

Cambridge University Press
 978-1-108-00997-3 - The Bible in Spain, Volume 1
 George Henry Borrow
 Excerpt
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THE BIBLE IN SPAIN.

CHAPTER I.

MAN OVERBOARD. — THE TAGUS. — FOREIGN LANGUAGES. — GESTICULATION. — STREETS OF LISBON. — THE AQUEDUCT. — BIBLE TOLERATED IN PORTUGAL. — CINTRA. — DON SEBASTIAN. — JOHN DE CASTRO. — CONVERSATION WITH A PRIEST. — COLHARES. — MAFRA. — ITS PALACE. — THE SCHOOLMASTER. — THE PORTUGUESE. — THEIR IGNORANCE OF SCRIPTURE. — RURAL PRIESTHOOD. — THE ALEMTEJO.

ON the morning of the 10th of November, 1835, I found myself off the coast of Galicia, whose lofty mountains, gilded by the rising sun, presented a magnificent appearance. I was bound for Lisbon; we passed Cape Finisterre, and standing farther out to sea, speedily lost sight of land. On the morning of the 11th the sea was very rough, and a remarkable circumstance occurred. I was on the fore-castle, discoursing with two of the sailors: one of them, who had but just left his hammock, said, "I have had a strange dream, which I

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do not much like, for," continued he, pointing up to the mast, "I dreamt that I fell into the sea from the cross-trees." He was heard to say this by several of the crew besides myself. A moment after, the captain of the vessel perceiving that the squall was increasing, ordered the topsails to be taken in, whereupon this man with several others instantly ran aloft; the yard was in the act of being hauled down, when a sudden gust of wind whirled it round with violence, and a man was struck down from the cross-trees into the sea, which was working like yeast below. In a few moments he emerged; I saw his head on the crest of a billow, and instantly recognised in the unfortunate man the sailor who a few moments before had related his dream. I shall never forget the look of agony he cast whilst the steamer hurried past him. The alarm was given, and every thing was in confusion; it was two minutes at least before the vessel was stopped, by which time the man was a considerable way astern; I still, however, kept my eye upon him, and could see that he was struggling gallantly with the waves. A boat was at length lowered, but the rudder was unfortunately not at

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hand, and only two oars could be procured, with which the men could make but little progress in so rough a sea. They did their best, however, and had arrived within ten yards of the man, who still struggled for his life, when I lost sight of him, and the men on their return said that they saw him below the water, at glimpses, sinking deeper and deeper, his arms stretched out and his body apparently stiff, but that they found it impossible to save him ; presently after, the sea, as if satisfied with the prey which it had acquired, became comparatively calm. The poor fellow who perished in this singular manner was a fine young man of twenty-seven, the only son of a widowed mother ; he was the best sailor on board, and was beloved by all who were acquainted with him. This event occurred on the 11th of November, 1835 ; the vessel was the London Merchant steam ship. Truly wonderful are the ways of Providence !

That same night we entered the Tagus, and dropped anchor before the old tower of Belem ; early the next morning we weighed, and, proceeding onward about a league, we again anchored at a short distance from the Caesodré, or

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principal quay of Lisbon. Here we lay for some hours beside the enormous black hulk of the Rainha Nao, a man-of-war, which in old times so captivated the eye of Nelson, that he would fain have procured it for his native country. She was, long subsequently, the admiral's ship of the Miguelite squadron, and had been captured by the gallant Napier about three years previous to the time of which I am speaking.

The Rainha Nao is said to have caused him more trouble than all the other vessels of the enemy; and some assert that, had the others defended themselves with half the fury which the old vixen queen displayed, the result of the battle which decided the fate of Portugal would have been widely different.

I found disembarkation at Lisbon to be a matter of considerable vexation; the custom-house officers were exceedingly uncivil, and examined every article of my little baggage with most provoking minuteness.

My first impression on landing in the Peninsula was by no means a favourable one; and I had scarcely pressed the soil one hour before I heartily

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Ch. I.] FOREIGN LANGUAGES.—GESTICULATION. 5

wished myself back in Russia, a country which I had quitted about one month previous, and where I had left cherished friends and warm affections.

After having submitted to much ill usage and robbery at the custom-house, I proceeded in quest of a lodging, and at last found one, but dirty and expensive. The next day I hired a servant, a Portuguese, it being my invariable custom on arriving in a country to avail myself of the services of a native, chiefly with the view of perfecting myself in the language; and being already acquainted with most of the principal languages and dialects of the east and the west, I am soon able to make myself quite intelligible to the inhabitants. In about a fortnight I found myself conversing in Portuguese with considerable fluency.

