

CHAPTER 25

Villafranca - The Pass - Gallegan Simplicity - The Frontier Guard - The Horseshoe - Gallegan Peculiarities - A Word on Language - The Courier - Wretched Cabins - Host and Guests - Andalusians.

"Ave Maria," said the woman; "whom have we here? This is not Gil the clock-maker." "Whether it be Gil or Juan," said I, "we are in need of your hospitality, and can pay for it." Our first care was to stable the horses, who were much exhausted. We then went in search of some accommodation for ourselves. The house was large and commodious, and having tasted a little water, I stretched myself on the floor of one of the rooms on some mattresses which the woman produced, and in less than a minute was sound asleep.



25.1 Villafranca in the 18th century

The sun was shining bright when I awoke. I walked forth into the market-place, which was crowded with people, I looked up, and could see the peaks of tall black mountains peeping over the tops of the houses. The town lay in a deep hollow, and appeared to be surrounded by hills on almost every side. "QUEL PAYS BARBARE!" said Antonio, who now joined me; "the farther we go, my master, the wilder everything looks. I am half afraid to venture into Galicia; they tell me that to get to it we must clamber up those hills: the horses will founder." Leaving the market-place I ascended the wall of the town, and endeavoured to discover the gate by which we should have entered the preceding night; but I was not more successful in the bright sunshine than in the darkness. The town in the direction of Astorga appeared to be hermetically sealed.

I was eager to enter Galicia, and finding that the horses were to a certain extent recovered from the fatigue of the journey of the preceding day, we again mounted and proceeded on our way. Crossing a bridge, we presently found ourselves in a deep gorge amongst the mountains, down which rushed an impetuous rivulet, overhung by the high road which leads into Galicia. We were in the far-famed pass of Fucebadon.¹



25.2 Slate houses in the Caurel mountains

It is impossible to describe this pass or the circumjacent region, which contains some of the most extraordinary scenery in all Spain; a feeble and imperfect outline is all that I can hope to effect. The traveller who ascends it follows for nearly a league the course of the torrent, whose banks are in some places precipitous, and in others slope down to the waters, and are covered with lofty trees, oaks, poplars, and chestnuts.² Small villages are at first continually seen, with low walls, and roofs formed of immense slates, the eaves nearly touching the ground; these hamlets, however, gradually become less frequent as the path grows more steep and narrow, until they finally cease at a short distance before the spot is attained where the rivulet is abandoned, and is no more seen, though its tributaries may yet be heard in many a gully, or described in tiny rills dashing down the steeps. Everything here is wild, strange, and beautiful: the hill up which winds the path towers above on the right, whilst on the farther side of a profound ravine rises an immense mountain, to whose extreme altitudes the eye is scarcely able to attain; but the most singular feature of this pass are the hanging fields or meadows which cover its sides. In these, as I passed, the grass was growing luxuriantly, and in many the mowers were plying their scythes, though it seemed scarcely possible that their feet could find support on ground so precipitous: above and below were drift-ways, so small as to seem

¹ Robertson [*Tour*, 83, and note 6] specifies: ‘Borrow makes a topographical error in referring to it as being the ‘far-famed pass of Fucebadon’ (...). This was indeed on the former pilgrimage road to Santiago, but in the opposite direction, and lies not far west of Rabal del Camino, on the direct road leading almost due west from Astorga to Ponferrada, now the LE142.’

² The old road ran through the very narrow valley of the small Valcarce river, for at least 10 km.

threads along the mountain side. A car, drawn by oxen³, is creeping round yon airy eminence; the nearer wheel is actually hanging over the horrid descent; giddiness seizes the brain, and the eye is rapidly withdrawn. A cloud intervenes, and when again you turn to watch their progress, the objects of your anxiety have disappeared. Still more narrow becomes the path along which you yourself are toiling, and its turns more frequent. You have already come a distance of two leagues, and still one-third of the ascent remains unsurmounted. You are not yet in Galicia; and you still hear Castilian, coarse and unpolished, it is true, spoken in the miserable cabins placed in the sequestered nooks which you pass by in your route.

