

## CHAPTER 20

### **Illness - Nocturnal Visit - A Master Mind - The Whisper - Salamanca - Irish Hospitality - Spanish Soldiers - The Scriptures advertised.**

But I am anxious to enter upon the narrative of my journey, and shall therefore abstain from relating to my readers a great many circumstances which occurred previously to my leaving Madrid on this expedition. About the middle of May I had got everything in readiness, and I bade farewell to my friends. Salamanca was the first place which I intended to visit.

Some days previous to my departure I was very much indisposed, owing to the state of the weather, for violent and biting winds had long prevailed. I had been attacked with a severe cold, which terminated in a disagreeable cough, which the many remedies I successively tried seemed unable to subdue. I had made preparations for departing on a particular day, but, owing to the state of my health, I was apprehensive that I should be compelled to defer my journey for a time. The last day of my stay in Madrid, finding myself scarcely able to stand, I was fain to submit to a somewhat desperate experiment, and by the advice of the barber-surgeon who visited me, I determined to be bled. Late on the night of that same day he took from me sixteen ounces of blood, and having received his fee left me, wishing me a pleasant journey, and assuring me, upon his reputation, that by noon the next day I should be perfectly recovered.

A few minutes after his departure, whilst I was sitting alone, meditating on the journey which I was about to undertake, and on the rickety state of my health, I heard a loud knock at the street door of the house, on the third floor of which I was lodged. In another minute Mr. S- of the British Embassy<sup>1</sup> entered my apartment. After a little conversation, he informed me that Mr. Villiers had desired him to wait upon me to communicate a resolution which he had come to. Being apprehensive that, alone and unassisted, I should experience great difficulty in propagating the gospel of God to any considerable extent in Spain, he was bent upon exerting to the utmost his own credit and influence to further my views, which he himself considered, if carried into proper effect, extremely well calculated to operate beneficially on the political and moral state of the country. To this end it was his intention to purchase a very considerable number of copies of the New Testament, and to dispatch them forthwith to the various British consuls established in different parts of Spain, with strict and positive orders to employ all the means which their official situation should afford them to circulate the books in question and to assure their being noticed. They were, moreover, to be charged to afford me, whenever I should appear in their respective districts, all the protection, encouragement, and assistance which I should stand in need of.

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<sup>1</sup> Henry Southern (1799 - 1853), first secretary of the British Legation in Madrid and personal secretary to Sir George Villiers. Son of a barber, and another friend of John Bowring's, he became a merchant in the south of Spain, and caught Villiers' eye by his neat, methodical reporting of the local situation. Southern later became Chargé d'Affaires at the court of Lisbon and had a distinguished career as the editor of various magazines. [Darlow, 219; Knapp I : 282, footnote; Robertson, *Ford*, 190 footnote.] Merciless as always, Hughes [*Overland*, vol. 2, chapter 25, 423] qualified him as a man of delicate appearance and average abilities.

I was of course much rejoiced on receiving this information, for though I had long been aware that Mr. Villiers was at all times willing to assist me, he having frequently given me sufficient proof, I could never expect that he would come forward in so noble, and, to say the least of it, considering his high diplomatic situation, so bold and decided a manner. I believe that this was the first instance of a British ambassador having made the cause of the Bible Society a national one, or indeed of having favoured it directly or indirectly. What renders the case of Mr. Villiers more remarkable is, that on my first arrival at Madrid I found him by no means well disposed towards the Society. The Holy Spirit had probably illumined his mind on this point. I hoped that by his means our institution would shortly possess many agents in Spain, who, with far more power and better opportunities than I myself could ever expect to possess, would scatter abroad the seed of the gospel, and make of a barren and thirsty wilderness a green and smiling corn-field.



