

treads out the corn upon the threshing-floors, or the mule or pony scuttles about it, dragging the primitive "threshing-machine," as it is called. The farmers are a rude, ignorant class of men; like English farmers, very conservative. The labourers are men who take little interest in the farm on which they work for the few months that working is possible. They are very poor, hopelessly ignorant, fare wretchedly, and dress sordidly. Still, they are ever polite, kindly, and generous to the stranger. About 1s. 6d. per diem would, perhaps, be the average amount of the agricultural labourer's wages; but he never strikes! He is ever "contented," if not "gay." True, his pleasures are very few, but he makes the most of them, and, where an English peasant would grumble, the joyous Andaluz laughs. He eats his bread and oil, he chews his lettuce, he makes and smokes his tiny cigarette; he earns a dollar, it is well; but to risk it is better. So, instead of buying clothes, or getting wine, or taking it home to the poor, hard-worked wife,—who once, remember, was a dark-eyed, handsome Spanish lassie, but, with hard feeding and hard breeding, and hard toiling in the field or at the wash-tub, is as much like a man as a woman now,—he goes to the nearest gambling-house, stakes his dollar, loses it, and walks out without a murmur!

Gambling, indeed, is a passion, and nothing else, with the Spaniards, high and low. If a man makes a large fortune, he never knows how to enjoy it unless he gambles at cards, or in the Government or private lotteries or at dice. In fact, the Spanish gentleman, if he does not gamble, seems to have nothing to do with his money: he hides it under the floor of his

house, or sinks it to the bottom of his well, if times be troublous. The peasant, besides smoking and gambling, has his look at the bi-annual bull-fight; he takes a peep, on Sunday, at the cock-pit; he hurls the iron bar or throws the iron ball along the dusty road, if strong and active; or he plays dominoes or *trugé* (the simplest game of cards) for *cuartos* (farthings) with his companions.

But what, then, you will say, does this careless, improvident fellow do when his hair is more than flecked with snow, when his limbs tremble under him, and his strength departs?

He simply becomes one of the beggars. He literally begs his bread from door to door, and, morning, noon, and night, you hear his double-knock, and his everlasting salutation, "Ave Maria purisima, dame una limosnita, por Dios"; and there, at your door, his crooked staff in his hand, his half-naked frame covered with a ragged manta or rug, stands the worn-out labourer, artisan, or miner. He has long since left his house, and he herds with the motley company of beggars in the caverns and clefts of the rocks outside the town.

He is filthily dirty. He has lost all hope, all self-respect,—and why? There is no poor-house, where, however uncongenial the element in which you live, you, at least, are clean, sheltered from wind and rain, and fed; and there is no parish relief. In fact, begging in Spain is a necessary evil. The cripple borrows a donkey, and begs from its back; the maimed man thrusts the ghastly stump of his hand or arm in your face.

On Friday, which is generally the beggars' day, the houses of the charitable are thronged with a

motley crowd of men, women, and children, of all ages, sorts, diseases, sizes, and descriptions. A noisy, wretched, forlorn, unkempt lot they are. They fight and push for the nearest place to the door. Many have come for miles to get their wretched chavo, or cuarto, or halfpenny, at the various houses. Then your kindly servant, her lap full of coppers, opens the door. The crowd surges up to and around her. At last all her store is exhausted. She draws back, and hastily bolts the door, against which a crowd of malecontents batter for five minutes, with loud cries of "Por Dios, señorita," *i. e.*, "For God's sake, my lady!" and then all is quiet. The blind, the lame, the halt, and the maimed have gone, and the house is quiet until Friday dawns again.

Sad to say, many strong young men and maidens, lost to all sense of self-respect, leave off their work habitually on Friday, in order to share and lessen the dole of their helpless brothers and sisters.

Well for you, when the beggars' hour is over, if you do not find a few fleas, and even lice, at your gateway; for, to use the very expressive word of a Spanish gentleman who was attempting to speak English, most of these people are, as to their clothes, "inhabited."

The education, or rather the want of it, claims mention in any account, however brief and necessarily imperfect, of the social state of the part of Spain here described.

