

CHAPTER 3

Shopkeeper at Evora - Spanish Contrabandistas - Lion and Unicorn - The Fountain - Trust in the Almighty - Distribution of Tracts - Library at Evora - Manuscript - The Bible as a Guide - The Infamous Mary - The Man of Palmella - The Charm - The Monkish System - Sunday - Volney - An Auto-Da-Fe - Men from Spain - Reading of a Tract - New Arrival - The Herb Rosemary.

Evora is a small city, walled, but not regularly fortified, and could not sustain a siege of a day. It has five gates; before that to the south-west is the principal promenade of its inhabitants: the fair on St. John's day is likewise held there; the houses are in general very ancient, and many of them unoccupied. It contains about five thousand inhabitants, though twice that number would be by no means disproportionate to its size¹. The two principal edifices are the See, or cathedral, and the convent of San Francisco, in the square before the latter of which was situated the posada where I had taken up my abode. A large barrack for cavalry stands on the right-hand side, on entering the south-west gate. To the south-east, at the distance of six leagues, is to be seen a blue chain of hills, the highest of which is called Serra Dorso; it is picturesquely beautiful, and contains within its recesses wolves and wild boars in numbers.² About a league and a half on the other side of this hill is Estremos³.

I passed the day succeeding my arrival principally in examining the town and its environs, and, as I strolled about, entering into conversation with various people that I met; several of these were of the middle class, shopkeepers and professional men; they were all Constitutionalists, or pretended to be so, but had very little to say except a few commonplace remarks on the way of living of the friars, their hypocrisy and laziness. I endeavoured to obtain some information respecting the state of instruction in the place, and from their answers was led to believe that it must be at the lowest ebb, for it seemed that there was neither book-shop nor school. When I spoke of religion, they exhibited the utmost apathy for the subject, and making their bows left me as soon as possible.

¹ In the later Middle Ages, Evora is said to have contained no fewer than 100,000 inhabitants, but after the Spanish take-over in the late 16th century it declined rapidly. It did not help that 25 years before Borrow's visit, on 30 July 1808, the French General Henri Loison had the city's entire populace massacred in revenge for its armed resistance against the Napoleonic occupation. Official numbers, however, give some 16,000 inhabitants for the 1830s, while Evora counts somewhat over 50,000 citizens today.

² Nowadays at least, the name of the mountains between Evora and Estremoz is written *Serra da Ossa*, or *Serra d'Ossa*, which - when pronounced fast enough - does indeed resemble 'Serra Dorso'. Not only Borrow writes the name thus; Hughes [*Overland*, vol. 2, chapter 16, 259] does the same. Borrow claimed to have climbed this mountain range at an unknown moment. On 24 December 1835 he wrote to his Danish friend John Hasfeld (supposedly from 'Evora in the Alementejo, Portugal'): 'About six leagues from Evora there is a tall ridge of mountains called the Serra Dorso; my duty called me thither a few days since, and after having transacted what I had to do, I ascended to the highest summit, and sitting down turned my eyes to the far North East, and wept like a child (for St Peterburg - PM)' [Fraser, *Hasfeld*, 15f; Robertson, *Portugal*, 14f].

³ Borrow's geography is sometimes as creative as his chronology. Since he travelled there later on, he might have noticed that Estremoz lies not to the south-east, but to the north-east of Evora.