Those who wish to make themselves understood by a foreigner in his own language, should speak with much noise and vociferation, opening their mouths wide. Is it surprising that the English are, in general, the worst linguists in the world, seeing that they pursue a system diametrically opposite? For example, when they attempt to speak Spanish, the most sonorous tongue in existence,

they scarcely open their lips, and putting their hands in their pockets fumble lazily, instead of applying them to the indispensable office of gesticulation. Well may the poor Spaniards exclaim, *These English talk so crabbedly, that Satan himself would not be able to understand them.*

Lisbon is a huge ruinous city, still exhibiting in almost every direction the vestiges of that terrific visitation of God, the earthquake, which shattered it some eighty years ago. It stands on seven hills, the loftiest of which is occupied by the castle of Saint George, which is the boldest and most prominent object to the eye, whilst surveying the city from the Tagus. The most frequented and busy parts of the city are those comprised within the valley to the north of this elevation.

Here you find the Plaza of the Inquisition, the principal square in Lisbon, from which run parallel towards the river three or four streets, amongst which are those of the gold and silver, so designated from being inhabited by smiths cunning in the working of those metals; they are upon the whole very magnificent; the houses are huge and as high as castles; immense pillars de-

find the causeway at intervals, producing, however, rather a cumbrous effect. These streets are quite level, and are well paved, in which respect they differ from all the others in Lisbon. The most singular street, however, of all is that of the Alemcrin, or Rosemary, which debouches on the Caesodré. It is very precipitous, and is occupied on either side by the palaces of the principal Portuguese nobility, massive and frowning, but grand and picturesque, edifices, with here and there a hanging garden, overlooking the street at a great height.

With all its ruin and desolation, Lisbon is unquestionably the most remarkable city in the Peninsula, and, perhaps, in the south of Europe. It is not my intention to enter into minute details concerning it; I shall content myself with remarking, that it is quite as much deserving the attention of the artist as even Rome itself. True it is that though it abounds with churches it has no gigantic cathedral, like St. Peter's, to attract the eye and fill it with wonder, yet I boldly say that there is no monument of man's labour and skill, pertaining either to ancient or modern Rome, for

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whatever purpose designed, which can rival the water-works of Lisbon ; I mean the stupendous aqueduct whose principal arches cross the valley to the north-east of Lisbon, and which discharges its little runnel of cool and delicious water into the rocky cistern within that beautiful edifice called the Mother of the Waters, from whence all Lisbon is supplied with the crystal lymph, though the source is seven leagues distant. Let travellers devote one entire morning to inspecting the Arcos and the Mai das agoas, after which they may repair to the English church and cemetery, Pere-la-chaise in miniature, where, if they be of England, they may well be excused if they kiss the cold tomb, as I did, of the author of "Amelia," the most singular genius which their island ever produced, whose works it has long been the fashion to abuse in public and to read in secret. In the same cemetery rest the mortal remains of Doddridge, another English author of a different stamp, but justly admired and esteemed. I had not intended, on disembarking, to remain long in Lisbon, nor indeed in Portugal ; my destination was Spain, whither I shortly proposed to

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direct my steps, it being the intention of the Bible Society to attempt to commence operations in that country, the object of which should be the distribution of the word of God, for Spain had hitherto been a region barred against the admission of the Bible; not so Portugal, where, since the revolution, the Bible had been permitted both to be introduced and circulated. Little, however, had been accomplished; therefore, finding myself in the country, I determined, if possible, to effect something in the way of distribution, but first of all to make myself acquainted as to how far the people were disposed to receive the Bible, and whether the state of education in general would permit them to turn it to much account. I had plenty of Bibles and Testaments at my disposal, but could the people read them, or would they? A friend of the Society to whom I was recommended was absent from Lisbon at the period of my arrival; this I regretted, as he could have afforded me several useful hints. In order, however, that no time might be lost, I determined not to wait for his arrival, but at once proceed to gather the best information I could upon those

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points to which I have already alluded. I determined to commence my researches at some slight distance from Lisbon, being well aware of the erroneous ideas that I must form of the Portuguese in general, should I judge of their character and opinions from what I saw and heard in a city so much subjected to foreign intercourse.

My first excursion was to Cintra. If there be any place in the world entitled to the appellation of an enchanted region, it is surely Cintra; Tivoli is a beautiful and picturesque place, but it quickly fades from the mind of those who have seen the Portuguese Paradise. When speaking of Cintra, it must not for a moment be supposed that nothing more is meant than the little town or city; by Cintra must be understood the entire region, town, palace, quintas, forests, crags, Moorish ruin, which suddenly burst on the view on rounding the side of a bleak, savage, and sterile looking mountain. Nothing is more sullen and uninviting than the south-western aspect of the stony wall which, on the side of Lisbon, seems to shield Cintra from the eye of the world, but the other side is a mingled scene of fairy beauty, artificial elegance,