

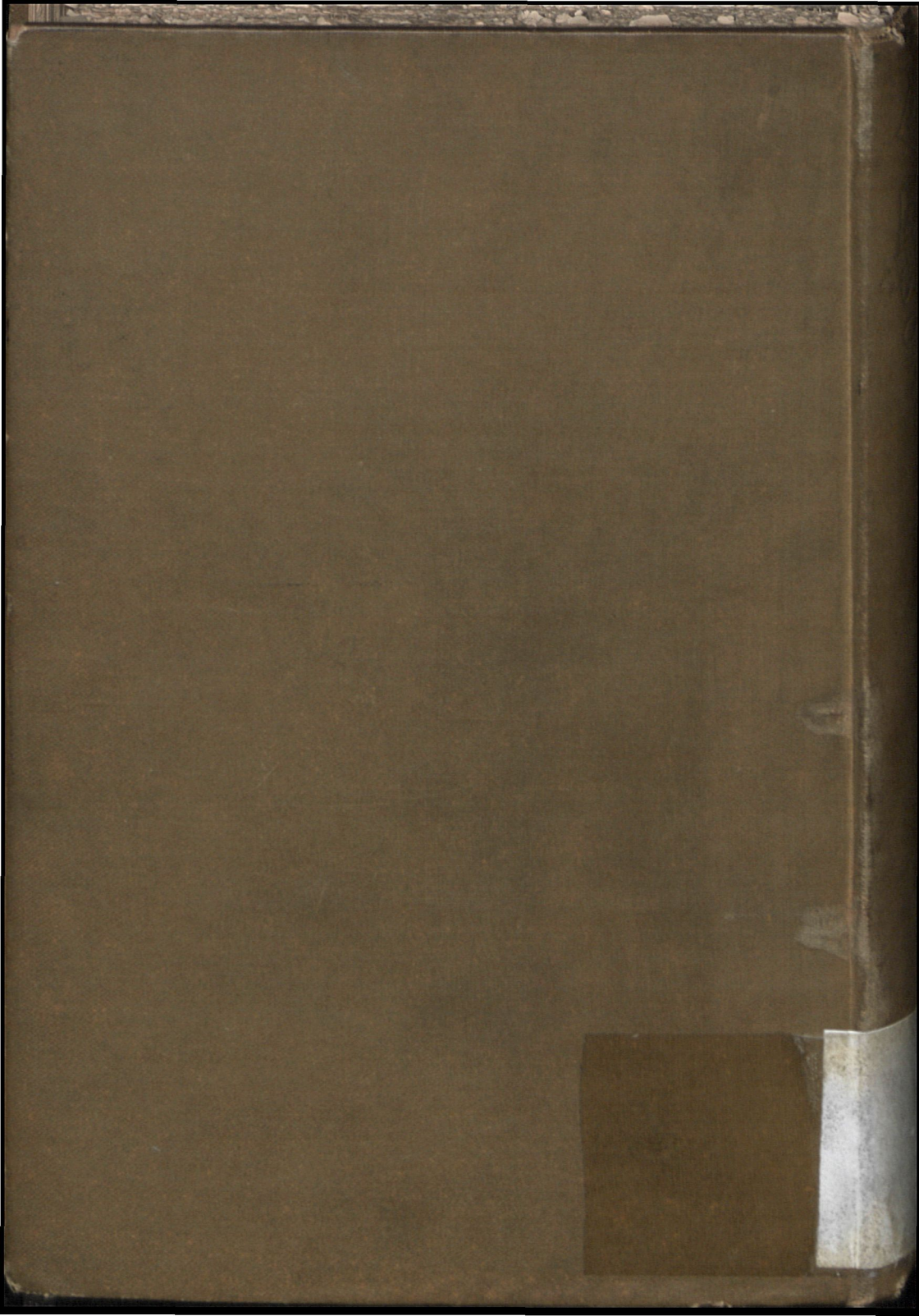


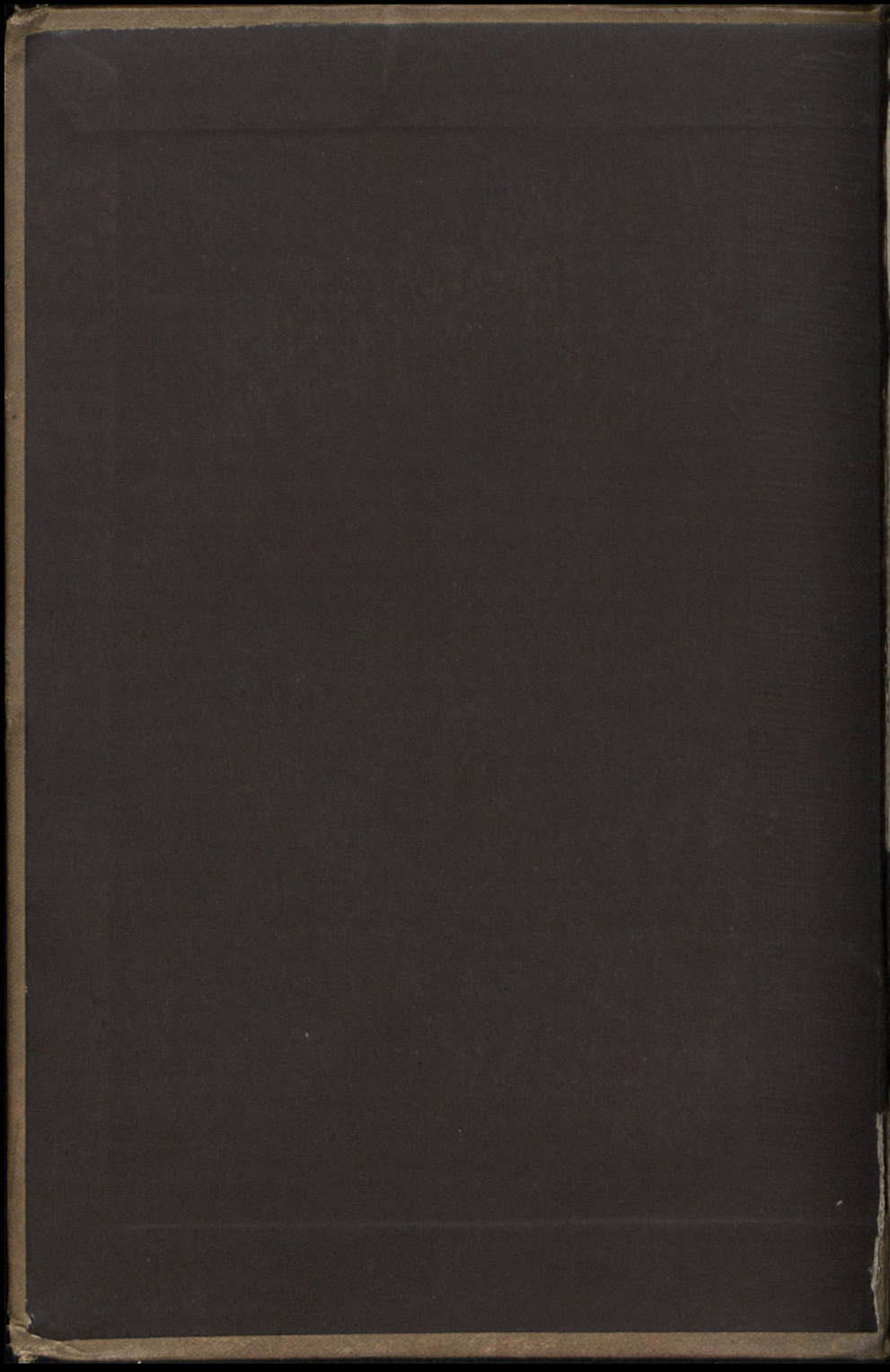
