

the right, to Zazahuete six leagues; thence to El Barco del Rio Xerte, one league; then three leagues and a half through aromatic wastes to Cuacos, and the Convent.

We took a somewhat different route. Descending from Oropesas soon after 8 A.M. on the 27th October, we regained the Camino Real, which we had followed the two previous days, and at the first post-house struck off to the right along a bye-road running in a northerly direction through open cornfields, which ere long we gladly exchanged for a picturesque tract of woodland, where groups of ilex and cork-tree interspersed with thicket, and brake of low shrub and wild vine, assured us we had now escaped from the monotony of the high-road, and were beginning to penetrate those remoter depths of Spanish scenery, to which we had hitherto been strangers. Every now and then we crossed the bed of some dried-up winter-brook. Better riding-ground we could not have than the firm sand, on which the hoof of horse and mule fell noiselessly, as vista, and glade opened, luring us onward through a succession of forest landscapes, that suggested any amount of romantic adventure, even in this work-a-day nineteenth century.

Our destination was San Benito, where we hoped to get further information, as well as something to eat, that ever-present necessity which "sits behind the rider" in Spain, wherever he goes. The distance was, of course, much greater than we had been led to expect, such being almost always the case in this "land of the unforeseen;" and a traveller at all inclined to practical philosophy will soon make a resolution never to think of his arrival at any place, until he is actually there. This decision will save an infinity of inquiries, loss of time and patience, to say nothing of those hopes deferred, which make the heart sick.

At length we reached San Benito, a farm in the very depths of the forest, belonging to the Marques de Mirabel, a nobleman of historical name, who owns quite a large district in the neighbourhood. It consists of two houses, one very smart with paint and glass windows (features in Spanish domestic architecture we have learnt to look upon with much respect, as the *ne plus ultra* of civilization and comfort), where the proprietor rusticates occasionally for shooting; while the other, a rambling farm-house, is occupied by the steward and his family. A small church completes the group of buildings. It is

a singular-looking spot, reminding one, in many respects, of the description of some great Australian sheep-farm, minus the smart house and the church.

Here we alighted, fully intending after a brief halt to proceed on our journey, in the hope of reaching Cuacos the same evening. The steward was from home, and his representatives showed such extreme caution, and reserve in doing the honours, that in England they would be set down as decidedly uncivil, and as they would not ask us to walk in, we were obliged to dispense with the ceremony, and entered the farm-house uninvited.

We now discovered, that Cuacos was still distant a long day's ride of very bad road, with a considerable river to cross, nor was there any posada midway where we might find accommodation for the night, nor any house for miles round. So we found ourselves obliged to request lodging, with something of the peremptoriness of a highwayman asking for a traveller's money, though prepared of course to pay for all we received. The mistress being a dutiful wife, would promise us nothing, till her goodman came home; so we made ourselves as comfortable as circumstances permitted, fully

resolved to abide by his permission, if granted, but to ignore a refusal altogether, as a breach of the law of nations. This determination answered perfectly, and when he came home to supper, our occupation of his house, and premises was a *fait accompli* of too settled a character to be overthrown.

On awaking next morning, in hope of an early start, we found it had been raining most of the night, with every prospect of continuance; and the brook which yesterday babbled by, a tiny rill, had now overflowed its banks, suggesting the obvious reflection, that many a watercourse in the forest, which on our way to San Benito might have been crossed dryshod, must now be swollen to the dimensions of an unfordable torrent.

It was the feast of St. Simon and St. Jude, and the Cura, who served the church, had come a considerable distance through the rain, to celebrate Mass at 7 A.M. An Englishman's traditional idea of a Spanish priest is compounded of Rosalind's lack-Latin ecclesiastic, "with whom time ambles," and Jacques' country justice "of fair round belly with good capon lined;" and when this clergyman at San Benito politely called on us, I dare say, we uncon-

sciously expected to see in him the realization of our national idea.

Poor man! the reality proved to be much more after the fashion of Romeo's starveling apothecary, and it quite grieved us to see one of his order bearing about him such unmistakable signs of poverty. The pittance he receives for serving the church at San Benito is paid by the Marques de Mirabel, and if good wishes on our part could have any potency, his stipend would soon be augmented.

