

CHAPTER 10

The Gypsy's Granddaughter - Proposed Marriage - The Algnazil - The Assault - Speedy Trot - Arrival at Trujillo - Night and Rain - The Forest - The Bivouac - Mount and Away! - Jaraicejo - The National - The Cavalier Balmerson - Among the Thicket - Serious Discourse - What is Truth? - Unexpected Intelligence.

We remained three days at the Gypsies' house, Antonio departing early every morning, on his mule, and returning late at night. The house was large and ruinous, the only habitable part of it, with the exception of the stable, being the hall, where we had supped, and there the Gypsy females slept at night, on some mats and mattresses in a corner.

"A strange house is this," said I to Antonio, one morning as he was on the point of saddling his mule and departing, as I supposed, on the affairs of Egypt; "a strange house and strange people; that Gypsy grandmother has all the appearance of a sowanee (SORCERESS)."

"All the appearance of one!" said Antonio; "and is she not really one? She knows more crabbed things and crabbed words than all the Errate betwixt here and Catalonia. She has been amongst the wild Moors, and can make more drows, poisons, and philtres than any one alive. She once made a kind of paste, and persuaded me to taste, and shortly after I had done so my soul departed from my body, and wandered through horrid forests and mountains, amidst monsters and duendes, during one entire night. She learned many things amidst the Corahai¹ which I should be glad to know."

"Have you been long acquainted with her?" said I; "you appear to be quite at home in this house."

"Acquainted with her!" said Antonio. "Did not my own brother marry the black Calli, her daughter, who bore him the chabi, sixteen years ago, just before he was hanged by the Busne?"

In the afternoon I was seated with the Gypsy mother in the hall, the two Callees were absent telling fortunes about the town and neighbourhood, which was their principal occupation. "Are you married, my London Caloro?" said the old woman to me. "Are you a ro?"²

MYSELF. - Wherefore do you ask, O Dai de los Cales?³

¹ The Moors, i.e. the inhabitants of the Maghreb.

² Caloro: One of the blood, i.e. a Gypsy. Ro: a married man. A married woman is a Romi.

³ Mother of the Gypsies.

GYPSY MOTHER. - It is high time that the lacha of the chabi⁴ were taken from her, and that she had a ro. You can do no better than take her for romi, my London Caloro.

MYSELF. - I am a stranger in this land, O mother of the Gypsies, and scarcely know how to provide for myself, much less for a romi.

GYPSY MOTHER. - She wants no one to provide for her, my London Caloro, she can at any time provide for herself and her ro. She can hokkawar, tell baji, and there are few to equal her at stealing a pastesas. Were she once at Madrilati, where they tell me you are going, she would make much treasure; therefore take her thither, for in this foros she is nahi (LOST), as it were, for there is nothing to be gained; but in the foros baro it would be another matter; she would go dressed in lachipi and sonacai (SILK AND GOLD), whilst you would ride about on your black-tailed gra; and when you had got much treasure, you might return hither and live like a Crallis, and all the Errate of the Chim del Manro should bow down their heads to you. What, say you, my London Caloro, what say you to my plan?⁵

Myself. - Your plan is a plausible one, mother, or at least some people would think so; but I am, as you are aware, of another chim, and have no inclination to pass my life in this country.

GYPSY MOTHER. - Then return to your own country, my Caloro, the chabi can cross the pani. Would she not do business in London with the rest of the Calore? Or why not go to the land of the Corahai? In which case I would accompany you; I and my daughter, the mother of the chabi.⁶

MYSELF. - And what should we do in the land of the Corahai? It is a poor and wild country, I believe.

GYPSY MOTHER. - The London Caloro asks me what we could do in the land of the Corahai! Aromali! I almost think that I am speaking to a lilipendi (SIMPLETON). Are there not horses to chore? Yes, I trow there are, and better ones than in this land, and asses and mules. In the land of the Corahai you must hokkawar and chore even as you must here, or in your own country, or else you are no Caloro. Can you not join yourselves with the black people who live in the despoblados? Yes, surely; and glad they would be to have among them the Errate from Spain and London. I am seventy

⁴ 'The virgin of the girl', i.e. the old lady's unmarried grand-daughter. Burke [Glossary], however, prefers to interpret 'lácha' as 'maidenhead, virginity', which would yield 'the virginity of the girl'.

⁵ This plentiful sprinkling of Caló words may be translated – following Burke's Glossary - as follows: Hokkawar: to cheat. Tell Baji: tell fortunes. 'Stealing a pastesas': stealing by sleight of hand. Madrilati: Madrid. Foros: town. Foros baro: Big town, i.e. the capital. Gra: horse. Crallis: King. Chim del Manro: The Land of Corn, i.e. Estremadura, the province around Badajoz.

