

for old Moorish towns, its isolated position offering so many advantages as a means of defence, before the invention of gunpowder rendered such natural fortifications of no avail. I took an early ramble the following morning through the town, and went into many of the churches, which were thronged with pious worshippers receiving the sacrament; an air of quiet devotion characterised them rarely to be seen in the larger capitals. The façade of the principal church is rather a good specimen of the Spanish Gothic of the fifteenth century. The town itself, climbing as it does up the hill, has narrow and tortuous streets. Nothing can be more picturesque than the lower town and the manner in which the houses are perched upon small projecting ledges of the rocks. The river is fringed with oleanders, and a wild, steep path leads up from it along the face of the cliff.

On leaving Arcos, a precipitous and stony path leads down to the river, which is forded at some little distance above the town. From here it is seen to great advantage; rising on its conical hill, it appears a perfect pyramid of snow against a sky of ultramarine. The banks of the river, far as the eye could reach, were covered with the greenest verdure, while groves of olives, relieved here and there by dense tufts of the rose-coloured cistus in its brightest bloom, presented a picture of sylvan beauty rarely to be surpassed. We soon reached a rocky hill, across which our path conducted us; and as we climbed up its parched and worn sides, we regretted the lovely valley we were leaving behind. On gaining its summit, however, what a scene lay before us! different, indeed, but far more splendid. Grand views of the distant mountains bound the prospect, while the country all around, in hill and dale, is covered with gigantic forest-trees—a sight so unusual in barren, treeless Spain, whose arid aspect seems rather to belong to the African than

the European world. But here we have indeed forest timber. Glorious trees, whose branches untouched by the hand of man, now rest upon the ground, now interlace each other, and again opening out, offer vistas of surpassing beauty. And then such dazzling sunlight in the open glades, such deep dark shadows beneath the trees. The path at one moment crossing a sandy soil, at another the luxuriant herbage forming a carpet beneath the horses' feet. And amid the forest glades wandered herds of gigantic goats, browsing on the trees and recklessly pulling at the branches which came within their reach.

Such a mixture too of foliage; the bright green of some of the oaks, contrasting with the dull, unchanging hue of the ilex and the cork, whose leaves, not presenting the brilliancy and colour of the deciduous trees, make up for the defect by retaining their verdant garb the whole year round. The strange fantastic shapes of the twisted, gnarled trunks of the cork trees; such varieties of under-wood filling up the scene, the bright blossoms of the cistus, the white branches of the sweet smelling hawthorn, the common dog-roses, and hundreds of little flowers peeping among the grass, added to the beauty of the scene. For hours we thus rode on; the ground became more hilly, and we caught a distant view of Zahara, the town so famed in Moorish story from being the first taken by Mulahacen; this attack forming in reality the commencement of the war, which ended in the surrender of Granada.

A romantic glen, with a stream flowing along as clear as crystal, tempted us to a mid-day halt. Our mantas were thrown upon the ground under the shade of a huge ilex, and while our horses browsed around, our gipsy party were soon engaged in the discussion of cold fowls, a matter-of-fact employment in so sweet a spot. The



purling stream which had tempted us to rest on its banks was most deceitful, for the strong chalybeate taste of its waters rendered them unfit for drinking. We rested long, luxuriating in the refreshing shade, and listening to the songs of the muleteers as they wound through the glen, returning from that busiest scene of all in Andaluçia—the fair of Ronda. On they go, sometimes walking by the side of their horses, at others resting on the packs, or perched on the top of their load, now sitting sideways, now riding along with their muskets hanging at their side, in their gay dress, with their cloaks thrown over them, always singing that same monotonous air, the “Rondeña,” the words of which are generally improvised to suit the occasion, or consist of some well-known couplets which seem almost devoid of meaning; and so they pass on with the usual greeting—the “Vaya Vd. con Dios,” which bids you speed upon your journey in peace and safety.

