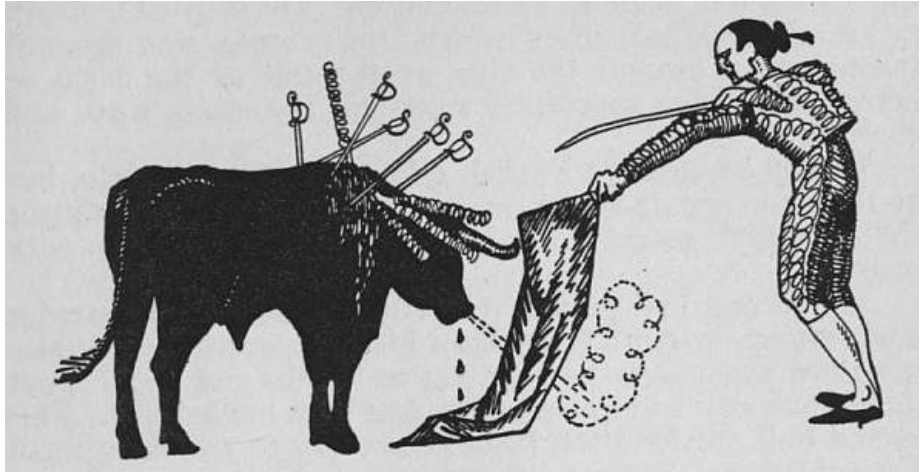
A torero who had carried an exceedingly faded violet cloak, and who had been perhaps most hasty in his dashes for the safety gaps, now discarded his cloak, and waving a pair of pink banderillas stepped into the centre of the ring. Like a foreigner at cricket we naturally missed much of the subtlety, but it was obvious that there were certain conditions under which the banderillero would meet the bull and others under which he would not. When the toreador seemed to think the bull in a good position, he waved his banderillas and stamped his feet as though about to fence. But the bull did not want banderillas stuck into him. Again and again he declined the invitation while the populace howled "No quiere, no quiere!" Personally I should have sent the bull home and ordered another with more ginger in it. At last, exasperated, the bull charged, the banderillero ran towards it in a slightly circular path, planted his two sticks, each some thirty inches long, into the bull's neck, and, curving out more widely, avoided by a few inches the upward thrust of the bull's horns. This piece of work looked dangerous, and the pay of a banderillero amounts to between £3 and £4 an afternoon. I think that he earns his money. What surprised us was to see the torero who had appeared such a scamperer with the faded purple

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cloak performing most pluckily with the paper-covered sticks. I suppose it is the case of a good batsman and good bowler—the arts are not interchangeable.

The six banderillas having been placed, another interval of harrying the unfortunate animal with minor exasperations of cloak-flapping followed: but at last the espatero, the swordsman, and the matador prepared to give the death stroke. Here again in first-class bullfighting probably the whole exhibition is one of supreme skill. We expected a certain number of showy passes with the scarlet flag, the matador keeping the bull circling about him—"wearing the bull as a waist-belt," as the saying is in Spain. Then a pause, a sudden thrust with the sword—and, with a groan, the bull is dead. It was not so. The espatero walked about flapping the cloak, at which sometimes the bull did charge, but more often did not. Several times the espatero had to run into a bolt-hole. The bull showed strong desires to go home: it went to the side of the ring and looked at the door from whence it had emerged, while more venturesome members of the audience leaned over the palisade and tried to snatch out a banderilla as a souvenir. The toreador chivied the bull round the ring, trying to get it face foremost. However, when he succeeded in this he did not seem satisfied, for though the people yelled: "Ahora! Ahora!"^[10] the matador only flapped his cloak.

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"He is rather a nervous espatero," said Luis, "so, when he does prepare to kill, look out. Sometimes the sword flies. Not very long ago it landed in the audience and killed a spectator." At last, however, the bull, tongue hanging out, foam dripping from its mouth, blood streaming from the lance and banderilla wounds in the shoulders, faced the matador with half lowered and sullen head. The matador, taking up the position of a man about to throw a javelin, aimed his sword, which was curiously curved in the blade,

and with quick steps ran in, thrust, and side-stepped. The bull, taken by surprise, could not bring its weight into action rapidly enough, the upward tossing horns missed the man by inches: the bull rushed forward at another torero who had taken position in line to attract the animal's attention. The matador had made no master stroke, the sword stood eighteen inches out of the bull's shoulder. The bull showed no signs of death, so the matador went away to procure another sword. Finally the bull, stabbed by four swords, was worried to death rather than killed, after which the corpse was dragged triumphantly around the ring at the tail of the team of horses, while the spectators stood on the stone seats and cheered.

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It may be that we English take our pleasures sadly, but at that moment it struck me that at an ordinary bullfight the Spaniard seems to take rather dull pleasures with ecstasy.

The second bull proved more lively, the second matador more expert, or more lucky than his confrère; but here also the show seemed to partake rather of the nature of what should properly be termed bull-baiting than bullfighting. This second bull provided the thrill of the day to the three small dirty children. With one thrust of its horn it killed a horse. The small boy (aged six or seven) turned to me with eyes sparkling with pleasure.

"Did you see that?" he exclaimed. "One thrust only."

After the death of this bull came the Interval.

"Look up the numbers printed on your tickets," said Luis.

Having found the papers, I raised my head and to my amazement saw, in the centre of the arena, a donkey, two young calves and a sewing-machine.

"Good heavens!" I exclaimed. "What are those?"

"They are the prizes of the tombola," explained Luis; "you or the Señor may win one."

The lots were drawn out of a large hat-box, and the numbers displayed on a blackboard. The donkey fell to a small boy, the calves to a peasant. But for some while the sewing-machine, forlorn and incongruous, stood in the centre of the bloodthirsty arena awaiting a claimant. Attention was finally concentrated upon a point high up amongst the cheap seats, to the right of the President's box. Shouting, persuasion, hand-clapping and arm-waving ensued, and at last the crowd squeezed out a small, dark woman, blushing and giggling behind her fan, accompanied by husband, husband's friend and six-year-old son. The sewing-machine was escorted out of the same door through which the dead bulls had been dragged.

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Then the bullfight began again. The third bull, a lusty black, was the most willing of all. He did

charge, he leapt high in his endeavours to kill those phantom cloaks. After all the necessary banderillas had been placed, there followed an incident. A boy of about sixteen years leapt the barrier and ran across the ring, hastily as he ran unwrapping something from a covering of newspaper. There was a sudden hum of excited voices from the spectators.

"Ei!" cried Luis. "An amateur!"

The boy reached the President's box, the unwrapped objects being a pair of dirty banderillas. Bowing to the President he craved permission to plant his banderillas in the bull. But, alas for youthful aspirations, permission was not given. The boy clambered sadly over the palisade to hide himself in the audience.

Unfortunately this bull, the bravest of the four, fell to the lot of the nervous matador. Death was a very lengthy operation, during the progress of which the bull knocked down the bullfighter. For a moment we wondered if the bull were going to take its revenge, but flapping cloaks instantly distracted it. Meanwhile, between the forelegs of the bull the matador lay very still, shielding his head with his arms. The nervous matador, however, went on with his task, using three swords before it was completed.

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The matador of the fourth bull made an exceedingly bad thrust. The populace howled insults at him, flinging at the same time those paper bags which we had seen on sale near the ticket-office. They contained no refreshment, nor material for bombarding unsuccessful matadors, but were stuffed with horsehair to soften the stone seats. By this time we wished we had inquired more about them, for the stone had proved anything but soft. The fourth bull dead, the bullfight was over.

"Come and see the toreros," said Luis.

So with the outflowing press we repassed into the culvert, down the stairs and along the corridors of brick, till we reached a window or grille, by staring through which we could see the "heroes of Spain" clambering into an ordinary station bus, in which they sat, stiff, cramped, dignified and unsmiling, conscious of their importance.

We returned with the returning crowds along the roads deep in dust, back to the centre of the town where there were cooling drinks and seats softer than those stone benches. While we were sitting thus, revelling in varied positions and summing up our first impressions, a large box cart of lattice work passed by. Within the cart were hung great joints of meat which swung to and fro as the cart bumped over the uneven road.

"There," said Luis, "go the bulls. They will be sold to-morrow in the market. The meat is cheap because it is rather tough."

This incident, because it seemed to contain a note of irony, because it had in it something sardonic and something callous, seemed to us a fitting termination to the spectacle which we had witnessed

FOOTNOTES:

[9] "He doesn't want to fight."

[10] "Now! Now!"

CHAPTER XIII

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AN EXCURSION

Murcia was very hot, very dusty and very sultry. We did not mind mere heat—though Spanish midsummer heat was not the best of pick-me-ups for the influenza—dust we could outlive, but the sultriness of the Murcian valley was beyond our physique. This flat valley, which is ten miles wide between abrupt mountains, is irrigated over the whole of its breadth and is one of the richest agricultural parts of Spain. The evaporation of the water makes the heat of Murcia damp; the summer in addition was cloudy, and the sun shining on to the clouds seemed to cook the air enclosed in the valley until the atmosphere resembled that of a glass-house for orchids. We wished to leave Murcia in spite of an affection which was growing in us for the town.

Luis met us at one o'clock on the terrace of the Reina Victoria. We had *café au lait* while waiting for the tartana. Luis said that the milk in the coffee was not good: he deduced preservatives. But the lean waiter stood loyally by his hotel.

"The milk is excellent, I assure you, Señor," he said. "My stomach is excessively delicate; the slightest thing and it is ... I assure you that I drink pints of this milk in this hotel. In fact my stomach is so delicado that I am a connoisseur in milk, es vero.^[11] If the milk were bad this fatality would happen to me."

He gave a dumb-crambo exhibition of the results of bad milk on his delicate digestion; it needed no words.

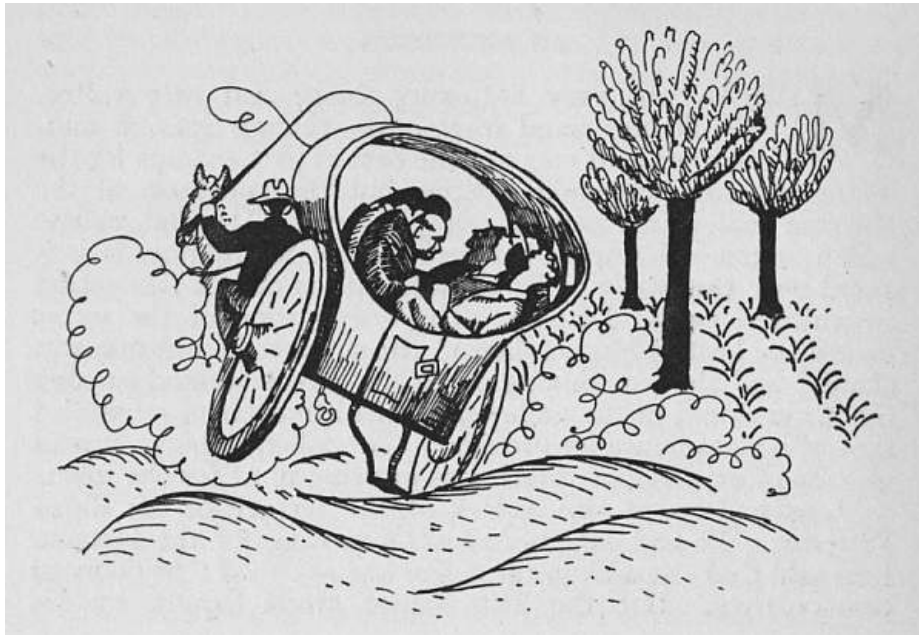
With deference he then proposed a new *café au lait*, which Luis sipped with a judicial but

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unconvinced manner.

The tartana was a tight fit. It is about as large as a governess-cart inside, and we were six. Luis, Jan and myself, a monk in brown, a thin pale Señor who had long eyelashes and many rings, and another passenger, a world type, the result of overwork and underpay, neither smart nor slovenly, with a rough manner covering a kindly nature.

THE DRIVE



We discovered why tartanas have bulging hoods. The vehicles roll and rock so much over the bad roads that it is necessary to make room for the passengers' heads to jerk backwards. Otherwise cerebral concussion would be the invariable result. [Pg 111]

Luis (to the little monk): "Excuse me, but are not your clothes very hot?"

The Monk (spreading out his hands): "They are hot, but nevertheless they keep out the sun."

We come out of the town into the gardens. There are flat fields of cultivation spotted with mulberry trees, the trunks of which seem vivid purple in the afternoon light.

I make a remark in Spanish. (Jan was still at the stage of appreciative listener).

The Clerkly Man: "Señora, your Spanish is good for a stranger—you can pronounce the Spanish J, which is difficult for foreigners."

I: "I have learned that from speaking German; it is rather like the German *ch*."

A discussion on idioms at once begins. The Spaniard, though he speaks foreign languages badly, has an inextinguishable interest in the subject of tongues. If ever you are bored in Spanish company start an argument about languages. After the discussion has been going on for some while the pale Señor says:

"Nevertheless it is sad that the Catalans wish to root Castilian out of their country."

Luis (with some heat): "Well! why should they not? They are the hardest working and the most valuable people of Spain. Why should not they do as they like? Why should everybody not do as he likes if he hurts nobody else?"

The pale Señor (with fridity): "But that is Bolshevism."

Luis (with increasing heat): "If that is Bolshevism then I do not mind being a Bolshevik."

Conversation is at an impasse. The carriage flings us to and fro for a while.

A motor-car passes us. The dust which is about six inches deep on the road is whirled up in a cloud so thick that we have to halt for a few minutes to allow it to settle, or we might have driven into the deep water-channels which edge each side of the road. [Pg 112]

Luis (to the Clerkly Man): "My friends want to live for a while out in the mountains. Do you by any chance know of a house?"

The Clerkly Man: "I am living with my family in the monastery of Fuen Santa. There is a guest house there and habitations are to let. I will find out all about them if you wish."

The pale little Señor (who has apparently forgotten all about Bolshevism): "There are one or two houses in my village of Verdolay. The proprietor is a friend of mine. I will inquire for you about it."

The tartana stops.

In front of a solitary house is a small wooden frame on which a few strips of dusty meat are hung. The driver buys some of this from the woman who comes out of the house.

The Driver (confidentially to the passengers): "Better get a bit of meat while you have the chance."

Nobody follows his example. The carriage bumps on.

The sun is now shining through the thin dust-laden trees which edge the road: they appear as flames of pale gold.

We mount over a bridge. A broad deep but waterless canal stretches away to right and left.

The little Señor: "We are now nearing Verdolay. It is still too hot for you to go hunting for a house. I shall be delighted if you will take possession of my house until the sun is cooler."

Luis: "Señor, I thank you very much, but we cannot do it."

The little Señor: "I insist—you will come?"

Luis: "Thank you very much."

This is Spanish courtesy. A single invitation is for politeness only, like the last piece of bread and butter left for Miss Manners. A second invitation means that it is really offered. [Pg 113]

We pass a group of houses the colour of baked bread; the most arid-looking spot we have seen as yet. The gardens come to an abrupt end. The road rises slightly, and grey-green olive foliage over gnarled trunks throw a thin lacework of shadow on the dry earth.

The tartana stops.

We all get out.

The clerkly man goes east; the priest south; we, led by the pale Señor, west.

We were at the entrance of a village. It spread over a mound at the foot of the higher hills. It was like a pyramid with toy houses coloured yellow, orange, green and grey upon the ledges, and all around trees like those from a child's play box. The village was fronted by a line of houses painted a deep crimson-vermilion. An iron windmill for pumping water was placed on the extreme point of the mound.

The little Señor showed us through the village to his house and left us in the entrada, while he went to get beer. The room was decorated with wooden "art-nouveau" chairs, oleographs and an extremely bad oil painting of a bull with banderillas shedding much blood. On a cane table was a gramophone.

The little Señor had shut a door made on the system of a Venetian blind to keep out the sun, and presently the lattice-work was crowded with children trying to peer in at us.

The Señor returned preceded by a large English setter. He drew the corks of the beer and asked us to make ourselves at home.

"The house and all that is in it is at your service," he said in the phrase of Spanish courtesy.

I was patting the dog.

"That dog," said the little Señor, "is a very valuable dog. It is unique in the province and possibly is unique in the south of Spain. It has a romantic history. It is bred by the monks in high Switzerland, and when the snow is deep on the mountains it goes out to hunt for lost travellers. It is the only specimen of a San Bernar' in the south of Spain." [Pg 114]

We looked at the setter; and drank some more beer.

"That bull," went on the Señor, pointing to the picture, "was painted by one of the best bull painters in Spain."

We looked at the picture and again took refuge in beer. Luis, who did not know about setters, but did know about pictures, drank in sympathy.

The Señor wound up his gramophone.

"Do you know 'Frou-Frou'?" he inquired.

"'Frou-Frou'?" we said.

"Yes, the French Comic Opera."

"But," said Luis, "have you not by chance a disc of Spanish music? You see," he added as excuse, "the Señors are foreign. It interests them to hear the national music, the Flamenco."

The little Señor pursed his lips.

"But," he said, "it is so vulgar. Nobody wants to hear that."

He possessed, however, a disc or two which he turned on, to our delight. But before we left him he insisted that we should sit through his favourite "Frou-Frou."

We went away. The strains of "Frou-Frou" which the little Señor had turned on once more followed us on the still air. The setter-St. Bernard walked with us to the beginning of the hill, from whence he turned sedately homewards.

We strode upwards—past cottages of all colours, past a large rambling monastery, which, perched on the far side of the Verdolay hill, very cubic in shape, is as romantic as it is possible for a building to be; past a watercourse, above which were dwellings hollowed out of the soft rock of the mountain-side, cave dwellings, and out on to the side of the mountains lying between Murcia [Pg 115]

and Carthagena. From here we could appreciate the width, flatness and verdure of the Murcian valley in the midst of which was the town, the campanile of the cathedral soaring into the air.

Here we had our first experience of a Spanish country walk. We were all wearing alpagatas, the canvas sides of which are not exceedingly thick. The dried herbage of the hills was intermingled with all manner of prickly weeds. The vegetation protects itself in this way from being eaten by anything less leather-tongued than a goat. The results are uncomfortable for the walker. The little hairlike spines pierce the shoes and break off, remaining as a continual irritant until the shoe is removed. Even then the spines, almost microscopic in size and almost flesh colour, are often difficult to find. The same uncomfortable fate is in wait for the unwary stranger who sits down without having carefully explored the place where he is going to seat himself. Indeed the fate is worse, because the thorns thus encountered cannot with decency be extracted in a public place and the victim is condemned to a lot similar to that of the naughty schoolboy.

The sun poured the full of its summer power on to the hill-side, which reflected both heat and light with overpowering intensity. Though it was almost four o'clock in the afternoon we felt that our salamandrine limits were being put to a test. A broad white road, mounting up the hill, crossed our path and we turned into it.

"We are going to the monastery of La Luz," said Luis. "I have heard that they sometimes take visitors for short periods. It would be interesting for you to spend a fortnight in a monastery."



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The road climbed up beneath high black cliffs. The other side of the valley was coloured orange and red upon which the sun was shining with all its force. The side of the hill was dotted with aloes, some having upright flower stems fifteen feet high in the air, around the flowers of which the bees were swarming in harmonious halos. A stately stone pine overshadowed a medley of old buildings which sprang from the top of a precipice out of which sprouted the weird branches of the prickly pear cactus. The road circled round the foot of this cliff, and still mounted till, making a full semicircle, it brought us on to a platform. On one side of the flat space was an open cistern into which led a pipe. From the pipe a deliberate trickle of water fell. Two women and two men sat about this pipe slowly filling their amphoras of Grecian form, while donkeys waited patiently in the background bearing panniers for the water-vessels on their backs. On the other side of the platform the monastery showed a high wall with a large gate leading into a courtyard from which arose the face of the church, painted a Cambridge blue.

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We could find no bell. The water-carriers shouted instructions to us. The bell clanged with an empty sound, as though echoing through miles of untenanted corridors. We rang again. No response. We rang three or four times before we heard the sound of shuffling steps. A peep-hole, shaped like a cross, opened and an eye examined us. The door swung slowly open, revealing a small obsequious man dressed in peasant costume. Through passages we came into a cloister which was built around a small courtyard full of flowers. In the middle of the courtyard was a high statue of the Virgin. It was framed and almost hidden by a creeper which offered to it a tribute of gorgeous purple bell-shaped flowers. At the foot of the figure was stretched a large cat. A strange thought came to me that the cat did not bother itself about the Virgin other than as something which threw a grateful shadow.

The apologetic little peasant monk, who had let us in was evidently an underling. He murmured something about Brother Juan and went away.

Brother Juan came groaning along the corridor with rheumatic steps. He had a tiny head and large-framed body; dressed in peasant's clothes, white shirt, black cummerbund, short knee

trousers, long white drawers to the ankle and sandals on bare feet. He was rather like a dear old gardener who has been in the family for years, and who has supported the teasings of generations of children. Age and a sweet nature had carved his face with horizontal wrinkles of kindness; rheumatism and pain had crossed these with downward seams of depression.

Luis introduced the object of our visit. Brother Juan doubtfully shook his head. They did have visitors, yes, but those were always well-known to the monastery. Introductions would be necessary. But, in any circumstance, the Father Superior was in Murcia at the moment, and nothing could be done without him.

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I, made conceited by the praise of the clerkly man in the carriage, then tried to charm Brother Juan by a series of apposite remarks in my most careful Spanish.

Brother Juan scratched his head.

"Doubtless, what the Señora says is very interesting." He raised his hands and eyes in pantomimed dismay. "But, oh, these languages! I can't understand a word!"

Brother Juan, groaning with rheumatism, led us to the gate. By some means an old woman dressed in black had joined us. As Juan was taking his leave of us his eyes suddenly lit up with a merry twinkle.

"If you will excuse me," he said to Luis, "it would be better, when you see the Father Superior, if the woman would dress rather less indecently. You see, we are monks and are not used to it."

We went down the hill accompanied by the old woman in black, who was chuckling at Brother Juan's last remark.

"If only the woman would ... he ... he ... we are monks and aren't used to it ... ho ... ho."

I was surprised. It had not seemed to me that I was indecent. I was wearing an ordinary English midsummer walking dress. Luis said:

"I think it was the opening at your neck that worried him. You see we haven't really taken up the open neck in Murcia as yet."

Directed by the old woman, we scrambled down steep paths to the bottom of the orange-coloured ravine, and up the other side past the aloes; we went through an olive grove, and again up a steep zigzag road to the second monastery. Here lived the clerkly man, but we did not know his name. This monastery began with a terra-cotta-coloured Gothic church with three tall towers and a cupola of blue glazed tiles, and rambled on up the ridge of a long hill to end in a tall building which looked like an overgrown Turkish bath. A grey building with a huge entrance door was pointed out as the *pension* of the monastery. We wandered into a large courtyard and to us came a fat priest wearing a biretta. He was courteous but firm.

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"We have no room," he said.

But we remembered that the clerkly one had said that there was room. I suppose again my dress was the real objection.

We went back towards the village of the little Señor. On our way we again crossed the dusty road which led to La Luz. A carriage was driving along it. In the carriage were two priests. Luis said:

"There probably goes the Father Superior. Shall we ask him now?"

After a moment's hesitation we turned and strode up the hill. We had to walk fast to catch the carriage, but at last the driver, perceiving that we were following him, halted.

"No," said one of the priests, "we are not the Superior of La Luz. Indeed, at this moment he is behind you. There."

He pointed out an old man in the costume of a peasant, who, bent with age, was toiling up the hill aided by his staff. The Father Superior was still some distance away. Hastily, with a brooch, we pinned my blouse up close around my throat.

The Father Superior had the face of one designed to be an ascetic, but his expression was inscrutable. He was very suave. He felt honoured, he said, by the request of the Señors, but there was no room. Now Brother Juan had said that there was room.

Luis tried to urge the matter: he instanced our Red Cross work in Serbia. The Father Superior said it was very praiseworthy of us, but ... and bowing unfelt regrets he left us.

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We went back to our little Señor.

He found for us a woman with the usual pound's weight of keys and conducted us to two bright red houses. Both were one story in height, but one was for three months' tenancy only. We decided to take the other. It was occupied to its limits by a Spanish family, so we took but the most cursory of glances into it. Then, our business settled, we said au revoir to the little Señor, who in Spanish fashion offered us his services whenever they should be needed.

We walked down a road and, in a short while, came to the village of Alverca. This was the first typical Spanish village we had passed through. It was long, stretched on the edge between the bare mountain and the fertile valley. The houses were low, one-storied for the most part, and the dust was all-prevalent. In the dusty street boys were playing football, which in Spain seems to be a summer game. In the middle of the village was a shop, which advertised itself as a Tobacco Agency, for tobacco is a Spanish government monopoly and can be sold only in licensed places. We went in to get a drink and to ask if by chance they had some tobacco, for all the while we were in Spain there was a famine of tobacco.

The inside of the shop was a curious mixture of the modern and of the very ancient. At one end of the counter was a modern brass beer machine, with carbonic acid gas cylinder—which gives to the tepid beer an extra fizz—pressure gauge and lead-lined sink. At the other end of the shop were huge jars four feet high, and nine or ten feet in circumference; amphoras of pale porous unglazed pottery, direct successors of the Grecian vase; small drinking pots of clay with short spouts for water or of glass with long spouts for wine, the latter in shape not unlike the brass drinking-vessels of Benares. Pendent from the ceiling hung candles two or three feet in length, for devotional purposes, and side by side with the candles were festooned strings of orange-coloured, highly flavoured sausages, which appeared very ominous. Some day one felt that one would be tempted by a Spanish friend to eat one of these sausages, and the fear of the experiment was always within us. Wine of a deep ruby tinged with brown filled a large glass barrel; wine which could be bought for one halfpenny a glass.

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Inside the shop, leaning against the zinc bar, were two tramps; the one swart with three days' beard on his chin, dressed in a blue jean smock and soiled yellow velveteen trousers; the other leaner, more pallid, furtive: in spite of the heat of the day he was covered with a large black cloak.

They at once offered us their glasses of wine.

"Gracias. Buen provecho," said we in customary refusal. They offered cigarettes to Jan and Luis. These, by courtesy, had to be accepted.

While we were drinking our tepid beer—fizzed up with the carbonic acid gas—Jan asked for and bought a box of matches. The Spanish matches, very bad, a government monopoly, are packed in a small cardboard box. This box is quite difficult to open. Whichever way you push it, like the well-known trick matchbox, the inside part seems to have two bottoms and no opening. The impatient traveller usually tears the box to pieces trying to get at the forty matches which are inside.

Jan asked for tobacco.

"There is not," sighed the fat woman.

Outside the shop the two tramps were waiting for us. The swart one peered quickly from left to right.

"We have tobacco," he said in a hoarse whisper. He snapped his fingers at his companion, who produced from beneath the cloak, furtively, a square orange packet.

"Good tobacco from Gibraltar," growled "Swart"; "will you buy?"

"No," said Luis.

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The pallid man slid the tobacco beneath the cloak again. The two slouched off through the dust.

"That would be tobacco at each end and cabbage or other refuse in the middle," said Luis.

We turned towards the setting sun.

Murcia has a tramway system. Blue cars run all over the town and reach out into the country at several spots. We came to the terminus in this direction at Palma, on the road to Carthagen. The people of the village crowded about us in curiosity; but by this time we were becoming used to a publicity which is, as a rule, only reserved for Royalty.

As the tram carried us home—with several halts due to failure of the electrical supply—we noticed through an open door a delightful interior, decorated with the huge water-jars—on a raised step—with which beautiful specimens of old Spanish pottery were arranged.

The village of the little Señor had pleased us so much that we made arrangements to move out there as soon as possible; for the heat of Murcia was now unbearable and we were in consequence on the verge of being really ill

FOOTNOTES:

[11] That is truth.

CHAPTER XIV

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VERDOLAY—HOUSEKEEPING

The house in Verdolay had five large rooms, stone-floored, and was unfurnished. We decided to borrow all our friend's kitchen furniture, to wit, a table, three chairs, water-vessels, etc., and we bought for ourselves a large frying-pan. But the bed was a problem. Our friend's bed looked too good to knock about, so at last we determined on the planks which we had already, and four packing-cases on which to lay the planks. Antonio, always eager to help us, promised to find the packing-cases and to make all the arrangements about a cart. At this moment Antonio's wife Rosa was ill. He had invited us to a noble lunch, and upon the day following he had told us that the lunch had disagreed seriously with Rosa. She did not get better. "There is much fever with it,"

said Antonio. Marciana, our charwoman, of whom we will tell more later, was also working for Antonio, and would bring us news of Rosa's illness, which appeared quite serious for so slight a cause.

"We must look out for tummy-troubles," said I.

It is amazing what a lot a small amount of furniture appears when one is preparing to move. We had thought the cart much too big, but we had some difficulty in stacking into it all our material, including the guitar, of which the driver was told to take especial care.

We drove out to Verdolay in a tartana, passing on the road our cart of furniture. We noted that the driver had added above our load two huge bundles of straw colour. We wondered what they might be. We were to discover later.

The little Señor took us to the owner of our prospective abode. His house was full of children, and the study, where we signed a Spanish agreement, was festooned with swords, pistols and guns, while a large photograph of him in officer's uniform explained the meaning of this warlike equipment. The proprietor, Don Ferdinand—a most unmilitary looking man—received our money with aloof dignity; but said, after the transaction was over, that if we ever needed a friend we now knew where to look for him. Subsequently Don Ferdinand placed in the yard next to ours a large dog, which howled all night and prevented us from sleeping, but the friendliness which he had professed did not induce him to move it.

