

The Galloway Raiders 'Discovering Crockett's Europe' a chapter from 'Twelve Spanish Adventures' published as 'The Adventurer in Spain.'

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THE MIDNIGHT FREE-TRADERS

To Biño I said nothing of my meeting with Doña Isidra and her father, Don Manuel. After all the matter was a personal one - a secret which circumstances had forced upon me, to be guarded all the more carefully that it was in no sense my own. But I had reckoned without the thousand eyes of a Spanish house, and I soon found that the tact with which I had followed Don Manuel's lead in humouring poor Doña Isidra's delusion was known and favourably commented upon by all at San Severino.

The evangelist brothers came up one by one, speaking frankly and kindly, shaking hands repeatedly, and leaving me with many expressions of goodwill. Even the wild-eyed herdsmen, slipping in from the hill, grew less suspicious, and after a cigar or two given and accepted, most of them found a few words of Castilian, or even of French, wherewith to counter my halting Catalan. We eked out the situation with that lingua franca of all Latin countries - abundant gesticulation. In a little while I had a vested right to a place among them under the great whitewashed hood of the fireplace, which I found much more comfortable than the chilly dignity of the chair in which, once on a time, a King had sat.

Here they smoked and told stories eternally, lowering their voices indeed when Don Manuel came in, or rising to bow with Iberian grace when Doña Carmen, or, more rarely, Doña Isidra passed through the house- place.

Outside the walls of San Severino the four Sebastian brothers were in command, subject indeed to their father's supreme authority. But within they were treated as the herdsmen and labourers - saving only their place at table, which was set within the limits covered by the white cloths. All four of them showed at first the aloofness of the true mountaineer - they had the slow speech which comes of much chewing the cud of thought, the quick grey eye, circled by its network of fine lines from being puckered in the sun-glare of the snows, or parched by the winds of the moistureless plateaus of Northern Spain.

Slowest and heaviest of all, moving quietly and speaking little, Don Matthew, the eldest, had nothing of the blithe alertness of my Biño's temperament, nor yet did he possess his father's high courtesy and knowledge of affairs, though of course he had the good manners which are the birthright of every Spaniard from Aran valley to the cliffs of El Tarik.

Yet since he came next to his father in the family councils, as well as because he was considerably older than the others, much deference was shown him. He would often come quietly up to me, if he saw me standing gazing out upon the mountains, or not reading my book.

'The Señor is dull,' he would say; 'he needs distraction. We must take him a trip across the mountains. That is our panacea for melancholy. Will the Señor try it?'

At first I did not understand him, and answered that having had so much trouble to get out of France, I was excellently well pleased to remain where I was, so long as my kind hosts were not tired of me.

Whereat he would protest that San Severino would not forgive itself if I so much as threatened to depart before having 'made the trip.'

'No man is a good Christian,' he would insist, 'who has not harried the partridge's nest beneath the stones.'

It was, of course, Biño who put me on the track of Don Matthew's meaning.

'He is offering you a great honour,' said Biño when I told him. 'Don Matthew is the head of all the freetraders in this part of the world - aye, and as far as Aran and Villefranche on the other side. He does not very often lead himself. He is getting too old to carry weight, but he arranges with Don John where the 'stuff' is to be put in hiding and at what dates it is to be 'lifted.'

'Then Don Matthew is, in fact, a smuggler?' I said, innocently surprised.

Biño's eyebrows lifted with a quaint amusement.

'What else?' he said. 'Every man on this side the frontier is a smuggler - by birth, by choice, by profession, and by pride. The carbineers, the very civil guards, are only old smugglers with Government coats on their backs. That is why they are dangerous, and why the game is such an interesting one. In old days the Government sent from Madrid, or from

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Barcelona, men in the official service to catch the smugglers. They are wiser now. They offer large rewards, and the market value of all the goods captured for every conviction -'

'And has this measure put down the practice?' I continued.

Biño smiled at the extreme crassness of my ignorance.

'No,' he said, reflectively, 'I do not know that there is any less free-trading across the frontier. But it is not done by fools nowadays. That became too dangerous. Moreover, there are no Frenchmen in it now - all are Spaniards. The Government has made it a good game and worth the playing.'

'Then you are no smuggler?' I retorted, though I knew otherwise. His eyes twinkled at this.

'Ah,' he said quietly, 'you see, I am no true Frenchman. I am not afraid to risk my skin just to feel the heart beat quicker. I can dance a jota and flirt a cloak in a bull's eyes, thrum the guitar, and lilt a serenade. Can any Frenchman alive do these things? Also I have a time or two crossed the saddle that is not made of leather!'

He pointed to the fair white barrier of the Pyrenees, hanging, with the exact line of the peaked saddle-housing of the Moors, afar up in the indigo sky. Then, laying his hand on my arm, he became confidential.

'Sir,' he said, unconsciously pinching my sleeve, 'you may read a houseful of books, but till you have 'made the trip' - Over-There-and-Back-Again - you will never understand the hill-men, never have your hand on the pulse of the North. It is here and here only that the pot boils - that is, from Cataluña to Hendaye! Barcelona is as much English as Spanish, more French than either. And the workmen of the towns - bah! Manresa and Ripoll - the people there are not true Spaniards. No Spaniard works all day with his nose to a machine.'

'No,' I answered, very unjustly, in order to provoke him; 'he would rather die in the dust, wrapped in a brown rug - and scratch!'

Biño, however, was far too cosmopolitan to be offended.

'In Valencia, maybe, you are right,' he answered serenely; 'but you know little of our North if you think such things of us. Yonder are the mountains. Beyond is France. The old game is played every day - aye, though Don Carlos is as dead as the dogs that barked in Sodom and Gomorrah, in spite of all the clatter you hear about him at San Severino. Come and see what is yet left alive!'

Even thus did two good men like Biño and Don Matthew tempt me to break the revenue laws of their respective countries. And so, simply that they might not lose so much honest effort, I succumbed.

When I told Don Matthew that I accepted his invitation, he laughed.

'It was in my mind that you would,' he said, 'otherwise I should not have proposed it. Mark, come hither! Luke - John!'

And then the four talked the affair over, only Luke being inclined to shake his head. Mark was on the whole my favourite, being less reserved than Don Matthew, while Luke appeared somewhat suspicious and saturnine, and of John the youngest I had as yet seen little. He had a sweetheart across the mountains (so Biño told me), and combined business with pleasure. He it was who placed the stuff ready to be 'lifted,' and brought word when the way was clear. On the other hand, Mark of the bluff countenance had acquaintance with all revenue officers, was welcome at all customs' posts, and used his repute of bon garçon to arrange the White Coups, as they were called - that is, those which were permitted or winked at by the local authorities in return for a proportion of the profit previously agreed upon.

