

CHAPTER 50

Night on the Guadalquivir - Gospel Light - Bonanza - Strand of San Lucar - Andalusian Scenery - History of a Chest - Cosas de los Ingleses - The Two Gypsies - The Driver - The Red Nightcap - The Steam Boat - Christian Language.



50.1 Seville harbour with a Guadalquivir steamer

On the night of the 31st of July I departed from Seville upon my expedition, going on board one of the steamers which ply on the Guadalquivir between Seville and Cadiz.

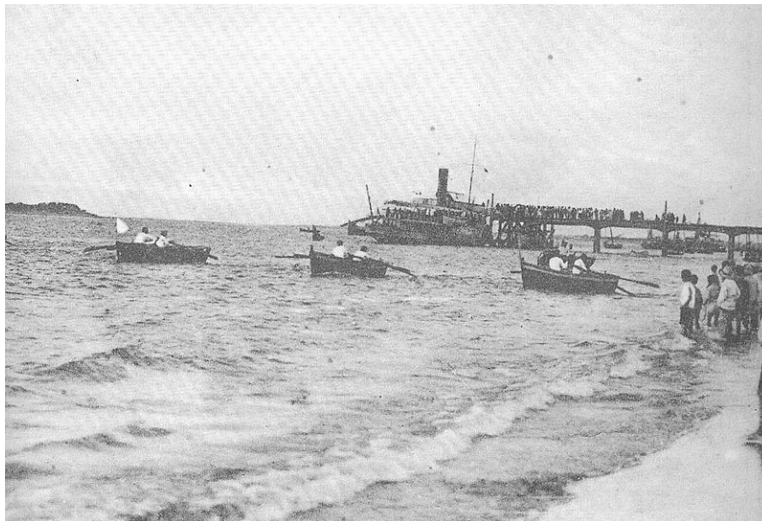
It was my intention to stop at San Lucar, for the purpose of recovering the chest of Testaments which had been placed in embargo there, until such time as they could be removed from the kingdom of Spain. These Testaments I intended for distribution amongst the Christians whom I hoped to meet on the shores of Barbary.¹ San Lucar is about fifteen leagues distant from Seville, at the entrance of the bay of Cadiz, where the yellow waters of the Guadalquivir unite with the brine. The steamer shot from the little quay, or wharf, at about half-past nine, and then arose a loud cry, - it was the voices of those on board and on shore wishing farewell to their friends. Amongst the tumult I thought I could distinguish the accents of some friends of my own who had accompanied me to the bank, and I instantly raised my own voice louder than all. The night was very dark, so much so, indeed, that as we passed along we could scarcely distinguish the trees which cover the eastern shore of the river until it takes its first turn. A calmazo had reigned during the day at Seville, by which is meant, exceedingly sultry weather, unenlivened by the slightest breeze. The night likewise was calm and sultry. As I had frequently made the voyage of the Guadalquivir, ascending and descending

¹ Old name for Morocco, which goes back to 'Berber', the generic name for the local tribes.

this celebrated river, I felt nothing of that restlessness and curiosity which people experience in a strange place, whether in light or darkness, and being acquainted with none of the other passengers, who were talking on the deck, I thought my best plan would be to retire to the cabin and enjoy some rest, if possible. The cabin was solitary and tolerably cool, all its windows on either side being open for the admission of air. Flinging myself on one of the cushioned benches, I was soon asleep, in which state I continued for about two hours, when I was aroused by the curious biting of a thousand bugs, which compelled me to seek the deck, where, wrapping myself in my cloak, I again fell asleep. It was near daybreak when I awoke; we were then about two leagues from San Lucar. I arose and looked towards the east, watching the gradual progress of dawn, first the dull light, then the streak, then the tinge, then the bright flush, till at last the golden disk of that orb which giveth day emerged from the abyss of immensity,² and in a moment the whole prospect was covered with brightness and glory. The land smiled, the waters sparkled, the birds sang, and men arose from their resting places and rejoiced: for it was day, and the sun was gone forth on the errand of its Creator, the diffusion of light and gladness, and the dispelling of darkness and sorrow.