Certain schools there are; and, in cases like that of the model schools of large towns like Cadiz (as described in a separate chapter), they are very good in theory, and work well. But the schools in the smaller towns are simply wretched, and those who

teach in them inefficient. The rooms, too, although supposed to be selected and paid for by the *alcalde* and *ayuntamiento* of the town in which they are situated, are dark, close, ill ventilated, and crowded.

Besides this, many among the higher classes are very imperfectly educated, and write and spell badly, especially the women. In a town well known to the writer, one gentleman, whose daughter was heiress to some £20,000, refused to allow her to learn to write, lest she should indulge in some clandestine correspondence.

This vile system of never trusting, of always preferring physical to moral power, of using external precautions to prevent sin or indiscretion, instead of cultivating that moral sense which the Almighty has implanted in every heart, has ever struck me as one of the great blots in the Spanish national character.

Awful and horrible cruelty to animals again, an utter indifference to their sufferings, is another blot on the Spanish poor man's character, and one that stares you in the face at every step. To beat his ass till it reels, to stone slowly the dog he wishes to kill, to drown the captured rat by slow and easy stages, holding it by its tail in a pail of water, these sights are things of every-day occurrence.

Religion, again, has generated into superstition. It has lost its backbone, its reality, and, consequently, its hold upon the masses. The priests, too, in the country places, are greatly degenerated from what they were, as we all must degenerate, if oppressed, day and night, by the sense of a soul-eating poverty, especially in the case of those whose tastes lead them to desire, and even need, a certain amount of culture and refinement in life.

In the smaller villages, the priests sometimes do not even get their pittance of £20 per annum from Government, and they turn, necessarily, to other employments, such as making bee-hives, mending watches (in the rougher cases), to win their bread.

In one instance known to me, the priest of a small town, of some five hundred people, actually won his bread by making bee-hives and bird-cages, and in another case, by his gun and his garden, which, joined to the scanty offerings of bread, or skins of wine, of his poor flock, supplied his simple needs.

Naturally, with the decay of true religion, and the absence of useful learning, the tone of morality, both among high and low, is frightfully bad. Cheating and lying are absolutely thought trifles by the Spanish coal-seller, or water-carrier, and such classes; while married life among the rich will, in too many cases, not bear a very strict scrutiny.

My picture, you will say, is not a bright one. I answer it could not be bright and true at the same time, of this beautiful, wild, and picturesque, but most unhappy country. Still, with all their faults, the Spaniards have many qualities that render them lovable. Their warmth of heart, their excessive kindness and politeness to the stranger, their love of seeing others around them happy, their genial courtesy to their dependents and inferiors, their great sobriety, their ready wit, all help to make up a national character which, if not stable, is certainly not wanting in a certain attractiveness.

CHAPTER IX.

A SPANIARD'S ESTIMATE OF ENGLISH POLITENESS.

“I THOUGHT the Englishman was drunk when he knocked me down; but when he begged my pardon, I knew he was!”

The above is all I shall offer on this point; it speaks for itself better than any words of mine.

SPANISH BLACK COUNTRY.

PART II.

CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCTORY.

It is my purpose, in this Part, to introduce the reader to the mines and miners of Spain; to a portion of the country and to phases of character so little known, that these chapters (which will abound with strange anecdotes, and statements of facts hitherto unchronicled, drawn from daily intercourse with the Spanish miners) might well bear the title of "Sketches in Untrodden Spain." And I believe that the plain, unvarnished tale which I shall offer will be full of interest to all my readers, especially to those who love to study human nature under its strangest phases.

Perhaps there is no country in the world with a more varied, extensive, and widely-spread store of mineral wealth than Spain. It is truly a "land whose stones are iron, and out of whose hills thou mayest dig copper." Its hills, in many places, are pregnant with metal; north, south, east, and west, lead, copper, iron, coal, and quicksilver are found; but in many places, owing to the hilly nature of the ground, and the expense and difficulty of transit, these deposits are still untouched.

The question of Spanish mines and mining is a very wide one; and for an unprofessional man to attempt to treat it scientifically, would be not only presumptuous, but hopeless. Having, however, resided for some months in the heart of a Spanish mining district, the writer of these pages has taken great interest in all that relates to Spanish miners and mining, and has studied attentively, and with care, the life and character of the Spanish miner, with whom he has had ample opportunities of becoming well acquainted.