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The cart of furniture had not arrived by the time we were in full possession of our new home. The front door led into a large entrada, from which one passed into an equally spacious kitchen, and then by a wide double door into the back yard. To the right and left of the entrada were rooms with windows, covered with a grille, looking on to the road. To the right of the kitchen the last room had a window looking into the yard.

Evening had come and still the cart delayed. Antonio had given us an introduction to a friend called "La Merchora." We found her in the village shop which she owned. Her shop was smaller than that in Alverca, but similar, save that she sold her beer in bottles and dispensed with the beer machine. The same bilious-looking sausage hung in festoons from the ceiling. She was like a fat, happy aunt to us, talked very fast, but was very proud of being able to understand what I said. She assured us that she would arrange things for us.

In the dusk we sat on the step of our empty house, and, illuminated by the light of a couple of candles lent by the little Señor, we ate provisions which we providentially had brought with us in the tartana. The cart arrived at about eight o'clock. The two large bundles had disappeared, but a certain amount of chopped straw scattered about amongst the furniture showed us what they had contained. The driver hesitated before accepting the tip which Jan offered him.

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We set up the bed as best we could. We had intended to put the packing-cases upright, but the structure seemed rather unsafe; so we laid them flat, put two of the planks lengthways and the rest crossing. Unfortunately two of the packing-cases were much narrower than the others. This made the structure slope down about a foot at one end. We did not have time or surplus energy to alter this arrangement during our stay, with the result that in the morning we had as a rule slipped gently down so that our feet projected some distance beyond the end of the bed. Mosquitoes had threatened us during our meal, so that we rigged the net at once.

We had been warned by many travellers of the verminous condition of Spain. We had taken the chances of this house, which in truth had appeared reasonably clean. Nevertheless we went to bed with some anxiety. No sooner had we lain down and the candle was out, than the trouble began. It was as though we had been invaded by a hundred thousand bugs. We both tossed about and cursed our luck. Suddenly a piercing and prolonged sting made me clap my hand suddenly to the spot attacked. I had imprisoned something. I had experienced bugs in Serbia: this did not seem like a bug, but much larger.

"Jan," I exclaimed, "I've caught something. Strike a light." The match revealed a *short piece of chopped straw*. The carter, with his bundles of chaff, had provided us with as uncomfortable a specimen of an "apple-pie" bed as it has been my lot to experience. The chaff had sifted down through everything, and had impregnated both the cover of the mattress and the sheets with the fine spikes of straw. We spent the better part of the night picking the tiny irritants out of our bedding. Even the thought that the house had proved bugless was at that moment but a poor solace. In addition to our discomforts of that night, the house was almost unbearable from the heat. We had chosen our first residence with some lack of experience. The house, we discovered on the morrow, faced east and west, and not, as did the majority of the houses in the village, north and south. In consequence of this fact we suffered from the sun, which poured through the front door all the morning, and through the back door all the afternoon. It was almost impossible to open the windows on both sides, to allow a draught to pass through the house. And for the worst house in the village we were being charged forty pesetas a month by our *friend*, Don Ferdinand.

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The discomforts of the night were added to by the cats, which chose our back wall for the most awesome serenades we have ever heard; and also by the plaintive baaing of a sheep tethered in an adjoining yard. We fell into an uneasy sleep about dawn, but were soon awakened by strange sounds which came from the kitchen. We listened, but could make nothing of them; they were strange hollow vocal sounds as though a small carpet was being beaten at irregular intervals. The front door was locked, the front windows barred; what had come in must have done so by the back, over the wall. What was it? Jan peeped through a crack of the door. On the kitchen floor was a flock of pigeons, which had come in to search the chaff, scattered by the previous night's

unpacking, for grains of corn.

It was now about 5.30. We decided to rest for a while, in view of the failure of our sleep. A rousing thump, thump on the front door drew Jan once more from bed.

At the door was a brown-faced peasant, clad in black cotton, with bare sandalled feet. Spotted about the street were goats, their distended udders almost trailing on the ground.

"Milk," said the peasant. "Do you want milk? La Merchora sent me."



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He took our milk-jug, selected a goat the udder of which seemed stretched almost to bursting, and milked the animal directly into the jug. He handed the jug of milk, hot and frothy, with a flourish.

"Three fat dogs and a little bitch," said he.

In such a hot country the milk keeps better inside the animal than outside. Milk shops in Spain therefore are usually quadruped, and there is never a question of inspector or of adulteration.

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We made up our minds to get up. We did not know what other venders La Merchora had prepared for us.

We had scarcely finished our breakfast of tea, bread and chocolate, when another thump, thump on the door announced the arrival of another ascetically faced peasant, tall, clad in blue. With him was a pretty girl of about fifteen and a dusty, tilted donkey-cart.

"Vegetables and fruit," said the girl.

The man, having firmly fixed in his head that we knew no Spanish, grunted and made noises, strange though cheery, in his throat. The inside of the cart was piled with all manner of excellent things—tomatoes, green and yellow melons, berenginas, peaches, plums, pears, red peppers, cucumbers, potatoes, huge purple onions, and lemons.

We bought many things. The system of weights and measures is supposed to be that of the kilogramme, as it is in France, but the methods by which these weights are translated into practice in Spain is delightful. Evidently there is no inspection of weights and measures. One of the weights used by the tall man was a small axe-head, another was a lump of rock.

After the donkey-cart, a man stumpy enough to be almost a dwarf rode up to our steps. He was grim-visaged and paunchy; and said in a sour voice that he would fetch us water if we so wished. The price was one peseta a donkey-load, a donkey-load of water being four full Grecian vases (called cantaros) which were carried in panniers, on the top of which the old man sat and looked grumpily at the world, while the water gurgled and clucked cheerfully beneath him.

Then came a witch-faced woman with a disagreeable voice. She carried a huge basket and said she was the shopping woman of Verdolay. Verdolay had no market, nor could one buy there anything other than the few immediate necessities which La Merchora sold. This woman was equivalent to our country carriers. She walked to Murcia every day and returned with laden

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basket through the heated dust. For this work she demanded a small percentage upon the value of her purchases; probably she also extracted a small commission from the shops in which she dealt. We did not employ her much, as her temperament was not agreeable to us.



Last of all came a little old woman—with a face seamed like a kindly walnut—dragging an old grey donkey. On the donkey's back was a pair of time-worn panniers from which bulged a medley of fruit and vegetables. She was the donkey-cart's rival. I had forgotten to buy onions.

During our trip we had been bothered by the fact that at moments our uncertain Spanish would be displaced by the language we had last learned, Serbian. Instead of the Spanish sentence, quite against our wills Serbian would speak itself. This phenomenon is quite common, I believe, to those who learn several languages more or less imperfectly.

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I now asked the old woman in unwished-for Serbian for onions. She struck an attitude of theatrical dismay.

"Señora," she exclaimed, "que es eso?"^[12]

I repeated my desire, and again Serbian came out. The old lady shook her head, and seemed frightened. I got a strong hold over my tongue, and said slowly in Spanish:

"Tiene cebollas?"^[13]

The old lady's face broke into a hundred wrinkles of delight.

"Ahe, Señora," she cried, "if you say 'cebollas,' I can understand that you want cebollas. But if you say something different from 'cebollas,' how can I know that you need cebollas?"

We walked round the corner to La Merchora's to discover what could, and what could not, be bought at first hand. La Merchora could supply us with olive oil, but not with vinegar. She sold beer, wine, lemonade and soda-water in siphons; dried sardines, very smelly; orange-coloured sausages; bread at a peseta the kilo; Dutch cheese, red pepper, chocolate and eggs. The last-named item on the list she said was scarce and variable in quality. I then asked her if it would be possible to find a maid in the village. The little Señor had said that servants were as plentiful as flies in June, but La Merchora said that they were as scarce as were the eggs. All the girls went off to Murcia, she said. There were several women in the little shop and a discussion began; they reviewed a list of the likely girls. A young woman came in, and said at once that her sister was out of a job. She would send her along. La Merchora was reluctant to tell us the correct price

to pay. I suppose she thought that she might be spoiling a beautiful piece of bargaining. Upon pressure, however, she admitted that the local price was about ten pesetas a month, this to include all the washing of linen, both house and personal.

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We bought some of La Merchora's chocolate. She asked us if we would have Spanish or French flavouring. We naturally chose the Spanish variety. It was very cheap. It had a dusty consistency in the mouth, and tasted of chocolate not at all, but strongly of cinnamon. It was eatable, but not exciting; we consoled ourselves with the reflection that it was nourishing without temptations towards greediness and ate no other chocolate during our stay in Verdolay. Behind her shop La Merchora had a large yard, with outside stove for cooking. In the yard was a flock of turkeys and several pigs. A black and white terrier pup was having a game with the pigs, running about and pulling their tails with his sharp teeth.

Our house had inconveniences. There was, as far as we could see, no place to put household refuse, nor any means in the village of collecting it. The windows on the road commanded a view almost of the whole house, and if we left them open at once the curious were at the grilles, staring through at us. As we could not open the back door or windows during the afternoon, this meant that if we wished for privacy we had to live in semi-gloom. Nobody in Spain, however, tries

to live other than in public; the people walked in and watched us as we were having our meals; walked round the house examining with interest the pictures which we hung on the walls to dry; and in time we became case-hardened to this semi-public life.

We had a siesta during the afternoon to make up for the sleep we had lost. At first we lay down without the mosquito-net, but the flies soon drove us to its protection. In the evening we called on the little Señor. He was a delicate and very likeable man, but his pretty wife showed a strong dislike for us, for which we could find no explanation save that perhaps she had been a pro-German during the war. We sat uncomfortably in a mixed atmosphere of liking and hate for some while, then, making our adieux, and followed by the setter-St. Bernard, we went home.

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I think that we first discovered the lack of privacy while we were undressing. We had left the front windows open for air, and soon a crowd was watching our preliminaries to sleep. Luckily we discovered it early. Jan closed the shutters, upon which a number of boys sat down on our doorstep and sang serenades to us for several hours

FOOTNOTES:

[12] "What is that?"

[13] "Have you onions?"

CHAPTER XV

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VERDOLAY—SKETCHING IN SPAIN

Sketching in Spain has inconveniences. In the summer the heat makes it imperative that the painter should be up with the dawn, for between eleven a.m. and four p.m. the heat and the brilliance of the light impose too great a strain on the eyes and the endurance. Under any circumstances we were almost forced to rise with the sun, for Milk and Vegetables both called before six.

Verdolay was an excellent spot at which to begin an acquaintance with Spanish scenery. There was a great variety of subject matter. The village itself was full of vividly coloured houses, and at the back was the wonderful old monastery of Santa Catalina. In the valley less than half a mile away were the huertas, or irrigated gardens, full of rich green. On the sides of the mountains were the olive terraces, which traced the architecture of the hills in a way to delight the painter's heart. Between the olives and the garden was the dusty cart road with its intermittent traffic, and the small dusty strung-out villages, the houses threaded on the road like beads on a necklace, especially that one called El Angel—though anything more arid and less angelic could hardly be imagined. In the hills themselves were fine ravines of strangely coloured ferruginous earths, orange, purple and blue; and the tops of the foothills were often crested with monasteries, like that of La Luz, which gave the scene a most romantic atmosphere. I clung more or less to the village, Jan wandered about the surrounding country or sat in the insufficient shadow of the olive trees near El Angel.



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The first real inconvenience which we noted was that seldom did the best view possess a suitable

piece of shade from which to paint it. Thus the artist's task was doubled; one had to find coincident scene and shadow. The apparently aimless wander of the artist looking for a subject usually excited the curiosity of the passers-by, so that either one was irritated by a series of remarks or became possessed of a small following of the curious. I use a square hole cut in a piece of cardboard in order to test the view and judge whether it would frame as satisfactorily as it promised to do. Whenever I placed this square to my eye one of my followers bobbed up his head and stared back at me through the hole, trying to fathom the mystery of my act. Once I had begun work I would become the centre of an excited conversation.

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The first strokes of the brush aroused merriment. But often some onlooker astonished me by perceiving the object of my sketch long before the drawing was in any way clear. She (it was generally a she) would then be eager to exhibit her superior knowledge to the others. She would therefore dab her finger on to my painting to point out what she had perceived. This nuisance I fought by covering intrusive fingers with oil paint. By the time the otherwise one had cleaned off the paint the drawing would be far advanced enough for the others to see for themselves what I was doing. As soon as I got well into the swing of work questions would begin.

"Why do you do this? Is it to make picture postcards from? Why isn't your husband with you? Are your father and mother alive? Do you like Spanish food? Have you got any children? If you have no children, as we have too many, would you like a baby to take away with you? Are you doing this for the cinematograph? Do you like painting? How old are you? Why haven't you put in So-and-so's house?" In this case the house in question was usually behind me.

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These questions were asked in Murcian Spanish not very easy to understand with my small lack of acquaintance; and I had to take my attention off my painting in order to find suitable Spanish answers. I tried once not to answer, but my audience then demanded:

"Are you deaf? Can't you hear? Don't you understand what we say?"

All this was said with the most courteous of intentions, direct questioning being permissible in Spain. Chairs were generally brought out, one for me and others for the spectators. Nurse-maids with half-nude babies formed a large proportion of my audiences. The Spanish baby suffers from over nursing; it is carried remorselessly about from six in the morning till twelve at night; it is as a rule fretful and feverish both from the heat and from lack of sleep. Indeed Verdolay always shrilled with wailing children.

At about nine o'clock the Spaniard takes a morning snack. This consists of a slice of bread soaked with olive oil and a dried sardine, the smell of which was almost paralysing. With the perfect courtesy which marked all my peasant audiences, this would be offered to me before it was chewed loudly in my ear. When the heat was very great I would abandon my sketch as soon as the sardine stage arrived.

I was continually pestered by polite requests that So-and-so should be painted in. This often led to a lecture on composition and on the introduction of figures. If I did, however, paint in anybody the enthusiasm was enormous. People would run down the road shouting in at every cottage door:

"She has painted Enrico" (or Miguel or Maria) "into her picture."

Once while near the water-fountain I painted in the donkey of a water-carrier. For days afterwards Paco, the donkey-boy, grasped the passers-by and exclaimed with tears of joy in his voice:

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"Ha pintado mi burro, *mi* burro."^[14]

The water-fountain was one of the gathering places of the village. It was the end of a small iron pipe which writhed down from the hills.

There were generally three or four donkey-boys with cantaros, and a crowd of women with amphoras waiting their turns to wedge their pots beneath the small trickle which ran from the nozzle of the pipe. Old Grumpy spent the best part of his day there, sitting with sour face in the shadow of a small tree—his chief work was either waiting his turn or leaving his pots to fill themselves. A tall bank of prickly pear cactus made a background to the gay scene. Women came from dawn until midnight, and even from the villages of the valley, for water was very scarce and most of the water in the valley wells unfit for drinking. With their heavy cantaros balanced on a projecting hip, these women walked two miles or more beneath the sweltering sun; and they asked me if I *liked* painting.

Sometimes the ladies of the village stopped and made suitable remarks. One, a summer visitor, told me that she knew a very good painter—"very good indeed," she said with a gentle emphasis which revealed what she thought of my work. "Why, he painted things five times as big as these which you do."

As the sketch progressed my audiences were very eager to point out to me anything which I seemed to have forgotten. At this moment somebody always said that Uncle Pepe's or Aunt Conchas' house wasn't in the sketch. These houses were invariably out of sight or behind my back. The Spaniards had futuristic instincts. But once they knew

me, my friends would not have me criticized. One passer-by made some disparaging remark about the painting.

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"We won't have our Doña abused," said the nurse-maids. "She is very clever. She knows lots more than you do; and plays the piano as well."

Sometimes I accompanied Jan out into the country, in the direction of La Luz or down into the huertas.

One day we were near La Luz and my interest was captured by a lemon and vine garden which was cultivated on terraces down the side of a baking ravine. The farmer's house with a red roof topped the hill. I sat down to paint. Presently the farmer with his wife and family clambered down into the ravine and climbed up the side to where I was sitting. Each time I returned the family came back and in awed silence watched the progress of the sketch.

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It happened that the water of Verdolay was not very nice for drinking purposes, being full of minerals and salts, while that of La Luz was delicious. A poor woman, who did charing jobs for the farmer above-mentioned, was delighted to be allowed to carry us heavy cantaros full of La Luz water, a mile and a half, for the pay of fivepence a cantaro. One day after the sketch was finished she came in with a look of importance on her face.

"My Señora," she said, "is enamoured of the little painting which you have done of her house and farm. She wishes to buy the sketch."

I had had some experience of Spanish prices, so I said:

"These paintings are made to exhibit in England. It is of no use to tell you the price, because English prices and Spanish prices are different."

"But, Señora," said the woman, "my masters are very rich, excessively rich. They will pay any price that you like to ask."

But I suspected her protestations. The sketch was one of the best I had done in Spain. I was not very eager to part with it. But owing to her entreaties, against my better judgment, fixing a low price because of Spain, I said at last:

"Two hundred pesetas."^[15]

Her mouth dropped open. For a moment she remained speechless with amazement. Then hastily crossing herself she gasped out:

"Madre Maria Sanctissima!"

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Being a woman I was often asked to paint female portraits, but suspecting the monetary value which the people would put on paintings I refused. Jan overheard a red-faced, wealthy looking farmer discussing with his father on our doorstep the question of how much I was likely to ask for a portrait of the farmer's daughter.

Red Face: "I think we might offer her ten pesetas."^[16]

The Grandfather: "Well, she is foreign, she might demand fifteen."

Red Face: "Even if she wishes twenty we might yet consider it; or perhaps twenty-five; but then we would have to think it carefully over."

Occasionally we would be asked into houses to examine pictures which the peasants believed to have value. In one house, a room was set aside as a small private chapel; it was full of painted plaster images covered with false jewels and tinsel; on the walls were oleograph reproductions of the Virgin by Spanish Old Masters, but one painting of the Murillo School probably had a real value. In another house we found a picture of Napoleon before which the inhabitants were burning a candle under the impression that the print represented an unidentified Saint. Maybe stranger personalities have been canonized before now.

Jan escaped from intimate touch with the people by making for the open country. He thus had fewer adventures than did I. Often, however, peasants spied him from the distance of a mile, and came to see what he was doing.

Once, when he had been painting on the cart-road near El Angel and had put a cart into his painting, a small boy followed him all the way home, shouting out to every one that he passed:

"That is a painter! He painted a cart and horse; just as it went along; all in a flash!"

We used to pin up our sketches on the wall of the house; because, as we intended to travel, we wished the sketches to become as dry as we could make them. This used to attract numbers of people, and usually the grilled window of our front room was occupied by a crowd of faces peering into the house. The fame of our picture exhibition spread over the country-side. People came from some distance to see the pictures; and if the front door was unlocked walked in, saluted us, and proceeded to go the round of the walls. At first we found this disconcerting, but with use much of our needless self-consciousness and desire for unessential privacy began to wear off.

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As we left our front window open during the night for air, we were many times awakened by the voices of the picture-gazers who gathered at our window as soon as the day broke

FOOTNOTES:

[14] "She has painted my donkey, *my* donkey."

[15] £8.

[16] 8s. 4d.

CHAPTER XVI

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VERDOLAY—CONENI

The peasant who came every morning with his daughter and donkey-cart full of vegetables and fruit at the dawn was rather like a genial bird of prey in features. This type is typically Spanish. There was something of the condor about him, though one can scarcely picture a condor with his welcoming smile or his kindly nature. He began with a fixed idea of our practical dumbness and deafness to the Spanish language. He was, we learned later, an exquisite dancer. We have heard tell of a well-known musician who has a dance for making the household beds, and another for digging potatoes, and so on, trying to bring æsthetics into the commonplaces of life. Coneni, for such was the peasant's name, tried to dance for us the fact that tomatoes were a halfpenny a

pound or that a melon was sixpence. His pretty, demure daughter resorted to more practical measures, held up fruit as samples and condescended to calculate in pesetas and centimos instead of in "royals" and "little bitches."

But the manners both of Coneni and of his daughter were impeccable. I think that they overcharged us slightly, but that was the Spanish tradition. Certainly they did not overcharge us as much as they would have done had they not liked us, and later on they quieted their consciences by making us presents.

Coneni was one of the first of our picture admirers, but he had pre-Raphaelite tendencies, and always said that he supposed they would be better when we painted them out properly. He became eager that we should sketch in his market garden, and gave us elaborate topographical directions. So one day, shouldering our sketch-boxes, off we set.

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We passed through El Angel on to the Murcia road. We then asked a group of men, who were winnowing corn on a flat biblical threshing floor of beaten mud, which was the direction. Unfortunately we had got rather mixed in the name. The peasant had not spoken his name very clearly and we had confused it with conecho.^[17] The winnowers said that they could not understand us very clearly, but that it was probably further along, and they wished us to "go with God." Further along the road we, having found in the dictionary what conecho really means, tried the other name.

The use of this brought us into a narrow side-path between rows of mulberry trees and deep watercourses. It took a sudden turn to the left, and on the path we saw Coneni, tall and lank, waving welcoming arms at us.

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The place was embowered in trees: lemon, fig, pear, plum, apple, quince and pomegranate flourished luxuriantly in the irrigated soil. The huertas of the Murcian plain were not separated, one from another, by hedges, and it was difficult to know how large was Coneni's garden. In one corner, beneath the shelter of overhanging fruit-trees, was a hut made of stiff bamboo-like reeds, the roof daubed with mud against the rain. From the front of this hut projected a long awning of reeds, beneath which the Coneni family was awaiting us. Mrs. Coneni was plump, motherly, and had a genial nature covering an inflexible will. She also had perfect manners, was full of courtliness and kindness, and was delighted to see us. She showed her naïve pleasure by touching me whenever she was able to do so without rudeness. Our broken Spanish aroused her sense of wonder. Coneni, for the first time in his life, made up his mind to understand us. He stopped his habitual pre-breakfast pantomime and swaggered about, saying:

"But I understand all they say. Yes, I do."

He disappeared into the square small hut and came out again carrying an enormous green watermelon called locally a sandia. He tapped it with a knuckle and, from the sound that it made, decided that it was ripe. He then cut off top and bottom with a small hatchet and divided it into huge slices. While we were eating the luscious pink fruit neighbours began to saunter up. They stood in a circle around us. Coneni, with the air of a showman, said:

"Now I will show you something. She smokes; it is true. I have seen her myself."

He made me a cigarette. The men were delighted and Mrs. Coneni was amazed. Coneni stood behind me with a lean hand on his hip, as if to say: "Alone I did it."

Beneath the reed shelter some of the children were lying asleep, and the youngest of all, a baby, was sitting by itself in a corner, stark naked, playing with a large lemon. The exquisite colour contrast between the transparency of skin of the sunburnt child and the hard yellow brilliance of

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the lemon filled me with a wild desire to paint it. Indeed, one does not come to appreciate the full beauty of the nude until one has seen it in a country where it is natural. In Spain the children, usually half nude, sprawled about in the heat in the most graceful of relaxed poses, sometimes lying half asleep across their mothers' laps, and a continual impulse was driving me to make studies of them. But the task is almost impossible. The fact of being sketched is too unusual. The people, naturally unselfconscious, at once become stiff and formal.

Within Coneni's hut was no furniture other than a four-post bed which almost filled the floor space. Here slept Coneni and his wife, and the space beneath the bed was used as a storehouse for melons. The children, three girls and four boys, all slept on the ground in the open beneath the shelter. But Mrs. Coneni explained to me with some care that the poverty was only apparent; that this was but their summer residence. For the winter they had a fine house in Alverca.

We did not have any very keen impulse to paint—it had become for that afternoon rather too much of a ceremony, like the old State painter *performing* before the Court—but to save our faces we had to do something, so Jan painted a portrait of a calf, while I selected a lemon tree. Before I had half finished, the interior of the tree was swarming with Coneni's children, hoping that they would be included. By my side sat Coneni's little girl nursing a bantam, like a doll, assuring it that mother wouldn't love it if it were not more quiet.

"And the Señor plays the guitar," exclaimed Coneni. "He is affectionate to music."

We discussed Spanish music and dancing. Coneni, bursting with hospitality, said:

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"Come again next Sunday. I will invite the young men and the girls and we will have a party. There are guitar and lute players at Alverca. They will all come."

Antonio's brother-in-law, Thomas, had spoken of the gay times when there is a party in the huertas; we accepted eagerly.

We went home laden with presents of fruit which Coneni had pressed upon us. Especially was our greed delighted with a large basket of figs. We had been asking the Conenis to bring us some figs for some days, but they had said:

"We can't bring you figs. Nobody sells figs here. We give them to the pigs."

So that evening we rivalled the pigs

FOOTNOTES:

[17] Rabbit.

CHAPTER XVII

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VERDOLAY—THE INHABITANTS

The little village of Verdolay was not a characteristic Spanish village, it was a watering-place. One came into it along the dusty road between banks on which grew the spiky aloe shrubs, behind which spread the spaced olive groves with trees drawn up into demure lines, amongst the grey foliage of which could be seen the red painted corrugated roofs of the French Silk Company. The village scrambled up a terraced hill. The lower edge was a line of orange-vermilion one-storied houses faced with a small promenade. Then the houses scattered. To the right as one faced the hill were the baths, a collection of bulky, ramshackle buildings which hid deep, cool courtyards, and from which came the plash of water and the sound of young voices. The hill-side was covered with terraced gardens in which were set houses painted yellow, green, blue or pink. The apex of the hill was decorated by an iron windwheel for pumping. A ridge joined the crest of the hill to the mountains, and here perched the ancient monastery of Santa Catalina; while a mile away to the right, showing white amongst a green bed of palms and firs, was the country seat of the Count of El Valle, and to the left amongst groves of oranges was the villa of an ex-Prime Minister.

One had almost a specimen of Spain in little in this one village. The vermilion houses, called the Malecon, sheltered a transitory population; visitors to the baths, who like ourselves arrived in carts with furniture, and after a few months disappeared back to town duties. These were usually of the superior artisan or small shopkeeping class. The second row of houses contained persons such as Don Ferdinand, the little Señor or the people who kept the baths. These represented the larger tradesmen and in general lived all the year in Verdolay, travelling to Murcia by tartana or by tram via Palmar. The two roads which swept up each side of the hill were edged with small cottages where the real peasantry lived, and the houses which stood amongst gardens on the hill terraces, each owning its proper entrance, were the residences of the merchantry. The Count of El Valle represented the county aristocracy and the ex-Prime Minister the Court.

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In spite of a somewhat evil local reputation, the peasantry could be counted as a quiet, hard-working, rather unintelligent, good-natured community which leaned vaguely, on the male side, to liberalism and atheism, but lacking the courage or determination to make either effective. It cursed the Court and told dirty stories about the priesthood, but all exasperation evaporated in words. This peasantry is the foundation on which the whole of this plutocratical hill of Verdolay rests; and it labours as severely as any other peasantry, perhaps even working harder because of the lack of water, which adds a need to be satisfied before work is over. The average traveller has the idea that the Spaniard is lazy. We are not sure that this is a correct estimate of him. We English have made a god of "Work." But indeed unnecessary work is mere foolishness. The great blessing to be sought for is leisure. Human advance comes from the reflections of leisure rather than from the activities of work. The Spaniard recognizes leisure as the benefit which it is. He has no false ideas about work. Adam bit the apple, and we pay his debts, but why load ourselves with compound interest at many hundreds per cent.? That is the Spaniard's point of view. He works when he must work. He rises with the dawn or before it, say four a.m., he works till eleven o'clock, then in the afternoon resumes toil from 3.30 till 6.30. The late-rising traveller who mouches about in his English custom during the hottest hours of the day sees the Spanish labourer at his siesta, snoozing by the roadside, or thrumming his guitar to a herd of sleepy goats. He draws a natural, though incorrect, conclusion.

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The Spaniard may be dilatory. He puts off doing to-day what he can do to-morrow, but it is from an exaggerated respect for the benefits of leisure. His handicap is that he has no proper means of filling that leisure, his apparent laziness comes from lack of education. About eighty per cent. cannot read, schooling is not enforced, and children begin work at ten years of age or thereabouts. But do not lay up the Spaniard's desire for inactivity as a crime; it is a virtue ill employed.

Our particular specimen of the Spanish peasant was my female servant, named Encarnacion. She was thirteen years old, could neither read nor write, and worked like a small mule for the not extravagant wage of eleven shillings and sixpence a month. She only worked half the day, it is true, but we did not give her food. We indeed overpaid her, for the regular wage of her kind was about eight shillings and fourpence a month. She had a small, stumpy child's body, sprouting into a long neck, at the top of which was a rounded head. Her forehead was intellectual, her features flattened, and her hair, done up tight into a small ball, was usually decorated with a flower or a green leaf.

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At first, like all Spanish peasants, she made up her mind that she could not understand what I said, but gradually learned that she had to do so, and in general succeeded pretty well. But it was to her a tremendous intellectual effort. She would wrinkle her noble-looking brow with the strain, and was never satisfied until she had translated my orders into her own patois for clarity. But she would not allow her fundamental ideas of what was proper to be influenced by my foreign notions. Sometimes she would interrupt me.

"No, Señora," she would say, "I do not like it done thus. That is not the custom. It must be done so."

If one insisted upon one's own way, the work was ill done. So that, as a rule, to save trouble, one allowed her to do as she wished. Encarnacion worked all the morning, singing an interminable Spanish song, which struck our ears queerly and pleasantly at the beginning, but of which in the end we grew very tired. By eleven o'clock she would have done all the housework, the shopping and the cooking, and would leave the stone floors soaked in water, the evaporation of which did a little to counteract the intense heat. She had a habit which we did not like of scattering our household refuse all over the small square yard. It looked dirty and untidy, but we found out that

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she knew better than we did. The vagrant cats soon cleared up any remains of meat, while the hot sun dried up all the other refuse, which could then be thrown away conveniently.