So while the brothers Sebastian talked together, listening to some proposal which my friend Mark was making to them, I naturally moved to a distance that I might not hear. But presently Matthew beckoned me.

'Mark here wishes to blood you on a White Coup,' he said, smiling, 'before you run the risks of the Black!'

'I do not understand the difference,' I said.

'It is mainly this. During the most part of a White Coup you can ride a mule. In a Black you must run all the way on your own legs. In a White Coup no one will meddle with you; but in a Black it is to be expected that some very clever men will try to catch you, and that some exceedingly good shots will fire rifle bullets at you!'

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'The difference is certainly material,' I answered, 'but I wish to understand the traffic to the bottom. I vote for the Black!'

'Well and good,' said my friend Mark, laying his hand on my shoulder to curb my enthusiasm. 'All the fruits of the earth in their seasons! But we also wish to try you. Before we take the sword to the battle we test it in the assault-at-arms. We will try the White first - indeed, it has been already arranged. The Velez Pass is to be open tonight - is it not so, John?'

The youngest of the four nodded.

'Do not let the Señor think that even so, there is no danger,' he added. 'My brother has made treaty with one only of the revenue officers. It is true he is the chief on this side, and we go empty-handed into France. But though Brigadier Muros is a moderately honest man and means to keep his word, it is by no means certain that he can put a halter on all his subordinates. If any of these do not obey his instructions to leave the Velez alone tonight, or have time to inform a superior officer, we must fight. This time our cargo is too valuable to abandon.'

It goes without saying that the risk was accepted. Who, indeed, could refuse? Not certainly one who had been brought up in an atmosphere of smuggling - decent, reasonable, logical, conscientious defrauding of the revenue. Had I not heard Cameronian elders gravely argue in favour of the practice, as a means of protesting against the unscriptural exactions of an uncovenanted King? Did not a complete smuggler's outfit of pack-saddle and keg chains hang at the end of the corn-mow in the barn of the house in which I was born, while over the mantelpiece was placed the leathern quirt of a relative reputed in his day to have been deep in the traffic - the same with which he had been wont to stimulate his cavalcade from Portowarren over the Cloak Moss towards Glasgow, with a score of revenue men full tilt after him?



THE MOONLIGHT STRUCK ON THE WHITE CLIFF, SHEER AS A CATHEDRAL WALL

But the Solway free-trade, the good and the ill of it, was over and done with decades before ever I set foot on the planet - at least, in this present incarnation. Never had the ear of flesh at the Dark o' any Moon heard their bridle reins jingling clear along the craigs of Co'en.

True, I had lain all day among the heather, and pointed a gun with deadly intent at a 'real-for-true' gauger, who (I told myself) was beating the countryside in search of my 'cave.' But in truth my weapon was of wood, the gauger only a friend of my youngest uncle's, and the pair of them engaged in no more dangerous occupation than that of ferreting rabbits. Still, I was heir to the spirit of the game. None knew better than I how the thing ought to be gone about. And here in Spain I had a chance for once to be my own great-grandfather and find out how it felt to have smuggled with Captain Yawkins and lain out on the hillside with Silver Sand.

It was nine o'clock at night when Biño finished my toilet. I wore a knitted cap, soft and clinging, on my head (the use of which I found out when I got up within the shrewd bite of the mountain frosts), a blue blouse belted at the waist, gaiters of paño pardo for my legs, thick double socks, alpargata sandals, and a pair of fingerless mittens for my hands.

Don Manuel had kept out of the way all day. Indeed, as responsible householder it

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was part of his duty to do so. I found out afterwards that he had ridden down to spend the day and night with his friend the Bishop, at the little city of El Seo, many miles down the valley. He had even invited the Alcalde of the town to dine with him. It was the most complete of alibis.

An unwonted animation stirred within the sombre walls of the ancient monastery. The atmosphere of San Severino was electric with expectation. Doña Isidra was nowhere to be seen, and I did not go into the little graveyard of the dead monks where it was likely she would be found. But Doña Carmen was everywhere, fluttering with excitement, almost to the point of hand-clapping, as this 'comrade' and that other appeared from behind a rock, dropping silently and unobtrusively down upon San Severino, his knife at his thigh, his gun slung across his back, like kites that scent the battlefield from afar.

A faint but continuous clattering guided me to the stables, which were mostly hewn out of the limestone rock, as dry as bone and as clean as a garnished altar. Luke the Grim met me at the door. I knew he did not quite approve of me, this Luke - no Beloved Physician he!

'You are in good time, Señor! Enter and choose your beast,' he said.

And going in I found the whole range of stalls filled with beautiful mules, the finest I had ever seen in Spain. Each macho looked over its shoulder as I moved along, observed strangers in the gallery, and - slightly widened the space between its hind feet.

Whereupon, recognising the guile in the heart of Don Luke, I charged him with it. He laughed.

'Well,' he said, 'I do not deny that there are one or two that are apt to take a stranger at an advantage, and you do not ill to leave the matter to brother Matthew. But come, I will show you something that you may never have seen the like of.'

He preceded me to the end of the long corridor, and, pointing with his hand, said, 'Look up!'

I did so, and saw that the low-hewn roof of these monolithic stables had expanded to the height of a stately cathedral nave.

'The cavern is a natural one,' said Don Mark; 'it winds through the heart of the mountains. Listen - do you hear anything?'

I had become conscious of a low humming sound, which, as I approached a large trapdoor of wood banded with iron, changed to a rushing of water.

Luke raised the lid. A booming sound rose out of a black cavity, as regularly pierced as the bore of a well, which yawned beneath. I stepped hastily back as a puff of ice-cold wind blew upward in my face.

'In the good monks' time,' said Luke, still more grimly, 'the English heretic who set foot on that trap-door would have been by this time . . .'

And he pointed suggestively downwards.

'Also the trap opened more easily in those days,' he added; 'and here in the wall is the hole through which they pulled the bolt behind his infidel back.'

And there sure enough it was, a round hole worn smooth by the friction of a cord.

'We use it for keeping our stables clean in these times,' he continued, 'but the good fathers shot other rubbish here! In which, perhaps, they had the better judgment!'

He took a newspaper from his pocket, tied it tightly in the centre, leaving the ends in a loose brush, struck a match, and set fire to the bundle. Then leaning over he let it drop into the deep shaft of the well. As it descended I could see the grey sides, dry as bone, without a particle of vegetation, smooth and water-worn, not to be climbed by human foot. As the newspaper fell rapidly, flaming like a torch, it receded till it became no bigger than a star - till it was no bigger than a pin's head. Then it struck the water, black as ink, which flowed through the bowels of the mountain - the sound of which, booming up, came to our ears with a heart-quailing note of awe.

'That is the Abbey back-door,' he said. 'The monks called it the Mouth of Forgetfulness.'