We too proceeded on our way, and stopping to ask for water at a cottage to replenish our jars, excited great astonishment in the minds of the women, who had never before seen so novel a mode of riding on horseback as ours. We went on through the same lovely scenery, the views increasing in beauty as we approached the mountains, open glades surrounded by hills, covered with forest timber, and hardly a house to be seen, only here and there a cottage, where many a princely mansion might ornament the land. But the owner of all this vast extent of property, is he not proud of it? does he not love to dwell among these glorious scenes? Far from it, he hardly knows what it resembles. It belongs to the Duke of Osuna, who has never once set his foot in Andaluçia!

This immense tract of country formerly lay under the dominion of the Dukes of Arcos, the great Ponces de Leon, whose title and estates, like those of Infantado,

Benavente, and many others, are now merged in the house of Osuna. It is melancholy the manner in which the great Spanish nobles spend their time and their fortunes exclusively in Madrid; their once proud palaces in the provinces now mere heaps of ruins; their very existence almost forgotten by their owners. They hardly know the venerable monuments of antiquity which some of these feudal mansions present. Standing in the middle of the villages, surrounded by the humbler cottages of their dependents, they are fast falling to decay—unknown and unheeded. One grandee of Spain, the owner of a most interesting ruin of this stamp, on being complimented on the beauty of his ancient residence, declared he was not aware he had anything of the sort; but he was often tormented by his agent for some few hundred dollars to keep some old house which belonged to him in one of his villages in repair.

In former days, these great territorial nobles exercised an authority which made the throne tremble at the power of its vassals; and the sovereigns of Spain endeavoured by every means to diminish the influence which lords of such enormous tracts necessarily exercised over their retainers, and by degrees that power was crushed. The nobles themselves were compelled to remain about the court; they took up their abode there, and abandoned their splendid residences on their own lands, and among their own people. Wars desolated the country; what remained was destroyed by the invading armies which swept over the Peninsula; and now the former castles of the Alvas and Infantados are mouldering heaps, ruinous and deserted, and crumbling into dust. Added to this, Spaniards of the present day have a perfect indifference to the beauties of nature, or the enjoyment of country life. They cannot understand it; they never have done so; they would be bored to death away from their theatres

and paseos, and they must alter strangely before it would become a thing of Spain. Many causes have contributed to this, but naturally their character is not one which can derive pleasure from such enjoyments. Study their literature, and you will find fewer descriptions of the charms of scenery than in that of any other nation; and then the insecurity of the country is always a sufficient excuse for not remaining there. But in the meantime, the neglected condition of the villages speaks volumes of the disadvantages the people labour under from the non-residence of their landlords.

Our second day's ride was now nearly brought to a conclusion; we soon spied the little town of El Bosque nestled on the slope of a wooded hill at the entrance of a valley, through which a gentle rivulet was murmuring along. The posada was even more unpromising than the one at Arcos, but it was very characteristic of its class. The large folding-doors opening into a huge room, at one end of which is the kitchen fire, where, round the joyous flame blazing brightly on the hearth, all assemble to discuss the events of the day, or listen to the tales of their companions. This room serves for every purpose, bedroom, sitting-room, and kitchen, all in one; for here, after they have talked enough, and arranged their horses for the night, they roll themselves up in their mantas and sleep soundly. At one end were two small rooms, separated by a division, which did not reach the ceiling, and into these our party were obliged to fit, the gentlemen on one side, the ladies on the other.

Here again we were most kindly and hospitably treated by the Duke of Osuna's agent, to whom we had brought letters. He could not entertain us himself as his wife was very ill; but everything we wished for was supplied with a generosity which seemed to know no bounds. Beds, wine liqueurs, sweetmeats, even to a bottle of

French perfume, appeared in quick succession, and only added another to the many proofs of the truly kind good-nature of the Spaniards. After our long day's ride we were not sorry to retire to our rooms; but, alas! rest was impossible, we had so many industrious companions that sleep was not to be thought of. Our neighbours on the other side of the wall were as lively as ourselves, and we made up for the impossibility of sleeping by an active conversation, which must have effectually disturbed the slumbers of all beyond our quarters.

A good ramble in the fresh morning air soon made us forget the troubles of the night. We clambered up the sides of the hill to the Calvario, whence the view was indeed lovely. Below, lay the winding valley and the clustering village; above, the lofty peaks shrouded in the mists, which were gradually clearing, and as they dispersed disclosed the rich foliage which dotted the mountains to the very summit; to our right a stream came tumbling through the tangled brushwood, over-arched again by the wide-spreading forest trees.

