

tation for dirt, we lodged at the house of Donna Ramona, a grocer's wife, who occasionally receives strangers, that are recommended to her. She was most kind and attentive, doing her utmost to make us comfortable in her clean and nicely-furnished house. Her cooking, however, did not suit us at all. She gave us so much saffron and other national condiments, abominable to an English taste, that we really had great difficulty in eating what otherwise would have been unexceptionable. Beside this, which affected the whole party, she took an unfortunate fancy to my night-dress, and with utter disregard for my feelings and prejudices, converted the skirt into a duster, and to judge by its subsequent appearance, applied it to articles that had not been dusted for a long time. This I did not consider a meritorious action, nor from my ignorance of Spanish had I the satisfaction of remonstrating with her afterwards, and so relieving my wounded feelings. Altogether, we did not find a private house answer, and decided for the future never to have recourse to one, except in case of absolute necessity, which curiously enough, as it eventually turned out, was perpetually recurring. But at that time we were mere novices in the

art of making the best of things, and had we chanced to take up our abode under Donna Ramona's roof a week or two later, we should no doubt have felt perfectly content with all we found there.

CHAPTER XVI.

AT Toledo we were to commence our riding-tour, as the wild regions of Estremadura, into which we were going to penetrate, are inaccessible except to the horseman and muleteer. Here and there, it is true, the province is intersected by the great roads along which the *correo*, or mail, and the diligence run; but our object was to avoid these routes as much as possible, which exhibit, all the world over, very much the same characteristics; and to traverse those vast solitudes and far-reaching wastes, which give so peculiar a charm to Spanish tours. For this purpose Lord Portarlington and Mr. Sykes had bought horses at Madrid, while I preferred taking my chance, and trusting to what could be hired on the road. Donna Ramona's goodman, a modest being, whose position lay somewhat in the background of the family picture, recommended one of his neigh-

bours, Marcos Rabosos, as muleteer to our party; and he, for the sum of six *pesetas*, about five shillings in English money, a day per beast, agreed to provide one horse, three mules, and six donkeys, to carry myself, Swainson, Elfick, and Purkiss, together with all and sundry our goods, chattels, and appurtenances, from Toledo to Talavera, a journey of two days, back-money, and all their provender on the road, included. As, however, Marcos could not supply all these quadrupeds from his own stable, he engaged Tomas —, a fellow-townsmen with an unpronounceable name, to provide the remaining beasts, and to act generally as second in command during the expedition. We were to start on Monday morning, Oct. 24.

Monday came, bringing with it a cold wind, and bright sunshine, which made us anxious to be off. But this was no easy matter. To pack six donkeys in a narrow Toledan alley, encumbered with packages of all sorts and sizes, was by no means a simple undertaking. Everybody was coming into collision. The horses would not stand still, and the mules whiled away the time in biting and kicking each other. Packing ropes were either too long or too short, or broke just where they should have been strong-

est. The heaviest articles fell to the lot of the weakest donkeys, and the burden was by no means suited to the back that bore it. The confusion was truly Crimean, and everything went wrong, to the great amusement of Donna Ramona's neighbours. At length, after much expenditure of breath in hasty exclamations, and entire loss of patience both in man and beast, the word was given to start. Of course, every donkey set off at once, jamming his load into his neighbour's ribs, and the narrow street was in a moment choked up with a struggling mass, that could neither advance nor recede. Then one of the mules happening to stand in a more open space, would do nothing but turn round in a way it made one quite giddy to look at; while one of the horses would persist, in spite of whip and spur, in going backwards, and very nearly carried himself and his master in that direction down a flight of cellar steps. In fact there was such an utter absence of discipline and organization, as argued ominously against the prosperity of our expedition. At last, the donkey which carried the panniers containing the stores, by a vigorous effort disengaged himself from the throng, and, with a bang against the corner house, violent enough to

place the precious contents in extreme danger, gallantly led the way through the streets.

After clearing the outskirts of the town, and producing a sensation of rare occurrence amid the stagnation of Toledan life, we soon entered upon scenery thoroughly characteristic of the Peninsula. Our road lay sometimes along the bed of dried-up torrents, which a day's rain would render impassable; but more generally through sandy wastes where hedge and tree are unknown, and in that free and open landscape, we felt we had indeed fairly entered upon those scenes, which, however devoid of natural beauty, have long been placed among the remarkable regions of the earth by the genius of Cervantes.

