

CHAPTER 26

Lugo - The Baths - A Family History - Miguelets - The Three Heads - A Farrier - English Squadron - Sale of Testaments - Coruna - The Recognition - Luigi Piozzi - The Speculation - A Blank Prospect - John Moore.



26.1 *The Plaza Mayor of Lugo*

At Lugo I found a wealthy bookseller, to whom I brought a letter of recommendation from Madrid.¹ He willingly undertook the sale of my books. The Lord deigned to favour my feeble exertions in his cause at Lugo. I brought thither thirty Testaments, all of which were disposed of in one day; the bishop of the place, for Lugo is an episcopal see, purchasing two copies for himself, whilst several priests and ex-friars, instead of following the example of their brethren at Leon, by persecuting the work, spoke well of it and recommended its perusal.² I was much grieved that my stock of these holy books was exhausted, there being a great demand; and had I been able to supply them, quadruple the quantity might have been sold during the few days that I continued at Lugo.

¹ Probably Pedro Pujol Macía who ran his bookshop in the Plaza Major [Fernandez de la Vega, C., *Dous escritores ingleses na Praza Maior de Lugo*, in: Galicia desde Londres, Coruña 1994; also Odriazola, A., and Barreiro Fernández, X.R., *Historia de la Imprenta en Galicia*, Coruña 1992, 301ff]. He was a son of the Catalan printer and bookseller José Pujol Bafler, who died on 14 December 1834 and left the shop to his sons Pedro and Manuel [Abel Vilela, A., ‘Historia de un Edificio Lucence’, in: *Boletín do Museo Provincial de Lugo*, nº 4, Lugo 1988-89, 139].

² This bishop, Don Hipólito Sanchez Rangel, was the only Galician prelate of liberal persuasion and loyalty to the cause of the child-queen Isabel II. His episcopal governor, Don José Maria Padilla y Aguila, who ran the diocese during his superior’s frequent absences as MP in Madrid, was an even more active and fervent supporter of the young queen and the liberal cause. The common clergy was, however, less enchanted with the new regime, and most of them refused to obey Padilla. Consequently Borrow’s remark that ‘several priests and ex-friars (...) spoke well of it’ may owe more to feigning than to true enthusiasm. [Barreiro Fernández, *Carlismo*, 128, 144 and 161f; Gonzalez Lopez, *Reinado*, 41 and 206.] As already noted, the 19th century scholar Balbin thought that the Lugo clergy and their flock bought Borrow’s books in order to burn them [Balbin, 275; Missler, ‘Lost in Lugo’, in *GBB* 38, 32f; Missler, *Daring Game*, 46f & 119].

Lugo contains about six thousand inhabitants. It is situated on lofty ground, and is defended by ancient walls.³ It possesses no very remarkable edifice, and the cathedral church itself is a small mean building. In the centre of the town is the principal square, a light cheerful place, not surrounded by those heavy cumbrous buildings with which the Spaniards both in ancient and modern times have encircled their plazas. It is singular enough that Lugo, at present a place of very little importance, should at one period have been the capital of Spain: yet such it was in the time of the Romans, who, as they were a people not much guided by caprice, had doubtless very excellent reasons for the preference which they gave to the locality.⁴



26.2 Roman remains in the Lugo Termas

There are many Roman remains in the vicinity of this place, the most remarkable of which are the ruins of the ancient medicinal baths, which stand on the southern side of the river Minho, which creeps through the valley beneath the town. The Minho in this place is a dark and sullen stream, with high, precipitous, and thickly wooded banks.

³ The famous walls of Lugo, which still stand, are Roman, from the late 3rd century A.D. They are unique, and the only Roman wall in the world which survives in its entirety. In the mid 20th century plans were made to pull them down because they supposedly hampered commerce and development (and the demolition work would generate jobs...) Ironically, the only reason this was not executed was that the local military thought the walls *might still serve a tactical purpose in the future!*

⁴ This remark – which Burke [footnote to 359] called ‘a curious blunder’ – is certainly an overstatement. Although Lucus Augusti was an important garrison town in Roman days, it was never the capital of Roman Spain, only the administrative centre of northern Galicia, easily overshadowed by Braga, in Portugal, which was the capital of ‘Galleacia’ south of the Minho. In any case there was never – until the time of Constantine - a true single Roman capital of all Iberia, which was for centuries divided into 3 major provinces: the Tarragonensis (north and east), Betica (present Andalucia) and Lusitania (today’s Portugal).

One evening I visited the baths, accompanied by my friend the bookseller. They had been built over warm springs which flow into the river. Notwithstanding their ruinous condition, they were crowded with sick, hoping to derive benefit from the waters, which are still famed for their sanative power. These patients exhibited a strange spectacle as, wrapped in flannel gowns much resembling shrouds, they lay immersed in the tepid waters amongst disjointed stones, and overhung with steam and reek.⁵

Three or four days after my arrival I was seated in the corridor which, as I have already observed, occupied the entire front of the house. The sky was unclouded, and the sun shone most gloriously, enlivening every object around. Presently the door of the apartment in which the strangers were lodged opened, and forth walked the whole family, with the exception of the father, who, I presumed, was absent on business. The shabby domestic brought up the rear, and on leaving the apartment, carefully locked the door, and secured the key in his pocket. The one son and the eleven daughters were all dressed remarkably well: the boy something after the English fashion, in jacket and trousers, the young ladies in spotless white: they were, upon the whole, a very good-looking family, with dark eyes and olive complexions, but the eldest daughter was remarkably handsome. They arranged themselves upon the benches of the corridor, the shabby domestic sitting down amongst them without any ceremony whatever. They continued for some time in silence, gazing with disconsolate looks upon the houses of the suburb and the dark walls of the town, until the eldest daughter, or *señorita* as she was called, broke silence with an "*Ay Dios Mio!*"