The Cura, and I, tried to converse together in Latin, but the English accent and pronunciation in speaking that language, are unfortunately so very different from those of every other nation, that we could hardly understand each other, and soon gave up the attempt. The hospitality of the steward and his family remained *in statu quo*. Cold as ice yesterday, to-day it was still unthawed, and its effect was very visible in the scantiness of our accommodations. Spanish households of every class, that came under our observation, abound with stores of linen. But at San Benito even towels were unattainable luxuries, and we had in consequence to make use of our own wearing-linen instead. I felt a strong inclination to

apply one of my sheets to that purpose, but the state of the weather suggested the extreme probability of our staying there another night, and the comfort of so ample a towel would have been dearly purchased by the discomfort of a damp bed.

It is astonishing, however, how well we managed to get on, despite our destitution of appliances, which at home are as necessary as daily food; and every day, by retrenching the range of comforts hitherto indispensable, taught us more and more the truth of the line, "Man wants but little here below." Were any of the "Gentlemen of England, who live at home at ease," to see my linen as it comes back from the wash, yellow and full of wrinkles as the visage of some old crone, he would be filled with horror. No one ever beheld such "getting-up," and I am beginning to regard such shirts, as one daily wears at home, with a feeling of positive reverence, as things pertaining to a higher state of existence.

It was a great resource to us that wet day, which ended, as it began, with rain, to write letters, and to bring up our journals to the current era, though not under the most favourable circumstances for refinement of composi-

tion; and if this record prove tedious, I must console myself with the recollection of the service it rendered me at San Benito, in the employment of hours, which otherwise would have hung heavily.

CHAPTER XIX.

NEXT morning, October 29th, Fortune smiled on us, and the sun came forth at intervals through the mist with every indication of better weather. Glad indeed were we all to be off, as soon as we had made a scanty breakfast, and settled accounts with our host, the fresh air of "incense-breathing morn" making mere motion a pleasure, while the rain had left upon every leaf and blade of grass a verdure, that is rarely seen in a Spanish landscape.

The forest, through which our road still lay, displayed timber of larger growth, and greater variety, than any we had yet met with. Many of the cork-trees had been recently stripped, exhibiting the inner bark, which when first laid bare is a vivid crimson, bright as fresh paint, as if Nature had lately been trying her hand at artificial decoration, in emulation of the painter's skill. The wild vine with

graceful festoons depending from the topmost branches of some ancient oak, here put forth its most brilliant hues, lighting up the whole scene, and outvying even the ruby of the Virginian creeper. There were pigs too in the forest eating the acorns, which yesterday's rain had brought down in profusion from ilex and cork tree, while the prettiest jays I ever saw, neat as Quakeresses, with black caps, and lavender bodies, flitted from bough to bough.

As we advanced, we had to ford several brooks, which yesterday must have been altogether impassable, and it was quite a picture to look back at the long train of mules and horses filing through the water. I never was in any spot, which so thoroughly realized the poetry of a forest, with its variety of timber, fern, heath, and low shrubs, its brooks and long-drawn glades leading we knew not whither. A dreamy stillness reigned around, carrying the mind far back into the past, until we were quite prepared to meet Jacques or Touchstone, or even Robin Hood and his men, so vividly were the days of old spent "under the greenwood tree" recalled to the imagination by surrounding objects. Nature had indeed amply done her part in preparing the stage,

but no actors in keeping with its scenes came forth to people it, or to satisfy our romantic aspirations by reproducing the past. A few muleteers, and swine-herds were the only figures, that gave animation to the landscape, and they neither moralized, jested, nor demanded our money.

One of them was excessively surprised to meet so large a calvacade in that lonely spot, without a guide, the lad who accompanied us from San Benito to show us the way, having by this time turned homewards.

We were making for the Tiedar, a tributary of the Tagus, and in due time reached its banks. It was flowing with a broad, rapid stream about forty yards wide, a considerable belt of sand on its left bank indicating, that occasionally it expands into three times that volume.

Here we found a ferry-boat of most primitive construction, large enough to carry our whole party, beasts and all, in two trips, and while the dilatory boatmen were making up their minds to the exertion of paddling us over, we had time for a hasty lunch. Hereabout the province of Toledo terminates, and the wild regions of Estremadura, to which we were look-

ing forward with so much hope and interest, commence.

