FROM *'THE ADVENTURER IN SPAIN'* S.R.CROCKETT

CHAPTER FOUR
THE CITY OF DREAM

Sometimes great and wise publishers and yet greater and wiser editors show their wisdom by asking me to write a book. Sometimes, also, to my sorrow, they add, 'Write me one like 'The Scarlet Shoe String' or 'The Rovers.' Then am I compelled to quarry in the book-bin for certain old volumes which, though bearing a name on the cover which I cannot disavow, seem to have been written by somebody dead and buried long ages ago.

But the wisest of all editors do not so. They know that, as one tree differeth from another in stature, so no book can, even with (on the author's part) the best will in the world, be a replica of any other. Now what these wise people ought to say to me at this stage of the negotiation is: 'Get away as quickly as you can to your City of Dream, and don't let us find your person blocking up our editorial staircase - till a great book, a true book, a book absolutely unprecedented, has been revealed to you. Thus we will assure to ourselves a long rest!'

And when, having exhibited to them the empty state of my pockets by the graphic method of turning them out side in, and so having moved them to advance me my railway fare, right gladly will I take me off, and - make a bee-line for this little city in which, after my double-barrelled smuggling trip, I now found myself.

I will call it El Seo, though that is by no means its name. For it contains a cathedral - so diminutive indeed that it might be added, say, to Cologne Minster, without anybody but the architect and the charwoman discovering the difference. It has also a Bishop, passing rich on the revenue of the average Scottish minister, who has never applied for an 'augmentation' - something, that is, on the underside of £200 a year - a Bishop who acts in the spirit of his Master, in that he was not ashamed to collogue openly with a certain out-at-elbows tramp and ex-smuggler who happened to be passing through his tiny episcopal city.

El Seo is my own name for it - this quaint City of Dream. But you may scan the rolls of the Arch-diocese of Tarragona without being able to locate this smallest and most unworldly of cities ecclesiastic. For, lest Messrs. Cook and Gaze should know of it, I have both photographically and in literary fashion 'mixed those babies up.' Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind as to his own particular City of Dream - but, if he is tempted to look for mine, I have taken good care that he shall not find it.

Never did I see so many books ahead of me as in those sunny days I spent at El Seo. I drifted about idly, irresponsibly, as near Nirvana as any son of Adam can expect to find himself this side the 'Mouth of Forgetfulness.' Morning found me among the faithful in the cathedral - aye, almost before the twilight. I had wrapped me in a huge Aragonese cloak, swinging it knowingly about my throat and mouth, for the ruby mist of sunrise in the City of Dream often issues in a most undreamlike calentura.

Then out towards the cathedral by brumous dusky streets, where sparse lights winked rufescent in cobblers' shops, and under arches men still carried lanterns - till, coming out suddenly into the open, lo! the great oleander flower of the dawn seemed to grow upon the cathedral tower as on a stalk. Behind that the long level lines of the ancient citadel glowed purple and cinnamon. I stood watching the momently increasing brightness till the bell in the minster turret clanged for matins. Then twenty steps through a little square brought me to the cathedral portal.

Dank smells of yesterday's incense, also some tang of the unwashen faithful of many generations, a rich gloom everywhere - Indian red dashed with yellow ochre, and through these, the clear sweet light of a few candles winking deep in the chapels. There was no general service. The great altar was dark, its unlighted candles mere white bars against the denser gloom behind. Only the eastern window had begun to blush with vague rich hintings of colour. The rest were yet sombre and very lonesome.

In little side chapels, here and there, women knelt, and priests were beginning to officiate in a heart-healing hush of peace. It was beautiful - perhaps the next thing to a Scottish communion, and my heart ached within me to believe even as these folk about me believed. What a simple unmurmuring earnestness there seemed about these poor working folk, both men and women of them, kneeling at this service of the Breaking Day. And looking at these peasants it came to me afresh that it matters hardly at all WHAT a man believes. But altogether, solely and only, HOW he believes it!

And now, since I could not be the solitary being holding aloof from the act of worship, I knelt on the cold stones at the bar of the chapel nearest the high altar. Who, indeed, was I, that I should come out to make of these honest folks' worshipping, a travellers' spectacle? Let me rather seek to approach to some God of mine own or of my fathers. For is it not the root and foundation of our Scottish faith that chiefly in the temple which every man carries about with him, is the God Unknown to be worshipped and his word to be heard?

There was in my pocket a little copy of the beautiful Desclée et Lefebvre Roman breviary, in two volumes 12mo, printed in Belgium and bound in England. Curiously enough I had bought it in Tarragona from the cheerful shopwoman who sells holy books below the archiepiscopal palace. I had carried it ever since in my wanderings, a cosmopolitan vade mecum. And now I read in it, by the light of the solitary altar candle, while I waited for the officiating priest. Something like this it was that I read.

'God of strong virtues, from whom cometh forth all that is best, implant in our hearts the love of thy most excellent name - '

Glancing aside when I came to this passage I was conscious of a priest who knelt beside me, pale, white-haired, ascetic, in a caped soutane of a faded violet hue, buttoned down to his feet. A skull-cap of silk was on his head. For one troubled instant our eyes met. Then his regard fell upon my open breviary. With an effort he seemed to put away vain thoughts. His head bent forward on the altar rail, and the service began.

I thought it strange that none of the country folk should come to kneel before this chapel, but judged it to be because it was the plainest and the least decorated of all. The man in violet and I had it to ourselves.

What happened after that I do not know. It is the beauty of the Ancient Way in the lands where it still conserves something of living power, that there you may worship as you choose - sit or stand - kneel, or only abide silent. Whichever you choose to do, none will cast an eye in your direction, or nudge an elbow saying, 'What doeth that Philistine?'

