

1908

A SPANISH HOLIDAY

BY

CHARLES MARRIOTT

A Spanish holiday; by Charles Marriott. With eight illustrations by A. M. Foweraker ... and twenty-two other illustrations.

Marriott, Charles, 1869-1957. New York, J. Lane, 1908.

Chapter VII

We rose at half-past six to take advantage of the cool of the morning. We had nearly fifteen miles to walk to Lequeitio, and for anything we knew the road might be mountainous. The people at the Fonda evidently thought we were a little mad for not travelling by the motor omnibus which makes the journey between Guernica and Lequeitio twice a day. It would start in an hour, at eight o'clock, said the maid who brought us our coffee.

Early as it was, Don Jose ran out of his house as we passed to embrace us cordially, ask if we were provided with cigarettes, and advise us not to walk in the sun after eleven o'clock nor to drink wine until we had reached our journey's end. The photograph facing this page gives a good idea of our last view of the little town we left with a pang of regret. The splendid movement of the Basque women, and the careful arrangement of their hair, are well illustrated by the figure of the elder girl on the right.

At a little distance from Guernica the road ascends in a series of wide curves, giving a bird's-eye view of the valley of the Mundaca. Lately, another road of easier gradients has been constructed for the motor omnibus, but we kept to the hills. The surrounding country was much wilder than that we had passed through between Amorebieta and Guernica, wooded on each side of the road with oak and chestnut. Farms were comparatively rare, but the little fields of maize and corn took on a greater value for their dark setting. As we followed the broad, white road we refreshed

ourselves with delicious wild strawberries which grew plentifully in crevices of the limestone. At intervals we met people going down to market in Guernica, groups of women stepping out bravely with heavy baskets on their heads, or a timber waggon drawn by a team of oxen, blinking mildly under the crimson fringe of their sheepskin-covered yoke, as they descended the hill with a slow, swaying movement. We passed through two or three villages, each with its little tiled parroquia, or parish church, and men and women working in the fields, reaping corn, or tilling the ground with heavy two-pronged mattocks resembling the Cornish "digger." Everybody we passed hailed us with "Adios!" or "Agur!" and once, instead of the native greeting, a man startled us with "Good morning." He was a ship's fireman on tramp to Bilbao. At a little lonely tavern on the farther side of the hill we rested and drank chacoli. The dark interior, with earthen floor and rude benches and tables, was filled with wood smoke. A black pot was suspended over the fire, and a woman sat beside the open hearth rocking a wooden cradle with her foot.

The motor road rejoins the other at a place called "Tres Cruces," after three crosses by the wayside, and not far from Lequeitio the omnibus passed us in a cloud of dust. With the greater part of our walk behind us, we could afford to smile at the compassionate glances of the passengers. Presently we came in sight of the little fishing town which, but for its red-tiled roofs, bears a startling resemblance to St. Ives. To us, accustomed to the unvarying grey of Cornish villages, it looked wrong somehow to see red roofs so near the sea. As is usual when approaching a place by the sea, the descending road split up into lanes which seemed to run hither and thither in a sudden flurry of excitement. A boy, unasked, politely pointed us out a short cut over a stony by-path,

and then we were among narrow streets with a cool air from off the harbour and the familiar sights and smells of a fishing town.

The lie of the place with regard to the points of the compass, the look of the streets and the relative positions of the church and the harbour, were so absurdly like St. Ives that we amused ourselves by pointing out the houses where our friends live. I suppose the truth is not that Lequeitio looks English but that St. Ives looks foreign. Like St. Ives, Lequeitio has an Island of St. Nicolas the patron saint of sailors but here the Island is really an island and not a peninsula, though artificially joined to the mainland at low tide by a raised causeway.

As if to keep up the illusion of our being at home, the charming young landlord of the Fonda de Beitia, overlooking the harbour, responded to my carefully worded inquiry for rooms with: "All right." He had been in England and spoke the language "not a great deal," as he said, but with a surprising mastery of colloquial expressions. His house was very full, he said, but he would be glad to take us in if we didn't mind a rather public bedroom. We assured him that the two beds behind clean white curtains suspended by string across the large airy central sola were all that we desired.

The company at luncheon were of a more cultivated and fashionable type than we had yet encountered at our public meals. There were a middle-aged artist, his wife, and a grave young man, his pupil very like the serious type of art-student at home and a family of summer visitors from Bilbao, consisting of papa, mamma, two children, and grandmamma. The last had a larger appetite than any old lady I have ever met. By the end of the meal which included a lobster salad every standing dish of biscuits, olives, fruit, and so on had drifted to her end of the table, surrounding her like a rampart. Everybody except the student was very relaxed and informal, as if in a seaside holiday humour. The painter's wife, a large, good-looking, languishing lady, was negligently attired in a pink petticoat and the frankest blouse I have ever seen worn in the daytime. Twice during the meal she drifted into her bedroom, which opened off the comedor, leaving the folding doors ajar, still further to simplify her costume, until James began to make sporting proposals as to the extent of the remainder. I fancied that the grave student, who kept his eyes on his plate and left the table before the end of the meal, a little disapproved of her, so possibly her position was less formal than that of a wife.