Escorted by a young Spaniard, the son of the Duke's agent, we afterwards ascended to a hermitage, at the source of this little rivulet. We left our horses at a pretty cottage, surrounded by a garden, where roses of every hue were blooming in profusion beneath the trellised vines; the view from here is charming, extending over the vast forest lands we had been traversing, and commanding, they assured us, when the air is clear, a view of Cadiz and the sea. We proceeded on foot to the spring, accompanied by a guard of rustic beauties, who had transferred the gayest flowers of their gardens to the black tresses of their hair. The water gushes in a sparkling waterfall, through a natural arch in the rock, and dashes down the glen in a succession of miniature

cascades. It was a pretty woodland scene, and spoke well for the taste of the venerable anchorite who had selected such a spot for seclusion. We drank of the fountain, nor was the draught less acceptable to the gentlemen of the party from being presented by one of the black-eyed houris who were escorting us.

On our descent, an ominous tale of some robbery and murder which had taken place in the neighbourhood the night before was related to us in the usual style, and we received many a warning to be careful. The gentlemen of our party instantly put fresh caps on their pistols, with the proud confidence they were quite a match for all the bandits of Andalucia. Our friend's son and a shabby-looking servant, with his musket dangling at his side, apparently all ready for a fight, accompanied us a portion of the way from El Bosque to Grazalema. His father bade us adieu with many kind offers of further assistance in any way we might require, and we said farewell to El Bosque, a sweet nook, but rarely visited, and well worthy of being included in a tour through these Sierras.

Our road ascended through the valley, which gradually narrowed to a gorge between lofty and precipitous mountains. The clouds which capped the rugged peaks around, occasionally favoured us with a passing shower, and then the sun burst forth again, the varied lights and shadows adding to the beauty of the wild landscape. The narrow path led us along the side of the declivity. Below us was the narrow valley, with its silvery stream winding among cottage gardens and vineyards; above, the jagged rocks, peeping occasionally through the clouds. We descended to the rivulet, and passed Benimohammed, a small village about a league and a half from El Bosque. Here the valley branches through two openings in the hills. We proceeded for a quarter of a mile up a ravine to see the

source of the stream. It gushes forth in numerous bubbling fountains at the foot of a lofty precipice. Along the glen were many picturesque cottages, with vines and other creeping plants trained over and about them, and forming luxurious bowers; and all the girls who came out to stare at the passing strangers, and wonder what could have induced them to stray into their secluded hamlet, had their hair gaily decked with flowers.

Here our young companion bade us farewell, and returned to his own village, and we continued our progress. We soon began gradually to ascend, but the pleasure of our ride was sadly interrupted by the rain, which now commenced descending in torrents. We halted under the trees, and as we were waiting, an old venerable mountaineer came tottering down the path, "with feeble steps and slow," as though each would be his last. He counted "five dollars," according to the quaint way they have of telling their ages in this country, that is, as there are twenty reals in a dollar, he meant to convey to us that he could reckon a hundred years. He presented a striking contrast to the light step of a sturdy little fellow of nine years old, who came to seek for shelter likewise where our caravan was stopping. He was on his way over the mountain to Grazalema, and a merry, talkative little urchin he was.

Each step as we mounted higher increased in wildness, and the cold, which was making itself most disagreeably felt, told us we were attaining a considerable altitude. The road winds round the south-eastern side of the Cristobal, and the stony path is steep and precipitous, but the vegetation most luxuriant; the branches of the trees meet overhead, while the ilex and the olive rise out of the thick underwood. The misty clouds at times cleared away, and disclosed occasional glimpses of the sea, with the wooded ground that lay between us and the blue ocean;

rugged cliffs and yawning precipices were laid bare for a moment, only to disappear the next in greater obscurity. We soon reached the limits of the shrubs and trees, the bare stones were only covered with the variegated lichen and a few small flowers, inhabitants of this elevated region. All looked the very picture of barrenness as we reached the culminating point of the road, when, turning to the north, we commenced descending upon Grazalema. The tall grey peaks rose on every side, but after an hour's descent, one gigantic pyramid of rock towered to our right, and beneath lay the strangely-situated town of Grazalema, perched like an eagle's nest, the houses clustering along a ridge about half-way up the mountain side.

