

CHAPTER II.

MINES AND MINERS.

STILL continuing my description of our typical mining town, let me say that its leading characteristics appear to me to be untidiness, noise by day and night, wine-shops, gaudiness of colour, and general picturesqueness of costume; absence of Spanish beauty among the women.

And, first, as to its untidiness. (I shall not detain my reader long on any head, but just give the detail of facts as I have seen them.) The huge pitching-stones are rolled on to the pavement, where there is a strip, by boys, for play, and left there; dead cats, and dogs, and fruit, in various stages of absorption, are lying in every direction—I say absorption, for decomposition and stench, owing to the extreme dryness of the atmosphere, are not found, as a rule, from such causes; the bundles of fire-wood (green) supplied to the houses are left out in the street often for twenty-four hours, and in the dark you fall over them; the *débris* of building materials is not cleared away oftentimes for months; donkeys take possession of the pavement, and, where you find a paved road, you are at free liberty to ride upon it and save your beast; beggars sit at every corner, and pursue you and seize your coat; begging children kiss your hand, and run by your side, with their unhappy, everlasting whine, “Una limosnita, por Dios, señor.” I have known a Spanish

horseman (a mining-agent) ride up one narrow street, down which I was walking, with an iron bar carried cross-ways across his saddle's pommel; it reached from one wall of the street to the opposite, within about two feet; the horse started, and went from side to side; a few minutes, and the man would be safely in the open country, so he held his bar firmly. Just as he neared me, one end caught in the iron bars of a small window of one of the houses, and as he managed to stay his horse, I too managed to get by. All the combing and dressing of the women's hair (I speak of the lower orders) is done sitting on low chairs in the streets, each person doing it for her next-door neighbour, or mother for daughter, and *vice versâ*. I think I have said enough on this head. What would a London policeman say, or rather, what would he not say, to all this; or to the sight of guitar-parties, or drinking-parties, squatting in the street, or sitting on low chairs right in the midst of the streets, to the great hindrance of traffic? "Obstructing the thoroughfare" is a mild term for all this; and as to "nuisances"—!

Next, as to noise, daily, nightly, as one of the leading characteristics of the mining town. An English miner, stealing forth to his work in the grey of dawn, would smoke his pipe in silence, and look at the clouds. The Spanish miner, even at five in the morning, commences that wild, peculiar, monotonous ditty which is the song, well-nigh the only song, of the Andaluz. As to the tune, it is ever the same. As to the words, he makes them up as he rides out to, or returns from, his work. His mule, too, is covered with bells hung on the collar round its neck. I once counted thirty bells on one mule laden with

cloth; but five and six to each mule for music is nothing.

Then, as to music. Many people in England think of Spain, and speak of her, too, as the land of music and flowers, and the dance; and there is some truth in the words, but, like every general statement, it needs modification. In the interior, as regards music, the musical powers of the people are very slender. Still, in a rough way, by far the greater proportion of them are musical, especially among the lower orders. The guitar is the favourite instrument, and hundreds of the men play upon it, or, at least, get a few notes out of it.

But let me describe to you the sort of music that it is. We are in a Spanish mining district, and it is evening. We are passing down the quarter inhabited chiefly by miners, rough labourers who tramp from place to place for work. In some streets, every room of every house contains at night from seven to ten of these poor fellows, who wrap themselves in their mantas (large warm rugs) without undressing, and so get their repose. All down the street you hear the tinkling of guitars; every door is open, and you will be warmly welcomed if you enter in to join the circle of twenty or thirty who are sitting, some outside the room, in the street, some within, doing nothing but smoking their usual little paper cigarillos, and listening to the music.

One man is now holding forth. There is very little air in what he sings, none at all in what he is playing; all that comes from his guitar is "tinkle, tinkle, tinkle," the same note struck over and over again very quickly. It is an accompaniment, a relief to his voice, and nothing more. As for his song, it is nothing but

a wild, loud ditty; the words are childish, but full of love :—

I.

“Black her eyes are,
And rich her hair,
Chaste is my girl,
And very fair.

II.

I love her well,
She loveth me,
Wait but awhile,
We'll married be.”

And so on. At the end of each verse, the man raises his voice in a series of rising and falling cadences, “la, la, la, la; la-la-la; la-la,” several times repeated. The Spaniards will sit listening to this until midnight. I have often joined the party, and, it is but fair to add, that several times I have, in these rough parties, heard music of guitar and voice simply enchanting and beautiful. But that is not the rule.