In my own land and among mine own people if any one does not rise and sit down with the multitude, the office bearers promptly bring him a cordial, or suggest that if he were to go out and take the air, he would probably feel better. But in Spain I might have kneeled all day beneath the crucifix and none would even have looked a question. It was an affair between me and the Unseen. With the bitterness of another's heart it is not good to intermeddle.

But though I read no more in my breviary, nor opened my missal, I had thoughts in my heart somewhat to this purport. 'Good is it that a man should see all, and know all, and try all that is done among all peoples. For 'to know' excelleth 'not to know' as the light the dark. And to have walked the way of the mountaineer when he takes his life in his hand, to have eaten of his wilderness bread, is better than the peculiar treasure of kings. So when a man dies, he shall go his unkenned gate a burnished weapon, a well-worn tool, unrusted - fit, if need be, for the Things that Remain.

'Yet withal if a man keep not the lowly heart, if he call not his sins to judgment, if, in the place of prayers and vows he is not vile in his own sight, then indeed he hath committed the unpardonable sin, and denied the Spirit that strove with him. For assuredly Self-conceit is the sin without forgiveness.'

So far had my mind reached out in that dusky place towards the things which are the foundation of all, when I heard the lesson from the Vulgate, not mumbled as usual but clearly read, and I was aware that all the people in the little cathedral had turned in our direction. The man in faded violet had moved within the bar and was kneeling on the steps of the altar with his face sunk in his hands. The officiating priest was reading these words: 'Do right to the widow, judge for the fatherless, give to the poor, defend the orphan, clothe the naked, heal the broken and weak, laugh not a lame man to scorn, defend the maimed, and let the blind man come into the sight of My clearness. Keep safe the old and young within thy walls. Wheresoever thou findest the dead take them and bury them, and (if thou doest these things) I will give thee the first place in my resurrection!'

'Amen!' said I, 'I am answered. If a man do not these things, better for him that he should have no part in any resurrection, but be even as the beasts that perish.'

So I went out, having heard what is 'true religion and undefiled' proclaimed in words older than those of James, apostle of the concision.

I asked the slim silk-capped macero at the door of the cathedral, on whose face I thought I saw the flicker of a smile, who was the priest in violet who had knelt at the

uppermost altar.

'Who but his Eminence the Bishop?' he answered, a little grimly. 'It is not every day that the Bishop of El Seo has the honour of saying his prayers side by side with a – '

He paused: I knew that in his intolerant Spanish heart he meant to say 'heretic.' But the sight of the breviary in my hand altered his thought, or at least his spoken word.

'. . . . With a foreigner!' he added, a little lamely.

It was not yet broad day. The clouds were scattering, but they had not scattered. There were glimpses of fresh snow on the mighty ridges of the Pyrenees behind.

As I passed along the little Alameda the cathedral of El Seo, striking in design though really one of the smallest in the world, stood out above the valley mists as if built of rose and flame. And I remembered that because of this even the Moors had spared it.

THE CATHEDRAL OF EL SEO STOOD OUT ABOVE THE VALLEY MISTS AS IF BUILT OF ROSE AND FLAME

'City of the twelve palm trees,' sang my heart, as I looked at the glorious and flamboyant beauty springing up over against me:

The heathen envied thee;

But they were not able to do aught against thee!

And I lifted my eyes to the City of Dream, that hung like a purple cloud of sunrise against the sky, hardly seeming to be of this earth, and the rest of the ancient and divine song came into my mind:

Twelve trees laden with divers fruit
As many fountains flowing with milk and honey -
Seven mighty mountains whereon grow roses and lilies,
By these shall the Lord fill thy children with joy!

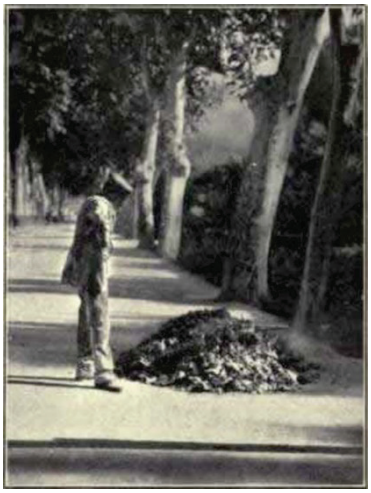
Then all at once I remembered that it was the Sabbath. For when alone in strange lands, and with saints' days taking up about one day in three, Sunday is only to be located as on Crusoe's island, by severe calculation with a notched stick.

I do not remember how I fed, or where, or on what, that first entranced day in the City of Dream. Sometimes I saw so many wonderful things before my waking vision that I feared I should never have time to write them all down. There were children on the street. They played at skipping-rope like bairns of other flesh-and-blood lands; but their cries fell on my ears far away and musical as bells that ring in dreams. The town cows went out making low music, mysterious as those at Ravelston, of which 'the mourning ghost still keeps the shadowy kine.' Only I saw these of El Seo go out in the blaze of noon, and in the face of the world - that is, if there had been any world to see.

I passed out of the City of Dream by an ancient port - half-gate, half hole-in-the-wall. A labourer to whom life was clearly no dream, stood staring at my camera with his muck-rake in his hand. The City of Dream was a city of much labour and scant wages to him. But he crossed himself when the eye of the Zeiss lens winked in his direction. That at least he knew for a portent of evil.