*20.1 Madrid from the west, beyond the Manzanares river*

A word or two about the gentleman who paid me this nocturnal visit. Though he has probably long since forgotten the humble circulator of the Bible in Spain, I still bear in mind numerous acts of kindness which I experienced at his hands. Endowed with an intellect of the highest order, master of the lore of all Europe, profoundly versed in the ancient tongues, and speaking most of the modern dialects with remarkable facility, - possessed, moreover, of a thorough knowledge of mankind, - he brought with him into the diplomatic career advantages such as few, even the most highly gifted, can boast of. During his sojourn in Spain he performed many eminent services for the government which employed him; services which, I believe, it had sufficient discernment to see, and gratitude to reward. He had to encounter, however, the full brunt of the low and stupid malignity of the party who, shortly after the time of which I am speaking, usurped the management of the affairs of Spain. This party, whose foolish manoeuvres he was continually discomfiting, feared and hated him as its evil genius, taking every opportunity of showering on his head calumnies the most improbable and absurd. Amongst other things, he was accused of having acted as an agent to the English government in the affair of the Granja, bringing about that revolution by bribing the mutinous soldiers, and more particularly the notorious Sergeant Garcia. Such an accusation will of course merely extract a smile from those who are at all acquainted with the English character, and the general line of conduct pursued by the English

government.<sup>2</sup> It was a charge, however, universally believed in Spain, and was even preferred in print by a certain journal, the official organ of the silly Duke of Frias, one of the many prime ministers of the moderado party who followed each other in rapid succession towards the latter period of the Carlist and Christino struggle<sup>3</sup>. But when did a calumnious report ever fall to the ground in Spain by the weight of its own absurdity? Unhappy land, not until the pure light of the Gospel has illumined thee wilt thou learn that the greatest of all gifts is charity.

The next day verified the prediction of the Spanish surgeon; I had to a considerable degree lost my cough and fever, though, owing to the loss of blood, I was somewhat feeble<sup>4</sup>. Precisely at twelve o'clock the horses were led forth before the door of my lodging in the Calle de Santiago, and I prepared to mount: but my black entero of Andalusia would not permit me to approach his side, and whenever I made the attempt, commenced wheeling round with great rapidity.

"C'EST UN MAUVAIS SIGNE, MON MAITRE," said Antonio, who, dressed in a green jerkin, a Montero cap, booted and spurred, stood ready to attend me, holding by the bridle the horse which I had purchased from the contrabandista. "It is a bad sign, and in my country they would defer the journey till to-morrow."

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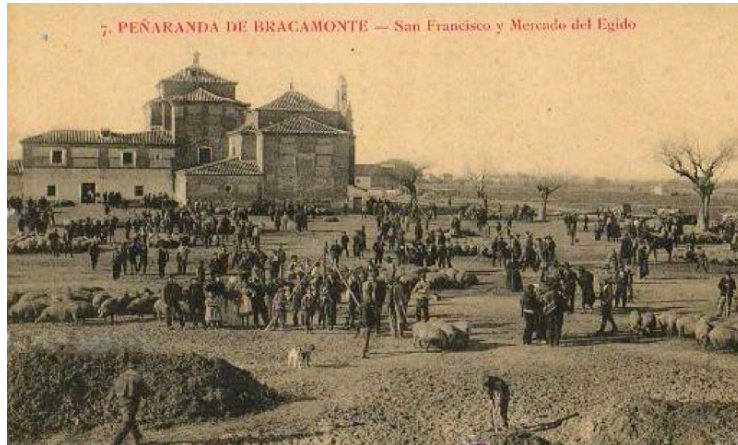
<sup>2</sup> Such a line of conduct by Southern is indeed most unlikely, if only because Ambassador Villiers was himself cooped up with the Queen at La Granja at the time, surrounded for three days by the 1,000 rebellious soldiers 'whom wine and fear of the consequences of what they had done' might drive to murderous desperation. Much as Villiers did not believe that Spain could be governed under the radical Cadiz Constitution of 1812 - which Ford [HB, 1052] qualified as both absurd and impracticable - he had urged the Queen Regent to adopt it, since a few more hours of delay 'would inevitably have cost her and her daughters their lives'. [Letter of Villiers to Palmerston of 17 August 1836, in: *Palmerston: Private Correspondence with Sir George Villiers 1833-1837*, 1985, 492f.]

<sup>3</sup> The Duke of Frias was appointed Prime Minister in early September 1838, shortly after the Ofalia Cabinet was forced out of office.