Having a letter of introduction to a person who kept a shop in the market-place⁴, I went thither and delivered it to him as he stood behind his counter. In the course of conversation, I found that he had been much persecuted whilst the old system was in its vigour, and that he entertained a hearty aversion for it.⁵ I told him that the ignorance of the people in religious matters had served to nurse that system, and that the surest way to prevent its return was to enlighten their minds: I added that I had brought a small stock of Bibles and Testaments to Evora, which I wished to leave for sale in the hands of some respectable merchant, and that if he were anxious to help to lay the axe to the root of superstition and tyranny, he could not do so more effectually than by undertaking the charge of these books. He declared his willingness to do so, and I went away determined to entrust to him half of my stock⁶. I returned to the hostelry, and sat down on a log of wood on the hearth within the immense chimney in the common apartment; two surly looking men were on their knees on the stones; before them was a large heap of pieces of old iron, brass, and copper; they were assorting it, and stowing it away in various bags. They were Spanish contrabandistas of the lowest class, and earned a miserable livelihood by smuggling such rubbish from Portugal into Spain⁷. Not a word proceeded from their lips, and when I addressed them in their native language, they returned no other answer than a kind of growl. They looked as dirty and rusty as the iron in which they trafficked; their four miserable donkeys were in the stable in the rear.

The woman of the house and her daughter were exceedingly civil to me, and coming near crouched down, asking various questions about England. A man dressed somewhat like an English sailor, who sat on the other side of the hearth confronting me, said, "I hate the English, for they are not baptized, and have not the law," meaning the law of God. I laughed, and told him that according to the law of England, no one who was unbaptized could be buried in consecrated ground; whereupon he said, "Then you are stricter than we." He then said, "What is meant by the lion and the unicorn which I saw

⁴ The name of this shopkeeper has not yet been unearthed.

⁵ Evora was, in fact, a very right-wing town. Nine years earlier, Carnarvon just happened to ride in when one more Miguelist riot broke out. He was nearly lynched by the populace for the simple crime of being English, hence a heretic and an enemy of the True Religion and the Rightful King. Ironically Carnarvon, scion of an ancient aristocratic family, was a staunch supporter of Dom Miguel, the right-wing Pretender. [Carnarvon, chapter 13.]

⁶ Letter to Brandram of 10 January 1836 from Badajoz [Darlow, 131]: ten of the twenty New Testaments and one of the two Bibles Borrow had taken along.

⁷ In the 1830s, Spain's fiscal system still languished dismally in the Middle Ages. In the absence of income tax, a crucial part of the state's revenue was derived from heavy dues on 'luxury' products, such as salt, soap, silk, cotton, linen, wine and tobacco. To give but one illustration concerning the latter: Cook [*Sketches*, vol. 2, 38] calculated that 'the tobacco that can be purchased at Gibraltar for 1 real, must be paid by the Spanish peasant, if he obey the law, 48 reals'! Naturally, this system stimulated an immense smuggling activity all along the coasts and borders; a tradition of many centuries which in recent times transformed itself first into the smuggling of cigarettes, and still later into the trafficking of narcotics. [See Cook, *Sketches*, vol. 2, chapter 2 for details]. Hughes [*Overland*, vol. 2, chapter 17, 277] noted how the 'season' for these Spanish smugglers only started with Martin-mass, 12 November, when the vintage in Spain was over and the wine ripened.

the other day on the coat of arms over the door of the English consul at St. Ubes?"⁸ I said they were the arms of England! "Yes," he replied, "but what do they represent?" I said I did not know. "Then," said he, "you do not know the secrets of your own house." I said, "Suppose I were to tell you that they represent the Lion of Bethlehem, and the horned monster of the flaming pit in combat, as to which should obtain the mastery in England, what would you say?" He replied, "I should say that you gave a fair answer."⁹ This man and myself became great friends; he came from Palmella, not far from St. Ubes; he had several mules and horses with him, and dealt in corn and barley. I again walked out and roamed in the environs of the town.