AN ANCIENT PORT – HALF-GATE, HALF HOLE IN THE WALL

Then along another Alameda, dappled of light and shadow, with bees humming overhead among the leaves and on the walk beneath a gardener who was indolently trying to light a damp heap of them. In vain, they would not blaze. Sleepily he searched for a match to try again. He had all day to do it in. They were doubtless dream leaves. The cows might eat them, they might burn, or they might only lie and rot. No man knew which. Indeed it was all the same. It was kismet. And, as I watched, out of the dim incense-scented gloom of a mediaeval Christianity I seemed to enter into the scarce-lit spaces of a yet older faith.



SLEEPILY HE SEARCHED FOR A MATCH TO TRY AGAIN

I gave the man a match. He was a Spaniard, yet he did not even thank me. He only struck it on his trousers and applied it to the leaves. They smoked a little, un-cheerfully, and as they never lighted it could not be said that they went out. But the man was not discouraged. He went and sat down on a stone seat, and rolling a cigarette, asked for another match. He had done his best. All was as God willed. No, he did not go often to church. He did not see that it made much difference. He was a labourer in the pay of a rich proprietor. He got two duros (eight shillings) a week. He did his work or it did itself. As for his master, he never came near the place. He lived in Madrid. (Here my pessimist entered into details unnecessary to be set down as to the method in which the young man spent his portion of goods in a far country. It was the one mentioned in Scripture.) So long as one let him alone the steward cared little, even when he was sober, and not at all when he was drunk. Meantime - what would you? He swept well - none praised him. He left the leaves to cumber the paths. None blamed him. In the meanwhile there was tobacco, and on saints' days a bota of wine. His wife was dead - of course, because he had wanted her to live. Yes,

he had loved her. As it happened to the wise man so it happened to the fool. He saw no difference. No, his conscience did not ask any more of him than that he should spend his wages as he made them. And at the last - well, that which befalleth a dog befalleth also a man. One grave was as comfortable as another.

'The priests?' - Ah - bah - he had had service with a priest once. It was vain to talk to him of priests. He knew. They also sucked the apple when it was ripe, even as other men - and why not? You put a bota of Val-de-Peñas to a dead man's mouth, will he drink? Drink then while you can, be you priest or porter! That was my sweeper's thought of it. The Bishop? They said he was a good man. The Bishop had spoken to him as he walked along his master's walks, reading his priest's book. He often came there - a very respectable man and nowise proud. The thing might be as they said - but for him, since God had taken his wife, the only thing that he had ever asked of Him - well - he had done with God! If the priests spoke true, carai! - he would not be worse off than Father So-and-so and Brother That-Other. All the world knew what they were. He had not chick nor child, sister, mother, nor wife. For what else then should a man work but for himself? What profit was there in his life? Let me answer that.

I had not Spanish enough to confute this new-old preacher. Nor if I had possessed all the words of the Velasquez, his lexicon, I am not sure that I could. Though I would have tried.

However, it was fated in my kismet book that I should have time to bethink me after the adventures of those nights on the mountains, when the joy of life bubbled all about me like a boiling pot, when human energy reached out to match itself with human restriction and enactment, chiefly for the pleasure of the risk.

I had begun my day with the bending Christian folk in the dim cathedral, the hum of prayer, the click of beads let fall by the faithful, in hopes that by their continual dropping they might wear the pavement of heaven. Then I had come on a gardener - of Adam's ancient trade and possibly also of the first man's most ancient faith. So now by the wayside I met yet another philosopher, with a scheme of his own - a philosopher with long ears, the longest I had ever seen manifest upon philosophic head.

BY THE WAYSIDE I MET YET ANOTHER PHILOSOPHER

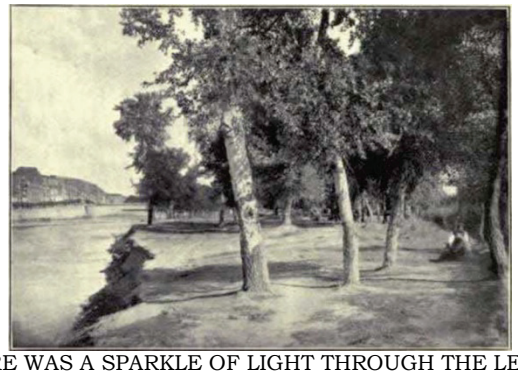
He was a donkey who had broken his tether. He had found a good bank of grass, fenced about with succulent reed, enduring bedstraw, and spiced with the thistle of his ancestors. He had all at command. His sides were plump with the fulness of them. The clear water of a canal was on the other side of the way to drink from when he was athirst. Cudgel had thwacked his sides, and would do so again. But he had forgotten the past and had never learned to forecast the future, wherein he was the better philosopher. His mind to him a kingdom was - the realm of the present. It was shut in by twitch grass, barriered by ground ivy, and down the long vista which is futurity he would see only infinite thistle and infinite wild teasle. Death - he had never even heard of that. He had, indeed, seen things that lay still - things that the futile Two-legged put into deep holes. But these were only asleep, and too wise to waken. Besides, the like would never happen to him. No such luck, indeed! He had to be roused up that his panniers might be placed astride his back, and sometimes his master would mount up behind - but why think of such things? Had he

yet eaten all the thistles? No? What was that large Two-legged doing, standing before him with a black box under its arm? Was there corn in that box - anything to eat? No? What then did the Two-legged mean by taking up a philosopher's time? Onward then - thistles in front of him, thistles to right of him, thistles to left of him, thistles within him! Worlds and worlds of thistles without end! Amen!

And perhaps I had now happened upon the oldest religion of all - at any rate, that which is still the commonest.

But in so brave a world it was time to get back to life and - my own thistles. For are there not dream thistles also? City of Dream is only one particular thistle which seems to me sweeter than all the others.