Sketches in Spain
from Nature & Art



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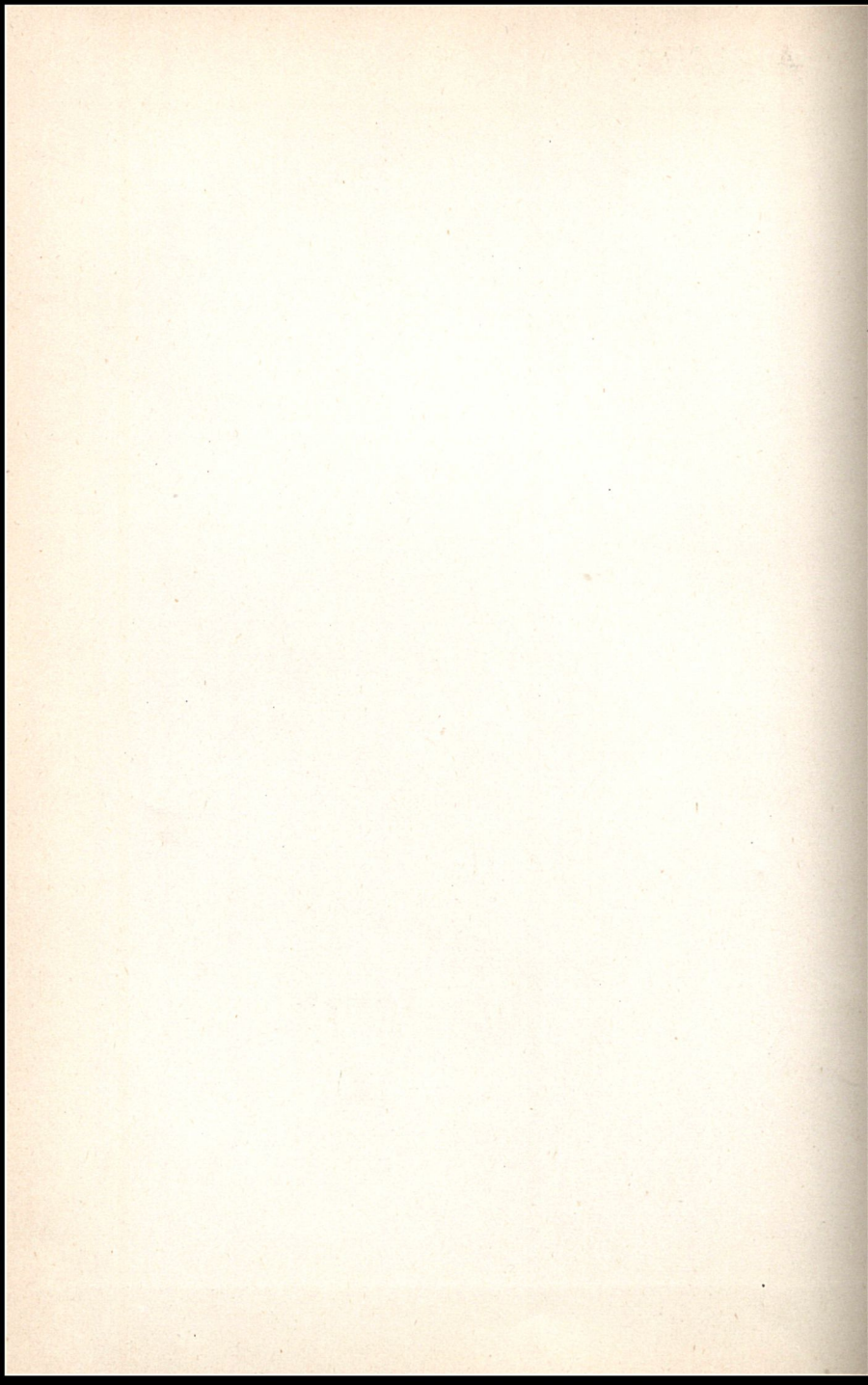






