

# GOTHIC ARCHITECTURE IN SPAIN

## CHAPTER I

### IRUN—SAN SEBASTIAN—BURGOS

So little has it been the fashion hitherto to explore the North of Spain in search of artistic treasures, that it was with somewhat more than usual of the feeling that I was engaged in an adventure that I left Bayonne on my first journey West of the Pyrenees. Yet, in truth, so far as I have seen there is little in the way of adventure to anticipate even there in these matter-of-fact days; and, some slight personal inconvenience excepted, there is nothing to prevent any traveller of ordinary energy doing all that I did with complete success, and an uncommon amount of pleasure. For if there are no serious perils to be encountered, there is great novelty in almost everything that one sees; and whether we wish to study the people and their customs, or to visit the country and explore it in search of striking and picturesque scenery, or to examine, as I did, its treasures of ancient art, we shall find in every one of these respects so much that is unlike what we are used to, so much that is beautiful, and so much that is ancient and venerable by historic association, that we must be dull indeed if we do not enjoy our journey with the fullest measure of enjoyment. Indeed the drawbacks about which so much is usually said and written—the difficulty of finding inns fit to sleep in, or food fit to eat—seem to me to be most enormously exaggerated. It is true that I have purposely avoided travelling over the well-beaten Andalusian corner of Spain; and it is there, I suppose, that most English ideas of Spain and the Spaniards are formed. But in those parts to which my travels have taken me, but in which English travellers are not known so well as they are in Andalusia, I have certainly seldom found any difficulty in obtaining

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such creature-comforts as are essential. Somewhat, it is true, depends upon the time of year in which a journey is undertaken; for in the spring, when the climate is most enjoyable, and the country gloriously green and bright with wavy crops of corn, the traveller has to depend entirely upon the cook for his food; and has no other resource even where the cookery is intolerable to his English sense of smell, taste, and sight! But in the autumn, if he chances to travel, as I have twice done, just when the grapes are ripening, he may, if he choose, live almost entirely, and with no little advantage to his health, on grapes and bread, the latter being always pure, light, and good to a degree of which our English bakers have no conception; and the former tasting as none but Spanish grapes do, and often costing nothing, or at any rate never more than a merely nominal sum.

On the whole, from my own experience, I should be inclined to recommend the autumn as the most favourable season for a Spanish journey, the weather being then generally more settled than in the spring. But, on the other hand, there is no doubt that any one who wishes to judge fairly of the scenery of Old and New Castile, of great part of Aragon, and of Leon, ought on no account to visit these provinces save in the spring. Then I know no sight more glorious in its way than the sea of corn which is seen covering with its luxuriance and lovely colour the endless sweeps of the great landscape on all sides; whereas in the autumn the same landscape looks parched and barren, burnt up as it is by the furious sun until it assumes everywhere a dusty hue, painful to the eye, and most monotonous and depressing to the mind; whilst the roads suffer sometimes from an accumulation of dust such as can scarcely be imagined by those who have never travelled along them. Even at this season, however, there are some recompenses, and one of them is the power of realising somewhat of the beauty of an Eastern atmosphere, and the singular contrasts of colours which Eastern landscapes and skies generally present; for nowhere else have I ever seen sunsets more beautiful or more extraordinary than in the dreariest part of dreary Castile (1).

So far as the inns and food are to be considered, I do not think there is much need ordinarily for violent grumbling. All ideas of English manners and customs must be carefully left behind; and if the travelling-clothes are donned with a full intention to do in Spain as Spain does, there is small fear of their owner suffering very much. But in Spain more than in

## SPANISH INNS

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most parts of Europe the foreign traveller is a rare bird, and if he attempt to import his own customs, he will unquestionably suffer for his pains, and give a good deal of unnecessary—because fruitless—trouble into the bargain.

Spanish inns are of various degrees, from the *Posada*, which is usually a muleteer's public-house, and the *Parador*, which is higher in rank, and where the diligence is generally to be found, up to the *Fonda*, which answers in idea to our hotel. In small country towns and villages a *Posada* is the only kind of inn to be found; and sometimes indeed large towns and cities have nothing better for the traveller's accommodation; but in the larger towns, and where there is much traffic, the *Parador* or *Fonda* will often be found to be as good as second-rate inns elsewhere usually are.