About half a mile from the southern wall is a stone fountain, where the muleteers and other people who visit the town are accustomed to water their horses¹⁰. I sat down by it, and there I remained about two hours, entering into conversation with every one who halted at the fountain; and I will here observe, that during the time of my sojourn at Evora, I repeated my visit every day, and remained there the same time; and by following this plan, I believe that I spoke to at least two hundred of the children of Portugal upon matters relating to their eternal welfare. I found that very few of those whom I addressed had received any species of literary education, none of them had seen the Bible, and not more than half a dozen had the slightest inkling of what the holy book consisted. I found that most of them were bigoted Papists and Miguelites at heart. I therefore, when they told me they were Christians, denied the possibility of their being so, as they were ignorant of Christ and His commandments, and placed their hope of salvation on outward forms and superstitious observances, which were the invention of Satan, who wished to keep them in darkness that at last they might stumble into the pit which he had dug for them. I said repeatedly that the Pope, whom they revered, was an arch deceiver, and the head minister of Satan here on earth, and that the monks and friars, whose absence they so deplored, and to whom they had been accustomed to confess themselves, were his subordinate agents. When called upon for proofs, I invariably cited the ignorance of my auditors respecting the Scriptures, and said that if their spiritual guides had been really ministers of Christ, they would not have permitted their flocks to remain unacquainted with His Word.

⁸ Old English name for Setubal, south of Lisbon across the Tagus estuary. Burke [35, footnote], who took the name to refer to Tubal, the legendary founder of Spanish and Portuguese cities mentioned in Genesis 10:2, called this 'the barbarous seaman's English transliteration' of the town's name. However, it rather seems to go back on the French *Saint Yves*. Palmela stands 10 km away to the north. [Ventura, 82 note 64 & 65.]

⁹ The Lion in the English coat of arms stood for England itself, and was originally combined with the red dragon of Wales. When James VI of Scotland came to reign over England in 1603, he replaced the latter with one of the two unicorns that figured in the arms of Scotland. Borrow here reinterprets the vignettes rather 'creatively' as an allegorical and apocalyptic struggle between Christ and Satan.

¹⁰ This fountain at Evora – known as the *Fonta Nova* - may still be seen, on the corner of the neglected Rua Gil Vicente and the Rua Diana de Liz which runs west from the Hermida de São Brás and past the old Quinta da Horta do Bispo. It was built in 1794 and restored in 1927. Its scenery has changed drastically, for the olive-groves among which it was originally set have become the pastures for sharkish developers who have surrounded it with shoddy suburban housing, while the distribution centre of the post office adjoins it on its north and east side.