"Behold the morning sun
Begins his glorious way;
His beams through all the nations run,
And life and light convey.

"But where the Gospel comes,
It spreads diviner light;
It calls dead sinners from their tombs,
And gives the blind their sight."³



50.2 Seville steamer arriving at Sanlúcar

² By the looks of it, a quote from some obscure poetic text, which still needs to be identified.

³ The first two verses of a hymn by Isaac Watts (1674 -1748) based on Psalm 19, second part.

We now stopped before Bonanza: this is properly speaking the port of San Lucar, although it is half a league distant from the latter place. It is called Bonanza on account of its good anchorage, and its being secured from the boisterous winds of the ocean; its literal meaning is "fair weather." It consists of several large white buildings, principally government store-houses, and is inhabited by the coast-guard, dependents on the custom-house, and a few fishermen. A boat came off to receive those passengers whose destination was San Lucar, and to bring on board about half a dozen who were bound for Cadiz: I entered with the rest. A young Spaniard of very diminutive stature addressed some questions to me in French as to what I thought of the scenery and climate of Andalusia. I replied that I admired both, which evidently gave him great pleasure. The boatman now came demanding two reals for conveying me on shore. I had no small money, and offered him a dollar to change⁴. He said that it was impossible. I asked him what was to be done; whereupon he replied uncivilly that he knew not, but could not lose time, and expected to be paid instantly. The young Spaniard, observing my embarrassment, took out two reals and paid the fellow. I thanked him heartily for this act of civility, for which I felt really grateful; as there are few situations more unpleasant than to be in a crowd in want of change, whilst you are importuned by people for payment. A loose character once told me that it was far preferable to be without money at all, as you then knew what course to take. I subsequently met the young Spaniard at Cadiz, and repaid him with thanks.



50.3 Sanlucar beach

A few cabriolets were waiting near the wharf, in order to convey us to San Lucar. I ascended one, and we proceeded slowly along the Playa or strand. This place is famous in the ancient novels of Spain, of that class called Picaresque, or those devoted to the adventures of notorious scoundrels, the father of which, as also of all others of the same kind, in whatever language, is *Lazarillo de Tormes*⁵. Cervantes himself has

⁴ A 'duro', a large coin worth 20 reales, ten times the fare.

⁵ A famous, anonymous, 16th century book of adventures, precursor to most picaresque novels.

immortalized this strand in the most amusing of his smaller tales, *La Ilustre Fregona*. In a word, the strand of San Lucar in ancient times, if not in modern, was a rendezvous for ruffians, contrabandistas, and vagabonds of every, description, who nested there in wooden sheds, which have now vanished. San Lucar itself was always noted for the thievish propensities of its inhabitants - the worst in all Andalusia. The roguish innkeeper in *DON QUIXOTE* perfected his education at San Lucar.⁶ All these recollections crowded into my mind as we proceeded along the strand, which was beautifully gilded by the Andalusian sun. We at last arrived nearly opposite to San Lucar, which stands at some distance from the water side. Here a lively spectacle presented itself to us: the shore was covered with a multitude of females either dressing or undressing themselves, while (I speak within bounds) hundreds were in the water sporting and playing; some were close by the beach, stretched at their full length on the sand and pebbles, allowing the little billows to dash over their heads and bosoms; whilst others were swimming boldly out into the firth. There was a confused hubbub of female cries, thin shrieks and shrill laughter; couplets likewise were being sung, on what subject it is easy to guess, for we were in sunny Andalusia, and what can its black-eyed daughters think, speak, or sing of but *AMOR, AMOR*, which now sounded from the land and the waters. Farther on along the beach we perceived likewise a crowd of men bathing; we passed not by them, but turned to the left up an alley or avenue which leads to San Lucar, and which may be a quarter of a mile long. The view from hence was truly magnificent; before us lay the town, occupying the side and top of a tolerably high hill, extending from east to west. It appeared to be of considerable size, and I was subsequently informed that it contained at least twenty thousand inhabitants. Several immense edifices and walls towered up in a style of grandeur, which can be but feebly described by words; but the principal object was an ancient castle towards the left. The houses were all white, and would have shone brilliantly in the sun had it been higher, but at this early hour they lay comparatively in shade. The *TOUT ENSEMBLE* was very Moorish and oriental, and indeed in ancient times San Lucar was a celebrated stronghold of the Moors, and next to Almeria, the most frequented of their commercial places in Spain. Everything, indeed, in these parts of Andalusia, is perfectly oriental. Behold the heavens, as cloudless and as brightly azure as those of Ind; the fiery sun which tans the fairest cheek in a moment, and which fills the air with flickering flame; and O, remark the scenery and the vegetable productions. The alley up which we were moving was planted on each side with that remarkable tree or plant, for I know not which to call it, the giant aloe, which is called in Spanish, *PITA*, and in Moorish, *GURSEAN*. It rises here to a height almost as magnificent as on the African shore. Need I say that the stem, which springs up from the middle of the bush of green blades, which shoot out from the root on all sides, is as high as a palm-tree; and need I say, that those blades, which are of an immense thickness at the root, are at the tip sharper than the point of a spear, and would inflict a terrible wound on any animal which might inadvertently rush against them?⁷