In a *Posada* it is generally easy to secure a bedroom which boasts at any rate of clean, wholesome linen, though of but little furniture; and in the remoter parts of the country—as in Leon and Galicia—there is no difficulty in securing in the poorest *Posada* plenty of bird or fish of quality good enough for a gourmand. The great objection to these small inns is, that nothing but the linen for the beds and the face of the waiting-maid ever seems to be washed. The water is carried to and fro in jars of the most curious and pleasant form and texture, and a few drops are now and then thrown on the floor of the *comedor* or eating-room by way of laying the ancient dust; but washing in any higher sense than this is unknown. It must be said also, that the entrance is common to the mules and the guests; and that after passing through an archway where the atmosphere is only too lively with fleas, and where the stench is something too dreadful to be borne with ease, you turn into the staircase door, and up the stairs, only to find when you have mounted that you have to live, sleep, and eat above the mules; and (unless you are very lucky), when you open your window, to smell as badly as ever all the sweets of their uncleaned and, I suppose, uncleanable stables!

The kitchen is almost always on the first floor; and here one may stand by the wood fire and see the dinner cooked in a mysterious fashion in a number of little earthen jars planted here and there among the embers; whilst one admires the small but precious array of quaint crockery on the shelves, and tries to induce the cooking-maid to add somewhat less of the usual flavouring to one at any rate of her stews! I confess, in spite of all this, to a grateful recollection of many a *Posada*, to a

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hearty appreciation of an *olla podrida*—a dish abused most by those who know least about its virtues—and to some suspicion that many of the humblest have treasures in their unsophisticated cooks for which one longs in vain in our own English country-town inns, which of all I have seen seem to me to be the worst, in their affectation of superiority, and in their utter inability to support their claim with anything more worthy than bad mutton-chops, doubtful beer, and wine about which there is no kind of doubt whatever! So much for the Posada. In the Parador or the Fonda the entertainment is generally very fair, whilst in many the sleeping-rooms are all that need be desired. But even here the smell of the stables is often so intolerable as to make it very desirable to find other quarters; and about this there is seldom if ever any difficulty; for in almost all towns of moderate size there are plenty of houses where lodgers are taken in for a night; and in these one may generally depend upon cleanliness, the absence of mules, and fairly-good cookery.

In all—whether inns or lodgings—it is well to eat when the Spaniard eats, and not to attempt to do so at any other time, else much precious time and temper will assuredly be lost, and with results entirely incommensurate with the sacrifice. At whatever hour you rise the maid will bring a small cup of chocolate and a vast glass of water, with some sweet biscuits or toast. And you must learn to love this precious cup, if you intend to love Spain: nowhere else will you get chocolate so invariably well made; and if after you have taken it you drink heartily of the water, you have nothing to fear, and may work hard without fainting till you get your morning meal, at about eleven o'clock. This is a dinner, and can be followed by another at sunset, after which you can generally find in a café either coffee, chocolate, or iced lemonade, whilst you watch the relaxation of the domino-playing natives (2).

Finally, there is seldom anything to quarrel with in the bill, which is usually made out for the entertainment at so much a day; and when this has been paid, the people of the house are sure to bid you God speed—*a dios*—with pleasant faces and kind hearts.

The journeys which I have undertaken in Spain have all been made with the one object of inspecting the remains of Gothic building which I either hoped to, or knew I should, find there. My knowledge of Spanish scenery has therefore been very much limited, and it is only incidentally that I am able to speak at all

## TOURS

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of it. Yet I have seen enough to be able to recommend a great extent of country as thoroughly worthy of exploration by those who care for nought but picturesque scenery. The greater part of Catalonia, much of Aragon, Navarre, the north of Leon, Galicia, and the Asturias, are all full of lovely scenery, and even in other districts, where the country is not interesting, there seem always to be ranges of mountains in sight, which, with the singular purity of the atmosphere through which they are seen, never fail of leaving pleasant recollections in one's mind. Such, for example, is the view of the Guadarrama Mountains from Madrid—a view which redeems that otherwise forlorn situation for a great city, and gives it the only charm it has. Such again are the mountain backgrounds of Leon, Avila, and Segovia.