After a siesta behind the white curtains of the sala we went out into the sunlight to explore the town. The church of Nuestra Senora de la Asuncion is very old and extremely beautiful, unusually free from jarring additions, with a retablo of dulled gold and a tabernacle of the same workmanship. Externally a curious effect, like that of banks of oars, is produced by a range of flying buttresses on each side of the nave.

The church is overlooked by a little conical mount like the Capstone rock at Ilfracombe. James wanted to finish his siesta on the wall outside the church, so I made the ascent alone by a

stony path encircling the mount, with "Stations of the Cross" at intervals, and a Calvary at the summit. From here I had a splendid view of the red-roofed little town, backed by the headland of Santa Catalina, which forms the western arm of the Landward a fertile and partially wooded valley ran up among the foot-hills of the Cantabrian Mountains. The heat here reflected from the stony ground was almost overpowering, and the glare was made more dazzling to the eyes by bright patches of valerian. Although it was not yet the middle of July, I picked ripe sloes.

On my descent I found James waking up to an interested audience of small boys, who afterwards did not improve the foreground of a photograph of the church tower. Graceful when unconscious of observation, the Spanish boy becomes the stiffest creature imaginable the moment he is aware of the camera. As we made our way among the narrow streets we began to see and feel all the subtle differences between Lequeitio and the familiar town to which we had compared it; the rich carving under the broad eaves of the tall houses, the innumerable balconies and the fulness of colour in the garments drying upon them. I have never seen such a quantity of "washing" displayed in all my life, the effect was of the preparation for some pageant. Not the least striking difference between this and any English town was in the sharp contrast between the old and the new; between the narrow crooked streets of crazy buildings with their blunt, irregular lines, and the trim quays, wide spaces, and clean-cut masonry of the harbour. In the most recently exploited watering-place in England you do not get a sudden jump from the old to the new; the crude villa is linked to the primitive cottage by a series of buildings which are merely old-fashioned and inconvenient, and in practical matters there is always a slight hesitation, as if the authorities, though without reverence for the past, had not quite the courage to accept the advantages of the present. The harbours and their appurtenances of the fishing towns I know in England are all a little behind the needs of the moment, as if hampered by consideration for the lady amateur painter in water colours. But when the Latin is practical he is very practical. Apparently he has never heard of or disregards the convention that comfort and convenience are incompatible with beauty. As a small example, the excellent harbour of Lequeitio is brilliantly lighted at night by acetylene lamps, "made at Willesden," we observed, on tall iron standards. The municipal authorities discovered that they were paying more than they should for the electric light which is used universally through-out the north of Spain, so they adopted acetylene on their own account with a gain both in cheapness and efficiency. Yet in spite of, or, as I prefer to believe, because of, this fearless consideration of practical needs, Lequeitio is unspoiled; in spite of the piquant contrast between old and new, it escapes the vulgarity of meaningless "improvements." On the other hand, I could name a fishing town and watering-place in England, with twice the population of Lequeitio, which is rapidly being made abominable by the worst type of villa and shops, but where the launching of the lifeboat at a time of peril has been

seriously hindered because the half-dozen miserable gas-lamps of the harbour were unlighted.

Lequeitio has its lifeboat conveniently housed in a bright pavilion in the angle of the outer arm of the harbour. As we stood there watching the open lug-sailed hake boats, each with a crew of eight or nine men, come in before a light breeze, we were accosted in polite but broken English by a dapper little man in a linen suit and straw hat, who was accompanied by three summer-clad children, two boys and a girl. After some preliminary compliments he said, "I am the Collector of Customs," adding with a touch of shyness, as if he were not sure that it was the correct form, but meant to risk it, "at your service." He never missed an opportunity, he said, of improving his knowledge of our language, which he was learning from an American gentleman who lived in Lequeitio, and from the Daily Mail. Producing a folded copy of the Paris edition of the latter from his pocket, he read out a paragraph about tariff reform with a pronunciation which betrayed the source of his learning. He offered to take us to that source, but we assured him that we were very happy where we were, and in the company of himself and his children. They were learning English, too, he told us. I'm afraid his idea of a useful education was unfortunately in agreement with that of certain people at home. The little pale, fragile creatures, their dark eyes burning with intelligence, were stood in a row and made to repeat a list of the principal ports of England: "London, Leeverpool, Soufampton, Porrtsmout, Brreestdl, Carrdeef, Ool." We spent a very pleasant half-hour with the Collector of Customs and his children, and when we parted he waved his hand and said, again in the shy tone of a person determined to brave the risks of idiom, "Until later."

When the tide fell we crossed to the Island of San Nicolas by a causeway like that which joins St. Michael's Mount to Marazion. The island is an irregular mass of granite with a scrub of gorse and heath and a variety of tiny wild-rose, growing flat to the ground, which I have seen in Cheshire. It is found also, I believe, in some parts of Scotland. From here we had a good view of the hills forming a background to Lequeitio and the inviting cliff road which we were to pursue on the morrow.

A violet dusk was falling when we returned to the town ; on the red sands a girls' school in uniform pink dresses danced a Zortzico without music. The effect of their silent movements, with outstretched waving arms, was very strange.