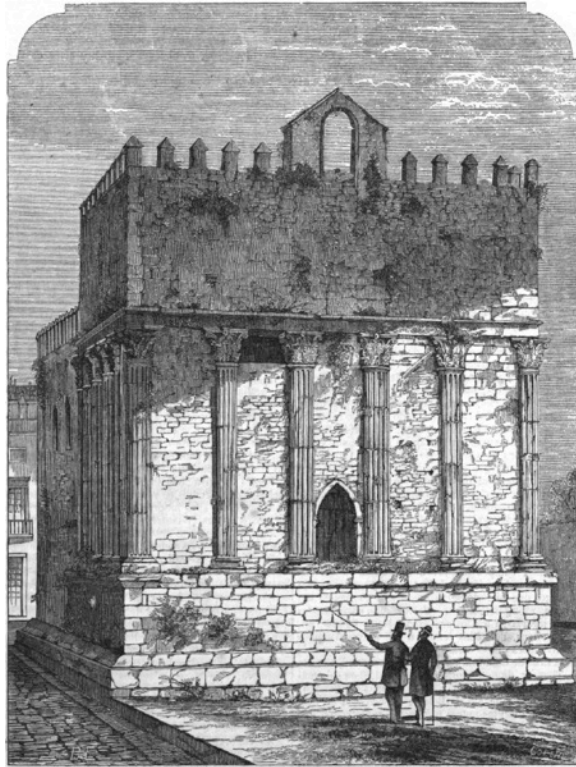


3.1 Borrow's fountain at Evora

Since this occurred, I have been frequently surprised that I experienced no insult and ill-treatment from the people, whose superstitions I was thus attacking; but I really experienced none, and am inclined to believe that the utter fearlessness which I displayed, trusting in the Protection of the Almighty, may have been the cause. When threatened by danger, the best policy is to fix your eye steadily upon it, and it will in general vanish like the morning mist before the sun; whereas, if you quail before it, it is sure to become more imminent. I have fervent hope that the words of my mouth sank deep into the hearts of some of my auditors, as I observed many of them depart musing and pensive. I occasionally distributed tracts amongst them; for although they themselves were unable to turn them to much account, I thought that by their means they might become of service at some future time, and fall into the hands of others, to whom they might be of eternal interest. Many a book which is abandoned to the waters is wafted to some remote shore, and there proves a blessing and a comfort to millions, who are ignorant from whence it came.



3.2 Evora's Temple of Diana today



3.3 Évora's Temple of Diana in Borrow's day

The next day, which was Friday, I called at the house of my friend Don Geronimo Azveto. I did not find him there, but was directed to the see, or episcopal palace, in an apartment of which I found him, writing, with another gentleman, to whom he introduced me; it was the governor of Évora¹¹, who welcomed me with every mark of kindness and affability. After some discourse, we went out together to examine an ancient edifice, which was reported to have served, in bygone times, as a temple to Diana¹². Part of it was evidently of Roman architecture, for there was no mistaking the beautiful light pillars which supported a dome, under which the sacrifices to the most captivating and poetical divinity of the heathen theocracy had probably been made; but the original space between the pillars had been filled up with rubbish of a modern date, and the rest of the building was apparently of the architecture of the latter end of the Middle Ages. It was situated at one end of the building which had once been the seat of the Inquisition, and had served, before the erection of the present see, as the residence of the bishop.

¹¹ Ventura [82, note 66] identifies this person as the civil governor, Antonio José de Ávila.

¹² The *Templo Romano*, which may now be seen partially restored to its old splendour. Popular legend has always ascribed it to the hunting deity Diana, but it is more likely it was dedicated to Jupiter. With its walls bricked up, carrying a roof and with a sort of tower in its middle, the building served as a slaughterhouse until 1870. Later still it was turned into a museum. Only shortly before 1907 an antiquarian-minded citizen of influence restored it to its original looks. [Gérard de Beauregard and Louis de Fouchier, *In Portugal*, in the series: 'De Aarde en haar Volken', 1908, 262f.]

Within the see, where the governor now resides, is a superb library¹³, occupying an immense vaulted room, like the aisle of a cathedral, and in a side apartment is a collection of paintings by Portuguese artists, chiefly portraits, amongst which is that of Don Sebastian¹⁴. I sincerely hope it did not do him justice, for it represents him in the shape of an awkward lad of about eighteen, with a bloated booby face with staring eyes, and a ruff round a short apoplectic neck.

I was shown several beautifully illuminated missals and other manuscripts; but the one which most arrested my attention, I scarcely need say why, was that which bore the following title:

*"Forma sive ordinatio Capelle illustrissimi et xianissimi principis Henrici Sexti Regis Anglie et Francie am dm Hibernie descripta serenissio principi Alfonso Regi Portugalie illustri per humilem servitorem sm Willm. Sav. Decanū capelle supradicte."*¹⁵

It seemed a voice from the olden times of my dear native land! This library and picture gallery had been formed by one of the latter bishops, a person of much learning and piety.

In the evening I dined with Don Geronimo and his brother; the latter soon left us to attend to his military duties. My friend and myself had now much conversation of considerable interest; he lamented the deplorable state of ignorance in which his countrymen existed at present. He said that his friend the governor and himself were endeavouring to establish a school in the vicinity, and that they had made application to the government for the use of an empty convent, called the Espinheiro, or thorn tree, at about a league's distance, and that they had little doubt of their request being complied with. I had before told him who I was, and after expressing joy at the plan which he had

¹³ The library in the former See was based on the collections of its late bibliophile incumbent Joaquim Xavier Botelho de Lima (1717-1800) and his successor Manuel do Cenáculo Vilas-Boas (1724-1814), to which were added the contents of confiscated libraries when the monasteries were closed a few years earlier [Ventura, 82f, note 69; Robertson, *Portugal*, 14]. Nowadays, the collection is municipal property, but can barely be seen since the building in question is perpetually being renovated.

