

## CHAPTER 40

**Ofalia - The Juez - Carcel de la Corte - Sunday in Prison - Robber Dress - Father and Son - Characteristic Behaviour - The Frenchman - Prison Allowance - Valley of the Shadow - Pure Castilian - Balseiro - The Cave - Robber Glory.**

Ofalia quickly perceived that the imprisonment of a British subject in a manner so illegal as that which had attended my own, was likely to be followed by rather serious consequences. Whether he himself had at all encouraged the corregidor in his behaviour towards me, it is impossible to say; the probability is that he had not: the latter, however, was an officer of his own appointing, for whose actions himself and the government were to a certain extent responsible. Sir George had already made a very strong remonstrance upon the subject, and had even gone so far as to state in an official note that he should desist from all farther communication with the Spanish government until full and ample reparation had been afforded me for the violence to which I had been subjected. Ofalia's reply was, that immediate measures should be taken for my liberation, and that it would be my own fault if I remained in prison. He forthwith ordered a juez de la primera instancia, a kind of solicitor-general, to wait upon me, who was instructed to hear my account of the affair, and then to dismiss me with an admonition to be cautious for the future. My friends of the embassy, however, had advised me how to act in such a case. Accordingly, when the juez on the second night of my imprisonment made his appearance at the prison,<sup>1</sup> and summoned me before him, I went, but on his proceeding to question me, I absolutely refused to answer. "I deny your right to put any questions to me," said I; "I entertain, however, no feelings of disrespect to the government or to yourself, Caballero Juez; but I have been illegally imprisoned. So accomplished a jurist as yourself cannot fail to be aware that, according to the laws of Spain, I, as a foreigner, could not be committed to prison for the offence with which I had been charged, without previously being conducted before the captain-general of this royal city, whose duty it is to protect foreigners, and see that the laws of hospitality are not violated in their persons."

JUEZ. - Come, come, Don Jorge, I see what you are aiming at; but listen to reason: I will not now speak to you as a juez but as a friend who wishes you well, and who entertains a profound reverence for the British nation. This is a foolish affair altogether; I will not deny that the political chief acted somewhat hastily on the information of a person not perhaps altogether worthy of credit. No great damage, however, has been done to you, and to a man of the world like yourself, a little adventure of this kind is rather calculated to afford amusement than anything else. Now be advised, forget what has happened; you know that it is the part and duty of a Christian to forgive; so, Don Jorge, I advise you to leave this place forthwith. I dare say you are getting tired of it. You are this moment free to depart; repair at once to your lodgings, where, I promise you, that no one shall be permitted to interrupt you for the future. It is getting late, and the prison doors will speedily be closed for the night. *Vamos, don jorge, a la casa, a la posada!*<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The name of the judge remains to be discovered. The Morning Herald of Wednesday 16 May 1838 [Fraser, *Sleeping*, Annex 2] states that he visited Borrow on Thursday 3 May, which would be the third night Borrow spent in jail, not the second.

<sup>2</sup> 'Come on, Don George: go home, go to your boarding house!'

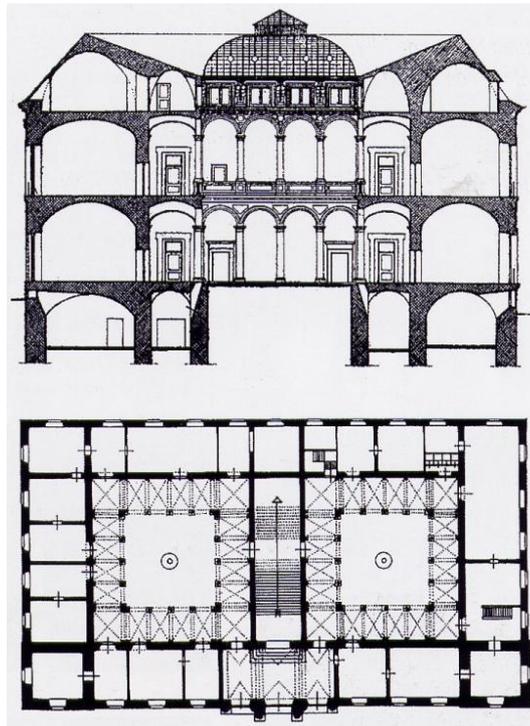
MYSELF. - "But Paul said unto them, they have beaten us openly uncondemned, being Romans, and have cast us into prison; and now do they thrust us out privily? Nay, verily: but let them come themselves and fetch us out."<sup>3</sup>

I then bowed to the juez, who shrugged his shoulders and took snuff. On leaving the apartment I turned to the alcaide, who stood at the door: "Take notice," said I, "that I will not quit this prison till I have received full satisfaction for being sent hither uncondemned. You may expel me if you please, but any attempt to do so shall be resisted with all the bodily strength of which I am possessed."