It amused us greatly to see an old mastiff, belonging to the steward at San Benito, in anxious haste to cross by the first boat. He had accompanied us thus far, as we fondly imagined, in polite acknowledgment of various little civilities rendered him by the members of our party, while we stayed under his master's roof. Now, however, we discovered he had ulterior views in joining himself to our company. In fact, he had a very hard life at San Benito, in the shape of short-commons coupled with a superabundance of kicks and blows. Our arrival, and all the choice morsels of Bayonne ham, and chicken bones, that descended upon him in consequence, had evidently inspired the poor drudge with ideas of a pleasanter world than he had ever moved in, and he was now taking advantage of our departure to go and seek his fortune. We really could not find heart to send him back, and when once he had landed on the right bank of the Tiedar, we felt the Rubicon of his career was crossed, and adopted him into all the privileges of our community, the two muleteers having already expressed serious intentions of offering him a

home with them at Toledo, when our wanderings are over. But alas! that I should have to finish the story. Next morning the muleteers having "slept on it," discovered they were undertaking too heavy a responsibility; the poor old dog was sent back by some chance opportunity to his rightful master at San Benito; and all his bright visions of plenty, and good treatment, vanished into thin air

The passage of the river having been safely accomplished, we now entered upon a very different country. Extensive tracts of low oak-scrub, where scattered groups of grey old boulders overtopping the underwood, enclosed here and there, amid spaces of greensward, cosy little nooks of extreme beauty, which fairies would delight in, had modern civilization left us any representatives of "the Fair Family." Now-a-days it would be considered the very spot for a pic-nic. The road was perpetually traversed by cross-paths, making it most intricate, and so detestably bad, that none but Spanish horses could have scrambled over such a succession of roots, rocks, and ruts. Soon after crossing the ferry we met a poor man, whose pony, laden with tiles, had broken its thigh from a fall, and though we would gladly have

helped him in his trouble, nothing could be done to relieve his poor beast. Sometimes we had a rapid descent of perhaps half a mile over pavement of almost Cyclopean character, inlaid with stones of such size and roughness, that even a good walker would find it difficult to pick his way in safety. By-and-by we entered upon a miry lane, where the mud was so deep and tenacious, that even the horses could hardly get on, while the poor donkeys seemed on the point of sticking fast at every step. In fact, the roads hereabout are so very bad, that at Madrid we had been expressly cautioned not to attempt them on horseback, a warning we never remembered, until it was too late.

The scenery, however, was so exquisitely beautiful, and so full of novelty, that we thought of little else, and we were now approaching the chain of mountains under which Yuste stands. An artist would have filled whole portfolios with the scenes revealed at every turn. One spot in particular seemed to challenge a painter's best powers.

A bridge of rough mountain stone, mossy and grey, with an arch of high pitch, spanned a stream, which combined the rush and foam of a torrent, with the pellucid brightness of

some lowland brook, meandering through fair meadows. Above, its course divided a range of fern-clad mountains, which descended in gentle slopes of brown to its very brink, while below it found a quiet bed among patches of newly-sown wheat, and strips of pasture, fringed with stately poplars in all the glory of their autumn tints, a picturesque old mill, that was in itself a study, throwing out the brighter portions of the picture by the modest tone of its colouring. Far as we had still to travel that day, we could not but pause a moment here.

We passed through several villages, and the natives stared as if they had never seen such an array of strangers, wondering no doubt what could be our inducement to penetrate these wild and unfrequented regions.

At nightfall I had an opportunity of testing the steadiness and good temper of the horse Lord Portarlington purchased at Madrid, which I rode to-day. We had just descended the worst piece of paved road we had yet met with, and seeing through the twilight, that a little further on a torrent of some depth, flanked by a precipice, crossed the road with no bridge but a few planks, I thought it best to dismount, not knowing how my horse would behave. I

had hardly got my right foot to the ground, when from resting on a loose stone it gave way, and in a moment I found myself thrown on my back in front of the horse, with my left foot wedged tight in its stirrup, an article of native workmanship so narrow, and cramped as to be quite dangerous. To make matters worse, I was encumbered with a thick cloak, a slight shower having recently fallen. The bridge was not above twenty or thirty yards ahead, and close behind, clattering over the stones, came the rest of the party. Most horses under such circumstances would have dashed onward in fear, and dismay, dragging me along to almost certain death; but by God's mercy mine stood perfectly still, and allowed me to drag myself upright by main force, pulling for dear life by the stirrup-leather. Never did horse give better proof of steadiness, and good-temper, and, as may well be imagined, I loved him ever after, as one who had been a true friend in a moment of extreme peril.