¹⁴ The 16th century boy king who died in Morocco. See note 22 to chapter 1.

¹⁵ I.e.: 'The fashion or ordering of the Chapel of the most illustrious and Christian prince, Henry VI, King of England and France, and lord of Ireland, described for the most serene prince, Alfonso the illustrious King of Portugal by his humble servant William Sav. Dean of the aforesaid chapel.'

The king was Alfonso V 'the African' and the dean William Saye of New College, Oxford, Proctor of the University in 1441 and afterwards Dean of St Paul's Cathedral and of Henry VI's chapel, as we learn from Burke [footnote to 39]. (Note that this transcription – which I copy from Burke – is not beyond all doubt; and that both *dm* and *sm* ought to have a stripe over the *m*)

in contemplation, I now urged him in the most pressing manner to use all his influence to make the knowledge of the Scripture the basis of the education which the children were to receive, and added, that half the Bibles and Testaments which I had brought with me to Evora were heartily at his service; he instantly gave me his hand, said he accepted my offer with the greatest pleasure, and would do all in his power to forward my views, which were in many respects his own. I now told him that I did not come to Portugal with the view of propagating the dogmas of any particular sect, but with the hope of introducing the Bible, which is the well-head of all that is useful and conducive to the happiness of society, - that I cared not what people called themselves, provided they followed the Bible as a guide; for that where the Scriptures were read, neither priestcraft nor tyranny could long exist, and instanced the case of my own country, the cause of whose freedom and prosperity was the Bible, and that only, as the last persecutor of this book, the bloody and infamous Mary, was the last tyrant who had sat on the throne of England.¹⁶ We did not part till the night was considerably advanced, and the next morning I sent him the books, in the firm and confident hope that a bright and glorious morning was about to rise over the night which had so long cast its dreary shadows over the regions of the Alemtejo.

The day after this interesting event, which was Saturday, I had more conversation with the man from Palmella. I asked him if in his journeys he had never been attacked by robbers; he answered no, for that he generally travelled in company with others. "However," said he, "were I alone I should have little fear, for I am well protected." I said that I supposed he carried arms with him. "No other arms than this," said he, pulling out one of those long desperate looking knives, of English manufacture, with which every Portuguese peasant is usually furnished. This knife serves for many purposes, and I should consider it a far more efficient weapon than a dagger. "But," said he, "I do not place much confidence in the knife." I then inquired in what rested his hope of protection. "In this," said he: and unbuttoning his waistcoat, he showed me a small bag, attached to his neck by a silken string. "In this bag is an oracum, or prayer, written by a person of power, and as long as I carry it about with me, no ill can befall me." Curiosity is the leading feature of my character, and I instantly said, with eagerness, that I should feel great pleasure in being permitted to read the prayer. "Well," he replied, "you are my friend, and I would do for you what I would for few others, I will show it you." He then asked for my penknife, and having unripped the bag, took out a large piece of paper closely folded up. I hurried to my apartment and commenced the examination of it. It was scrawled over in a very illegible hand, and was moreover much stained with perspiration, so that I had considerable difficulty in making myself master of its contents, but I at last accomplished the following literal translation of the charm, which was written in bad Portuguese, but which struck me at the time as being one of the most remarkable compositions that had ever come to my knowledge.

¹⁶ Queen Mary I, a.k.a. 'Bloody Mary', eldest daughter of Henry VIII, who reigned 1553-1558 and forcefully tried to return England to Catholicism.