"Your worship is right," said the alcaide with a bow, but in a low voice.

Sir George, on hearing of this affair, sent me a letter in which he highly commanded my resolution not to leave the prison for the present, at the same time begging me to let him know if there were anything that he could send me from the embassy to render my situation more tolerable.

I will now leave for the present my own immediate affairs, and proceed to give some account of the prison of Madrid and its inmates.



*40.1 Lay-out of the Carcel de Corte*

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<sup>3</sup> Acts 16 : 37 [Burke, footnote to 551]. Note that this Bible quote is already found in a manuscript press-release which Borrow penned in May 1838 from jail for international journalists to use in their reporting [Fraser, *Sleeping*, Annex 3].

The Carcel de la Corte, where I now was, though the principal prison of Madrid, is one which certainly in no respect does credit to the capital of Spain. Whether it was originally intended for the purpose to which it is at present applied, I have no opportunity of knowing. The chances, however, are, that it was not; indeed it was not till of late years that the practice of building edifices expressly intended and suited for the incarceration of culprits came at all into vogue. Castles, convents, and deserted palaces, have in all countries, at different times, been converted into prisons, which practice still holds good upon the greater part of the continent, and more particularly in Spain and Italy, which accounts, to a certain extent, for the insecurity of the prisons, and the misery, want of cleanliness, and unhealthiness which in general pervade them.<sup>4</sup>

I shall not attempt to enter into a particular description of the prison of Madrid, indeed it would be quite impossible to describe so irregular and rambling an edifice. Its principal features consisted of two courts, the one behind the other, intended for the great body of the prisoners to take air and recreation in. Three large vaulted dungeons or calabozos occupied three sides of this court, immediately below the corridors of which I have already spoken. These dungeons were roomy enough to contain respectively from one hundred to one hundred and fifty prisoners, who were at night secured therein with lock and bar, but during the day were permitted to roam about the courts as they thought fit. The second court was considerably larger than the first, though it contained but two dungeons, horribly filthy and disgusting places; this second court being used for the reception of the lower grades of thieves. Of the two dungeons one was, if possible, yet more horrible than the other; it was called the gallinaria, or chicken coop, and within it every night were pent up the young fry of the prison, wretched boys from seven to fifteen years of age, the greater part almost in a state of nudity. The common bed of all the inmates of these dungeons was the ground, between which and their bodies nothing intervened, save occasionally a manta or horse-cloth, or perhaps a small mattress; this latter luxury was, however, of exceedingly rare occurrence.

Besides the calabozos connected with the courts, were other dungeons in various parts of the prison; some of them quite dark, intended for the reception of those whom it might be deemed expedient to treat with peculiar severity. There was likewise a ward set apart for females. Connected with the principal corridor were many small apartments, where resided prisoners confined for debt or for political offences. And, lastly, there was a small capilla or chapel, in which prisoners cast for death passed the last three days of their existence in company of their ghostly advisers.

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<sup>4</sup> Nothing in this description of Borrow's is untrue or overdone. Misery and mortality rates in Spanish prisons were awful – particularly during the Carlist Civil War, when two or three times more inmates were locked up than the inadequate buildings could handle. For a truthful, if slightly pathetic, description of the conditions of this jail (which included dirt, epidemics, theft, violence, sodomy and rape): see Ayguals, vol. 1, chapter 5, 160f. See also Resident Officer, vol. 2, chapter 7, for another knowledgeable account which bears Borrow out word for word.

I shall not soon forget my first Sunday in prison. Sunday is the gala day of the prison, at least of that of Madrid, and whatever robber finery is to be found within it, is sure to be exhibited on that day of holiness. There is not a set of people in the world more vain than robbers in general, more fond of cutting a figure whenever they have an opportunity, and of attracting the eyes of their fellow creatures by the gallantry of their appearance. The famous Sheppard<sup>5</sup> of olden times delighted in sporting a suit of Genoese velvet, and when he appeared in public generally wore a silver-hilted sword at his side; whilst Vaux and Hayward, heroes of a later day, were the best dressed men on the pave of London. Many of the Italian bandits go splendidly decorated, and the very Gypsy robber has a feeling for the charms of dress; the cap alone of the Haram Pasha, or leader of the cannibal Gypsy band which infested Hungary towards the conclusion of the last century, was adorned with gold and jewels to the value of four thousand guilders.<sup>6</sup> Observe, ye vain and frivolous, how vanity and crime harmonize. The Spanish robbers are as fond of this species of display as their brethren of other lands, and, whether in prison or out of it, are never so happy as when, decked out in a profusion of white linen, they can loll in the sun, or walk jauntily up and down.