I confess I was rather relieved when Luke shut down the trap. I did not again venture upon it, or test whether indeed it might not (just once more) open downwards instead of up. The bolt might not quite have forgotten its old tricks, and I had no idea of following the flaming newspaper down into Lethe Mouth with such expedition.

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At last all was ready for the White Coup. Our provisions were all duly put away in leathern sausage-bags upon the necks of our mules. By Don Matthew's good offices I was allotted a broad-backed animal of approved temper, whose only fault was that she would not allow the least pull upon her bridle without making trouble. But, left with a free rein, she would follow her leader perfectly and willingly.

The bells which make every muleteer's train a far-heard rippling tintinnabulation were now carefully stripped from the graith, and deposited by each driver in his own private stall. Horsecloths doubled were substituted for saddles, and the keg girths, of strongly sewn canvas with leathern slings, were prepared to receive the small casks and boxes which were to be the object of our quest. Then, each man leading his beast, we filed out into the night. Up to this moment I had been a respectable British citizen, travelling in Spain under the immediate protection and passport of my Lord Salisbury, Minister for Foreign Affairs. The passport was still in my pocket, yet now I might sing with the best of my comrades, 'Yo! que soy contrabandista! Yo ho!'

For the first time in my life I was an outlaw. If I were caught in the act, my country would disclaim me. And at the thought my heart was filled with joy unspeakable - far beyond the delights of virtue.

It was a clear starry night, and in a little while we would have the moon. Our path lay down the long valley I had looked into from Don Manuel's watch-shelf. The hills mounted steeply on the right. Behind was the clear line of the snows. In the bottom of the valley, flashing silver-white, dividing, uniting, hiding and reappearing, playing hide-and-seek with the innumerable boulders and rocky islands, ran the infant river. As the moon rose we could see the path by which we were to go - the Velez Pass, left clear for tonight only, in virtue of the aforementioned friendly arrangement with the brigadier of the district.

At my first mounting upon Conchita of the Bells I felt a great sense of insecurity. For indeed the path at this place differed but little from the torrent bed fifty yards further down, save that it was a little dryer. But my companion, an old gipsy, whom I had last seen exercising his national profession of horse-clipping under the shadow of the great aqueduct at Segovia, reassured me.

'Comfortable as your Excellency's easy chair at home,' he said, 'is Conchita of the Bells - a pearl of a mule, Conchita - Don Manuel himself rides her.'

Which last I thought no great recommendation. For the old chief of San Severino was a very centaur in the saddle, whilst I, to put the matter mildly, was not. But it turned out even as my Segovian acquaintance predicted. Conchita of the Bells was a paragon, certainly - mouse-colour, steady, for a lady-mule good-tempered, actually understanding kindness, and even to some extent responding to it.

Up the pass we went, so far without very much concealment. The night was yet young. There was plenty of time - the moon in the right quarter. We kept in the shadow, mostly I think for the sake of discipline. Indeed, Don Matthew checked John and Mark several times for breaking out into the swinging catch of a Malagueña. But they (and he) knew that there was no real danger. The Guardias Civiles had been sent far off - they knew still better why. They were patrolling the Cerde or smoking under the arcades of El Seo, with Don Manuel talking to his friend the Bishop and keeping an eye upon them from the episcopal balcony.

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GYPSY HORSE CLIPPING

The extension of the telegraph throughout Spain is of immense service to the free-traders. For instance, if Don Manuel wired to his son from the telegraph office at El Seo that he saw a chance to dispose of 'the dun cow' upon a certain date. The 'dun cow' was a code word for the Velez Pass. The 'white macho' would have meant another route on the side towards Andorra. Occasionally such despatches, if containing anything of exceptional secrecy, or leading words not provided for in the prearranged code, would be sent to Bourg Madame, Léz, Saint Bêat, or some other office on the French side, from which they were brought to San Severino by one or other of those swift and willing messengers with whom all the frontier villages are filled from one end of the Pyrenees to the other.

The 'Velez' Pass - you will not find it on the map, at least under that name - is by no means one of the highest passes. Neither is it one of the easiest. It is, in fact, a mule track, and the bridges across the torrents are made passable for that animal. Still, so far as I was concerned, I wished that Conchita of the Bells had been going alone over these knife-edges. As we approached the first bridge the moonlight struck on the white cliff, sheer as a cathedral wall. The rough logs sounded hollow under Conchita's pattering hoofs. There was not the vestige of a parapet on either side. The Aran roared sixty feet below of the colour of café-au-lait, chafing about the boulders in the stream. I felt that I was, after all, perhaps more suited to a sedentary life than to be a smuggler bold like my great-grandfather. At least, if the choice had been allowed, I would rather have done my smuggling on foot. One feels desperately ill-prepared to die, perched at midnight on mule-back, crossing a yard-wide bridge in the heart of the Pyrenees.



THE SECOND BRIDGE HAD STONE FOUNDATIONS, A LITTLE RUINOUS BUT WITH A PICTURESQUE PARAPET

Once across, however, the path grew better. Yonder were the familiar telegraph poles, stalking away as fast as they could in the direction of France. Presently there came another crossing much more to my liking. This second bridge had stone foundations, a little ruinous it is true - but, what attached me to it especially, a strong and picturesque parapet, doubled along the top and cross-gartered with sturdy pine ties beneath. It was a bridge to please the eye of Mr. Joseph Pennell. I felt more than ever, as Conchita strode confidently across it, that I had always loved the picturesque.

By midnight we were far up on the mountain slopes. Presently, however, the path faded out, and a general sense of direction alone kept the cavalcade on its way. We serpented up the ravines, listening for the stones which whizzed down from high above, and passed the ear with a vicious 'scat' as if warning us off their domain.

Then we crossed talus after talus of snow, the half-rotten remains of the spring

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avalanches. In one place the whole of the path had been cut clean away, and it was necessary to make a long and difficult détour in order to get the mules round.

Some ten minutes before midnight we reached the top of the pass, a wide flattish valley with the mountains bellying upwards on either side like half-filled balloons, not at all like the jagged wave-crests we had seen from San Severino.

We had begun to descend; but we were not yet on French soil. The snow, which had never been heavy, thinned out and grew patchy. Pines, buried almost to their tips in shaly debris, grew on undauntedly, as if nothing had happened. Then came pines half uncovered, with branches weighted by the downward push of the detritus, pines desperately clutching at the rock crevices to avoid being pushed altogether over the precipices. So, hour after hour, on we went till, lo! on a sudden, far below, a French village lay clear in the moonlight. It was built in a true Pyrenean cirque, and from it certain terraces of cultivation struggled up, potato mostly, with patches of onion and beet. Sainte-Marthe-de-Léz was the strangest village I had ever seen - seen, that is, as we saw it, by moonlight and from high above. I wished that it had been possible to photograph it. But for that I had to wait another year; and then, in the broad glare, it looked nothing so very marvellous - a mere huddle of white and red houses on the side of a mountain. In one place and another, indeed, it seemed as if the foundations had given way and the houses slid together, like children's toys when the toybox is overturned. But let no one seek it out. It is mine by right of pre-emption. Trespassers will be prosecuted with the utmost rigour of the law!