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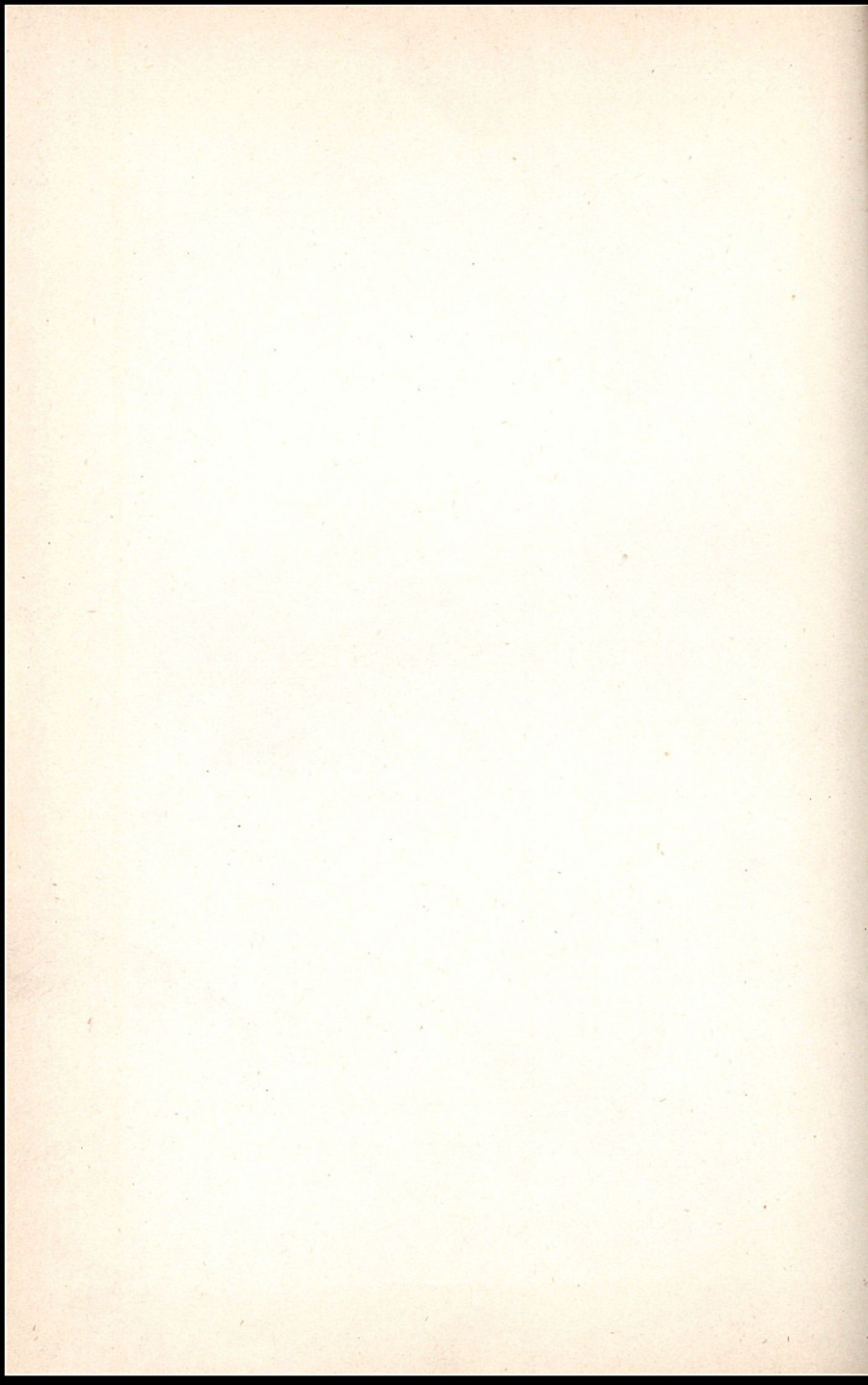
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SKETCHES IN SPAIN