⁶ See *Don Quijote*, part 1, chapter 2 and 3.

⁷ Which was precisely the reason why these plants were so frequent in Andalusia. Rooting in North African customs, both aloes and cactus were in the old days planted around the house and garden to keep out thieves and stray cattle.

One of the first houses at San Lucar was the posada at which we stopped. It confronted, with some others, the avenue up which we had come. As it was still early, I betook myself to rest for a few hours, at the end of which time I went out to visit Mr. Phillipi⁸, the British vice-consul, who was already acquainted with me by name, as I had been recommended to him in a letter from a relation of his at Seville. Mr. Phillipi was at home in his counting-house, and received me with much kindness and civility. I told him the motive of my visit to San Lucar, and requested his assistance towards obtaining the books from the customhouse, in order to transport them out of the country, as I was very well acquainted with the difficulties which every one has to encounter in Spain, who has any business to transact with the government authorities. He assured me that he should be most happy to assist me, and accordingly despatched with me to the custom-house⁹ his head clerk, a person well known and much respected at San Lucar.

It may be as well here at once to give the history of these books, which might otherwise tend to embarrass the narrative. They consisted of a chest of Testaments in Spanish, and a small box of Saint Luke's Gospel in the Gitano or language of the Spanish Gypsies¹⁰. I obtained them from the custom-house at San Lucar, with a pass for that of Cadiz. At Cadiz I was occupied two days, and also a person whom I employed, in going through all the formalities, and in procuring the necessary papers. The expense was great, as money was demanded at every step I had to take, though I was simply complying in this instance with the orders of the Spanish government in removing prohibited books from Spain. The farce did not end until my arrival at Gibraltar, where I paid the Spanish consul a dollar for certifying on the back of the pass, which I had to return to Cadiz, that the books were arrived at the former place. It is true that he never saw the books nor inquired about them, but he received the money, for which he alone seemed to be anxious.

Whilst at the custom-house of San Lucar I was asked one or two questions respecting the books contained in the chests: this afforded me some opportunity of speaking of the New Testaments and the Bible Society. What I said excited attention, and presently all the officers and dependents of the house, great and small, were gathered around me, from the governor to the porter. As it was necessary to open the boxes to inspect their contents, we all proceeded to the court-yard, where, holding a Testament in my hand, I recommended my discourse. I scarcely know what I said; for I was much agitated, and hurried away by my feelings, when I bethought me of the manner in which the word of

⁸ Mr. Charles *Philippe*, not Phillipi [Knapp I : 319]

⁹ The custom house was located on the Plaza de los Cisnes (formerly Plaza de Aduana), exactly on the where today the 'ugly ice cream parlour' stands [Fernandez de Castro, 283]. Gauthier [chapter 15] gives a short, dismissive description of a big square building he saw from the river, and which possibly was the Sanlúcar custom house: 'Un grand bâtiment d'architecture moderne, construit avec cette régularité de caserne et d'hôpital qui fait le charme des constructions actuelles, portait à son frontispice une inscription quelconque que nous ne pûmes lire, ce que nous regrettons peu. Cette chose carrée et percée de beaucoup de fenêtres a été bâtie par Ferdinand VII. Ce doit être une douane, un entrepôt ou quelque fabrique dans ce genre.'