The noise of the street-cries is also excessive. In the town of which I write, most of the trading is done in the street, and I have ever found that the itinerant seller of fruit, cloth, handkerchiefs, candlesticks, is more reasonable in his prices, and has a better and more varied stock of goods, than are to be met with in the shops. But, really something ought to be taken off from the price for the nuisance caused by these cries. From five o'clock in the morning until seven or eight at night, your house is never quiet. The cries are peculiar, the fashion being to prolong one syllable of the word cried until breath fails. “El toneler-----ro!”—here comes the travelling cooper. “El herrero-----ro!”—the black-

smith. "Pañuel-----os!"—here come handkerchiefs and cloth, strapped up to the height of four feet on the sides of a tinkling-necked mule, and wrapped in red, blue, green, and yellow waterproof cloths. "Muy buenos tomates y pimiento-----s!"—here comes a donkey laden with vegetables.

While at early morning, say five o'clock, or thereabouts, you are awaked by the cry of the goat-milk seller, "Leche-e-e-e-e!" I timed one of these last men, and found that twenty seconds was the time he kept up the cadence of the final *e*.

So much for noise. The muleteers shout; the donkey-riders sing, or hum their Andaluz ditties; the women sing at their work. Every cart-mule, every chief goat of a flock, and sometimes every goat, has its bell.

Then, as to the tiny wine-shops. The wine-shop is simply, in the mining town, one small dark room, with a heavy curtain across the door; within which stand a barrel of white, and a barrel of red, Val-de-Peñas. The room is rented of the owner of the house, and locked up at night. It is stone flagged, dark, and a little red curtain, half drawn back, across the door opening from it into the back courtyard, shows the women who keep the *venta* sitting on their low stools sewing, in the cool, out of the reek of the wine and tobacco. A few tiny shelves, in one corner of the *venta*, are studded with bottles of various colours; the white fluid (*aguardiente blanco*) predominates; then comes *mentha*, or mint-spirit; *apio*, or liqueur of celery; and, probably, a rough kind of plum-brandy and cherry-brandy; all of which cost four *cuartos* (farthings) the wine-glassful. Plenty of cooling vessels stand about, and green and yellow pottery.

Over the door is hung a tiny bush of wild olive, or chaparro, whence the proverb, "Good wine needs no bush!" and over the door is written, "Vino de Bal de Peñas, Vlanco y Tinto, Aguardiente Valenciano." The wine is sold in a vaso, or tumbler; the half-tumbler being called "caño de vino"; the full, "ration," in vulgar Spanish.

Every tenth house seems to have a venta; and, on the road to mines from any town, the ventas are little windowless, chairless, one-roomed stone shanties. The wine is vilely adulterated, as a rule; and it is best, when you are travelling, to ask at some private cottage for a drink of wine. If the cottager boast no barrel, he will at least possess a skin or bottle of wine, and will readily give you a draught.

Gaudiness of colour and general picturesqueness of costume, I spoke of as being also characteristics of the Spanish mining town. The drapery in the shops is of the brightest, coarsest colours; a rich light yellow, for the women's dresses, predominates. The handkerchiefs, worn over the head by men and women, are red, blue, yellow, and the three mixed. Many women, of the lower class, wear a yellow skirt of a kind of coarse woollen serge, with red stripes about four inches broad sewn on. Every one who flocks to the mining town for work preserves for awhile his individuality, and you see the Valencian peasant in canvas shirt, and baggy canvas trousers to his knee, tied round the waist with a piece of common cord; the Manchegan, in blue and yellow handkerchief knotted round his head, with skull-cap of fur, and huge flaps over his ears; the hardy peasant of Leon, with embroidered waistcoat, low-brimmed hat, and black cloth gaiters with steel buttons; the

Castilian peasant, with montera and tattered capa; the Catalunan, with his picturesque semi-Genoese dress;—these, and half-a-dozen other costumes, mingle in the Plaza with the pork-pie sombrero, short black jacket, scarlet faja, and woollen trousers of the Andaluz, and form a Babel of tongues, and lend a general picturesqueness to the scene.