It was in this mood we journeyed on for leagues over a vast undulating plain, cultivated only in patches, and stretching on all sides to the horizon, with here and there a village chequering the waste. Every sight was a novelty that day, and the commonest farming operation reminded us we were really in the most old-world country in Europe, where many things are done to the present hour exactly as of yore in the days of the Patriarchs and Prophets. Once we came upon a party of peasants ploughing with twelve yoke of oxen, calling to mind

Elisha's employment, when summoned to follow Elijah.

A keen north wind was blowing in our faces, and when we stopped to lunch at a Posada close to the bridge that crosses the Guadarrama, a confluent of the Tagus, we were glad enough to shelter ourselves within the broad porch, where sunshine and food cheered us for a fresh start. At these mid-day halts, which became our rule, whenever it was practicable, we always fed the horses; while the poor mules and donkeys had no refreshment whatever, and were condemned to a lengthened fast, often of twelve hours, being muzzled during the halt to prevent their eating each other's tails, as mules are very apt to do. The usual provender is barley and chopped straw, a very powerful, but heating diet, which renders horses especially liable to sudden attacks of inflammation.

In spite of the undeniable monotony of our route, we still found it most interesting, completely realizing as it did all our previous conceptions of a Spanish landscape. Our late start caused us to be benighted, and for about three hours we rode on in darkness over a wild heath, where the path was rough and uncertain, and where in by-gone times, robberies were frequent.

Such things, however, are seldom heard of nowadays, thanks to the exertions of the Guardia Civil, and the only anxiety we felt was to reach St. Olalla, where we proposed sleeping, and as the night was pitch-dark, with nothing to diversify our monotonous journeying but stumbles and collisions, we were not sorry to find ourselves at last in the court-yard of a Posada.

As we are now for several weeks to have so much to do with Inns, it will be well to mention, that in Spain they are of three classes. The Fonda, which is seldom found except in the largest and most-frequented cities, corresponds to the Hotel of other parts of Europe. The Posada, which is universal in town and country, stands upon a level with a way-side inn, or bettermost public-house, while the Venta is about as good or bad, as the English beer-shop, being frequented by only the very lowest classes. In towns you may occasionally meet with decent accommodation at a *Casa de pupillos*, a sort of boarding-house.

Of all these, we had most to do with the Posada, and it is only fair to state, that we generally found them far more comfortable than we had expected. The Posada professes to supply nothing but lodging, the beds being

almost invariably clean and comfortable, with now and then a separate sitting-room, containing a table, some chairs, and adorned with a few religious prints. The only comestible you can reckon upon is bread; while eggs, wine of the neighbourhood, and milk of ewe or goat, generally belong to the category of luxuries, and cannot be had for love or money in many places.

The Posada at St. Olalla, like most others we met with, is entered through a large barn-like room, open to the roof, and traversed by all the winds of heaven. On one side, the fire-place withdrawn into a recess formed a most picturesque chimney-corner, welcoming us with a cheerful blaze that lighted up the whole apartment, while around sat a group of muleteers singing to the guitar. *Vis-a-vis* was a long room containing no fire-place, and only one small window unglazed, and this, with two side-chambers, supplied us accommodation for the night. Opposite the entrance, which is a regular gateway, and has almost a fortified character, is the stable, a most important feature in all Spanish inns.

A brazier, brimful of aromatic embers, soon filled our sitting-room, which at first looked

dismal and chilly, with warmth, and sweet odours; and though there was nothing but eggs to be had in the house, yet these, with slices of broiled ham, made us an excellent supper. At least we thought so at the moment; but our ideas on the commissariat developed so largely afterwards, when from time to time we were regaled with kid, hare, partridges, fresh pork, and other delicacies, that we came to regard our dinner at St. Olalla as the rude essay of novices in the art of providing for themselves.

I relate all these things, which in themselves are very trivial, not only because they were to us matters of daily concern, but as being so many illustrations of travel in this singular land. Before quitting the culinary department I must add, that we are looking forward with peculiar interest to the first of November, because on that day, pork-killing becomes legal, and in many districts we shall have to depend entirely upon the flesh of the unclean beast for animal food. Between Easter and All Saints' no pig in Spain dies according to law, and as mutton and beef are rarities, even in towns of considerable size (such as Placentia for instance, where with a population of 12,000, only one

ox is killed during the whole twelve months), the late autumn, when excellent pork is plentiful, is one of the best seasons for travelling in Spain for those who are not strong enough to dispense with the usual diet of Englishmen.