⁶ Pani: Water, here: the sea or ocean. Burke [Glossary], following Borrow himself [*Zincali*, part 1, chapter 6], points out that this is 'the one special word known to all gypsies wherever found, even in Brazil,' sometimes in the shape of Pawnee. It goes back to the Sanskrit original, *Pani*.

years of age, but I wish not to die in this chim, but yonder, far away, where both my roms are sleeping. Take the chabi, therefore, and go to Madrilati to win the parne, and when you have got it, return, and we will give a banquet to all the Busne in Merida, and in their food I will mix drow, and they shall eat and burst like poisoned sheep. . . . And when they have eaten we will leave them, and away to the land of the Moor, my London Caloro.⁷

During the whole time that I remained at Merida I stirred not once from the house⁸; following the advice of Antonio, who informed me that it would not be convenient. My time lay rather heavily on my hands, my only source of amusement consisting in the conversation of the women, and in that of Antonio when he made his appearance at night. In these tertulias the grandmother was the principal spokeswoman, and astonished my ears with wonderful tales of the Land of the Moors, prison escapes, thievish feats, and one or two poisoning adventures, in which she had been engaged, as she informed me, in her early youth.

There was occasionally something very wild in her gestures and demeanour; more than once I observed her, in the midst of much declamation, to stop short, stare in vacancy, and thrust out her palms as if endeavouring to push away some invisible substance; she goggled frightfully with her eyes, and once sank back in convulsions, of which her children took no farther notice than observing that she was only lili, and would soon come to herself.

Late in the afternoon of the third day, as the three women and myself sat conversing as usual over the brasero, a shabby looking fellow in an old rusty cloak walked into the room: he came straight up to the place where we were sitting, produced a paper cigar⁹, which he lighted at a coal, and taking a whiff or two, looked at me: "Carracho," said he, "who is this companion?"

⁷ Burke [Glossary]: Aromali: truly, now really! Chore: steal. Parné: white, i.e. silver, money, from parno, white. Drow: poison. For 'the black people who live in the despoblados': see footnote 42 to chapter 9 above, and the end of *Zincali*, part I, chapter 6.

⁸ This statement contradicts Knapp's statement that the three-day Gypsy wedding ceremony which Borrow describes at length in *Zincali*, part II, chapter 7, took place at this time [Knapp, I : 242]. According to a further elaboration in a third person autobiography written in jail for distribution to the foreign correspondents of Madrid, and published by one 'J.W.W.' in the Morning Herald of 21 May 1838, this festival was celebrated 'near the ruins of Merida in Estremadura' [Fraser, *Sleeping*, Annex 2, 44ff and Annex 3, 46]. Knapp's assumption is, however, far from certain. In *The Zincali*, Borrow merely says he was present at a Gypsy wedding, without mentioning a place or date; meanwhile, the text of the Morning Herald article and the autobiography on which it is based, are truly too fantastic to be accepted at face value. There, Borrow writes that 'the gypsies crowned him their king, near the ruins of Mérida in Estremadura, at a barbarous festival,' which resembles in many aspects the description of the wedding celebrations as given in *The Zincali*. The fact is that the entire chronology of the period between Borrow's departure from Lisbon 4 or 5 weeks earlier, and his arrival in Madrid in late January or early February 1836, is about as solid and consistent as a piece of Gruyère cheese (compare footnote 1 and 16 to chapter 6 above, and footnote 20 to chapter 9.)

⁹ See footnote 5 to chapter 9 above.

I saw at once that the fellow was no Gypsy: the women said nothing, but I could hear the grandmother growling to herself, something after the manner of an old grimalkin when disturbed.

"Carracho," reiterated the fellow, "how came this companion here?"

"NO LE PENELA CHI MIN CHABORO," said the black Callee to me, in an undertone; "SIN UN BALICHO DE LOS CHINELES,"¹⁰ then looking up to the interrogator she said aloud, "he is one of our people from Portugal, come on the smuggling lay, and to see his poor sisters here."



El Alguacil.

10.1 An alguacil in 1850

"Then let him give me some tobacco," said the fellow, "I suppose he has brought some with him."

"He has no tobacco," said the black Callee, "he has nothing but old iron. This cigar is the only tobacco there is in the house; take it, smoke it, and go away!"

Thereupon she produced a cigar from out her shoe, which she presented to the alguacil.

¹⁰ [Author's note] "Say nothing to him, my lad, he is a hog of an alguacil." [Editor's edition:] An alguacil was a bailiff or low police-officer. Throughout Spanish history, they were famously corrupt and abusive.

"This will not do," said the fellow, taking the cigar, "I must have something better; it is now three months since I received anything from you; the last present was a handkerchief, which was good for nothing; therefore hand me over something worth taking, or I will carry you all to the Carcel."

"The Busno will take us to prison," said the black Callee, "ha! ha! ha!"

"The Chinel will take us to prison," giggled the young girl "he! he! he!"

"The Bengui will carry us all to the estaripel," grunted the Gypsy grandmother, "ho! ho! ho!"¹¹

The three females arose and walked slowly round the fellow, fixing their eyes steadfastly on his face; he appeared frightened, and evidently wished to get away. Suddenly the two youngest seized his hands, and whilst he struggled to release himself, the old woman exclaimed: "You want tobacco, hijo - you come to the Gypsy house to frighten the Callees and the strange Caloro out of their plako¹² - truly, hijo, we have none for you, and right sorry I am; we have, however, plenty of the dust A SU SERVICIO."

