

LETTER II.

ROUTE TO SPAIN THROUGH FRANCE.

Bayonne.

THE position of Burgos on the principal line of communication by which Madrid is approached from the north of Europe; the fact of its being the first city met with, after crossing the Pyrenees, in which monuments are found remaining of the former genius and grandeur of the country; and the name of which calls up the more stirring and eventful epochs of Spanish history,—render it, notwithstanding its actual distance from the frontier, a sort of introduction or gateway to Spain—the Spain of the tourist.

The most agreeable and least troublesome way of visiting the best parts of Spain excludes, it is true, this route; for the provinces of the Peninsula which combine the greater number of requisites for the enjoyment of life with the most attractive specimens of the picturesque, whether natural or artificial, are those nearest to the coast, and they are approached more conveniently by sea. Those, however, who can

devote sufficient time, will be repaid, by a tour in the interior of the country, for the increase of trouble it may occasion them; and this tour should precede the visit to the maritime provinces, as it will render their superior comforts and climate the more acceptable from the contrast. The scenery of the Pyrenees, and the passing acquaintance formed with the original and picturesque population of the Basque provinces, secure the traveller against any danger of ennui throughout the land-journey between the frontier and the city of Burgos.

There does not exist the same security throughout the extent of route which it is necessary to travel in order to reach this frontier. The approach to Spain across the south-western provinces of France offers few objects worthy of detaining us on our way to the Peninsula. It is one of the least interesting of French routes. From Paris you pass through Orleans and Tours. At Chatellerault—between the latter city and Poitiers—the inn-door is besieged by women offering knives for sale. It is everywhere known that cutlery is not one of the departments of French manufactures which have attained the greatest degree of superiority. A glance at the specimens offered for our choice while changing horses at Chatellerault, showed them to be very bad, even for France.

This did not, however, prevent a multitude of travellers from purchasing each his knife, nor one of them from laying in a plentiful stock, stating that he destined a knife for each member of his family—evidently one of the most numerous in France. I inquired of a native the explanation of this scene, and whether these knives were considered superior to those met with in other towns. “Oh no,” was the reply; “but it is usual to buy knives here.” I ventured to say I thought them very bad. “That is of no consequence; because, whenever you have passed through Chatellerault, every one asks you for a knife made on the spot.” These victims of custom had paid enormous prices for their acquisitions.

Poitiers is a crazy old town, but contains one of the most admirable specimens of the architecture immediately preceding the pointed, or ogivale, and which the French savans call “the Romane.” I allude to the church called “the Notre Dame de Poitiers.” The west front is highly ornamented, and unites all the peculiar richness with the quaintness and simplicity of design which characterize that fine old style. I must not omit the forest of Chatellerault, passed through on leaving that town. It is famous as the scene of the picnic given to the ladies of the neighbouring city by the officers of a Polish regiment quartered there, immediately before the breaking out

of the Peninsular war. It is related that Polish gallantry overstepped etiquette to such a degree,—and *that* by premeditation,—as to urge these cavaliers, by force of bayonet, and sentries, to separate all the husbands, and other male relatives, from the fairer portion of the guests. The consequences of such a termination of the festivities may easily be imagined; Bonaparte, a rigid judge with regard to all divorces except his own, on receiving the complaint of the insulted town, condemned the officers *en masse* to be decimated, and the survivors degraded from their rank. He relented, however, afterwards, on an understanding that they were to regain their sullied laurels in the Peninsula; where, in fact, in consequence of his orders, such opportunities were afforded them, that scarcely a man in the regiment survived the earliest campaigns.

The inhabitants of Chatellerault are said to take great offence on being asked their age, suspecting the inquirer of a malicious calculation.

The new quarter of Bordeaux is handsome, spacious, and airy. In the promenade called “La Quinconce,” on the bank of the river, a large insulated edifice, the most monumental in view, is discovered by the inscription on its front to be an establishment for warm baths. At one extremity of the principal façade is seen, in sculptured letters, “Bains des

dames ;" at the other, "Bains des hommes." At this latter entrance a handsome staircase leads to the corridor of general communication, on the unsullied white wall of which the code of discipline of the establishment, traced in large sable characters, forces itself on the notice of the visitor. It consists of the following single and rather singular statute: "Il est expressement défendu aux garçons de permettre à deux hommes de se servir de la même baignoire." After some reflection I concluded it to be a measure of precaution with regard to cleanliness, carried, no doubt, to an extreme at Bordeaux. This town is well deserving of a few days' halt, should the traveller's object be amusement, or the pleasures of the table, for which it enjoys a well-merited reputation. It is a large and handsome city, the second in France in beauty, and vies with the capital in the elegance of its shops and principal streets. The theatre is, externally, the finest in France; and there is, besides the cathedral, and surpassing it in interest and antiquity, a remarkable Gothic church.