Encarnacion was sad that she could neither read nor write, and was proudly jealous of her younger sister, who, working in the milk factory, was being taught to spell.

She of course acquired a proprietary right in us. She upheld the honour of the house, and gave a lesson in manners to a gipsy girl from the cave dwellings who had once thrown a stone at me. She also criticized our work. To the almost daily parties of strangers who walked into our house whenever the door was left unlocked, she acted as guide to our pictures drying on the walls, and she would explain to whom each house in the sketches belonged.

But she never said "Thank you."

There are considerable differences between Spanish customs and those of ordinary Europe, and these are apt to disconcert the traveller. Here are a few Spanish ones that we noted *en passant*.

You may walk into any house or garden if moved to do so by curiosity if you, previous to entering, utter the magic formula: "Se pueda entrar?"^[18]

You may stare as much as you like at anything or anybody, for staring is in reality a compliment.

Self-consciousness is a silly vanity.

If you feel friendly towards an acquaintance you may call on him at nine in the morning and you may repeat your call three or four times during the same day. (What the man does to get rid of you we have not yet discovered. We have only been the victims, not the visitors.)

You must refuse everything that is suddenly offered to you, except cigarettes or sweets offered in the fingers. Do not accept other things until the third offer. But to refuse sweets or cigarettes is almost insulting.

You must offer to give any object to anybody who admires it (especially objects of jewellery or babies). [Pg 152]

You may ask any questions you like, even upon the most intimate of subjects; and you must expect to be asked similar questions.

If invited to a meal, you may refuse no dish that is served to you, even though indigestion is clutching at your vitals, or repletion stopping your throat.

For a specimen of the small tradesman class of the malecon we had La Merchora. She kept the village shop, the last house on the terrace, and was in some way a relative of Antonio. Her home was planned like ours was, and one of the rooms beside the entrada had been filled with a counter, some shelves, and a large tin of paraffin oil; ginger-coloured sausages were festooned from the roof and the shop was complete. She was unmarried, and therefore, from a theoretical point of view, negligible; but it did not disturb her. Indeed, little did disturb her. She had the figure which grows out of a combination of good living, no thinking and reasonable working. In any village you will find an example of her kind. She is good-natured but respected. Liberties are not taken with her, and in Cornwall she is called Aunt So-and-so. La Merchora was not even black-visaged, there was in fact nothing that one can count for Spanish about her.

She had two epithets—*atrocidad* and *barbaridad*—but she said them with so jovial an aspect that atrocity or barbarity faded into the gentlest of denunciations. When our first servant, Encarnacion's elder sister, deserted us without warning for a better job, La Merchora said it was an *atrocidad*; when the water-carrier overcharged us she said it was *barbaridad*. When the Count El Valle's watchman chased us off some square miles of unfenced unproductive mountain she said it was *atrocidad*; when the weather was hot she said it was *barbaridad*.

Every evening after supper there was a gathering outside La Merchora's shop. La Merchora, Uncle Pepe, her father, the niece, the gaunt woman from next door, her baby, half naked but with a flower in its hair, women coming through the night to fetch water (an interminable task), carters returning from work and others, would gather on chairs, benches, or on the stone wall of the malecon; and beneath the faint glow of the electric light would gently talk of things, while the niece was catching the foolish cicadas or crickets (attracted by the light) with which to amuse the baby and with which to awaken in the child some primary instinct of cruelty to animals. [Pg 153]

Uncle Pepe was La Merchora's father. He was a withered brown peasant baked by the sun to the colour of a pot. Wrinkles of careful economy and of good humour were as indelibly roasted into him as the pattern on a Roman dish. In recognition of La Merchora's accumulated kindnesses I painted his portrait on a small panel for her. She pondered some while on the problem of a suitable recompense, and at last gave us an antique Sevillian basin decorated with a primitive painting of a yellow and green cat. It was an old and valuable piece of earthenware used for washing the linen, and had probably been employed to wash Uncle Pepe's shifts and himself as well when he was a baby. These basins, two feet in diameter, are used as decorative and practical adjuncts to the huge red earthenware pots in which the villagers of the Murcian valley store the household water. We protested against the generosity of this gift, but in vain. One day, while we were out, she had it carried to our house, and would on no account receive it back.

Pepe and La Merchora illustrate the rapid evolution of the modern Spanish gentleman. Antonio is the third stage in the development. The little Señor is the fourth. Pepe is an unlettered peasant, knowing nothing but the labour of the soil but possessing the traditional culture of Spain. By the time one has reached the little Señor and the people of the Baths, one has arrived at letters but one has lost much of the culture. Pepe's wisdom is the common sense of centuries stored up in [Pg 154]

proverbs; he has one to fit every occasion. The little Señor's learning is supplied by the newspapers. The grandparents of all these people, even of the rich merchants who lived on the apex or Verdolay hill, were peasantry—Pepes, as a rule. Then one perceives that with the accumulation of wealth, the culture gradually diminishes in a like proportion. The third generation has lost almost all culture and has nothing but a kind heart and a love of making money. The Spanish bourgeoisie is inverting the processes which are going forward in England to-day. It is trying to forget its old customs—too late we are trying to revive ours. It has learned to despise its exquisite folk music, already becoming forgotten—we are trying to fudge out a few miserable tunes from the memories of senile fiddlers.

These people have won to that leisure so sweet to the heart of man; but they don't know what to do with it. They sleep and so grow fat. Having become fat they are good-natured and laugh. The old saw should be inverted. Indeed, many an old saw is in reality the truth turned inside out. They were a good-natured kindly people, these bulky tradesmen, but they were deadly dull. The daughters of Verdolay banged untuned pianos to the strains of dances forgotten by Europe, polkas, mazurkas and pas de quatre; but their own dances—the malagueñas and baturras—were unknown to them. They were pressing in their invitations, and were angry with us because we preferred La Merchora's doorstep with its changing audience of passers-by.

Of the Count and the ex-Prime Minister we know but little; they lie, anyway, beyond the scope of this book. The Count possessed in this district a country house set in a deep, wooded valley, in which was a medicinal spring, and a few square miles of unfenced sterile mountain land from which his watchman, armed with a gun, was instructed to drive away unauthorized pedestrians. He was not popular and was always at daggers drawn with the village; though from other sources we have learned that he is personally a charming and a generous man. At any rate he has left a fine estate to remain practically unproductive (the two farms and the house itself are in ruins). This practice seems to be normal in Spain, and we have heard of many a case where the aristocracy have deliberately hindered national development. There are rumours, however, that this estate is being bought for the government and will be afforested and developed.

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The ex-Prime Minister's villa was the most amazing example of bad taste in architecture that we have ever seen

FOOTNOTES:

[18] "May one enter?"

CHAPTER XVIII

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VERDOLAY—THE DANCE AT CONENI'S

We had been looking forward to the dance which Coneni had promised us. Spanish music had become with us a hobby, and the dancing which goes with it had excited our imagination. Antonio's sister had led us to believe that wonderful dancing was to be found in the Murcian huertas, and the vague hints of gay times *al campo* stirred us up to eager anticipation.

On Sunday afternoon at about four o'clock we set off, Jan carrying the big white guitar in its case. The cicadas were making their accustomed strident din in the mulberry trees, men on the roadside shouted to us: "Vaya con dios, y con la guitarra."

The Conenis were furbished up for the occasion. A few girls in bright cottons and a few young men in check suits, English caps and buttoned brilliant boots were awaiting us. Others came in one by one. Coneni chopped up a huge pink-fleshed melon for us, and while we were yet revelling in its cool lusciousness the faint sound of music was heard through the saw-note of the cicadas. The sound came nearer. Presently through the trees a band of youths and girls headed by a girl playing a guitar, and a boy of fourteen playing a Spanish lute (or laud) were visible.

They marched into the garden thrumming bravely a popular two-step march. It is the custom of the musicians thus to arrive in full cry, as it were. Amongst the group was the little Señor's nurse-maid bravely carrying through the heat the inevitable baby. Later on the baby caused a diversion by getting itself stung by a bee.

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The arrival of the music drove Coneni to a pitch of excitement. He brought out a drinking flask of wine. The flask had a long slender spout, and the guests drank by pouring the wine straight into their mouths, tilting their heads backwards. I was afraid of this method, and to my disgrace had to be given a glass. Tables and chairs, made of rough planking, were brought from neighbouring huertas.

"Now," cried Coneni, "for some dancing."

The guitar and laud players sat down. They played a polka, a common polka. And the girls and English-capped youths danced a solemn polka. Then followed a schottische, then another polka, then a murdered two-step.

Disappointment rushed upon us.

But where then was the Spanish dancing? Had this infernal European mechanical civilization

quite driven all feeling from the land? Where were the jotás, the malagueñas, the baturras?

"But," said Jan at last to Coneni, "can you not dance a Spanish dance?"

"Why, of course," cried Coneni. "Here, let us dance a malagueña. It is my favourite dance. Come, who will dance with me?"

But there was nobody amongst the girls who could dance it. Mrs. Coneni said that she was too old and too fat. Nor was there amongst the laud players one who could play a malagueña, nor could the guitar player beat the *tempo*.

So in the end it was Jan who played the malagueña as best he could, while Coneni, using his lank limbs with the flexibility of a youth, danced in marvellous fashion. But he soon tired of dancing solos.

We went home, headed by the band, seconded by Coneni's son carrying for us a large green melon, followed by Coneni's daughter loaded with a basket of figs.

We parted from the band at El Angel, we going up to Verdolay, they going across to Alverca, but with the good-byes the guitar playing girl said: [Pg 158]

"Aha, but since you are so 'affectionate' to music we will come and play to you this evening at your house."

When Encarnacion heard this, she said:

"Oh, beautiful! And I will ask all my friends and we will dance. And I will bring all Mother's chairs."



We arranged all Encarnacion's mother's chairs in a neat circle in our entrada and waited. Nine o'clock went by—no music—ten passed and 10.30. At eleven o'clock we heard the band far away on the Alverca road. It came musically through the night. We had contrived an especial illumination of candles, but our guests repudiated houses. They were too hot. So in spite of any possible traffic the chairs were dragged out into the middle of the road, and we had our concert there.

It was not a very inspiring concert. At the opening of it the young laud player handed his instrument to Jan, demanding that it should be tuned. We discovered later that quite a number of the minor village executants cannot tune their own instruments. Jan, however, at this time knew nothing about lauds. So the boy had to do the best he could with it. He managed to worry the instrument more or less into tune with itself, but the task of getting his laud accorded with his sister's guitar was beyond his power. However, a concert could not be disturbed for so trifling a matter; and to the perfect satisfaction of the players, and, as far as we could see, of the audience, the two instruments played until about three o'clock in the morning, each one a semi-tone different in pitch from the other. [Pg 159]

We had provided bottles of wine for the occasion at the cost of sixpence a bottle. This wine was the ordinary drinking wine of the district. It speaks well of the abstemiousness of the Spaniard that though we had at least thirty guests about half a bottle of wine only was drunk. The major part of the audience contented itself with cool water from the algazarra.

Some time later on in the evening the players confided to us that they were the pupils of a maestro who lived in Alverca, and that they had only been studying for two months. The fact that there was a teacher in Alverca fired me. I had wanted to learn the laud for some while, but the opportunity had not offered itself. I inquired his terms. The band said that they were twopence-halfpenny a lesson. So I at once told it to send the maestro along. At 3.30—after we had been wondering for some time how much longer our eyes would remain open—the band took its leave, saying that it would come again one evening. It then marched, playing loudly, back to Alverca.

The maestro sent word that he would come on Tuesday evening. He was of that type of southern European that the American terms "Dago." He was typically Dago. He was a plumber by trade, and in the evening augmented his income by odd twopence-halfpennies picked up from the [Pg 160]

would-be "affectionates" of the guitar or laud. He loved wine with a sincere though timid reverence. When she heard that he was coming to give me a lesson, Encarnacion said:

"Oh, beautiful! And we will all come and listen to your lesson, and afterwards we will dance."

But even Spain could not make me unselfconscious enough to support that test. With grim harshness we locked the door on our lessons.

The maestro, like Blas, considered two airs his daily portion. At the end of the first air he would empty his tumbler of wine, and would gently repudiate the idea that it should be refilled. The third glass he accepted with quite vehement protestations. His course homeward was, I fear, usually more discursive than that of his coming. Like all Spanish musicians he sang upon the slightest excuse. He corrected my melody by singing: "Lo, La, Lo, La, Lo, La," as I played.

Having played the violin, the mandolin and the piano, I did not find the laud very difficult. It has a queer tuning in fourths and is played with the plectrum. But when La Merchora discovered that I had learned a piece in two days she was quite eloquent in her astonishment

CHAPTER XIX

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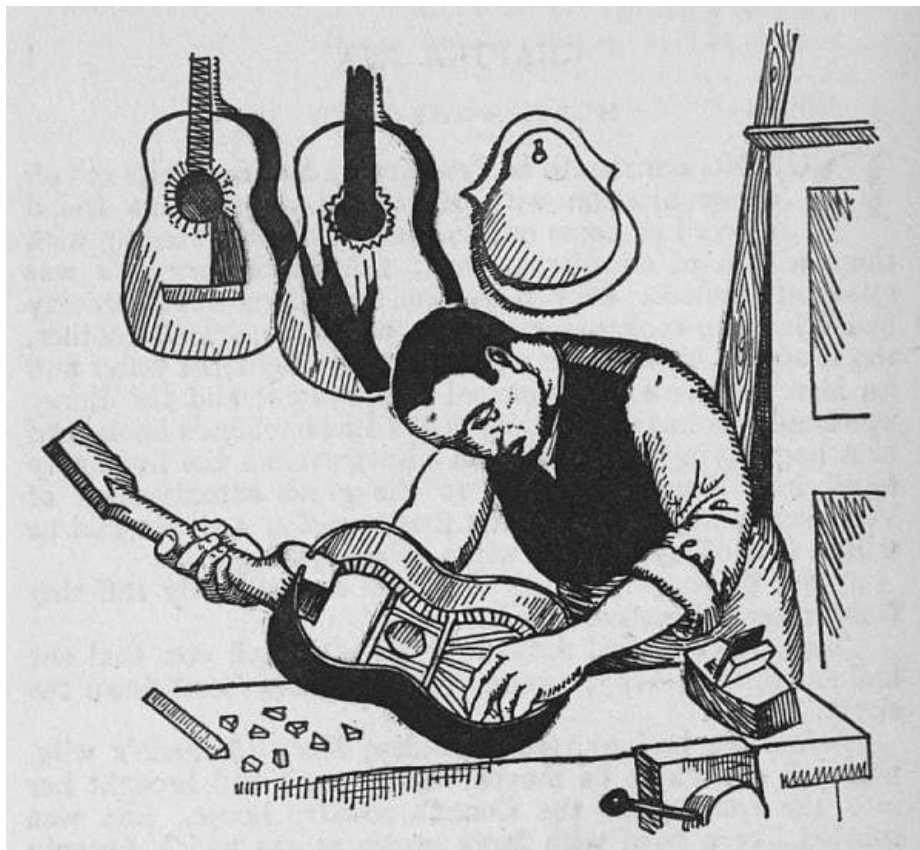
MURCIA—THE LAUD

During our month in Verdolay we had not quite cut off communication with Murcia. Luis and his friend Flores had come out to lunch with us, bringing with them a slab of odoriferous dried fish which *they said* was excellent in salads. On this occasion many families in Verdolay had offered to cook our dinner for us, Encarnacion's mother, the shopping woman, the woman who brought the water and La Merchora were the principal competitors; and the dinner was finally cooked out in the open in La Merchora's back-yard in a huge frying-pan. We had also travelled the five dusty miles into Murcia, walking, to the grave astonishment of Verdolay plutocracy. On the first occasion Antonio told us with a face of joy that his wife *was out of danger*.

"Out of danger," cried we; "but she was only suffering from a small digestive attack!"

"Oh, no," replied Antonio; "didn't I tell you that she had smallpox? Why, a man died of it three doors down the street."

Before we had quitted Verdolay, Rosa (Antonio's wife) was well enough to be moved, and Antonio had brought her into the country to the Count's country house. She was spotted like a pard with large brown marks which Antonio assured us would disappear with time, leaving no pits.



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On another visit Jan had gone into the shop of Emilio Peralta to buy some guitar strings. The shop of Emilio was not like that of Ramirez in Paris. It was set in a canyon of a street so deep that the midday sun for one short hour or so shines on the cobbles, so narrow that the carts which pass through it are permitted to go in one sole direction marked at the entrance by a pointing arrow. Ramirez had a workshop only, but Emilio had as well on his working bench three brave showcases painted apple green, one of which was filled with instruments—guitars, lauds and

bandurrias—with a drawer for strings, capo-d'astros and other instrumental appurtenances. Of the two other showcases, one housed the guitar-maker's tools, the third having degenerated to a pantry, and while one was buying strings from Emilio, his wife would be surreptitiously taking dishes of boiled garbanzos or of dried sardines out of the garishly painted frand. The place was indeed workshop, pantry and reception room. A counter cut the place in two. To the left as you entered Emilio made his instruments. To the right was a rough semicircle of chairs, and here the *aficionados*^[19] of the guitar came in the evening, to play on Emilio's latest creation. To our dismay, however, we found that the intensely interesting music of Spain, the Flamenco, as it is called, was somewhat despised in Emilio's shop. In Spain, music is divided to-day into the major divisions, Classical and Flamenco. Classical includes anything from Beethoven to Darewski, from Sonata or Symphony to Fox-trot or Polka. The guitar-maker to-day says proudly: "I do not make instruments for 'Flamenco,' mine are made for 'Classical'": and he but echoes the bad taste of the educated Spaniard. The Flamenco, the native music, having perhaps a stronger character than any other Folk music in Europe, is considered very vulgar; it is called "Tavern Music," as "still lives" in painting are called "Tavern pictures."

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Nevertheless, we were not to be seduced from our desire to study the Flamenco, and for the purpose of continuing that study I had been looking out for a laud which is peculiarly adapted to the music, much of which was composed originally upon this instrument. Hitherto I had been unable to find an instrument which I had liked, for the ordinary lute is queer in shape and rather harsh in quality. But the plumber-maestro in Alverca had lent me an instrument—a laud of simpler form and sweeter tone, called a sonora—which pleased me.

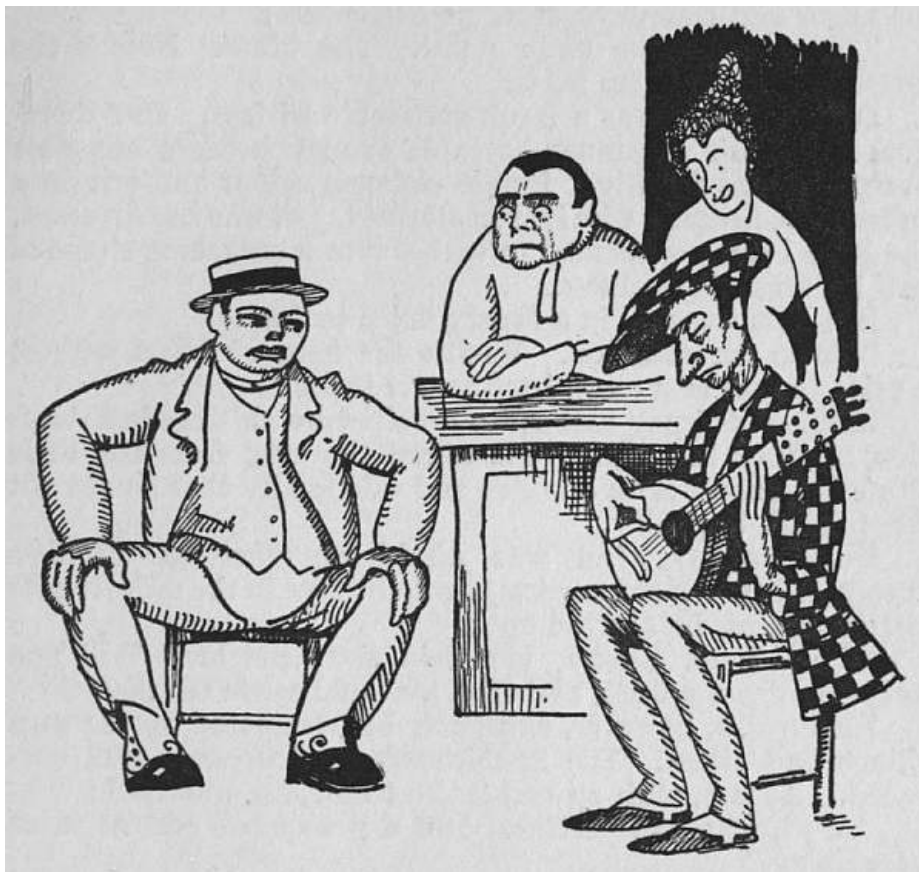
Jan going into Emilio's shop had found there a newly completed sonora, very like that of the little maestro's, but better in quality. He engaged Emilio to keep it till we returned, and Emilio said he would bring the Professor down to play it for us to show off its qualities. On the evening of the day on which we came back to Murcia we went to Emilio's shop. The chairs were all set in their prim semicircle and Emilio, round-shouldered and heavy-faced, sat us down while he expatiated on the excellence of the workmanship and the beauty of the tone of his instrument. He demanded sixty pesetas for the instrument, but said that we might possibly come to some friendly arrangement over the price, as he was trying to popularize this form of laud. The little Professor came in. He was a strange man. He was extremely emaciated, with one eye destroyed and almost blind in the other, dressed in *outré* style as though he were acting as jockey in an impromptu charade. His flexible hands seemed almost translucent in their delicacy. He at once addressed us with such rapidity of speech that we were unable to understand what he said (though our understanding of Spanish had made great progress), and he was extremely irritable with us for seeming so stupid. This frail, delicate, peering thing was a queer contrast to the burly, almost clumsy form of Emilio.

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The little Professor picked up the sonora, and passed it backwards and forwards slowly beneath his short-sighted eye. He sat down and played. His nimble fingers ran up and down the strings. We had almost decided to begin the delicate matter of bargaining when a fat form, white-waist-coated, straw hat perched jauntily over an Egyptian face, showed itself in the doorway. It was Blas. And Blas was drunk. He bowed in an heroic manner to me, shook hands in simulated affection with Jan; and, his soul obviously consumed with jealousy, greeted the little Professor, who returned his salutation with coldness.

"Go on," ordered Blas to the little Professor, "play." The little man put the sonora again on his thigh. One could almost hear his teeth grit. Then he began to show off. He possessed a very effective trick of playing intricate runs by the mere beat of the fingers of his left hand, that is without plucking the strings with his right. This he now exhibited to its full. He was on his mettle, Greek and Trojan were face to face. Blas, seated on his chair, his fat hands on his knees, smiled a drunken and somewhat patronizing approval of his rival's exhibition.

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The little Professor finished his exhibition, which the gipsy did not attempt to rival, for he played only the guitar. For a moment there was an embarrassing silence. The gentle art of bargaining was about to displace the art of music. But we had reckoned without the half-drunken Blas.

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Suddenly rising to his feet he faced Jan, and rubbing his finger and thumb together he exclaimed:

"Now comes the main point. The brass. Now is the question of cashing up for it."

Doubtless this was a frank statement of fact. But three-quarters of life continues bearable enough because one does not put things frankly. Emilio changed colour and put on a sullen face, Emilio's wife looked alarmed, Jan was embarrassed, the little Professor seemed to wither into a crouching shape of half his normal smallness.

But Blas went on in a breezy voice to Jan:

"Come on, come on. What's the matter? You suggest a price to him and he will tell you if it fits."

Emilio's delicacy was quite revolted by this crude exhibition of gipsy bad taste. He seized the laud from the little Professor, thrust it on one side and said loudly that he did not want to sell it at all.

Unfortunately, Jan was afraid of offending Emilio's susceptibility. Not knowing how to behave in the unfortunate circumstances, he blurted out:

"Look here, Emilio, you said sixty pesetas. Will you not come down a little, and then we could settle the matter?"

Emilio was, however, extremely bad-tempered by the turn things had taken. The Spanish sense of decency was outraged. At last, with an evil look at Blas, he muttered:

"Well, fifty-five pesetas. Not a penny less and no more bargaining."

Jan, to cut the scene short, agreed. The instrument was wrapped up in a paper bag. While Jan was paying over the money, Blas said:

"And you will give five pesetas to this gentleman, who is a poor man: and five pesetas to me also."

He seized five pesetas of the money from the counter and pressed them on the little Professor. The latter, with girlish giggles, refused; but Blas, with the insistence of a drunkard, pressed his desire until, to quieten him, the little Professor slipped the money into his waistcoat pocket. Blas then demanded his own commission, saying that as he had been Jan's Professor, and as Jan had once mentioned the subject of the laud to him, he was fully entitled to his claim. But Jan, outwardly calm, inwardly annoyed with Blas, would not give him a halfpenny. At last Blas was begging:

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"Well, at least give me a peseta to get a drink with."

"You have had enough drink already," said Jan.

He picked up the laud, and with farewells to Emilio, his wife and the little Professor we walked out of the shop, pushing our way through the crowd which had gathered at the shop door.

On the following day we returned to Emilio's shop to apologize for the contretemps. We found both Emilio and his wife very disturbed by what had happened. They said that their regrets were

eternal, and that it would have been better had we deferred the business matter until a better occasion.

"It was a disgraceful affair," said Emilio, "disgraceful; and to cap it all, after you had gone, Blas was most outrageous. We had actually to pay him two pesetas to go away."

"We were afraid for our lives," said Mrs. Emilio. "He is a bad man, and one never knows what rogues he might have brought upon us."

Though Jan did not believe much in the active danger of Blas, yet the terror of Emilio and of his wife was quite evident. So in the end he disbursed the five pesetas given to the little Professor as well as the two given to Blas. So that our laud actually cost us sixty-two pesetas, instead of the sixty for which we might have bought it without any bargaining.

With the little Professor we had made an engagement for the afternoon. He was to give me a lesson on which I could study while we were away at Jijona. He came, feeling his way up our staircase. He shook hands with us and said that the affair of last night had greatly oppressed his spirit.

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"I felt it much in my heart," he said.

We explained to him that we were going away for a month, but that we would return to Murcia later, and that when we returned I would take lessons from him.

"My price," he exclaimed (all his speech was exclamation), "is one duro a month. I am not one of those villains who charge one price to one person and a different price to another. No, my price is fixed and unalterable. One duro, five pesetas, a month."

Now, although this little man was probably as good a teacher as could be found in the town of Murcia, his price averaged about *twopence a lesson*.

We discovered later that the laud suffers not only from a ban of "bad taste," but also from a moral one. To-day its use in Spain is almost limited to the playing of dance music in houses of bad fame

FOOTNOTES:

[19] Lovers.

CHAPTER XX

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ALICANTE

Our second experience in Spanish village life was to be at Jijona, a small town in the country near Alicante. Our friend had what he called a studio there, and this was at our service. Luis said that there was furniture in the studio but no cooking utensils or bed. After our packing-case bed in Verdolay, we determined to take with us nothing but a mattress and either to sleep on the floor or to buy planks locally. So we had packed our trunk with painting materials, crockery and clothes. We had also made up a large roll of bedclothes and mattress such as emigrants travel with. Having risen with the dawn, our preparations were complete by the time at which the donkeyman who peddled drinking-water about the streets of Murcia called for us with his long cart. He was not quite satisfied with our roll, and with expert hands repacked it in a professional manner. But his long water-cart would only take our trunk and the rolled mattress, so, burdened with rucksacks, camera, guitar, thermos flasks and a rush basket containing crockery which would not pack into the trunk, and the laud, we walked the quarter of a mile to the station. Thus burdened, we expected more staring and laughter than before from the Murcianos, but, to our amazement, the people looked upon us with kindly eyes and wished us God-speed. Thus Spain reverses the manner of England.

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Jan took his place in the ticket queue while I, assisted by a friendly porter, looked for seats in a third-class carriage. The carriages were full enough despite the fact that we were in good time. Large numbers of children seemed to be travelling, and many of the passengers were stretched out on the wooden seats, taking a snooze before the train should start. The divisions between the compartments were only breast high, and already animated conversations had begun between the passengers who, from different compartments, shouted remarks to each other. In our compartment were a sandalled peasant stretched at full length, a bearded man with a huge brass plate on his breast and a shot-gun, evidently a gamekeeper, and a smart young man with patent leather boots and a straw hat. The last was reading a book. On the platform we noted an important priest striding about, his black soutane covered with a silk dust-coat, and an old woman with a posy of bright flowers about twice as big as her head. The train was the centre of an excited crowd, the carriage full almost to bursting-point. As the time for departure came near most of those we had imagined to be our fellow passengers got slowly down on to the platform; all the children disappeared. They had merely been taking advantage of the train's presence in the station to take a rest.

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The three strokes on the bell, which denote the starting of the train, had sounded when our carriage door was flung open and a panting bundle of humanity was thrust upwards and amongst us. As the train moved out, it resolved itself into a small woman, very loquacious, carrying in her arms three babies. Talking very excitedly, she laid her brood out on a wooden seat. The woman was black-haired and her jet eyes sparkled with excitement.

"They are bandits," she exclaimed. "Yes, bandits they are, rushing about like that. I was with my children in Uncle Pepe's donkey-cart. Then they come along. Of course the bullocks in the stone waggon in front wouldn't move quick enough, and so they come tearing across the road, flip us under the axle, and over we all go into the dust. Uncle Pepe strained his wrist and the shaft is broken. And that's the way they treat us just after my poor husband has died of smallpox. It's lucky that nobody was killed and that I didn't lose the train. Murderers, that's what they are."