THE CHARM

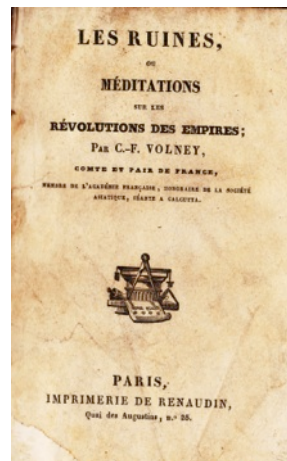
"Just Judge and divine Son of the Virgin Maria, who wast born in Bethlehem, a Nazarene, and wast crucified in the midst of all Jewry, I beseech thee, O Lord, by thy sixth day, that the body of me be not caught, nor put to death by the hands of justice at all; peace be with you, the peace of Christ, may I receive peace, may you receive peace, said God to his disciples. If the accursed justice should distrust me, or have its eyes on me, in order to take me or to rob me, may its eyes not see me, may its mouth not speak to me, may it have ears which may not hear me, may it have hands which may not seize me, may it have feet which may not overtake me; for may I be armed with the arms of St. George, covered with the cloak of Abraham, and shipped in the ark of Noah, so that it can neither see me, nor hear me, nor draw the blood from my body. I also adjure thee, O Lord, by those three blessed crosses, by those three blessed chalices, by those three blessed clergymen, by those three consecrated hosts, that thou give me that sweet company which thou gavest to the Virgin Maria, from the gates of Bethlehem to the portals of Jerusalem, that I may go and come with pleasure and joy with Jesus Christ, the Son of the Virgin Maria, the prolific yet nevertheless the eternal virgin."

The woman of the house and her daughter had similar bags attached to their necks, containing charms, which, they said, prevented the witches having power to harm them. The belief in witchcraft is very prevalent amongst the peasantry of the Alentejo, and I believe of other provinces of Portugal. This is one of the relics of the monkish system, the aim of which, in all countries where it has existed, seems to have been to beset the minds of the people, that they might be more easily misled. All these charms were fabrications of the monks, who had sold them to their infatuated confessants¹⁷. The monks of the Greek and Syrian churches likewise deal in this ware, which they know to be poison, but which they would rather vend than the wholesome balm of the gospel, because it brings them a large price, and fosters the delusion which enables them to live a life of luxury.

The Sunday morning was fine, and the plain before the church of the convent of San Francisco was crowded with people hastening to or returning from the mass. After having performed my morning devotion, and breakfasted, I went down to the kitchen; the girl Geronima was seated by the fire. I inquired if she had heard mass? She replied in the negative, and that she did not intend to hear it. Upon my inquiring her motive for absenting herself, she replied, that since the friars had been expelled from their churches and convents she had ceased to attend mass, or to confess herself; for that the government priests had no spiritual power, and consequently she never troubled them¹⁸.

¹⁷ Charms of this sort, indeed as frequent among the peasantry of Portugal and Spain as Borrow claims, were written and sold both by ecclesiastics and by village *curanderos* or faith-healers. Those written by the former were usually more in keeping with the dogmas of the Church; while the witch doctors produced texts full of confused astrology, pagan magic and mangled Christianity. In this particular case the text is a version of the well-known '*Oração do Justo Juiz*' (Prayer of the Rightful Judge), which was quite popular in the Alentejo and of which many examples survive. [Ventura, 83, note 72.]

¹⁸ Under the new, liberal, constitutional regime, parish priests were appointed and paid by the government. An oath of loyalty to the constitutional regime was a condition for employment. Most conservative priests refused to take this oath and so were kicked out of their positions.