40.2 John Sheppard in jail  
From Borrow's *'Celebrated Trials'*, vol. 3, p. 378.

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<sup>5</sup> John or Jack Sheppard, a famous bandit born at Spitalfields in 1702 and executed at Tyburn in 1724. He figures in the *Celebrated Trials* (vol. 3, 375-389) which Borrow edited for the publisher Richard Phillips in the 1820s. On page 387 it says: 'Jack now resolved to appear like a gentleman among his old friends in Drury-land and Clare-market. He strutted about in a fine suit of black, a light tie-wig, and a ruffled shirt, with a silver-hilted sword by his side, a diamond ring on his finger, and a gold watch in his pocket' [Editor's italics].

<sup>6</sup> In *The Zincali*, part 1, chapter 5, Borrow writes on this subject: 'Cases of cannibalism are said to have occurred in Hungary amongst the Gypsies; indeed, the whole race, in that country, has been accused of cannibalism (...): it is very probable, however, that they were quite innocent of this odious practice, and that the accusation had its origin in popular prejudice, or in the fact of their foul feeding, and their seldom rejecting carrion or offal of any description.' As for Haram Pasha, no more seems to be known about him than what is said here.

Snow-white linen, indeed, constitutes the principal feature in the robber foppery of Spain. Neither coat nor jacket is worn over the shirt, the sleeves of which are wide and flowing, only a waistcoat of green or blue silk, with an abundance of silver buttons, which are intended more for show than use, as the vest is seldom buttoned. Then there are wide trousers, something after the Turkish fashion; around the waist is a crimson faja or girdle, and about the head is tied a gaudily coloured handkerchief from the loom of Barcelona; light pumps and silk stockings complete the robber's array. This dress is picturesque enough, and well adapted to the fine sunshiny weather of the Peninsula; there is a dash of effeminacy about it, however, hardly in keeping with the robber's desperate trade. It must not, however, be supposed that it is every robber who can indulge in all this luxury; there are various grades of thieves, some poor enough, with scarcely a rag to cover them. Perhaps in the crowded prison of Madrid, there were not more than twenty who exhibited the dress which I have attempted to describe above; these were *Jente de reputacion*,<sup>7</sup> tip-top thieves, mostly young fellows, who, though they had no money of their own, were supported in prison by their majas and amigas, females of a certain class<sup>8</sup>, who form friendships with robbers, and whose glory and delight it is to administer to the vanity of these fellows with the wages of their own shame and abasement. These females supplied their cortejos with the snowy linen, washed, perhaps, by their own hands in the waters of the Manzanares, for the display of the Sunday, when they would themselves make their appearance dressed a la maja, and from the corridors would gaze with admiring eyes upon the robbers vapouring about in the court below.

Amongst those of the snowy linen who most particularly attracted my attention, were a father and son; the former was a tall athletic figure of about thirty, by profession a housebreaker, and celebrated throughout Madrid for the peculiar dexterity which he exhibited in his calling. He was now in prison for a rather atrocious murder committed in the dead of night, in a house at Caramanchel<sup>9</sup>, in which his only accomplice was his son, a child under seven years of age. "The apple," as the Danes say, "had not fallen far from the tree"; the imp was in every respect the counterpart of the father, though in miniature. He, too, wore the robber shirt sleeves, the robber waistcoat with the silver buttons, the robber kerchief round his brow, and, ridiculous enough, a long Manchegan knife in the crimson faja. He was evidently the pride of the ruffian father, who took all imaginable care of this chick of the gallows, would dandle him on his knee, and would occasionally take the cigar from his own moustached lips and insert it in the urchin's mouth. The boy was the pet of the court, for the father was one of the valientes of the prison, and those who feared his prowess, and wished to pay their court to him, were always fondling the child. What an enigma is this world of ours! How dark and mysterious are the sources of what is called crime and virtue! If that infant wretch become eventually a murderer like his father, is he to blame? Fondled by robbers, already dressed as a robber, born of a robber, whose own history was perhaps similar. Is it right?

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<sup>7</sup> Burke [Glossary]: *Gente de reputación*, 'swells', 'swagger people'.

<sup>8</sup> Very lower class women, and in this context often prostitutes. Burke [Glossary] explains that *Majo* (fem. *Maja*) 'is a word of more general signification than *Manolo*. [*Majo*] is a dandy, or smart fellow, all over Spain; [*Manolo*] is used only of a certain class in Madrid.' For the latter term see footnote 27 to chapter 12.

<sup>9</sup> As Burke [footnote to 555] points out: the correct name would be Carabanchel or Carabancheles, two villages a few miles south of Madrid at the time.