¹⁰ Some 130 Scio New Testaments [Darlow, 442] and slightly less than 50 copies of the Gypsy Luke and Basque Luke each [Missler, *GBB* 32, 37f].

God was persecuted in this unhappy kingdom. My words evidently made impression, and to my astonishment every person present pressed me for a copy. I sold several within the walls of the custom-house. The object, however, of most attention was the Gypsy Gospel, which was minutely examined amidst smiles and exclamations of surprise; an individual every now and then crying, "COSAS DE LOS INGLESES." A bystander asked me whether I could speak the Gitano language. I replied that I could not only speak it, but write it, and instantly made a speech of about five minutes in the Gypsy tongue, which I had no sooner concluded than all clapped their hands and simultaneously shouted, "COSAS DE INGLATERRA," "COSAS DE LOS INGLESES." I disposed of several copies of the Gypsy Gospel likewise, and having now settled the business which had brought me to the custom-house, I saluted my new friends and departed with my books.

I now revisited Mr. Phillipi, who, upon learning that it was my intention to proceed to Cadiz next morning by the steamer, which would touch at Bonanza at four o'clock, despatched the chests and my little luggage to the latter place, where he likewise advised me to sleep, in order that I might be in readiness to embark at that early hour. He then introduced me to his family, his wife an English woman, and his daughter an amiable and beautiful girl of about eighteen years of age, whom I had previously seen at Seville; three or four other ladies from Seville were likewise there on a visit, and for the purpose of sea-bathing. After a few words in English between the lady of the house and myself, we all commenced chatting in Spanish, which seemed to be the only language understood or cared for by the rest of the company; indeed, who would be so unreasonable as to expect Spanish females to speak any language but their own, which, flexible and harmonious as it is, (far more so I think than any other,) seemed at times quite inadequate to express the wild sallies of their luxuriant imagination. Two hours fled rapidly away in discourse, interrupted occasionally by music and song, when I bade farewell to this delightful society, and strolled out to view the town.

It was now past noon, and the heat was exceedingly fierce: I saw scarcely a living being in the streets, the stones of which burnt my feet through the soles of my boots. I passed through the square of the Constitution, which presents nothing particular to the eye of the stranger, and ascended the hill to obtain a nearer view of the castle. It is a strong heavy edifice of stone, with round towers, and, though deserted, appears to be still in a tolerable state of preservation. I became tired of gazing, and was retracing my steps, when I was accosted by two Gypsies, who by some means had heard of my arrival. We exchanged some words in Gitano, but they appeared to be very ignorant of the dialect, and utterly unable to maintain a conversation in it. They were clamorous for a gabicote, or book in the Gypsy tongue. I refused it them, saying that they could turn it to no profitable account; but finding that they could read, I promised them each a Testament in Spanish. This offer, however, they refused with disdain, saying that they cared for nothing written in the language of the Busne or Gentiles. They then persisted in their demand, to which I at last yielded, being unable to resist their importunity; whereupon they accompanied me to the inn, and received what they so ardently desired.