Of the sixty leagues which separate this town from Bayonne, forty afford the most perfect example of monotony. One sighs for the Steppes of Russia. These are the well-known Landes, consisting of uncultivated sands and morass; now covered league after league with the unvarying gloom of the pine

and cork forests,—now dreary and bare,—but ever presenting to the wearied eye a wide interminable waste, replete with melancholy and desolation. It is true, that a day of pouring rain was not calculated to set off to advantage the qualities of such a region, and should in strict justice be admitted in evidence before passing condemnation on the Landes.

LETTER III.

THE BASQUE PROVINCES.

Burgos.

IT never causes me surprise when I see the efforts made by persons of limited means to obtain the situation of Consul in a continental town.

In spite of one's being, as it were, tied to one's residence,—and that not one's home,—there are advantages which counterbalance the evil. The place carries with it a certain degree of consequence. One feels oneself suddenly a man of influence, and a respectable public character. I have heard one, certainly far from being high on the list of these functionaries, termed by a humbler inhabitant of his "residence," the "Premier Consul."

The income, too, is, it is true, limited; but then one is usually in a cheap place. In fact, I always envied these favoured individuals. No calling, however, is without its *déboires*. It seems as if Providence had decreed that an income cannot be fairly,

if agreeably, earned. Thus, the set-off against the bliss of the consul, is the necessity he is under of holding out his hand for his fee. I make these remarks, to introduce to your notice an ingenious method, put in practice—probably invented—by our consul at Bayonne, for getting over the irksomeness of this duty. I found him in his *bureau*, pen in hand, and a large sheet of official-shaped paper before him, half written over. On my passport being presented for his *visa*, his countenance assumed a painful expression, in which regret was blended with a sort of tendency to compassion, and which at first occasioned me a sensation of alarm, conjuring up in my imagination all the consequences of an irregular passport—tedious routes to be retraced, time lost, expense incurred, and suspicion, and even incarceration—infection—death!

Meanwhile he pointed to the letter he was writing, and, drawing forward with the other hand a chair, said that he was at that moment memorializing the Foreign Office on the subject of these visas; that his pain was extreme at seeing travellers compelled to send or come to his office, and to lose thus much valuable time; he was likewise concerned at their having to pay three francs each for so useless a ceremony as his *visa*; but he wished it to be remarked, that it was at present a ceremony quite indispensable;

since, only four days back, a gentleman had been compelled to return from the Spanish frontier (a distance of seven leagues) in the middle of the night, in consequence of his having neglected this, as yet, necessary observance.*

Leaving Bayonne by Diligence, although still at some distance from the frontier, you are already in a Spanish vehicle. The only difference consists in its being drawn by horses as far as Irun, a few hundred yards in Spain, at which place they are replaced by a team of mules; but the *mayoral* is Spanish from the commencement, as also usually the greater number of the travellers. From the first view of Spanish ground, the monotony of the landscape ceases, and gives place to picturesque scenery. This effect is as sudden as if produced by the whistle of a scene-shifter. From the brow of a hill the valley of the Bidassoa opens on the view, the bay on the right, two or three towns in the centre, and beyond them, stretching to the left, the chain of the Pyrenees. This opening scene is very satisfactory to the newly arrived traveller, whose expectations have been rising towards fever-heat as he gradually neared the object of his dreams—the “renowned romantic land;” the more so, as he is well prepared,

* The very polite individual alluded to no longer fills the post of Consul at Bayonne.

by the Landes of France, to enjoy to the utmost the variety of scene afforded by the two days of mountain and valley which separate the frontier from the town of Vitoria.

The Diligence comes to a halt every afternoon; the day's journey having commenced at three in the morning. There are three of these days between Bayonne and Burgos. At Tolosa and Vitoria—the intermediate places of rest—the system is as follows: Arriving at about four in the afternoon, an interval is allowed of about two hours, which in a long journey can always be profitably employed, until the meal, called supper. This is Homericly plentiful, and varied sufficiently to suit the tastes of all such as are accustomed to the vicissitudes of travelling. The repast over, all gradually retire to their sleeping apartments, where they are undisturbed until two o'clock in the morning.