Boys were bathing from the steps of the harbour; each crossed himself before he dived. Later, we wandered about the streets and quays by moonlight of a peculiar quality and breadth, in which there were no sharp contrasts of light and shade, but rather a diffused luminosity, as if it were given out from within the objects on which it fell. The acacias on the quays under the tall acetylene lamps flung exquisite wavering shadows like stirring water. Lequeitio goes to bed early. At half-past nine there was hardly a lighted window, and we met less than a

dozen people in the streets. Two youths and a gigantic dog, like some hound of dreams, moved swiftly and silently along the quayside. Here and there we heard the quiet voice of a girl, unseen upon a balcony, answered by a man's voice from below.

We had a long and interesting talk with the landlord of the Fonda before we went to bed. When we asked him how he liked England, he said, "I like the English laws." He was a quick, intelligent young man with a slightly worried expression, as if he were haunted by unpleasant memories, and I think he must have had some experience in the past which made him put a high value on bodily safety. He said that Vizcaya was the best governed of the three Basque provinces, adding, "You can go out at one o'clock at night, or you can dance with a girl without fear of a knife." More than once he spoke with relief of security from the knife. The Spanish Government, he said, appreciates the prosperity of the Basque provinces, but is always on guard against the independent spirit of their inhabitants. A man could be put in prison for talking here. The Basque farms were small but profitable, and most of the farmers owned their land. That was a good thing; he did not like landlords; when he improved his house and put in more bedrooms his landlord had raised his rent. He was a pure Basque; his aunt, to whom he introduced us, could speak barely a word of Spanish.

It was queer to be awakened by a man saying in English that it was six o'clock. I had slept soundly, but James had suffered equally from the mosquitos and the serenoes or night watchmen. In his broken dreams they were indistinguishable one from the other; the mosquitos chanted the hour, and flew about with lanterns and staves, and several times James was prevented from killing one by the reflection, just when he had raised his hand, that it would be murder to do so. The matter was complicated by somebody having told him that you could kill a man in Spain for five pounds. More than once during the night he counted his money, and I have a hazy recollection of hearing a resounding slap, followed by a sleepy and despairing murmur, "There goes another fiver."

The morning was clear and grey and chilly, with promise of brilliant sunshine later on. We started early, as we had nearly fourteen miles to walk before noon, when we hoped to catch a train from Deva to Durango. The road, which follows the coast to Deva, leaves Lequeitio by a splendid bridge of a single arch. Before we reached it we passed a fine mansion, surrounded by tall poplar trees. From the stables a groom led a horse with a coronet worked in blue upon its fawn covering. We were told that the place belonged to a countess, and that several notable people had country houses in the neighbourhood of Lequeitio. A few people were bathing in the sea as we crossed the bridge, and we met a group of bare-footed women walking into the town with large, flat baskets of laundry on their heads. A carabinero in blue linen uniform and white shako, armed with a rifle, lounged against the parapet of the bridge and watched us thoughtfully as we made our way up the long, gradual ascent.



HAKE BOAT; LEKEITIO

Charles Marriott (1869-1957) nobelagile eta arte kriti-kari ingelesa izan zen. 1908an argitaratu zen liburu hau, baina baliteke bidaia 1907an egin izatea -Cavallaseri ere antzekoa gertatu zitzaien, 1857an egon Lekeitio eta 1858an publikatu liburua-. Irakurri duzu Chicharro eta Rivera pintoreak 1907ko udan Lekeitio egon zirela, ez dira Hotel Beitian agertzen diren pintoreak izango, ezta? Ez dut uste¹, baina bada pintoreak Lekeitioa etortzen ziren seinale. Sorolla handiak ere Beitian hartuko zuen ostatu.

Charles Marriott ez zen bakarrik etorri, Albert Mourtou Foweraker pintoreak (Doweraker sinatzen zuen) lagundu zion. Charlesenak dira Lekeitioko argazki biak eta testua noski, eta Albertena kanposantura igotzen den bidexkaren irudia.

Egun bat baino ez ziren egon britaniarrak Lekeitio, baina makina bat gauza egin zuten. Astia izan zuten eliza, portua, kaletxoak, Lumentxa, irla... bisitatzeko edo neskatoak zortzikoa dantzan eta mutikoak portuan dzangaka ikusteko. Hala ere, Hotel Beitian ikusi eta bizi izandako anekdotak dira mamitsuenak.

Cornuallesko St. Ives herriaren antz handia hartu zioten Lekeitiori. Ez dakit antz hori non edo zertan datzan baina... Eta, *Lekeitio goes to bed early*, goiztarrak gu? Lehen izan beharko!

Azkenaldian amaierako komatxoaren erabilera aldatu egin da, antza; baina gure printzipioei jarraituz liburuan zeuden bezala mantendu ditugu



A CORNER IN LEKEITIO

¹ Eduardo Chicharro 1873an jaio zen, beraz 34 urte zituen Lekeitio egon zenean. 1904an ezkondu zen Maria Brionesekin eta 1905an jaio zen seme Eduardo. Zer izango zen Marriottentzat pertsona heldua, *middle aged*?