A MERE HUDDLE OF WHITE AND RED HOUSES ON THE MOUNTAIN SIDE

Between two huge black bastions of rock we halted. John, the youngest of the San Severino brothers, went on ahead. It was now one o'clock in the morning. The air was of a razor edge, and I for one felt eager enough to be on the backward track into Spain. For the moment, smuggling seemed a foolish thing, or, if done at all, ought to be gone about comfortably, with registered trunks and a Napoleon in one's waistcoat pocket wherewith to grease the palm of the custom-house officer.

However, there was nothing better for it. We had to wait, patiently or not, according to temperament. Luke came along the line, speaking to none of us, for to men his mood was bitter. But, for all his surliness, he was a true lover of animals.

'They do not outwit one like an Englishman,' he was accustomed to say, 'they do not lie like a Frenchman, nor jabber like a woman of any country. Your horse is more silent than a Basque, your mule more obstinate than an Aragonese!' So now he passed along the line, patting and fondling every item of the cavalcade, with a word for each as he went by.

'Daughter, well done!' he would say to Conchita of the Bells, who nuzzled a moist nose in his breast. An Englishman would have grunted, 'Hut! you beast!' But this surly young Basque only laid an arm behind the beast's head as if she had been his sweetheart, and murmured coaxingly, 'Aye! here we are! It is as I told you. Is it not so? An hour or two more and you will again be in your stable, Beauty!'

Stamping with the feet being forbidden, the only sound (after Don Luke had betaken himself away out of sight) was the nervous shaking of the chains which each beast wore attached to its pack-saddle, telling of the plague of insects from which these animals suffer.

At last, from far up the valley, the moon being hidden behind the spreading cloud of

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night, there came a faint, tremulous pattering, the clink of iron, the scrape of a shod hoof slipping on a rock. The mules grew more and more uneasy, but made no noise. It was the cavalcade which we were there to meet. Don John had not made his arrangements in vain. We heard them long before they reached us, for the air was so thin and clear upon the heights that sounds carried far.

Then I understood how impossible is this kind of smuggling with mule-trains, unless the officials are bribed. The Guardias Civiles know the mountains and patrol them perfectly. Yet, so admirably arranged is the administration, that not they, but the local carbineers control the excise. The civil guards are for the prevention and punishment of crime. They have quite extirpated brigandage and, practically also, blackmail. But smuggling is another matter. In their hearts, the very gendarmes do not believe it to be wrong. It is meritorious, rather. Every dashing young blade must sow his wild oats on the passes. The police, even, are only officially on the official side. And I have heard of a carbineer, on holiday and home to see his parents, taking a trip in plain clothes, *tras los montes*, just to keep himself amused.

At any rate there was evidently going to be no interference this night. So at least we were assured. And, indeed, the trans-shipment of the casks of 'Martel,' packages of French dress goods, cases of champagne, boxes of guns, ammunition, and other heavy articles, made enough noise to bring the carbineers upon us from the distance of several miles. All was remarkably free and easy. There was abundance of jesting, handshaking, the drinking of a draught or two, and, lo! the chains were being looped upon the full pack saddles. Conchita of the Bells was now dowered with a couple of cases of cheap assorted jewellery destined for the Fair of the Holy Virgin of the Pillar at Zaragoza. As the moon came out of the cloud Conchita looked over her shoulder to see if I were going to mount as well. But I thought of the smugglers' bridges, and assured her that I had been brought up to show kindness to all dumb animals.

Thus, with a full cargo, we started back towards the pass. At first I held Conchita's bridle and led her. Or, perhaps, it would be truer to say that Conchita pushed me. For at all the really perilous parts of the roads, where the cases on one side could be heard scraping against the wall of rock, and on the other observed overhanging an abyss swimming with pale blue vapour, a sharp tug at the bridle warned me that Conchita desired the privilege of preserving her own balance without unskilled assistance.

Indeed after the first mile I never interfered with her. For Conchita had a convincing display of dentistry when I went in front, and a playful readiness of hoof when I lagged behind, both worthy of the utmost respect. Don John asserted she could kill a bluebottle with her left at six feet from her tail, and certainly John should have known. But it is to be admitted that his brother evangelists were not synoptic with him on this occasion.

All the same, I liked to listen to his stories, when he dropped behind his mule and began to talk. The rhythmical movement of the cavalcade, the slipping of some of the beasts on the ice-worn stones prevented me from catching all that he said. He spoke in a low even voice, that he might not be called to order by Don Matthew. But I made out that he was offering to associate me with his brother Mark and himself in something infinitely more distinguished than 'free-trade by arrangement.'

Among his other accomplishments, Don John spoke French much better than any of his brothers.

'Small praise to him,' quoth his brother Mark, 'when he has had half a score of sweethearts 'twixt here and the Ariège to learn it from. I could have spoken French also, had I learned it as an old dog learns to be indoors at supper-time!'

As revealed to me, the achievement in prospect was infinitely more 'class' than that upon which I was being blooded.

'See,' said Don John, 'like this it shall happen. When we are almost clear of the Velez on the way back, you and I with Mark will cut across a col I know well, to a place I know better, where we can lie and rest a day or two. It is a place of friends. There we may watch for a chance to bring over a dozen packages, worth all these mule-loads of rubbish a dozen times over. And we will pay never a sou to fat old Muros, the brigadier of carbineers down at El Seo. He would ask too much, the old skinflint, the pájaro! Even for this night, I question whether there will be a matter of twenty francs left over for each man. But next time all

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shall be for ourselves. And what can any man do without money? I, who am the stoutest contrabandista on the mountains - even I cannot get married till I put down enough to buy a little piece of land. Yes, Señor, a powerful noble is my Lord Money. God is Almighty, truly - but on the day after He created the world He dubbed Money His viceroy!

'Why, Don John,' I said, 'surely it cannot be that she whom you love is mercenary?'

I could see him shrug his shoulders in the moonlight.

'No,' he said, 'my girl would let me take her across my saddle any night, and live content with me in a cane brake. But she has a father who - well, is a Frenchman, and thinks that his 'little economies' will bring him to Paradise! And Josephine is a good girl, and would fret her heart out to disobey her parents. It is strange. Certes, I would disobey mine soon enough, if I did not know that Don Manuel would immediately take a gun and shoot me dead for it!'

It was the earliest orange-and-smoky-crimson dawn of Northern Spain, when, after duly making our adieus to Don Matthew and Don Luke, who were left in charge of the cavalcade, the two remaining brothers Sebastian, with Biño and myself, struck away to the left, over a pine-covered col which led presently into the wildest country I had yet seen.