At this hour each passenger is furnished with a candle, and requested to get up; and at a quarter to three the *muchacha* (chambermaid) reappears, bearing in her hand a plate, on which, after rubbing his eyes, the traveller may discover, if it be allowed so to speak, an imperceptible cup, a *xicara*,—since, having the thing, they have a name for it, which is of course untranslatable,—of excellent chocolate, an *azucarillo* (almost transparent sugar prepared for

instantaneous melting), a glass of water, and a piece of bread. After partaking of this agreeable refreshment, you have just time left to pay your bill, fold up your passport, which during the night has remained in the hands of the police, and to take your seat in the Diligence.

The towns of the Basque provinces appear not to have been much maltreated during the Carlist war; not so the villages, most of which present a melancholy aspect of ruin and desolation. The churches, built so as to appear more like keeps of castles, have mostly withstood the shock. The destruction was oftener the result of burning than of artillery. The lover of the picturesque offers his silent gratitude to the combatants on both sides, for sparing, although unintentionally, some of the most charming objects of all Spain.

Among the most striking of these is Hernani. It is composed of one street, of the exact required width for the passage of an ordinary vehicle. This street is a perfect specimen of picturesque originality. The old façades are mostly emblazoned with the bearings of their ancient proprietors, sculptured in high relief. On entering the place, the effect is that of a deep twilight after the broad blaze of the sunny mountains. This is caused by the almost flat roofs, which advance considerably beyond the

fronts of the houses, and nearly meet in the centre of the street: the roof of each house is either higher or lower, or more or less projecting, than its neighbour; and all are supported by carved wood-work, black from age. The street terminates on the brow of a hill, and widens at the end, so as to form a small square, one retreating side of which is occupied by the front of a church covered with old sculpture; and the diligence, preceded by its long team of tinkling mules, disappears through the arched gateway of a Gothic castle.

In this part of Spain one does not hear the sounds of the guitar; these commence further on. On Sundays and holydays, the fair of Tolosa, and of the other Basque towns, flourish their castagnettes to the less romantic whinings of the violin; but, in traversing the country, the ear is continually met by a sound less musical, although no less national, than that of the guitar—a sort of piercing and loud complaint, comparable to nothing but the screams of those who have “relinquished hope” at Dante’s grim gateway.

These unearthly accents assail the ear of the traveller long before he can perceive the object whence they proceed; but, becoming louder and louder, there will issue from a narrow road, or rather ravine, a diminutive cart, shut in between

two small round tables for wheels. Their voice proceeds from their junction with the axle, by a contrivance, the nature of which I did not examine closely enough to describe. A French tourist expresses much disgust at this custom, which he attributes to the barbarous state of his neighbours, and their ignorance of mechanical art; it is, however, much more probable that the explanation given by the native population is the correct one. According to this, the wheels are so constructed for the useful purpose of forewarning all other drivers of the approach of a cart. The utility of some such invention is evident. The mountain roads are cut to a depth often of several yards, sometimes scores of yards, (being probably dried-up beds of streams,) and frequently for a distance of some furlongs admit of the passage of no more than one of these carts at a time, notwithstanding their being extremely narrow. The driver, forewarned at a considerable distance by a sound he cannot mistake, seeks a wide spot, and there awaits the meeting.

You need not be told that human experience analysed resolves itself into a series of disappointments. I beg you to ask yourself, or any of your acquaintances, whether any person, thing, or event ever turned out to be exactly, or nearly, such as

was expected he, she, or it would be. According to the disposition of each individual, these component parts of experience become the bane or the charm of his life.

This truth may be made, by powerful resolve, the permanent companion of your reflections, so as to render the expectation of disappointment stronger than any other expectation. What then? If you know the expected result will undergo a metamorphosis before it becomes experience, you will not be disappointed. Only try. For instance,—every one knows the Spanish character by heart; it is the burden of all literary productions, which, from the commencement of time, have treated of that country. A Carlist officer, therefore,—the hopeless martyr in the Apostolic, aristocratic cause of divine right; the high-souled being, rushing into the daily, deadly struggle, supported, instead of pay and solid rations, by his fidelity to his persecuted king;—such a character is easily figured. The theory of disappointments must here be at fault. He is a true Spaniard; grave, reserved, dignified. His lofty presence must impress every assembly with a certain degree of respectful awe.—I mounted the *coupé*, or *berlina*, of the Diligence, to leave Tolosa, with a good-looking, fair, well-fed native, with a long falling auburn moustache. We commenced by ban-