26.3 *The Roman walls of Lugo*

⁵ The remnants of these baths, known as the '*Termas Romanas*', are still extant, but have been integrated into a new spa, called the *Hotel Balneario*, whose modern buildings date partly from the early and partly from the latter decades of the 20th century. Some time during these modernisations the actual tubs which Borrow here describes must have been razed and replaced by new and better ones. The five small Roman spaces which survive were dressing- and storage-rooms, of very little archaeological interest [See Missler, 'Lost in Lugo', in: *GBB* 38, 26-31; and Ford, *HB* 968, which partly copies Borrow]. As Gauthiers [*Voyage*, chapter 11, 245] explains, the 'shrouds' worn by the patients were a hygienic precaution.

DOMESTIC. - AY DIOS MIO! we have found our way to a pretty country.

MYSELF. - I really can see nothing so very bad in the country, which is by nature the richest in all Spain, and the most abundant. True it is that the generality of the inhabitants are wretchedly poor, but they themselves are to blame, and not the country.

DOMESTIC. - Cavalier, the country is a horrible one, say nothing to the contrary. We are all frightened, the young ladies, the young gentleman, and myself; even his worship is frightened, and says that we are come to this country for our sins. It rains every day, and this is almost the first time that we have seen the sun since our arrival, it rains continually, and one cannot step out without being up to the ankles in fango; and then, again, there is not a house to be found.

MYSELF. - I scarcely understand you. There appears to be no lack of houses in this neighbourhood.

DOMESTIC. - Excuse me, sir. His worship hired yesterday a house, for which he engaged to pay fourteen pence daily⁶; but when the señorita saw it, she wept, and said it was no house, but a hog-sty, so his worship paid one day's rent and renounced his bargain. Fourteen pence a day! why, in our country, we can have a palace for that money.

MYSELF. - From what country do you come?

DOMESTIC. - Cavalier, you appear to be a decent gentleman, and I will tell you our history. We are from Andalusia, and his worship was last year receiver-general for Granada⁷: his salary was fourteen thousand rials, with which we contrived to live very commodiously - attending the bull funcions regularly, or if there were no bulls, we went to see the novillos,⁸ and now and then to the opera. In a word, sir, we had our diversions and felt at our ease; so much so, that his worship was actually thinking of purchasing a pony for the young gentleman, who is fourteen, and must learn to ride now or never. Cavalier, the ministry was changed, and the new corners, who were no friends to his

⁶ It is not altogether clear what coin Borrow means when he uses the word 'pence'. He may have had an English 'pence' in mind, which – at the value of some 14 *maravedis* – would result in 5,75 *reales*. In Coruña, a wealthy harbour town, one might have a floor-and-attic for 4 *reales* daily, and a shop plus two floors at 6.

⁷ The identity of this official has not yet been discovered, but it should not be too hard to do so, seeing his station in life and the composition of his family. Adolfo de Abel Vilela [*Historia de un Edificio Lucense: el Meson de San Roque*, 147] suggests that it may have been a collaborator of Andrés Rojo de Cañizal, who was appointed to the new post of *Intendente* of the Lugo Province on 12 April 1837, and had arrived in Lugo in May. His salary was a generous 20,000 reales, double the income of this Andalusian official.

⁸ Burke [footnote to 361]: 'Combats with young bulls, usually by amateur fighters. Although the animals are immature, and the tips of their horns, moreover, sawn off to make the sport less dangerous, accidents are far more common than in the more serious *corridas*, where the professionals take no step without due deliberation and *secundum artem*. *Novillo*, of course, means only a young bull; but in common parlance in Spain *los toros* means necessarily a serious bull-fight, and *los novillos* an amateur exhibition.'

worship, deprived him of his situation. Cavalier, they removed us from that blessed country of Granada, where our salary was fourteen thousand rials, and sent us to Galicia, to this fatal town of Lugo, where his worship is compelled to serve for ten thousand, which is quite insufficient to maintain us in our former comforts.⁹ Good-bye, I trow, to bull funcions, and novillos, and the opera. Good-bye to the hope of a horse for the young gentleman. Cavalier, I grow desperate: hold your tongue, for God's sake! for I can talk no more."

On hearing this history I no longer wondered that the receiver-general was eager to save a cuarto in the purchase of the oil for the gaspacho of himself and family of eleven daughters, one son, and a domestic.



26.4 *The Minho river at the height of Lugo*

We staid one week at Lugo¹⁰, and then directed our steps to Coruna, about twelve leagues distant. We arose before daybreak in order to avail ourselves of the escort of the

⁹ In itself, an income of 10,000 reales yearly was not a truly low salary. The minimum wage for an unskilled worker was 3 or 4 reales daily (between 1,000 and 1,500 a year), and for a master craftsman, a foreman or a junior officer it varied between 10 and 12 a day (from 3,500 to 4,400 yearly). A captain in command of a small garrison made roughly the same as this Andalusian tax-inspector. Yet to maintain 13 family-members plus a domestic on that income would indeed proscribe all luxuries. Note, meanwhile, that George Borrow himself made the equivalent of some 20,000 reales yearly (55 reales a day), apart from all his costs when travelling. His manservant Antonio made 4,300, or some 12 reales daily.