Let us first take a general view of the chief centres of mining interests in the country; then we will go to the mines, and spend a day underground with the Spanish miner.

In various parts of Spain the mines have yielded their treasure successively to the Phœnician, the Roman, the Moor, the Spaniard; and now "concessions" are being duly granted to the *estrangeros*, or foreigners, among whom English and German mining companies hold a prominent place.

Among mining districts, the province of Murcia, which lately gained from its unhappy city, Cartagena, so unenviable a notoriety, plays an important part. In native produce, both vegetable and animal, this province is rich; and the Carthaginians, despite its parching droughts, knew its value. Whole districts are covered with the *esparto*-grass—a tough, wiry, grass, something like the "spear-grass" of the north-east coast of England, which is not only largely used throughout Spain for ropes, sandals, mats, baskets, and the like, but has lately been largely exported to England and France for the manufacture of paper. The *soda*-plant, yielding alkali when burnt, grows

also plentifully. Off the coast of Cartagena a species of tunny is also taken, and salted down for exportation; and salt is found nearly as plentifully there as at San Fernando, near Cadiz. But the chief trade of Cartagena is in lead and silver. So pregnant with minerals is the district, that the silt washed down by the wintry rains yields lead in abundance, with a small proportion of silver.

The province of Jaën, perhaps, comes next in importance, having many lead-mines, the lead of which yields a small, but very small, proportion of silver. Linares, its chief mining town, situated amid arid plains and slopes of stunted, dusky olives, boasts a colony of Englishmen, Frenchmen, and Germans, and without one particle of beauty, and with little comfort, is one of the chief districts of mining industry. This town is said to be the Hellanes of the ancients.

In the north-west, amid the wooded hills of Leon, where the pine and fir would recall to the passing traveller's mind memories of Scotland, and where are patches of verdant scenery almost Devonian, are the coal-mines of Arnao, the principal shaft of which is below the water's level; and not far off, in the same province, are the mines of Cangas de Onis, rich in copper and carbonate of zinc. The rough weather and deep snows of winter, however, detract from the working value of the mine, by making it inaccessible for weeks together.

In Aragon and Navarre are silver-mines. In the Basque provinces, near Bilbao, are two of the richest iron-mines in the Peninsula, although the hardy "caballero" peasant prefers poverty, rough fare, and independence on his tiny three-acre tenure, to the service of an Englishman; while Estremadura, the

Spanish peasant's "land of corn," the birth-place of Cortes and Pizarro, the land of locusts, and sport, and loneliness, and sweet jamones (the sweet ham of Spain), offers one of the largest quicksilver-mines in the world, and is a source of increasing wealth to the Spanish Government.

The mines of Rio Tinto give a fair amount of copper, while Ronda and Granada can also show their wealth of mineral, chiefly lead.

Such is a slight outline of the chief centres of mining work in this country. Some few of the above-mentioned districts I have personally visited, and it is to a mine and mining town, where, with the miners, I have lived on terms of daily intercourse, and, in our rough way, friendship, that I wish to introduce my readers.

Perhaps there are no towns in civilized countries where the whole atmosphere of the place is rougher—I know not how better to express myself—than in these mining towns. Exceeding roughness and an unheard-of primitiveness are stamped on everything: the country is rough, the people are rough, the talk of daily life is rough. In the lead mining districts one's ear is deafened and one's heart numbed and beaten down by the ever-recurring topics of "dineros" (money) and "plomo" (lead), day after day, week after week, month after month: "Plomo—plomo—plomo." "Alas!" said a scientific man, who came to live near me for awhile, "I should at last grow like the lead, as dull and heavy, if I had to live here." And so it is. From morning until night you hear nothing, see nothing, but lead: lead at the railway-station, lead-smoke (from the smelting works) in the air, lead on the donkeys' backs: plomo en galápagos,

plomo en plancha, plomo primero o segundo (lead in pigs, in sheets, lead of the first or second quality). Lead and money, varied by money and lead, it is depressing alike to soul and body; and, gentle reader, remember there is a proverb among us, "Andar con pies de plomo" (to proceed with leaden feet); and a disease among us which is called "being leaded," and makes a man's eye dull, and his brain sleepy. So, if I seem to you to merit the application of the first, overlook it, and follow me patiently, and believe that while I am writing this I am "leaded," and, therefore, it is to be borne with me. But if you have ever done as I have, and struck out a few lumps of lead "underground," by the dim light of the Spanish miner's lamp, you will know that even the dull lead, as you strike it from its granite surroundings with the pico (pick-axe), or, as the miners call it, "picajo," sparkles; and so even the dull atmosphere of Spanish lead-mines is enlivened with Spanish salt!