I was soon on the banks of the river - a still sweetly-flowing river, most un-Spanish-looking, full from bank to bank with the melting of the fresh snow on the mountains, a little drumly certainly from the caving banks further up, but in the main quiet and large and purposeful. Only, happily, there was nothing for it to do in or about this City of Dream - no mills to turn, no paper to wash, no power to generate. A few women, constant at their scrubbing-boards, made with their tongues, sufficiently far off, a pleasant clatter of sound. Otherwise merely silence and the wash of water.



THERE WAS A SPARKLE OF LIGHT THROUGH THE LEAVES

Crossing an ancient bridge I found myself upon a deserted river bank - long alleys of white poplars, here and there a rough wooden seat. There was a sparkle of light through the leaves, a sudden coolness, then a running wave of silver as the wind flashed their undersides into view. No old-world glooms, or death-in-life philosophies here, but wind and earth and water making merry as of old, after the fashion the Greeks knew for the Way of the Gods.

Two men seated under the shade looked inquiringly at my camera and at me, but I had had enough of my species for one day. They might be philosophers, or preachers in disguise, or only plain-song donkeys. At any rate, I gave them a wide berth, including them, however, in my picture to show that there were others as idle as I that day in the precincts of the City of Dream.

Then I sat down and dreamed undisguisedly in an open glade, looking across at the battlemented castle, seen over a foreground of river reeds and tall oleander tufts. From here El Seo seemed more dreamlike than ever, a 'rose-red city half as old as time,' passing mysterious in the sweet open silence of the forenoon - the river sheeted silver at its feet, and the sky of a full and perfect blue above. Actual larks were singing above the meadow-flats. I might have been in Scotland, save for the rosy towers of the cathedral, the cinnamon-coloured soil, and the untouched bloom of antiquity which was upon every work of man that I could see.

THE BATTLEMENTED CASTLE, SEEN OVER A FOREGROUND OF RIVER REEDS

Ah, these strange contrasts of Spain! Who that hath seen remembers not the arid dusty city with its wondrous opaline hues - the parched brickyard about the gates - then a sudden plunge into a valley, the gleam of silver, the rustle of trees - you look about, and lo! you might be in England.

What makes the difference? Water - only water. The Spaniards have lost or thrown away most of their old Moorish legacy, but this they have kept. They understand the art of irrigation. That little three-foot wide canal, draining the river more remorselessly than the wisest sangrador ever let loose from Salamanca, made to grow the crops over yonder that are already ripe and harvested, though to English notions it is yet the springtime of the year. Even as I sit the breeze from the north strikes cool, and like a flash the rows of dusky willows turn silver-grey, and the larks are blown about the sky on a wandering wind-gust from the gorges behind - some back-swirl doubtless of the long unwearying mistral of Provence which is now breaking itself in vain against the barrier of the Pyrenees.

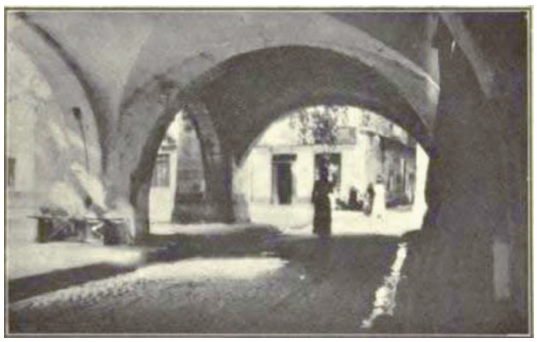
THE WIND TURNS THE DUSK WILLOWS SILVER GREY

The breeze is grateful, so grateful that while it lasts I climb back again to the plateau on which stands the citadel, complete outwardly to the eye, but in reality a mere shell, with a few companies of artillerymen camping in one corner of its vast and ruinous buildings - sans ammunition, sans guns, sans everything except ill-kept uniforms and unlimited time in which to smoke cigarettes. How different these fellows are from the Guardias Civiles in their smart uniforms, as spick and span as though they put them on fresh and fresh every morning. But indeed it was an evil time for soldiering in Spain. Cuba was daily costing the lives of her best and bravest, ground between the millstones of an evil past and an effete present. I doubt not that these two score of poor lads were glad enough to be left to rough it in the quietest corner of the old castle of El Seo. Far from railways, with the War Office administration at Madrid in a state of senile collapse, I question if anybody even thought of them. They were certainly forgotten at El Seo. Nor did they in the least desire to be remembered. They blew no trumpets. They fired no sunset gun. The very sentry at the entrance betook himself within when he saw a visitor approaching. The door was shut, and had you been the commander-in-chief himself (especially if you had been the commander-in-chief) there would have been for you no admission.

Back into the town again! I had been afoot so early that it was still only shaking itself awake. My matutinal friends of the dusky cathedral were doubtless but workpeople and countrywomen come in to market. For naturally the City of Dream lies long abed. Even at

ten o'-the-clock they were only sweeping the cigar-ends out of last night's cafés. The boys who did it were rubbing their eyes. And small wonder, for three in the morning had not seen them in their beds. The arcades of the streets were still invincibly gloomy. The morning puddles had not yet dried in the gutters, and by more than one sense a stranger was informed that in the City of Dream all was not illusion.

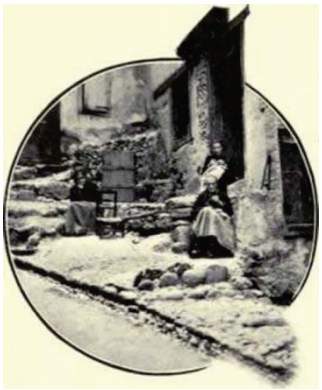
But still the enchantment held, in spite of odours quasi-mediæval. One could not proceed a score of yards without coming on a wooden overhanging balcony, a reach of brilliantly coloured tiles, a Moorish courtyard, or a charming characteristic group seated by the wayside.