¹⁰ Once again the exact length of Borrow's stay cannot be determined. Here he states he 'staid' [sic] a week, but in his letter to Brandram from Coruña of 20 July 1837 [Darlow, 224], he only mentions four days. The latter is the more likely span of time.

general post, in whose company we travelled upwards of six leagues.¹¹ There was much talk of robbers, and flying parties of the factious, on which account our escort was considerable. At the distance of five or six leagues from Lugo, our guard, in lieu of regular soldiers, consisted of a body of about fifty Miguelets. They had all the appearance of banditti, but a finer body of ferocious fellows I never saw. They were all men in the prime of life, mostly of tall stature, and of Herculean brawn and limbs. They wore huge whiskers, and walked with a fanfaronading air, as if they courted danger, and despised it. In every respect they stood in contrast to the soldiers who had hitherto escorted us, who were mere feeble boys from sixteen to eighteen years of age, and possessed of neither energy nor activity.¹² The proper dress of the Miguelet, if it resembles anything military, is something akin to that anciently used by the English marines. They wear a peculiar kind of hat, and generally leggings, or gaiters, and their arms are the gun and bayonet. The colour of their dress is mostly dark brown. They observe little or no discipline whether on a march or in the field of action. They are excellent irregular troops, and when on actual service are particularly useful as skirmishers. Their proper duty, however, is to officiate as a species of police, and to clear the roads of robbers, for which duty they are in one respect admirably calculated, having been generally robbers themselves at one period of their lives. Why these people are called Miguelets it is not easy to say, but it is probable that they have derived this appellation from the name of their original leader. I regret that the paucity of my own information will not allow me to enter into farther particulars with respect to this corps, concerning which I have little doubt that many remarkable things might be said.¹³

¹¹ This escorted courier in whose wake Borrow travelled from Lugo to Betanzos was only inaugurated four weeks earlier. It took one day to reach Betanzos, and set out on the Thursday [Gonzalez Lopez, *Reinado*, 382]. Hence it seems Borrow moved to Betanzos on 13 July 1837.

¹² This troop of 50 men probably belonged to the Guitiriz garrison, which guarded the Camino Real's strategic crossroads towards Santiago and Mondoñedo, and was particularly active and efficient. They were an exception. Most of the better Galician soldiers – who made fine fighters – had been marched out of the province to fight the regular civil war in the Basque countries, leaving the defence of the province to citizen militias and the second-rate, newly-drafted recruits Borrow here describes. The results showed immediately when the Gomez Expedition invaded Galicia in July 1836. Without exception, every garrison, troop and patrol stationed at the bridges ran for its life on the approach of the battle-hardened Carlists, few as they were.

¹³ In his earlier book *The Zincali* Borrow described the Migueletes as: 'a species of gendarme or armed policeman. The Miquelets have existed in Spain for upwards of 200 years. They are called Miquelets, from the name of their original leader. They are generally Aragonese by nation, and reclaimed robbers' [Zincali, part III, chapter 1, footnote to 290]. Ford [*HB*, 64f] affirms that they got their name from 'one Miguel de Prats, an armed satellite of the famous or infamous Caesar Borgia', in the early 16th century (called by others Miquelot de Prats). A species of carabinieri, they served all sorts of purposes in these chaotic days before a regular police force – the present Guardia Civil - was organised in 1843: such as guard-duty, chasing countryside robbers, escorting the mail and government transports of monopoly commodities such as tobacco, and even, at a small price, the escort of travellers who solicited help from the captain general. See also Robertson, *Ford*, 68 for another description.



26.5 *The bridge at Castellana*

Becoming weary of the slow travelling of the post, I determined to brave all risk, and to push forward. In this, however, I was guilty of no slight imprudence, as by so doing I was near falling into the hands of robbers. Two fellows suddenly confronted me with presented carbines, which they probably intended to discharge into my body, but they took fright at the noise of Antonio's horse, who was following a little way behind. The affair occurred at the bridge of Castellanos, a spot notorious for robbery and murder, and well adapted for both, for it stands at the bottom of a deep dell surrounded by wild desolate hills.¹⁴ Only a quarter of an hour previous I had passed three ghastly heads stuck on poles standing by the way-side; they were those of a captain of banditti and two of his accomplices, who had been seized and executed about two months before. Their principal haunt was the vicinity of the bridge, and it was their practice to cast the bodies of the murdered into the deep black water which runs rapidly beneath. Those three heads will always live in my remembrance, particularly that of the captain, which stood on a higher pole than the other two: the long hair was waving in the wind, and the blackened, distorted features were grinning in the sun. The fellows whom I met wore the relics of the band.¹⁵

¹⁴ This bridge at La Castellana over the River Mandeo (which is really no more than a brook at this height) still stands, tucked away behind its more modern successors. An unavoidable bottleneck in the road, completely out of view and offering the victim no chance of escape, the neat stone bridge could pride itself on being a favourite haunt of both Carlist guerrillas and common bandits of the period. On 26 March 1836, for instance, the Madrid-Coruña 'galera' (a large, slow, cumbersome stagecoach) was held up here, its mules stolen, the official mail and money robbed and the coach itself burned [Gonzalez Lopez, *Reinado*, 382]. A newspaper clipping from June 1849 still describes it as 'extremely dangerous, for being the place where robbers and scoundrels are in the habit of attacking peaceful travellers with the aim of despoiling them' [Garcia Barros, *Medio Siglo*, 296].

