

Appendix 2

Borrow left Spain definitely on 3 April 1840, sailing from Cadiz on the Royal Adelaide steam packet, together with his fiancée Mary Clarke, her daughter Henrietta, his new manservant Hayim ben Attar, and their lapdog Craffs. Sidi Habismilk, his splendid Arabian steed, was slung aboard ship and transported to Great Britain through the good offices of consul Brackenbury, who had one of his own servants, a man called Medina, perform the difficult transfer of the wild, kicking animal from the sloop to the ocean steamer.¹ The ship stopped in Lisbon on 5 April 1840 for a number of hours, and here Borrow met General Don Luis Fernandez de Cordoba, as described in a lengthy autobiographical episode which Borrow inserted in his abortive review of Richard Ford's Hand-Book for Travellers in Spain.²

[Meeting with General Córdoba in Lisbon Harbour]

About five years ago we were lying off Lisbon in a steamer on our way from Spain. The morning was fine, and we were upon deck staring vacantly about us, as is our custom, with our hands in our pockets, when a large barge with an awning, and manned by many rowers, came dashing through the water and touched the vessel's side. Some people came on board, of whom, however, we took but little notice, continuing with our hands in our pockets staring sometimes at the river, and sometimes at the castle of Saint George, the most remarkable object connected with the 'white city,' which strikes the eye from the Tagus. In a minute or two the steward came running up to us from the cabin, and said, 'There are two or three strange people below who seem to want something; but what it is we can't make out, for we don't understand them. Now I heard you talking 'Moors' the other day to the black cook, so pray have the kindness to come and say two or three words in Moors to the people below.' Whereupon, without any hesitation, we followed the steward into the cabin. 'Here's one who can jabber Moors with you,' bawled he, bustling up to the new comers. On observing the strangers, however, who sat on one of the sofas, instead of addressing them in 'Moors,' we took our hands out of our pockets, drew ourselves up, and making a most ceremonious bow, exclaimed in pure and sonorous Castilian, 'Cavaliers, at your feet! What may it please you to command?'

¹ So Knapp, I : 338f and II : 298f. However, Angus Fraser - a meticulous researcher who rarely if ever got such things wrong - thought that the horse was transported on another, subsequent vessel [Fraser, *Hasfeld*, 11; also Ridler, in *GBB* 24, 69 note 28 and *GBB* II : 6, 98 note 22.]

² Reproduced in Knapp I : 339-342 and later published by Thomas White, as 'A supplementary chapter to *The Bible in Spain*, inspired by Ford's *Hand-Book for Travellers in Spain*, by George Borrow, London: printed for private circulation 1913'. There are some minor differences between both versions which I will not note; here I merely point out that in Knapp's manuscript, the tale is told in the singular, not the bothersome 1st person plural as in White's published text.

The strangers, who had looked somewhat blank at the first appearance of our figure, no sooner heard us address them in this manner than they uttered a simultaneous ‘*Ola!*’ and, springing up, advanced towards us with countenances irradiated with smiles. They were three in number, to say nothing of a tall loutish fellow with something of the look of a domestic, who stood at some distance. All three were evidently gentlemen—one was a lad about twenty, the other might be some ten years older—but the one who stood between the two, and who immediately confronted us, was evidently the principal. He might be about forty, and was tall and rather thin; his hair was of the darkest brown; his face strongly marked and exceedingly expressive; his nose was fine, so was his forehead, and his eyes sparkled like diamonds beneath a pair of bushy brows slightly grizzled. He had one disagreeable feature—his mouth—which was wide and sensual-looking to a high degree. He was dressed with elegance—his brown surtout was faultless; shirt of the finest Holland, frill to correspond, and fine ruby pin. In a very delicate and white hand he held a delicate white handkerchief perfumed with the best atar-de-nuar of Abderrahman.

‘What can we oblige you in, cavalier?’ said we, as we looked him in the face: and then he took our hand, our brown hand, into his delicate white one, and whispered something into our ear—whereupon, turning round to the steward, we whispered something into his ear. ‘I know nothing about it,’ said the steward in a surly tone—we have nothing of the kind on board—no such article or packet is come; and I tell you what, I don’t half like these fellows; I believe them to be custom-house spies: it was the custom-house barge they came in, so tell them in Moors to get about their business.’

‘The man is a barbarian, sir,’ said we to the cavalier; ‘but what you expected is certainly not come.’ A deep shade of melancholy came over the countenance of the cavalier: he looked us wistfully in the face, and sighed; then, turning to his companions, he said, ‘We are disappointed, but there is no remedy—*Vamos, amigos.*’ Then, making us a low bow, he left the cabin, followed by his friends. The boat was ready, and the cavalier was about to descend the side of the vessel—we had also come on deck—suddenly our eyes met. ‘Pardon a stranger, cavalier, if he takes the liberty of asking your illustrious name.’ ‘General Córdoba,’ said the cavalier in an under voice.³ We made our lowest bow, pressed our hand to our heart—he did the same, and in another minute was on his way to the shore.