THE ARCADES OF THE STREET WERE STILL INVINCIBLY GLOOMY

Generally the younger women, if such there were, put up their hands to their faces or fled (not to the willows) with shrieks of simulated laughter. For the younger generation of Spain, even in the City of Dream, knows very well what a camera is. Though, as I think, mine was the first of English make that had ever penetrated thither.

But it was otherwise with the elders. Sometimes an old woman would cross herself hastily, muttering the while, lest the black box should contain some imp of mischief. Mostly, however, they sat sternly sober, calm as mothers in Israel in the presence of unknown bewitchments. It would not do to tell them first that they were being photographed, still less to ask their permission, at least not before the shutter clicked. That must wait. But, once done, a courteous word, a lift of the hat, a smile, worked their way in the City of Dream as elsewhere throughout the world.



THEY SAT STERNLY SOBER, CALM AS MOTHERS IN ISRAEL

It was early afternoon before the sleepy streets awoke a little. Not that El Seo became even then any less a City of Dream. Indeed, I think its afternoon mood was perhaps the most dreamlike of all. The sun was still high, and had at last vanquished the morning haze. Every particle of mist had been chased away. Heat and light filled the narrow streets as water fills a jug. All was a feast of colour - the many coloured hangings, the striped awnings, the bright print dresses of the girls at the street corners, the red and white Tam-o'-shanters of the boys (mere imps of darkness, they!) made up a scene like some old untheatric fairyland - perhaps that which one imagined long ago couched in the corner of the garret over a first entrancing perusal of Sinbad the Sailor.

HEAT AND LIGHT FILLED THE NARROW STREETS

To my good henchman, Biño, El Seo was not in the least a City of Dream - unless, that is, the excellent fellow dreamed while he slept. He had been up betimes to make a cup of coffee, but when he brought it he had appeared so 'dozen' with interrupted slumber that I ordered him instanter back to bed. He was still asleep when I peeped in upon him at noon, but when I returned for some fresh 'Edward's' films he had vanished, and it need not be said (to those who know a Spanish posada) that no one in the house had the least idea where he had gone. Now I had never asked Biño any questions as to his family affairs. I knew, of course, that he had a family - a father, brothers, but he was naturally as well as racially reticent, and I had put no questions to him as to his immediate state, married or single. He had, however, given me the idea of a man who cared little about women. So far as I knew he twanged his guitar admirably, but exclusively in male society. He had been only distantly polite to Doña Carmen at San Severino, but that might proceed from a consciousness of difference of station. He had abused Don John for a young fool - a colt unhaltered, on account of his night-running adventures. But now, looking from the window of the comedor, while waiting one of the tardive meals of Spain, I saw Biño, bareheaded, in his blouse and sandals, carrying water for a tall peasant girl.

My Dream City had taken on reality for one person, at least. Without spying upon my friend I took occasion to sit on the side of the table, which, through a window, gave me a vista of the little fountain. Something, it appeared, had stopped the flow, whereupon handy Biño went off at once to a plumber's shop, and, borrowing a tool, restored the water to its channel. That was the French blood in him. A Spaniard would have waited (that is, the average Spaniard) till the municipality, being moved by resolution had acted in the matter - and meanwhile all the women would contentedly have gone a quarter of a mile further on and waited their turn at the next fountain. But Biño wasted no time. As he worked he talked, and I could see the girl smile responsively. It was an idyll - or at least the opening page of one.

BINO AND THE PEASEANT GIRL AT THE FOUNTAIN

Still more idyllic was it when, the pitchers being filled to the brim (indeed absent-mindedly to the overflowing), Biño took them up and strode off with them round the corner of the street, the girl walking quietly enough by his side and looking up in his face as they

went. Such brazen resolution in the face of very day I had never seen in Spain. It also must have come from the Ariège, where on fête days you can still see the Gothic blood pink on the cheeks and blond in the hair of the peasant folk.

At this I laughed softly to myself, and looked up proverbial phrases out of Don Quijote and the dictionary wherewith to tease my companion upon his entrance, not knowing that in a little while I should have quite other matters on my mind. For at that moment Pablo, the generally invisible factotum of the posada, burst in upon me with a rush, as one who would say, 'Flee, my lord, the bailiffs are upon you!'

'There is an officer in waiting,' he cried, 'with an equipaje!'

THE GIRL LOOKING UP IN HIS FACE AS THEY WENT

I could not for the moment make out whether he meant 'equipage' or 'baggage.' In either case it was sufficiently alarming. For I had no luggage of any kind nearer than San Severino, and any officer 'with an equipage' must certainly have arrived at the Posada of the Sun for the purpose of conveying a certain ex-smuggler to prison!

But no! The equipage was of the true ancient Spanish sort. It was no prison van. A noble coche it proved to be, harnessed to a couple of mules by the collars. Steps of wrought-iron depended from the sides, while the dreaded 'officer' proved to be the very functionary whom I had seen and spoken with that morning at the cathedral door. Judging by its size the coach ought to have been drawn by six mules instead of two, but as I had never yet seen any road in the vicinity of El Seo practicable for wheels, I judged that the journey could not be a long one. But the visit of the one coach in the town to the humble Posada of the Sun was not without its effect on the neighbourhood. My stock of credit, previously low, went up on the moment. Heads protruded from every neighbouring window, and as I stood on the doorstep opening the large square envelope, my threadbare grey tweed suit, which had hardly gained me admission yesterday, still dripping after my recent passage of the river, must have seemed transfigured. The Amo of the Posada del Sol himself came bowing to the door. He had, it seemed, been entertaining angels unawares.