¹⁵ The 'captain of banditti' was a common bandit known as *El Sastre*, i.e. *The Tailor*, who was caught by a patrol on 10 May 1837, and was shot by firing-squad on the bridge itself [*Gaceta de Madrid*, n° 895, 18 May 1837]. Following the medieval custom of the day, still continued by the liberal regime in spite of their claim to enlightened manners, his head was severed and 'exposed at one of the sites of said road where he committed his crimes', as the newspaper put it. The spot where Borrow saw these heads was the T-crossing at which the direct road to Santiago (the present N-634) splits away from the Royal Highway between Lugo and Coruña. [Missler, P., 'The Bandit of Castellana', in: *GBB* 18, 46-49.]



26.6 *'The deep black water which runs rapidly beneath...'*

We arrived at Betanzos late in the afternoon. This town stands on a creek at some distance from the sea, and about three leagues from Coruna. It is surrounded on three sides by lofty hills. The weather during the greater part of the day had been dull and lowering, and we found the atmosphere of Betanzos insupportably close and heavy. Sour and disagreeable odours assailed our olfactory organs from all sides. The streets were filthy - so were the houses, and especially the posada. We entered the stable; it was strewed with rotten sea-weeds and other rubbish, in which pigs were wallowing; huge and loathsome flies were buzzing around. "What a pest-house!" I exclaimed. But we could find no other stable, and were therefore obliged to tether the unhappy animals to the filthy mangers. The only provender that could be obtained was Indian corn. At nightfall I led them to drink at a small river which passes through Betanzos. My entero swallowed the water greedily; but as we returned towards the inn, I observed that he was sad, and that his head drooped. He had scarcely reached the stall, when a deep hoarse cough assailed him. I remembered the words of the ostler in the mountains, "the man must be mad who brings a horse to Galicia, and doubly so he who brings an entero." During the greater part of the day the animal had been much heated, walking amidst a throng of at least a hundred pony mares. He now began to shiver violently. I procured a quart of anise brandy, with which, assisted by Antonio, I rubbed his body for nearly an hour, till his coat was covered with a white foam; but his cough increased perceptibly, his eyes were becoming fixed, and his members rigid. "There is no remedy but bleeding," said I. "Run for a farrier." The farrier came. "You must bleed the horse," I shouted; "take from him an azumbre of blood." The farrier looked at the animal, and made for the door. "Where are you going?" I demanded. "Home," he replied. "But we want you here." "I know you do," was his answer; "and on that account I am going." "But you must bleed the horse, or he will die." "I know he will," said the farrier, "but I will not bleed him." "Why?" I demanded. "I will not bleed him, but under one

condition." "What is that?" "What is it! - that you pay me an ounce of gold."¹⁶ "Run for the red morocco case," said I to Antonio. It was brought; I took out a large fleam, and with the assistance of a stone, drove it into the principal artery horse's leg. The blood at first refused to flow; with much rubbing, it began to trickle, and then to stream; it continued so for half an hour. "The horse is fainting, mon maitre," said Antonio. "Hold him up," said I, "and in another ten minutes we will stop the vein."



26.7 Betanzos in the old days

I closed the vein, and whilst doing so I looked up into the farrier's face, arching my eyebrows.

"Carracho!¹⁷ what an evil wizard," muttered the farrier, as he walked away. "If I had my knife here I would stick him." We bled the horse again, during the night, which second bleeding I believe saved him. Towards morning he began to eat his food.

¹⁶ Borrow, scandalised by such a steep price (a gold *onza* - 320 *reales* – being a sixth of the price he had paid for the whole horse!) puts the man down as an avaricious scoundrel. However, as in the case of the blacksmith and the horseshoe of chapter 25 above, the farrier ran a vast risk by touching a sick animal. If the horse died, he might be accused of killing it; and since the justice system lacked all sophistication, he might spend many weeks in jail while the investigation crawled forward at a snails pace. Only a short time later, a Santiago ostler and a pharmacist were arrested as Carlist saboteurs for 'poisoning' an officer's horse when the medicine they applied to the animal failed to cure it. Such is the context in which the farrier's behaviour ought to be read. As we will still see, Gallegos were sometimes quite accomplished con-men; but this is not a case of swindling.

¹⁷ Burke [footnote to 366]: 'The real word, of which this is a modification, is *Carajo* - a word which, used as an adjective, represents the English 'bloody' and used as a substantive, something yet more gross. In decent society the 1st syllable is considered quite strong enough as an expletive, and, modified as *Caramba*, may even fall from fair lips.'

The next day we departed for Coruna, leading our horses by the bridle: the day was magnificent, and our walk delightful. We passed along beneath tall umbrageous trees, which skirted the road from Betanzos to within a short distance of Coruna. Nothing could be more smiling and cheerful than the appearance of the country around.¹⁸ Vines were growing in abundance in the vicinity of the villages through which we passed, whilst millions of maize plants upreared their tall stalks and displayed their broad green leaves in the fields. After walking about three hours, we obtained a view of the bay of Coruna, in which, even at the distance of a league, we could distinguish three or four immense ships riding at anchor. "Can these vessels belong to Spain?" I demanded of myself. In the very next village, however, we were informed that the preceding evening an English squadron had arrived, for what reason nobody could say. "However," continued our informant, "they have doubtless some design upon Galicia. These foreigners are the ruin of Spain."¹⁹