Shortly before we reached the summit of the pass thick mists began to envelop the tops of the hills, and a drizzling rain descended. "These mists," said Antonio, "are what the Gallegans call *bretima*; and it is said there is never any lack of them in their country." "Have you ever visited the country before?" I demanded. "Non, mon maitre; but I have frequently lived in houses where the domestics were in part Gallegans⁴, on which account I know not a little of their ways, and even something of their language." "Is the opinion which you have formed of them at all in their favour?" I inquired. "By no means, mon maitre; the men in general seem clownish and simple, yet they are capable of deceiving the most clever filou of Paris; and as for the women, it is impossible to live in the same house with them, more especially if they are Camareras, and wait upon the Señora; they are continually breeding dissensions and disputes in the house, and telling tales of the other domestics. I have already lost two or three excellent situations in Madrid, solely owing to these Gallegan chambermaids. We have now come to the frontier, mon maitre, for such I conceive this village to be."

We entered the village⁵, which stood on the summit of the mountain, and as our horses and ourselves were by this time much fatigued, we looked round for a place in which to obtain refreshment. Close by the gate stood a building which, from the circumstance of a mule or two and a wretched pony standing before it, we concluded was the posada, as in effect it proved to be. We entered: several soldiers were lolling on heaps of coarse hay, with which the place, which much resembled a stable, was half filled. All were exceedingly ill-looking fellows, and very dirty. They were conversing with each other in a strange-sounding dialect, which I supposed to be Gallegan. Scarcely did they perceive us when two or three of them, starting from their couch, ran up to Antonio,

³ Due to the state of the roads (dirt-tracks in the best of cases), the climate lethal to horses (as Borrow himself will soon discover) and the scarcity of apt fodder, the ox-cart was the preferred, if not the only feasible means of transport in Galicia until the arrival of the truck and tractor in the 1970s. In some backward areas these were still in use in the early years of the 21st century, although quickly disappearing now that the countryside is emptying out.

⁴ Besides the migrant workers who moved to Castile for the reaping and to northern Portugal for the wine harvest, a great many Gallegos were employed as domestic servants, particularly in Madrid and Lisbon. In southern Spain they were often self-employed as water-carriers. Their reputation was indeed not brilliant, and much in keeping with Antonio's opinions here.

⁵ Peyrafitta do Cebreiro (Pedrafita in Spanish). At present the village no longer has gates or defensive walls.

whom they welcomed with much affection, calling him *Companheiro*. "How came you to know these men?" I demanded in French. "*Ces Messieurs sont presque tous de ma connoissance*," he replied, "*Et, entre nous, ce sont des veritables vauriens*⁶; they are almost all robbers and assassins. That fellow, with one eye, who is the corporal, escaped a little time ago from Madrid, more than suspected of being concerned in an affair of poisoning; but he is safe enough here in his own country, and is placed to guard the frontier, as you see; but we must treat them civilly, mon maitre; we must give them wine, or they will be offended. I know them, mon maitre - I know them. Here, hostess, bring an azumbre⁷ of wine."

Whilst Antonio was engaged in treating his friends, I led the horses to the stable; this was through the house, inn, or whatever it might be called. The stable was a wretched shed, in which the horses sank to their fetlocks in mud and puddle. On inquiring for barley, I was told that I was now in Galicia, where barley was not used for provender, and was very rare. I was offered in lieu of it Indian corn, which, however, the horses ate without hesitation.⁸ There was no straw to be had; coarse hay, half green, being the substitute. By trampling about in the mud of the stable my horse soon lost a shoe, for which I searched in vain. "Is there a blacksmith in the village?" I demanded of a shock-headed fellow who officiated as ostler.

OSTLER. - Si, Senhor; but I suppose you have brought horse-shoes with you, or that large beast of yours cannot be shod in this village.

MYSELF. - What do you mean? Is the blacksmith unequal to his trade? Cannot he put on a horse-shoe?

OSTLER. - Si, Senhor; he can put on a horse-shoe if you give it him; but there are no horse-shoes in Galicia, at least in these parts.

MYSELF. - Is it not customary then to shoe the horses in Galicia?

OSTLER. - Senhor, there are no horses in Galicia, there are only ponies; and those who bring horses to Galicia, and none but madmen ever do, must bring shoes to fit them; only shoes of ponies are to be found here.