These long, gracefully contoured ridges of the Eastern Pyrenees have a way of breaking down suddenly - as it were, when no one is looking - into a dance of splintered peaks, towered bastions, poised rocking-stones, vast cirques with precipitous sides, bare save for the clinging cistus and the wild rhododendron.

More than once I impressed it on the Sebastians that there was really no need for such hurry. Even Biño added his entreaties to mine. But I verily believe that Mark and John did not know that they were going over the terrible ground as fast as a fairly good walker could cover a piece of level road.

After a night of climbing and mule-riding it may be supposed that I was glad enough when we came to a halt on a craggy platform, with a couple of stern grey bastions towering immediately above us. Mark pointed downwards and said, 'There! That is the finest mas in all the Eastern Pyrenees - it is the farm of the great Don Cristobal Ribas!'

'That is where we are to wait?' I asked with some hope. It was a cosy modern-looking range of buildings. Not that I was particular. A shed full of hay - a bed of clover and mountain fodder, a mouthful of bread and cheese, with, if the gods were kind, a bota of wine - these were all I asked of Señor Don Cristobal Ribas, or any other Señor.

The Sebastian brothers burst out laughing at my ignorance. Even Biño smiled. 'It will be our most earnest endeavour,' said my friend Don Mark, 'to keep out of the path of Don Cristobal. It were good to eat, better still to sleep. Yet we must go about, and far about, that no shepherd on his hills, or fodder-lout looking up from his stock-yard, may get his eyes upon us.'

'Is he then, in the service of the Government?'

For the second time they laughed. And again Mark enlightened me,

'No,' he said, 'Don Cristobal is not with the Government. On the Pyrenees there is no one on the side of the Government - no, not its own officers. Learn this - that in all the North - Guipuzcoa, Navarra, Aragon, Cataluña - when people speak respectfully of the Spanish Government they have their tongues in their cheeks. Don Cristobal is no spy of Madrid, but he is worse. He is a rival in business, and if he got wind that the Sebastians were in his country to run a batch, it is ten to one that we should be relieved of the task of carrying home so much as a single package!'

'You mean that he would steal your property?'

The brothers shrugged their shoulders at my invincible English ignorance.

'Oh, no,' they answered, philosophically, 'the thing is a custom of Spain. We would have to fight for the goods, and the strongest, of course, would take them. For how could we carry any complaint to the authorities? Every stick has two ends, you see, so that is why we are so careful to hold tightly to ours, lest Don Cristobal should beat us with the other!'

So even as Don Mark had said, we were at great pains to pass unseen high above the well-cared-for buildings of Don Cristobal Ribas, member of the Cortes, smuggler and

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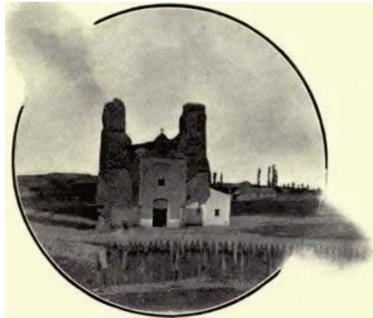
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practical freebooter.

It seemed that the pass we were now to essay was in a manner of speaking 'held in fee' by the owner of the great alqueria beneath us. And being a man who stood well with the Government, not an ex-Carlist like Don Manuel Sebastian, he had much more liberty. So in the pass which, as it were, opened out of his back garden, being the best and most secret east of the Maladetta, the interference of strangers was not invited. And it was whispered that by means of his tusos and peones, the modern parliamentarian levied toll upon all, much after the manner of the merry barons of old. Yet I have been privileged to see this same gentleman take his railway ticket at Jaca for Madrid. To be exact, it was a ticket of the second class. He also made speeches which were printed in all the newspapers of the region. I was even introduced to him and had the honour of dining at his table. I found him courteous, well informed, and with the manners of a prince. After dinner, toasts were called for. It was the time of the 'late unpleasantness' with regard to Cuba, so when I was called upon to give a toast I thought myself tolerably safe with 'Viva España!' There were half a dozen gentlemen present, all Spaniards, all proprietors of the neighbourhood. To my surprise and embarrassment they sat still, though I was on my feet, and at sad loss for words. The pause was decidedly an awkward one. I ran over in my mind how I could possibly have given offence. Then my host, toying with his wine-glass, said without looking at me, 'If the Señor will change his toast to 'Viva Cataluña!' we are with him to a man!' The which, without any disloyalty to the existing Government of Spain, I instantly and most thankfully did.

In the meantime, however, we left Don Cristobal's masarie far beneath us, descending down, down, down into a dusty sun-baked plain, surrounded on every side by hills and looking like a little bit of Africa dropped by mistake into a 'howe' of the Pyrenees. Cataluña and Eastern Aragon are full of such contrasts. They are so near the Mediterranean coast that ever and anon one comes on bits of them which are as Moorish as Murcia itself.

The mountains towards the north were low and barren, yet already in the improved dwellings of the people one could see that there was another spirit abroad. For though the valley was Spanish territory, the river which was to wet me several times during the trip sped on into France.



THE BOLD KEEP OF A RUINED CASTLE, FLANKED BY TWO TOWERS

We were nearing our journey's end. In the midst of the sun-baked valley, dusty and dreary like a brickfield, there was one striking memorial of ancient times. The bold keep of a ruined castle, flanked by two towers of massive stones, stood up sharply out of the barren plain. Jackdaws circled and cawed about the turrets, and the building, as we first saw it, might have been deserted for five hundred years. But lo! when we came to the leonine front which it turned towards the mountain, we found that a huge plastron of red brick had been most incongruously attached to its northern side. In this a great door was pierced, proportionate indeed to the castle but utterly disproportionate to the internal accommodation, being twenty-five feet high and partly closed with a screen of rough wood, from which depended a string curtain. An ordinary whitewashed house was attached to the right of this House of the Cyclops. But the haze of morning so heightened the weird effect on these patched ruins, that they seemed to my eyes even more impressive than San Severino, standing out stark and bone-bare on the sun-baked plain.

Every seeker after new impressions will understand with what pleasure I heard Don Mark say that here for the present was the bourne of our travel.

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AN OLD WOMAN CLOTHED IN BLACK CAME ALONG, DRIVING BEFORE HER A LITTLE FLOCK OF GOATS AND SHE-ASSES

As it happened, we had two days and a night to remain at Torre Toran, so that I had abundant opportunity of studying both the place and its inhabitants. In the small photograph the long battlemented wall to the rear, broken down in places, is not shown. We had to skirt this in order to reach the entrance of ceremony. As we did so an old woman came along, clothed in black from head to foot. A black hood shaped out of a shawl was over her head, almost concealing her face. She was driving before her a little flock of goats and she-asses, which, resignedly enough, proceeded to search for herbage where apparently even a royal warrant would not have produced a single blade of grass.