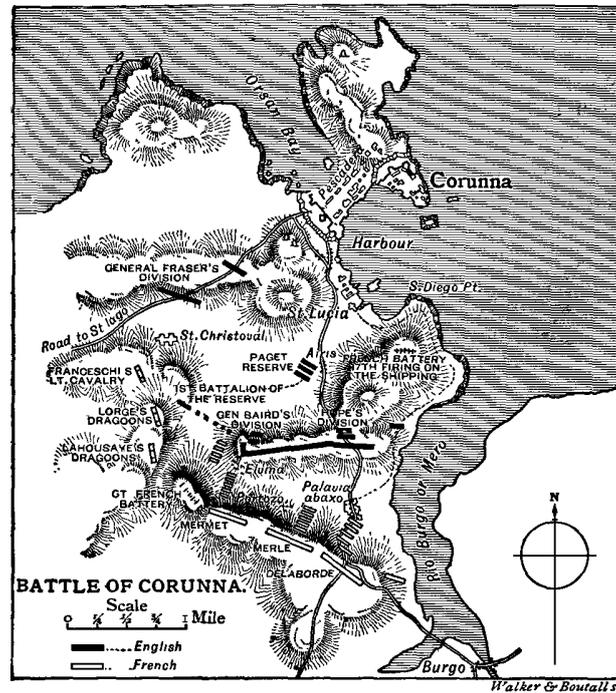
We put up in what is called the Calle Real, in an excellent fonda, or posada, kept by a short, thick, comical-looking person, a Genoese by birth²⁰. He was married to a tall, ugly, but good-tempered Basque woman, by whom he had been blessed with a son and daughter. His wife, however, had it seems of late summoned all her female relations from Guipuscoa, who now filled the house to the number of nine, officiating as chambermaids, cooks, and scullions: they were all very ugly, but good-natured, and of immense volubility of tongue. Throughout the whole day the house resounded with their excellent Basque and very bad Castilian. The Genoese, on the contrary, spoke little, for which he might have assigned a good reason; he had lived thirty years in Spain, and had forgotten his own language without acquiring Spanish, which he spoke very imperfectly.

¹⁸ Widdrington [vol. 2, 161] fully agreed with Borrow that this stretch of road was 'one of the very best and most pleasing in Spain'.

¹⁹ These three ships, which according to the *Boletin Oficial de la Coruña* n° 113, of Saturday 15 July 1837, had sailed in on the 13th, were the 'Navio de guerra ingles *Hercules*, com. J GORDM [sic], de Plimouth; Fragata id. id. *Pique*, com. Rose, de id.; Fragata id. id. *Castor*, com. Eduardo Calier, de id.' Borrow's own doubts as to their number – 'three or four' - may be due to the fact that the French *Corvette de Guerre Thisbe* had also sailed in on the 12th, towing the French brigantine *Jules*, which had run into trouble on the high seas, and one of them may still have been in port. The reason for the presence of the British vessels in Coruña, which Borrow could only guess at, is explained in an official note in *Boletin* n° 114 of 17 July, which says that the British government had decided to protect the east coast of Spain from Carlist attacks by putting warships into all the harbours between Barcelona and Gibraltar. This was most needed, because after the 1805 Battle of Trafalgar, there was no Spanish fleet left to speak of. One begins to understand why this news was so widely celebrated by the ultra-liberal inhabitants of Coruña. Borrow's spokesman may well have been a Carlist sympathiser.

²⁰ Robertson [*Tour*, 69]: probably the *Fonda del Comercio*, or, as Ford [*HB*, 971] calls it: *El Comercio*, an upper class establishment which cost the considerable sum of about 16 *reales* per person per night. (An alternative is the *Café del Correo*, for which no address is mentioned.)

We found Coruna full of bustle and life, owing to the arrival of the English squadron. On the following day, however, it departed, being bound for the Mediterranean on a short cruise, whereupon matters instantly returned to their usual course.



26.8 Coruña in the early 19th century

I had a depot of five hundred Testaments at Coruna, from which it was my intention to supply the principal towns of Galicia²¹. Immediately on my arrival I published advertisements, according to my usual practice, and the book obtained a tolerable sale - seven or eight copies per day on the average. Some people, perhaps, on perusing these details, will be tempted to exclaim, "These are small matters, and scarcely worthy of being mentioned." But let such bethink them, that till within a few months previous to the time of which I am speaking, the very existence of the gospel was almost unknown in Spain, and that it must necessarily be a difficult task to induce a people like the Spaniards, who read very little, to purchase a work like the New Testament, which, though of paramount importance to the soul, affords but slight prospect of amusement to the frivolous and carnally minded. I hoped that the present was the dawning of better and more enlightened times, and rejoiced in the idea that Testaments, though but few in number, were being sold in unfortunate benighted Spain, from Madrid to the furthestmost parts of Galicia, a distance of nearly four hundred miles.

²¹ Seeing that his horses could only carry so many copies, Borrow had instructed his printer Andres Borrego to dispatch this supply from Madrid. His commercial contact in Coruña, to which the shipment was addressed and where presumably his stock was kept, was the bookshop of Juan (or José) Maria Perez in the Calle Real n° 43 of Coruña, the biggest bookshop in town at the time. [Missler, *Daring Game*, 29f, 47, 169 & 174.]