Here, thrusting her hand into her pocket, she discharged a handful of some kind of dust or snuff into the fellow's eyes; he stamped and roared, but was for some time held fast by the two Callees; he extricated himself, however, and attempted to unsheath a knife which he bore at his girdle; but the two younger females flung themselves upon him like furies, while the old woman increased his disorder by thrusting her stick into his face; he was soon glad to give up the contest, and retreated, leaving behind him his hat and cloak, which the chabi gathered up and flung after him into the street.

"This is a bad business," said I, "the fellow will of course bring the rest of the justicia upon us, and we shall all be cast into the estaripel."

"Ca!" said the black Callee, biting her thumb nail, "he has more reason to fear us than we him, we could bring him to the filimicha¹³; we have, moreover, friends in this town, plenty, plenty."

"Yes," mumbled the grandmother, "the daughters of the baji have friends, my London Caloro, friends among the Busnees, baributre, baribu (PLENTY, PLENTY)."

¹¹ Burke [Glossary]: Chinel: Official; Bengui: demon; Estaripel: Prison.

¹² Burke [Glossary]: Plako: Tobacco.

¹³ Burke [Glossary]: The gallows.

Nothing farther of any account occurred in the Gypsy house; the next day, Antonio and myself were again in the saddle, we travelled at least thirteen leagues before we reached the Venta¹⁴, where we passed the night; we rose early in the morning, my guide informing me that we had a long day's journey to make. "Where are we bound to?" I demanded. "To Trujillo," he replied.



10.2 A primitive venta in Estremadura

When the sun arose, which it did gloomily and amidst threatening rain-clouds, we found ourselves in the neighbourhood of a range of mountains which lay on our left, and which, Antonio informed me, were called the Sierra of San Selvan¹⁵; our route, however, lay over wide plains, scantily clothed with brushwood, with here and there a melancholy village, with its old and dilapidated church. Throughout the greater part of the day, a drizzling rain was falling, which turned the dust of the roads into mud and mire, considerably impeding our progress. Towards evening we reached a moor, a wild place enough, strewn with enormous stones and rocks. Before us, at some distance, rose a strange conical hill, rough and shaggy, which appeared to be neither more nor less than an immense assemblage of the same kind of rocks which lay upon the moor. The rain had now ceased, but a strong wind rose and howled at our backs. Throughout the journey, I had experienced considerable difficulty in keeping up with the mule of Antonio; the walk of the horse was slow, and I could discover no vestige of the spirit

¹⁴ Having travelled the same road in a stage coach some 30 years later, Knapp [I : 241] suggests this would be the Venta de la Guia. There still seems to be a restaurant of that name between Merida and Trujillo, although it is only some 35 km from the former city, not the 70 km which Borrow here mentions. Note that 70 km would be an extremely long distance to travel on horseback in a single day.

¹⁵ Names may have changed; the present mountain of San Servan lies a few miles to the south-west of Merida. Hence if Borrow and Antonio were really 13 leagues (i.e. 70 km) towards Trujillo, the mountain range on his left must have been the present Sierra de Montánchez or the Sierra de San Pedro if they took the road slightly to the west.

which the Gypsy had assured me lurked within him. We were now upon a tolerably clear spot of the moor: "I am about to see," I said, "whether this horse has any of the quality which you have described." "Do so," said Antonio, and spurred his beast onward, speedily leaving me far behind. I jerked the horse with the bit, endeavouring to arouse his dormant spirit, whereupon he stopped, reared, and refused to proceed. "Hold the bridle loose and touch him with your whip," shouted Antonio from before. I obeyed, and forthwith the animal set off at a trot, which gradually increased in swiftness till it became a downright furious speedy trot; his limbs were now thoroughly lithy, and he brandished his fore legs in a manner perfectly wondrous; the mule of Antonio, which was a spirited animal of excellent paces, would fain have competed with him, but was passed in a twinkling. This tremendous trot endured for about a mile, when the animal, becoming yet more heated, broke suddenly into a gallop. Hurrah! no hare ever ran so wildly or blindly; it was, literally, VENTRE A TERRE; and I had considerable difficulty in keeping him clear of rocks, against which he would have rushed in his savage fury, and dashed himself and rider to atoms.