<sup>4</sup> Borrow left Madrid some day between 11 and 16 May 1837, i.e. nearly three weeks later than he had originally planned [Knapp I : 266; Robertson, *Tour*, 64]. The reasons for this delay were many and confused. In a letter of 10 May 1837 to Brandram [Darlow, 213] he says it was because he had to sack his former servant (whom he replaced with Antonio Buchino). Here in *The Bible in Spain* he claims he left late because he dropped gravely ill, a reason he also mentions in his letter of 7 June from Salamaca [Darlow, 215]. But in a letter to Hasfeld of 29 April 1837 [Darlow, 210; Fraser, *Hasfeld*, 23f], he blames a combination of bad weather and the flue. He writes: 'In a few days I quit Madrid. It was my intention to have set out sooner, but the state of the weather has been such that I thought it more prudent to defer my departure; during the last two months violent and bitter winds have blown without ceasing, before whose baneful influence animal and vegetable nature seems to have quailed. I was myself, during a fortnight, prostrated, body and limb, by a violent attack of *la grippe*, or, as it is styled in English, the "influenza". I am, however, by the blessing of the Almighty, perfectly recovered and enjoying excellent spirits, but multitudes less favoured have perished, especially the poor.' All this together has led biographers to suppose Borrow suffered from two illnesses in a row: the two-week *influenza* in April and a 'throat-ache' in early May. This, however, leans exclusively on his present claim that the surgeon who bled him did so the day before departure; which is not necessarily true. Borrow may simple have pushed the bleeding forward for dramatic effect.

"Are there whisperers in your country?" I demanded; and taking the horse by the mane, I performed the ceremony after the most approved fashion: the animal stood still, and I mounted the saddle<sup>5</sup>, exclaiming –

"The Rommany Chal to his horse did cry,  
As he placed the bit in his horse's jaw;  
Kosko gry! Rommany gry!  
Muk man kistur tute knaw."<sup>6</sup>



20.2 Peñaranda, where Borrow sold 5 New Testaments

We then rode forth from Madrid by the gate of San Vicente, directing our course to the lofty mountains which separate Old from New Castile.<sup>7</sup> That night we rested at Guadarama, a large village at their foot, distant from Madrid about seven leagues. Rising early on the following morning, we ascended the pass and entered into Old Castile.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> One more case of ‘Borroviaan pretence’. Horse-whispering – which in real life comes down to a simple, Pavlovian conditioning of an animal, associating certain words with pain and others with pleasures over a lengthy period of time – was considered pure magic in the world of superstition. Borrow always claimed to have learned this occult art from Gypsy friends and Irish hoof smiths. [See his *Lavengro*, chapter 13 and 17; see also Ridler, *GBaal*, 200, footnote 11]

<sup>6</sup> Burke [footnote to 274]: Romany chal = Gypsy lad. The last two lines mean: ‘Good horse! Gypsy horse! Let me ride thee now.’

<sup>7</sup> Robertson [*Tour*, 64]: from Calle de Santiago nº 16, Borrow and Buchino ‘trotted down the Calle de Bailén, and passing through the Puerta de San Vicente, descended to the Puente de Segovia, spanning the insignificant Manzanares (...) On its far bank they turned north to follow the well paved highway leading towards the Sierra de Guadarrama’. It is, however, equally possible that Borrow took the Puente Verde to cross the Manzanares, or even the Puente de San Fernando, 5 km to the north.

<sup>8</sup> Robertson [*Tour*, 65]: ‘Having climbed to the Puerto de los Leones by the main road, only constructed in 1749, the pair descended the far side of the range and rode on through Villacastin, and at Sanchidrián veered west’.