CHAPTER XX.

JUST about sunset we passed through Xarandilla, where Charles V. spent three months while Yuste was being prepared for his reception. Stirling ("Cloister Life," pp. 28, 29) says of it, "Xarandilla was, and still is, the most considerable village in the Vera of Placentia. Walled to the north with lofty Sierras, and watered with abundant streams, its mild climate, rich soil, and perpetual verdure, led some patriotic scholars of Estremadura to identify this beautiful valley with the Elysium of Homer, 'The green land without snow, or winter, or showers.'

"The fair valley was unquestionably famous throughout Spain for its wine, oil, chestnuts and citrons, for its magnificent timber, for the deer, bears, wolves, and all other animals of the chase, which abounded in its woods, and for the delicate trout which peopled its mountain waters.

“The village of Xarandilla is seated on the side of the Sierra of Xaranda, and near the confluence of two mountain torrents, which fall from the steep Penanegra. The mansion of the Oropesas, built in the feudal style, with corner towers, has long been in ruins; and of its imperial inmate the village has preserved no other memorial than a fountain, which is still called ‘The Fountain of the Emperor,’ in the garden of a deserted monastery, once belonging to the order of St. Augustine.”

Night overtook us soon after passing Xarandilla, and the only light we had to guide us on this worst of all possible roads, (as in our inexperience we then deemed it,) was the faint beam, that fell from the slender crescent of the young moon as she declined towards the west.

At last we saw the lights of a village, and made sure it was Cuacos. But when, at the peril of our necks, we had scrambled along a series of those stony gutters, which in this neighbourhood have done duty for streets some three centuries or more, with a stream strong and rapid as a small mill-race careering down the centre, and then emerged into the village square, we found to our infinite disappointment,

that Cuacos was still a good league off, which in Spain is a most elastic figure of speech, representing any distance from four to seven miles, especially in mountain districts, where large ideas are in vogue.

So on we toiled, rather out of humour, and when at last, after another hour and a half's travel, we reached our destination, men and beasts had done a good day's work of at least eleven hours.

We found the posada so very wretched, that we betook ourselves forthwith to that ever-open refuge for the destitute traveller in all Roman Catholic countries I have visited—the house of the *Cura*.

That gentleman, Don Louis Setiz, gave us a most cordial welcome, utter strangers though we were, without even an introduction except our necessities. Not only did he place his house, with all it contained, at our disposal, in the spirit of true Spanish courtesy, but took care moreover to prove his words were no mere Chinese compliment, professing everything, but meaning nothing.

We must have caused him considerable inconvenience, but there was no indication of its existence to be traced in the perfect kindness

of his manner the whole time we remained under his roof.

I wonder what any of us English clergymen would say, were three gentlemen from Spain to throw themselves on our hospitality some Saturday night between eight and nine, taking possession of the best portion of the Parsonage, and turning the Incumbent himself (if unmarried) out of his own particular bedroom? I fear they would hardly meet with the welcome we received at Cuacos!

Purkiss set up his cuisine at the posada, supplying our meals from thence, and there he, Swainson, and Elfick, managed to get some sort of beds, after having slept in their clothes the three previous nights. Unhappily, however, the loft in which they lay was so abundantly stored with newly-gathered pods of red pepper, that their eyes streamed like fountains all night long, and they had, poor fellows! a most miserable time of it.

Ford, in his "Gatherings," p. 169, inveighs against English servants as worse than useless in Spain. "They are nowhere greater incumbrances than in this hungry, thirsty, treeless, beerless, beefless land; they give more trouble, require more food and attention, and are

ten times more discontented, than their masters.”

Our experience was altogether different; nothing could exceed the good-humour, patience and cheerfulness, with which each of them underwent every sort of discomfort, privation, and fatigue, from the beginning to the very end of our long journey, and this in a man of Purkiss's age, between fifty and sixty, was especially praiseworthy.