50.4 San Lucar Castle

In the evening I was visited by Mr. Phillipi, who informed me that he had ordered a cabriolet to call for me at the inn at eleven at night, for the purpose of conveying me to Bonanza, and that a person there who kept a small wine-house, and to whom the chests and other things had been forwarded, would receive me for the night, though it was probable that I should have to sleep on the floor. We then walked to the beach, where there were a great number of bathers, all men. Amongst them were some good swimmers; two, in particular, were out at a great distance in the firth of the Guadalquivir, I should say at least a mile; their heads could just be descried with the telescope. I was told that they were friars. I wondered at what period of their lives they had acquired their dexterity at natation. I hoped it was not at a time when, according to their vows, they should have lived for prayer, fasting, and mortification alone. Swimming is a noble exercise, but it certainly does not tend to mortify either the flesh or the spirit¹¹. As it was becoming dusk, we returned to the town, when my friend bade me a kind farewell. I then retired to my apartment, and passed some hours in meditation.

It was night, ten o'clock; - eleven o'clock, and the cabriolet was at the door. I got in, and we proceeded down the avenue and along the shore, which was quite deserted. The waves sounded mournfully; everything seemed to have changed since the morning. I even thought that the horse's feet sounded differently, as it trotted slowly over the moist firm sand. The driver, however, was by no means mournful, nor inclined to be silent long: he soon commenced asking me an infinity of questions as to whence I came and whither I was bound. Having given him what answers I thought most proper, I, in return, asked him whether he was not afraid to drive along that beach, which had always borne so bad a character, at so unseasonable an hour. Whereupon, he looked around him, and seeing no person, he raised a shout of derision, and said that a fellow with his whiskers feared not all the thieves that ever walked the playa, and that no dozen men in San Lucar dare to waylay any traveller whom they knew to be beneath his protection. He was a good specimen of the Andalusian braggart. We soon saw a light or two shining dimly before us; they proceeded from a few barks and small vessels stranded on the sand close below Bonanza: amongst them I distinguished two or three dusky figures.

¹¹ Borrow himself was an outstanding swimmer all his life. In 1853, at the age of 50, he even saved a drowning man in the waves of the North Sea before Great Yarmouth.

We were now at our journey's end, and stopped before the door of the place where I was to lodge for the night. The driver, dismounting, knocked loud and long, until the door was opened by an exceedingly stout man of about sixty years of age; he held a dim light in his hand, and was dressed in a red nightcap and dirty striped shirt. He admitted us, without a word, into a very large long room with a clay floor. A species of counter stood on one side near the door; behind it stood a barrel or two, and against the wall, on shelves, many bottles of various sizes. The smell of liquors and wine was very powerful. I settled with the driver and gave him a gratuity, whereupon he asked me for something to drink to my safe journey. I told him he could call for whatever he pleased; whereupon he demanded a glass of aguardiente, which the master of the house, who had stationed himself behind the counter, handed him without saying a word. The fellow drank it off at once, but made a great many wry faces after having swallowed it, and, coughing, said that he made no doubt it was good liquor, as it burnt his throat terribly. He then embraced me, went out, mounted his cabriolet, and drove off.

The old man with the red nightcap now moved slowly to the door, which he bolted and otherwise secured; he then drew forward two benches, which he placed together, and pointed to them as if to intimate to me that there was my bed: he then blew out the candle and retired deeper into the apartment, where I heard him lay himself down sighing and snorting. There was now no farther light than what proceeded from a small earthen pan on the floor, filled with water and oil, on which floated a small piece of card with a lighted wick in the middle, which simple species of lamp is called "mariposa."¹² I now laid my carpet bag on the bench as a pillow, and flung myself down. I should have been asleep instantly, but he of the red nightcap now commenced snoring awfully, which brought to my mind that I had not yet commended myself to my friend and Redeemer: I therefore prayed, and then sank to repose.



50.5 *The Bonanza docks*

¹² Ford [*HB*, 95 & 244] explains that such *mariposa* lamps were already known in Pharaonic times. Herodotus, book II, 62, describes a night time celebration in the Delta city of Sais, known as the 'Festival of Lamps'. At this festival, writes the Father of History, 'everybody burns a great number of lights in the open air around the houses; the lamps they use are flat dishes filled with oil and salt, with a floating wick which keeps burning throughout the night.'