After crossing the mountains, the route to Salamanca lies almost entirely over sandy and arid plains, interspersed here and there with thin and scanty groves of pine. No adventure worth relating occurred during this journey. We sold a few Testaments in the villages through which we passed, more especially at Penaranda<sup>9</sup>. About noon of the third day<sup>10</sup>, on reaching the brow of a hillock, we saw a huge dome before us, upon which the fierce rays of the sun striking, produced the appearance of burnished gold<sup>11</sup>. It belonged to the cathedral of Salamanca, and we flattered ourselves that we were already at our journey's end; we were deceived, however, being still four leagues distant from the town, whose churches and convents, towering up in gigantic masses, can be distinguished at an immense distance, flattering the traveller with an idea of propinquity which does not in reality exist. It was not till long after nightfall that we arrived at the city gate,<sup>12</sup> which we found closed and guarded, in apprehension of a Carlist attack; and having obtained admission with some difficulty, we led our horses along dark, silent, and deserted streets, till we found an individual who directed us to a large, gloomy, and comfortless posada, that of the Bull, which we, however, subsequently found was the best which the town afforded<sup>13</sup>.

A melancholy town is Salamanca; the days of its collegiate glory are long since past by, never more to return: a circumstance, however, which is little to be regretted; for what benefit did the world ever derive from scholastic philosophy? And for that alone was Salamanca ever famous. Its halls are now almost silent, and grass is growing in its courts, which were once daily thronged by at least eight thousand students<sup>14</sup>; a number

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<sup>9</sup> Peñarande de Bracamonte [Robertson, *Tour*, 65]. According to his letter to Brandram of 7 June 1837 from Salamanca [Darlow, 217], Borrow sold a grand total of 5 copies in the villages.

<sup>10</sup> A writing mistake. It was the 4<sup>th</sup> day of travelling, since the whole road took 4 days according to Borrow's letter to Brandram of 7 June 1837 from Salamanca [Darlow, 217]. This was the standard length of travelling this stretch of road, some 50 km per day, with overnight stops at Guadarrama, Labajoz and Muñoz Sancho. [Missler, *GBB* 40, 67 & 76f]

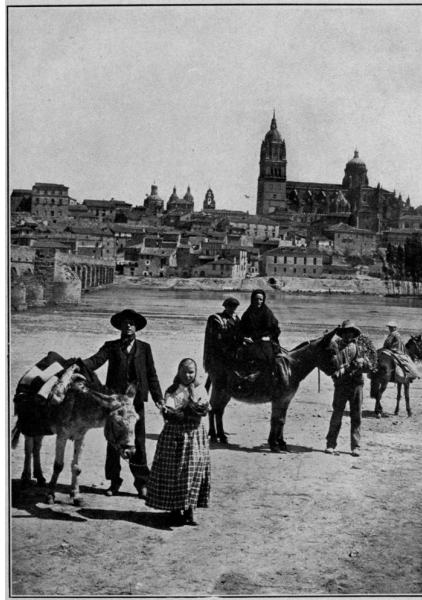
<sup>11</sup> Lugilde [page 9] says this would be at the height of Cordovilla village on the present N-501.

<sup>12</sup> By the Gate of Saint Thomas, according to Lugilde [page 9]. This corrects Ian Robertson's supposition [*Tour*, 65] that Borrow entered the town over the old Roman bridge to the south, since '*la ruta que cruza el Tormes en Encinas de Abajo no se pone en funcionamiento hasta la construcción del puente, provisional, a partir de 1846*'. Robertson, however, insists that Borrow would have crossed to the south bank of the river at Alba, and crossed back and into the town over the Roman bridge [personal communication, 20 June 2013].

<sup>13</sup> The *Posada de los Toros*, i.e. 'Bulls', not 'Bull'. Also known as the *Meson de los Toros*, it had its entrance and address on the *Plaza de la Verdura* (nowadays *Plaza del Mercado*) [Lugilde, 10], but was part of the ring of buildings around the adjacent *Plaza Mayor*, some of the rooms enjoying that view. Ford [*HB*, 849] says that 'Salamanca is without even a tolerable *Posada*', and merely mentions two: *La Posada de los Toros*, the Coach Inn from which the Ledesma diligence started, and *La Posada de Navarra*, 'a mere *parador*.'

