

## OLD CASTILE

‘**T**EMPORA mutantur . . . .’ Vergil knew the proverb; yet what a theme for his idyllic muse had he foreseen the restoration of the crumbled ruins of his Tiber city to recall the Golden Age! Even Nemi must be drained for its gold and galleons . . . . ‘Tempora mutantur . . . .’ There is a hungering for the charm of antiquity, a charm which progress cannot destroy. Nor is it peculiarly Roman. The castles and cathedrals of Old England, signs of a lingering greatness, call to the heart of every genuine traveller with the same age-old voice.

Older civilizations, too, are not without this attraction. What of Spain, relic of the Ice Age, one might say? There is no need to resurrect her former glory by excavative endeavour, for the Plaza de Toros still rears its lofty, red-brick walls in disdain over the presumptive football ground that has ranged alongside. The gaudy artistry of cigar-box lids has yet its inspiration; the mantilla still survives, on occasion, the ubiquitous toque; nor has the automobile altogether ousted the bullock-cart off the country lane.

Of course, one does not realise this immediately. Every country has its own type of ‘red tapestry,’ and at Irun one makes acquaintance with the peculiar Spanish texture. It is a nuisance. International relationship seems to demand it. But why, in these enlightened days?

Then, the fresh beauty of the Pyrenean scenery soothes one’s ruffled feelings, and Iberia’s stronghold is entered. Not without some disappointment, though. After the mountains have exercised their exotic influence, and the red-tiled roofs have slipped away, come the long, monotonous stretches of grey sand

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which make up the Castilian plateau. Here is a typical village, dun-coloured, adobe, clinging to the grey hill-side. There, a high church with a flat-topped tower. A pretty etching it would make, you imagine. But the reality . . . horrid! The train goes through a level crossing where patient bullocks stand and chew, waiting for the signal-woman to open the gates. And so on into the heart of Castile.

Since that first impression, acquaintance has given birth to intimacy, and a lurking affection for the be-draggled countryside has grown, almost unheeded.

Viana de Cega, for instance, is typical of scores of other villages. From the window of the dining-car one catches a glimpse of shallow river, quaint streets of thatched, adobe hovels, then the squat church, as graceless a structure as one could meet anywhere. Then it is gone, hidden quickly in the heat-haze of noon. Easily forgotten. Yet who will deny the charm of a ruined cottage, festooned with clematis and wild roses? There are several. There are pretty gardens, too, and curious shops which sell everything, like the Post Office in the Irish village. More taverns than one would consider necessary. The outlook over the railway line has never embellished lurid posters. Yet the vine-furrowed hills and waving fields of wheat and Indian corn are pretty enough. When night falls there are nightingales, the eternal whisper of the pine trees, housetops, snowy beneath the torrential moonlight. The flowers have lost their colour. But who would ask for it just then, with all those textures of shadow, from filmy darkness to black velvet?

And, what of the inhabitants? On slight acquaintance they are easily misunderstood, for, like all country folk, they are of a retiring disposition, and do not at once take kindly to strangers. Brown and wrinkled features (how soon these people age!) hold a hint of curiosity which must be satisfied before friendly rela-

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tions can be established. Not till then does one notice the merry spark of humour that kindles lives tediously employed in the culture of the stony earth. They live frugally, date their sowings and reapings by the calendar of the Saints, honour Saint Roch as their village patron, and hold their *fiestas* with time-honoured celebrations of wine and song. The '*dolce far niente*' spirit that characterises the Castilian peasantry is responsible here, as elsewhere, for the lack of prosperity amongst the small-farmer communities. Here, after all, the times do not change so quickly. Antiquated methods are still employed. The old flint-studded board, oxen-drawn, still grinds the corn. The Georgics once again!

From Viana one travels, by way of Puente Duero, through an odoriferous pine forest to Simancas. For quite an appreciable distance the sturdy growth obscures the view, and it becomes increasingly difficult to keep bearings fixed. Then suddenly a wide lane (they say that Wellington made it) cleaves the trees, and the castle towers and battlements leap into view. This relic of Spain's mediaeval glory is perched perilously on a hill-side, with the green water of the Pisuerga coursing below. 'Relic' is the exact term. For now use and disuse have come to terms, and of glory there is none to be seen. A bridle-path leads up from the stone bridge of many arches. And so one enters the village.

The castle is of conventional style and effective architecture, with an encircling moat which is now nothing more than a grassy trough eight or ten feet deep. In the days of Ferdinand and Isabella this northern stronghold was razed in a Moorish siege. Whether in attestation of this historical connexion or not, local history makes no mention, the castle has since been re-built, and now houses the archives of Castile. Here there is a special tit-bit for the English

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tourist. For, amongst the miscellany that one expects to find in such a place, there is carefully preserved the marriage certificate of Henry the Eighth of England and the unhappy Catherine of Aragon. The unsophisticated guide still finds a childish delight in showing it off. And over his evening *copita* of wine in the village inn, of which here again there are several, the stolidity or marked effusion with which you greeted his display will, no doubt, be discussed.