We descended on the town, and anxiously inquired for a house in the Calle Arcos, which had been recommended to us in preference to the posada, the latter, we were told, containing more inhabitants than we should find agreeable. Nothing could exceed the sensation created by our arrival; we were decided novelties; everyone rushed out to see us, and by the time we reached the door of the house we were seeking, the streets were crowded. We saw a great many pretty faces peeping at us in every direction; ladies on horseback in the English fashion had evidently never been seen at Grazalema before. After some delay and a great deal of conversation, two necessary preliminaries to the arranging of anything in Spain, we managed to establish ourselves very comfortably. Our hostess had to vacate her own apartments, and some of our party were honoured with a room where there was a small shrine at one end, with an image of the Virgin and a lamp burning before it.

While my companions were preparing for dinner, unpacking the alforjas, or saddle-bags, &c., I ensconced myself on the balcony, to make a little sketch of the

street with the rocks soaring above the houses. This attracted the attention of the crowd more than ever; the street became impassable, and one little youngster, more enterprising than the rest, took advantage of a *reja* on the ground-floor, by the assistance of which he climbed up to the balcony, where I was sitting. Nothing could be more amusing than the tone of contemptuous surprise with which he exclaimed to the crowd: "*Nada particular; todo blanco!*" an announcement which was received by his friends with evident signs of disappointment. The excitement spread even to the upper classes of society in Grazalema, and I had an embassy from some young *Señoritas*, who wished to see what I had been doing, a request I could not well comply with for the best of reasons, that at that early stage there really was nothing to be seen. We were considerably surprised at finding that a rage for theatricals had found its way to this remote corner of the world, and the question whether we were going to the play excited very nearly as much surprise to us as our appearance had caused to them. We said, "yes," of course, and the manager soon arrived in person, and offered us four stalls and four *entradas* for the enormous sum of twelve reals—three shillings!

The theatre was next the church, and a strange place it was: evidently a stable originally; pit, boxes, gallery were all in one; the orchestra consisted of a flute, a pair of cymbals, a drum, and a guitar; the lights, a few oil lamps; the audience, what one might imagine to be the *élite* of Grazalema society. The play proceeded. "*Maternal Affection*" was the subject which was to inspire the actors and actresses, and really it was not so badly done neither; the hero went through his part admirably, and knew everybody else's as well as his own, which saved the prompter trouble. Alas! I cannot ven-

ture to describe the play, for some of our party were rather tired, and we left at the conclusion of the first act. The little we did see was highly flattering to our national vanity, for, curiously enough, half the characters were English, and their conduct in deeds of generosity, valour, and all sorts of good qualities displayed the character of John Bull in a most favourable light.

The precipitous streets of Grazalema are most picturesque, with charming fountains here and there, round which the women were grouped in their gay-coloured petticoats and "mantillas de tiro," as the head-dress of the humbler class is called. One of these fountains was exceedingly pretty, of a fine white stone tinged with the mellow hue of time, the water gushing out of the mouths of ever so many quaint looking masks, and the whole surmounted by a pediment, and a simple stone cross. The vines clamber over the roofs of the adjacent houses, which again are backed by the odd-shaped rocks, grey, cold and barren. A steep descent leads across the bed of a torrent towards the cemetery, situated in a most charming position. Shrubs struggle out from among the rocks in every direction, and a few tall cypresses appropriately mark the spot. There are niches as usual to receive the bodies, and a very neat chapel attached to the cemetery. The view of Grazalema from this point is very grand, with its houses nestling against the-hill side; some hanging over the precipice to the left; and the tall gigantic peak, which they call El Peñon Grande, and round the base of which we passed on our arrival, towering behind.

To the right rises the Cristobal, three thousand three hundred feet high,* but still capped by clouds, from which

* The Cristobal is the loftiest peak of this range, and has received the name of this favourite saint, from being the first high land visible to mariners as they approach the shore—a good omen to look upon St. Christopher in any form.