<sup>14</sup> According to Ford [*HB*, 854] Salamanca had 14,000 students in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, and still 7,000 in the 16<sup>th</sup>. The former may be slightly exaggerated, 7,000-12,000 being the usual maximum estimate. By 1837 only 500 students were left, because - just like many other University towns - Salamanca had been hit hard by the outbreak of the Carlist Civil War. Many of its students volunteered for service in one band or the other; many of its professors, who were

to which, at the present day, the entire population of the city does not amount<sup>15</sup>. Yet, with all its melancholy, what an interesting, nay, what a magnificent place is Salamanca! How glorious are its churches, how stupendous are its deserted convents, and with what sublime but sullen grandeur do its huge and crumbling walls, which crown the precipitous bank of the Tormes, look down upon the lovely river and its venerable bridge.



20.3 Salamanca in the 19<sup>th</sup> century

What a pity that, of the many rivers in Spain, scarcely one is navigable. The beautiful but shallow Tormes, instead of proving a source of blessing and wealth to this part of Castile, is of no further utility than to turn the wheels of various small water mills, standing upon weirs of stone, which at certain distances traverse the river.

My sojourn at Salamanca was rendered particularly pleasant by the kind attentions and continual acts of hospitality which I experienced from the inmates of the Irish College<sup>16</sup>,

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mostly ecclesiastics and hence Carlists, had fled or had been arrested; and much of the income of the colleges had dwindled. Salamanca would never again regain the fame and prominence it once enjoyed; yet other than what Borrow here suggests, the university did survive and returned to a tremendous academic performance.

<sup>15</sup> Ford [*HB*, 849 & 852], however, credits Salamanca at this time with some 14,000 inhabitants, while Madoz [*DG*, vol. 13, 657 & 662] gives 2,867 *vecinos* and 13,786 souls, in 2,800 houses.

<sup>16</sup> The ‘Colegio Real de San Patricio de Nobles Irlandeses’ in the full Spanish title, or short: Saint Patrick. Ford [*HB*, 868] points out that the Irish students were originally housed in the ‘Jesuitas’ (today’s Universidad Pontificia in the Calle Compañía) when the college was founded by Philip II in 1592 to educate Irish students for the salvation of England. From 1838 onward to its closure in 1951, it was housed in the Colegio del Arzobispo Fonseca (in today’s Calle Fonseca). [For details see Murphy in *GBB* 40, 108f; for the lifestyle of the students a few decades later, see Pedro Alarcon, ‘Dos Dias en Salamanca’, chapter 10.]

to the rector of which I bore a letter of recommendation from my kind and excellent friend Mr. O'Shea, the celebrated banker of Madrid.<sup>17</sup> It will be long before I forget these Irish, more especially their head, Dr. Gartland, a genuine scion of the good Hibernian tree, an accomplished scholar, and a courteous and high-minded gentleman<sup>18</sup>. Though fully aware who I was, he held out the hand of friendship to the wandering heretic missionary, although by so doing he exposed himself to the rancorous remarks of the narrow-minded native clergy, who, in their ugly shovel hats and long cloaks, glared at me askance as I passed by their whispering groups beneath the piazzas of the Plaza. But when did the fear of consequences cause an Irishman to shrink from the exercise of the duties of hospitality? However attached to his religion - and who is so attached to the Romish creed as the Irishman? - I am convinced that not all the authority of the Pope or the Cardinals would induce him to close his doors on Luther himself, were that respectable personage at present alive and in need of food and refuge.

Honour to Ireland and her "hundred thousand welcomes!" Her fields have long been the greenest in the world; her daughters the fairest; her sons the bravest and most eloquent. May they never cease to be so.

The posada where I had put up was a good specimen of the old Spanish inn, being much the same as those described in the time of Philip the Third or Fourth<sup>19</sup>. The rooms were many and large, floored with either brick or stone, generally with an alcove at the end, in which stood a wretched flock bed. Behind the house was a court, and in the rear of this a stable, full of horses, ponies, mules, machos, and donkeys, for there was no lack of guests, who, however, for the most part slept in the stable with their caballerias, being either arrieros or small peddling merchants who travelled the country with coarse cloth or linen. Opposite to my room in the corridor lodged a wounded officer, who had just arrived from San Sebastian on a galled broken-kneed pony; he was an Estrimenian, and was returning to his own village to be cured. He was attended by three broken soldiers, lame or maimed, and unfit for service: they told me that they were of the same village as his worship, and on that account he permitted them to travel with him. They slept amongst the litter, and throughout the day lounged about the house smoking paper cigars. I never saw them eating, though they frequently went to a dark cool corner, where stood a bota or kind of water pitcher, which they held about six inches from their black filmy lips, permitting the liquid to trickle down their throats. They said they had no pay, and were quite destitute of money, that SU MERCED the officer occasionally gave them a piece of bread, but that he himself was poor and had only a few dollars. Brave guests for an inn, thought I; yet, to the honour of Spain be it spoken, it is one of the few countries in Europe where poverty is never insulted nor looked upon with contempt. Even at an inn, the poor man is never spurned from the door, and if not harboured, is at least dismissed with fair words, and consigned to the mercies of God