As to the last characteristic of the mining district—absence of personal beauty among the women—I can only say that, with the exception of their magnificent dark eyes, and bushy, glossy, well-kempt hair, I never saw plainer features, both among rich and poor. Of course, Spanish beauty in some parts of Spain, especially Malaga, Cadiz, and the northern provinces, is marvellous, especially in the hair and eyes, and the exquisitely proportioned figure, and small hand and foot that strike you, set off, of course, by the graceful trailing dress, and that unrivalled head-dress, the mantilla. The Spanish beauty generally fails in her nose and mouth, which, toward middle age, often develope into actual unsightliness, the upper part of the face being still pretty. But in the interior the women are somewhat under-sized; inclined to be too much *embonpoint*, and not by any means so pretty as the English peasantry.

As to the shops of the town, they are of the roughest, but the drapery, cloth, &c., is marvellously strong and serviceable. There is the *Tienda de Comestibles*, where you can buy anything from a stabbing-knife to a sweet ham, bedsteads, goat's-milk, cheese, cocoa, &c.; the "Despacho de Aceitunas de Sevilla," or store of Seville olives—the finest in Spain; the "Despacho de Carne," or butcher's shop, where mutton sometimes can be got, tough as leather, in the summer, and in the winter, *carne de macho*, or goat's flesh—most

distasteful to a foreign palate ; the "Sombrereria," or hat shop ; the stall, not shop, of "Refrescos y Gazeosas" ; and the "Despacho de Dulces," or sweets' shop. As to shops for luxuries, books, articles of *virtù*, they do not exist ; but every year a travelling-man comes, and, for six weeks, rents a front room ; he brings really beautiful and good articles, and his shop, ere he departs, is empty, his pocket full. Shops wholly and solely for the sale of navajas, or clasp-knives—some of astounding size—are found in plenty ; and saddlers' shops also abound.

And now, let us leave the town, with its dirty streets, its teeming inhabitants, its ever-recurring savour of garlic, and strong-smelling aceite (oil-olive used for frying), and get a breath of fresh air as we breast slope after slope towards the mines.

On a bright, but chilly and blowing, morning in February, I once passed out of the town, accompanied by a Spanish miner as guide, for one of the chief mines, distant about four miles. First, ere we left the outskirts, we passed the "Valley of the Washer-women." A stream and spring flowed through the sandy, rock-strewn hollow, the waters of which were collected at two points ; on the one side, they flowed into a long, stone trough for the mules and donkeys engaged in the traffic to drink at, and overflowed into the hollow, making inky pools of mud ; on the other, they flowed into a long collection of stone troughs, with sloping stones at the side of each, on which to rub the clothes. On either side rose a slope of olives, and all about the sandy, rocky ground were tiny stone-hovels, tenanted by every sort, shape, and description of persons. Gipsy, beggar, worn-out soldier, strumpet of the lowest class, men on tramp for work,

all were sitting outside these, what in English landlord's phraseology would be called, "cottages on the waste." Hither, to these washing-grounds, flock the servants, washer-women, mothers of families, and, paying to the owner about a penny, more or less, per hour, they stand over their dripping linen from morn till eve. A more motley crew I never saw; their dresses of every imaginable hue, chiefly red, yellow, green, and striped; their bare arms, strong as those of a man; their uncouth, unceasing jabber; their hot words, for they often turn up sleeves and have a set-to with fisticuffs; all presented a strange picture. But, as a rule, they are a hard-working, industrious, honest lot. They may be described as what English soldiers call "Rough Christians."

The first half-mile of the road is made somewhat picturesque by the ever-recurring gaudily-painted stalls of the sellers of early coffee and aguardiente to the miners, as they pass on their workward road; by the donkeys, wholly hidden beneath their load of wild-olive boughs and evergreen oak, going into the town to supply the early bakehouses; and the rich hues of the morning sun, that, flooding hill and vale, lend a certain beauty even to the red dusty road, the shivered lumps of brown granite, the dusky olives, and the half-yellow plains of stunted barley.

Two little episodes, so wholly Spanish that I may be pardoned for introducing them, happened to enliven the earlier part of the journey—a journey otherwise only broken, as to its monotony, by the gay prattle of my guide, who gave me a long description of a midwifery operation he had performed the night before, and suddenly broke off from his Andaluz ditty to exclaim, "Caramba! I'll go to the

end of the world with you, I like you so well," and the shouts of muleteer and donkey-driver, as we met or passed them, "Ar-r-r-r-r-e, moo-----lo, ar-r-r-e," or "Arre, borri----co," and the everlasting viaticum, which you receive and give as a matter of courtesy to all, "Vaya usted con Dios," sounds which seemed to go up like a chorus along the whole length of the road.