CHAPTER XVII.

WE had hardly started next morning, (Tuesday, October 25,) before it began to rain, and a walk of about four miles an hour being our usual pace, it was not quite enjoying "the sunny south" to go on toiling hour after hour, cloaked and umbrella-ed, along a muddy road, with nothing to look at but an endless sweep of saturated cornfields. We toiled on, however, through the successive showers, hoping for great things at Talavera, and a name so familiar to English ears seemed to promise more than a common welcome. We found (alas! for the vanity of human wishes) a very different reception. The principal Posada was filled with a troupe of French circus-people on their way to Lisbon, and it was only after we had wandered more than once up and down the town, and even then chiefly by the aid of one of the equestrians, a

most good-natured lad, that we found any place to put our heads in. Our new-made acquaintance rendered us another material service, by initiating Purkiss into the mysteries of Talavera shopping, the result of which appeared in due time under the shape of a substantial supper.

The only objects of interest we saw at Talavera were some very fine Roman remains, and several specimens of the porcelain which takes its name from the town, most of these being let in, like panels, into the fronts of houses and churches. The Tagus too is a feature, but in other respects it is one of the most deplorable-looking towns we saw anywhere in Spain; so that we were not at all sorry next morning to take our departure, setting off for Oropesa, in the pleasant sunshine, the mere change of weather making to-day's ride delightful, by contrast with yesterday's downpour.

Our road lay still through the same great plain; but we had now on our left, wide-spreading prospects, and purple distances to give it interest, while to the right, dense masses of fog and cloud reminded us of the recent rain. Presently up sprang a fresh breeze from the west, the clouds and fog gradually lifted, revealing, to our surprise and delight, the towering form of

the Sierra de Gredosa, a range of mountains more than 10,000 ft. high, powdered half-way down by newly-fallen snow. These mountains continued in sight the whole day, adding an unexpected charm to the broad valley of the Tagus, as we were not at all aware till then, that so elevated a chain exists in this part of Spain.

While we were at Madrid, Sir Andrew Buchanan had kindly procured for Lord Portarlington an order from the Home Minister addressed to the Guardia Civil, a body of police stationed along all the great roads, and as good of their kind, as the far-famed Irish constabulary. This was a great advantage, enabling us in certain localities to have an escort, if required. One of their stations lies between Talavera and Oropesas, and the sergeant in charge informed us, that orders had been sent down the line directing them to render us every assistance.

We saw men belonging to this force in different parts of the country, and always found them particularly civil and intelligent. From everything we heard and observed, no greater benefit has been conferred on Spain during the present century, than the formation by Narvaez of this police, which has annihilated the organized

brigandage, which twenty years ago was an all-pervading nuisance. At that moment, the sergeant and his party were in quest of an enterprising individual, who, according to O'Connell's phrase, "had registered a vow" (though, I fear, not exactly in the same registry as the Irish demagogue used to have recourse to), that he would rob the first mail, or diligence that came in his way. Whether he succeeded in fulfilling his vow unscathed, or whether he fell into the hands of the police, we never heard.

As we began to approach the confines of Estremadura, our route, which had hitherto lain through the province of Toledo, now skirted forests of ilex, and other kinds of evergreen oak, with which extensive districts in this neighbourhood are covered. There we made our first acquaintance with the Estremenian pigs, a race of porkers held in high estimation all through the Peninsula, and equalling, both in symmetry and fatness, any I have ever seen in England. At this season they are driven daily into the forests from the surrounding villages, to feed themselves fat on the acorns of oak, ilex, and cork tree, and for the moment with their attendant swineherds they impart to those solitary glades an amount of

animation, never observed there during the rest of the year. These herds are excessively shy, disappearing instantly at the approach of a stranger. If, however, any one desires a closer inspection, he has only to beat the fruit-laden trees for a few minutes, and he will soon be surrounded by a swinish multitude attracted from all quarters by the welcome sound of crashing boughs, and the downfall of acorns, which they know will follow. I became quite an adept at the work, and the swineherds used to regard me with a friendly eye, though evidently wondering why I should give myself so much trouble for other people's pigs.