O, man, man, seek not to dive into the mystery of moral good and evil; confess thyself a worm, cast thyself on the earth, and murmur with thy lips in the dust, Jesus, Jesus!



40.3 *The Majos and Majas of Lavapies*

What most surprised me with respect to the prisoners, was their good behaviour; I call it good when all things are taken into consideration, and when I compare it with that of the general class of prisoners in foreign lands. They had their occasional bursts of wild gaiety, their occasional quarrels, which they were in the habit of settling in a corner of the inferior court with their long knives; the result not unfrequently being death, or a dreadful gash in the face or the abdomen; but, upon the whole, their conduct was infinitely superior to what might have been expected from the inmates of such a place. Yet this was not the result of coercion, or any particular care which was exercised over them; for perhaps in no part of the world are prisoners so left to themselves and so utterly neglected as in Spain: the authorities having no farther anxiety about them, than to prevent their escape; not the slightest attention being paid to their moral conduct and not a thought bestowed upon their health, comfort or mental improvement, whilst within the walls. Yet in this prison of Madrid, and I may say in Spanish prisons in general, for I have been an inmate of more than one<sup>10</sup>, the ears of the visitor are never shocked with horrid blasphemy and obscenity, as in those of some other countries, and more particularly in civilized France; nor are his eyes outraged and himself insulted, as he would assuredly be, were he to look down upon the courts from the galleries of the Bicetre. And yet in this prison of Madrid were some of the most desperate characters in Spain: ruffians who had committed acts of cruelty and atrocity sufficient to make the flesh shudder. But gravity and sedateness are the leading characteristics of the Spaniards, and the very robber, except in those moments when he is engaged in his occupation, and then no one is more sanguinary, pitiless, and wolfishly eager for booty, is a being who can be courteous and affable, and who takes pleasure in conducting himself with sobriety and decorum.

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<sup>10</sup> Of two, to be exact, the other being the prison of Seville, where Borrow was locked up for a few days in late November 1839. There is absolutely no reason to accept the suggestion voiced by Knapp [I : 353f] and followed by Burke [footnote to 557] that Borrow was ever imprisoned in the jail of Pamplona in the mid 1820s. See Missler, *GBB* II : 7, 8ff.

Happily, perhaps, for me, that my acquaintance with the ruffians of Spain commenced and ended in the towns about which I wandered, and in the prisons into which I was cast for the Gospel's sake, and that, notwithstanding my long and frequent journeys, I never came in contact with them on the road or in the despoblado.

The most ill-conditioned being in the prison was a Frenchman, though probably the most remarkable. He was about sixty years of age, of the middle stature, but thin and meagre, like most of his countrymen; he had a villainously-formed head, according to all the rules of craniology, and his features were full of evil expression. He wore no hat, and his clothes, though in appearance nearly new, were of the coarsest description. He generally kept aloof from the rest, and would stand for hours together leaning against the walls with his arms folded, glaring sullenly on what was passing before him. He was not one of the professed valientes, for his age prevented his assuming so distinguished a character, and yet all the rest appeared to hold him in a certain awe: perhaps they feared his tongue, which he occasionally exerted in pouring forth withering curses on those who incurred his displeasure. He spoke perfectly good Spanish, and to my great surprise excellent Basque, in which he was in the habit of conversing with Francisco, who, lolling from the window of my apartment, would exchange jests and witticisms with the prisoners in the court below, with whom he was a great favourite.

One day when I was in the patio, to which I had free admission whenever I pleased, by permission of the alcaide, I went up to the Frenchman, who stood in his usual posture, leaning against the wall, and offered him a cigar. I do not smoke myself, but it will never do to mix among the lower classes of Spain unless you have a cigar to present occasionally. The man glared at me ferociously for a moment, and appeared to be on the point of refusing my offer with perhaps a hideous execration. I repeated it, however, pressing my hand against my heart, whereupon suddenly the grim features relaxed, and with a genuine French grimace, and a low bow, he accepted the cigar, exclaiming, "*Ah, Monsieur, pardon, mais c'est faire trop d'honneur a un pauvre diable comme moi.*"<sup>11</sup>

"Not at all," said I, "we are both fellow prisoners in a foreign land, and being so we ought to countenance each other. I hope that whenever I have need of your co-operation in this prison you will afford it me."

"Ah, Monsieur," exclaimed the Frenchman in rapture, "*Vous avez bien raison; il faut que les etrangers se donnent la main dans ce . . . pays de barbares*"<sup>12</sup>. *Tenez*, " he added, in a whisper, "if you have any plan for escaping, and require my assistance, I have an arm and a knife at your service: you may trust me, and that is more than you could any of these *sacres gens ici*," glancing fiercely round at his fellow prisoners.