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SKETCHES IN SPAIN

FROM

NATURE, ART AND LIFE

BY

JOHN | LOMAS



EDINBURGH: ADAM AND CHARLES BLACK

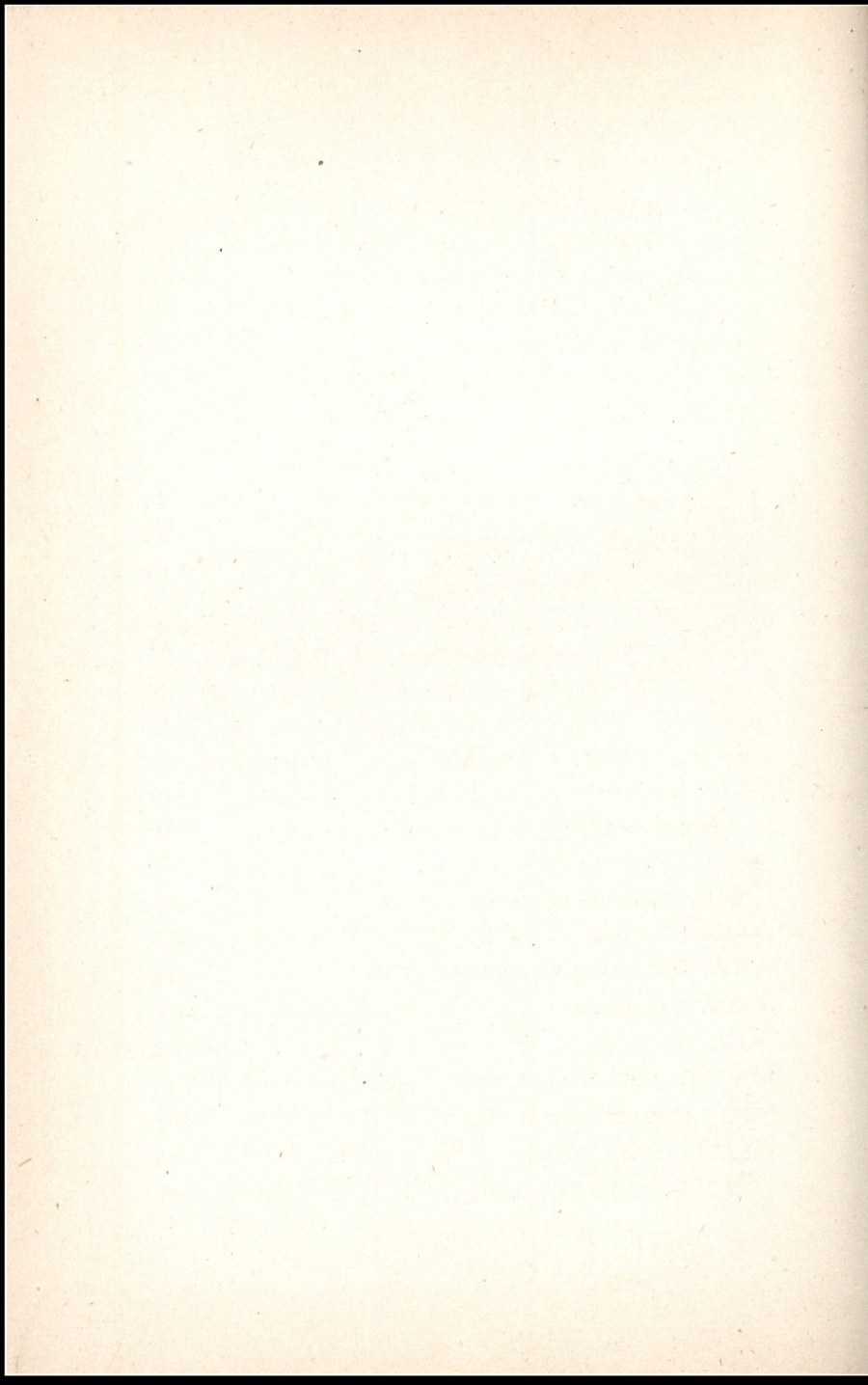
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1884

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INTRODUCTION.

ONE of our foremost Continental guide-books, professedly corrected up to summer of 1884, sums up its general remarks upon Spain and Spanish travelling in the following terms:—"Passports are required . . . Paper is not easily changed. Even with gold a reduction of 5 *per cent* must be submitted to; that is, you will get only nineteen pesetas for a napoleon, and only twenty-four for a sovereign. Do not expect the comforts of a Swiss or French hotel; be content with plain food; wines are poor and dear. . . . Almost everything is dear, and people will take advantage of you if they can."