Both among the mining-agents and mine-owners, as well as among the pitmen, the observant eye and ear will find a rich fund of originality, quaintness, and droll humour side by side with the deepest pathos and the most hopeless suffering.

After many months' residence in the heart of one of the largest and most densely populated mining centres of Spain, I sought permission of a Spanish mine-owner to visit personally the workings of his finest mine and go underground; and he gave me (*rara avis in terris* in the mining districts) a glass of first-rate vino de Oporto, the port wine of the English squire. As we drank it, and discussed mines and mining, he said that his wine always recalled to him "a truly touching anecdote." A young Spaniard had

married a lady fifty years his senior, not a love-match, but a *dineros*-match. They called upon him together, and a bottle of the ruby port was broached. The old lady enjoyed, even (so he said) made music with her lips (? smacked her lips) over the grateful drink. Her adorer sat by her side, sipping his wine in silence. Suddenly the ancient dame said, "O señor" (to her host), "if you could only get me a barrel of that same wine I should live for another eighty years."—"And," said my host, "if you could have seen the pleading look the young man gave me, you had never drunk the wine without a sigh!"

But this semi-pathetic, ever-ready humour is one of the redeeming points of Spanish conversation. You never converse with a Spaniard, high or low, without a laugh. In the course of the same conversation we were discussing the general state and internal management of Spain, and I said, "There are two things in England, in the cause of 'humanicacion,' to which I attach great importance, as showing that this humanization in marching onward, the Life-boat and the Home for the fallen woman. Are there any in Spain?"—"As to the former," said he (and he was a man of education), "I do not know, not living near the sea; as to the latter, I have heard of no homes for them, but plenty of homes of them." The latter statement, up to this time, I have been unable to verify, and I merely quote it as showing the ready wit of the Spaniard, even in the mining districts.

Here is a typical mining town. It is on the outskirts of the wild range of the Sierra Morena. It stands on the gently declining slope of a hill; around it stretch plains of tawny sand, covered in spring with green crops of barley, broad-beans, and coarse

wheat, belted in with olive groves, their dusky, stunted trees enclosed in crumbling stone walls, each enclosure having a small, dark-roomed shanty, the "lodge" of the olive-guard, in its midst.

The town is old, as many a fragment of crumbling Roman or Moorish masonry will show. It was built originally for some eight thousand people, and now at least forty thousand are packed within its walls, literally "like herrings in a barrel." The town is not Moorish, for the Moors knew well how to build the houses high, and with courtyards or patios for coolness within doors, the high wall on either side of the narrow street precluding the rays of the tropical sun from ever looking upon them. Most noticeable is this in Cordoba, where the old streets are so narrow that two vehicles cannot pass, and the high houses seem almost to meet overhead. The houses of the mining town are, at least a great proportion of them, of Spanish design, and consist of a one-storied building made of the huge thick blocks of the granite in which the lead usually is found, with very small iron-caged windows without glass; others of modern and wholly different architecture have sprung up in a thick and growing crop all around and among them. The streets are not paved, as a rule, but have been pitched at some remote period. In the summer droughts the loose stones roll about, and yield to your tread, often giving horse or man a nasty fall; in the winter the water stands in pools six inches deep, and streams of water rush, during the tropic rains, down the streets. Open drains abound in the suburbs; here is a long, sluggish, black stream, which flows from the "washing grounds" of the servants on the hill just above the town; it once was soap-suds, but has lost its beauty

now. You never would believe that inky fluid had made your linen clean! As you approach the streets toward the suburbs, they, hitherto narrow and pitched, are broad, straggling, and of the natural soil; that is, in summer six inches of dust, which the slightest wind whirls into your face in dense and blinding clouds; in winter six inches of deep, black mud. Here and there it is "being mended," that is, huge lumps of granite are being carried to the worst places in panniers on donkey-back (the refuse of the masons), and are shot down into the mud, or pools of inky water, unbroken. Great, many, and loud are the curses of the muleteer,—the road-mender, the saints, his beast, his kin ("sangre," literally blood) all come in for a share of his curses.