Inside the castle it is comparatively dark. A fact which enables you to realise that one of the loveliest things in Spain is its light. It is always lovely, but different is the fragile loveliness of dawn from the thick light of afternoon, and from the incandescence of the night.

Simancas has recently leapt into a new kind of fame. Roman Ostia and Ur of the Chaldees shall not outdo this unobtrusive corner of Europe. Excavations in the vicinity have brought to light the site of an Iberian camp. Vases and ornaments of that age have confirmed original suspicions, and more extensive excavations are now being carried on under the auspices of the National University.

From Simancas one travels north for a distance of eight miles by the state road to Valladolid, the centre of a flourishing agrarian district, and capital of Old Castile in the early days of Philip II. The town is rich in historical association, whilst modern civilisation adds an enhancing charm to the relics of a former greatness which it cannot altogether obliterate. Besides being the scene of the brilliant courts in which Philip so excelled, it has the proud distinction of having housed Cervantes in a quaint house in the Calle Miguel Iscar. A mural tablet in the Calle de Colon marks the spot where Columbus died in the wretchedness and poverty which a jealous court meted out to him.

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This, of course, is history. More recently Valladolid claimed vulgar renown as the muddiest town in Castile. At least so I was informed on the train coming down from the frontier. Now it is hard to believe. The quiet accumulation of trade prosperity, so foreign to the general European depression, is bidding everywhere for better sanitary accommodation. The wisdom of peace, and one can discount the exaggerated, internecine party strife, is being made, slowly but surely, manifest. The day when civic improvements meet the requirements of the suburbs and the countryside is not so far away. What a charm the trees add to the city! Fortunately there is no danger of their removal, in spite of the overhead electric wires. Trees in this blazing city are a necessity. And as for fountains, they, too, are practically essential. The movement of water, the flash, the music! The life, gushing from blocks of stone. The long, slender jet, the shower of pattering spray. How well it all fits in with the colour of the buildings, the sunshine, the cobalt sky.

High, narrow streets, beloved of the art-photographer by reason of the cleaving shadows, frame many corners of architectural beauty. The University buildings, the museum, housing its priceless collection of Spanish art, the façade of the Dominican church of San Pablo, cruelly scarred by Napoleon, are all fascinating works of mediaeval art.

Herr Baedeker will tell you that Valladolid is an Archiepiscopal seat of some considerable importance, and, thus impressed, you naturally look for a cathedral, the magnificence of which suggests not only the importance of the Archdiocese, but embodies much that was precious to the mediaeval architect as well. If you arrive from the north you expect something like the flowery Gothic edifice that has made Burgos a favourite halting-place. Should you travel from the

Seville Exhibition and break your journey at Toledo, some image of that cathedral still lingers on, perhaps, with a hope that is, alas, not to be realised. Strangely enough, the present cathedral is, mathematically speaking, an ideal which has only quarter materialised. There can, however, be no doubt that its completion would have placed a monumental work in the field of mediaeval architecture.

Yet who admires such potential conquests? Whether from lack of financial aid, patronage, or whatever else was required in those days to build a church, I cannot say, but the intended cruciform structure was abandoned on the completion of a single gigantic arm. Herrera, the architect, fled in disgust, but lived to realise his ideal in the Augustinian monastery church at the Escorial.

In the cathedral quarter of the city we meet pleasant gardens, and arcades of stone pillars, gnarled and chipped with age and wear, supporting the ubiquitous balconies. It is only in such a setting that the shops can exist at all, or at least make an effective display of wares, for how would the fashionable window decorations endure the destroying sunshine, were it not for such shade as the arcades give? Here and there a café has made its egress into the open street, and occasionally one catches the modern strains of dance music issuing from within. It is something very novel, this clashing of old and new. One meets it everywhere. Even the haughty Castilian beauties of the cigar-box lids, with their laces and mantillas, have yielded place to the '*petites dames*' fashionably attired, not in their own flowing laces and shawls, but in the abbreviated attire of twentieth century fashion.

It is in the great, gaunt churches, of which there is a surprising number, where one recovers something of a lost atmosphere. San Pablo, Santiago, the Antigua, Santa Cruz, with all their massive pillars and arches,

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and tumble-down altars, grotesque with Spanish artistry, seem like rugged strongholds of the undying-conservative spirit of the ages.

Twentieth century Spain is a land of transition where cosmopolitan ideals are working themselves out to the detriment of historical association. And yet, perhaps, this is saying more than the strict truth warrants. For, after all, the spirit which is resurrecting Roman glories from the dust of antiquity is alive here, too; and, although the old proverb has been relegated to the earlier pages of the Latin grammar, the very humane sympathy which first evoked it, with a sigh, we imagine, augurs as little change as does humanity itself.

T. D. SHEILS.

### AT COMMUNION

**N**OW love to this unloving breast  
Has come, abandoning a throne;  
And trustful as a child at rest  
He lays His head—upon a stone.

The Holy One to this foul cell  
Descends to banquet there with me.  
What can I offer but the smell  
And running sores of leprosy?

Ah God! Ah Son of Man! Without  
A miracle how can it be?  
Make now the very stones cry out,  
The leper clean to welcome Thee.

THEODORE MAYNARD.