In my first Spanish tour I entered the country from Bayonne, travelled thence by Vitoria to Burgos, Palencia, Valladolid, Madrid, Alcalá, Toledo, Valencia, Barcelona, Lérida, and by Gerona to Perpiñan. In the second I went again to Gerona, thence to Barcelona, Tarragona, Manresa, Lérida, Huesca, Zaragoza, Tudela, Pamplona, and so to Bayonne; and in the third and last I went by Bayonne to Pamplona, Tudela, Tarazona, Sigüenza, Guadalajara, Madrid, Toledo, Segovia, Avila, Salamanca, Zamora, Benavente, Leon, Astorga, Lugo, Santiago, la Coruña, and thence back by Valladolid and Burgos to San Sebastian and Bayonne.

Tours such as these have, I think, given me a fair chance of forming a right judgment as to most of the features of Spanish architecture; but it were worse than foolish to suppose that they have been in the slightest degree exhaustive, for there are large tracts of country which I have not visited at all, others in which I have seen one or two only out of many towns which are undoubtedly full of interesting subjects to the architect, and others again in which I have been too much pressed for time. Yet I hardly know that I need apologise for my neglect to see more when I consider that, up to the present time, so far as I know, no architect has ever described the buildings which I have visited, and indeed no accurate or reliable information is to be obtained as to their exact character, or age, or history. The real subject for apology is one over which I have had, in truth, no control. The speed with which I have been compelled to travel, and the rapidity with which I have been obliged to sketch and take dimensions of everything I have seen, have often, no doubt, led to my making errors, for which, wherever they exist, I am sincerely sorry. In truth, the work I undertook was

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hardly the mere relaxation from my ordinary artistic labour for which it was first of all intended, and has been increased not a little by the labour which I have undertaken in the attempt to fix by documentary evidence, where possible, the ages of the various parts of the buildings I have described.

It will be observed that I have not visited the extreme south of Spain; and this was from the first a settled purpose with me. We have already been treated almost to surfeit with accounts of the Moorish remains at Granada, Seville, Cordoba, and other places in the south; but beside this my anxiety was to see how the Christians and not how the Moors built in Spain in the middle ages, and I purposely, therefore, avoided those parts of the country which during the best period of mediæval art were not free from Moorish influence. The pages of this book are the best evidence I can give of the wisdom of such a decision, and I need only say here that I was more than satisfied with the purity and beauty of the Christian architecture of Spain, and that I have no hesitation in the advice which I give to others to follow in my track and to make good the deficiencies in my investigations, of which I am so thoroughly conscious.

By this time travelling on the great high road through Spain *viâ* Madrid is much easier than it was when I first made the journey. The railway to Madrid is now either completed or all but completed, and it is possible to travel from Calais to Alicante on an almost unbroken line. It is a matter to be grateful for in most respects, yet I rejoice that I made my first journey when it was still necessary to make use of the road, and to see something on the way both of the country and of the people (3).

It was after a hurried journey by night to Paris, and thence the next night on to Bordeaux, that I arrived, after a few hours spent in that interesting old city, at the end of the second day in Bayonne. Here my first work was to furnish myself with money and places in the Spanish diligence; and in both these matters I received my first lesson in one peculiarity of Spaniards—that of using foreign words in another and different sense from that to which we are accustomed. Napoleons are said to be the best coin for use in Spain, and I furnished myself with them only to discover, when it was too late, that in Spain a Napoleon means a silver five-franc piece, and that my gold Napoleons were all but useless out of Madrid. And again, when I asked for places in the coupé of the diligence, I found that I was really trying to secure seats in the *banquette*—the coupé being called the *berlina*, and the *banquette* the coupé.