10.3 A melancholy village in Estremadura

This race brought me to the foot of the hill, where I waited till the Gypsy rejoined me: we left the hill, which seemed quite inaccessible, on our right, passing through a small and wretched village. The sun went down, and dark night presently came upon us; we proceeded on, however, for nearly three hours, until we heard the barking of dogs, and perceived a light or two in the distance. "That is Trujillo," said Antonio, who had not spoken for a long time. "I am glad of it," I replied; "I am thoroughly tired; I shall sleep soundly in Trujillo." "That is as it may be," said the Gypsy, and spurred his mule to a brisker pace. We soon entered the town, which appeared dark and gloomy enough; I followed close behind the Gypsy, who led the way I knew not whither, through dismal streets and dark places, where cats were squalling.¹⁶ "Here is the house," said he at last, dismounting before a low mean hut; he knocked, no answer was returned; - he knocked again, but still there was no reply; he shook the door and essayed to open it, but it appeared firmly locked and bolted. "Caramba!" said he, "they are out - I feared it might be so. Now what are we to do?"

¹⁶ Trujillo at this time had no more than 4,000 inhabitants [Widdrington, vol. 1, 106].

"There can be no difficulty," said I, "with respect to what we have to do; if your friends are gone out, it is easy enough to go to a posada."

"You know not what you say," replied the Gypsy, "I dare not go to the mesuna, nor enter any house in Trujillo save this, and this is shut; well, there is no remedy, we must move on, and, between ourselves, the sooner we leave this place the better; my own planoro (BROTHER) was garroted at Trujillo."

He lighted a cigar, by means of a steel and yesca¹⁷, sprang on his mule, and proceeded through streets and lanes equally dismal as those which we had already traversed till we again found ourselves out of the town.

I confess I did not much like this decision of the Gypsy; I felt very slight inclination to leave the town behind and to venture into unknown places in the dark night: amidst rain and mist, for the wind had now dropped, and the rain began again to fall briskly. I was, moreover, much fatigued, and wished for nothing better than to deposit myself in some comfortable manger, where I might sink to sleep, lulled by the pleasant sound of horses and mules despatching their provender. I had, however, put myself under the direction of the Gypsy, and I was too old a traveller to quarrel with my guide under the present circumstances. I therefore followed close at his crupper; our only light being the glow emitted from the Gypsy's cigar; at last he flung it from his mouth into a puddle, and we were then in darkness.

We proceeded in this manner for a long time; the Gypsy was silent; I myself was equally so; the rain descended more and more. I sometimes thought I heard doleful noises, something like the hooting of owls. "This is a strange night to be wandering abroad in," I at length said to Antonio.

"It is, brother," said he, "but I would sooner be abroad in such a night, and in such places, than in the estaripel of Trujillo."

We wandered at least a league farther, and appeared now to be near a wood, for I could occasionally distinguish the trunks of immense trees. Suddenly Antonio stopped his mule; "Look, brother," said he, "to the left, and tell me if you do not see a light; your eyes are sharper than mine." I did as he commanded me. At first I could see nothing, but moving a little farther on I plainly saw a large light at some distance, seemingly amongst the trees. "Yonder cannot be a lamp or candle," said I; "it is more like the blaze of a fire." "Very likely," said Antonio. "There are no queres (HOUSES) in this place; it is doubtless a fire made by durotunes (SHEPHERDS); let us go and join them, for, as you say, it is doleful work wandering about at night amidst rain and mire."

¹⁷ Burke [Glossary]: a tinder.

We dismounted and entered what I now saw was a forest¹⁸, leading the animals cautiously amongst the trees and brushwood. In about five minutes we reached a small open space, at the farther side of which, at the foot of a large cork tree, a fire was burning, and by it stood or sat two or three figures; they had heard our approach, and one of them now exclaimed *Quien Vive?* "I know that voice," said Antonio, and leaving the horse with me, rapidly advanced towards the fire: presently I heard an *Ola!* and a laugh, and soon the voice of Antonio summoned me to advance. On reaching the fire I found two dark lads, and a still darker woman of about forty; the latter seated on what appeared to be horse or mule furniture. I likewise saw a horse and two donkeys tethered to the neighbouring trees. It was in fact a Gypsy bivouac. . . . "Come forward, brother, and show yourself," said Antonio to me; "you are amongst friends; these are of the *Errate*, the very people whom I expected to find at Trujillo, and in whose house we should have slept."



10.4 Gypsy camp, by Jacques Callot

¹⁸ This probably was the forest of Las Gamas. In *The Zincoli*, part 1, chapter 5, Borrow names that place in the context of a famous 1620 trial in which gypsies camped there were accused of cannibalism. The wording, geography and *puchera* ingredients strongly suggest the identification: 'I am myself well acquainted with this same forest of Las Gamas, which lies between Jaraicejo and Trujillo; it abounds with chestnut and cork trees, and is a place very well suited either for the purpose of murder or cannibalism. It will be as well to observe that I visited it in company with a band of Gitanos, who bivouacked there, and cooked their supper, which however did not consist of human flesh, but of a *puchera*, the ingredients of which were beef, bacon, garbanzos, and berdolaga, or field-pease and purslain, - therefore I myself can bear testimony that there is such a forest as Las Gamas, and that it is frequented occasionally by Gypsies, by which two points are established by far the most important to the history in question, or so at least it would be thought in Spain, for being sure of the forest and the Gypsies, few would be incredulous enough to doubt the facts of the murder and cannibalism.'