These things were doubtless true fifteen or twenty years ago, but it is a pity that travellers should be misled by such statements nowadays. And it is a greater pity that there should still linger—as there does linger—a certain class of tourists, who, imbued beforehand with such notions as are here set forth, go far to endow with an actual existence the ghosts of which they are taught to stand in fear. These are citizens of some particular little country first, and everything else

afterwards. They refuse to understand that a passport is asked for at *postes restantes* chiefly in their own interest, and not in any way from a desire to persecute. They conceive that a simple assurance as to name and country ought to have some magic 'open sesame' in it. They are indignant because their own particular gold coins are not known everywhere, and, where they are known, have no special charm. They exhibit in all their ways—and especially in their bearing—a living exposition of the parable of the rich man who was a Pharisee, and, making no secret of their conviction that those who surround them are bent upon fleecing them, naturally get paid off occasionally by their own standard. They seem unable to appreciate what is good in religious beliefs other than their own, and so take a sort of fierce pleasure in showing a contempt for forms and ceremonies and sacred spots which even their own Church honours. And all this, too, in the midst of a nation where an hour's unprejudiced observation should show them that ceremonials of every grade are much more thought of than in their own slightly careless country, and where a few grains of brotherly feeling should teach them, in all matters non-essential, to accommodate themselves to the flow of life and thought around them.

These are old acquaintances. I have seen them, often, departing over the frontier, metaphorically shaking the dust from off their feet, and vowing that, if they are only vouchsafed an unhurt subsidence into the well-

lined arm-chairs at home, nothing shall tempt them again to stray in quest of novel experiences.

But I am thankful to believe that it is a type that is dying, if slowly, the death ; that there is a daily increasing number of those who, nature's gentlemen, able—ay ! eager—to fix upon the good and beautiful that are everywhere, and to endure the evil that usually overlies them, cherish a loving appreciation of bright and well-spent days in a sunny and goodly land, and of the numberless acts of courtesy and brotherhood which have done much to smooth hard paths ; who go their ways from Spain with regret, and return with a keen pleasure. All such, and all those readers who are willing to qualify themselves for the journey by a little doffing of self, pride, and national prejudice, and by a sufficient desire to study reverently a country and a people that have undergone, probably, greater vicissitudes than any other country and people upon the earth, I would invite to accompany me upon a ramble over the chief places of interest in the Peninsula.

Let us be careful as to season and route—points too often neglected. We will enter the country by Irun, at the close of October ; proceed by way of Burgos, Valladolid, and all the district of Old Castile to Madrid ; from thence to Sevilla and the south for winter ; back by way of the Mediterranean coast in early spring ; and home again by way of Zaragoza, Asturias and Leon before the hot early summer sets in. In this way we shall have the clear rich autumn days for the plain, when



the colouring of its old cities is at its best, and when there is no heat, no wind, no dust; we shall face the treacherous climate of Madrid when it is just cold enough to encourage wraps and caution; we shall have the indescribably lovely southern winter, with its golden distances, deep blue sky, and crisp air; we shall see the Mediterranean coast—Valencia, Tarragona, Barcelona, Monserrat—in all the beauty of spring; and shall be able to take Oviedo, Leon, and Santiago before the freshness and verdure of the north-west have given way to a summer sun, and when they are not dominated by the cold mists and rains of autumn and winter.

As for preparation—it will not be necessary to provide aught more than for any other long journey; except, perhaps, a little extra amount of patience, and, being English folk, an unusual stock of *simpatia*—as the Spaniard beautifully puts it—and politeness. For in nearly all our wanderings every needful comfort will be met with, and, where something may be lacking, there will be shown such an amount of goodwill and helpfulness, such honesty, and such laborious striving to make up for defects, that the want will only deserve a laugh.

As for the sinews of war—which need not be one whit stronger than would be required for a trip of equal duration in Switzerland—they should be in circular notes, or cheques, or bank notes, certainly *not* in either English or French gold, which is only unmanageable and not liked. Good paper, changed into Spanish

gold or notes in the great commercial centres, will always command par, and very often a substantial premium.