We noted that she and her babies were covered with dust, and that she was dressed all in black even to her alpagatas. While she had been talking so volubly she had been unpacking a basket which, with the bundles, had been thrust in after her. She got out a bottle of water and a piece of rag. With a moistened rag she tried to wash the babies, but made rather a smeary mess of it. The occupants of the other compartments were leaning over sympathizing with her mishap. But, as she had omitted the cause of the mishap, somebody questioned her.

"Why, motors, of course," she snapped. "It's murderous the way they go rushing about. Not caring for any one, and not waiting to see what damage they have done."

As most of the carriage occupants seemed to be peasantry, they agreed with her. Somebody went on:

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"And are those all you have?"

The young woman drew herself up with pride. "No," she answered, "I've got four, and all men too."

The train was rolling with a determined manner down the Murcian valley. On one side the hills drew closer, on the other they were receding. We noted that all the carriage doors were left swinging wide open to admit as much air as possible. Presently there was a noise outside and the

ticket-collector scrambled into the carriage. He examined all the tickets in our coach, and swung himself again out on to the footboard, making his way slowly forward. Some of the passengers, too, who had friends in other carriages made visits *en route*, scrambling along the moving train. And the carriage doors had notices on them saying: "It is dangerous to put the head out of the window."

After an hour or more of sedate travel, we came to Orihuela, which boasts a huge monastery on the hill and a broad zigzag road which looked like an engineering feat. The station was like a flower shop. Vendors were running up and down the train thrusting elaborate bouquets into the windows. Some women dressed in royal blue satin came into our carriage, they stuffed unfortunate live poultry and rabbits, with feet tied up, under the seat and covered the wooden bench of the compartment with magnificent flowers. During the rest of the journey, the monotonous flip, click of their fans as they were opened and shut punctuated the conversation.

We passed through the famous date palm groves of Elche and at last came in sight of the sea at Alicante, which was our terminus. The journey of about forty-five miles had taken us nearly four hours, and we were almost an hour and a half late. Time-tables are more or less ornamental in Spain.

Outside the station at Alicante there was a horde of omnibuses surrounded by a fringe of touts. They were conducting their chaffering for passengers with a reasonable quietness, until they espied us. But perceiving that we were English and, therefore, fair prey, pandemonium broke out. Gradually the omnibuses filled and the babel, for babel it was, consisting of Spanish, Valenciano, bad French and worse English, died down. Two omnibus touts, however, persisted, and at last, in order to prevent battle between them, we chose our man for his looks. He promised to take us to the fonda from which started the motor service to Jijona.

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We had been warned by our English friend that it was often difficult to get seats on the motor, because the conveyance started from Jijona and many of the passengers booked return tickets. The omnibus tout added to this that there was a fiesta at Jijona, and that many people were going there. However, he said:

"If there are no seats in the motor, we will surely get them on the lorry, which will do just as well and is cheaper."

The omnibus was full with an unsmiling family, but we were crushed in. We were dragged along beneath a magnificent avenue of date palm trees which bordered the deep blue expanse of the Mediterranean, and then into streets of modern and of bad architecture. The family got out and paid the driver. Jan strained his eyes to see how much was the price, for we had foolishly made no bargain with the driver. As far as he could see most was paid in coppers. We then passed up into narrow and steep streets and halted before a wide door. The tout got down, but returned almost immediately, saying that the motor was full for two days.

"The motor-lorry is better," he said.

With some difficulty the bus was turned round in the narrow street and we went downhill again, coming at length to the entrance of another fonda. We passed through its broad entrance and at a small office window interviewed an old man who said that there was room in the lorry but that he did not know when it was going. So we deposited our luggage in the wide entrance, amongst packing-cases, sacks of flour, mattresses and japanned boxes. We then asked the price of the bus from the tout.

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"Seven pesetas," he said.

The whole drive had not taken twenty minutes, and Jan was sure that the other family of four had not paid more than two pesetas for the lot. After some argument and much blasphemy from the driver, we paid five pesetas, and the bus drove off vomiting curses at us from both driver and tout. (On the return journey from Jijona we happened on the same bus, but we made our bargain beforehand. The same trip then cost us two pesetas, and was accomplished with smiles instead of curses, and both driver and tout clapped us on the shoulder and wished us: "Vaya con dios.")

This fonda was a typical peasant inn. The entrance door which pierced through a block of buildings was big enough to admit a full-sized traction engine, had there been such a thing in Alicante. This wide passage led into a big courtyard open to the skies. On each side of the courtyard a staircase led to balconies from which opened the doors of the bedrooms, below were the dark stables, and the courtyard itself was filled with the large two-wheeled tilted carts which, dragged by from two to eight draught animals, keep up communications in Spain wherever the railway does not penetrate. To the right of the entrance was the fonda restaurant, and also a huge kitchen with several cooking fires at which the traveller, if he wished, could cook his own meals, and a long dining-table at which he could eat them. We went into the restaurant, for we were hungry. To our table came an old couple. They were at once friendly and told us that they had come from Africa. They were Spanish but had lived more than thirty years in North Africa, and though the old man could neither read nor write he could speak several African dialects quite well. They were making a pleasure tour of the south of Spain for a short holiday. They told us that the fonda was quite clean, and that we could take a room in it without fear. They added that though Murcia was but "a dirty village" the fonda there had been clean also, but that at Guadix they had been eaten alive.

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Our dinner finished, we sat ourselves down on a bench in the entrada and looked about us.

To one side of the entrance was a small stall which sold iced drinks. Men and women were sitting in after-lunch ease amid the boxes and sacks which lined the opposite wall, on low chairs, or on

the bench with us. A dog, shaved all over its body, partly because of the heat, partly to keep off the fleas with which all Spanish animals are infested, was asleep on our mattress. The proprietor of the fonda was standing in a lordly manner in the middle of the floor. He was dressed in white shirt and flannel trousers, and must have weighed almost sixteen stone, although quite young. He looked as if he had been inflated with air.

We had noticed, though we have not before mentioned, a curious illness which seems prevalent in Spain. In Murcia were large numbers of monstrous children; boys and girls had reached enormous proportions before the age of ten years old. We came to the conclusion that it was a form of illness, because, though the children seemed healthy enough, we have never seen this development of monstrosity elsewhere, nor did large numbers of them appear to survive adolescence, though there were a certain number of excessively fat girls. The proprietor was such a monstrosity grown up. His wife, a dark-eyed beauty, was sitting in a rocking-chair near the kitchen door and her baby of about three years old, standing in its mother's lap, was having a great lark, pretending to catch lice in its mother's head. Thus do our ideas of innocent sports for children differ from those of other nations.

There was some coming and going amongst the fonda visitors. The guests seemed to be all peasants, the men in blouses, the women in pale skirts, black blouses and shawls of paisley pattern over the shoulders. Many had bundles of towels and of bathing dresses. One group we heard saying that they had come down to Alicante for a week's sea bathing.

As the afternoon drew on and the lorry delayed, we again interviewed the old man, who answered that probably it would not come that day. Accordingly, we spoke to the proprietor, who rather roughly said that we could have a room for two pesetas a night. The room was small, and the bed only just big enough for two. There were two doors, one leading into the interior of the inn, one out on to a balcony. The latter was half of glass and had no lock, and as there was plenty of traffic along the balcony, which was used for drying linen, underclothes and bathing dresses, one only had a chance of privacy by closing the shutters, leaving oneself in the dark, and no chance of sleeping with the window open despite the heat. But Spain does not believe in open windows or doors at night; it has "a robber complex."

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We put our small luggage into the bedroom, leaving the large trunk and the roll of mattress in the entrada. We then went out to explore the town and to find a young painter to whom we carried an introduction from Luis. Emilio, for such was his name, was one of the lucky ones of this world. His parents kept a wine-shop which relieved him of a pressing need of earning a living. He could thus study at his ease. Our investigations took us through a shop full of large barrels, up some narrow stairs and on to a landing where two girls were working at pillow lace. Emilio received us with a brusque cordiality, showed us some of his work, which had talent, came back to the inn with us, where he arranged for our transport by the lorry whenever it should arrive, and said that he would also find a carter to take our heavier luggage out on a road waggon. This readiness to help a stranger, often at considerable personal effort, we found characteristic of the parts of Spain which we have visited.

Emilio, having an engagement, left us, and we strolled through the town. To the east lies the older part of the Port clambering up the rugged side of the steep rock, at the top of which lies the castle. The fishing village, at the extreme end of Alicante, is beautiful with its small primitive cubic houses painted in garish patterns. Through steeply sloping streets we came to the beach. Here were Mediterranean fishing boats drawn up in ranks; then, as we returned towards the harbour, more open beach covered with people in gay dresses and children playing on the sands. Then came the bathing establishments built out on piles over the tideless sea. The bathing establishments increased in luxury towards the town and were, for the most part, fantastic wooden erections of Moorish design. We came back to the broad double avenue of palm trees which faced the more luxurious hotels and cafés.

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Night came softly on, and one by one amongst the palms the lights of the town threw beams over the chattering people who strolled in ever-thickening processions to and fro beneath the palm trees; mingled with the conversation was the incessant click, click of the fans of the girls and women. We went back to the fonda for supper and afterwards returned to the sea front. The cafés had spread tables beneath the palms, and we sat down enjoying our "Blanco y negro," an iced drink composed half of white cream ice flavoured with vanilla, and half of iced coffee.

Bands of musical beggars assailed us. Most of the mendicants were blind. One group, a veritable orchestra, travelled from café to café clinging to the edges of a bass viol which the one seeing member, the money collector, dragged the way it should go, by the peg-head. There was an old guitarist who played and made queer noises through a small gazoo. Another orchestra of three, guitar, laud and bandurria, the latter instrument a small cousin of the laud, and in this case played beautifully by a blind boy of about nineteen years. There were other beggars too, but the devil of cheap European music had entered into them all. Not one played their own native Spanish music. I suppose nobody would pay to hear it played.

At the end of the palm avenue an artist had set up an easel on a raised dais. His work was illuminated by a strong acetylene gas lamp. The canvas was painted bright sparrow's egg blue and surrounded by a frame of staring gilt.

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On the blue canvas he was painting an imaginary landscape, the blue serving as sky and for the waters of a still lake. A drab woman was threading her way to and fro through the crowd which surrounded him, crying out: "The numbers, the numbers. Who would like to win a magnificent picture, framed complete for ten chances a penny?"

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Another crowd surrounded a buck nigger who, displaying his magnificent and gleaming teeth, was crying out the virtues of his dentifrice.

A third crowd listened to a quack doctor who, backed by a large picture depicting the jungle, was selling a specific called "African Tonic." The tonic, he said, was derived from essences extracted at enormous expense from the tiger, the elephant, the monkey, and from I know not what else. From time to time he rested his voice by turning on a squeaky gramophone.

Tired from our journey we went to bed betimes.

We got up early. In the waggons, which were lined up in the big courtyard, the families which had slept in them were making their toilet. In the entrada, the old man of the inn, aided by the stable boy, was packing away the hammock beds slung from trestles, on which slept those travellers who, having no waggon, did not wish to pay the expense of a bedroom.

We had noted small café stalls near to the market, so, in order to see some more of Alicante life, we took our breakfast there rather than in the fonda. The café stalls were wooden box-like kiosks, and they spread wicker chairs and tables over the open street, and soldiers and workmen were sitting sipping their morning refreshment. Beneath the shelter of the kiosk a lad was making the day's supply of ice cream. The cream is frozen by the amount of heat absorbed from it by the freezing mixture. One might also say that the amount of refreshment to be derived from ice cream seems proportionate to the amount of energy absorbed from the lad who manufactures it: it appeared a fatiguing business. Crowds of people on the way to market passed us, and to where we sat came the cries of the market salesmen. We were not stared at here as we had been in Murcia. Strangers were evidently more common.

A small boy stationed himself near our table gazing longingly at a breakfast roll. To all intents and purposes he hypnotized it from the table into his hand. He broke into unexpected French. His father, like so many Spaniards, had been working at Lyons during the war. He deplored the fact that he had no education, but said that he was trying to learn some English from the sailors who came to Alicante. He had begun with the swear words, of which already he had a fair collection. He said that his father was a bootmaker, out of work, and asked if we had any boots to mend. He wheedled also some cigarettes and a few coppers from us.

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Emilio, who had sent off our heavy luggage on the previous night as he had promised, met us, and together we went to a café on the front, where we wrote a letter to Antonio saying that we had left our passports behind by accident. In spite of this oversight we had decided to push on to

Jijona and to trust to luck.

After lunch we again sat down in the fonda wondering if the motor-lorry would come. Many peasants also were there. Motor omnibuses drove in, but these were destined for other parts. Opposite the bus office was a gambling machine, into which one pushed a penny and if one were lucky received back twopence, fourpence, sixpence or even tenpence. But this machine had gone wrong, and the bulky proprietor spent the greater part of the afternoon over it with a screw-driver. A drunkard was staggering up and down, now shouting, now singing, now dancing a few unsteady steps. The stable boys were making a butt of him. Presently he sat down on a sack and fell asleep, his head tilted back, his mouth open. The opportunity was too good to miss.

Pulling out his sketch book, Jan began to make a sketch. The old ticket-office man, perceiving what Jan was doing, leaned over his shoulder, and as the sketch developed began to chuckle. Soon there was a double queue of spectators, giggling with suppressed laughter, stretching on each side from Jan to the drunkard across the width of the entrada. When the drawing was finished, the old man exclaimed:

"But that is excellent; will you not give it to me, Señor?"

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Jan made of the drawing a rapid tracing which pleased the old man as much as the original.

"I'll keep that," said the old man.



To our horror he walked across the entrada, with a thump in the ribs awoke the drunkard, and showed him the sketch. Gradually, as he realized what had been done, an expression of wrath grew on the drunkard's face. Luckily for us, he became possessed of the idea that the drawing had been done by one of the stable boys. No one undeceived him and, amidst roars of laughter, he addressed a long speech to the stable boy in question.

"The rights of man," said the drunkard, "are inalienable, and of all the rights of man, the greatest right is that of his person. The stable boy has, therefore, transgressed against the most sacred of men's rights. I could have excused most things," went on the drunkard, "but this is inexcusable; to inflict indignity on a man in his own person. Since neither the stable boy nor the spectators of this crime seem sensible of the enormity they have committed, the only act by which I can express the contempt which I feel for the meanness of your natures is that of removing myself from the company of such low mortals."

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Having thus delivered himself with the air of a Demosthenes, he literally shook the dust from the soles of his alpagatas and staggered out into the street. Coincident with the departure of the drunkard was the arrival of the Jijona motor-lorry.

The lorry was heavy, with solid tyres. Michelin's motor guide had described the route as: "Cart road bad and very indisposed," and we wondered what the sixteen miles would value as experience. We all scrambled in, arranging our luggage as best we could on our laps or under the narrow wooden benches nailed to the lorry's sides. The centre of the lorry was occupied with

cargo, in this case barrels, some full, some empty, standing on end. We thought that we had all fitted in so nicely, but a wail from the courtyard drew our attention to an old woman who, loaded with parcels and almost weeping with despair, had failed to find a seat. We said "Move up" to each other, but no moving up was possible. The old man came out in anger from the ticket-office.

"But this is ridiculous," he shouted; "there is room, there are so many seats on the lorry, I sell so many seats, therefore there must be room."

Slowly the elucidation of the mystery dawned on us. Three of our passengers were of such girth that each ought in common fairness to have booked two seats for himself. So with much effort we squeezed and shoved into the fat men until we gained a narrow slit of seat into which the little old woman was dropped. But immediately the active pressure was released the resilience of fat reasserted itself, and the little old woman spent the first part of the journey moaning out that she was being crushed to death. Most of the voyagers were peasants; one or two were travellers going to the fiesta; one was dressed in soldier's uniform, but he seemed to be neither officer nor private. We discovered later that he was a veterinary surgeon. Our musical instrument caused some attention and our fellow voyagers smiled at us with sympathy and kindness.

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"Are you artists?" they asked.

"Yes," we replied.

"Then we will come to your concert," said they.

The road was indeed "indisposed." We rolled, rocked, and bumped along miles of dusty road, by the side of which the trees were so drenched in dust that they were but ghosts of themselves; the herbage below seeming like the delicate clay work of a magic potter, having no hint of green for the eye. Nor can empty barrels be considered good travelling companions. If the lorry were toiling uphill the barrels sidled down the floor with a seeming leer. One snatched one's toes out of the way without ceremony. On reaching the end of the lorry, the barrels spread themselves sideways, crushing the knees of the sitters. When the lorry reached the top of the hill and began to thunder down the new slope the barrels bounced and bumped to the other end of the lorry, bruising everybody in their passage. Finally the young soldier sat on one of the centre barrels and tried to quell their antics, without much success.

The lorry climbed into the mountains, round roads which curved like a whiplash. At one spot the young soldier remarked: "The motor-bus fell over here once; six of the passengers were killed."

The sun beat down on the canvas top of the lorry, and the large white porous water-jug hanging at the end was in constant demand. We halted at a small and lonely house where beer was for sale. The passengers also bought beans pickled in salt and handed them to each other.

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The dusty miles rolled off, at one moment through grey cliffs which shone in the evening light, and another over deep water courses, along the bottom of which ran serried terraces of vines. Presently a pretty girl, whom we took to be the daughter of a wealthy farmer, and who had spent the better part of the journey flirting with the young soldier, exclaimed: "Mira! Shishona!"^[20]

Through a cleft between two mountains we caught a glimpse of distant houses clustered up the side of a hill towards an old Saracen ruin which gleamed ochreous against the evening sky.

In spite of the presence of a couple of factories, the entrance of Jijona from the south is one of the most romantic sights we have seen in Spain. Ancient Spanish buildings sprang from the edge of a ravine covered with prickly pear, and faced a steep cliff, along the precipitous face of which ran water courses. Old houses stood step above step, on a hill so steep that the roadways were all staircases and the houses had two entrances, the front into the lowest story and the back into the upper, and often the back-yard was higher than the roof. A white stone bridge carried the road with a noble curve across the ravine, and round this curve we swung, the passengers waving hands and shouting greetings, into the town.

Our destination was a casa de huespedes (half inn, half boarding-house) called "La Vinaigre," and the name was not altogether unsuitable. But our first reception was as cordial as we could have wished. Owing to our friend's mattress, which the old hostess had recognized, we were welcomed with open arms.

CHAPTER XXI

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JIJONA—THE FIESTA

The only fiesta we had hitherto experienced in Spain had been a small peasant feast during an afternoon at Verdolay. We had gone to it; but finding that we as foreigners constituted the chief centre of interest, we had run away to the seclusion of our house. At the big fiesta of Jijona were so many strangers that we were almost overlooked.



The family at the "Vinegar" consisted of an old bent-backed father peasant, sandalled; a mother, in black with black shawl; several sons, reaching towards mercantile gentility owing to the turrón factory, which was in the cellars of the house; and several daughters, most of whom had married personages of importance in the little town. In fact the "Vinegar" family was upon the up-grade. They promised us a week of unparalleled amusement.

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First, they said the town was crammed with people—a most necessary concomitant to Spanish enjoyment. In no other country in the world is the gregarious nature of man so plainly exhibited. The man who plays his lonely golf matched with an imaginary colonel would not be understood; your solitary pleasurer would find no sympathizers. Crowds, crowds, form the oil in the salad of Spanish amusement. Secondly: that very night the priests were giving a free public cinema entertainment. Thirdly: "They will loose a cow on the streets to-morrow night. Oh, it is precioso. It is a wonderful diversion. The cow gallops, the men try to catch her. They are tossed right and left, others come to the rescue. Magnificent! Eh?" Fourthly: the old drama of the Moors and Christians was to be performed.

Jijona lies in territory once captured by the Moors. They say that the original name was Saracena, and to-day locally it is pronounced "Shishona." It owes its considerable wealth to the extensive terrace cultivation of almonds, by means of which the hard-working Moors converted the mountains from barrenness to fertility.

"There is a castle of boards erected in the plaza," said the Vinegars; "this will be stormed first by the Moors, then by the Christians. It is very luxurious. Not so luxurious as last year, perhaps, because the captains of the fiesta are not so wealthy as those of last year, and owing to the tobacco famine, the Contrabandistas will omit their drama of tobacco smuggling. Yet it will exhibit much lujo."^[21]

At supper we tasted for the first time the famous turrón of Jijona. This was manufactured by our hosts. It is a crisp, dry, almond sweetmeat, probably Moorish in origin, for it is not unlike Halva de Smyrne and carries behind its almond flavour a queer but not unpleasant taste resembling the smell of an over-heated chair. Supper over, we went out to the plaza. The first need of Spanish amusement had been fulfilled. The streets were crowded. A few of the more sophisticated visitors were even wearing hats.

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At the far end of the plaza, dimly, could be seen the wooden castle, in shape not unlike one of those quaint wood cuts from an old edition of Froissart; some distance in front of it, high in the air, was the sheet on which the free "pictures" were to be thrown from the topmost pinnacle of the castle. As the time of the performance drew near, the people came bringing chairs with them until both before and behind the screen the plaza was crammed. The performance was not a success. The illumination was dim; the sheet stretched high above the people's heads. In addition, a young moon in its first quarter intruded from above the mountain-tops. This intrusive crescent, shining almost through the centre of the sheet, sometimes took the place of the heroine's head, sometimes of the hero's waistcoat. After straining our eyes for a while, having reflected on gift-horses and teeth we went back to the Vinegars' and to bed. As we went we wondered what those spectators who were on the wrong side of the sheet and who in consequence could not read the legends—if they were able to read—would construe out of those dim dramas.

We awoke on the morrow eager to see what the "Studio" of our friend was like. Father Vinegar had gone before us, but Mother Vinegar took the road and showed us up through tortuous and romantic staircases of streets, up—up—until we reached the highest level of the town. But our friend's house was yet higher. We clambered up a zigzag path over a widening hill-side to the crest of the ridge. There on the top, fronting the ruins of the old Saracen fortress, was our friend's house "El Torre de Blay." It was a long house of one story, backed by a round tower of

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three stories. The tower was claimed to be Saracen in origin: it overlooked a walled yard, which was filled with chickens, rabbits and turkeys, for the Vinegars were using the house during the absence of our friend. A pile of almond shells was in the entrada and a back door led out into a terraced garden full of pomegranate, pear, fig, almond and olive trees and grape vines. Old Vinegar, called locally "Père Chicot," led us round, discoursing on the beauty of the house, which was indeed cool, large and airy. But the *clou* of the house Père Chicot kept till the last. With a gesture of profound pride he swung open a small door.

"Señor and Señora," he exclaimed, "I will warrant that there is not a W.C. to compare with this in the whole province of Alicante."

Mother Vinegar, talking in a high-pitched, querulous voice, was complaining of the rise in prices, of the hardness of the season. The garden of the Torre, she said, was not worth looking after, there were no grapes, and as for the almonds, she went on, pointing to a small heap, that was the whole crop for the year. She added that only a little while ago somebody had broken into the yard and had stolen two hundred and fifty pesetas' worth of poultry and rabbits.

It occurred to us that some of her cordiality to us came from the fact that she looked on us to make up some of that lost money. So I gently led her on to the question of ways and means. She said:

"Oh, El Señor used this place as a working place only. He lived and slept at our house, and for that he paid ten pesetas a day."

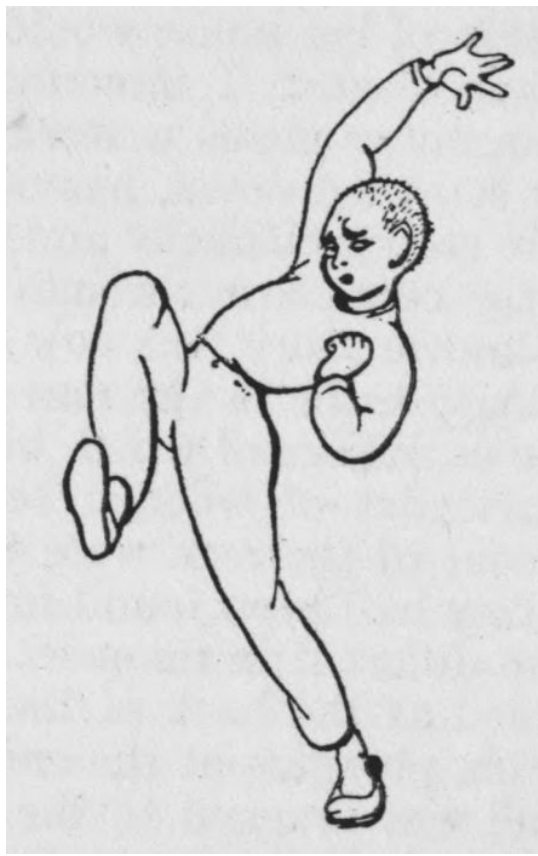
Now El Señor (our English friend) had told us that he paid seven pesetas. Our suspicions were correct. I am afraid that in the end Mrs. Vinegar, like the undertaker in Tchekov's story, counted us amongst her losses. Her manner changed gradually from cordial to chilly: she had promised to help me to shop, but she put obstacles in my way and also, I believe, tried to prevent us from finding a servant. Finally we made an arrangement that Mrs. Vinegar should supply us with meals at two pesetas fifty each. Remembering that Elias had fed us in Murcia for one peseta fifty I struggled to reduce the price to two pesetas for less food, but Mrs. Vinegar said that Jijona was far more expensive than Murcia (as a matter of fact it was, if anything, cheaper), and that the reputation of her house would not stand a lower price. Finally, to her disgust, I announced that we could not afford more than three meals a week at that rate, and we were accordingly scrawled down, heavily underlined, with red ink, amongst the stolen chickens and rabbits.

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But the idea of the cow chase through the streets excited us. As in the well-known story, the cow turned out to be a bull; nor was the chase to be in the narrow winding streets, but in the plaza, the entrances of which had been blocked up with extempore barricades of wooden beams. The women and the less courageous of the men were to fill the balconies, and places in a balcony had been found for us by the Vinegar girls, who were quite different in manners from their parents. The bulls were stabled at the back of the town; and, like a wasp in a spider's web, plunging at the ends of long ropes tied to its horns, the bull was dragged to the plaza, when it was insinuated into a rough bull-pen erected near the castle. There were three bulls, and a second was thus dragged up and penned in. The third, however, was tied to a tree, and pads, like boxing-gloves, were fixed solidly to its murderous horns. Then with some precautions the bull was loosened. The game was a sort of ticky-touchwood. Home in this case was anywhere out of reach of the bull's tossing capacity: open doors, the ironwork of windows, water pipes, trees, the barricades of the streets, lamp posts, a fountain—around which one could dodge—and a wall topped by a rickety pailing, and the woodwork of some swing-boats near the castle.

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Jan had gone down into the plaza to get some photos. From the balcony the game was exciting, though not furious. Some of the boys showed considerable pluck; and it was amusing to watch the strange concavities shown in the back of one running away who thought that the bull was close behind and who could feel in imagination those horns prodding his spine.



But the fun was not furious enough to bear long watching from the balcony. So I went down into the square and joined Jan. I had several reasons for this action. I was bored, and thought it would be more exciting below. But the chief idea I had was that by this manœuvre I would be able to introduce myself to Jijona *en bloc*. I should be universally known, and would thus escape the continual shrieks and giggles with which strangers greeted my appearance. So I went down into the plaza.

A loud gasp went up from the crowds.

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Some youths ran up to me.

"Señora, Señora," they cried, "you mustn't stay here. It is dangerous!"

"Why?" asked I.

"But don't you understand? The bull! He might get you."

"But," I answered, "he might get you too."

"Oh, but we can run."



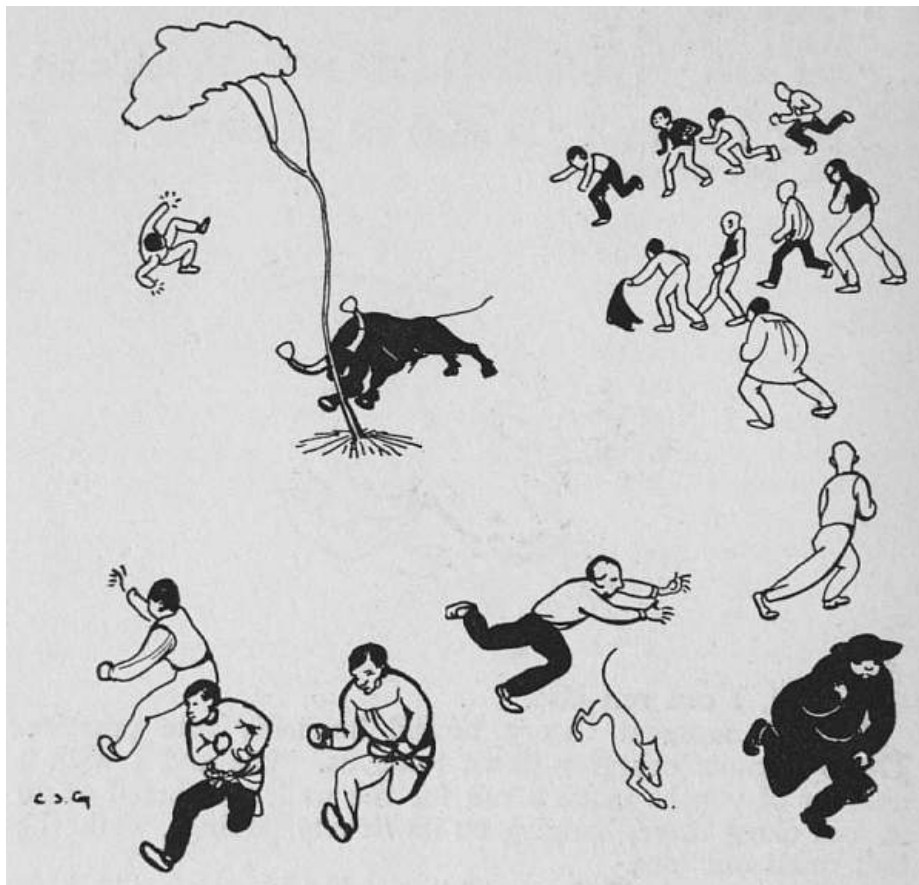
"Well, I can run also."