3.4 Volney's 'Les Ruines'

She said the friars were holy men and charitable; for that every morning those of the convent over the way fed forty poor persons with the relics of the meals of the preceding day, but that now these people were allowed to starve. I replied, that the friars, who lived on the fat of the land, could well afford to bestow a few bones upon their poor, and that their doing so was merely a part of their policy, by which they hoped to secure to themselves friends in time of need¹⁹. The girl then observed, that as it was Sunday, I should perhaps like to see some books, and without waiting for a reply she produced them. They consisted principally of popular stories, with lives and miracles of saints, but amongst them was a translation of Volney's *Ruins of Empires*²⁰. I expressed a wish to know how she became possessed of this book. She said that a young

¹⁹ Although Borrow has a fine point here, he blatantly overlooks the dire consequences of the crushing of the Church's power, both in Portugal and Spain. Before the liberal advent, Church institutions were the only ones providing any sort of charity to the poor. When the monasteries were closed and the Church stripped of its lands and revenue, this thin social safety net disappeared. The liberals, ever ready to offer lofty modernist theory, promised to replace Church charity with state assistance. Of course nothing ever came of it. Inefficiency, the war-effort and shameless corruption gobbled up all state income, and the poor were left to fend for themselves. Thus, liberal 'modernisation' represented not progress, but a pronounced deprivation to the weaker shifts of society. To someone like Borrow, who was obsessed with the evils of the Catholic Church, such an observation was naturally most unwelcome.

²⁰ Count C.F. Volney, *Les Ruines, ou Méditations sur les Révolutions des Empires*, first published 1791, one of the most influential books of the French Enlightenment. Up to this time there were two editions in Portuguese, one from 1822 which was banned and destroyed; the other from 1834 which may have been the one the inn-keeper's daughter possessed [Ventura, 83, note 74]. Volney's work was so abhorrent to Borrow because it dismissed all established religions as equally derivative and mutilated forms of the true Natural Religion, and all priests as mistaken and misleading. Consequently Borrow's beloved Anglicanism could not aspire to be mankind's best and only true religion. Volney proposed a Natural Law, a vaguely deistic system based on strict logic, in which God gets reduced to an abstract and absent Supreme Being without much effect or character, and man has to live not according to the laws of religion, but according to the guiding principle of Reason. It is perhaps a sign of its popularity in Portugal that old copies of *Les Ruines* may still be found with some regularity in the antiquarian bookshops of Lisbon and Oporto.

man, a great Constitutionalist, had given it to her some months previous, and had pressed her much to read it, for that it was one of the best books in the world. I replied, that the author of it was an emissary of Satan, and an enemy of Jesus Christ and the souls of mankind; that it was written with the sole aim of bringing all religion into contempt, and that it inculcated the doctrine that there was no future state, nor reward for the righteous nor punishment for the wicked. She made no reply, but going into another room, returned with her apron full of dry sticks and brushwood, all which she piled upon the fire, and produced a bright blaze. She then took the book from my hand and placed it upon the flaming pile; then sitting down, took her rosary out of her pocket and told her beads till the volume was consumed. This was an AUTO DA FE in the best sense of the word²¹.



3.5 Commemorative plaque on Borrow's Evora fountain

On the Monday and Tuesday I paid my usual visits to the fountain, and likewise rode about the neighbourhood on a mule, for the purpose of circulating tracts. I dropped a great many in the favourite walks of the people of Evora, as I felt rather dubious of their accepting them had I proffered them with my own hand, whereas, should they be observed lying on the ground, I thought that curiosity might cause them to be picked up and examined²². I likewise, on the Tuesday evening, paid a farewell visit to my friend Azveto, as it was my intention to leave Evora on the Thursday following and return to Lisbon; in which view I had engaged a calash of a man who informed me that he had served as a soldier in the grande armee of Napoleon, and been present in the Russian campaign. He looked the very image of a drunkard. His face was covered with carbuncles, and his breath impregnated with the fumes of strong waters. He wished much to converse with me in French, in the speaking of which language it seemed he prided himself, but I refused, and told him to speak the language of the country, or I would hold no discourse with him.

²¹ Literally: an 'Act of Faith', i.e. a public session of burning heretics by the Inquisition.