The old lady took not the least notice of us, sombrely keeping on her way, her eyes on the ground and her hands holding together the ends of the shawl with which she was hooded. Don John explained.

'She is called the Mother-of-Renato. The gendarmes killed him in the pass!'

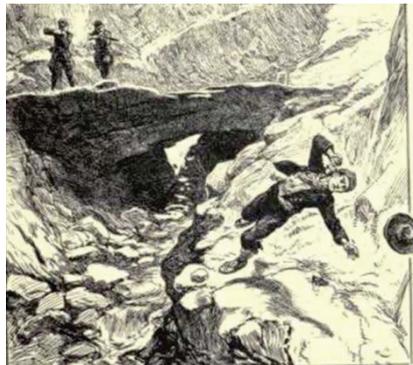
He spoke quite as if the matter were of ordinary occurrence. I was interested to know which pass.

'The same through which you are to go tonight,' he answered.

This interested me still more. I pressed for particulars.

'Oh,' said John lightly, 'it was nothing unusual. It might arrive to any one. He was called upon to stop. And he did not stop. Voilà tout!'

Exactly - it might arrive to any one! Well, I at least knew some one who, if called upon to stop, would stop with extreme suddenness. I was not so young as when I ran in the college paper-chase. And besides, running away full tilt is, to say the least of it, unseemly.



HE WAS CALLED UPON TO STOP. AND HE DID NOT STOP! VOILA TOUT.

As we approached the side entrance (the 'Gate of the Sun-dial') a second old woman, this time more gaily attired in blue head kerchief, red-and-green striped shawl with a crimson border, a faded lilac dress and a red apron, was conducting the last of another herd of goats through a narrow doorway into an inner courtyard.

'We are in luck,' said Don John, gleefully; 'that is our hostess, Doña Ana. She is taking in her flock to be milked. We are in time for dinner.'

Now in the splendid speech of hungry Spain there is no word so wholly pleasant as comida, which signifies the solid and comfortable meal which can be taken at any hour. Breakfast is generally a delusion, and supper the heart is sick for, because it is always so long deferred. But comida is infallibly a 'square meal,' and though on this occasion it

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approached the unfashionable hour of three (as the long clean line upon the sun-dial shows), I was rejoiced that we had hit to a nicety the time of the dinner of the workers. Within, we found three or four hardy fellows reclining in the high airy coolness, some on sacks, some on couches of juniper and heath brought from the alp outside. The floor itself was of beaten clay, with that bloom upon it which is the sign-manual of Spain, where all things, even the sunsets, appear through a ruddy haze of dust.



A SECOND OLD WOMAN MORE GAILY ATTIRED

All rose at our entrance. The two evangelist brothers shook hands familiarly, and with a few words, evidently cabalistic, introduced Biño and myself. The pot-au-feu was soon steaming on the table, brought in by the cook, a young and comely woman, who apparently blushed on the least provocation. She was, however, on eminently good terms with Don John. But there was evidently a mystery somewhere, for Biño and I were warned not to let out to any of those at Torre Toran that Don John had engaged himself 'for the good motive' to a sweetheart over in the Ariège.

The explanation seemed to be that in the not distant past our inconstant youth had had an affair with the pretty dame of the pots and pans.

'She is married now,' he says, somewhat shamefacedly, explaining the matter; 'but what would you? She is married herself, but just like a woman, she would not like to hear that I was going to marry myself also!'

He set up for knowing something about women, this same slender Don John. But whether he was right or not in this instance, certain it is that, when at last the comida smoked upon the table, to him were apportioned both wings of the chicken, a slight which, at least, one other person felt very much - for the discerning would as soon think of eating the beak as the leg of a full-sized Pyreneean pullet.

There was the usual difficulty in making out which was the husband of the young woman. The amo or 'good-man' of the house, was a grey-headed crisp-tempered old fellow, who sat a little behind the cowl of the fireplace. Then, when Doña Ana came in with the milk with which to make his special mess of rice and eggs, all of us had to rise and be introduced afresh to her as the ama, or wife of the proprietor of Torre Toran.

It was not for some time, and only by careful observation, that I made out the husband of our pretty cook to be a certain quiet, stoop-shouldered giant, who sat hour after hour looking into the fire without saying a word to any one, without glancing at his wife, or seeming to notice the numerous compliments that were showered upon her. His sole occupation was to throw scraps to a band of hungry cats which appeared from nowhere and everywhere, only to be shooed away by the cook, or dislodged from under settles by the rattle of Doña Ana's broom. I noticed, however, that the big man occasionally held out his hand in an absent-minded way to his wife for a handful of scraps wherewith to continue his feeding operations. Her hand invariably met his.

After dinner, and when some excellent wine had fortified the inner man, sharp-set after the shrewd air of the mountain tops, I was informed by Don Mark that it would be

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impossible to 'lift' the goods that night. The party which had agreed to cache them had found itself watched, and had had to return with them to headquarters near to Saint B at. Don John had gone off to make new arrangements. He would be back in the morning. Glad enough of the rest, I took my camera, and, after the manner of my kind, went forth to seek what I might devour.

I was not long in finding a witching marvel of an ancient doorway, evidently belonging to the chapel of the castle. Saints surrounded the broad arch. Devils grinned from the low tiles. The inlay work of grey and red porphyry was perfect as the day it had been completed. But a pair of the amo's trousers flapped from the handle of the great door, and as I waited the mother of the dead Renato passed slowly up the steps with a brace of cans of milk fresh from her turn at the dairy. So that, though it was certainly invisible to the human eye, the goats and the she-asses must have found fodder among the stony d bris about Torre Toran.

That night I slept on a mattress in a corner, the sleep of the tired and the insect-immune. Let none go gipsying in Spain whom a flea will bite - not to speak of the yet slower and more deadly terror of the Creeping-Thing-that-walketh in Darkness! In the morning, very early, Bi o came to my bedside with a cup of chocolate and a glass of water, which I took thankfully enough, with a lump of black or rather brown bread thereto. The curtain was already drawn aside from the great twenty-five foot door, and from where I lay I could see right out across the plain to the summits of the hills, all covered with fresh-fallen snow, the clouds still wreathing and hovering about them, or slowly mounting in long level banks as the sun struck upon them. The whole interior of Torre Toran was filled with the fresh scents of dawn.

I rose and went out. All was of a magic and mystic clearness. Little details of hill-side ten miles away came out as if within pistol shot, a broken pine, a fox earth - or at least so it seemed - perhaps, more likely, the mouth of some yawning cavern. The landscape from verge to verge was washed with dew - spring-cleaned, as it were, while the nearer rocks and cliffs had the delusive glitter of French polish.