At this moment theory turned hurriedly into practice. The bull came charging down upon us. Jan and I with a number of youths made a run for the wall, clambered on to it, and clung there, hanging on its rickety pailings, while the bull smelt our toes.

"Curse you! Curse you!" screamed out an old man who was dancing with rage on the other side of the pailings. "Get down. Can't you see that in a minute you'll bring the whole place down? Get off at once."

But the boys merely gave him retort for curse. The bull turned on to another baiter and dashed away. This boy sprang into the branches of a young tree. The bull, going full speed, hit the stern of the sapling with his forehead, and the youth was shot off, describing a graceful parabola, and landing with a thump on to the ground. Gradually the game drifted to the other end of the plaza and we came down from the fence.

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"Señora," said an anxious voice, "I have here a balcony. It is quite respectable, for my wife is there. Pray do not risk your life any longer." [Pg 193]

The speaker was the husband of one of the Vinegar girls, one of the nicest men we met in Jijona. He was short and plump, and even as he spoke to me he gazed anxiously towards the end of the plaza. While he was still urging me, the bull made a movement in our direction, and he bolted. This time we sought shelter in an open doorway, accompanied by two priests. One lad tripped and the bull rolled him over with its padded horns, but other lads ran up, one flapped a handkerchief before the animal's nose, another hung on to its tail. Somehow we could not help wondering what would have happened to the bull had twenty public schoolboys been loosed in that plaza!

At last the light faded. First the bull, then the boys grew tired. The animal, captured with ropes, was led away to become meat for future Jijona dinners—eating a playmate, it seemed to me.

Further north in Spain they have a variant of this game. A young bull is put into a wide circle formed of carts. The bull's horns are not padded, and this game is quite dangerous. A Polish painter, a friend of ours, once entered such a ring. He was chased by the bull and to escape sprang for a cart. He was not quite quick enough. With the upward toss the bull thrust a horn through the seat of his trousers, as the painter was in mid-air. Luckily the trousers were an old pair, the seat came out wholesale and the painter tumbled head first into the cart. He says that for the rest of the day he went about with his hat clapped behind him.

The bull-baiting over, we called upon the doctor to whom we carried an introduction from Luis. Then we scrambled up to our Torre, taking with us provisions and candles. We made up our mattress on the floor and slept the more soundly for our hard bed.

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We had one joy at Jijona—there were no mosquitoes, and the nights were deliciously cool. Our windows were far enough from the ground to allow the most timid of Spanish women to sleep secure from robbers. The sun streaming in at our windows awoke us before six—we dressed and breakfasted, looking down on the town, which still lay in the shadow. Immediately beneath our windows were two hundred yards of stony hillside; then began the houses, small and closely crowded as though they feared the rough arid expanse of the towering hills of rock. We looked down upon an almost Moorish succession of flat roofs, plunging downhill into the valley. The surrounding country was like a rough sea suddenly frozen, in front of us the mountains seemed almost to curl over. A violet smoke was rising from Jijona chimneys, a smoke which drifted a sweet scent to our nostrils, a scent of sage and of fir. From the middle of the village the church tower covered with blue and white tiles suddenly chimed the hour with discordant bells.

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Mrs. Vinegar was to take me the round of the shops. She had previously tried to impress me with the dreadful price of provisions in Jijona, and this time she prevented me from buying eggs. The greengrocer's shop, kept by a gay woman named Concha, was only an entrada filled with baskets. Mrs. Vinegar had refused to change a note of 100 pesetas for me, and we discovered later that notes of any magnitude greater than twenty-five pesetas are difficult to change in villages. But Concha changed the money cheerfully and earned my gratitude. Opposite Concha's shop, frowning on the main street with grated windows, was the prison, of which somebody said:

"Heavens! The Jijona men are so good that there hasn't been a soul in the prison for the last five years. It is full of chickens and rabbits."

We bought a frying-pan, having to choose between one very small and one very large. The latter was thick in rust, and must have been I don't know how many years on the shelves of the shop. We chose it on condition that the shop man could get it clean, and he at once put the whole of his family to work on it, including a prospective daughter-in-law, a French-African girl just arrived from Morocco. The customers were whispering one to another, and at last one more bold than the others addressed me:

"I saw you yesterday go down amongst the bulls. Were you not terribly frightened? I thought that my heart was going to stop."

We went to buy drinking glasses. The china shop was deserted and we had to shout loudly before we could get anybody to serve us. The woman did not know the price of the glasses.

"But no matter," she said, "you can pay any time you like. And weren't you terribly frightened yesterday, going down into the bulls? I couldn't draw my breath when I saw you jump on to the wall."

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There were children crowded at the shop door. As we came out I heard murmurs, which gradually we made out as:

"La Valiente, La Valiente, La Valiente!"

I was known by this name during the whole of my stay in Jijona.

On Sunday we dined at the Vinegars' and in the afternoon the doctor took us to the Casino. I believe there is gambling at these Casinos, but this takes place upstairs, and on the ground floor they perform the function of the local club. On Sunday afternoons and in the evenings the aristocracy of the place collect here to sip ices while the local pianist rattles off the latest music which has reached the town.

After supper we walked through the streets, feeling our way up and down hill, for lights were few and the streets full of rocks and unexpected steps. We heard the sound of guitars and at once climbed towards it. At the top of a staircase we came to a shop in front of which a family was sitting. A woman with a rough voice began to chaff us.

"Ah, yes," she exclaimed, "you are the English of the Torre de Blay. And the lady is the valiant one who is not afraid of bulls. Ha ha! What? You are going to see the dancing—well, let's all go."

The family heaved itself to its feet, surrounded and escorted us down a narrow lane which ended at a platform which hung on the cliff's edge. Three men were sitting on the doorstep of a house, two playing guitars, one playing the bandurria. A crowd, young men in blouses and girls, with light skirts and shawls, were standing about or dancing. Three couples were dancing a Valencian jota. Some of the movements of the dance seemed intricate, but they danced with a fine natural grace, and there was a beautiful balance of body which echoed the movement of the music. A woman standing behind me said:

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"Now, Señora, I will teach you the jota one of these evenings. And you will take my baby, because I have lots and they say you have none."



Both on Saturday and on Sunday bull-baiting exhibitions had taken place, but we had not gone to see them. One day had been quite sufficient. On Monday morning we were awakened by the sounds of music. The local band was parading the streets playing a queer semi-Oriental music. As the morning advanced other bands came in until seven or eight bands were in full blast, each playing a different tune and each trying to drown its rivals with sound. Gradually Moors and Christians gathered. The Moors came from the Near East and from the Far. The Chief and his immediate suite were Bedouin Arabs, and there were Turks, Saracens, Hindus, Chinamen, negroes and some of uncertain lineage. Girls accompanied each group dressed in appropriate Hourii costume, carrying bottles filled with a liquor which would have pleased Omar rather than Mahomet. The Christians included Roman soldiers, crusaders, cavaliers and smugglers of 1800. The latter were the chief Christian and his retinue. Vivandières attended the Christians with drink no less stimulating than that supplied to their Moorish enemies. Moors and Christians carried large blunderbusses of ancient mode, and all day long to the sounds of indefatigable melody they paraded the town. It appeared to be the duty of the Moors to be comic; they wore big goggles and many had huge imitation beards with which, when the heat grew greater, they fanned themselves. They pranced and postured through the streets while the Christians marched along in solemn ranks. Nor did the fiesta end with the going down of the sun. With discreet intervals for refreshment, marching and music continued till 2 a.m., at which time sleep and a blessed silence fell on Jijona.

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Undeterred by but four hours' rest, punctually at six the cacophony of brass began again. By midday crusaders and bandsmen, having exchanged helmets and caps, were dancing jotas down the principal streets. But a short siesta revived them for the principal work of the day: the entry of the Moors. At about four in the afternoon the performers gathered at the picturesque southern entrance of the village, thus symbolizing the direction from which the Moors had come. Then group by group, with blunderbusses banging off into the air, the Christians retreated slowly up the street, going backwards. Last of all the Christians went the Contrabandistas, and last of the Contrabandistas the Captain, dressed in a wonderful ancient costume of velvet, embroidered with gold, silver and silk, and a blanket striped in many colours. Facing him, advanced with equal solemnity and noise the chief Moor. After some two hours of deafening reports the whole troupe was in movement, some forwards, others backwards, and had arrived at the wooden castle in the plaza. By seven o'clock, at this funereal pace, the Moors were at last massed before the castle.

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"Now for the charge and for some fun," we thought. But mounting a profusely decorated horse, the chief Moor began a speech. The Contrabandista, evidently a man of deeds only, had hired a real actor, dressed in the costume of a cavalier, to represent him. For almost an hour exchange of dramatic verse continued, after which the Christians quietly walked out of the castle, and the Moors walked in.

"Good heavens," thought we, "is that all?"

With ears deafened from the guns we went home; passing on the way a booth of green branches in which Moors and Christians, overcome either by the heat or by the assiduous ministrations of Hourri or Vivandière, were laid out on sacks.

Though officially the day was ended, practically it was not. Those who had private stocks of powder continued the gunfire till midnight. The bands, their music becoming more and more incoherent, played on till two o'clock.

We decided that we had seen enough fiesta. We stayed in our castle and went out sketching in the country to avoid the appalling din which rose from the town to our windows. At night there was a modest display of fireworks in the plaza, which we were quite content to enjoy from where we were.

After all was over they said to us:

"Wasn't it a beautiful fiesta?"

Outwardly we were forced to agree with them, but inwardly we recognized—perhaps with a sense of regret—that to enjoy these fiestas as they ought to be enjoyed, that is, as a Spaniard enjoys them, requires a sense of values and perhaps a nervous organism which we do not possess

FOOTNOTES:

[20] "Look! Jijona!"

[21] Luxury.

CHAPTER XXII

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JIJONA—TIA ROGER

Jijona lived on almond paste. All around us the grey, pallid or zebra striped mountains were terraced, and wherever enough earth could be gathered together for an almond tree to grow, there it was planted. The turrón of Jijona, which is made in perfection nowhere else, is a very popular sweet meat all over Spain and even is widely appreciated in South America. In Barcelona I have been greeted by turrón-selling youths who addressed me as La Valiente. On the French frontier in a little village we found a turrón-stall kept by a man in Jijona costume of black blouse and pointed hat; but he was a fraud: he had never been near Jijona, nor could he speak the Jijona dialect. But the whole life of Jijona was dominated by turrón marzipan, and the varieties of sweet meats made from almonds. We arrived as the almonds were beginning to ripen. Out on the mountains one heard the thrashing of the canes amongst the branches as the peasants beat the nuts off the almond trees. From the village rose up a sound like that of a gigantic typewriter as the women of the village sat in the streets in circles and cracked the almond shells. In our entrada old Père Chicot crouched most of the day on his haunches, peeling, drying and cracking the almonds from El Señor's garden.

In consequence of the turrón work we found it very difficult to get a woman to work for us. Life became difficult. The conditions in Jijona were not the same as those in Verdolay. In the latter place we could buy excellent charcoal, but to our surprise we found charcoal difficult to get in Jijona. When we did get it, from the proprietor of the local cinematograph theatre, it was so hard that it would not burn. Père Chicot said gruffly, "What are almond shells for?" We then tried burning almond shells; but they made a poor fire, and an accumulation of shells soon put itself out. We wasted one and a half hours trying to fry potatoes on an almond-shell fire. So as long as we could not get a woman, we had to live on cold stuff that we could buy from the shops: Dutch cheese, and sardines, principally.

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At last I thought that I had found a woman. I was perched on the watercourse which ran across the face of the precipice opposite the entrance of the town. From this spot there was an excellent view of Jijona in its most romantic, but also in its most plastic aspect. To me came a woman walking along the edge of the watercourse, balancing on her head a large washing-basket. She stopped to watch my work, and as was the custom in those early days began to talk about the bull episode.

"Ah, that was a terrible thing to do," she said. "If I had gone down into the plaza, my knees would have turned to water."

I then asked her how I could get somebody to work for me.

"Why," she answered, "I'll come myself, or send somebody else."

She then began to move along her way. The wall of the watercourse was about a foot wide; but ten yards further along it ceased to curve around the face of the precipice and sprang across a chasm over a narrow bridge. The approach to this bridge was guarded by a large polished boulder about three feet high, and to get on to the bridge one had to clamber over this boulder. I had crossed it on hands and knees cautiously, for there was a sheer drop of forty or fifty feet below. The woman looked at this boulder and turning said to me:

"That is a nasty spot. I'll have to be careful there, or I'll drop my washing."

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With the basket on her head she walked to the boulder and began to walk up its slippery side. Balancing herself and basket in what appeared a dangerous manner, giving little cries of "Aie! Aie! I'm afraid I'll drop my basket," she surmounted the obstacle and strode carelessly across the bridge. My heart left my throat to regain its normal position and I realized that there is even a fashion in "fear."

But the woman never came, and for a week we were servantless. The pretty girl who had driven out with us in the lorry, and who we had imagined to be the daughter of a fairly well-to-do farmer, was as a matter of fact our nearest neighbour. She lived at the top house of the town. Her father was the village dust-cart, and any day could be seen walking about the streets bent almost double beneath the weight of a huge pannier which he carried on his back, into which he flung any object which had no permanent right on the high road. Her house was a small affair of two rooms only. We put our difficulty to her as she was friendly, and to our surprise she said that she would come and do it herself. She did arrange that the goat with his milk should call upon us; but the Vinegars enticed her into their turrón factory, and again we were in despair. However, the girl had an idea.

"Why, Mother will do it for you," she said.

Mother was an apt-looking spouse for the dust-cart, and was considered, we heard, the dirtiest woman in the village. Her foggy blue eyes showed white all round them, and she threw up her lips like a biting horse when she spoke Castilian (which she did very badly). I don't know why she made me think of the Red queen in Alice, but her silhouette was not unlike, and she had a queer trick of being in the house one instant, and in the next of having quite vanished—which was Red-queenlike. She was called "Aunt Roger" in the village, because of her ruddy hair. Aunt Roger cleared up the mystery of the Jijona fuel. She made bargains with boys, who wandered out over the hills, and returned looking like walking haycocks under a load of branches of mountain pine and other coniferous shrub. From then on we cooked over large bonfires built on the square hearth which was in our largest room.

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Tia Roger was elusive in small matters, as she was in larger ones. She had a hasty Spanish way of agreeing at once to save herself the trouble of understanding my language, and we never knew whether she would come or no. She drew our pay without demur, but if an occasion offered for other employment she took it. We would return home at eleven o'clock worn out with a hard day's painting, to find the place uncleaned, no fire alight, no food either bought or prepared. This would entail on our part a rush down the steep hill into the town, to search for food. Probably on the way we would discover Tia Roger sitting amongst a circle of gossiping and pleased women, industriously cracking almonds. She would show no signs of conscious sin, but would grin and nod at us as we passed. Then we had to scramble again up to our eyrie under the full heat of the Mediterranean sun.

Tia Roger had many children. Her eldest daughter was married to a man who for some time puzzled us. We first saw him wandering about the upper streets of the old town during the fiesta. He carried an elaborate pair of sandwich boards. On the front was the well-known picture, "St. Veronica's Handkerchief," and on the back an oleograph representing two conventional angels—golden hair, nightdress, and wings. Both pictures were surrounded by flat wooden frames fretworked in the hideous art-nouveau manner. He wandered about thus, enclosed, as it were a slab of humanity between two slices of divinity; but we could not imagine what his purpose was. We imagined that he filled a semi-religious post, something connected with the priests, and their fiesta, and their cinema, and bull chasings. But on the fourth day of the fiesta, this wandering, apparently purposeless man tripped over a washing-basket. His language at once put to flight all our ideas of his religious functions, it issued straight from a nature by no means purged of old Adam, despite its devotional enclosure. Later, he fell over me as I was sketching, and he cursed me with gusto. I then saw he was blind. This had not been apparent to us earlier, for he took the rough and precipitous streets of Jijona at an extraordinary speed.

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One day we saw him still wandering to and fro, but the pictures had disappeared. A cage was on his back, and in the cage, balancing against the joggle and movement of his walk, was an uncomfortable hen. We had become more accustomed to the Jijona speech by this time, and the tickets which the pictures had hidden were plainly visible in his hands. He was running a private lottery at three chances "a little bitch." I took thirty tickets for the hen, and gave fifteen of them to Tia Roger, but we pulled blanks. His next venture was a bedroom looking-glass, the stand of which stuck out from his back in an ungainly fashion. It must have needed considerable ingenuity to keep his small village clientèle sufficiently desirous to ensure for him any sort of a living.

His wife learned that I had put him into one of my sketches. She hurried to the Torre de Blay, carrying her child, and accompanied by a horde of women friends to see "The Portrait." Her disappointment was great to find that he was but a minute figure in a street landscape. She told me that her husband had lost his sight ten years before in a street quarrel. His opponent had slashed a knife across his eyes. For this the law exacted no penalty. But she had drawn no lesson from her husband's misfortune. Her baby was in a bad condition, flies, dust and exposure to the

sun were working wickedly on the child's eyes, and even then early blindness appeared to be threatening. But it seemed to us that many of the more ignorant Spanish were careless of their children's eyesight. Blindness is rampant, but blindness leads to beggary; and beggary accompanied by blindness is a profitable pursuit. Possibly a woman may say, "Little Juan seems to be going blind. Well, that's a comfort, he will be settled in life anyhow."

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Jijona had two other blind men. The one made a living by selling cigars from a glass case strapped to his chest.

We were sitting in the entrada of the Vinegars' on the first day of the fiesta. The curtain was pushed slowly aside and through the opening crept a pathetic figure. It was that of an old man; his eyes were sightless and suppurating, a straw hat with a torn brim shaded his heavy face, in one hand he grasped an aged guitar, in the other a stick with which he explored the entrada for a chair. Jan quickly got out of his chair for fear that the blind man should sit down on his lap. The man found the chair with his stick, and trembling with the pain of movement took a seat. Adjusting the guitar, with stiff fingers he rasped the strings which gave out a sound, thin as though withered by extreme age. With exercise his fingers strengthened, until from the decrepit instrument he plucked a melody from which one might imagine that the blind in Maeterlinck's play were dancing to solace their loneliness. The almost macabre dance came to an end, then striking out a new set of chords he broke into a Spanish song. His voice was an instrument as worn out as the guitar.

He ceased his heartrending performance, collected his meed of halfpence; I spoke to him, and he broke into an hysterical laugh of joy.

"You have returned, you have returned," he cried.

"It is El Señor that he takes you for," explained one of the girls. "He was very good to him. The old man recognizes the English accent."

We explained to him his mistake, and the delight faded from his poor old face, and the blank expressionless look of the blind came back. Slowly he turned to the entrance and his tapping, which led him away down the street. Thus he pursued his trade, feeling his way from door to door, entering any one that was open, seating himself upon the first unoccupied chair which he could find: few could have been hard-hearted enough to deny his unspoken pleading.

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One evening we met him in the upper town.... An accident had happened, and his guitar was opened out like an old boot; it still held together at the handle, but at the front of the instrument the soundboard and back had become detached from the sides. In a clumsy fashion the hurt had been bound up with string. We asked him what had happened. He did not reply, but cried out with a high-pitched, half-crazy laugh. Then standing astraddle in the precipitous street he began to pluck at the strings as though the guitar could answer for him. The thin voice of it had now sunk to a mere ghost of a sound, the murmur of a summer freshet might well have drowned its plaintive whisper. Then turning he made his way downhill

CHAPTER XXIII

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JIJONA—A DAY'S WORK

It was a toss-up which would arrive first: the sun shooting its long level rays over the mountain-top through our windows, or Tia Roger's daughter hammering on the door with the milk, warm and frothy, in a jug. Either the one or the other aroused us from our mattress on the floor—for we had dispensed quite comfortably with the complications of a bed. Possibly our night had been restless, for inadvertently I had imported a host of fleas into the house. They had come from the garden, from a small spot near an outhouse door, where there was a fascinating view, and I had stood there one morning with bare legs and feet admiring the scene. When I had returned to the house, I had noticed a strange blackish discoloration on my ankles, and stooping had discovered to my horror that hordes of hungry fleas were crawling up my legs. I had jumped into a basin of water, but many had escaped. From that moment the house was never clear of them, and our nights were sometimes disturbed. We suspect that Père Chicot kept his rabbit skins in the outhouse.

We got out of bed either at the call of the sun or of the milk; and as we were dressing we watched the purple and green mists of night clearing off the valley and from the town below us. Breakfast was a simple affair—tea and dry bread and grapes. Spanish coffee is expensive and bad, cocoa we did not find, and butter and jam were unprocurable. For the boiling water we could not go to the trouble of building a bonfire, so in spite of the expense of spirit we used a methylated spirit stove. This Jan had bought in Murcia. The shopman had ill understood Jan's attempts to make his needs known. "Lampara para alcool"^[22] had elicited no response, but at last, driven by repeated requests with variations, explanations, hand wavings, and so on, intelligence had brightened the shopman's face.

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"Ah, Señor," he had cried, "I understand you now. What you require is a 'little hell.'"

So the kettle sang daily over "little hell," but this morning, Tia Roger having forgotten to purchase alcohol overnight, it looked as if we were to breakfast on goat's milk alone. But an idea occurred to me. El Señor, when he had transferred his major residence to Murcia, had left some

furniture and much litter in El Torre de Blay. Amongst the litter were odd bottles which had contained toilet lotions, one was half full. Was there not a chance then that it was alcoholic? I routed out the bottle. The smell told me nothing. Practical experiment was the only thing. Imagination was rewarded. "Little hell" worked as well on hair-wash as with any other fuel.

We ate our simple breakfast at an ancient refectory table, the top hewn from the width of a large tree, the legs curved and carved like those in Viking pictures. Then we set to packing up paint and brushes, and the preparing of sketch boxes. Leaving the things untidy for Tia Roger to clear, we set off on our respective ways, I down into the old town, Jan out across the mountains. Jijona was a maze of zigzag streets. In the morning it was almost manless, but women went to and fro on their household errands, and the children followed me in swarms. Standing about in the streets were small coops, enclosing either a chicken or a turkey, while the queer lean Egyptian cats, with rat-like tails, slunk along the walls, vanishing like ghosts at any attempt to stroke them. Even the kittens of a few days old spat at a proffered pat as though at a dog. I was bound for the street near the monastery which, with its blue-tiled roof, brought the eastern end of Jijona to a full stop.

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As soon as I had settled down the questions began. They were the usual Spanish questions such as one had heard in Verdolay, and many of the answers I knew now by heart. But one woman behind me said something new.

"It is an English Señora. She is painting. All the English people paint, for there have been other English here—El Señor, and his friends—and they, too, painted. It is strange, indeed, that a whole nation should be thus gifted. Also all the English are very rich, for they come here from a long distance, and they paint pictures, and all that is very expensive. Another thing that I can tell you about the English is that they are all very tall. Every Englishman that I have seen (she had seen four) is much taller than we Spanish are. It does not matter that I am saying this out loud because La Doña does not understand Valenciano."

While I was working this morning there was a continual sound of squealing pigs. Men's voices mingled with those of the pigs, urging them to be quiet. The sound came from a high-walled enclosure to which the entrance was an archway closed by a massive wooden door. Then along came a goat herd leading his flock. But as soon as the herd came opposite to this door it refused to pass it. With shouts, curses, and stones the man urged the goats along. In little quick rushes, thus urged on, one by one the goats dashed past the door and on down the road. But two refused the passage perilous. They made sneezing noises of protestation, but nothing would induce them to move. In despair the man at last had to bring all his goats back and take them to the hills by some other route. Later I realized that the door which these intelligent animals would not pass was the slaughter-house.

Old men, dressed in the ancient Jijona costume of black blouse and black velvet hat with turned-up brim and pointed crown—kept on to the head by an elastic at the back—would address me in a patois impossible to understand. As the sketch neared completion my audience became excited.

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"Ha Pintado tod'! tod'! tod'!"^[23] they exclaimed. They searched the picture for the smaller details, the strings of red peppers hanging from the balconies especially delighted them. Indeed, they gave my pictures titles because of some minute detail.

"What is she doing?" a new-comer exclaimed. The answer was "The fig tree." I was astonished, because I could see no fig tree in the whole sketch. At last one of my audience pointed to one tiny branch of green projecting over a wall.

Jan had four directions to choose from. North and south led him across a flattish plain seamed with deep watercourses, east and west took him into the mountains. To the east the mountains were grey bare stone, almost uncultivated; to the west the mountains went steeper and steeper, ending in a high ridge, at the foot of which was a queer leprous country, the earth spotted all over with lichens and looking as though mouldy. Wherever he went were the terraces and almond trees; and lonely little farms were perched high up on the slopes. Terrible little places those farms were for the doctor, for, if any one were ill in them, there was often no means of approach other than miles of climbing on foot. But all across the mountains, incongruous enough in that landscape of primitive agriculture where the plough was but a stake with an iron spike, and where no roads were, went standards carrying wires of electricity. On the standards, deaths'-heads were painted to scare off the inquisitive child.

Jan had not only to contend with sun and flies. Shadow was even more difficult to find at Jijona than at Verdolay; the almond as a shade tree is negligible. It was hot setting out, but it was hotter coming back. One did not delay much after half-past ten, but, whether the sketch were finished or no, one packed up one's things and set off homeward. As one walked one could feel the heat of the ground through the soles of the alpagatas. There were reputed to be scorpions in the mountains, and it was as well to be careful when taking a seat or when picking up some painting implement dropped to the ground. But Jan never saw one. The peasants said that if he were stung the best thing to do was to plunge the stung part—usually a finger—into a raw egg; when the yolk had turned black, a fresh egg was to be substituted.

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We were both back in good time on this day, because we were to lunch with the doctor and his wife. They had promised us a truly Spanish meal. Here is the menu:

1. Smoked uncooked ham.
2. Hors d'œuvre, olives (cured in anis and mint), pink tomatoes (a Jijona speciality), cucumber, and orange-coloured sausage.

3. Soup.

4. A stew of chicken, potatoes and garbanzos. (Garbanzos, or chick-peas, look something like dried nasturtium seeds. They are cooked like haricot beans, and taste like a blend of haricot bean and lentil. They are a very favourite Spanish vegetable.)

5. Cold fish and mayonnaise. (The mayonnaise was made from almond oil, lemon juice and hard-boiled egg, and was extremely delicate in flavour.)

6. Fried ham and grilled tomatoes.

7. Turrón and almond paste sweets.

8. Yellow melon and muscatel grapes. Brandy.

9. Iced coffee (brought in by a boy from the Casino).

The doctor's wife asked me if it were true that English people did not like questions. I said personally we did not mind questions, but that in England direct intimate questions were generally avoided.

"But," said the doctor's wife in amazement, "if you wish to find out something about anybody, how do you do so? And how do you carry on conversations?"

The meal over, we toiled slowly up again to El Torre, taking the hill in as leisurely a manner as we could. Tia Roger's daughter was sitting on our doorstep eating grapes. As we passed she held the bunch out to us.

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"Les Gusta?"^[24] she said.

"Buen provecho," we replied.

Before their gateway, the two aged men and the one old woman sat, as they did from morning till night, plaiting an everlasting rope of esparto grass.

We had acquired the siesta habit, so lay down until four o'clock. Then, as the dinner had rather disorganized our desire to paint, Jan and I went for a walk. We clambered down through the town, passed out by the southern entrance, across the bridge, and clambered up the hill opposite. At a long open washing-place, women were on their knees beating and scrubbing clothes with the Spanish soap which will not lather; amongst them, working as hard as the rest, was a child of five years old.

We skirted the line between the mountains, and the flat and plain for about two miles, then Jan took a path leading away from the mountains. We came out into the most fantastic scenery of its kind I have ever seen. In the winter the torrential rains burst on the mountains and the water rushing down had scooped deep clefts in the earth of the plain. The ground itself appeared to be in layers of various colours, and these layers falling in one above the other had striped the sides of the deep canyon purple, blue, white, orange and red. The water had cut out of the clayey earth a hundred fantastic shapes—I have seen photographs of the Grand Canyon of Colorado, this was like them on a small scale; at one place the clay was harder and the water dripping down had carved the cliff-side like great organ pipes or like the columns of an Egyptian temple. In the deep bottoms of the canyon were vine terraces; and further down flat, irrigated fields of tomatoes, of herbage or of vegetables. Little farm-houses sheltered under the mud cliffs, and on the circular threshing floors almonds and red peppers were spread out to dry in the sun. In one place a man had scooped his dwelling out of the cliff-side. These cave dwellings are common enough. At Verdolay was a whole colony of them, and the cavemen were reputed to be thieves and vagabonds, and the members were despised by the peasants proper. At the end of the ravine or barranca we came to a many-arched bridge which towered high above our heads, and clambering up by a zigzag track found ourselves on the Alicante road.

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In appearance this country is very deceptive. It appears arid, almost desolate, but the mountains are covered with almond trees, which for all their scanty foliage bear valuable crops, while the plain hides its richness in ravines a hundred feet or more below the level of its surface.