"You appear to be no friend to Spain and the Spaniards," said I. "I conclude that you have experienced injustice at their hands. For what have they immured you in this place?"

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<sup>11</sup> 'Forgive me, dear sir, but this is a greater honour than a poor devil like myself deserves.'

<sup>12</sup> 'You are most certainly right. Foreigners must stick together in this... land of barbarians.'

"*Pour rien du tout, c'est a dire pour une bagatelle*<sup>13</sup>; but what can you expect from such animals? For what are you imprisoned? Did I not hear say for Gypsyism and sorcery?"

"Perhaps you are here for your opinions?"

"*Ah, Mon Dieu, non; je ne suis pas homme a semblable betise.* I have no opinions. *Je faisois . . . mais ce n'importe; je me trouve ici, ou je creve de faim.*"<sup>14</sup>

"I am sorry to see a brave man in such a distressed condition," said I; "have you nothing to subsist upon beyond the prison allowance? Have you no friends?"

"Friends in this country, you mock me; here one has no friends, unless one buy them. I am bursting with hunger; since I have been here I have sold the clothes off my back, that I might eat, for the prison allowance will not support nature, and of half of that we are robbed by the Batu, as they call the barbarian of a governor.<sup>15</sup> LES HAILLONS which now cover me were given by two or three devotees who sometimes visit here. I would sell them if they would fetch aught. I have not a *sou*, and for want of a few crowns I shall be garroted within a month unless I can escape, though, as I told you before, I have done nothing, a mere bagatelle; but the worst crimes in Spain are poverty and misery."

"I have heard you speak Basque, are you from French Biscay?"

"I am from Bordeaux, Monsieur; but I have lived much on the Landes and in Biscay, TRAVAILLANT A MON METIER. I see by your look that you wish to know my history. I shall not tell it you. It contains nothing that is remarkable. See, I have smoked out your cigar; you may give me another, and add a dollar if you please, NOUS SOMMES CREVES ICI DE FAIM. I would not say as much to a Spaniard, but I have a respect for your countrymen; I know much of them; I have met them at Maida and the other place<sup>16</sup>."

"Nothing remarkable in his history!" Why, or I greatly err, one chapter of his life, had it been written, would have unfolded more of the wild and wonderful than fifty volumes of what are in general called adventures and hairbreadth escapes by land and sea. A soldier! what a tale could that man have told of marches and retreats, of battles lost and won,

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<sup>13</sup> 'For nothing at all, that's to say: something trivial.'

<sup>14</sup> 'Ah, good Lord, no: I am not the kind of man who commits such a stupidity. I have no opinions. I committed.... But no matter! Here I am, where I starve dismally.'

<sup>15</sup> Burke [Glossary]: Batu, Romany for Father. In thieves' slang, a prison governor or jailer.

<sup>16</sup> [Author's note] Perhaps Waterloo. [Editor's addition] The Battle of Maida (a village in Calabria, the 'toe' of Italy) took place on 4 July 1806, pitching a British expeditionary force under John Stuart against a French contingent under Jean Reynier. It was a hard-fought British victory. The Frenchman would have come to Spain later, between 1808 and 1814, to fight the Spaniards and English during the Peninsular War. Many such French veterans stayed behind after the war, and a number of them turned into notorious bandits.

towns sacked, convents plundered; perhaps he had seen the flames of Moscow ascending to the clouds, and had "tried his strength with nature in the wintry desert," pelted by the snow-storm, and bitten by the tremendous cold of Russia: and what could he mean by plying his trade in Biscay and the Landes, but that he had been a robber in those wild regions, of which the latter is more infamous for brigandage and crime than any other part of the French territory. Nothing remarkable in his history! then what history in the world contains aught that is remarkable?

I gave him the cigar and dollar: he received them, and then once more folding his arms, leaned back against the wall and appeared to sink gradually into one of his reveries. I looked him in the face and spoke to him, but he did not seem either to hear or see me. His mind was perhaps wandering in that dreadful valley of the shadow, into which the children of earth, whilst living, occasionally find their way; that dreadful region where there is no water, where hope dwelleth not, where nothing lives but the undying worm. This valley is the facsimile of hell, and he who has entered it, has experienced here on earth for a time what the spirits of the condemned are doomed to suffer through ages without end.