Every now and then we fell in with a party of muleteers, going in the same direction, and our combined forces presented quite an imposing appearance. Some of these parties, as I cannot help recollecting, showed an anxiety to keep company with us, such as we never observed on any other occasion. They had no doubt heard of the brigands' presence in that neighbourhood, and fancying probably that we carried fire-arms, which, however, was not the case, were not sorry to avail themselves of our escort; their own numbers, though considerable, affording no reliable protection against

the *mala gente*, a single brigand having been known to rob eighteen or twenty natives at once, without meeting with the slightest resistance.

At Oropesas, where we arrived some time before sunset, we found the most primitive posada imaginable. Not a single pane of glass in the whole establishment, the windows being mere latticed casements, that offered us the alternative of total darkness, or an incursion of keen wintry air, fresh from the snow-clad heights of the neighbouring mountains. The people of the house were most civil, doing their best to make us comfortable, and giving up their own beds to increase our accommodation. Everything was perfectly clean, and though, by way of precaution, I blew a cloud of flea-powder over my bed, I quite believe from the experiences of the rest, it was a needless ceremony. Before night-fall we visited the castle, a very fine mediæval building, though of no great extent. It is in tolerable condition, and the battlements command an unbroken view over plain and mountain, which, as we saw them suffused with the glories of sunset, formed a panorama of rare beauty.

Purkiss to-day served us a feast of pork and

hashed hare, so that with our store of wine we fared sumptuously, and as we now began to understand better what we were about, and to discover more resources both in ourselves and in the country, we went to bed in excellent spirits, hoping to reach Cuacos to-morrow.

Just as I was turning in, having by a lucky accident secured the door, I heard a loud hammering at its massive panels, and on opening it found myself face to face with the landlord, who was intent upon making his way to his accustomed night-quarters, at that time in my occupation, while his daughter, behind him, was doing all she could to frustrate his intentions. As he was a puny little body, and she a sturdy dame with a stalwart arm and determined will, the struggle soon terminated, and she carried him off with many words, which having a most vituperative sound, were interpreted to us afterwards as expressing a decided resolution to break the head of her "respected Parient." It turned out that the little man had been taking so much wine as to render him utterly oblivious of his duties as a landlord. To such a pitch of independence had his potations elevated him, that he actually conceived he had a prior claim to his own proper bed! and it was under the influ-

ence of this delusion that he began to batter the door leading thither. Poor man! he looked next morning smaller than ever, and it was in a tone of annihilating sarcasm that his daughter remarked to us, as he sat cowering in the chimney corner, "He was somebody yesterday, to-day he is nobody!"

We always make a bargain beforehand at every inn we enter, finding it absolutely necessary to take this precaution. Until we adopted this plan, the most absurd demands were made for the most ordinary accommodation, and we observed it to be an invariable rule, that the less we had, the higher the charge. At St. Olalla, for instance, where we had nothing but bread, eggs, and milk, with lodging for ourselves and the servants, and provender for three horses (the muleteers paying for the rest of the beasts), the landlord had the effrontery to ask ten dollars, about £2 5s., which Lord Portarlington refused to pay, giving them seven, and even that was far too much.

Bargaining beforehand economizes time, temper, and money, and enables the traveller to part from his host in a friendly mood. Indeed, since we adopted this plan, nothing can be more affec-

tionate than our adieux, and after having paid about half the sums previously demanded, we set out on our day's march amid the tenderest demonstrations of respect and affection from host, hostess, and the whole family circle.

CHAPTER XVIII.

IT is quite surprising what extreme difficulty we find in getting accurate information respecting distances, roads, inns, and other matters affecting the convenience of travellers. Purkiss speaks Spanish fluently, and from his long residence in the country is intimately acquainted with the ways of the people; yet with all these advantages, he is seldom successful in obtaining reliable information, even in the immediate neighbourhood of a locality for which we happen to be making. When we stood on the battlements of the Duque de Frias' fine castle at Oropesas, gazing at the Vera below us, as it glowed in the sunset, the old man, who accompanied us, pointed out the direction of Yuste, and spoke of the distance as a moderate day's journey. We found it, however, a very different affair. Ford directs those riding from Madrid to Yuste, to turn off at Naval moral to