"And what," said I, "could have induced them to leave their house in Trujillo and come into this dark forest in the midst of wind and rain, to pass the night?"

"They come on business of Egypt, brother, doubtless," replied Antonio; "and that business is none of ours, Calla boca¹⁹! It is lucky we have found them here, else we should have had no supper, and our horses no corn."

"My ro is prisoner at the village yonder," said the woman, pointing with her hand in a particular direction; "he is prisoner yonder for choring a mailla (STEALING A DONKEY); we are come to see what we can do in his behalf; and where can we lodge better than in this forest, where there is nothing to pay? It is not the first time, I trow, that Calore have slept at the root of a tree."

One of the striplings now gave us barley for our animals in a large bag, into which we successively introduced their heads, allowing the famished creatures to regale themselves till we conceived that they had satisfied their hunger. There was a puchero simmering at the fire, half full of bacon, garbanzos, and other provisions; this was emptied into a large wooden platter, and out of this Antonio and myself supped; the other Gypsies refused to join us, giving us to understand that they had eaten before our arrival; they all, however, did justice to the leathern bottle of Antonio, which, before his departure from Merida, he had the precaution to fill.

I was by this time completely overcome with fatigue and sleep. Antonio flung me an immense horse-cloth, of which he bore more than one beneath the huge cushion on which he rode; in this I wrapped myself, and placing my head upon a bundle, and my feet as near as possible to the fire, I lay down.

Antonio and the other Gypsies remained seated by the fire conversing. I listened for a moment to what they said, but I did not perfectly understand it, and what I did understand by no means interested me: the rain still drizzled, but I heeded it not, and was soon asleep.

The sun was just appearing as I awoke. I made several efforts before I could rise from the ground; my limbs were quite stiff, and my hair was covered with rime; for the rain had ceased and a rather severe frost set in. I looked around me, but could see neither Antonio nor the Gypsies; the animals of the latter had likewise disappeared, so had the horse which I had hitherto rode; the mule, however, of Antonio still remained fastened to the tree! this latter circumstance quieted some apprehensions which were beginning to arise in my mind. "They are gone on some business of Egypt," I said to myself, "and will return anon." I gathered together the embers of the fire, and heaping upon them sticks and branches, soon succeeded in calling forth a blaze, beside which I placed the puchero, with what remained of the provision of last night. I waited for a considerable time in expectation of the return of my companions, but as they did not appear, I sat down and breakfasted. Before I had well finished I heard the noise of a horse approaching rapidly, and presently Antonio made his appearance amongst the trees, with some agitation in his countenance. He sprang from the horse, and instantly proceeded to untie the mule. "Mount, brother, mount!" said he, pointing to the horse; "I

¹⁹ Spanish for 'Shut your mouth', 'Be silent'.

went with the Callee and her chabes to the village where the ro is in trouble; the chinobaro²⁰, however, seized them at once with their cattle, and would have laid hands also on me, but I set spurs to the grasti, gave him the bridle, and was soon far away. Mount, brother, mount, or we shall have the whole rustic canaille upon us in a twinkling."

I did as he commanded: we were presently in the road which we had left the night before. Along this we hurried at a great rate, the horse displaying his best speedy trot; whilst the mule, with its ears pricked up, galloped gallantly at his side. "What place is that on the hill yonder?" said I to Antonio, at the expiration of an hour, as we prepared to descend a deep valley.

"That is Jaraicejo," said Antonio; "a bad place it is and a bad place it has ever been for the Calo people."

"If it is such a bad place," said I, "I hope we shall not have to pass through it."

"We must pass through it," said Antonio, "for more reasons than one: first, forasmuch as the road lies through Jaraicejo; and second, forasmuch as it will be necessary to purchase provisions there, both for ourselves and horses. On the other side of Jaraicejo there is a wild desert, a despoblado, where we shall find nothing."

We crossed the valley, and ascended the hill, and as we drew near to the town the Gypsy said, "Brother, we had best pass through that town singly. I will go in advance; follow slowly, and when there purchase bread and barley; you have nothing to fear. I will await you on the despoblado."

Without waiting for my answer he hastened forward, and was speedily out of sight.

I followed slowly behind, and entered the gate of the town; an old dilapidated place, consisting of little more than one street. Along this street I was advancing, when a man with a dirty foraging cap on his head, and holding a gun in his hand, came running up to me: "Who are you?" said he, in rather rough accents, "from whence do you come?"

"From Badajoz and Trujillo," I replied; "why do you ask?"

"I am one of the national guard²¹," said the man, "and am placed here to inspect strangers; I am told that a Gypsy fellow just now rode through the town; it is well for him that I had stepped into my house. Do you come in his company?"

"Do I look a person," said I, "likely to keep company with Gypsies?"