⁶ 'These gentlemen are nearly all of my acquaintance, and – between us – they are total rascals.' Borrow does indeed write the obsolete spelling 'connoissance' instead of the modern 'connaisance'.

⁷ An old measure of liquids of Moorish origin. It usually contained some 2 litres.

⁸ Barley - which other than wheat grew well in the wet and chilly climate of Galicia - was not so much rare, as reserved for other purposes: it was the staple diet of the human being. As for the horse fodder, Richard Ford had a similar experience. In *Gatherings*, chapter 7, he wrote that: 'We well remember the horror of our Andalucian groom, on our first reaching Galicia, when he rushed in, exclaiming that the beasts would perish, as nothing was to be had there but oats and hay. After some difficulty he was persuaded to see if they would eat it, which to his surprise they actually did; such, however, is habit, that they soon fell out of condition, and did not recover until the damp mountains were quitted for the arid plains of Castile.'

MYSELF. - What do you mean by saying that only madmen bring horses to Galicia?

OSTLER - Senhor, no horse can stand the food of Galicia and the mountains of Galicia long, without falling sick; and then if he does not die at once, he will cost you in farriers more than he is worth; besides, a horse is of no use here, and cannot perform amongst the broken ground the tenth part of the service which a little pony mare can. By the by, Senhor, I perceive that yours is an entire horse⁹; now out of twenty ponies that you see on the roads of Galicia, nineteen are mares; the males are sent down into Castile to be sold. Senhor, your horse will become heated on our roads, and will catch the bad glanders, for which there is no remedy. Senhor, a man must be mad to bring any horse to Galicia, but twice mad to bring an entero, as you have done.¹⁰

"A strange country this of Galicia," said I, and went to consult with Antonio.

It appeared that the information of the ostler was literally true with regard to the horse-shoe; at least the blacksmith of the village, to whom we conducted the animal, confessed his inability to shoe him, having none that would fit his hoof¹¹: he said it was very probable that we should be obliged to lead the animal to Lugo, which, being a cavalry station, we might perhaps find there what we wanted. He added, however, that the greatest part of the cavalry soldiers were mounted on the ponies of the country, the mortality amongst the horses brought from the level ground into Galicia being frightful. Lugo was ten leagues distant: there seemed, however, to be no remedy at hand but patience, and, having refreshed ourselves, we proceeded, leading our horses by the bridle.

⁹ 'Entero', i.e. 'whole': a horse not gelded (castrated).

¹⁰ Although it sounds jocular, what the ostler here tells Borrow is borne out by the documents. At this time, scores of horses were brought into Galicia from Castile to serve the cavalry in hunting down the mounted Carlist guerrilleros. However, most of these animals indeed fell sick or died within weeks after arrival. It was one of the reasons why the army often had such trouble rotting out the Carlist riders, who were mounted, if not on ponies, on the native horses lent to them by sympathising village priests, whose animals were accustomed to the local fare and climate. Every foreigner had, however, to learn this fact of Galician life for himself; something so much the harder since opposite rules often applied in the rest of Spain, as is witnessed by Ford [*Gatherings*, chapter 8]: 'a rider should choose a mare rather than a gelding; the use of entire horses is, however, so general in Spain, that one of such had better be selected than a mare.'

¹¹ Unknown to Borrow, the situation was a little more complicated than this simple problem of supply (which any blacksmith worth his salt, given a piece of iron, can solve within a quarter of an hour...) Since the Carlist guerrilleros were invariably mounted, so as to gain the necessary speed of movement to survive, horse shoes had become strategic material. Only a year earlier, the Military Governor of the province had decreed that all horse-gear, saddles, bridles, blankets etcetera, had to be declared to the authorities, and that selling such gear, or shoeing horses without previous notification to the authorities, was punishable by death. It was a necessary measure, since blacksmiths sympathetic to the Carlist cause are known to have shod the guerrillero horses on the sly, at special places and times of appointment. In this light, the fact that the blacksmith mentioned below miraculously 'found' a horseshoe on the road, and shoes Borrow's horse, brings both of them much closer to prison than either of them would have cared for.