We arrived home to find a stranger dressed in black clothes, but with an official cap on his head, sitting on a stone seat before our door. He was reading a book, and as we came up he bowed and said that he hoped his presence was not distasteful to us. We, of course, in the fashion of Spanish courtesy, put our whole home at his disposal, and invited him indoors. He demurred in the correct fashion, but on a second invitation came in with us. In the long entrada Père Chicot was looking out through the back door and shaking his head at the garden.

"There's another tree dying," he said. "All the trees are dying, and the vines won't bear. You can't do anything without water."

"But is there no water at all?" we asked.

"Ay," replied Père Chicot, "there used to be the right to two hours of water once a fortnight. But the owners sold it. They wanted money and it was worth many hundreds of pesetas."

Our visitor was very interested in the house, for he confided in us that there was a housing shortage in Jijona, like that in the rest of the world. He was chief of the municipal officers, dust-cart, water-supply, electric light and so on. He had just come from Toledo, and the only place he could find in Jijona was not nearly large enough for his family.

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"This would just suit me," he said, peering into room after room, "seven rooms; and they say that St. Sebastian used to live here. Did you know that?"

His eye was attracted by the guitar of El Señor, which we had brought with us.

"And you an aficionado of the guitar," he exclaimed. "I, too, have played in my time."

We pressed him to play.

"No, no; indeed I would like to, but I may not. You see, my wife's father died a week ago, and it would seem very wicked if I were to play, or to sing."

Jan played him a farouka which he had learned from Blas.

"It seems a good guitar," said the man.

He picked it up, and fingered the chords. Then he went to the door and peered round it to see if Père Chicot had gone home.

"I might sing you something if you won't tell any one," said the chief of the municipal officers. "But I will sing it in a very low voice, so that it will be less disrespectful to my wife's father."

He sang, in a hoarse unmusical whisper, a guajiras.

"I like the guajiras and also the tango," said he. "You see, I did my military duty in Cuba, and I learned many over there."

Here are three of the songs he sang:

"I will never marry,
For as a bachelor I am gay,
I have money to spend,
I live like a general all day.

And if I come to marry,
Though I may be rich,
I shall have to lower my crest,
Like 'Barrabas' the cock,
But the bachelor is
Like God painted by Peter."

"On a serene night
The sad lament was heard
Of a poor soldier, wounded
And covered with blood and sand.
For the ambulances were full,
And the Red Cross doctors were busy.
At the sight of his oozing blood
The brave soldier prayed
That death should overtake him,
For no one could assist him."

"At breakfast one morning
A wise man said, sighing,
That women in weeping
Are false as are traitors.
This has oft been ignored.
But I've seen and I know
That the tears of a woman,
As down they are falling,
Make naught but deception
For the man who supports her."

As he went on he began to forget his father-in-law, and in a short while he was bawling indecent tangos at the top of his voice. He showed no signs of departure, so I began to prepare for supper. I lit the bonfire which Tia Roger had laid in the wide hearth-place, placed over it a three-legged trivet of iron and on the trivet our huge saucepan full to the brim with olive oil. We then made use of a Spanish custom. We asked him to supper with us. This he was forced by Spanish custom to refuse, and as we did not repeat the invitation he had to make his compliments—which he did with the greatest courtesy—and go home.

After supper, as our bread supply was short, we felt our way down the hill in the dark and down the staircases of streets to the shop of Manuel Garcia. Garcia and his wife sold bread at one fat dog cheaper than the other shops. The bread was quite as good as any other, it had a very white powdery kind of consistency, baked in flat loaves with a very hard, anæmic crust. The Garcias had showed us one of the economical devices which were in current use. We had for some days bought candles at this shop, but Mrs. Garcia said:

"Why do you spend all this money on candles? Here is a thing much better, and much cheaper. You first pour water into a cup or bowl until half-way up, then fill to the top with olive oil. Float one of these on the top of the oil, and set fire to it. There you have a light at half the cost of candles."

The box she handed to us was full of pieces of cork through which a wick had been thrust. On the top of the box was the name of the device "little-lamps-little-boats" and a picture of the Virgin. We stepped back in our illumination to the most ancient of methods—the old Roman conquerors

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of Spain must have illuminated their villas in this way. "Little-lamps-little-boats" had probably given light to the halls of the Saracen castle which now was but a few crumbling masses of slowly disintegrating cement. It was curious to think that one-half of Jijona was lit by electric light, the other by this antique device, and that there was practically nothing between. Mrs. Garcia had urged us to the stewing of garbanzos.

The Garcias were go-ahead Spaniards. Starting from very small origins, they had begun a small turrón factory in a back room. Not content with making turrón alone, they had peddled it all over the Balearic Isles. Gradually they had prospered, and the whole upper part of the house was now factory, the entrance to the factory being higher up the hill in a back street. Yet they remained simple people, sitting, in the evenings, on their doorstep gossiping, while the flaxen-haired daughter, sixteen years old, painted with a toothpick dipped in dye eyes and noses on sugar pigs and cats.

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"We had a hard time at first," said Mrs. Garcia. "In Majorca the people were very jealous of us, and often very rude. They would tell us to go back to our own district; they used to laugh at our speech, though God knows they can't speak proper Spanish themselves."

This inter-district jealousy seems characteristic of Spain. The man from Toledo laughed at the Jijona people; the people of Jijona called those of Murcia "gipsies"; the people of Murcia say that the Jijona folk are mere uncultivated mountaineers; Catalan and Castilian are in semi-enmity. Each person that one spoke to lauded the beauties and the food of his own district at the expense of other places. All about Jijona they would have nothing but maleagueñas and Valencian jotás. The other varieties of Spanish music they were not interested in.

But the Garcias were progressive people. They had made a success of their Balearic venture, and now had a stall in the market of Alicante. This was kept by a sister-in-law. Garcia and his wife were making preparations to go to the great fair at Albacete. The shop was full of large bales done up in straw matting, boxes and crates of sweets and of turrón. They would go by road, for it was cheaper, and only about a hundred miles away.

"That is a queer town," said Garcia. "There are gates to the walls, and at a certain hour they shut the gates, and if you are outside you stay outside till the morning."

Mrs. Garcia wanted me to paint her portrait. If she would have posed to me in the ordinary, peasant, workaday dress I would have done it with pleasure. But she had a fine fashionable modern silk dress of black and she wanted to pose in this. I managed to put off the proposal until the time of her departure was too close. She went away unsatisfied

FOOTNOTES:

[22] Spirit lamp.

[23] "She has painted everything, everything, everything!"

[24] "Would you like them?"

CHAPTER XXIV

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JIJONA—THE GOATHERDS

Murcia could be counted as unmusical, in Verdolay one heard either a gramophone of the little Señor, or the piano banged by the girls who lived in the topmost house of the village. In Jijona, on the contrary, almost every evening could be heard the sound of the guitar or of that strange Eastern singing of Spain. Young men sat on the edge of the cliff below the Saracen castle and thumped two or three chords from a guitar for half the night long. It had a delight, analogous to that which the tom-tom gives, a delight drawn from the hypnotism of inexorable rhythm. But save for the commandant of the municipal officers, who was a stranger, we had made the acquaintance of none of the musicians until one afternoon the goatherds perched themselves in the shadow beneath our walls.

We were taking a siesta when the sound of thrumming roused us from the half sleep which the afternoon gives. Jan exclaimed:

"That music sounds quite near."

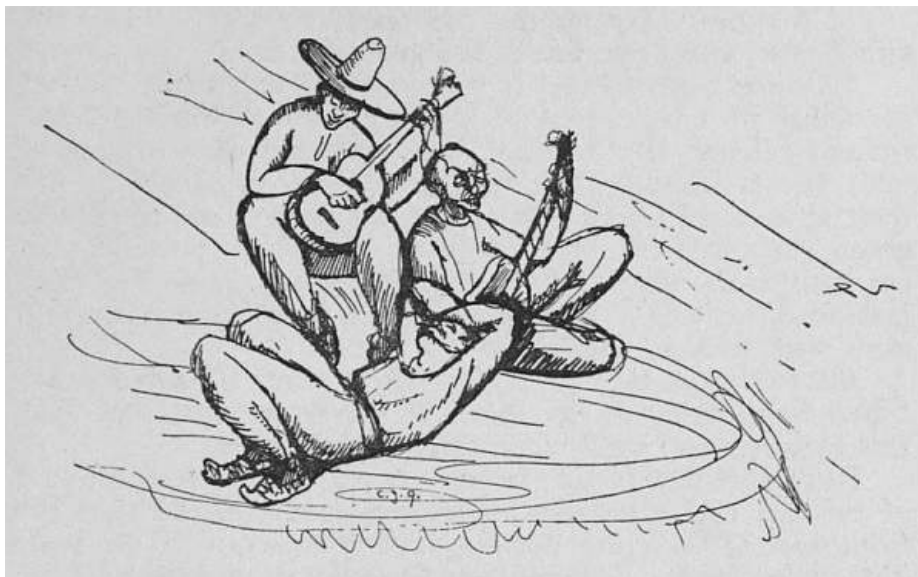
He jumped up and looked out of the window. On a narrow ledge of flat rock at the foot of the wall three men were sitting in the shadow of the house. Two had guitars, and all along the wall of the garden a number of goats were lying down or were browsing on the small weeds which sprouted between the rocks. On the hill-side the kids were engaging one another in mock battle, rearing up in feint, with the most dainty of gestures, or interlocking their infantile horns.

We slipped on our clothes, and crawling out by the garden door, the opening of which was only about four feet high, we joined the goatherds in their patch of shadow.

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"Buenos dias," said Jan. "I, too, love the guitar."

"Si, Señor," answered one of the herds, "through the windows we have heard you playing."



One of the men was thin but wore an enormous pagoda-like sombrero of straw, one was a boy of eighteen with a huge moustache, the third was an old man with a large nose, the wrinkles on his face drawn more deeply than any we have before seen. Their guitars were poor instruments and the strings were broken and knotted together, in consequence of which little bits of stick were tied across the arm of the instrument in order to clamp the strings down to the fingerboard below the knotted parts. As the strings break and are repaired, this stick is moved up the fingerboard until the strings are too short to play upon. Jan crawled through the small door and brought out the big white guitar. The thin man handled it with reverence.

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"I know the instrument," he said. "It is El Señor's. It is a good instrument, but he has a better. A big brown one which is a marvel. He must be very rich. They say he gave more than two hundred pesetas for it."

He played on it for a moment, but soon handed it back to Jan.

"I'd rather play on my old one," he said. "I'm not afraid of it, and I can knock it about as I like."

All three were dressed in cotton shirts and pants, tied at the ankle with tape, over these they wore cotton coats and trousers; when the weather was very hot they dispensed with the trousers. Their feet were bare of stocking, but their shoes were heavy; woven by themselves out of esparto grass, very Oriental in shape with turned-up, pointed toes. On their backs were sacks containing esparto grass and half-fashioned sandals. Each possessed a long, heavy, crook'd stick shod with an iron point.

All too soon they said that they must be moving on. "But come down to the street of the soap house, top side, this evening, and we'll have a dance and singing."

I had sketched in this street. It was on the steepest part of the hill and ran almost horizontally across, so that the front door of the upper houses were on a level with the roofs of the lower ones. The roadway was divided along the centre, one-half being some twenty feet above the other; a low parapet protected the drop. It was lucky that the dwellers in the upper part of the street were sober Spaniards.

We found, as usual, the party seated on chairs in the middle of the street, near a small electric light; some of the men were sitting along the parapet. We were greeted by an old, but very large woman who groaned all the evening with rheumatism. The girls were in their best dresses of pale coloured skirt and embroidered paisley patterned shawls. A long silence followed our arrival. We were waiting for a player who was the best in the village. He could not come, but sent his brother instead, who played well, but was left-handed. Three guitars and a guitarron formed the orchestra.



Thrum, thrum, thrum, went the guitars, while across the deeper chords the little guitarron, with its strange tuning, threaded a shrill pattern of monotonous arpeggios. The music of Spain has something fundamental about it. It has a hint of the heart-beat of the universe. The rich, pulsating rhythm of it seems to set the air flowing in waves like those in a disturbed pool. It seems to speak of something ideally simple, to create an harmonious forgetfulness. A girl sitting amongst us threw back her head and sang. Her voice carried the sad minor cadences of the eternal East; it was pitched queerly in the throat and wailed across the still night like the voice of a passionate soul.

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"When I am dead a hundred years,
And when the worms have eaten me,
The signs you find in my dead bones,
Will show that I have worshipped thee.
When I am dead a hundred years."

The song began with a long-drawn-out aie-e-e, which ran a gamut of strange, almost creepy modulations, the guitars slowed down their tempo, but when the last echo of the song had died amongst the hills, the instruments took up once more the remorseless beat of the malagueña.

Again she sang:

"New pain drives out old pain,
New grief drives out old grief,
One nail drives out another nail,
But love to love gives no relief.
New pain drives out old pain,
Aie-e-e...."

Once more she sang:

"Your eyes like double evils are,
Black as is the dark of Hades,
And you have to cover them
The ebon thickets of your lashes.
Your eyes like double evils are."

The guitars beat up the rhythm once more and then a man began to sing:

"In your eyes there is a sky,

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Your mouth with heaven itself can vie,
A garden blooms whene'er you smile,
But in your breast's a crocodile.^[25]
In your eyes there is a sky."

Again he sang:

"The only love which I discovered,
Like black gunpowder reacted;
Fire, explosion, light; then after ...
Followed ashes, silence, darkness.
The only love which I discovered."

By this time a large number of men and of girls had gathered.

"Vamos!" they cried. "Let's have a jota. Come on, Perico, play something that we can dance to."

The guitar-players changed their tempo, the little guitarron beat out with a more insistent though more flexible rhythm. The jota has a beat which is partly the beat of the bar, partly that of the phrase. This is common in Spanish music and has points of resemblance with early European music generally.

Three girls and three of the youths lined up face to face, and soon the dancers were swinging to and fro over the uneven roadway. There is an agile grace in the jota. We watched it with delighted eyes. But the old rheumatic woman did not look pleased.



"That girl," she muttered to me, nodding her head at one of the dancers, "she has no right to dance. She is apunto. You know," she went on, noting my perplexed expression, "she is expecting a baby soon. It is very wrong of her to dance." [Pg 223]

The dancers moved with flexible rhythm, snapping their fingers with the music, and their shadows, flung on the wall by the dim electric light, caricatured their movements. The guitars beat on, creating an atmosphere of careless joy which seemed to bring us into more sensitive contact with the Spaniards than ever we had been before. We wonder if civilization has anything to give to these people. They live simple, straightforward and pleasant lives, tempered, it is true, by sickness and pain and sometimes by privation; but it would be a rash man who would promise to give them greater store of valuable things than they already have. The fact that most cannot read does not hamper them very much. They have wisdom stored up in a thousand witty proverbs, and for their leisure they have the guitar and their songs.

What a wonderful instrument the guitar is! The simplest of all instruments for the learner, a few

days' practice makes him so that he can play as do the generality of these herdsmen. Then one can hypnotize oneself with the sonorous rhythm of repeated chords. But if one wishes to go further, the range and variety of the guitar is inexhaustible. It has as many moods as nature and is as difficult to conquer. Sarasate, they say, gave up the guitar because it was so difficult. But the guitar in the hands of the master is the finest of all instruments. Of single portable instruments it alone is complete; it alone is fully satisfying. We English do not know the guitar. Outside of Spain it has never been played. And the Spanish music made for the guitar ... like life itself with its interwoven themes of sadness and of joy; with mournful melody accompanied by strange gay accompaniment, the words often in strange contrast with the melodic theme. There is no native music in Europe which has the range, the variety, and the depth of feeling possessed by that of Spain.

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We tore ourselves away while yet they were dancing; for we remembered that 5.30 was our rising time. The thin goatherd, who wore the enormous hat in the daytime, took us into his house and gave us a drink. The baby was in its cradle, its face carefully tucked under the sheet. The aguadiente which he poured out for us was strong and harsh to the taste; and one was grateful for the glass of water which it is customary to drink afterwards.

As we were getting ready for bed, we could still hear the sounds of the guitars and the cries of the dancers on the calm air of the night.

The goatherds used to come almost every afternoon to the foot of our castle, and we gave up the siesta habit in their favour.

I made the acquaintance of one other goatherd in Jijona. I was painting in a street near the Garcias' shop. When the picture was nearly complete, I wished for a figure and asked an old man to pose for me. He was nearing eighty, and his face was a map of wrinkles, with a mountain of nose and chin and a valley of toothless mouth. His clothes were a patchwork of different materials. The study which I made of him delighted him so much that he begged for it. He would pay me, he said.

"The price does not matter," he exclaimed, "if only La Doña will put in a goat also." For he owned the flock which he led every day into the mountains.

I made him a copy of it, and all the other goatherds trooped up to the castle to see Tio Pepe's portrait.

"Ay, there's Pepe," they cried, slapping their thighs; "there he is with his patches, and his crook'd stick, and his sandals and his old nose and all. Tod', Tod'."

It was near the time of our departure from Jijona. Tio Pepe in vain tried to press on me a few pesetas for the portrait. He searched his old mind for a means of showing his gratitude; and just as we were leaving he found a solution. At five o'clock in the morning, as our trunk was leaving the house on the shoulders of Tia Roger's strong young son, up ran Uncle Pepe with a large can of goat's milk, all of which we had to drink on the spot; or he would never have forgiven us.

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The night before our departure we had packed, for we had to start early to catch the motor-bus. Then we had gone to bed. We had just snuggled down beneath the blankets, for the nights were getting quite fresh, when I heard the sounds of a guitar. The sounds drew closer. They were coming up the hill. A suspicion grew to a certainty.

"Jan," I cried, "those goatherds are giving us a farewell serenade."

We hurried into our clothes. The goatherds had sat themselves down on the stone bench at the front door and were singing lustily at the moon. I don't know what the Spanish etiquette in such matters is, but we went out and took part in our own serenade. It was a lengthy affair. The time crept on, and we, shivering somewhat, for the night grew quite cold, sat ungratefully thinking of the sleep we were missing, and wondering how we were to awaken ourselves at four o'clock. At two o'clock they went away, and we rushed back to bed to seize the two hours of sleep which remained for us

FOOTNOTES:

[25] Crocodile is Spanish slang for a false lover.

CHAPTER XXV

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MURCIA—AUTUMN IN THE PASEO DE CORVERAS

We came back to Murcia, to our headquarters in the Paseo de Corveras, at the beginning of October. Though the town was so far south, the cold weather had well begun. In the daytime the sun seemed as fierce as ever, but the dust that had lain inches deep during the summer was now an equal depth of semi-liquid mud, and the house, without fireplaces or any means of creating artificial warmth, had in it a faint though insidious chill. Save in the hottest weather, stone or cement floors are comfortless to live with. Marciana, the woman whose services we had shared with Antonio during Rosa's smallpox, returned to us. She was a woman of sixty years, bulky in figure, dressed in black of an eternal mourning, and was mother of the most talented sculptor of

Murcia. She was an illustration of the inter-provincial jealousy of the Spaniard. She came from Don Quixote's country, La Mancha, and was never weary of chanting its praises.

"Ah, Señora," she exclaimed, "that is a wonderful land. Corn, oil and wine in abundance. Dancing and singing in the villages all night long. And what a wonderful people are those of mi pueblo.^[26] My two sisters, they each weigh at least twice as much as do I. And then we are a civilized folk there, I can assure you. You saw how they treated it here when Rosa had the smallpox. No precautions, even though one died of it a few doors down the street. Now in mi pueblo they stretch sheets in front of the doors of warning; the necessities of life are put on to the doorstep, and the money to pay for them is dropped by the hands of those who are in the house, and who are not allowed beyond the sheet, into pans of vinegar, so that they may be purified of the disease. Now that is real cleanliness.

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"But, thanks to God, Señora, Rosa is much better. The spots are disappearing, she will not be marked, and she has given birth to a son. It was a most divine birth. Of course it was fear for the son that made everybody so anxious."

Marciana was a dilatory servant. Nothing was ever ready up to date, and she invariably drowned all my commissions for the market with a flood of words. She would wait all the morning in the queue which gathered at the Government Olive Oil depot, to buy olive oil for me at a few centimos cheaper than she could buy it from the grocers; and no explanation that she wasted more of our pay than she gained in cheapness convinced her.

Antonio greeted us with delight, as did Emilio, the guitar maker, whom we went to visit on the first day of our return. Each, however, was in a different mood. Antonio, in spite of the joy caused by his new son, who he said had been born "most precious," was in a rage. He was in trouble with the local authorities about his taxes. It appears that there is a factory tax which does not depend upon the size of the business, but the mere fact that there is a business. Thus Antonio, with his three or four girl helpers, was condemned to pay the same sum as a factory employing a thousand hands.

"It is impossible!" shouted Antonio. "We are thus crushed out of existence. I may be able to arrange it, but, if I cannot, then it is no use my going on. All the profits are swallowed up in one gulp. I shall shut down, and sell up everything."

Emilio, on the other hand, was flushed with unsullied delight. A pompous man was sitting in his shop with a guitar across his knees. Now and then he drew from it a flourish of arpeggios, very technical, but rather meaningless. Emilio stood over him, his eyes sparkling at the guitar, which appeared to be exquisite in tone and strong in volume.

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"Aha! my friends, congratulate me," cried he. "I have surpassed myself. Permit me, Señor." He took the guitar from the pompous man, and handed it reverently to Jan. "Try it, only touch it and see what a quality it has. See how the bass note rings out, and how well-balanced to it is the treble. I had no more than set the strings out on to it when Don Feliz, the little maestro whom you know, came in. He played upon it, and so full was my heart with the perfect tone of it, and with the thought that I, Emilio Peralta, had made it, that the tears came running down my face. I wept, Señor, to hear it. All night long I could not sleep for fear that the tone might alter, as sometimes it does. Sometimes, indeed, a guitar newly made sounds of no value, but in a few days or weeks even it may become first rate. But this was good from the beginning, and it has remained so."

The pompous man took a stately leave of us. Emilio was so excited by his new achievement that he went on talking:

"One does not come to make guitars like this easily. How many are there alive in Spain to-day who could do it? Only one, and I am he. Arias is dead, Raminez also, though I have not seen a Raminez to equal this one. For I will warrant that there are few better guitars than this in Spain. Unluckily, it was sold before it was completed, or I would scarcely have let it go. It was ordered by a colonel in the Army. Play on it, Señor, but do not play Flamenco, for you must not tap upon the soundboard, or you will injure the varnish. This is built for Classical."

Jan played, and it gave out a sonorous arid clear melody.

"From whom did I learn, Señor? I learned from nobody. My father was a guitar-maker, but a poor one. He taught me nothing. Indeed, I was married before the desire came to me to make fine instruments. Then how I worked, Señor! I had an idea of the perfect guitar in my head; but between idea and accomplishment what a gap! I could not cross it. Of two guitars, made equally alike, one would be good, the other useless. When this happened I would take them to pieces to search for the reason. For years I have lived in poverty, spoiling good wood which cost me all my earnings. I have not studied the guitars of others. Always in my head I carried the idea of the perfect instrument. Slowly I have struggled towards it. Now I know. But at what a cost have I acquired knowledge!"

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Jan touched a chord on the instrument in his hands, and as it throbbed out its deep responsive note he remembered the saying of Chopin: "Nothing is more beautiful than a good guitar; save perhaps two."

Emilio promised to send Professor Feliz to us as soon as he came in; and we walked back to the house through the Murcian mud, which, soaking through our shoes, made us modify our previous eulogy of the alpagata. On barrows in the street they were selling the first culled clusters of dates of the season; we bought both pale and dark varieties, but they were hard and tasteless. With the dates on the barrows were the orange fruit of the persimon.

While we had been away at Jijona a cat had taken possession of our house for the purpose of kitting. How she had got in was a mystery, for the windows and doors all had been tightly sealed up, but we had discovered her with her family at the bottom of the packing-cases which had formed our bed at Verdolay. We had heard strange faint sounds as though of mice on the evening of our return. The noises, however, did not cease for all our presence. We had gone to explore; suddenly, a noise like a boxful of exploding matches had burst up from under our noses, and something black dashed across the dimly lit room and out through the window. There were two kittens at the bottom of the narrowest of the packing-cases. We had moved them to a large box near to the window. That night there had been a fearful noise of yowling and squeaking. In the morning we found the kittens back in the box from which we had moved them. The cat was quite unapproachable. She burst out into a fury of spitting whenever we came near. Then with one final explosion hurried from the room. These wild cats were the pest of Murcia. One could leave no window open but they poured into the house. All food had to be securely shut up, the marks of their dusty paws were everywhere.

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When we returned from Emilio's we found that our presence in the house had been too much for the cat's nerves. She had disappeared from her box and the kittens were gone with her.

Don Feliz, the half-blind guitar teacher, came in the evening. He again said he was an honest man, and that his terms were five pesetas a month. He was delighted to hear that we both were to be his pupils. Part of his delight came from the money he would earn; but some of his delight was due to the fact that he had ousted Blas as Jan's teacher. I do not think we have met anybody more inappropriately named than Don Feliz. If Mr. Shandy's theories have any foundation he was cursed from his christening. He was not a Murciano, but a Castilian, and, in consequence, depreciated the people he lived amongst and was in turn not appreciated by them. He lived constantly torn by jealousy of the other guitar-players in the town.

"Tell me," he exclaimed, "what do you think of the playing of Don Ambrosio?"

Don Ambrosio was the pompous man we had met in Emilio's shop.

"Technically, excellent, but rather frigid," we said.

"Yes," exclaimed Don Feliz, "that is it. Frigid, yes, frigid! Nor is Don Timoteo a good player, and as for that Blasito, that gipsy—pah! You see, he has never learned music. So that, if he does get a good melody from somebody else, he cannot harmonize it. And his Flamenco is of the taverns. It is low, common music. Now I play Classical. Have you heard my piece which represents a battle? How I imitate the mitrailleuse on the base string? Now that is quite different from anything which that fellow Blas can play. Of course I regret that you wish to learn Flamenco. But that which I will teach you will be a classicized Flamenco. I have made it into music. You see, I have been in a conservatoire in my youth. That puts me on a different level from all these other players. So I have made of my Flamenco something more refined. It is no longer your tavern monstrosity that Blas plays."

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Personally we preferred Blas as a player, and the music of Blas as music. But Don Feliz was somewhat better as a teacher. His conservatoire had taught him at least the names of the notes. But he was very irritable. Poor fellow, at twopence a lesson, he had to give a round of thirty lessons per day to make a bare subsistence. Sometimes he said that his pupils were so dense that he could teach them but three or four consecutive notes per day. Once we heard him debating with a possible client whether it was worth while or no to walk two miles in order to get three lessons in the same house. Our consciences—concerning sweating—pricked us and we paid him double fees. In consequence of his gratitude he came to our house last of all and gave us lessons of four times the duration of any one else.

After he had gone, we were still playing, when Marciana came in with some parcels.

"Aha!" she cried. "That is a jota. It is the music of mi pueblo. La jota, La jota."

She put down the parcels; spread out her arms and with a balance and elegance extraordinary in one so bulky began to dance. After twenty bars, however, she stopped.

"Ei," she sighed, "how sad it is that one grows old. How sad that youth passes all too quickly!"

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That night a terrific thunderstorm broke over the valley. The thunder crashed, the lightning flared and the rain came down as though pouring from a gigantic hose. In the middle of all the noise we heard a strange sound.

"Wah! wah! wah! Squeak! Squeak!"

The cat had come back; but with only one kitten. The next morning we stayed in the house. From the windows we could mark the change which autumn had brought over the Paseo de Corveras. The dust was no longer blown along the road, which was now a still river of liquid mud. The town dust-cart, a donkey with panniers, no longer promenaded the street; no longer did we hear the cheerful blasphemy of the dust-boy who, stooping to gather up some refuse, found that his dust-cart had impatiently trotted on. In its place were the exhortations of the pig-drivers, who urged hordes of monstrous black pigs through the mud. Some of the porkers were, however, so heavy on their feet that they had to be brought in carts. The squealing of them filled the morning air. The fruit merchants, also with panniered donkeys, no longer called out "Melacotones, peras!" but "Uvas! Uvas!"^[27] and a man wandered about with a huge basket of snails. The maize fields in front of the house were cut and stacked, and in the fields queens of Sheba were dragging the primitive ploughs, while men behind them beat to powder the lumps of baked earth which were turned up. Instead of the almost dead silence which greeted the strengthening sun, people moved

about all day; parasols had given place to flirting fans. The country girls wore bunches of flowers in their hair, some even put one tall blossom sticking upright from the *coiffure*, where it nodded and bowed with the movements of the wearer. In the fruit garden the lemons had quite fallen, but the oranges were beginning to become a livid yellow on one side of the bush, while the dates had passed from a pale to a deep golden hue.

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I went about with Luis exploring balconies for views, and finally decided upon a view of Murcia from the tall campanile of the Cathedral. When I got back I found that the cat once more had decamped, taking the kitten with her. The second kitten had been lost. In the afternoon Luis came in. He brought an invitation from some friends for me to play the piano at their house on Saturday evening. That evening Don Feliz exclaimed:

"I have an old guitar. It is a unique instrument, none other like it has ever been seen in Spain. I bought it, at a bargain, for thirty pesetas; but I would sell it to a friend for the same money. Now you, Señor, have no guitar of your own. This is a veritable instrument for a museum. Come and see it on Sunday morning. I will show you the way."