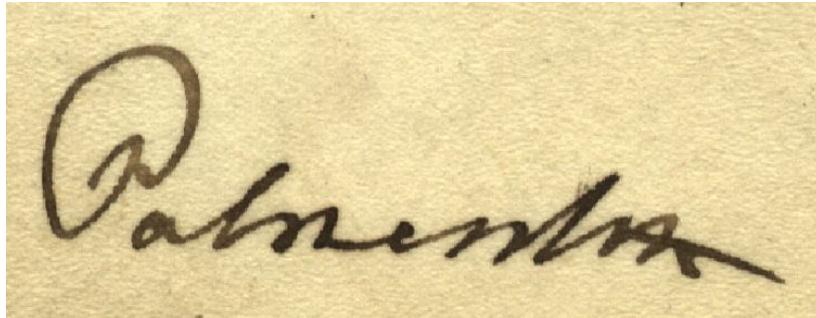
²⁰ Burke [Glossary]: Chin + baro = official + great, hence head official.

²¹ The *Guardia Nacional* was the citizen militia, called into being by the Liberal government as a middle class fighting force with a stake in the constitutional regime, whose members could defend their home towns in case of attack by Carlist forces or guerrillero bands. Depending on the place and their leadership they could be efficient or a rabble; but they were always deeply hated by all Carlists and other conservatives. In the absence of a police force, they often performed – formally or ‘voluntarily’ – the necessary police tasks.

The national measured me from top to toe, and then looked me full in the face with an expression which seemed to say, "likely enough." In fact, my appearance was by no means calculated to prepossess people in my favour. Upon my head I wore an old Andalusian hat, which, from its condition, appeared to have been trodden under foot; a rusty cloak, which had perhaps served half a dozen generations, enwrapped my body. My nether garments were by no means of the finest description; and as far as could be seen were covered with mud, with which my face was likewise plentifully bespattered, and upon my chin was a beard of a week's growth.

"Have you a passport?" at length demanded the national.

I remembered having read that the best way to win a Spaniard's heart is to treat him with ceremonious civility. I therefore dismounted, and taking off my hat, made a low bow to the constitutional soldier, saying, "Señor nacional, you must know that I am an English gentleman, travelling in this country for my pleasure; I bear a passport, which, on inspecting, you will find to be perfectly regular; it was given me by the great Lord Palmerston, minister of England, whom you of course have heard of here; at the bottom you will see his own handwriting; look at it and rejoice; perhaps you will never have another opportunity.²² As I put unbounded confidence in the honour of every gentleman, I leave the passport in your hands whilst I repair to the posada to refresh myself. When you have inspected it, you will perhaps oblige me so far as to bring it to me. Cavalier, I kiss your hands."

A photograph of a handwritten signature in dark ink on aged, yellowish paper. The signature is written in a highly stylized, cursive script. The first letter is a large, ornate capital 'P'. The rest of the name 'almerston' is written in a fluid, connected cursive hand. The ink is dark brown or black, and the paper shows signs of age and wear.

10.5 A specimen of Lord Palmerston's signature

I then made him another low bow, which he returned with one still lower, and leaving him now staring at the passport and now looking at myself, I went into a posada, to which I was directed by a beggar whom I met.

²² Lord Palmerston was the British foreign minister at the time. The whole of the following passage is designed to bring to the fore the militiaman's stunning ignorance. Below, he not only mispronounces Palmerston as *Balmerson* (which shows he has never heard of the 'great general'), but is also easily convinced that the huge signature which appeared at the bottom of such Foreign Office passports was hand-written rather than printed [see Robertson, *Ford*, 236f; Ford, *HB* 14; and Missler, *GBB* 40, 65 & 71].

I fed the horse, and procured some bread and barley, as the Gypsy had directed me; I likewise purchased three fine partridges of a fowler, who was drinking wine in the posada.²³ He was satisfied with the price I gave him, and offered to treat me with a copita, to which I made no objection. As we sat discoursing at the table, the national entered with the passport in his hand, and sat down by us.

NATIONAL. - Caballero! I return you your passport, it is quite in form; I rejoice much to have made your acquaintance; I have no doubt that you can give me some information respecting the present war.

MYSELF. - I shall be very happy to afford so polite and honourable a gentleman any information in my power.

NATIONAL. - What is England doing, - is she about to afford any assistance to this country? If she pleased she could put down the war in three months.

MYSELF. - Be under no apprehension, Señor nacional; the war will be put down, don't doubt. You have heard of the English legion, which my Lord Palmerston has sent over? Leave the matter in their hands, and you will soon see the result.²⁴

NATIONAL. - It appears to me that this Caballero Balmerson must be a very honest man.

MYSELF. - There can be no doubt of it.

NATIONAL. - I have heard that he is a great general.

MYSELF. - There can be no doubt of it. In some things neither Napoleon nor the Sawyer²⁵ would stand a chance with him for a moment. ES MUCHO HOMBRE.²⁶

²³ Partridges were the common fare on this road. Hughes [*Overland*, vol. 2, chapter 10, 157] noted with disdain that a partridge he was served for breakfast in his Talavera tavern was about the fiftieth he had eaten that month (September 1846).