We were now on level ground, being upon the very top of one of the highest mountains in Galicia. This level continued for about a league, when we began to descend. Before we had crossed the plain, which was overgrown with furze and brushwood, we came suddenly upon half a dozen fellows armed with muskets and wearing a tattered uniform. We at first supposed them to be banditti: they were, however, only a party of soldiers who had been detached from the station we had just quitted to escort one of the provincial posts or couriers. They were clamorous for cigars, but offered us no farther incivility. Having no cigars to bestow, I gave them in lieu thereof a small piece of silver. Two of the worst looking were very eager to be permitted to escort us to Nogales, the village where we proposed to spend the night. "By no means permit them, mon maitre," said Antonio, "they are two famous assassins of my acquaintance; I have known them at Madrid: in the first ravine they will shoot and plunder us." I therefore civilly declined their offer and departed. "You seem to be acquainted with all the cut-throats in Galicia," said I to Antonio, as we descended the hill.

"With respect to those two fellows," he replied, "I knew them when I lived as cook in the family of General Q-, who is a Gallegan¹²: they were sworn friends of the repostero.¹³ All the Gallegans in Madrid know each other, whether high or low makes no difference; there, at least, they are all good friends, and assist each other on all imaginable occasions; and if there be a Gallegan domestic in a house, the kitchen is sure to be filled with his countrymen, as the cook frequently knows to his cost, for they generally contrive to eat up any little perquisites which he may have reserved for himself and family."

Somewhat less than half way down the mountain we reached a small village.¹⁴ On observing a blacksmith's shop, we stopped, in the faint hope of finding a shoe for the horse, who, for want of one, was rapidly becoming lame. To our great joy we found that the smith was in possession of one single horse-shoe, which some time previously he had found upon the way. This, after undergoing much hammering and alteration, was pronounced by the Gallegan vulcan¹⁵ to be capable of serving in lieu of a better; whereupon we again mounted, and slowly continued our descent.

¹² Although there is documentary evidence for many upper class employers of Buchini, not a single general whose name starts with a Q is attested. Since there cannot have been too many of those around, however, the one meant is probably General Antonio Quiroga y Hermida, born in Betanzos in 1784, and around this time the Captain General of New Castile.

¹³ Burke [Glossary]: 'The butler, or majordomo, in a great house'.

¹⁴ Ferreira, Noceda or Doncos. Which of these cannot be determined with the scant clues here provided.

¹⁵ The Latin name of the Greek god Hephaistos, blacksmith of the Olympos.

Shortly ere sunset we arrived at Nogales, a hamlet situate in a narrow valley at the foot of the mountain, in traversing which we had spent the day. Nothing could be more picturesque than the appearance of this spot: steep hills, thickly clad with groves and forests of chestnuts, surrounded it on every side; the village itself was almost embowered in trees, and close beside it ran a purling brook. Here we found a tolerably large and commodious posada.¹⁶

I was languid and fatigued, but felt little desire to sleep. Antonio cooked our supper, or rather his own, for I had no appetite. I sat by the door, gazing on the wood-covered heights above me, or on the waters of the rivulet, occasionally listening to the people who lounged about the house, conversing in the country dialect. What a strange tongue is the Gallegan, with its half singing half whining accent, and with its confused jumble of words from many languages, but chiefly from the Spanish and Portuguese. "Can you understand this conversation?" I demanded of Antonio, who had by this time rejoined me. "I cannot, mon maitre," he replied; "I have acquired at various times a great many words amongst the Gallegan domestics in the kitchens where I have officiated as cook, but am quite unable to understand any long conversation. I have heard the Gallegans say that in no two villages is it spoken in one and the same manner, and that very frequently they do not understand each other.¹⁷ The worst of this language is, that everybody on first hearing it thinks that nothing is more easy than to understand it, as words are continually occurring which he has heard before: but these merely serve to bewilder and puzzle him, causing him to misunderstand everything that is said; whereas, if he were totally ignorant of the tongue, he would occasionally give a shrewd guess at what was meant, as I myself frequently do when I hear Basque spoken, though the only word which I know of that language is *Jaunguicoa*¹⁸."