We dined at Elias', as was our custom, and trudged back through the mud. On the darkened stairs of our house we heard a wailing and almost tumbled over the spitting cat, which had brought back the kitten once more. We gathered up the kitten and, followed at some distance by the suspicious cat, put it back into the packing-case.

All this while we were rather short of electric lights in our house. Antonio had borrowed most of the light-bulbs to decorate a shrine which he had erected in one of the churches. The candle which the righteous once offered up to God is going out of fashion. Nowadays, instead of burning so many feet of bees-wax, one turns on so many volts. Lamb has drawn a picture of two priests disputing as to which should offer up a blessing, with a final compromise that neither should do so; and the disappointment of the defrauded God. To-day he could go further, he could depict the deity being forced to go to the factory chimney for the scent of his burnt sacrifice. A Spanish writer, Pio Baroja, in a novel proposes a society called the "Extra-Rapid to Heaven Assurance Society." The insurer pays in a sum, and on his death hundreds of gramophones are turned on chanting prayers for his speedy deliverance from purgatory. "God," says the author, "is so far away, that he will not notice the substitution." This is, of course, a satire on the modern habit of replacing candles by electric lights, but the satire is no more absurd than the actuality.

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Alongside of the bridge was a tall shrine built into the side of the house and lit up thus at night with electric light. The image was covered with a large sheet of plate glass, and I said that it was a sculptured figure. Jan, on the other hand, insisted that it was a painting. We had an argument about it and on the next day returned to verify together. It was, in fact, a painting. But at night, returning from Elias', we looked up at the shrine by chance, and stopped, astonished. If it was a painting it was most realistic. We looked more closely. The more we examined it, the more did it seem sculptured. Then the explanation dawned on us. It was sculptured, but during the daytime a painted curtain was drawn down in front of it.

At luncheon next day we were disturbed by a hullabaloo from the attic. The wretched cat had taken her kitten up there, to look for peace from those meddlesome humans. That night we were awakened again by terrible noises from under our bed. The cat was still wandering like a lost soul looking for peace. Daily the kitten appeared and disappeared with exasperating irregularity. At last, however, we managed to tame the cat so that we were able to stroke her. Then the animal burst out into the strangest of noises, like a small badly oiled circular saw. It was purring. From that moment it took possession of the house. All its shyness vanished. It tucked up its sleeves and turned out of the house any other feline intruder.

One afternoon we were awakened from our siesta by a furious cat fight underneath the bed. The black cat and a ginger-coloured female were locked in combat, and making a noise like a hundred siphons. The battle continued across the sitting-room, the ginger cat giving ground. Finally she retreated to the balcony, where there was for a while armed neutrality, both singing war songs quite Spanish in their intervals. Then the black cat sprang. Ginger backed to avoid the rush, but backed too far. She toppled over into the street, fell with a thud on to the mud pavement, gathered herself together and with a scream of disappointed fury dashed through the nearest open door. To our amazement all the occupants of the house, a young man, an old woman, a girl of seventeen and one of six hurried into the street, their eyes wide open with terror.

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"What is the matter?" we shouted to them.

"A cat with rabies has just rushed into our house," they cried in answer.

The fear of rabies is very prevalent, and with reason. One does not pat stray dogs in Spain, nor does one make advances to unknown cats. Any animal which can bite is under suspicion. It is lucky, indeed, that fleas can't get rabies.

One Saturday I began sketching in the Cathedral campanile. The ascent of the tower was not by means of steps but by sloping lanes which travelled all round the inner walls. I had chosen my view from the belfry. On each side of me were small bells, and as each in turn clanged out the half or quarter hour according to size I stopped my ears. Suddenly there was a deafening crash. Before I realized what had happened I had fallen from my seat, the easel had gone spinning ... almost fainting from the shock, I looked about me. Over my head an enormous clapper was swinging. Unconsciously, I had seated myself almost inside one of the biggest bells in the south of Spain, and it had rung. The clapper again swung itself with force against the side of the bell, and in spite of my protecting hands the sound burst through my head. For ten minutes afterwards my hand was shaking too violently to allow me to paint.

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The view from the tower was exquisite. Immediately below me were the blue glazed cupolas and the arabesques of the cathedral facade on which little stone saints gazed out over the town. Then came a large square centred on a circular garden of flowers—edged on one side by the pink front of the Archbishop's palace, many windowed. From the end of the square narrow sunless streets led into the town, which gradually became a patchwork of flat roofs on which smaller buildings were erected. The huge square block of red brick of the Reina Victoria Hotel stood out over the sinuous river, on the banks of which stood the red pepper mills and beyond which showed the huertas stretching out to the mountains. Red, ochre, yellow and green were the chief colour notes, while blue and purple shadows gave relief and solidity to the whole.

In the evening I played the piano at the house of Luis' friends. Here was a typical Spanish bourgeois interior. Every resting-place was crowded with cheap bric-à-brac. The chairs were draped with velvet and silk hangings and antimacassars; the walls hung with enormous photographic enlargements, from the decorating of which Flores made some of his living. Card-racks covering the interspaces of the walls were filled with coloured picture postcards.

"We have brought you here," said Flores, "because it is just opposite to the Circulo des Varios Artes.^[28] The pianist of the Arts Club is very conceited. We want to take him down, by showing him that a Señora can play better than he does."

I was rather annoyed; but could not draw back. So I put my best into the music. Grieg (pronounced by them Hriech) seems to suit the Spanish temperament: so I played The Wedding March, Papillion and the Carnival. There was a pause. Then faintly as a retort, from the Circulo des Varios Artes, came the easiest of Grieg's "lyrical pieces" played carefully by the maestro. As if he would say, "I too can play Grieg."



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On Sunday morning we set off with Don Feliz to see the old guitar.

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"It is in the house of my novia,^[29] whom I shall be delighted to introduce to you."

We were amazed. Until that moment we had imagined Don Feliz to be quite an old man, but looking closely at him one could see that he might be within the limit of thirty to forty years. On this second visit to Murcia the people were not so strongly affected by my appearance in the streets. For my part I no longer wore a hat, but carried a parasol; I had exchanged my ordinary dress for an ex-munition overall, which people said was *muy elegante*. But we penetrated into a new part of the town, then was some staring and some pointing. I mentioned this casually to Don Feliz.

"Do not fear," he exclaimed, "you are safe with me. I have a terrible reputation in these parts. I am known as a bad man. If I get into a rage, my anger is terrible to see ... terrible. The children slink away in the street at my coming."

This was not the estimate we had formed of him, from his encounter with Blas in Emilio's shop. Poor Don Feliz, like so many others he had formed a dream self which contained most of the qualities in which he was lacking. I fear that only his illusive self was terrible, and that none but dream children ever shrank at his passing. The house of his novia bore on its weather-beaten front the arms of some bygone hidalgo; now it was an apartment house. We clambered up staircases of black wood, into one of the few dark-coloured interiors we have seen in Spain. The guitar was of a strange form and with a scrolled head, the curve of its shape having some of the beauty to be found in negro sculpture. Jan seized the bargain, and carried it home.

No sooner had he the guitar in the house than he tuned it, and crashing his finger-nails across it, struck out a rasped chord. He quickly followed it with a shout of dismay. From out of one of the big holes had crept a startled bug.

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After my experience with the church bell I could sympathize with the insect, weeping perhaps "walrus tears" upon its death-bed. But the problem of how one could disinfect a guitar was worrying. The case had no cracks for vermin-harbours, so we shut up the instrument; and after some indecision Jan decided to trust to luck and leave it alone.

On Sunday night we gave a party to Emilio, his wife, the little Professor and other aficionados of the guitar. We played to them selections of genuine classical music, Bach, Beethoven, Handel on the gramophone. Don Feliz sat by himself in a corner, his head in the air, tapping his foot to the metre.

"All that, all that I have heard before," he said.

Emilio listened with delight on his rugged face. Every few minutes he whispered to his wife:

"Shut up talking. This is worth listening to."

Then we tried an experiment. We had just received from El Señor a plate of Stravinsky's "Oiseau du Feu." We put it on to the machine. The audience kept an intense silence.

"But that is marvellous!" they exclaimed as soon as the record was over. "Play it once more, Señor."

"Señor," said one of Emilio's friends, "what can I do for you? Have you any milk—no?"

He ran downstairs and out of the house. In ten minutes he came back, thrust a milk-can into Jan's hands.

"There!" he exclaimed. "And if you want any more cow's milk, come to me. I keep a milk-shop, you know." Then he went on more seriously: "But you are indeed lucky to have bought that old guitar of Don Feliz. He would never sell it to me. I have offered a hundred pesetas for it; and there are others who have offered more."

This left us with a problem in psychology to work out for the next few days. Why had Don Feliz sold Jan the guitar?

We put the question to Luis.

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"Oh," he answered, "probably Don Feliz found the Señor Juan sympathetic."

But this did not satisfy us. Don Feliz had made much of the fact that we were leaving the country: that we were going far away. At last we worked it out thus.

Don Feliz had bought his novia a laud. He was short of money to pay for it. This, however, would not have been enough reason in itself, but he was also jealous of the other players in the town, and by selling the guitar definitely to Jan he would first allay the temptation that he might sell it locally. He put the price low, because he knew we were badly off; but some of the wrench of parting with the instrument—of which he was very proud—was eased by knowing that it was going to be taken to the grand cities of London and Paris, where its uniqueness would be valued. But we think he would have died of starvation rather than allow one of his local rivals to possess his old guitar.

When I was not sketching in the campanile, Jan and I went to the cafés and drew the people sitting about us. This gave delight to the waiters. One morning while we were at one of the café's facing the river Blas came up. He passed over the fact that we had quarrelled, and that Jan had dropped him for Don Feliz.

"Draw me!" said Blas.

The result was that one by one all the richest gipsies of the town came and posed to me at the café tables. This was, in fact, the gipsies' café. They were on the whole a handsome set of men, very intelligent and shrewd in expression and of prosperous appearance. Most of these carried the indefinable touch which makes an internationalism amongst those who are interested in beasts of burden. They are reputed to be expert cattle and horse thieves, and are still to some extent despised by the Spaniard. But our first impressions were not unfavourable.

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The autumn seemed to be a period of fiesta. We had luckily just missed the great fiesta of Murcia which culminates with a huge procession out to Fuen Santa in the mountains. But often we were awakened at three in the morning by a series of alarming reports and explosions in the street outside. There was a large church at the end of the Paseo de Corveras, and it seemed as though guns were going off all around the walls. The first time we heard this we sprang to our windows, for we had heard something of the quarrelsome nature of the Murcians. But the explosions were up in the air. Rocket after rocket soared up into the air and exploded with a loud crash, then large zigzag crackers were thrown down into the street. Grumbling at the noise, we went back to bed. Next day we found out that it was a fiesta, the rockets sent up by the priests; and often after that we were awakened in the dead of night by these almost Chinese religious ceremonies.

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We had heard much of the quarrelsome nature of the huertanos. Luis and Flores had both told us tales of quarrels amongst the cultivators. Both at Verdolay and in Murcia we had seen small bands of young men wandering about at eventide with guitars and songs. They were hunting for trouble, and if they should meet another band, then a fight ensued, ending with broken instruments and possibly a stab or two.

One afternoon Jan was walking homewards from Emilio's, where he had been buying guitar-strings. He was close to the Paseo de Corveras, when a young man rushed round a corner and cannoned hard into him. Jan stumbled and to save himself clutched the man by the coat. It was a corner around which youths were accustomed to lark, and Jan, believing this to be a piece of horse-play, decided, while yet stumbling and clutching, that the horse-play was too rough. So dragging at the blouse of the man, who struggled to escape, Jan exhorted him to come back and to explain himself. While he was still holding on to the man, a crowd burst around the corner and flung itself on to the presumed joker. Jan's head was in a whirl. One man leapt fiercely on to the joker's back, wrenched his arms behind him and grasped him. The struggling crowd swayed to and fro and suddenly lurched sideways through the door of a tobacconist's shop. Two women in the shop began to shriek at the upper pitch of their voices.

The turmoil quietened. A furious talk began in the shop. The young man who had pinioned the joker, trying to explain, loosened his grip to use his hands conversationally. At once the joker leapt for freedom. He ran, panting like a dog, out of the shop, the crowd bellowing, amid screaming, at his heels. The man was chased into an ironmonger's, where he took refuge behind the counter. The crowd blocked up the doorway. Jan, who had joined the crowd in dismayed curiosity, then began to pick up detached words: "Asesino, Asesino ... asesinato."

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"Good Lord!" said Jan to himself. "I don't want to get mixed up in a murder trial."

As he turned away, two gendarmes, with the ridiculous schoolgirl hats on their heads, led the murderer away.

During this time I had been at home. A sudden outburst of noise dragged me to the window. Down the street, a man was running. He went in a queer way, holding himself between the legs with his hands, and sometimes stumbling, sometimes leaping as one does in dreams of pursuit. Carts were driven furiously after him. He was shouting out in a voice, full of surprise and of anger. After a moment I made out the words:

"Catch the man who has murdered me! Catch the villain who has killed me!"

He stumbled once more and fell. Men jumped from the carts, lifted him into one, and drove him away.

I ran downstairs. Antonio's gaunt mother-in-law was standing in the doorway.

"It is an assassination," she said. "I doubt that the poor man will live. He was stabbed in a ticklish part."

"I wonder where Jan is," I said to myself; and at that moment saw him coming along the sidewalk. I ran to him. "Jan," I cried, "a man has been murdered."

"I know," he answered; "I unwittingly caught the murderer."

The Paseo de Corveras must have more than its fair percentage of fat old women. They all stood on their doorsteps talking in awed tones of the tragedy. Then with a ludicrous unanimity each pushed her skirts between her legs with a dramatic hand and holding herself so that she plainly illustrated her meaning exclaimed,

"Ei! el pobre! Y en un sitio tan delicado."

FOOTNOTES:

[26] My village.

[27] "Peaches, Pears!" but "Grapes! Grapes!"

[28] The Arts Club of Murcia.

[29] Betrothed.

CHAPTER XXVI

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LORCA

We still had money for another three weeks, although we had been four months in Spain. The weather in Murcia was very cold; damp, chilling winds blew down the valley. We decided to go westwards, to explore Lorca, which we had heard was both fine pictorially and also which was called "the City of the Sun." On suggesting the idea to some of our Murcian friends, they advised us not to go. "It is a town of bad people," they said; "they are all gipsies." We had heard before of these towns of bad people. One lay on the far side of the Murcian valley; a village which clustered round the foot of the peak of rock on the top of which was a ruined castle. These people had the reputation of chasing out intruding strangers with sticks and stones. Antonio, fishing in the vicinity of this village, had once been maltreated. The villagers were proud of this brutality.

"Yes," they would say, "we *are* brutes. We *are* uncultivated. We are the biggest brutes for fifty miles around, and we mean to remain so."

Other people had said that Lorca was charming. So we decided to find out for ourselves. We hoped to find rooms in a posada, and we reduced our luggage to moderate dimensions; most of it we put in the van, leaving ourselves only the guitar and the laud to look after.

The train left early in the morning, and stopped at the first station, where we had to change. We rushed across the line, having to clamber under a long train of waggons which blocked the way, and won corner seats. A lanky boy of eighteen, dressed in a long white travelling ulster, with a *béret* on his head, took most of the other seats in the carriage, filling them with packages. The young man seemed very familiar with railway travelling: he called all the porters by name, and exchanged smokes with the engine-driver.

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But the train did not move. Presently the youth came back and said:

"The engine is a bad one. It won't start. They are sending to Murcia for another."

He went away once more. A luggage train rumbled into the station. This brought our boy back with a rush.

"Here," he cried, "spread out, spread out as much as you can. It's an agricultural train, and we shall be swamped with labourers."

He pushed his boxes and packages more widely over the seats. His prediction was justified. A horde of unshaven men, carrying sacks and implements clambered up the side of the train and peered with round eyes into the windows.

"No room here, no room here," cried the youth.

"But there is nobody in the carriage," protested one of the agriculturists.

"They are in the fonda," said the youth.

In spite of the energies of officials accommodation could not be found. Soon the agriculturists were wailing their protests, wandering forlornly up and down. At last the heart of our youth was softened.

"Here," he cried. "Room for two. Got to let some in," he added to us in an undertone, "or they'll push the lot in on us."

The two who accepted the invitation were very subservient, almost cringing, and we stowed their

sacks and other luggage between our legs. They talked together in hoarse whispers. In time most of the peasants were placed, but one man who carried an enormous sack of potatoes seemed to be unplaceable, for he refused to be parted from his sack. The officials said the sack was too big for carriage traffic: it ought to go in the van. But no protestation moved the owner. He was determined that, come what might, he and his sack would never part. Eventually, as usually happens in Spain, he was allowed to do as he liked. He and his sack were crushed into another carriage.

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Then ensued another dreary wait, and at last, three hours late, the train drew out of Alcantarilla.

As soon as we were well under way, the youth said: "I'm off to a second-class carriage."

He opened the carriage door, got down on to the running board and clambered off. After half an hour he returned.

"They collect tickets round about here," he said.

Sure enough within ten minutes came the ticket collector.

The train stopped at a station. The youth got out on to the platform with a carriage whip and a square parcel, which he handed to a waiting man, for which service he received money. This he did at other stations, and gradually we realized what was his occupation. In one part of Murcia we had noted shops which called themselves Agencies. They had large notices saying, "Commissions for Lorca, for Barcelona, for Zaragoza, etc., etc."

We had not understood their purport, but by some jump of intuition connected the youth with these shops. He was the only Spanish substitute for the parcels post.

At Totana two gipsy women came into the carriage, very friendly and talkative. At the next station the two workmen left us. In the carriage they had appeared good-humoured, inadequate morsels of humanity. But they descended into the bosoms of their family. Wives and daughters crowded round them and seized and shouldered their bags, packs, sacks and implements. The men seemed to swell out like a dry thing cast into water, blooming like a dead sea lily as they stood receiving the caresses of their womenfolk. The last we saw of the more insignificant of the two was a picture of him striding like a king along the dusty road to the village with his family in humble though happy procession behind. Well does the Spanish proverb say, "It is better to be the head of a mouse than the tail of a lion."

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Two gendarmes—greenish khaki in uniform, with the schoolgirlish helmets—armed with rifles took the place of the peasants. The younger gipsy woman addressed them. One of the gendarmes grunted, the other glared his eye round and said nothing. Again she made a remark, and again there was no reply. Then she said:

"But it was you who arrested José."

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"Well," answered the gendarme with a beard, "what of it?"

"But why did you arrest him?" said the gipsy. "He was innocent. He did not murder Ramon."

"So you say."

"But it is true. He is a cousin of Conchita here. He was at her house that evening. There is no evidence."

"There was enough to get him arrested."

"But that was all made up. You see, Esteban hates him, and Esteban got up that false evidence."

You look up what Esteban was doing. I don't say that he was the murderer, but he knows something about it."

"Yes, he knew that José did it."

"But I tell you José was with Conchita here."

"Well, tell that to the Judge. It is nothing to do with me. I was told to arrest José and I arrested him. Hum"—he looked at Conchita—"I suppose she is going to see him now?"

"Yes, we are going to see José. Poor fellow, and him innocent."

"Well, if his defence is all right, he'll get off. If it isn't, he won't—that's all."

We did not think that José's neck was in any danger. We had gained an impression that the average sentence for casual murder in Spain is about two or three years' imprisonment. This conversation went on for some time. The gipsies talked round the subject, over it, under it, twisted it inside out and outside in. With all these variations it lasted till we arrived at Lorca, when we all, gipsies, gendarmes, agency boy and ourselves, got down from the train.

We put our luggage into the luggage-room and set out to look for the town, which we had learned by experience would be found at some distance from the station. A boy who carried a rope over his shoulder accosted us, but we declined his services. We strode out into a dusty road, and there stood undecided, for there were two paths to choose from. The boy with the rope, who now had a huge box on his shoulders, came up, and saying, "Follow me, Señores," walked on. We looked at him and realized that here again we had touched the East. Here was a cord porter straight out of *The Arabian Nights*. The rope was round the box and he held it to his shoulders. With his rope he earned his living. We followed him, asking him for some place where we could eat. He named the dearest hotel at once. We declined, explaining that we wanted the cheapest possible, that is, as long as the cooking was fit to eat.

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"I understand," he said. "Follow me."

The long avenue of lime trees came to an end—and our first view of Lorca was opened out. The town was almost like a mathematical line, length without breadth. It skirted the foot of a hill for three miles, almost one long street, which we were looking at end on. Spires towered into the air, and on the top of the cliff the walls of a great Saracen ruin overlooked the town. The whole hillside, between town and castle, was covered with the grotesque foliage of the prickly pear. The cord porter took us down to the river, which was crossed by a plank, then up into the town. He led us through small streets which fringed the great main street, put down his box at a corner, led us up another street and stopped at a high barricaded gate. Two filthy children were playing on the step. The cord porter rapped with his knuckles. There was no answer. He rapped again loudly. A hoarse voice cried out in questioning reply.

"It's Paco," shouted the porter. "I've got two customers here."

A quarrel ensued through the keyhole.

There was a sound of a rusty lock and the door swung open. A woman heated with cooking and with annoyance began to curse the cord porter.

"Why couldn't you bring them to the proper entrance?" she cried.

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But she let us in, took us through a yard in which huge stew-pots and frying-pans were cooking over a wood fire, and ushered us upstairs, past rooms filled with workmen diners, into a long chamber lit by a window at one end, with bullfight posters on the walls. She brought us a plate of stew and wine. We asked for bread.

"Why didn't you bring your own?" she said.

"We did not know," we answered.

"Oh, all right. I'll give you bread this time. But, next time, bring your own bread with you."

We thought, "Lorca is a rough place." There was a sound of loud chaffing, and in walked our agency boy of the train.

"Hullo," he exclaimed to us. "Are you here?"

"Yes," we answered. "And, now we see you here, we are sure this is the best place."

He grinned, chucked the waitress under the chin, and ordered a complex meal. As soon as the staff perceived our acquaintance with the agency boy, their manners changed. They became charming, inquiring after our need with a lively solicitude. We asked the diners about a posada. A bluff man, with a walrus moustache, seated at the same table, said the posada at which he was staying was comfortable.

"When you have finished your meal," he said, "I will lead you there and introduce you to the proprietor, an excellent fellow. But you come unluckily. To-day is market day. There are many farmers in from the country, and it is possible that you will find difficulties."

As we went out the waitress came running after us. "You have left your bread behind," she cried.

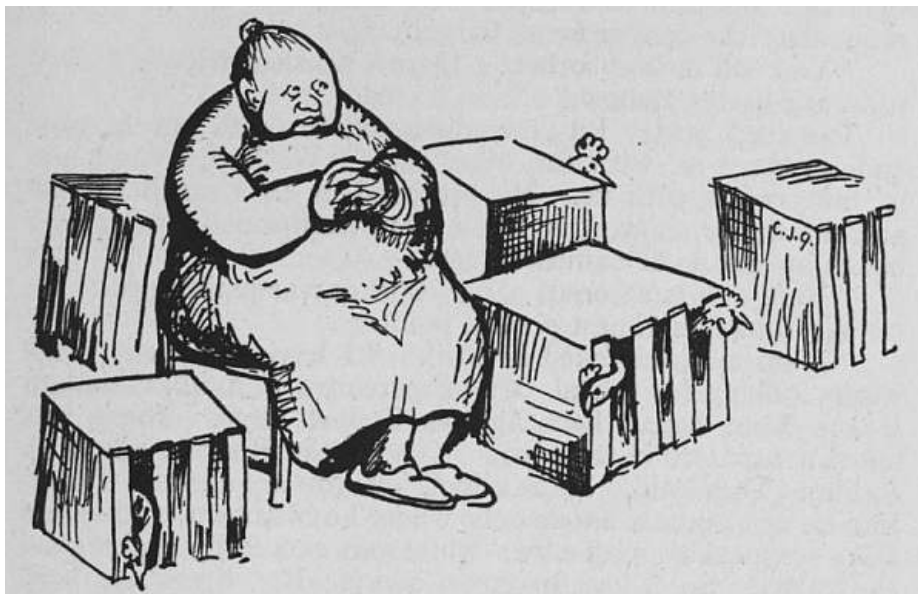
With our new friend we went off. But the posada was full for the night.

"There is another one, we will look at that," said our guide. "If the other is full also, you shall have my room, and I will find a bed somewhere until a room is free. Tomorrow the place will be emptier."

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On the way to the second posada, we fell in once more with the cord porter.

"You are looking for rooms," he cried. "Why didn't you tell me before? I know of a splendid place. I will lead you there."



"Perhaps that will be better," said the man. "I do not think the other posada would really suit you. They say it is the meeting-place of loose women. You understand?"

The cord porter took us to a house outside of which were about ten hen-coops. In the midst of the coops an old woman was sitting on a low chair. She was an extraordinary shape; like a Chinese lucky image, Hotei. Her knees were perched on the rung of the chair, and so large was her stomach that it rose in front of her like a balloon, coming in its highest part well to the level of her chin. She looked dingy and unwashed, but we could not well draw back, for the cord porter had told her our needs. The obese woman stood up, balancing her fantastic stomach by a backward bend of the spine.

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She had two rooms, one with a single bed, one with a couple. The single bed was small, the ceiling looked as if it were not innocent of vermin. We chose the double-bedded room after the conventional bargaining.

"You will indeed be better there," said our friend. "Two beds are better than one."

The cord porter was commissioned to fetch our luggage and we went off with the other man. We had invited him to take coffee with us. He preceded us to a small *buvette*, and the waiter showed us into a room partitioned into private boxes by means of canvas screens.

"Here one is at one's ease," said our acquaintance. We told him that we were painters.

"I am a zapatero,"^[30] he said. "I have been here some weeks looking for work. My proper town is Aguilas, though I was born here. But Aguilas is not large. There was another zapatero in the town. The people all took their work to him. They said, 'He is a fool, but you are clever. Therefore he can make a living only where he is known, and where folks sympathize with him; while you can easily make good elsewhere.' So I had to come away. But times are bad. They say that there are too many zapateros in Lorca already.

"Times are so bad in Lorca," he went on, "that I don't expect you will do the business here that you hope. Now, if you are the painters you ought to be, I have a proposal to make. You come with me to some towns I know of down the coast. You will put up your easel in the main street, and will paint, and I will sell lottery tickets at three goes for the real. We will do a splendid business. I can assure you that."

Had the offer come at another moment we would have jumped at the chance of the fun. But we had a London Exhibition hanging over our heads. We dared not waste the time. This we explained to the zapatero, adding also our regrets and how well the idea would have gone in the book we were projecting. His expression altered at once.

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"Books?" said he. "You are book people?"

"Yes."

"But," he persisted, "you don't mean to say that you are that kind of persons? Not with *those* books that Englishmen come selling. You are book people"—his voice rose with indignation—"you have to do with those Bibles!"

Shades of Borrow! we roared with laughter. Somewhat reassured the zapatero resumed his seat. We explained.

"Ah," he said, "I did not think that you could be that sort of persons and yet ... You are English. I," he added proudly, "am an Atheist! Of course I let my little boy read *that* book, one has to learn to read somehow. But I say to him, 'Don't believe it. Use it if you like, but don't be taken in by it.'"

We went back to the house to find that our luggage had arrived. A button was coming loose from

my boot, so the zapatero borrowed needle and cotton and sewed it on professionally. Then, as he said he liked the guitar, we took out our instruments and began to play. The female Hotei ran into the entrada waving her hands.

"Oh, oh," she cried, "you mustn't play here! You mustn't play here! The owner of this house died three days ago, so we cannot allow any music here. It would show the greatest disrespect."

We said au revoir to the zapatero, and went out to examine Lorca. The houses on one side of the long street had swelled up the hill towards the Saracen castle. Through this we went clambering upwards. In appearance it was the oldest town we had seen. The houses were of all shapes, but of a uniform colour, like yellow rust, and the earth was of the same tint. The houses piled themselves up in fine shapes, but Lorca suffered from the same drawback as Murcia, a drawback we had feared: it was too big. Had we attempted to sketch in the streets we should have been swamped by people as I had been in the market-place. The streets were full of men sitting in groups making alpagatas. They called out after us as we passed. The songs were different from those of Murcia or Jijona. Here is one, a guajiras which a woman was singing:

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"Love is an insect
Which enters the body,
And no rest is left there
When it takes possession.
It gnaws like a wood-louse
The tree where it burrows;
And in time it devours
Volition and strength,
Leaving only desires
For the one who is worshipped."

We scrambled up to the castle and from thence found a view of the surrounding country. On the south there was a passage not unlike that of Murcia, a flat cultivated valley; but to the north it looked as though giants had been at mining operations. The hills looked not like the result of nature but of artifice, they appeared to be huge mine dumps and slag heaps. It was fantastic and unpaintable. The town itself was too much like the conventionally picturesque mud coloured compositions of Southern Europe that every painter brings back from his travels, and we decided that Lorca was not a painting ground for us; and that we would go back to Murcia on the following day, looking for some suitable spot at which to paint on the homeward route to Barcelona.

We came down by a different path, passing a cluster of seven white hermitages built on a square plateau. They were small box-like structures, and once, we believe, hermits did live in them, but now they are deserted. We reached Mrs. Hotei's house both tired and hungry. A crowd of women in black had just returned from the landlord's funeral. They consented to boil us some eggs for supper, which we ate under Mrs. Hotei's piercing eyes. From the ceiling of the supper-room hung clusters of quinces, and on the mantelpieces were some interesting specimens of antique Spanish pottery.

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We went to bed early, and to our dismay found that one of the beds had been taken away. There was no washing apparatus in the room, and the window looking on to the road was curtained by an old dirty sack.

"Well," said we, "we are in for it. Pray Heaven that there are no bugs."