I have seen these roads, on the outskirts of the town, sometimes well-nigh impassable for man or horse; only a donkey could be trusted to pick his way over the stones and through the pools of black, stinking mud. From these latter sometimes even a sensitive donkey will recoil with a face of horror, and shut his brown eyes if he must take the plunge!

The streets are generally called after the names of saints, Calle de San José, Calle de la Virgen; or from political events, Calle de la Republica Federal, and so on. The rent of the houses, wretched as they are, in these over-stocked towns, is very high. In the Spanish interior, generally, house-rent is very low; but in these towns a small house of four rooms and tiny courtyard will fetch £30 per annum, unfurnished. The roofs of the houses are of massive white tiles, and slope gently; the top story, with its tiny "cat-holes" (for the cats from the roof to enter by), being used as a camera or granary, the heat rendering it unfit for

any other purpose. The walls, of grey or red granite, are made enormously thick, for the sake of coolness. Here and there one tiny bow-window, with lighted candles burning on either side of the brightly-dressed image which it enshrines, proclaims the house of a "religious" or strict Roman Catholic. At night, to a stranger wandering down these dimly-lit streets, the effect of suddenly coming upon one of these lighted up is striking. Saving this, however, the aspect of the town is not, as in many of the old country towns of the Spanish interior, religious.

The miners, wandering about the streets at night, may often be seen to stop and devoutly cross themselves before the images. Although not really a fervently religious set, they have a certain sense of the nearness of the world unseen, a sense probably inspired by the perils of their daily life. In my personal intercourse with them, I have on more than one occasion been led to mark a great similarity between the religious side of their character and that of the fishermen on our south coast of England. Both the fisherman and the miner see "the works of God and His wonders in the deep," both daily hold their life in their hand, both are irreligious in the ordinary acceptance of the word "religious," and yet both have a certain great generosity of character, a certain freedom from fear, a certain natural dependence, half-unknown even to themselves, upon the love and power of Him who made them.

The subjoined extract, relating to the Tarshish of the Bible, as is supposed, is from the note-book of a leading civil engineer and mine-owner in Spain:—

"In time of Strabon, century of Tiberio, the Rio Tinto, or River Tinto, so well known in Spain as giving a name to the celebrated mines (copper and

iron) at its source, was called Hyberus, or Hir-beras. At this time Ura-berosa in the Basque, supposed to be one of the most ancient languages of Spain, means burning water, and the Rio Tinto was then, doubtless, as now, destructive to vegetation on its banks and injurious to cattle. It is popularly supposed that the province of Huelva was one of the first colonies of the Phœnicians, the Carthaginians, and the Romans in Spain; and it is not improbable that the Roman name of Hyberus was derived from Ura-berosa, and thence, from Hyberus to Iberia or Hiberia, the connexion does not seem remote. Another of the celebrated mines in the province of Huelva is the Tharsis. The country people still call the Sierra in the neighbourhood of that mine Tarsé; the Romans called it Tartésia, and its inhabitants Tartéssi. It is said here that 'writings of the time of Solomon state that a journey of three years was necessary to get to Tarsé to get copper, silver, and gold.' (?) It is supposed, with some foundation, that the Phœnicians associated the name of Solomon with wealth, particularly mineral wealth; and it is certain that many mountains, &c., in the south of Spain are so called: thus—at Rio Tinto is the Cerro Salomon (peak or ridge of Solomon); near Rio Tinto is the town called Salamea la Real (Royal Solomon); in Estremadura is Salamea la Serena, near a large deposit of lead slag; near Cordoba is another Cerro Salomon, also near a large deposit of lead slags; at and in the neighbourhood of the Tharshish mine are found remains both Roman and Phœnician, as is said."

These notes were taken by a leading civil engineer, after a conversation with a well-known Spanish antiquary at Seville.