Coruna stands on a peninsula, having on one side the sea, and on the other the celebrated bay, generally called the Groyne. It is divided into the old and new town, the latter of which was at one time probably a mere suburb. The old town is a desolate ruinous place, separated from the new by a wide moat. The modern town is a much more agreeable spot, and contains one magnificent street, the *Calle Real*, where the principal merchants reside. One singular feature of this street is, that it is laid entirely with flags of marble, along which troop ponies and cars as if it were a common pavement.²²

It is a saying amongst the inhabitants of Coruna, that in their town there is a street so clean, that puchera²³ may be eaten off it without the slightest inconvenience. This may certainly be the fact after one of those rains which so frequently drench Galicia, when the appearance of the pavement of the street is particularly brilliant. Coruna was at one time a place of considerable commerce, the greater part of which has latterly departed to Santander, a town which stands a considerable distance down the Bay of Biscay.²⁴

"Are you going to Saint James, Giorgio? If so, you will perhaps convey a message to my poor countryman," said a voice to me one morning in broken English, as I was standing at the door of my posada, in the royal street of Coruna.

I looked round and perceived a man standing near me at the door of a shop contiguous to the inn. He appeared to be about sixty-five, with a pale face and remarkably red nose. He was dressed in a loose green great coat, in his mouth was a long clay pipe, in his hand a long painted stick.

"Who are you, and who is your countryman?" I demanded; "I do not know you."

"I know you, however," replied the man; "you purchased the first knife that I ever sold in the marketplace of N-."²⁵

²² The new city, on the isthmus which connected the old town to the mainland, was locally known as the *Pescaderia*, and constituted the modern, fashionable, mercantile part of town. The moat between the old and the new parts has since been reclaimed and no trace is left of it. Whether the flagstones in the *Calle Real*, which is still magnificent, were ever of marble, remains to be determined. Nowadays they rather strike one as plain local granite. Needless to say: pavements of *any* sort were rare in the Galicia of Borrow's day.

²³ A 'puchero' – called after the glazed earthenware pot in which it is cooked – is a stew made of beef, chickpeas and anything else which strikes the cook's fancy. Its main ingredient, however, is 8 hours boiling time until everything in the pot falls apart.

²⁴ Cook [*Sketches*, vol. 1, 76] shows that the change was actually a deliberate government-inspired action of the 1820s. It was only a temporary change. Ever since, Coruña regained its importance as an international harbour, while Santander has again fallen back to a minor town, living mainly off tourism and leaving the major shipping to its bigger sister Bilbao.

²⁵ Norwich, the town where Borrow grew up.

MYSELF. - Ah, I remember you now, Luigi Piozzi²⁶; and well do I remember also, how, when a boy, twenty years ago, I used to repair to your stall, and listen to you and your countrymen discoursing in Milanese.

LUIGI. - Ah, those were happy times to me. Oh, how they rushed back on my remembrance when I saw you ride up to the door of the posada. I instantly went in, closed my shop, lay down upon my bed and wept.

MYSELF. - I see no reason why you should so much regret those times. I knew you formerly in England as an itinerant pedlar, and occasionally as master of a stall in the market-place of a country town. I now find you in a seaport of Spain, the proprietor, seemingly, of a considerable shop. I cannot see why you should regret the difference.

LUIGI (dashing his pipe on the ground). - Regret the difference! Do you know one thing? England is the heaven of the Piedmontese and Milanese, and especially those of Como. We never lie down to rest but we dream of it, whether we are in our own country or in a foreign land, as I am now. Regret the difference, Giorgio! Do I hear such words from your lips, and you an Englishman? I would rather be the poorest trampler on the roads of England, than lord of all within ten leagues of the shore of the lake of Como, and much the same say all my countrymen who have visited England, wherever they now be. Regret the difference! I have ten letters, from as many countrymen in America, who say they are rich and thriving, and principal men and merchants; but every night, when their heads are reposing on their pillows, their souls *auslandra*²⁷, hurrying away to England, and its green lanes and farm-yards. And there they are with their boxes on the

²⁶ Much as this looks like one more of those incredible coincidences in Borrow's works, the meeting with Piozzi has been substantiated by the Spanish author Juan Campos Calvo-Sotelo, who found the errant Italian recorded on page 60 of Antonio Mejjide Pardo's *Temas y personajes de la Historia Coruñesa Contemporanea* (Coruña, Diputacion de la Coruña, 1997). There Mejjide writes that one 'Luis Pozzi' is registered as retail shopkeeper nº 105 in the 1830 *Matriculas Industriales* (included in the *Censo de comerciantes Coruñeses en los años 1830-1845*, presently kept by the *Archivo del Colegio Notarial* of Coruña) and adds that the Italian 'states in his declaration that he was "born in Commo, jurisdicion ibid, province of Italy, subject to Austria"'. These details square up perfectly with Borrow's own description of Pozzi as a man of some 65 years of age, born in Como, and having moved to Coruña from England some 16 years ago (i.e. roughly in 1821). Although Borrow here spells the name as 'Piozzi', he used the apparently more correct form 'Pozzi' in a dialogue with a travelling Italian from chapter 24 of his later book *Wild Wales* (published in 1862 about two walking tours in 1854 and 1857):

"I have seen Giovanni Gestra myself," said the Italian, "and I have heard of Luigi Pozzi. Giovanni Gestra returned to the Lago — but no one knows what is become of Luigi Pozzi."

"The last time I saw him," said I, "was about eighteen years ago at Coruna in Spain; he was then in a sad drooping condition, and said he bitterly repented ever quitting N."