²⁴ The British Legion (a.k.a. the Auxiliary Legion) was an expeditionary force of some 10,000 volunteers, meant to bolster up the tottering war-effort of the Madrid government in the Basque countries. It was sent over in the summer of 1835 and soon saw action on the heights above San Sebastian. The unjustified optimism which Borrow here displays in January 1836 he truly felt at the time. In his letter to Hasfeld of 23 May 1836 from Madrid, he wrote: 'Don Carlos is still fighting like a tiger at bay against his enemies (...) but his doom is sealed; the action at San Sebastian where the English legion scaled almost impregnable heights, though they were cut down by dozens and twenties, and put his best troops to flight, has decided the matter' [Fraser, *Hasfeld*, 18]. The civil war was, in fact to last until 1840. The Legion officially remained until 1837, but many men fought on beyond that time in other units and guises.

²⁵ [Author's note] El Serrador, a Carlist partisan, who about this period was much talked of in Spain. [Editor's addition:] See footnote 19 to chapter 16 for details of the Sawyer's life.

²⁶ The closest translation of this nearly untranslatable expression is: 'He's quite a guy', which misses, however, the strong emphasis on *machismo* contained in the phrase.

NATIONAL. - I am glad to hear it. Does he intend to head the legion himself?

MYSELF. - I believe not; but he has sent over, to head the fighting men, a friend of his, who is thought to be nearly as much versed in military matters as himself²⁷.

NATIONAL. - I am rejoiced to hear it. I see that the war will soon be over. Caballero, I thank you for your politeness, and for the information which you have afforded me. I hope you will have a pleasant journey. I confess that I am surprised to see a gentleman of your country travelling alone, and in this manner, through such regions as these. The roads are at present very bad; there have of late been many accidents, and more than two deaths in this neighbourhood. The despoblado out yonder has a particularly evil name; be on your guard, Caballero. I am sorry that Gypsy was permitted to pass; should you meet him and not like his looks, shoot him at once, stab him, or ride him down. He is a well known thief, contrabandista, and murderer, and has committed more assassinations than he has fingers on his hands. Caballero, if you please, we will allow you a guard to the other side of the pass. You do not wish it? Then, farewell. Stay, before I go I should wish to see once more the signature of the Caballero Balmerson.

I showed him the signature, which he looked upon with profound reverence, uncovering his head for a moment; we then embraced and parted.

I mounted the horse and rode from the town, at first proceeding very slowly; I had no sooner, however, reached the moor, than I put the animal to his speedy trot, and proceeded at a tremendous rate for some time, expecting every moment to overtake the Gypsy. I, however, saw nothing of him, nor did I meet with a single human being. The road along which I sped was narrow and sandy, winding amidst thickets of broom and brushwood, with which the despoblado was overgrown, and which in some places were as high as a man's head. Across the moor, in the direction in which I was proceeding, rose a lofty eminence, naked and bare. The moor extended for at least three leagues; I had nearly crossed it, and reached the foot of the ascent. I was becoming very uneasy, conceiving that I might have passed the Gypsy amongst the thickets, when I suddenly heard his well known Ola! and his black savage head and staring eyes suddenly appeared from amidst a clump of broom.

"You have tarried long, brother," said he; "I almost thought you had played me false."

He bade me dismount, and then proceeded to lead the horse behind the thicket, where I found the mule picqueted to the ground. I gave him the barley and provisions, and then proceeded to relate to him my adventure with the national.

"I would I had him here," said the Gypsy, on hearing the epithets which the former had lavished upon him. "I would I had him here, then should my chulee and his carlo become better acquainted."²⁸

²⁷ I.e. Sir George de Lacy Evans (1787-1870), Coronel of the British Legion.

²⁸ Burke [Glossary]: Chuli: knife; Carlo: heart.

"And what are you doing here yourself," I demanded, "in this wild place, amidst these thickets?"

"I am expecting a messenger down yon pass," said the Gypsy; "and till that messenger arrive I can neither go forward nor return. It is on business of Egypt, brother, that I am here."

As he invariably used this last expression when he wished to evade my inquiries, I held my peace, and said no more; the animals were fed, and we proceeded to make a frugal repast on bread and wine.

"Why do you not cook the game which I brought?" I demanded; "in this place there is plenty of materials for a fire."

"The smoke might discover us, brother," said Antonio, "I am desirous of lying escondido in this place until the arrival of the messenger."

It was now considerably past noon; the gypsy lay behind the thicket, raising himself up occasionally and looking anxiously towards the hill which lay over against us; at last, with an exclamation of disappointment and impatience, he flung himself on the ground, where he lay a considerable time, apparently ruminating; at last he lifted up his head and looked me in the face.

ANTONIO. - Brother, I cannot imagine what business brought you to this country.

MYSELF. - Perhaps the same which brings you to this moor - business of Egypt.

ANTONIO. - Not so, brother; you speak the language of Egypt, it is true, but your ways and words are neither those of the Cales nor of the Busne.