²² As Robertson [*Portugal*, 13] points out, this course of action itself was exceptional for an agent of the British and Foreign Bible Society, and shows what leeway Borrow was given at this particular time. The Bible Society did not usually distribute tracts, only pure Scripture in translation; nor was it in any way engaged in missionary work, preaching or making converts. Scripture, so the philosophy went, could speak for itself and do its own beneficial work.

Wednesday was stormy, with occasional rain. On coming down, I found that my friend from Palmella had departed: but several contrabandistas had arrived from Spain. They were mostly fine fellows, and unlike the two I had seen the preceding week, who were of much lower degree, were chatty and communicative; they spoke their native language, and no other, and seemed to hold the Portuguese in great contempt. The magnificent tones of the Spanish sounded to great advantage amidst the shrill squeaking dialect of Portugal. I was soon in deep conversation with them, and was much pleased to find that all of them could read. I presented the eldest, a man of about fifty years of age, with a tract in Spanish. He examined it for some time with great attention; he then rose from his seat, and going into the middle of the apartment, began reading it aloud, slowly and emphatically; his companions gathered around him, and every now and then expressed their approbation of what they heard. The reader occasionally called upon me to explain passages which, as they referred to particular texts of Scripture, he did not exactly understand, for not one of the party had ever seen either the Old or New Testament.

He continued reading for upwards of an hour, until he had finished the tract; and, at its conclusion, the whole party were clamorous for similar ones, with which I was happy to be able to supply them.

Most of these men spoke of priestcraft and the monkish system with the utmost abhorrence, and said that they should prefer death to submitting again to the yoke which had formerly galled their necks. I questioned them very particularly respecting the opinion of their neighbours and acquaintances on this point, and they assured me that in their part of the Spanish frontier all were of the same mind, and that they cared as little for the Pope and his monks as they did for Don Carlos; for the latter was a dwarf (CHICOTITO) and a tyrant, and the others were plunderers and robbers. I told them they must beware of confounding religion with priestcraft, and that in their abhorrence of the latter they must not forget that there is a God and a Christ to whom they must look for salvation, and whose word it was incumbent upon them to study on every occasion; whereupon they all expressed a devout belief in Christ and the Virgin.

These men, though in many respects more enlightened than the surrounding peasantry, were in others as much in the dark; they believed in witchcraft and in the efficacy of particular charms. The night was very stormy, and at about nine we heard a galloping towards the door, and then a loud knocking; it was opened, and in rushed a wild-looking man mounted on a donkey; he wore a ragged jacket of sheepskin, called in Spanish *zamarra*, with breeches of the same as far down as his knees; his legs were bare. Around his *sombrero*, or shadowy hat, was tied a large quantity of the herb which in English is called *rosemary*, in Spanish *romero*, and in the rustic language of Portugal, *alecrim*; which last is a word of Scandinavian origin (*ELLEGRÉN*), signifying the elfin plant,

and was probably carried into the south by the Vandals²³. The man seemed frantic with terror, and said that the witches had been pursuing him and hovering over his head for the last two leagues. He came from the Spanish frontier with meal and other articles; he said that his wife was following him and would soon arrive, and in about a quarter of an hour she made her appearance, dripping with rain, and also mounted on a donkey.

I asked my friends the contrabandistas why he wore the rosemary in his hat; whereupon they told me that it was good against witches and the mischances on the road. I had no time to argue against this superstition, for, as the chaise was to be ready at five the next morning, I wished to make the most of the short time which I could devote to sleep.



3.6 The Convent of San Francisco

²³ Burke [Glossary] notes that ‘Ellegren’ is unknown to the dictionaries, even though ‘elle’ means ‘fairy’ and ‘gren’ means ‘bough’ in the Scandinavian languages. He points out rather more sensibly that the word is probably ‘of Arabic origin, perhaps *al karim*, a precious thing. The Spanish [is] *romero*, or pilgrim flower. The English word is said to be derived from *ros marinus*, dew of the sea.’