I was awakened more than once during the night by cats, and I believe rats, leaping upon my body. At the last of these interruptions I arose, and, approaching the mariposa, looked at my watch¹³; it was half-past three o'clock. I opened the door and looked out; whereupon some fishermen entered clamouring for their morning draught: the old man was soon on his feet serving them. One of the men said to me that, if I was going by the steamer, I had better order my things to the wharf without delay, as he had heard the vessel coming down the river. I dispatched my luggage, and then demanded of the red nightcap what I owed him. He replied "One real." These were the only two words which I heard proceed from his mouth: he was certainly addicted to silence, and perhaps to philosophy, neither of which are much practised in Andalusia. I now hurried to the wharf; the steamer was not yet arrived, but I heard its thunder up the river every moment becoming more distinct: there was mist and darkness upon the face of the waters, and I felt awe as I listened to the approach of the invisible monster booming through the stillness of the night¹⁴. It came at last in sight, plashed its way forward, stopped, and I was soon on board. It was the Peninsula, the best boat on the Guadalquivir.

What a wonderful production of art is a steamboat; and yet why should we call it wonderful, if we consider its history. More than five hundred years have elapsed since the idea of making one first originated; but it was not until the close of the last century that the first, worthy of the name, made its appearance on a Scottish river.¹⁵

During this long period of time, acute minds and skilful hands were occasionally busied in attempting to remove those imperfections in the machinery, which alone prevented a vessel being made capable of propelling itself against wind and tide. All these attempts were successively abandoned in despair, yet scarcely one was made which was perfectly fruitless; each inventor leaving behind him some monument of his labour, of which those who succeeded him took advantage, until at last a fortunate thought or two, and a few more perfect arrangements, were all that were wanting. The time arrived, and now, at length, the very Atlantic is crossed by haughty steamers. Much has been said of the utility of steam in spreading abroad civilization, and I think justly. When the first steam vessels were seen on the Guadalquivir, about ten years ago, the Sevillians ran to the banks of the river, crying "sorcery, sorcery," which idea was not a little favoured by the speculation being an English one, and the boats, which were English built, being provided with English engineers, as, indeed, they still are; no Spaniard having been found capable of understanding the machinery. They soon however, became accustomed to them, and the boats are in general crowded with passengers. Fanatic and vain as the Sevillians still are, and bigoted as they remain to their own customs, they know that good, in one instance at least, can proceed from a foreign land, and that land a land of heretics; inveterate prejudice has been shaken, and we will hope that this is the dawn of their civilization.

¹³ This is the only indication we have that Borrow carried a watch while travelling in Spain.

¹⁴ Steamboats were still something of a novelty in these days, and the racket they made was the first mechanical noise to be heard beside factories.

¹⁵ The first steamboat 'worthy of the name' which Borrow has in mind here may have been Patrick Miller's experiment launched upon Dalswinton Loch in October 1788. Note that there were, however, many other working models in France and the USA before that time.

Whilst passing over the bay of Cadiz, I was reclining on one of the benches on the deck, when the captain walked by in company with another man; they stopped a short distance from me, and I heard the captain ask the other, in a low voice, how many languages he spoke; he replied "only one." "That one," said the captain, "is of course the Christian"; by which name the Spaniards style their own language in contradistinction to all others¹⁶. "That fellow," continued the captain, "who is lying on the deck, can speak Christian too, when it serves his purpose, but he speaks others, which are by no means Christian: he can talk English, and I myself have heard him chatter in Gitano with the Gypsies of Triana; he is now going amongst the Moors, and when he arrives in their country, you will hear him, should he be there, converse as fluently in their gibberish as in Christiano, nay, better, for he is no Christian himself. He has been several times on board my vessel already, but I do not like him, as I consider that he carries something about with him which is not good."

This worthy person, on my coming aboard the boat, had shaken me by the hand and expressed his joy at seeing me again.

¹⁶ The expression '*habla Cristiano*', i.e. 'talk in a Christian tongue', is still part and parcel of Spanish parlance when summoning a fellow Spaniard to stop speaking nonsense, or instruct a foreigner to switch to the Castilian language.