¹⁶ This must have been the same posada, 'kept by the daughter of Don Benito', where Sir John Moore was lodged during his retreat to Coruña in January 1809 [Ford, *HB*, 890].

¹⁷ Up to here Antonio's discourse - or rather Borrow's through Antonio's mouth - is fairly accurate. The Gallego tongue (which, as Burke observes in his footnote to page 351 was the *lingua franca* of the northern Spain in the high middle ages) is indeed one of the many Peninsular descendants of vulgar Latin, and - being older than both - hovers midway between Portuguese and Spanish. It shares many grammatical features with Portuguese, yet contains a heap of original vocabulary, inherited from the many linguistic groups which invaded the province in the past, and maintained due to the isolated and independent nature of the area. Since the valleys within Galicia are also quite isolated from one another, and people on the whole moved very little, there is a noted difference between the various dialects within Gallego. Consequently sometimes even native speakers have trouble understanding each other.

¹⁸ Burke [Glossary]: 'The Lord God. *Jaun* = man, sir, lord; *Gincoa* or *Jincoa* = God.' Note that Basque, which is in a linguistic category of its own, is perfectly unrelated to any other language spoken in the Peninsula, and as such stands out as far more exceptional than Gallego or Catalan. With its 17 (!) cases, it is also notoriously hard to learn unless one is a native.

As the night closed in I retired to bed, where I remained four or five hours, restless and tossing about; the fever of Leon still clinging to my system. It was considerably past midnight when, just as I was sinking into a slumber, I was aroused by a confused noise in the village, and the glare of lights through the lattice of the window of the room where I lay; presently entered Antonio, half dressed. "Mon maitre," said he, "the grand post from Madrid to Coruna has just arrived in the village, attended by a considerable escort, and an immense number of travellers.¹⁹ The road they say, between here and Lugo, is infested with robbers and Carlists, who are committing all kinds of atrocities; let us, therefore, avail ourselves of the opportunity, and by midday to-morrow we shall find ourselves safe in Lugo." On hearing these words, I instantly sprang out of bed and dressed myself, telling Antonio to prepare the horses with all speed.

We were soon mounted and in the street, amidst a confused throng of men and quadrupeds. The light of a couple of flambeaux, which were borne before the courier, shone on the arms of several soldiers, seemingly drawn up on either side of the road; the darkness, however, prevented me from distinguishing objects very clearly. The courier himself was mounted on a little shaggy pony; before and behind him were two immense portmanteaux, or leather sacks, the ends of which nearly touched the ground. For about a quarter of an hour there was much hubbub, shouting, and trampling, at the end of which period the order was given to proceed. Scarcely had we left the village when the flambeaux were extinguished, and we were left in almost total darkness; for some time we were amongst woods and trees, as was evident from the rustling of leaves on every side. My horse was very uneasy and neighed fearfully, occasionally raising himself bolt upright. "If your horse is not more quiet, cavalier, we shall be obliged to shoot him," said a voice in an Andalusian accent; "he disturbs the whole cavalcade." "That would be a pity, sergeant," I replied, "for he is a Cordovese by the four sides²⁰; he is not used to the ways of this barbarous country." "Oh, he is a Cordovese," said the voice, "vaya, I did not know that; I am from Cordova myself. Pobrecito! let me pat him - yes, I know by his coat that he is my countryman - shoot him, indeed! vaya, I would fain see the Gallegan devil who would dare to harm him. Barbarous country, IO LO CREO²¹: neither oil nor olives, bread nor barley. You have been at Cordova. Vaya; oblige me, cavalier, by taking this cigar."

¹⁹ The 'Grand Post' as Antonio here calls it was the special, super-rapid government courier, who maintained communications between Coruña and Madrid. While a normal stagecoach took some 10 to 12 days to move between these two capitals, this non-stop travelling pony-express ensured that government correspondence would be received within only four or five days, an essential service in time of civil war.

²⁰ The whole of this conversation is an exercise of 'how to bluff your way back into safety' on Borrow's part. With his unfailing ear, Borrow does not only recognize the soldier's pronunciation as Andalusian, which is obvious to anyone who knows some Spanish, but even recognizes his accent as *Cordobese*, which is no easy feat except for born Andalusians... The pedigree of the horse, incidentally, is perfectly imaginary. As far as we know, Borrow had no clue where the animal came from or who its grandparents were.