And now, before we set out, and with the aid of some former experience and knowledge, let us endeavour to form some definite conception of the state and prospects—the being and the to be—of the people in the midst of whom we have elected to dwell for some months. It may quicken sympathy, help understanding, correct misconception, and, in all these ways, be not only useful, but enormously enhance the pleasure of the journey.

There can be no doubt as to Spain forming one of the great questions and interesting problems of the day. English and German papers are continually proclaiming the fact, and usually painting the situation in rosy hues; statesmen are cherishing ideas of commercial treaties, and relations of closer friendship and wider import; merchants are turning eager and inquiring eyes upon the comparatively untried ground; and speculators are fondly hoping that they have at last discovered, after many lean years, an El Dorado that shall not prove barren or unfruitful.

The colouring is by no means false, but is so general, and is laid on so thickly, that it obscures the sober tints that should prevail here and there. Not that the statements made as to the increased prosperity of the country are erroneous. It is perfectly true that she is blessed with a constitutional, liberal and enlightened monarch;

that her natural resources—unrivalled, probably, in any other land—are being gradually and surely developed ; that liberal institutions, schemes and laws are being set on foot and promulgated ; that the floating debt is being reduced by very considerable strides, and the general finances—though by an arrangement decidedly unfair to the foreign creditor, in view of the prosperous future dangled before him—brought into manageable condition ; finally, that the figures which speak of home and foreign trade are rapidly approaching respectable proportions.

All this is being said—and said truly. And there is much more of good that might be set forth, but is overlooked. Not only is the tyranny of priestcraft felt to be a burden, in an indefinite sort of fashion, but the country is making notable efforts to be freed from it,—as witness the introduction of lay schools, the agitation upon the subjects of civil marriage and divorce, and the welcome which is being accorded in certain districts to Protestant efforts at proselytism. In view of the time-honoured ultramontaniam of the nation too, and with the Great Inquisition only just receding into history, it is refreshing to find the Government not only repeatedly declining to take up the cudgels on behalf of Popedom,* but actually apologising to the Italian Government, when the ill-

* *E.g.* when pressed to do so by certain members of the Córtes with reference to the popular *émeute* at the removal of the remains of Pio Nono, when it strengthened its refusal by vigorously reproving the Archbishop of Toledo for the pastoral wherein he called upon Spain to interfere.

advised zeal of some servant of the Church has produced a state of friction between the two courts. Then the Spanish is pre-eminently a sober nation—sober past conception in the north—the vice of drunkenness being, comparatively speaking, unknown; and finally, among the lower classes at any rate, there is an almost incredible amount of honesty, thrift, and industry. It is a pleasure to be able to chronicle these things, for which due credit is not often given.

And yet, notwithstanding all hopeful symptoms of returning health, too sanguine a view of the situation—too sanguine for the purposes of to-day—is being taken in many influential quarters. The great future will come, but not just yet—not without many backward steps and slippings, many *pronunciamientos*, changes of dynasty, and even forms of government. Spain is finding many friends, and she is deserving them. But she has an inveterate enemy, and she will find it at home—in her sons and daughters.

A volume might easily be written upon the various and striking forms of evil underlying the social and political life of the country, some the result of ignorance, some of superstition, some of natural, some of national qualities. But perhaps all may be focussed into four words:—the Spaniard has no faith in, or respect for, his fellows; no faith in, or respect for, his Government; no true faith in, or respect for, his religion; and he has an unbounded and blind faith in himself.

His faith in himself leads immediately to supreme

care for self, and hence to an overwhelming objection to make the personal sacrifices which must be made before his country can do or become the great things to which she aspires. It very often blinds him to the fact that honesty and liberality are the best policy in the long run, and it always makes him averse to forego something to-day that he may reap the more to-morrow. It makes him callous to the feelings and sufferings of others—heedless of the fact that such self-concentration rebounds upon himself—and strengthens all natural aversion to receive such ideas as that there may be more joy in bearing, doing, suffering, in the hard search after knowledge and truth, than in any merely animal indulgence.