He was executed about a month from this time. The bagatelle for which he was confined was robbery and murder by the following strange device. In concert with two others, he hired a large house in an unfrequented part of the town, to which place he would order tradesmen to convey valuable articles, which were to be paid for on delivery; those who attended paid for their credulity with the loss of their lives and property. Two or three had fallen into the snare. I wished much to have had some private conversation with this desperate man, and in consequence begged of the alcaide to allow him to dine with me in my own apartment; whereupon Monsieur Basompierre<sup>17</sup>, for so I will take the liberty of calling the governor, his real name having escaped my memory, took off his hat, and, with his usual smile and bow, replied in purest Castilian, "English Cavalier, and I hope I may add friend, pardon me, that it is quite out of my power to gratify your request, founded, I have no doubt, on the most admirable sentiments of philosophy. Any of the other gentlemen beneath my care shall, at any time you desire it, be permitted to wait upon you in your apartment. I will even go so far as to cause their irons, if irons they wear, to be knocked off in order that they may partake of your refection with that comfort which is seemly and convenient: but to the gentleman in question I must object; he is the most evil disposed of the whole of this family, and would most assuredly breed a function either in your apartment or in the corridor, by an attempt to escape. Cavalier, *me pesa*<sup>18</sup>, but I cannot accede to your request. But with respect to any other gentleman, I shall be most happy, even Balseiro, who, though strange things are told of him, still knows how to comport himself, and in whose behaviour there is something both of formality and politeness, shall this day share your hospitality if you desire it, Cavalier."

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<sup>17</sup> A quip on the prison warden being himself of doubtful morality. François, Marquis of Bassompierre (1579 - 1646) was the warden of the Bastille for about 10 days in 1617. In 1631, he was arrested and spent twelve years there as a prisoner.

<sup>18</sup> I am truly sorry.

Of Balseiro I have already had occasion to speak in the former part of this narrative<sup>19</sup>. He was now confined in an upper story of the prison, in a strong room, with several other malefactors. He had been found guilty of aiding and assisting one Pepe Candelas, a thief of no inconsiderable renown, in a desperate robbery perpetrated in open daylight upon no less a personage than the queen's milliner, a Frenchwoman, whom they bound in her own shop, from which they took goods and money to the amount of five or six thousand dollars. Candelas had already expiated his crime on the scaffold,<sup>20</sup> but Balseiro, who was said to be by far the worst ruffian of the two, had by dint of money, an ally which his comrade did not possess, contrived to save his own life; the punishment of death, to which he was originally sentenced, having been commuted to twenty years' hard labour in the presidio of Malaga. I visited this worthy and conversed with him for some time through the wicket of the dungeon. He recognized me, and reminded me of the victory which I had once obtained over him, in the trial of our respective skill in the crabbed Gitano, at which Sevilla the bull-fighter was umpire.



40.4 *The assault on the shop of the queen's milliner*

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<sup>19</sup> See the end of chapter 12 above. Balseiro had been arrested the previous July. A newspaper clipping dated 12 July 1837 and reproduced in Garcia Barros, *Medio Siglo*, 131, tells how he was arrested in Madrid's Calle de la Magdalena, after having escaped some time earlier from the prison of Valladolid. He was dressed elegantly, and sported some bushy sideburns as a disguise.

<sup>20</sup> Luis Candelas, a famous Lavapiés bandit born around 1805, was arrested in Olmedo, Valladolid, on 18 July 1837 and executed by garrote on 6 November 1837, just outside the Toledo Gate of Madrid. The assault of the Queen's milliner, a French lady called Vicenta Mormín, took place in the fashionable Calle del Carmen nº 32, shortly after December 1835. The loot consisted of 35,000 reales in cash and another 300,000 reales worth of clothes ready for delivery to the palace. Balseiro was part of Candelas' famous gang, which also included the notorious Francisco Villena, a.k.a. Paco 'El Sastre'.

Upon my telling him that I was sorry to see him in such a situation, he replied that it was an affair of no manner of consequence, as within six weeks he should be conducted to the presidio, from which, with the assistance of a few ounces distributed among the guards, he could at any time escape. "But whither would you flee?" I demanded. "Can I not flee to the land of the Moors<sup>21</sup>," replied Balseiro, "or to the English in the camp of Gibraltar; or, if I prefer it, cannot I return to this foro (CITY), and live as I have hitherto done, choring the gachos (*robbing the natives*); what is to hinder me? Madrid is large, and Balseiro has plenty of friends, especially among the lumias (*women*)<sup>22</sup>," he added with a smile. I spoke to him of his ill-fated accomplice Candelas; whereupon his face assumed a horrible expression. "I hope he is in torment," exclaimed the robber. The friendship of the unrighteous is never of long duration; the two worthies had it seems quarrelled in prison; Candelas having accused the other of bad faith and an undue appropriation to his own use of the CORPUS DELICTI in various robberies which they had committed in company.