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<sup>17</sup> According to some rather vague indications in family blogs, Henry O'Shea – who would later write a guidebook to Spain and created the *Banco Español de Credito* - had arrived in the country as War Commissioner during the Peninsular War, and stayed behind in Valencia as a businessman before moving to Madrid around 1824. His brother William died in Malaga in 1826. Their descendants are still living in Madrid and Valencia. [See also *GBB* 40, 72]

<sup>18</sup> Rev. James F. Garland, rector between 1830 and 1868 [Lugilde, 12; Murphy, *GBB* 40, 108].

<sup>19</sup> I.e. in the early 17th century.

and his mother. This is as it should be. I laugh at the bigotry and prejudices of Spain; I abhor the cruelty and ferocity which have cast a stain of eternal infamy on her history; but I will say for the Spaniards, that in their social intercourse no people in the world exhibit a juster feeling of what is due to the dignity of human nature, or better understand the behaviour which it behoves a man to adopt towards his fellow beings. I have said that it is one of the few countries in Europe where poverty is not treated with contempt, and I may add, where the wealthy are not blindly idolized. In Spain the very beggar does not feel himself a degraded being, for he kisses no one's feet, and knows not what it is to be cuffed or spitten upon; and in Spain the duke or the marquis can scarcely entertain a very overweening opinion of his own consequence, as he finds no one, with perhaps the exception of his French valet, to fawn upon or flatter him.

During my stay at Salamanca, I took measures that the word of God might become generally known in this celebrated city. The principal bookseller of the town, Blanco<sup>20</sup>, a man of great wealth and respectability, consented to become my agent here, and I in consequence deposited in his shop a certain number of New Testaments<sup>21</sup>. He was the proprietor of a small printing press, where the official bulletin of the place was published. For this bulletin I prepared an advertisement of the work, in which, amongst other things, I said that the New Testament was the only guide to salvation; I also spoke of the Bible Society, and the great pecuniary sacrifices which it was making with the view of proclaiming Christ crucified, and of making his doctrine known<sup>22</sup>. This step will perhaps be considered by some as too bold, but I was not aware that I could take any more calculated to arouse the attention of the people - a considerable point. I also ordered numbers of the same advertisement to be struck off in the shape of bills, which I caused to be stuck up in various parts of the town. I had great hope that by means of these a considerable number of New Testaments would be sold. I intended to repeat this experiment in Valladolid, Leon, St. Jago, and all the principal towns which I visited, and to distribute them likewise as I rode along: the children of Spain would thus be brought to know that such a work as the New Testament is in existence, a fact of which not five in one hundred were then aware, notwithstanding their so frequently-repeated boasts of their Catholicity and Christianity.

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<sup>20</sup> Vicente Blanco, whose bookshop was in the Calle de la Rúa, today's Calle Mayor between the Plaza Mayor and the Cathedral. [Lugilde, 14]

<sup>21</sup> In his letter to Brandram from Astorga of 5 July 1837 [Darlow, 219], Borrow mentions proudly that 'I myself had the pleasure of seeing three despatched in less than a quarter of an hour that I remained in the shop.'

<sup>22</sup> Lugilde [page 15] has gone in search of this advertisement, but found nothing in the *Boletín Oficial de la Provincia*. He advances the theory that – for sake of caution – the advertisement may have been a loose fold-in, only given to customers who were of a known 'progressive' opinion. Note that Borrow, rather ambiguously, says he 'prepared' an advertisement for the *Boletín*; not that he *included* it!