My letter was no less than an invitation from the Bishop for the English Señor to visit him! I stood in a quandary. I could not refuse a dignitary of the Church, and yet - I glanced down at my attire. Like Huckleberry Finn of affectionate memory, I felt that I was not 'dressed fittin'.' But at this moment Biño came in sight, having at the thunderous alarm of the equipaje made a hasty end of his water-carrying. To him, forgetting the witty sentences I had prepared for the occasion, I propounded my difficulty.

'Go,' he said, 'very likely it is the suit of clothes he wishes chiefly to see.'

This could not be called flattering, but it was certainly reassuring. Excusing myself to the macero in the cocked hat, I ran upstairs hastily and made what toilet I could. Luckily I had bought a clean collar in the town, so with hair in order and my coat buttoned, what linen I had secured with a safety pin, I presented at least the upper half of a fairly respectable appearance. But there was no help for the alpargatas. They had to act as dress shoes on this occasion, for the good reason that I possessed no others, nor were there any of my size in that town. A pair of pocket scissors, used freely to trim the fringes from the lower extremities of my trousers, gave a final (and necessary) touch of elegance to my appearance. My checked tweed cap was certainly not respectable, for it had been used to lift hot pannikins off the fire, to hold frying-pans in the blaze, to clean pens, and to perform other menial offices. I therefore kept the man-of-office waiting while I darted into the

nearest shop and procured a more respectable hat, in which, however, had I appeared in the Strand or Fleet Street, I should immediately have found myself arrested for the most dangerous of anarchists. But all's well that ends well! The severe correctness and dignity of the final result won a nod even from the official beadle and coachman of El Seo.

The Bishop, it seems, was not at his town residence, but at his country house, an old monastery in which, by grace of the Government, he had been permitted to furnish a few rooms in the plainest fashion. It was by the riverside, and a little winding path mounted behind it which led up to the ruined citadel of El Seo.

The honour of the Bishop's coach at my service was doubtless a great one, but certainly it would have been vastly more comfortable to have gone that distance upon my feet. For the pavements of El Seo were but ill adapted for vehicles, while the river road alternated between torrent bed and slough of despond. The bridge, however, was a fine one with two noble arches, and the walls of the old convent rose immediately beyond.

The coach drove into the courtyard and stopped. I got out and stood on the clean cold cloisters more ashamed of my appearance than ever. I was buttoned up to the neck, precisely like those shirtless gentlemen who solicit a temporary half-crown loan at street corners, and I presented the same mean and slinking appearance. I was glad, however, that my hair, at least, was uncompromisingly long. At least I was free from that suspicion. But I had no great while to wait. There, at a door which gave a glimpse of garden greenery beyond, stood the Bishop of El Seo. He was wrapped about in a great cloak, though the day was now warm, and in the sun even hot.

'I bid you welcome to La Delicia,' he said, in good English. And then, seeing my astonishment, he added smiling, 'I have resided in your country - long ago, in the time of the troubles.'

In another moment he had held out his hand to me, which, remembering what I had heard of the respect due to great ecclesiastics in Spain, I would have stooped to kiss. But he repeated, smiling, 'I have been in England - and I prefer your 'shake-hand!"

THE BRIDGE WAS A FINE ONE, WITH TWO NOBLE ARCHES

In a few minutes we were walking confidentially together in the old monastery garden, part of which the Bishop cultivated, working there sometimes with his own hands, though the greater part was still a tangle of weeds, roses, and clambering vines rising almost breast-high, right to the walls of the cloister.

The Bishop of El Seo as I now saw him was a man of seventy, but save when much wearied or troubled, his brightness of eye and the vivacity of his speech betokened a much younger man. Nevertheless the care with which he sat down on the benches, and the little stiff hitch with which he raised himself again, advertised the man well stricken in years.

It was not long before the Bishop of El Seo opened the campaign.

'You were in the cathedral this morning?' he said, gently leaning his hand on my arm as we walked.

I nodded without speech. I knew what was coming.

'You are of the Faith?' he went on, a little tremulously.

'Of the Faith, but not of the Church!' said I. The hand on my arm fluttered. The Bishop sighed a low gentle sigh. I think he had hoped against hope, knowing me of the English nation.

'But you had our Book?' he continued, gently querulous, almost reproachful. 'You kneeled at our service?'

'It is a good book,' I said, 'and it is good to kneel, if so be the heart kneel also. There is but one God!'

He bowed his head. Under the heavy black cloak the fingers of his other hand were

busy with his beads – or mayhap with his crucifix. Was he at prayer for the heretic, this gentle Bishop?'

'One God,' he said sweetly with a gentle childlike intonation, 'yes, there is one God, but who knows the Way to Him? Is it not better to trust Holy Church?'

I was silent. I knew that he spoke much more to himself than to me. But he was in no wise offended, for he leaned more and more heavily on my arm. We were following a little path amid euphorbias and ilex oaks, a path which led upward to a point of rock pleasantly carpeted with juniper, close-set with little green balls, from which we looked down on one side upon the buildings of the old convent, and away to the left to the indented sky-line of El Seo, its Cathedral, citadel, and high-piled town.

The Bishop was breathless when we reached the little rustic seat. He smiled up at me as he sank down, pressing his hand to his side.

'An old man,' he said, 'aye, an old man! I come not here often, only when I have a stranger. For this is our peculiar treasure - the delight of La Delicia!'

Then his thoughts reverted to the Breviary.