40.5 Luis Candelas

I cannot refrain from relating the subsequent history of this Balseiro. Shortly after my own liberation, too impatient to wait until the presidio should afford him a chance of regaining his liberty, he in company with some other convicts broke through the roof of the prison and escaped. He instantly resumed his former habits, committing several daring robberies, both within and without the walls of Madrid. I now come to his last, I may call it his master crime, a singular piece of atrocious villainy. Dissatisfied with the proceeds of street robbery and house-breaking, he determined upon a bold stroke, by which he hoped to acquire money sufficient to support him in some foreign land in luxury and splendour.

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<sup>21</sup> Such escapes did happen; see footnote 41 to chapter 9 above.

<sup>22</sup> Burke [Glossary] explains that 'harlots' is a better translation of this Caló word than 'women'

There was a certain comptroller of the queen's household, by name Gabiria, a Basque by birth, and a man of immense possessions: this individual had two sons, handsome boys, between twelve and fourteen years of age, whom I had frequently seen, and indeed conversed with, in my walks on the bank of the Manzanares, which was their favourite promenade<sup>23</sup>. These children, at the time of which I am speaking, were receiving their education at a certain seminary in Madrid. Balseiro, being well acquainted with the father's affection for his children, determined to make it subservient to his own rapacity. He formed a plan which was neither more nor less than to steal the children, and not to restore them to their parent until he had received an enormous ransom. This plan was partly carried into execution: two associates of Balseiro well dressed drove up to the door of the seminary, where the children were, and, by means of a forged letter, purporting to be written by the father, induced the school-master to permit the boys to accompany them for a country jaunt, as they pretended<sup>24</sup>. About five leagues from Madrid, Balseiro had a cave in a wild unfrequented spot between the Escorial and a village called Torre Lodones<sup>25</sup>: to this cave the children were conducted, where they remained in durance under the custody of the two accomplices; Balseiro in the meantime remaining in Madrid for the purpose of conducting negotiations with the father. The father, however, was a man of considerable energy, and instead of acceding to the terms of the ruffian,

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<sup>23</sup> See the end of chapter 13. The correct name of the father was Manuel de Gaviria y Donza.

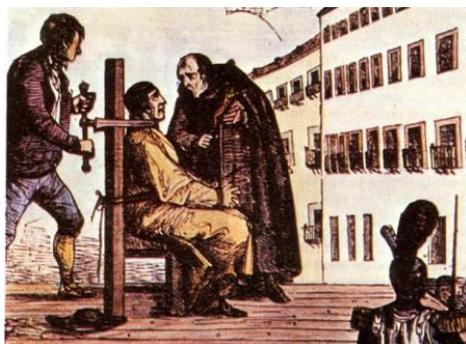
<sup>24</sup> This kidnapping by Balseiro and Paco 'El Sastre' of Manuel and Paco Gaviria, 10 and 12 years old, took place on 27 April 1839, from the Escuelas Pías de San Anton, in the Calle de la Hortaleza in Madrid. Some sources tell that the kidnapers used a far more convincing trick: they showed the rector a letter supposedly written by the boys' great-uncle, announcing the imminent death of their father and calling them to his sickbed. So as not to upset the children, they were to be told that they would be taken on an outing to Valdemoro. Instead, they were taken on horseback to the bare, rocky Pedriza mountain. Here the bandits and the boys stayed in the company of some goatherds.

<sup>25</sup> The spot where the children were kept is nowhere near the Escorial or Torre Lodones, but many miles to the north. Here Borrow simply took advantage of a good occasion to slander the village of Torre Lodones, which he loathed profoundly; perhaps because he experienced some unpleasantness there while passing through on his way to Segovia in the summer of 1838, the details of which have not come down to us. In any case he went out of his way several times to calumny the place. In his 'Report on Past and Future Operations in Spain' of November 1838, he wrote that Torre Lodones, when he passed there, had proven a bad client for his books, because: '[It] is indeed a mere wretched assemblage of huts, the inhabitants of which labour under the most squalid poverty, owing to the extreme niggardness of the neighbouring soil, which consists almost entirely of rock from which scarcely anything can be gathered, so that the people are proverbially thieves. Only three copies of the sacred volume were purchased in this unhappy place' [Darlow, 378] Borrow once again alluded to this 'proverbial' reputation in chapter 46 of *The Romany Rye*, written some 15 years later, when one of the characters, Borrow's Irish childhood friend Murthagh, tells how he was robbed after a card game by the Torre Lodones priest and all his parishioners, adding: 'Och! it's a bad village that, and if I had known what it was I would have avoided it, or run straight through it (...). There is a proverb about it, as I was afterwards told, old as the time of the Moors, which holds good to the present day - it is, that in Torre Lodones there are twenty-four housekeepers, and twenty-five thieves, meaning that all the people are thaves, and the clergyman to boot, who is not reckoned a housekeeper; and troth I found the clergyman the greatest thaif of the lot.' The original proverb must have gone something like: '*Torre Lodones, veinticuatro vecinos, veinticinco ladrones*'.