²¹ 'I do believe so', 'Indeed it is!'



25.3 A USA mail courier

In this manner we proceeded for several hours, up hill and down dale, but generally at a very slow pace. The soldiers who escorted us from time to time sang patriotic songs, breathing love and attachment to the young Queen Isabel, and detestation of the grim tyrant Carlos. One of the stanzas which reached my ears, ran something in the following style:

"Don Carlos is a hoary churl,
Of cruel heart and cold;
But Isabel's a harmless girl,
Of only six years old."²²

At last the day began to break, and I found myself amidst a train of two or three hundred people, some on foot, but the greater part mounted, either on mules or the pony mares: I could not distinguish a single horse except my own and Antonio's. A few soldiers were thinly scattered along the road. The country was hilly, but less mountainous and picturesque than the one which we had traversed the preceding day; it was for the most part partitioned into small fields, which were planted with maize.²³ At the distance of

²² The Spanish original of this song has unfortunately been lost.

²³ The *minifundia*, or system of subsistence farming based on an infinite number or tremendously small plots, was – and still is – the curse of Galicia. This, rather than the Gallegos' wayward moral attitudes or their lack of Bible reading (as Borrow would have it), was the true reason why the province was in such a poor state. At the time, the average number of fields per farm was 16, although 35 plots – of a few meters width, and scattered for miles around – was nothing uncommon. Consequently, no effective or modern methods of farming could be applied, machinery was useless, and any sort of mechanisation or industrialisation was doomed to failure for simple lack of adequate space. Brought forth mainly by the traditional system of inheritance – which for centuries divided a father's possessions among all the living children – it petrified due to the traditional, medieval system of long-term, hereditary leases, and got nailed into the future

every two or three leagues we changed our escort, at some village where was stationed a detachment. The villages were mostly an assemblage of wretched cabins; the roofs were thatched, dank, and moist, and not unfrequently covered with rank vegetation. There were dunghills before the doors, and no lack of pools and puddles. Immense swine were stalking about, intermingled with naked children. The interior of the cabins corresponded with their external appearance: they were filled with filth and misery.

We reached Lugo about two hours past noon²⁴: during the last two or three leagues, I became so overpowered with weariness, the result of want of sleep and my late illness, that I was continually dozing in my saddle, so that I took but little notice of what was passing. We put up at a large posada without the wall of the town, built upon a steep bank, and commanding an extensive view of the country towards the east.²⁵ Shortly after our arrival, the rain began to descend in torrents, and continued without intermission during the next two days, which was, however, to me but a slight source of regret, as I passed the entire time in bed, and I may almost say in slumber. On the evening of the third day I arose.

There was much bustle in the house, caused by the arrival of a family from Coruna²⁶; they came in a large jaunting car, escorted by four carabineers. The family was rather numerous, consisting of a father, son, and eleven daughters, the eldest of whom might be about eighteen. A shabby-looking fellow, dressed in a jerkin and wearing a high-crowned hat, attended as domestic. They arrived very wet and shivering, and all seemed very disconsolate, especially the father, who was a well-looking middle-aged man. "Can

by the *desamortizacion*, when the new moneyed landowner classes bought up the leases confiscated from the church, not to develop them, but simply to milk them dry to finance their urban, bourgeois life-styles. The mass migrations to the New World, which began in 1850s, was the immediate result; small time farming being too poor to gain a livelihood – in spite of the fact that Galicia, with its mild climate and its fertile soil, was potentially the most productive and wealthy province of Spain.

²⁴ On 10 July 1837.