A long lazy day was before us at Torre Toran. Don John had come back and was helping the pretty cook to get the breakfast. He had girt himself with a blue apron, and now peeled vegetables, washed salad, and cleaned knives - while the son of the house, the lady's husband, occasionally glanced at him with a slow smile of quizzical contempt. There was no harm in Don John - so much his smile said. And at any rate, his own Albecete knife was by his side - the repairer of mistakes, the 'regulator' of all things that go awry in Spain. But Don John also knew this as well as any one, and (be it said again) there was no harm in Don John.



A WITCHING MARVEL OF AN ANCIENT DOORWAY

There is little to tell of the day - which shows how pleasantly it must have gone. I sat out, mainly in the yard, and smoked with Bi o and the husband of the pretty cook, Don Reinaldo, who drawled sleepy tales in easy French of a good accent. He had been at the lyc e of St. Gaudens, I was astonished to hear. But he was more than content to come home again to Torre Toran. He was the only son of the house, and as he said, 'I might have been a small official in France, and sat all day writing in a book or licking on postage stamps. But how much better to be here with the hills all about, a wife who loves me, a

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brave old father as tough as saddle-leather, a good mother who would die for me, a few books, and every day a chance to use my gun!



DON REINALDO IN THE CASTLE YARD

He showed me his armoury, of which he was justly proud. It contained a very fine new Winchester, bought for him by a friend, in Paris. It was kept like a piece of jewellery. He possessed besides a double-barrelled English sporting gun, and a Webley revolver of the heaviest navy pattern. I happened to have a few cartridges to suit this last at the bottom of my camera carrying-case, with which I made him exceedingly happy. In return he told me many tales, some romantic and a few full of a humour of the broader sort. And so we whiled the time past, till the fall of the twilight brought the band together. By this time I had taken a great liking for Don Reinaldo, this quiet man who had seen and done so many things, who loved both 'Don Quijote' and 'Gil Blas' in their original tongues, and who under a blouse of blue linen and a flat-brimmed cap, hid away such a world of refinement and good sense. As I was taking a picture of him seated on a log in the castle-yard, he advised me for that night to leave my camera at Torre Toran. His wife would take every care of it in our absence, he said.

It was between eight and nine when we started, not as formerly in one imposing cavalcade, but on foot and in little groups of two or three at most. Don Reinaldo and Biño kept close to me. Not a word was uttered. It was a gloomy starless night, the moon obscured, and so dark at first that I would have stumbled and fallen had not Don Reinaldo given me his hand.

'It will be easier presently,' he whispered; 'but, indeed, darkness is best till we are well off the plain, so that none may track us. When we get among the hills, the clouds will break and we will see well enough.'

The ridges stood out against the slaty grey of the sky. If you looked long at them, they became edged with a misty aureole, like that which outlines a saint's head in old pictures. Then we passed a tall post black against the sky.

'The frontier!' whispered Biño, with some relief. 'Now we are in France.'

As soon as we had reached the bottom of the bank we stopped in a sheltered place, and Don Reinaldo gave a short sharp whistle. It was the trysting-spot. Here all the men I had seen at the Torre were quickly assembled. Not a word was spoken. It was now Don John's business to lead, so I was placed behind with Don Reinaldo, while Biño, who also knew the country well, accompanied Don John as additional adviser.

Our pace was not particularly rapid - rather the steady going of men who know that they have a long and difficult task before them. It was still too dark to see clearly. Yet the mountaineers went inevitably on, each as if he had been ascending his own staircase to bed. Once we seemed to be passing through a deep and narrow defile, upon rocks which sounded hollow beneath the feet, while far below me I heard the splash of falling water.

From this gloom we emerged, suddenly, as from a prison cell. The moon struggled through fleecy clouds with a vague luminous radiance. My alpargatas touched grass, gratefully enough, and lo, before us lay the place of our quest, the Rochers de Léz - a wide uneven plain on which blocks of stone were scattered, of all sizes, from that of a man's

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hand to huge boulders ten and fifteen feet in diameter. What a place to play hide and seek in! That was my first thought. And there the packages lay ready for the Spaniards. French hands had placed them in hiding, but the risk itself must always be run by the men of Spain. Labour is cheap south of the Pyrenees - life also.

Don John went straight to a tall boulder, squared like an obelisk in a cemetery, which stood at the south-west corner of the plain. Then he threaded his way back, following some intricate key-plan which he had in his head.

'Toma!' he cried, suddenly pointing with his hand, 'there you are!'

The men foraged about among the huddle of stones upon which a thin covering of heath and juniper had been artistically replaced. Soon our 'affair' lay before us. Small square packages of thirty and forty pounds' weight each were neatly wrapped up in glazed waterproof cloth. Not a moment was now wasted. Don Reinaldo checked the number of burdens as each was drawn out of its hiding-place.

Then the men attached to the corners of each package a cross-harness of straps, like those which sustain the rüch-sack of the Alps - two broad bands passing bandolier-wise across the chest and under the arm-pits. Those who made it a point of honour to select the heaviest packages had, some of them, L-shaped carrying boards, but most mounted the package plainly on the back with no other attachment than the broad shoulder-leathers, crossed over the breast in grenadier fashion. To me was entrusted the smallest and lightest of all the packages - jewellery of price, I was told, destined for the best shops of Barcelona and Madrid. The larger packages held mostly Jura-made watches, smaller leather work, gold and silver cigar cases, and all that dainty nick-nackery which is so popular in Spain, and of which not one article in ten ever pays to the Government the very heavy and indeed prohibitory duty imposed upon it.

With this businesslike despatch it was not long before every back had its burden, and we were once more on the road for Spain. This 'run' was a very different affair from that of the cavalcade. No arrangement had been made, or indeed could be made, with the authorities for the passing of a cargo so valuable. And the carbineers, old smugglers to a man, would certainly be on the alert if they had the least suspicion of what was afoot.

For me, in spite of my light load, not more than a fifth of what the others were carrying, I found the pace quite fast enough.

But Don Reinaldo wished to get through the narrow gorge before the light came clearer. It was easy to see that the clouds were passing off the face of the moon, and that long before our goods were safe in hiding, the whole of the mountains would be as bright as day.

I could hear the heavy and even painful breathing of the men as they followed each other up the steep slopes. Every five minutes at the worst parts, less frequently elsewhere, the leader would give a sort of guttural 'Humph!' Then the exhausted men would lean their loads and themselves against the wall of rock. The moon looked out for a moment at one of these halts, and I saw the young man's face next to me. It was drawn and haggard. The sweat stood in great goutts on his brow, and I could see the labouring of his lungs as he panted with shut eyes and open mouth. Assuredly this smuggling is no child's play.

We passed the dreaded gully in safety, and all breathed more freely as the pass opened out. We kept high on one side, serpentine among the scattered rocks. The moon had again removed herself. There was a growling of thunder low down towards the plains of Aragon. The storm seemed to be coming in our direction.