communicated in a letter<sup>26</sup>, instantly took the most vigorous measures for the recovery of his children. Horse and foot were sent out to scour the country, and in less than a week the children were found near the cave, having been abandoned by their keepers, who had taken fright on hearing of the decided measures which had been resorted to; they were, however, speedily arrested and identified by the boys as their ravishers. Balseiro perceiving that Madrid was becoming too hot to hold him, attempted to escape, but whether to the camp of Gibraltar or to the land of the Moor, I know not; he was recognized, however, at a village in the neighbourhood of Madrid, and being apprehended, was forthwith conducted to the capital, where he shortly after terminated his existence on the scaffold, with his two associates; Gabiria and his children being present at the ghastly scene, which they surveyed from a chariot at their ease.<sup>27</sup>

Such was the end of Balseiro, of whom I should certainly not have said so much, but for the affair of the crabbed Gitano. Poor wretch! he acquired that species of immortality which is the object of the aspirations of many a Spanish thief, whilst vapouring about in the patio, dressed in the snowy linen; the rape of the children of Gabiria made him at once the pet of the fraternity. A celebrated robber, with whom I was subsequently imprisoned at Seville,<sup>28</sup> spoke his eulogy in the following manner. -

"Balseiro was a very good subject, and an honest man. He was the head of our family, Don Jorge; we shall never see his like again; pity that he did not sack the parne (MONEY), and escape to the camp of the Moor, Don Jorge."



40.6 The Execution of Luis Candelas

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<sup>26</sup> As the bandits themselves could not write, one of the boys, in a nice wry touch, actually penned the letter to his father demanding 3,000 gold *onzas* if he wished to see them alive again. This letter was delivered by one of the shepherds, but another local notified the authorities of nearby Manzanares village, and a manhunt was organised. When the posse of soldiers approached, the bandits abandoned the children in the hut of the old shepherd Perea, near the 'Canto del Tolmo' rock, and fled.

<sup>27</sup> Other sources say that both Balseiro and Paco 'El Sastre' were arrested in Madrid's Plazuela del Rastro a few days later. They were executed in the morning of 20 July 1839 in the usual spot before the Toledo Gate.

<sup>28</sup> For this imprisonment, see Appendix 1 at the end of this book. The 'celebrated robber' must either have been Palacio, 'the most expert housebreaker and dexterous swindler in Spain', or Salvador, 'the highwayman of Ronda, who has committed a hundred murders' [Darlow, 454].

[From: *The Zincali*, part 2, chapter 6]

There are other ways of accomplishing the hokkano baro. The most simple, and indeed the one most generally used by the Gitanas, is to persuade some simple individual to hide a sum of money in the earth, which they afterwards carry away. A case of this description occurred within my own knowledge, at Madrid, towards the latter part of the year 1837. There was a notorious Gitana, of the name of Aurora; she was about forty years of age, a Valencian by birth, and immensely fat. This amiable personage, by some means, formed the acquaintance of a wealthy widow lady; and was not slow in attempting to practise the hokkano baro upon her. She succeeded but too well. The widow, at the instigation of Aurora, buried one hundred ounces of gold beneath a ruined arch in a field, at a short distance from the wall of Madrid. The inhumation was effected at night by the widow alone. Aurora was, however, on the watch, and, in less than ten minutes after the widow had departed, possessed herself of the treasure; perhaps the largest one ever acquired by this kind of deceit. The next day the widow had certain misgivings, and, returning to the spot, found her money gone.

About six months after this event, I was imprisoned in the Carcel de la Corte, at Madrid, and there I found Aurora, who was in durance for defrauding the widow. She said that it had been her intention to depart for Valencia with the 'barias,' as she styled her plunder, but the widow had discovered the trick too soon, and she had been arrested. She added, however, that she had contrived to conceal the greatest part of the property, and that she expected her liberation in a few days, having been prodigal of bribes to the 'justicia.' In effect, her liberation took place sooner than my own. Nevertheless, she had little cause to triumph, as before she left the prison she had been fleeced of the last cuarto of her ill-gotten gain, by alguazils and escribanos, who, she admitted, understood hokkano baro much better than herself.

When I next saw Aurora, she informed me that she was once more on excellent terms with the widow, whom she had persuaded that the loss of the money was caused by her own imprudence, in looking for it before the appointed time; the spirit of the earth having removed it in anger. She added that her dupe was quite disposed to make another venture, by which she hoped to retrieve her former loss.