'And you read our book? Strange - and yet withal you believe it not - still stranger!'

'My father,' I said, 'I read it with reverence, not as a task but because it is a good book, loving and true - a book of books.'

'Ah,' he said, looking through the dwarf poplars to where the old bell of the monastery, which had so often called the faithful to prayers, now hung rusty and silent in its open tower, 'when I was young, for a little time I thought, like you, to pick and choose. Now I am wiser. Once I possessed one of your English Bibles. I looked often therein. I read it, fearing greatly, and, truth to tell, I saw nothing wrong. But that was my ignorance, for our Holy Church condemned it - so - I parted with it.'

'Let me send you another - bound like the Breviary you saw this morning! You are a Bishop now and can decide for yourself!'

'AN OLD MAN' HE SAID, 'AYE, AN OLD MAN!'

I could see the good simple prelate hang a moment on the apex of a temptation. Then he shook his head.

'I thank you,' he said; 'in a way you are right. No book would do harm to so old a man; but to conceal it would hurt my heart! Yet - your English leather binding is certainly very beautiful - soft as silk. We have none like it.'

His fingers worked as it caressing a book. I noted the action, and my heart made a resolve. If he would not have a Bible he should at least possess a binding. I knew that 'purring' movement of the fingers of the true book-lover. The Oxford-bound Breviary would never quit El Seo. So much was clear to me.

'You are of Scotland,' he continued; 'I thought (he hesitated, anxious not give offence) that the type of religion there was hard and cold.'

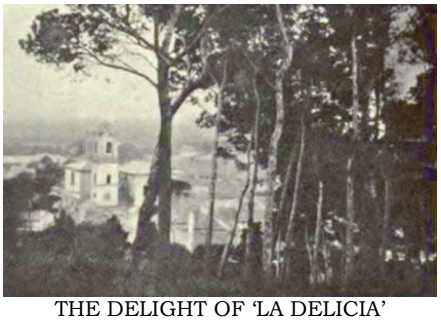
'My father,' I said, seeking how best to answer him, 'it is not hid from you that religion is not a thing of the nation but of the individual. As to that, are there not hearts warm and hearts cold - even in Spain?'

He shook his head gently and pensively. 'Ah, many, many are the cold hearts in Spain. Many, even in Holy Church, seek only things of earth!'

'So,' said I, 'is it in Scotland - so also throughout the world. Yet better is any religion than none. For even weak ones and foolish ones may walk with feet that stumble, yet with eyes that look upward.'

He caught my meaning, and nodding his head, interpreted it after his own fashion. "Tu es Petrus" he said. "Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-Jona - sinner, liar, blasphemer - yet,

because thou didst repent, on thee shall I build my church.' There is more hope for a great sinner than for the man just in his own sight.'



THE DELIGHT OF 'LA DELICIA'

Again he crossed himself, resting with closed eyes for a moment. His gentle face, full of a generous refinement, was turned away from me. I felt that it was good to be in the presence of a man 'on terms with his God,' as the old Covenanters would have said. To give him time, I walked to the parapet and stood looking down on the ruined monastery of La Delicia. I could see the exact spot where the Bishop's attempt at cultivation had stopped. The rest of the pleasance was weedy, overgrown, broken-down. But at my feet there was a patch sweet and clean, of a simple usefulness, like the man himself - whose work was on the earth and whose hope in the heavens.

Good is it for a man to stand with his hat off in the presence of that which he knows to be better than himself, to salute with what of reverence is in him, unworldly aims, simple apostolic life. It was good to stand and see what true religion and undefiled can do - in every land and under all creeds. The Roman prelate reminded me of certain I had known in Scotland - poor contented ministers, continually zealous of good works. He made me think of Cameronian herds on Galloway hills, men who abhorred the very name of Rome, yet who, with the Bishop of El Seo, 'had a firm grip upon the fundamentals.' This man's Chief End was certainly to glorify God and to keep himself unspotted from the world - his sufficient work to visit the village priests throughout his remote little diocese, and to bless the children that were brought to him. What more happy life or more Christ-like than that of the Catholic Bishop of El Seo! I had met a good man who believed his creed, who acted out his preaching to the letter. Laus Deo! The salt of the earth hath not yet lost its savour, and not all men have ceased to hear the still small voice.

Presently the Bishop called me to him. He had returned to certain practical matters which had been troubling him.

'How is it,' he asked, 'that you can see and respect the things that are good amongst us, yet your country, men have spoken so much evil of the Church Catholic in Spain? Oh (he continued, seeing my surprise), I have read your books - as I say, when I was younger. Even now I remember the book of the adventures of 'Don Jorge'!'

'Borrow,' said I, with a sudden flash of something like religious enthusiasm (of the literary sort), 'you have read Borrow?'

It had not struck me before that there were two points of view, equally tenable, as to 'The Bible in Spain.'

The Bishop nodded. I tried to reassure him. 'You must not mind what good old Borrow says,' I urged. 'There are few institutions in his own land of which he did not speak as hard things as ever he said of the Spanish Church Catholic. When Don Jorge had a stick in his hand, and saw a head before him, his rule was to hit it - and afterwards to inquire to whom it belonged.'

'Then,' continued the Bishop, 'there was one who wrote a book of many journeyings in our country - a good book, a true book, as to things that are seen - one Don Richard Ford. I have remembered his name exactly. And he spoke evil of our saints and our ceremonies, finding them all pagan and unchristian, even as the saturnalia of heathen Rome!'

I had to admit that this, to a certain extent, was true also. But I assured the Bishop that Mr. Ford had come to Spain so filled with classic lore and tradition, that he was ready to see what he looked for.