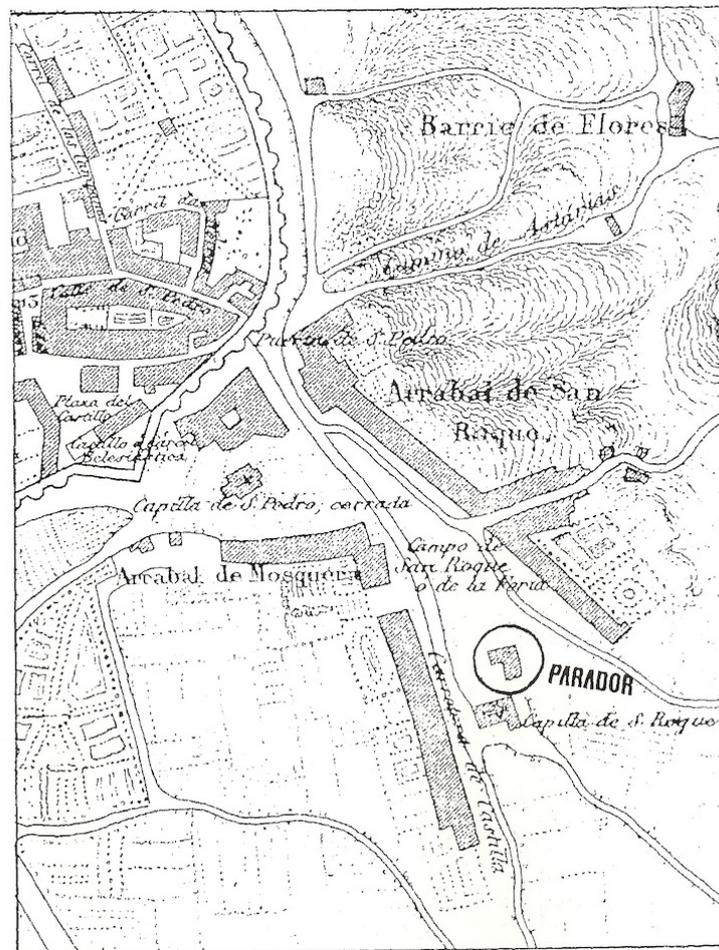
²⁵ Almost certainly the 'Meson Aguiar', a.k.a. the 'Taverna dos Toldanos' on the Rua San Roque, founded before 1800 and only pulled down in the late 1980s during the unstoppable Spanish drive to replace all historic buildings by hideous concrete high-rises. This was the Diligence Inn, where the stagecoaches stopped, and effectively the only quality hotel in town. As such it is also the only one which Ford [*HB*, 891 & 968] mentioned and recommended, by the looks of it on Borrow's own suggestion (see Ford's letter to Borrow asking for the names of Spanish inns, 'especially in the Lugo country', reproduced in Knapp II : 303f). [Missler, 'Lost in Lugo', in *GBB* 38, 20-36; Abel Vilela, Adolfo, 'Historia de un edificio lucense: el Meson de San Roque, in: *Boletín do Museo Provincial de Lugo*, nº 4, Lugo 1988-89, 121-152.]

²⁶ As we will learn below, the family came originally from Granada. They took a boat from the south coast to Coruña, a cheaper and much saver way to travel than overland, particularly with so large a family, which would have required at least two coaches and three weeks travelling.

we be accommodated?" he demanded in a gentle voice of the man of the house; "can we be accommodated in this fonda?"²⁷

"Certainly, your worship," replied the other; "our house is large. How many apartments does your worship require for your family?"

"One will be sufficient," replied the stranger.



25.4 The position of the Meson Aguiar on the San Roque road of Lugo
(from: Abel Vilela, *Historia de un edificio lucense*, p. 30)

²⁷ The use of the word *Fonda* is no coincidence here, but rather Borrow's attempt at irony. Nowadays the most inferior class of boarding house, in the 1830s it was the best of all possible hotels. Ford [*Gatherings*, chapter 15] notes that the name was derived from the Venetian *Fondacco*, a top slot hotel, and that 'the fonda is only to be found in the largest towns and principal seaports, where the presence of foreigners creates a demand and supports the establishment. To it frequently is attached a cafe, or (...) a bottlery and a place for the sale of liqueurs, with a "neveria" a snowery where ices and cakes are supplied. Men only, not horses, are taken in at a fonda; but there is generally a keeper of a stable or of a minor inn in the vicinity, to which the traveller's animals are consigned.' Much as the Meson Aguiar was the best hotel in Lugo, it was still a far, far cry from the luxury establishments in the big cities.