And then, going hand in hand, as it must ever do, with the lack of faith in those around him, this spirit of selfishness makes the Spaniard ignore the value of the 'long pull, and the strong pull and the pull all together,' which alone will crown the regeneration of his country. So Cataluña comes to look to Catalonian interests solely, careless of the fact that she only forms part of Spain; the Basque provinces distrust and hate the ways and projects of the south, and party interest holds paramount sway in high places. And down into private life go these same two all-pervading principles, making a healthy social life an impossibility, bringing in a supreme indifference to foreign ways and the course of events in the outside world, hindering due appreciation of the fact that the education of the country is in the

hands of those who substitute church lore, and the futile gropings of the dead antique, for the invigorating light and ever advancing knowledge of the day, and condemning to the lowest possible standard the woman's influence and the woman's life.

Which last is of prime importance, if the Spain of to-morrow is to be higher than the Spain of to-day—the sons better than the fathers. In no country would one so willingly see the question of woman's rights agitated. With all the perfectly natural extravagances which the agitation brings in its train, and all its necessarily accompanying temptations to assume duties, and enter upon careers for which a woman is unfitted, it possesses the one unfailingly good feature of recognising the deep truth that without responsibility, trust—trial and suffering, if need be—a nature, be it of man or woman, is so cumbered by the deadening ways of ordinary existence that it cannot be or do anything great or noble. The Spanish woman is but the doll and plaything of the man—save in the lower grades of life, when she is his helpmate as a beast of burden—and never has she the opportunity of overcoming a natural predilection for an evil or useless existence, or creating a work and mission for herself.

Of the lack of faith in the Church one has abundant evidence in every religious ceremony—nay, in every street. Roman Catholicism at its best affects the dangerous extreme of form and ceremony—dangerous as tending to choke all true devotional feeling, and

inner life; but when the grievous burdens, always heavy to be borne, are bound down by a clergy who are, as a rule, unworthy of their office, it is not to be wondered at if no amount of effort can produce a loving or thoughtful adherence. What would an Englishman think, if, as he walked along the streets, he saw at every corner cartoons representing the ministers of his religion actively engaged in every unbridled course of indulgence into which poor human nature is apt to be drawn? And what would be his feelings towards his Church if he could not but acknowledge that the representations fell, if anything, short of the truth? The fault, however, does not rest so much with the Church as with the State. So long as sees are kept vacant in order to save the appertaining salaries; so long as high officials are liable to be deprived of the half—in some cases three-quarters—of their always insufficient emoluments; so long as the pay of the common priests is barely enough to keep body and soul together, it must not be wondered at if those who enter the Church are not models of refinement, learning and enlightenment. It may seem an unduly strong assertion to say that Spain is a land without religion, when one sees the numberless churches crowded by seemingly devout worshippers; but, if the true character of the short-lived devotion, and the irreverent conduct of those who are engaged in the holy offices be noted, and if, furthermore, the private life of the people be gauged, the verdict will be found not far from the truth. Forms and ceremonies that

have little effect in church, and none at all outside, may indeed overshadow every act of life—as they do—but there is nought but the show—no substance.

And then there is the absence of faith in, and respect for, the existing forms of government. This deserves a paragraph, because the outside world does not understand the terrible task—the perfectly Augean stable—which an honest rule has to-day to face. Indeed, Spaniards themselves entirely fail to appreciate it; and so, looking at the apparent paucity of result, and because the ranks of adverse critics are always largely reinforced by self-seeking malcontents, the almost universal cry is, ‘Oh, for some better form! oh, for some stronger hand!’ It is, and has been from time immemorial, the established order of things that all minor officials and servants shall be underpaid, and even that the miserably insufficient salaries shall be withheld at will—or subject to discount; thereby opening at once the widest possible door to peculation and corruption. The unequal administration of justice—the ease with which impunity can be obtained if one possesses influence, and the rigour with which a delinquency is pursued if no interest intervenes—is an openly accepted fact. The very highest offices are in no sort freed from this universal taint of corruption. It is admitted on all hands that the Government never loses an election—if it is important that it should be won. Putting aside all unauthenticated stories of ‘men in the moon,’ and extraordinary finds of money, etc., the fact stands out