²⁷ Clearly a loanword from Austrian German into the Italian of Lombardy. Its meaning would be something like 'go abroad', 'emigrate' or 'roam about', with its roots, naturally, in the German noun *Ausland*, i.e. 'foreign lands'. In chapter 24 of *Wild Wales*, yet another travelling Italian whom Borrow meets at Cerrig y Drudion points out that the verb — there shortened to *Slandra* — is vulgar and belongs to the speech of illiterate men. Asked where he learned it, Borrow says he heard it from the same Giovanni Gestra mentioned in the previous note. [Burke, Glossary]

ground, displaying their looking-glasses and other goods to the honest rustics and their dames and their daughters, and selling away and chaffering and laughing just as of old. And there they are again at nightfall in the hedge alehouses, eating their toasted cheese and their bread, and drinking the Suffolk ale, and listening to the roaring song and merry jest of the labourers. Now, if they regret England so who are in America, which they own to be a happy country, and good for those of Piedmont and of Como, how much more must I regret it, when, after the lapse of so many years, I find myself in Spain, in this frightful town of Coruna, driving a ruinous trade, and where months pass by without my seeing a single English face, or hearing a word of the blessed English tongue.

Myself - With such a predilection for England, what could have induced you to leave it and come to Spain?

LUIGI. - I will tell you: about sixteen years ago a universal desire seized our people in England to become something more than they had hitherto been, pedlars and trampers; they wished, moreover, for mankind are never satisfied, to see other countries: so the greater part forsook England. Where formerly there had been ten, at present scarcely lingers one. Almost all went to America, which, as I told you before, is a happy country, and specially good for us men of Como. Well, all my comrades and relations passed over the sea to the West. I, too, was bent on travelling; but whither? Instead of going towards the West with the rest, to a country where they have all thriven, I must needs come by myself to this land of Spain; a country in which no foreigner settles without dying of a broken heart sooner or later. I had an idea in my head that I could make a fortune at once, by bringing a cargo of common English goods, like those which I had been in the habit of selling amongst the villagers of England. So I freighted half a ship with such goods, for I had been successful in England in my little speculations, and I arrived at Coruna. Here at once my vexations began: disappointment followed disappointment. It was with the utmost difficulty that I could obtain permission to land my goods, and this only at a considerable sacrifice in bribes and the like; and when I had established myself here, I found that the place was one of no trade, and that my goods went off very slowly, and scarcely at prime cost. I wished to remove to another place, but was informed that, in that case, I must leave my goods behind, unless I offered fresh bribes, which would have ruined me; and in this way I have gone on for fourteen years, selling scarcely enough to pay for my shop and to support myself. And so I shall doubtless continue till I die, or my goods are exhausted. In an evil day I left England and came to Spain.²⁸

MYSELF. - Did you not say that you had a countryman at St. James?

LUIGI. - Yes, a poor honest fellow, who, like myself, by some strange chance found his way to Galicia. I sometimes contrive to send him a few goods, which he sells at St. James at a greater profit than I can here. He is a happy fellow, for he has never been in England, and knows not the difference between the two countries. Oh, the green English

²⁸ Scribal corruption, as much in the justice system as in such lucrative posts as the customs service, was indeed impressive in 19th century Spain, as was the immense paperwork and red tape needed to accomplish any remunerative activity. Not for nothing did the country tumble from the richest empire in the world to the poorest beggar land in the course of only a 100 years.

hedgerows! and the alehouses! and, what is much more, the fair dealing and security. I have travelled all over England and never met with ill usage, except once down in the north amongst the Papists, upon my telling them to leave all their mummeries and go to the parish church as I did, and as all my countrymen in England did; for know one thing, Signor Giorgio, not one of us who have lived in England, whether Piedmontese or men of Como, but wished well to the Protestant religion, if he had not actually become a member of it²⁹.

MYSELF. - What do you propose to do at present, Luigi? What are your prospects?

LUIGI. - My prospects are a blank, Giorgio; my prospects are a blank. I propose nothing but to die in Coruna, perhaps in the hospital, if they will admit me. Years ago I thought of fleeing, even if I left all behind me, and either returning to England, or betaking myself to America; but it is too late now, Giorgio, it is too late. When I first lost all hope, I took to drinking, to which I was never before inclined, and I am now what I suppose you see.

"There is hope in the Gospel," said I, "even for you. I will send you one."



26.9 *The tomb of Sir John Moore*

There is a small battery of the old town which fronts the east, and whose wall is washed by the waters of the bay. It is a sweet spot, and the prospect which opens from it is extensive. The battery itself may be about eighty yards square; some young trees are springing up about it, and it is rather a favourite resort of the people of Coruna.

²⁹ By the looks of it, this remark came from Borrow's wish to impress his pious readers rather than from Pozzi's lips. It is rather unlikely that – as Borrow here pretends – many devout Catholic Italians would suddenly have become willing Protestants because England offered hedgerows, fair dealing and ale.

In the centre of this battery stands the tomb of Moore, built by the chivalrous French, in commemoration of the fall of their heroic antagonist³⁰. It is oblong and surmounted by a slab, and on either side bears one of the simple and sublime epitaphs for which our rivals are celebrated, and which stand in such powerful contrast with the bloated and bombastic inscriptions which deform the walls of Westminster Abbey:

"JOHN MOORE, LEADER OF THE ENGLISH ARMIES, SLAIN IN BATTLE, 1809."³¹

The tomb itself is of marble, and around it is a quadrangular wall, breast high, of rough Gallegan granite; close to each corner rises from the earth the breech of an immense brass cannon, intended to keep the wall compact and close. These outer erections are, however, not the work of the French, but of the English government.