The two incidents were these. A lead-laden donkey had fallen in the road, and the driver could not get the poor beast up. He cursed the Virgin and the saints for bringing him such ill luck, and finally fairly wallowed on the ground with blind and senseless passion.

At a bend in the olives we came on four miners, fine muscular young fellows, stripped, their knives lying on the rock hard by, playing their favourite game of the iron bar. The iron bar is about five feet long, with smooth round handle, and weighs, I was told—of course I had no means at hand to verify the truth of the statement—from twenty-five to thirty pounds. Each man in turn steps forward, grasps it about the middle, gets a little purchase as best he can, and throws the bar in a horizontal position. Whoever throws farthest, wins the stakes. It is needless to say the game is always played for money. Amusement without the excitement of gambling added would be no amusement to the Spaniard.

The men offered me the bar, and I can only say that a man who threw it would, if unused to it, run a great risk of a rupture or strain. We sat down hard by, my mining friend and I, to make our simple breakfast of Val-de-Peñas and bread and bacon—Spanish fare; and on my proffering the bottle to Juan, he said, as

he took a long and steady pull, "My father was a teetotaller, so it behoves his dutiful son to drink heartily, to atone for his one defect."

The stunted character of the trees; the clumps of prickly pear; the quaint wild figures; the shoal of wild-looking dogs at the road-side at one spot, some lying smeared with blood, as to their head and fore-paws, and wholly surfeited, but looking very well contented with themselves, some lying half-inside the ribs, and tearing at the flesh, of a horse that had dropped; the utter absence of water and green, and all that one associates with the name of home, certainly strike an Englishman whenever he sees them.

As we crossed one more hill, the tall, smoking chimneys of the lead-mines, and the long ridges of granite thrown out (for all the soil about here is but two or three feet deep, and then comes granite rock, to an enormous depth, in which granite the lodes of lead run), and the clanking of the machinery rose close before us. My first impression was, what industry, what enterprise is here; for, remember, these mines are miles and miles from any railway, and, of course, there is no demand for the mineral on the spot. My next thought was, what a hopeless enterprise it must seem at first to commence mining, and in such a district. Foreign artificers and engineers, machinery, hands, all must be brought to, for they cannot be found upon, the spot.

CHAPTER III.

UNDERGROUND.

THE way of entering upon a mine is this: first, a competent person finds out at what depth, in what direction, and at what angle the "lodes" or veins of lead run,—all this can be judged with some little degree of certainty, but an opinion often proves ill founded; then the Government, which holds all these unclaimed districts of rock, and wood, and fell, is applied to for what is here called a "concession," that is, the Government are asked by the mining company to sell to them the "mineral rights" of such and such a tract of country. This effected, the mine-owner's agent does what is called "denounce" (*denonciar*) the land—that is, formally lay claim to and take possession—ratifying his agreement with the civil authorities of the nearest town. And then he must get machinery and men—no easy task in many cases, owing to the exceeding badness of the roads, distance of the tract denounced from railways, and the hilly ground; but over all these drawbacks enterprise and faith have triumphed, and Spain is dotted with many little colonies of French, English, and German miners.

Perhaps, after all, at the commencement, the taking a mining tract does not require so much more faith in the man than ploughing the grey, slaty, wintry seas for fish, or casting the seed on the brown soil, not so

much faith, perhaps, as is required of the little child when first told to say its prayers, and "keep on saying them, though you seem to receive no answer," as the teaching of the dame's school ran in other days.

I met the friend with whom I was to spend the day underground, and we repaired to the undressing-room. A glass of vino tinto and a cigarette repaired my nerves, which had been somewhat shaken by the contemplation of "breaking with the daylight," and we proceeded to put on the "underground dress." It consisted of a pair of thick woollen socks and list slippers, canvas trousers to the ankle, a warm sailor's jersey next the skin, and over it a short brown-holland (it seemed) jacket, lined with wool and flannel; on our heads we wore a tight-fitting linen skull-cap, and over that a "billy-cock" made of a composition of wool, felt, rosin, grit, hard as cement, and sounding, when tapped, like metal. This is to preserve the head in case of a stone or piece of rock falling on it. This last is a Cornish institution, and a most valuable one; but the Spanish miner works with his head unprotected save by the linen skull-cap, which, of course, is a protection against nothing but the dust and dirt.