'Some of us will sleep in wet jackets tonight, that is, if we sleep at all!' muttered Biño, who remained beside me. Though carrying his share like any of the others, the sturdy fellow kept offering to relieve me of mine at difficult parts of the road.

Suddenly Don Reinaldo, who had been leading, threw up his hands, and with a muttered 'Al abrigo! (To cover)' he effaced himself behind a boulder.

So indeed did we all. And not a moment too soon. For 'spat - spat - spatter' came half a dozen bullets against the rocks. Some of them buzzed along the hillside like great bees. They whistled overhead. They clicked and burrowed like rats in the short dense undergrowth, as the facets of the rocks turned them aside. But no one of our company was touched.

'They are over on the other side - lower down!' whispered Biño. 'Do not be afraid. It is

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only playing the game. They will do us no harm, but all the same it is a mercy the moon is covered. I wish that thunderstorm would make haste.'

'Are they Don Cristobal's men?' I inquired. For I thought it might be the deputy to the national Cortes who was objecting to our intrusion upon his vested rights of breaking the laws he had helped to make.

'No,' said Don John, who lay next on my right, 'nothing so serious as that - only the silly carbineers. Cristobal's men would have had the hill of us by this time, and in ten minutes we would have seen their knives glancing. But these fellows will just keep firing away bullets and wasting good Government powder. They will never dare to attack us. All the same it is very stupid - very tiresome. One does not want to be recognised. And it is much too near Don Cristobal's to think of playing cache-cache with our cargo!'

After the first surprise of the thought that these bullets were fired at us, it was astounding how soon we got used to the fusillade in the dark. The Spaniards passed jests after their kind, chiefly grumbling because Don Reinaldo would not permit cigarettes to be lighted, lest the heath and dried grasses of the hillside might be set on fire.

'In twenty minutes we must make a rush for it - bullets or no bullets!' said Don Reinaldo, 'else daylight will catch us with the stuff still on our backs!'

Very anxiously therefore we watched the clouds pass over the moon. But it darkened steadily, and it was not five minutes before the first drops of the thunderstorm fell, broad as Spanish dollars, plashing solidly in our faces. Then with a low sigh of relief, each man adjusted his package and stood erect.

'That will damp the wasps' powder for them!' said Don John. 'I wish old slow-coach Reinaldo there would let us just send one volley among them for luck!'

But the stoop-shouldered giant was far too steady a leader for any child's play of that sort. As the lightning began to quaver, flash on quick flash, we could see in the pale lilac glare away across on the other side of the valley, a file of black figures hastening in the direction of the carbineer post.

'Now, I wonder what they suppose themselves to have gained by all that?' growled Biño in my ear; 'something to put in their report, I suppose - 'Wonderful activity of the carbineers of the district of Aran! Daring attack upon armed partidas concealed among rocks! The contrabandistas dispersed!''



AS WE CROSSED THE RIVER FOR THE LAST TIME

After this stirring episode, the rest of the journey to the old shed, where the packages were finally rubbed dry and hidden under heaps of fodder, was certainly monotonous. It was one long plodding misery of feeling oneself wet to the skin, of plunging on across loose banks of slaty débris through swamps muddy with the rains, of barking shins and stubbing toes against the stumps of stone pines half buried in the drift.

But the 'cache' once reached all was soon stowed away, and we filed out of the shed, dusting the 'bits' off our coats, to become once more law-abiding citizens of our respective countries.

'Now,' said Don Reinaldo, 'we must get down to El Seo and constitute ourselves, so to speak.'

In my innocence, I had expected that we would take the goods directly back to Torre Toran, or, perhaps, even as far as San Severino. But the best smugglers of Spain never 'fyle their ain nest.' They carry everything in the direction of some unfrequented railway-side station, whence some trusted member of the fraternity takes the whole down to the best

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markets in Barcelona or Madrid. The day is past when the contrabandista was a mere stupidly-daring tool in the hands of cleverer men. He knows and studies the markets. Though he carries his life in his hand, he never risks his skin unnecessarily.

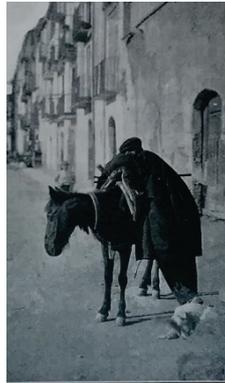


AN OFFICER OF CARBINEERS REGARDED US A LITTLE CURIOSLY AS WE PASSED

Generally, he will not fight for his goods against Government troops, though he will stand up fiercely enough against raiders of his own kind. He is wise, acute, long-suffering, and knows that it is better to abandon one cargo than to be marked and known for life by the spies of the Excise. At worst, he has to contend with spurts of energy on the parts of new brigadiers, who come to the frontier with quite un-Spanish ideas of honesty. But, even so, such commanderies as those of San Severino and Torre Toran are hardly ever seriously interfered with.

As we crossed the river for the last time, the early sunshine was flooding it mildly through fleecy clouds. Being already as wet as we could be, we plunged in recklessly up to our shoulders, splashing each other like boys let loose from school. Yet our clothes were almost dry by the time we had got to the summit of the rocks on the opposite bank. It was afternoon when the little city appeared, as we would say in Scotland 'in the lirk of the hill,' with the clear river washing its apostolic feet.

In twenty minutes we were at the gate of El Seo. An officer of carbineers regarded us a little curiously as we passed. I fancied he laid his finger against the side of his nose, but as to this I will not take oath in any court of justice.



A BOY LEANING ON A MULE COCKED A CUNNING EYE AT US

'That Thing there,' growled Don John, ungratefully, 'is the old pig of a thousand pigs to whom my father had to pay a hundred duros for leaving the Valdez open the other night. Praise to the saints, he gets not so much as one 'little dog' (Perro chico: 'little dog' - a half-penny.) out of this night's work!'

I wondered which of the saints had our midnight labours under his care - holy Saint Nicholas, I should think, the patron saint of all marauding night-hawks.

As we passed through the sun-bright Plaza of El Seo, a boy leaning on a mule, apparently more than half asleep, cocked a cunning eye at us and said something in a low tone to Don Mark.

'All right,' he whispered, a moment after, 'our Matthew got through the Valdez safe with all the stuff. So that old scoundrel of a Brigadier earned his dollars after all!'

The Galloway Raiders 'Discovering Crockett's Europe' a chapter from 'Twelve Spanish Adventures' published as 'The Adventurer in Spain.'

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Several of our company went off to the quaint little cathedral, but Biño and I sought a quiet Posada, where I could get comfortably into bed with a blanket about me, while my entire wardrobe dried shamelessly on the balcony which gave upon the street. In this guise, with a cup of coffee by my side, I smoked the easeful cigarette, and, failing any fit priest of my faith, confessed the crimes of the past nights - to my diary.