³ Luis Fernández de Córdoba (1798 – 1840). Born in Cádiz as the son of a navy captain, Cordova was at first a staunch defender of the absolutist regime of Ferdinand VII. He fought the liberal regime of the *Trienio Constitucional* in 1820-1823, and was ambassador in Paris, Lisbon and Berlin in the subsequent years. On the death of Ferdinand in 1833, however, he accepted the late king’s wish that his daughter Isabel II reign instead of his brother Don Carlos. Fighting for the liberal regime against the Carlists over the next years, he rose to be commander of all the northern armies. But when the Queen Mother Maria Cristina was forced to accept the 1812 Constitution after the La Granja Rebellion of 1836 (see chapter 14 above), Córdoba stepped down and fled to France. In 1838 he returned to Spain and organised an abortive rising in Seville. When this failed, he fled to Lisbon.

‘Do you know who that was?’ said we to the steward—‘that was the great General Cordova.’ ‘Cordova, Cordova,’ said the steward. ‘Well, I really believe I have something for that name. A general do you say? What a fool I have been—I suppose you couldn’t call him back?’ The next moment we were at the ship’s side shouting. The boat had by this time nearly reached the *Caesodrea*⁴, though, had it reached Cintra—but stay, Cintra is six leagues from Lisbon—and, moreover, no boat unless carried can reach Cintra. Twice did we lift up our voice. At the second shout the boat rested on its oars; and when we added ‘*Caballeros, vengan ustedes atras,*’ its head was turned round in a jiffy, and back it came bounding over the waters with twice its former rapidity.



Luis Fernández de Cordoba

We are again in the cabin; the three Spaniards, the domestic, ourselves, and the steward; the latter stands with his back against the door, for the purpose of keeping out intruders. There is a small chest on the table, on which all eyes are fixed; and now, at a sign from Córdoba, the domestic advances, in his hand a chisel, which he inserts beneath the lid of the chest, exerting all the strength of his wrist—the lid flies open, and discloses some hundreds of genuine Havannah cigars. ‘What obligations am I not under to you!’ said Córdoba, again taking us by the hand, ‘the very sight of them gives me new life; long have I been expecting them. A trusty friend at Gibraltar promised to send them, but they have tarried many weeks: but now to dispose of this treasure.’

In a moment he and his friends were busily employed in filling their pockets. Yes Córdoba, the renowned general, and the two secretaries of a certain legation at Lisbon—for such were his two friends—are stowing away the Havannah cigars with all the eagerness of *contrabandistas*. ‘Rascal,’ said Córdoba, suddenly turning to his domestic with a furious air and regular Spanish grimace, ‘you are doing nothing; why don’t you take more?’ ‘I can’t hold any more, your worship,’ replied the latter in a piteous tone. ‘My pockets are already full; and see how full I am here,’ he continued, pointing to his bosom. ‘Peace, *bribón,*’ said his master; ‘if your bosom is full, fill your hat, and put it on your head.’

⁴ The *Caes do Sodré*, the landing docks of Lisbon harbour. See footnote 4 to chapter 1 above.

‘We owe you more than we can express,’ said he, turning round and addressing us in the blandest tones. ‘But why all this mystery?’ we demanded. ‘O, tobacco is a royal monopoly here, you know, so we are obliged to be cautious.’ ‘But you came in the custom-house barge?’ ‘Yes, the superintendent of the customs lent it to us in order that we might be put to as little inconvenience as possible. Between ourselves, he knows all about it; he is only solicitous to avoid any scandal. Really these Portuguese have some slight tincture of gentility in them, though they are neither Castilian nor English,’ he continued, making us another low bow. On taking his departure the general gave the steward an ounce of gold, and having embraced us and kissed us on the cheek, said, ‘In a few weeks I shall be in England, pray come and see me there.’ This we promised faithfully to do, but never had the opportunity; he went on shore with his cigars, gave a champagne supper to his friends, and the next morning was a corpse. What a puff of smoke is the breath of man!⁵

Next day the ship sailed for Oporto, Vigo, Falmouth and London, which was reached on 16 April 1840. Borrow and his family put up in the Spread Eagle Inn in Gracechurch Street, London.

Borrow had a final interview with the Bible Society on 20 April 1840. It proved to be a fruitless conversation. Much as he had hinted time and time again at his desire to be sent to China, the Bible Society had clearly grown weary of an agent with more zeal than judgement. Next day, Brandram, clearly relieved at having brought the rambling black sheep back into the fold, wrote Borrow a quick note in a conciliatory tone stating that ‘after what you said yesterday in the Committee, I am hardly aware that anything can arise out of [your communications] (...) I do not myself see any sphere open to which your services in connection with our Society can be transferred.’⁶

Brandram’s intuition proved correct. Some days later, the pertinent body of the Bible Society determined that ‘upon mature consideration, it does not appear to this Sub-Committee that there is, at present, any opening for employing Mr Borrow beneficially as an Agent of the Society.’ Borrow’s Bible peddling years had come to a definite end.

*It was time, in short, to settle down. On 23 April 1840, George Borrow and Mary Clark were married at St. Peters, Cornhill.⁷ Together with his wife, his stepdaughter, and his man-servant from Fez, Borrow settled in Oulton to the mostly sedentary life of a small but respectable landowner. In the tea house on the grounds, Borrow began to write his novels and travelogues: first *The Zincali*, published in 1841; after that, in 1843, *The Bible in Spain*, which became an instant bestseller.*

⁵ In reality, Córdoba did not die the next day, as Borrow here dramatically claims, but some three weeks later, on 22 April 1840 [Knapp I : 342 footnote 2; Wikipedia].

⁶ Jenkins 325.

⁷ Jenkins 324; Robertson, *Portugal*, 20-21.