As we were about to undress we heard scuffling and giggling which drew our attention to another drawback, one to which we would not submit. There was a second door to our room, half glazed, and the glass was covered by a hanging drapery. But this drapery, which was outside the glass, had been pulled aside, and a row of faces of curious children were staring in on us. We rang the bell. The daughter of Mrs. Hotei was half surprised at our objection to publicity and that we were so squeamish about undressing as a popular spectacle. But we persuaded her to pin up a pink shawl on our side of the door, and we then went to bed.

To bed, but not to sleep.

The bed was distressingly narrow. We could remain in it by clinging together, but if we loosened our grip, one or the other began to roll out. After some while Jan had ideas of getting out and of sleeping on the floor, but the floor was of stone and the only mat in the room was small and circular. Our determination to leave Lorca strengthened as the night wore on. At last we found a partial solution, we lashed ourselves together with the blankets. When sheer weariness was making us doze off, a man upstairs began to take off his boots. The floors were thin, and he seemed to be a centipede. Boot after boot he hurled into a corner, but even his feet were not inexhaustible, and at last we slept fitfully.

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We awoke very early, grateful at least that no bugs had disturbed us. In spite of the many warnings we had had of the verminous condition of Spain, it has not been our experience to encounter in the provinces of Murcia and Alicante even as much insect life as one might easily find in Chelsea. Fleas, of course, there are, but in a hot dusty country fleas are to be expected.

Washing things were brought on demand, though I think they had expected us to wash at the public sink in the outhouse. Then we breakfasted on bread, coffee and grapes, while Mrs. Hotei sat by resting her stomach on the edge of the table and chanting in a hollow voice a pæan of her own virtues. It ran somewhat thus:

"I am la gorda,
The fat one of Lorca.
My stomach is ill.
Of an illness which makes it
Swell up like a football.
But my heart has no illness;
It is sound, it is loving,
And makes no distinctions
Between different peoples.

"I am la gorda,
The fat one of Lorca.
My home is well known
Because of its cheapness
And the love of a mother,
Which I shed o'er my lodgers.
Nowhere else will you
Find meals of such richness
Or cooking so luscious
For people whose purses
Are small in dimensions.

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"I am la gorda,
The fat one of Lorca.
My house is so loved by
The folk of the district
That *my* bedrooms never
One moment are empty.
I'll give you an instance:
Last night, for example,
Each bed carried double
And would have contained more
Could one but compress folks
To smaller dimensions.

"I am la gorda,
The fat one of Lorca.
Those who once come here
Come back again, always.
My card I will give you
That you may remember
That Lorca possesses
A kind-hearted mother,
Or, anyhow, one who
Will fill that position
As long as you settle
The bill she presents you."

In this plain song she explained both the disappearance of our second bed and the centipedal man upstairs. When she had finished we broke to her the news of our imminent departure. We lunched once again at the eating-house, which this day was full of peasants. Three women in black who might have stepped out of the pages of the Bible faced us. They were not friendly in manner. A small soldier, half tipsy, came in and, soon after him, the agency youth. The latter began to tease the tipsy soldier, and in a short while both had pulled out knives and were threatening each other in mock earnestness. But one could see that it needed little—an accidental word, a sentence misunderstood—to swing the drunken soldier over from joking to earnest. We took coffee at a café in the central street. La gorda rolled up the street, came to our table, and accepted a glass of anis dulce for the illness of her stomach.

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We set off to the station followed by a small boy wheeling our luggage on a barrow. As I went people shouted after me: "Sombrero, Sombrero." The train was, of necessity, late. We sat down in the station hall, and the gipsy woman who had come from Totana joined us. A blind woman led by a child took up her position at the booking-office exit, cunningly begging from the folk as they were handling their small change. The small child had one bad eye and was wiping both eyes with the same handkerchief. One could see that she, too, was threatened with blindness. The zapatero came, having dined at a friend's house.

A good deal of farm produce was being prepared for the train. There were crates of chickens, which were thrown about from hand to hand; but some unfortunate turkeys were not even as lucky as the hens. About twenty of them were packed loosely into a large net bag. The porter picked up each bag and, the turkeys squeaking loudly, pitched it up to a man who was standing in the truck. The bags were packed one on the top of another with a total lack of consideration for the turkeys' feelings. There is no S.P.C.A. in Spain.

Jan told the zapatero that if he were coming to Murcia he could give him an address which might be useful. He then wrote Antonio's name and direction, which the zapatero accepted almost with reverence. Jan went off to the ticket-office, while I, aided by the zapatero, found a carriage in the

train, which had just arrived. The gipsy woman came with us; and an old man also got into the carriage. Up and down the platform a hawker was walking with a broad basket over his arm. He was selling thin circular cakes. I bought five, one for each person in the carriage. The old man accepted the cake which I offered him, took a large bite, ruminated for a moment over it and remarked:

"These cakes value nothing."

The zapatero and the gipsy woman each took a bite. Opinion seemed unanimous. I then bit in my turn. The cake had a queer taste: it was something like a thin cold muffin flavoured with cayenne pepper. The gipsy woman collected the cakes, each with a bite out of it (like the mad hatter's saucer), and put them into her basket, saying, "Oh, the children won't grumble at them." But I was determined that Jan should have the experience.

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As he came out of the ticket-office he was intercepted by the cake-sellers, who said to him:

"Señor, you have a wife, who is a remarkable woman." The old man turned to the zapatero.

"Who are these people?" he demanded.

The zapatero began to give an account of us.

"They are painters," he said; "they travel about the country making pictures with paint and brushes, not with a machine. Not content with that they are amateur musicians, and can play. There are their instruments. But better than all this they can read and write; and what is more I can prove it."

With an air of pride he drew from his bosom the card on which Jan had written Antonio's address.

The old man took it. He perched a pair of horn spectacles on his nose and read the address through from end to end.

Then he handed the treasure back solemnly to the zapatero.

"And very well done too," he said.

We said good-bye to the zapatero, and the train drew out of the station some two hours late. Gradually the night darkened. There was a long wait at Alcantarilla, and we arrived at Murcia within the four hours' limit which one must place on the Spanish time-table. We left our van luggage to be collected in the morning, and carrying our instruments in our hands walked back to the Paseo de Corveras

FOOTNOTES:

[30] Bootmaker.

CHAPTER XXVII

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MURCIA—LAST DAYS

Next morning we sent Marciana to tell Jesus, the water-carrier, to bring our registered luggage from the station. After a long delay she came back saying that no luggage with a number corresponding to that of the receipt was to be found. We set off through the mud to the station, and after having suffered from some lack of courtesy on the part of one or two of the clerks we were able to convince ourselves that Jesus had spoken the truth. Our luggage, consisting of a suit-case, a rucksack and a hold-all, containing all our warm clothes, our painting materials, all our drawings of the past five months, was missing. We were assured that we had nothing to be anxious about. The next train from Lorca would arrive about six-thirty, and the things which *must* have been left behind at Lorca would come on by it. But the Spanish reassurances had no foundation, the baggage did not come, and the baggage officials confessed themselves astounded. "Such a thing," they said, "has never happened before." The station-master, a short, portly, grumpy fellow, at first refused to listen to our complaints. When at last we compelled him to do so, he shrugged his shoulders and said, "It is a fatality." After some pressing, however, he consented to telegraph to Lorca, and to telephone to Alcantarilla, the junction.

The next day no news was forthcoming of our luggage, and the station-master was hostile. He saw in us persons who were troubling the peaceful round of his easy duties. The other station officials said plainly the baggage had gone to Madrid by mistake, or perhaps to Carthagena. But neither Lorca, Alcantarilla, Madrid nor Carthagena would confess knowledge of our errant luggage. We were indeed in rather an awkward situation. We had reserved just enough money with which to travel homewards, but were now faced with the prospect of a long stay in Murcia waiting till our luggage was found and, if it continued missing, with the purchase of many necessary articles which we now lacked. For instance, we had no boots, having made the journey in alpagatas.

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By this time, of course, Antonio, and indeed, through the agency of Marciana and of Jesus, the whole quarter had learned of our misfortune. Antonio arranged for a meeting with a clerk of some commercial firm. This clerk's chief occupation seemed to be the pestering of the Spanish

railways for lost objects, and he entered with gusto into our affair. He made us work out a list of our losses and added on a thousand pesetas to our total, which he said was ridiculously underestimated. Then we went, backed by Antonio, to the railway station.

"What do you want?" snarled the station-master, as he saw us appear once more.

"These Señores have come to make a claim," said Antonio.

"Ha ha!" said the station-master, grinning. "They won't be able to do so. They are foreigners, and will not be able to write it out properly."

"Pardon me," answered the clerk. "I am here to write it properly in their names, and they will sign it. This will be sufficient."

After a short argument the station-master gave way. He took us into an office and spread out before us a large book. It seemed that the railway companies had made ample provision for recording losses.

The clerk opened it, tucked up his sleeves, squared his elbows, and in careful orthography began to shape on the page a complex document, full of Spanish equivalents for "whereas" and "wherefore." When the signing was completed we went home. [Pg 262]

"I have given them a week in which to find the luggage," said the clerk. "After that delay is over, they will have to pay you. Even if the luggage is recovered the day after the week is up, you may refuse it, and demand the cash in its place."

We went home to count up our diminishing resources: "Here is a week," said we, "here are two pairs of boots." We had heard rumours of boats which travelled round the coast, and understanding these to be cheaper than the railways we made inquiries; but Murcia was just too far from the sea to be interested in shipping, and we had to give up the idea of reaching France by this means.

Murcia was bitterly cold during those days of waiting. Our warmer underclothes were lost with the luggage, and our friend's house, wonderfully cool on the hottest day of summer, was frigid in the damp, rainy autumn. We had nothing to do, for all our materials were missing, and one could not make excursions on foot, because the roads were deep in mud. So we waited, shivering, until we could escape from a country which had no suitable appliances for warming its chilled inhabitants.

We at last came to the end of the week's grace, and the luggage had not appeared. So, finding that the process of extracting payment from the railways was going to be a long one, we decided to give Antonio a power of attorney to manage the affair for us. We were assured that payment would certainly be made eventually, though with a little delay. Antonio took charge of arrangements to draw up the necessary papers, while we set to packing what remained to us of luggage, including the large Sevillian basin given to us by La Merchora. At last everything was ready; on the following day we were to sign the papers in the presence of a lawyer, and the next day we were to set out for Alicante by the morning train. [Pg 263]

On the morning of the last day, while we were sewing La Merchora's Sevillian basin into a huge rush basket which was to protect it from damage on the journey, we looked out of the window and saw, somewhat to our dismay, a fat, familiar figure strolling along the pavement. The bootmaker had arrived from Lorca hunting for work.

In spite of a feeling of gratitude which we entertained towards him for the help he had given us at Lorca, we could not but wish that he had come at some other time. Our day would be as full as we could well manage. The complications which might be added by having to dance attendance on the zapatero filled us with dismay. To our relief the bootmaker sauntered on towards the town. Selfishly we hoped that he would leave us alone. We had told Antonio about him, and both Luis and Flores had promised to help him to find work when he arrived.

Commissions called us into the town, and we slunk along the streets, spying for a portly form. But upon our return we met it, coming out of Antonio's house. Our Fate could not be avoided, so we asked him in to a simple lunch, at which we put before him, amongst other things, a large dish of especially selected olives which we had bought to take back with us to England. The zapatero approved so much of our taste in olives that, to our dismay, he almost finished up our store; and in consequence we had to waste more of our precious time in buying a new supply. We might indeed have saved ourselves the trouble: we were fated to reach England without olives, for the bottle holding them was afterwards forgotten and left in a railway waiting-room. After lunch we dismissed the zapatero, hinting to him as broadly as we could that we now had a lot to do, but that we would be delighted to see him at about seven o'clock, by which time our business would be over.

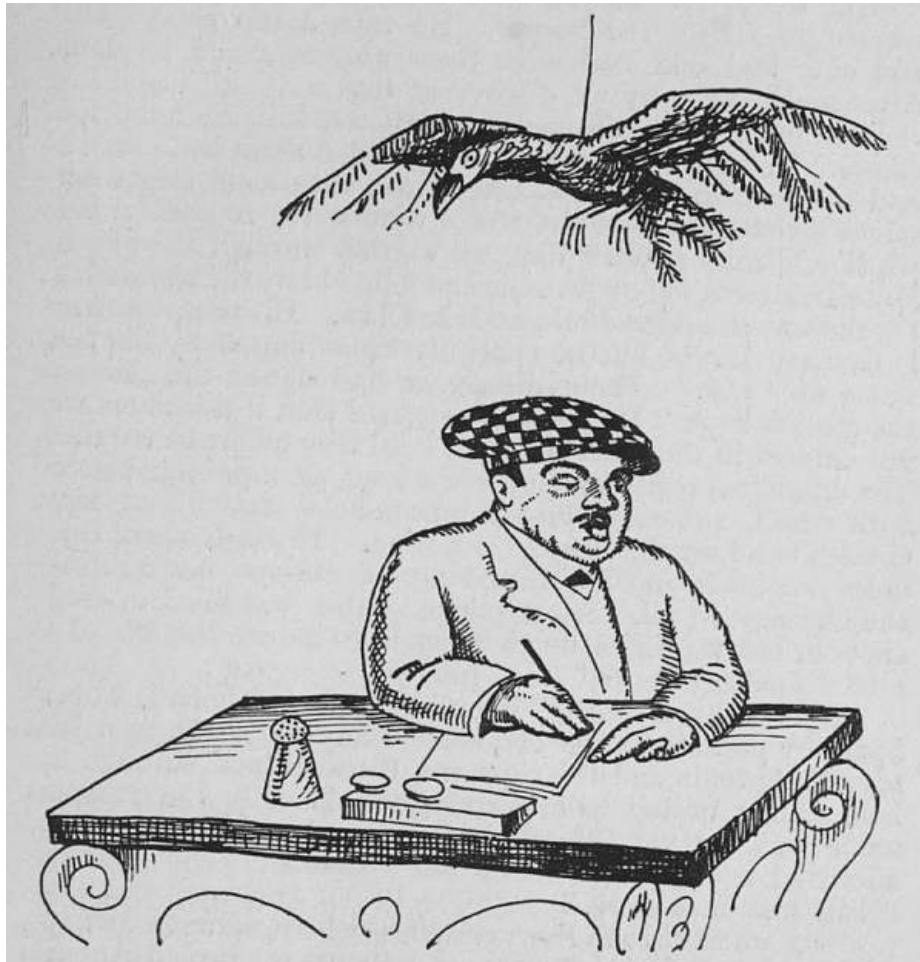
However, when at three o'clock we called at Antonio's house to bring him to the lawyer's office at which the power of attorney was to be signed, the zapatero was sitting comfortably in one of the rocking-chairs awaiting our arrival. We suggested to him that we had business to attend to. He replied that he would accompany us into the town. [Pg 264]

So Antonio, the clerk, the zapatero, Jan and I set out for the lawyer's office. We had expected the bootmaker to leave us on the threshold, but he stalked gravely in our rear, and introduced himself to the lawyer's clerks as a friend of the family. The lawyer's office was a large apartment with a black and white tiled floor, at one end of which was the clerk's table and at the other that of the lawyer. He was a thick-set man covered with a huge golfing cap in loud checks. Over his head was suspended from the ceiling, with outstretched wings, a stuffed and dilapidated eagle

from which generations of moth had stolen all hint of beauty. We discovered that this eagle, in some form or another, is the recognized trademark of the lawyer. One is tempted to wonder if this bird of prey hovers thus emblematically over the head of the man of law as a sort of symbolic warning to the simple-minded peasants.

The legal preliminaries were brought to a stop by the discovery that Jan had forgotten the passports; so, while he set off in a hurry to get them, we sat around in an uncomfortable circle. Meanwhile the chill from the tiled floor crept upwards through my feet. To break the silence the lawyer began to pay me the usual compliments on my Castilian. Immediately in came the zapatero.

"She is a talented lady," he exclaimed. "Not only does she speak English in addition to our language, but she can paint pictures, and play on musical instruments. These I have seen and heard myself. Furthermore, she has other talents: she can read and write, and so can her husband. In case you do not believe this latter statement I can prove it."



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Whereupon he pulled from his pocket the address which Jan had written for him at Lorca and, unfolding it with some solemnity, placed it on the lawyer's desk. The latter, perceiving nothing humorous in the zapatero's action, read the writing gravely and handed it back with expressions of approval.

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But the arrival of Jan with the passports by no means seemed to satisfy the lawyer. He turned the papers over and over and said that with these nothing could be done. After much difficulty we discovered that no justice could be claimed in Spain unless one were registered at the municipal offices. The tax for registration depended upon one's station and possessions. There was just time, with luck, to get ourselves registered before the offices were shut; so, fearful that we should miss another day, we hurried through the narrow Murcian streets, led by Antonio and followed by the bootmaker. On the way a sudden doubt attacked Jan. His passport name is Godfrey Jervis, but he generally signs himself by his pen-name of "Jan." Thoughtlessly he had signed the claim in the station book "Jan" and was afraid that if this name was not entered in the other papers a legal flaw might be entailed. The municipal registry office was a long, dark passage pierced with small, square, deep-set pigeon-holes and about large enough to admit the passage of a head. Through one of these holes we made our claim, asking for tramps' certificates—the cheapest of all. My municipal paper was filled in easily enough, but we had a tough struggle to induce the official to alter "Godfrey Jervis" to "Jan."

At first, as is official habit, he was hidebound, but in Spain by persistence one can achieve anything. In turn Jan, myself, Antonio and the zapatero, thrust a head through the hole adding urging to expostulation. Luckily the passport name was not very clearly written, and at last the official admitted a compromise: he put "Godfrey Jan," and our spirits rose once more.

Back we went to the lawyer's office, where, with some delays, and the expenditure of eighteen pesetas, we turned Antonio into our representative against the railway companies. We may add that one year and six months have passed since then; we have since paid twenty-two pesetas

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more for another document; and a few months ago we were informed that possibly our case would come up for settlement next year.^[31]

Before the night was over we also learned to our satisfaction that Luis had found a job for the zapatero, and that Antonio had got him a bedroom at the small confectioner's in a street close by.

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FOOTNOTES:

[31] At the time of going to press we have just received a message from Spain. The Spanish authorities announce a *happy* ending to the trouble. Our luggage has been discovered at Alcantarilla, four miles from Murcia, where it has been all the while.

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE ROAD HOME

We set out on our journey home next morning. The bootmaker, who arrived at the house almost before we were dressed, came with us to the station, where he presented us with a large packet of angels-hair cakes as sustenance for the journey. This favourite Murcian delicacy, made from the inside of a gourd, has a stringy consistency and a sickly flavour. The zapatero had secured them "on tick" from the confectioner's where he was lodging. As we take leave of him, we may summarize his subsequent history as we drew it by hints and half-made revelations from Antonio and his companions. I am afraid that the zapatero's account of his departure from his village may have been invention. In Murcia he revealed himself as a man who was work-shy. He borrowed money to get his tools, he got advances on his wages, he arrived late to work, he ran up a large bill at the confectioner's; and then, one fine morning, decamped. This much we gathered. Antonio would never tell us, but I believe that he himself paid the confectioner's bill after the zapatero's disappearance; but to what extent our friends had suffered we could never learn.

As we had just finished breakfast we put the angels-hair cakes into our haversack. But under the strain of travel the flimsy paper bag in which they were packed went to pieces, the angels-hair spread itself in fibrous stickiness all over the contents of the haversack. We felt no gratitude to the zapatero for his parting gift.

Our resources, despite an extra hundred pesetas borrowed from Antonio, were at a low ebb, and, after some tedious searching of a Spanish railway guide, we had decided to make our way home up the east coast of Spain to Barcelona and thence to Paris. This route was cheaper than that through Madrid. In addition, we could travel by night, spending our days in the towns, and thus dodge the expenses of hotels. We travelled, of course, third class because of cheapness, and because of the interest which was always to be found amongst one's fellow passengers. The journey was cold on account of our thin clothes, and in spite of our hopes the carriages were so full and the interchanges of passengers so frequent that we could get no sleep. After two days and nights we reached Barcelona worn out, having passed through Alicante, Valencia and Tarragona, but too weary to get interest or amusement from any of these towns.

We arrived at Barcelona on a chill morning and set out from the station to look for the British Consul, whom we wished to consult about our lost luggage. Barcelona is large, and we waited for a tram. A passer-by told us that our waiting was vain. There was a traffic strike in progress and neither tram, omnibus nor cab was to be had. We would have to walk. Bad luck seemed to have reserved her efforts for the last few days.

We do not think that England realized the great interest excited all over the world by the sufferings of the late Mayor of Cork. While his fate hung in the balance people would stop us in the streets of Murcia, or even in the outlying villages, to ask us if we believed that there was a chance of his recovery. He had died shortly before our homeward journey began. The Northern parts of Spain see a parallel between their position and that of Ireland. Indeed, the parallel is not exact; rather one might compare them to the position to which Ulster fears to be relegated. The fact remains that Catalonia and the Basque countries, the hard-working, commercial parts of Spain, object to the domination, laxity and misrule of the Government of Madrid. I believe that the party which wishes independence, the Spanish Sinn Fein, is very small; but it has become mixed with socialistic propaganda, communism, and so forth. At any rate, Barcelona, combining as it does the excitable nature of the Spaniard with the organization of a working community, provides the field for a series of extremely unpleasant strikes, riots and demonstrations. The transport strike was an illustration of this. During the two days we were in Barcelona, three employers were shot in the streets by employés.

To return to the Mayor of Cork. His death was the signal for a typical demonstration in Barcelona, in favour of the Sinn Fein and of the Irish Republic. England was far enough away to remain undisturbed. The English Consul was at hand. When we reached his house we found that all his window-glass had been smashed in sympathy for Irish freedom.

At a first glance Barcelona does not seem to be a Spanish town. There is something Germanic about it. Sitting in the main square and watching the people pass by, one could well imagine oneself in some town on the German border of Alsace.

We remained in Barcelona two days, recovering from the fatigues of the journey. On our last afternoon, as we were strolling through a narrow back street, our attention was caught by a window full of small figures, baked in clay, highly coloured and gilt. The figures were all those of saints and biblical characters, not depicted in the formal manner of religious moments, but in a familiar and homelike way. We went into the small shop and asked their purpose, and were told that these figures were for Christmas decorations. We bought two—one of the Blessed Virgin hanging on a line a chemise which she had just washed, the other an incognita lady saint with a distaff and a cat.

We had taken up our quarters at a small, disreputable lodging-house opposite the station, where they charged us the exorbitant fee of two pesetas a night each. (We suspect that the real price was one peseta). The night-watchman got us out of bed at three o'clock, as our train left at half-past four in the morning, and the preliminaries to Spanish travelling are complicated.

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To our surprise we found but a small queue of people waiting at the ticket-office. Our immediate neighbour was a shabby man in a bowler hat from beneath which showed the curly black hair of an Italian. He was accompanied by a middle-aged bustling bourgeois. The bourgeois took a ticket, which he handed to the Italian. We then demanded tickets to the French frontier at Cerbere.

"We cannot book you to Cerbere," said the clerk; "the railway bridge between Figueras and Port Bou has been damaged. It will not be passable for three days."

We thought drearily of having to return to the lodging-house, of three days more in this large, transportless town of Barcelona, of again getting up at three a.m.

At this moment the Italian came to our aid.

"From Figueras," he said, "there are motor-cars which will carry the passengers over the frontier. You can get along that way easily."

So we booked to Figueras.

The Italian accompanied us and revealed his history. He was wandering about, looking for work. He had crossed the frontier on foot from France. His papers were in a queer condition, and some of them he had had to leave in the custody of the frontier officials as a guarantee. But there was no work in Barcelona, so he was going back once more. The bourgeois was an employé of the Italian Consulate, who had come to the station to pay his fare and to see that he really left the town.

The train rolled along through that rich Catalan scenery depicted in the landscapes of José Pujo, and at about ten o'clock we reached Figueras. With some difficulty we found a boy and a hand-cart, by means of which we could transport our luggage to the diligence office. The road was uphill and deep in a clayey mud. The poor boy tugged and pushed, and Jan had to go into the slime to help him. Through a long, narrow, old-fashioned street, Figueras opened out into a plaza planted with tall lime trees, the fallen leaves of which made a sodden carpet on the ground. The dead leaves seemed to give the dominant note of Figueras, a note of exhausted melancholy.

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Misfortune, as has so often been said, is sometimes good luck in disguise. More "get on or get out" passengers had forestalled us with the car, notably a fussy man who, dragging with him two or three musical instrument cases, was loudly informing everybody that he had a concert engagement somewhere in France and that his career would be blasted if he did not fulfil it. There was no seat left for us. We turned to the boy and asked him to find us some sleeping place for the night.

"There is the Grand Hotel," he said.

"Do not talk to us of grand hotels," we answered. "Grand hotels are institutions which level humanity to a dead datum of boredom and mulct it of expensive fees in the process."

"Claro," responded the boy.

"Take us to some local pub," we continued, "where the stranger rarely intrudes."

The boy, forcing his cart uphill, led us down a side street to a small wine-shop, the woodwork of whose windows had recently been painted a gay violet hue. We pushed our way inside. A man with beady eyes, who might well be called "black-complexioned," curtly demanded our business. On our request for a bed he scanned us from head to foot. We were indeed somewhat respectable, having travelled in our best clothes for fear of another accident to our luggage, wishing, if such occurred, to save the best we had. The dark man turned to a woman who had a kind of hard, crystalline beauty, and consulted with her. At last the woman said in a coarse voice:

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"They can have a room if they will take their meals here."

To which we consented.

The Italian had been following us, vainly begging us to walk over the frontier with him, but as we had still a trunk, two rucksacks, and the large Sevillian dish in its basket, his suggestion did not seem feasible. So we finally said good-bye to one another, he setting off again on foot for France.

We were sitting over our coffee after lunch, when the black-eyed host came near, drew a chair close up to us, stared at us with perplexed brows for a moment, then said, suddenly:

"I know why you have come here."

"We have come because the bridge is broken," we said.

He waved this aside.

"You need not mince matters with me," he answered. "I can see, I have two eyes. I have plenty of opium upstairs."

"Opium?"

"Yes, you can smuggle it over to France quite easily from here."

"But we are not smugglers."

"I'll let you have it cheap," answered the host, closing one eye.

We again protested the entire innocence of our trafficking, but obviously did not convince him. He knew that people in our condition did not come to his shanty for nothing. He renewed his attack after supper.

"Why have you come to my dram shop?" he asked.

"Because big hotels are dull," we answered.

He shook his head.

"You have some reason for wanting to get to France secretly," he persisted. "Your papers, for instance, are not in order."

We protested that they were.

"You need not be afraid of me," went on our host. "I am quite trustworthy."

We replied that in spite of the high opinion he had of us we had done nothing to deserve it.

"Let me see your passports," said the landlord.

"I knew it," he went on, as soon as he had examined them. "You have not been viséd at Barcelona. You will not be able to get over the frontier. They will turn you back."

We had understood that no visé was necessary to get back into France. He said that we were mistaken.

"This is where I can aid you," said the host. "I can get you over the frontier, so that you need not pass the customs or the passport office at all. I have a special route by which I pass French deserters to and fro. Of course, as you are not really dangerous, I would only charge you a small sum—say forty or fifty pesetas apiece. For the deserters the charge is considerably higher, as the risk if caught is considerable; while if you were caught you would only be sent back again into Spain. One of my men would drive you up at night, and then at about four o'clock in the morning you would dash over the frontier. I have sent hundreds to and fro."

We must confess that the adventure attracted us. We had just enough money left to pay for the passage, but one thing deterred us. We had with us all the pictures which we had painted in Spain. If we were captured these would possibly be confiscated, and this was a risk we could not cheerfully face. We told our host that we would take a day to think it over. The next day we decided that if the bridge were repaired within two days we would go to Cerbere and try the normal course, but that if the delay were longer we would take the deserters' route. That day at Figueras was so tedious that we mutually shortened our probation by a day. On the morrow, however, we heard by chance that the bridge had been reopened and that a special train would pass through Figueras at eleven o'clock. It was then half-past ten. Jan rushed to pack, while I hurried to our host to find some means of transport. I found him giving his small child a ride-a-cock-horse on his foot. To my news he answered that it was impossible, that we could not reach the train, that it was a train-de-luxe and terribly expensive, and so on.

After a long and aggravating demur he suddenly turned to me.

"All right," he exclaimed. "If you *will* do it, it shall be done."

He hurried me round a series of back streets, routed out an old man and a donkey-cart, and in a few minutes the luggage was packed and we were off to the station. It was a close race. Jan ran on to get the tickets. I remained with the old man and the donkey. We had been told to pay the man a peseta; but he expostulated at the wage, demanding three. We held firm, however, and at last, with sighs and groans of despair, the old fellow was going off, apparently as heartbroken as though a near and dear friend had died. We called him back and added twopence-halfpenny to his shilling. He immediately broke into wreathed smiles and patted us cheerfully on the back, wishing us a good journey.

At Cerbere our passports were refused. We had to go back to Port Bou, where the French Vice-Consul stamped them and, with the loss of another day, we were once more on our way to Paris. The night journey from Cerbere to Paris was terrible. Owing to the loss at Lorca we were in thin summer clothes, the temperature was three degrees below freezing point, owing to some defect in the apparatus the carriages were not heated, and a bulky market woman thrust her hand through the glass of the window; so that for twenty-three hours a freezing draught searched every cranny of the carriage.

Amongst our lost luggage had been our winter hats, and we landed in Paris, much to the amusement of the Parisians, wearing Panama hats in the middle of November.

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