26.10 *The commemorative plaque on the spot where Sir John Moore died*

³⁰ Sir John Moore – Wellington’s only equal as a commander - fell on 16 January 1809, near the village of Elviña, on the plateau just above Coruña, in a rear-guard action meant to stop the pursuing French armies of Soult and Ney from interrupting a hurried, Dunkerque-style embarkation of the English Expeditionary Force. An exploding obus tore his belly to shreds and one arm from his shoulder, and he died some hours later in the mansion of Don Jenaro Fontela, in the Canton Grande nº 16 [Robertson, *Tour*, 69; Fernandez de Castro, 137ff]. He was buried on one of the bulwarks that looks out to sea, and there the tomb still stands, although new highways now ensure that its wall is no longer ‘washed by the waters of the bay’, as Borrow has it, but by a steady stream of traffic; while the ‘young trees’ have now grown to huge and venerable chestnuts. Crews of passing British Navy ships still regularly deposit wreaths on the tomb. For a contemporary description and the story of how the monument came into being, see Ford, *HB* 977ff. Ford is being quite unfair, however, when it comes to the neglect of the tomb by the Corunese. Already in November 1838 a municipal collection was held to turn the San Carlos Bulwark into a garden and repair the monument; to which the citizens contributed a smacking 10,084 *reales* [Garcia Barros, *Medio Siglo*, 149; also J. Vincenti, *El sepulcro de Moore*, Coruña, 1857].

³¹ The inscription was in Latin. Madoz [*DG*, vol. 7, 123] transcribes it as:

Joannes Moore
Ejercitus Britannici Dux
Proelio Occisus
A.D. 1809

Yes, there lies the hero, almost within sight of the glorious hill where he turned upon his pursuers like a lion at bay and terminated his career. Many acquire immortality without seeking it, and die before its first ray has gilded their name; of these was Moore. The harassed general, flying through Castile with his dispirited troops before a fierce and terrible enemy³², little dreamed that he was on the point of attaining that for which many a better, greater, though certainly not braver man, had sighed in vain. His very misfortunes were the means which secured him immortal fame; his disastrous route, bloody death, and finally his tomb on a foreign strand, far from kin and friends. There is scarcely a Spaniard but has heard of this tomb, and speaks of it with a strange kind of awe. Immense treasures are said to have been buried with the heretic general, though for what purpose no one pretends to guess.³³ The demons of the clouds, if we may trust the Gallegans, followed the English in their flight, and assailed them with water-spouts as they toiled up the steep winding paths of Fucebadon; whilst legends the most wild are related of the manner in which the stout soldier fell. Yes, even in Spain, immortality has already crowned the head of Moore; - Spain, the land of oblivion, where the Guadalete flows.³⁴

³² In the autumn of 1808, Moore took command of the English Army in Portugal, and rushed to the assistance of the Spanish army, which had almost kicked the French invaders out of the country. Unfortunately, Napoleon, seeing the danger, had taken personal command in Spain and squashed the Spanish army in a few swift battles in November 1808. This news reached Moore at Salamanca. With the enemy on three sides of him, and no Spanish army left to support his scant 20,000 men, he decided to beat a hasty retreat to the nearest safe harbour, Coruña. In the middle of winter, the column had to negotiate the Cantabrian Mountain range (which cost Borrow such trouble in *July!*) The scene was horrendous, thousands of soldiers, camp followers, women, children and pack animals freezing to death or dying of hunger. The only thing which went right was the arrival of the fleet, which managed to evacuate a fair part of the army before it could be annihilated. [See Missler, *Treasure Hunter*, chapter 8, p. 50ff.]

³³ The believe in hidden treasure in exceptional structures (from dolmen to watch towers to recent tombs) is epidemic in Galicia. Yet it surely helped that Moore's name is usually *hispanified* to 'Moro', i.e. a Moor – while the great majority of whispered hidden treasures are said to have been buried by the panicky Moors just before they were expelled from the country in the middle ages, and are said to be guarded by Moorish spirits and phantoms. To this date, nobody has yet opened Moore's tomb on the sly; but it may happen any day now...

³⁴ [Author's note:] The ancient *Lethe*. [Editor's note:] In ancient mythology, the Lethe – a Greek word which means 'forgetfulness' [*Dictionary of Phrase and Fable*, 637] was one of the rivers which washed the Underworld. The souls of the dead were supposed to drink from its waters before entering the Hades, so they would forget everything said and done while alive before entering the heathen Hereafter. Other mythical variations held that if one merely *crossed* the Lethe, one instantly forgot everything. Of course, the name *Guadalete* – a river in the south of Spain – is Arabic *Wadi Al-Lete*, and it is rather unlikely that it goes back to the Greek name, as Borrow here pretends. Another Galician river, the Limia, was also identified as the Lethe. When Junius Brutus led his legions into the province in the 2nd century B.C., he himself had to cross the river first, to show his hesitant soldiers that he still retained his memory, and that the superstition was groundless.

[From letter to Brandram of 20 July 1837 from Coruña, in: Darlow 226f.]

In about a fortnight I shall depart for Santiago, where I intend to pass several days; then retracing my steps to Corunna I shall visit Ferrol, whence I shall perhaps shape my course for Oviedo in the Asturias, either along the seashore or by the mountain route, in which latter case I should have to revisit Lugo. Every part of Galicia abounds with robbers and factious, so that almost all travelling is at an end, and the road to Santiago is so bad that no one is permitted to travel it unless in company with the weekly post, which goes attended by a strong military escort. This gives me some uneasiness, as the stallion I ride is so vicious and furious that it is dangerous to bring him in contact with other horses whom, with the exception of his companion, he invariably attacks, getting me into all manner of scrapes. (...)