'If Mr. Ford had been a student of the Moslem literature instead of a classical scholar,' I went on, 'he would have seen, what is indeed much more apparent, traces of the Moors

everywhere throughout Spain!'

The Bishop looked up quickly, a 'gleg' and quizzical light glinting in his dark eyes.

'Ah,' he said, 'and is that your theory? Will you, when you come to write a book on our poor land, find that everything with the true Iberian borrachera - everything that tastes of the right Spanish wine-skin, is but the leavings of the Moro, the scouring of the pots of El Islam?'

Again I reassured him, and he became again gently pensive, which was his proper mood; but the doubtful humour of controversy did not wholly leave him for some time.

'You will tell them of my carriage, doubtless?' he questioned, 'you will set that down to the desire for display of a Spanish Bishop. It is true, in the days before Mendizabal, my predecessors drove six snow-white mules in that same coach, whereas I am glad of two. And I would be yet gladder if I could make firewood of it altogether. But the good people of El Seo would not hold me for a true Bishop if I did. They would pull off my ring and throw my crozier behind the fire, if they saw me sally forth on festival days without my coach. So I have to keep it, but indeed and indeed it costs little. For Baltasar, the beadle of the cathedral, drives it, and there is enough good mule-feed in the garden of La Delicia for a full grandee's team, instead of my poor two!'

I reassured him as to my intentions, and said that if ever I should write a book about Spain, I would deal most tenderly both with his episcopal carriage and with the Church in Spain - which indeed I think I have done, especially with the former.

We went down presently, and there on the plain deal table of the refectory, scoured speckless, but without covering of linen, was served a humble repast of wheaten bread and herbs and honey. In my favour a pottle of wine was added. I could see the versatile Baltasar watching surreptitiously from a distant doorway to make sure that we found all in order.

We sat and chatted pleasantly, now in English and now in French, eking out any misunderstanding with a Spanish or Latin word, but on the whole comprehending each other very well. The good man was greatly interested in my hand-camera, and especially so when I assured him that it was made by a friend of mine, a Spaniard of Valladolid, at present living in London. He was eager to see specimens of its art, and enthusiastic as to the uses which might be made of the strange contrivance, so easily carried and so clear in the results - as he remarked judiciously, 'far above painting.'

'For in painting with a brush,' he commented naively, 'I can never see the resemblance. But with the photograph it is different. Even Baltasar there could recognise a picture of his own cathedral. With pictures made by hand, not so - that is difficult even to an educated man.'

Luckily I had with me a few prints of Poblet, Ripoll, Montblanch, and other holy places of Spain. These interested him, but not nearly so much as a series of children romping knee-deep in flowers in Scottish meadows. I could see his eye brighten. The last of all showed a little maid munching a biscuit on a winter's day, muffled to the neck in fur, the snow flecking her boots and lying in the folds of her gaiters. This took his fancy amazingly.

He returned to it again and again, and when I was putting them up in their case I found him with that picture still in his hand. Whereupon I offered it to him, and, since you must always press anything on a Spaniard if you really wish him to accept it, I offered it twice and thrice. I could easily make another, I said. Half he was in the mind to accept. I saw the yielding on his face.

But he put it away finally with the gentlest possible negation of head and hand.

'No,' he said, 'I am an old man - and - my thoughts must be of the things that yet remain to be accomplished.'

He bade me good-bye on the outer step of the little door of La Delicia, bending and kissing me on either cheek.

'Let me look once more at your little Scottish girl,' he said, as if with an after-thought, 'she who smiles because her cake is sweet. Ah,' (he cried, taking the picture in his hands, with a caressing delicacy), 'may the Bread of Life be sweet also to her soul!'

He looked long at it. I cannot tell what old buried thoughts were fragrant in his own at that moment. I did not look carefully at his eyes. Of his own accord he put the picture back in the packet with a sigh. Then, turning, he gave me his final blessing.

There was no coach this time. I think the Bishop had forgotten, for I saw Baltasar running furiously in the direction of the stable. But I had no wish to be overtaken or to

rumble through the streets after the two mules. So I turned me aside up the hill which rose steeply behind La Delicia, and scrambled back to the town by the goat's path which led along the ancient fortifications, now crumbling and desolate. There were thoughts in my heart which I wanted to think out. For it is not every day that, all unexpectedly, in the hither and thither of the adventurer's life, one meets an altogether gentle gentleman - the fine flower of true religion and undefiled.

At the hill-top I sat and looked long at the gardens of La Delicia. I could see the figure of the Bishop walking slowly up and down the one cleared path, his hands behind his back, his head bent. At times he stopped, and taking something out of his breast he held it to his lips.

Perhaps it was the crucifix. Perhaps not. At all events I wondered what the picture of a little child, one whom he had never seen, had to do with it.

This is a brief adventure, yet I can write no more tonight. I do not wish to mix the outer world with my memories of the truly holy and reverend father in God, Armandus, once Bishop of El Seo, in the archdiocese of Tarragona.

It was the Sabbath evening, and I felt that no strictest Calvinist could take up his testimony against me for misspending it. From the charitable I had learned charity. I had walked with one who ordered his conversation aright, and who, as a reward, had seen the salvation of God. A man, a sinner, had walked with the godly, underneath trees planted by rivers of waters. And lo! the sweetest and most heavenly thing we had seen together that day, was the smile upon the face of a little child.

You have been reading a chapter from *The Adventurer in Spain* first published in serial form in 1902 and book form in 1903. This chapter is part of the 'Discovering Crockett's Europe' project by the Galloway Raiders. To find out more about Crockett and his work visit our website www.gallowayraiders.co.uk

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