The host, who was a gouty personage and leaned upon a stick,²⁸ looked for a moment at the traveller, then at every member of his family, not forgetting the domestic, and, without any farther comment than a slight shrug, led the way to the door of an apartment containing two or three flock beds, and which on my arrival I had objected to as being small, dark, and incommodious; this he flung open, and demanded whether it would serve.

"It is rather small," replied the gentleman; "I think, however, that it will do."

"I am glad of it," replied the host. "Shall we make any preparations for the supper of your worship and family?"²⁹

"No, I thank you," replied the stranger, "my own domestic will prepare the slight refreshment we are in need of."

The key was delivered to the domestic, and the whole family ensconced themselves in their apartment: before, however, this was effected, the escort were dismissed, the principal carabineer being presented with a peseta.³⁰ The man stood surveying the gratuity for about half a minute, as it glittered in the palm of his hand; then with an abrupt VAMOS! he turned upon his heel, and without a word of salutation to any person, departed with the men under his command.

"Who can these strangers be?" said I to the host, as we sat together in a large corridor open on one side, and which occupied the entire front of the house.

"I know not," he replied, "but by their escort I suppose they are people holding some official situation. They are not of this province, however, and I more than suspect them to be Andalusians."

In a few minutes the door of the apartment occupied by the strangers was opened, and the domestic appeared bearing a cruse in his hand. "Pray, Señor Patron," demanded he, "where can I buy some oil?"

²⁸ Juan Perez Aguilar, the Salamanca-born owner, who ran the Meson from the late 1820s to his death in 1846.

²⁹ Here the host at least offers a service belonging to a *Fonda*, which was the only sort of inn that would serve food and cook for its guests. Normal *posadas* did not. Ford [*Gatherings*, chapter 15] specifies: 'Strictly speaking, the keeper is only bound to provide lodging, salt, and the power of cooking whatever the traveller brings with him or can procure out of doors; and in this it differs from the *fonda*, in which meats and drinks are furnished.'

³⁰ A *peseta*, being 4 *reales*, equalled the daily pay of an unskilled worker, and also the daily sold of a soldier (next to room and board). This tip, however, would have to be shared by four men, which made it indeed extremely miserly. Ford [*HB*, 66] recommended that a traveller thus escorted through dangerous country follow the usual custom of giving 'each man a couple of pesetas a-day and a dollar (20 *reales*) to their leader'!

"There is oil in the house," replied the host, "if you want to purchase any; but if, as is probable, you suppose that we shall gain a cuarto³¹ by selling it, you will find some over the way. It is as I suspected," continued the host, when the man had departed on his errand, "they are Andalusians, and are about to make what they call gaspacho, on which they will all sup. Oh, the meanness of these Andalusians! they are come here to suck the vitals of Galicia, and yet envy the poor innkeeper the gain of a cuarto in the oil which they require for their gaspacho³². I tell you one thing, master, when that fellow returns, and demands bread and garlic to mix with the oil, I will tell him there is none in the house: as he has bought the oil abroad, so he may the bread and garlic; aye, and the water too for that matter."

³¹ A 'cuarto' was so very small a coin that one can barely tell what purchasing power it had. Its nominal value was 4 *maravedis* (the *maravedi* being an old Arabic coin, used mainly for calculation, since physically almost inexistent), of which there were a handy 34 to every *real*, the standard unit of coinage. To illustrate the smallness of the *cuarto*, it is sufficient to mention that Ford notes [*HB*, 8 and again in *Gatherings*, chapter 9] that already in the late 1820s (i.e. still before the further inflation caused by the war-economy struck) *cuartos* were infinitesimally small pieces of scrap metal chopped from canon and melted bell-towers. Once, for an amusing experiment with Spain's troublesome coinage, Ford went to the Seville marketplace to try to change a *duro* (20 *reales*) into small change. In return, he says he received a weird collection of odd coins, which even included antique Arab and Roman ones, which were still generally used and accepted!

³² Cold Andalusian soup, made of tomatoes, garlic, oil, bread, water and sometimes onions. It is particularly cheap and refreshing, which makes good sense in sweltering Andalusia, but is an oddity in chilly Galicia.