MYSELF. - Did you not hear me speak in the foros about God and Tebleque?²⁹ It was to declare his glory to the Cales and Gentiles that I came to the land of Spain.

ANTONIO. - And who sent you on this errand?

MYSELF. - You would scarcely understand me were I to inform you. Know, however, that there are many in foreign lands who lament the darkness which envelops Spain, and the scenes of cruelty, robbery, and murder which deform it.

ANTONIO. - Are they Calore or Busne?

MYSELF. - What matters it? Both Calore and Busne are sons of the same God.

ANTONIO. - You lie, brother, they are not of one father nor of one Errate. You speak of robbery, cruelty, and murder. There are too many Busne, brother; if there were no Busne there would be neither robbery nor murder. The Calore neither rob nor murder each other, the Busno do; nor are they cruel to their animals, their law forbids them.

²⁹ Burke [Glossary]: God the Saviour, Jesus.

When I was a child I was beating a burra, but my father stopped my hand, and chided me. "Hurt not the animal," said he; "for within it is the soul of your own sister!"

MYSELF. - And do you believe in this wild doctrine, O Antonio?

ANTONIO. - Sometimes I do, sometimes I do not. There are some who believe in nothing; not even that they live! Long since, I knew an old Caloro, he was old, very old, upwards of a hundred years, - and I once heard him say, that all we thought we saw was a lie; that there was no world, no men nor women, no horses nor mules, no olive trees. But whither are we straying? I asked what induced you to come to this country - you tell me the glory of God and Tebleque. Disparate! tell that to the Busne. You have good reasons for coming, no doubt, else you would not be here. Some say you are a spy of the Londoné,³⁰ perhaps you are; I care not. Rise, brother, and tell me whether any one is coming down the pass."

"I see a distant object," I replied; "like a speck on the side of the hill."

The Gypsy started up, and we both fixed our eyes on the object: the distance was so great that it was at first with difficulty that we could distinguish whether it moved or not. A quarter of an hour, however, dispelled all doubts, for within this time it had nearly reached the bottom of the hill, and we could descry a figure seated on an animal of some kind.

"It is a woman," said I, at length, "mounted on a grey donkey."

"Then it is my messenger," said Antonio, "for it can be no other."

The woman and the donkey were now upon the plain, and for some time were concealed from us by the copse and brushwood which intervened. They were not long, however, in making their appearance at the distance of about a hundred yards. The donkey was a beautiful creature of a silver grey, and came frisking along, swinging her tail, and moving her feet so quick that they scarcely seemed to touch the ground. The animal no sooner perceived us than she stopped short, turned round, and attempted to escape by the way she had come; her rider, however, detained her, whereupon the donkey kicked violently, and would probably have flung the former, had she not sprung nimbly to the ground. The form of the woman was entirely concealed by the large wrapping man's cloak which she wore. I ran to assist her, when she turned her face full upon me, and I instantly recognized the sharp clever features of Antonia, whom I had seen at Badajoz, the daughter of my guide. She said nothing to me, but advancing to her father, addressed something to him in a low voice, which I did not hear. He started back, and vociferated "All!" "Yes," said she in a louder tone, probably repeating the words which I had not caught before, "All are captured."

The Gypsy remained for some time like one astounded and, unwilling to listen to their discourse, which I imagined might relate to business of Egypt, I walked away amidst the thickets. I was absent for some time, but could occasionally hear passionate expressions and oaths. In about half an hour I returned; they had left the road, but I found then behind the broom clump, where the animals stood. Both were seated on the

³⁰ Burke [Glossary]: the English.

ground; the features of the Gypsy were peculiarly dark and grim; he held his unsheathed knife in his hand, which he would occasionally plunge into the earth, exclaiming, "All! All!"

"Brother," said he at last, "I can go no farther with you; the business which carried me to Castumba³¹ is settled; you must now travel by yourself and trust to your *baji* (FORTUNE)."

"I trust in Undevel,"³² I replied, "who wrote my fortune long ago. But how am I to journey? I have no horse, for you doubtless want your own."

The Gypsy appeared to reflect: "I want the horse, it is true, brother," he said, "and likewise the macho; but you shall not go EN PINDRE (on foot); you shall purchase the burra of Antonia, which I presented her when I sent her upon this expedition."

"The burra," I replied, "appears both savage and vicious."

"She is both, brother, and on that account I bought her; a savage and vicious beast has generally four excellent legs. You are a Calo, brother, and can manage her; you shall therefore purchase the savage burra, giving my daughter Antonia a *baria*³³ of gold. If you think fit, you can sell the beast at Talavera or Madrid, for Estremenian bestis are highly considered in Castumba."

In less than an hour I was on the other side of the pass, mounted on the savage burra.

³¹ Burke [Glossary]: Castumba: Castile.

³² The Caló word for God.

³³ Burke [Glossary]: Here and elsewhere Borrow uses this word for the gold '*onza*' of 320 reales. It belongs more properly, however, to *Germania*, Spanish thieves' slang. The correct Gitano word for an *onza* is *jara*.