Thus attired, we walked across to the mouth of the shaft, one of us, at least, not feeling very comfortable. The "shaft," for the first descent, was so narrow that, passing down the ladder, we could reach back, and lean against the opposite side. It looked like a simple well-head, and the ladder-head, standing a foot above the surface, was only one foot wide. "Which shall it be, ladder, or swing down by the rope?" had said my kindly companion, and I had elected the

ladder. Down we went, I holding on like grim death. The arrangement of the several flights of ladders in this mine was very ingenious. At very short spaces each ladder came to an end, and there was a small space for a "rest," so that even were a man to fall he would only fall a small distance, ere he swung himself down on to the next, holding firmly with one hand to the former ladder. I should say that we each carried a common tallow candle for light, with a ball of clay stuck round just below the lighted end. As the candle burns down to the ball of wet clay, you push the ball an inch lower. This clay prevents the tallow from running over your hand, and so making it slippery.

The ladders are of wooden sides, and have iron spokes for the most part. They seemed firm and strong; but in some of the other Spanish mines—this was owned by an English company, and worked by Spanish miners—I am assured the descent is not so safe.

This mine was a very wide-spreading one. Wonderful indeed is it to walk through the dark, narrow galleries, and see, towering high above you on either side, the huge walls of solid granite. You hold your candle up, and, lo! the lead lodes, looking like the spatter left by a bullet on a rifle-butt, glitter and shine above, below, about, and around. On the first working you can sometimes see the distant daylight through some cleft above for a moment, and suddenly you have to climb through a low, dark passage, roofed with heavy oak trees and planks, capable of supporting five hundred tons of falling granite. This "roof" is placed in those places where there is a likelihood of a fall of granite.

We crept and stumbled along. Suddenly three

miners came hurrying round a corner, looking ghostly enough by the light of their flickering oil-lamps, and into our gallery. "Barreno, Barreno, Barreno," they shouted, and the hoarse shout echoed and re-echoed from gallery to gallery. In a moment, as they rounded the corner, a dull boom like thunder shook and made to tremble and vibrate the granite rock against which we leant, and nearly put out our candles; then another; then a third. This was the blasting, by which much of the work is necessarily done.

I noticed in this mine the "old men's workings," as the miners call them; they were the shafts driven in by Phœnician or Roman; but the mining companies of the nineteenth century have gone four times as deep below the end of the "old men's workings," and been rewarded with rich treasure.

This mine has four workings, each about forty fathoms below the other. In the uppermost the soil is dry; but in the lower galleries the miner has to work up to his ankles in mud and water, although the pumps are for ever at work, night and day. We had, in some places, in order to get to a working, to crawl through dark, dismal-looking passages on hands and knees, passages about two feet high by two broad; and the natural thought of a mind unused to this sphere of labour was, "How easily a block of granite might fall and cut off my retreat, and I hardly be missed in this labyrinth of darkness."

The darkness, the huge granite rocks, shivered about by pick and gunpowder, the pallid faces of the miners, lighted up by their little triangular oil-lamps, the dull boom of the blasting, the ceaseless, slow, measured, steady "pick, pick, pick," the utter sense of

suffocation one experiences, the sulphurous smell of the blasting-powder,—all these must be heard and seen, described they cannot be in such a way as to give even a faint idea of the immensity of labour and force in rendering tunnels, and galleries, and chambers out of the granite womb of the earth.

The lead is found running in regular “lodes,” or veins, from eight inches to two and five feet broad, and, perhaps, equal height—although this last has rarely been found—through the granite rock. It generally runs from east to west, at an angle of about thirty-two degrees. When a miner lights upon one of these veins, if large, he commences to blast, bore, and work with pickaxe at once; if small, the engineer or captain measures its proportions, and can tell in a moment whether it will pay to work it.

The losses and risks to the mine-owners are chiefly these; the vein is often lost for a while, or wholly, and the men’s labour for weeks, in endeavouring to regain it, perhaps, without ultimate success, is lost. Then, again, it often takes weeks, even months, to find, in all the mass of granite rock, what is called a “paying” or “working lode.” Strikes are unknown here, so there is no loss on that score.

There seemed to me to be two kinds of granite, one of a dark, tawny-red colour, and another of whiter colour—a sort of grey granite. I noticed, also, iron pyrites, and also frequently a border of white mica on either side of the vein of lead, separating it from the granite on either side. The lead is picked off in irregular-shaped lumps, like pieces of rock. By the lamp-light it looks quite silvery, but, above ground, just like the lead spattered on a hard surface from a rifle-bullet.