## BAYONNE

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At Bayonne there is not very much to be seen beyond the cathedral, the river crossed by the Duke for his attack on Soult, and a charming view from the top of the cathedral tower of the lower ranges of the Pyrenees. The Trois Couronnes is the most conspicuous peak, and its outline is fine; but here, as generally in the distant views of the chain which I obtained, there is a lack of those snow peaks which lend so much beauty to all Alpine views. The exterior of the cathedral (4) has been almost entirely renewed of late, and a small army of masons was busy in the cloister on the south side of the choir. It is to be hoped that the stoppage of the funds so lavishly spent upon the French cathedrals may happen before the Bayonne architects and masons have come round to the west end. At present there is a savage picturesqueness about this which is beyond measure delightful, whilst the original arrangement of the doorways and porches on the west and south, with enormous penthouse roofs over them, is just so far open to conjecture and doubt as to be best left without very much alteration. The general character of the interior of the cathedral is only moderately good, the traceries of the lofty traceried triforium and the great six-light windows of the clerestory in the nave being unusually complicated for French work. The choir is of late thirteenth-century work, very short, with five chapels in the chevet.

In the afternoon we followed the stream and drove to Biarritz. A succession of vehicles of every kind, crowded with passengers, gave strong evidence of the attractions either of the place or else of the emperor and empress, who had been there for a week or two; and the mob of extravagantly dressed ladies, French and English, who thronged the bathing-places and the sandy plain in front of the Villa Eugénie, accounted for the enormous black boxes under which all the vehicles seemed to groan. The view from the cliffs on the western side of Biarritz is strikingly beautiful, embracing as it does the long range of the Pyrenees descending to the sea in a grand mass above Fuenterrabia, and prolonged as far as the eye could reach along the coast of Biscay. The next morning we left Bayonne at four o'clock for Burgos. We had seats in the coupé, the occupants of the berliça on this journey being a son of Queen Christina, with his bride. In Spain every one seems to travel by the diligence; you seldom meet a private carriage; there are no posting arrangements; and owing to the way in which the diligences on the great roads are crowded, it is very difficult

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indeed to stop on the road without running great risk of indefinite delays in getting places again (5).

The drive was very charming. The sun rose before we reached St. Jean de Luz,<sup>1</sup> and we enjoyed to the full the lovely scenery. Crossing the Bidassoa at Irun, the famous Ile de Faisans was seen—a mere stony bank in the middle of the stream, recently walled round and adorned with a sort of monument—and then ensued a delay of an hour whilst our luggage was examined and *plombé* in order that it might pass out of Guipuzcoa into Castile without a second examination.

There is a rather characteristic church (6) of late date here. It stands on ground sloping steeply down towards the river, and has a bald look outside, owing to the almost complete absence of window openings, what there are being small, and very high above the floor. The plan is peculiar: it has a nave and chancel, and aisles of two bays to the eastern half of the nave, so that the western part of the nave corresponds in outline very nearly with the chancel. There is a tower at the west end of the south aisle. The groining is many-ribbed, and illustrates the love of the later Spanish architects for ogee surface-ribs, which look better on a plan of vaulting than they do in execution. The east end is square, but the vaulting is apsidal, the angles of the square end being cut across by domical pendentives below the vaulting. The most remarkable feature is the great width of the nave, which is about fifty-four feet from centre to centre of the columns, the total length not being more, I think, than a hundred and fifty feet. The church floor was strewn with rushes, and in the evening when I visited it the people stole in and out like ghosts upon this quiet carpeting. This church was rebuilt in A.D. 1508, and is of course not a very good example of Spanish Gothic.

Fuenterrabia is just seen from Irun in the distance, very prettily situated, with the long line of the blue bay of Biscay to its right. From Irun the road to San Sebastian passes the land-locked harbour of Pasage: this is most picturesque, the old houses clustering round the base of the great hills which shut it in from the sea, between which there is only a narrow winding passage to the latter, guarded by a mediæval castle. Leaving

<sup>1</sup> The church at Bidart (7), between Bayonne and the French frontier, is quite worth going into. It has a nave about forty-five feet wide, and three tiers of wooden galleries all round its north, west, and south walls. They are quaint and picturesque in construction, and are supported by timbers jutting out upwards from the walls, not being supported at all from the floor.



## SAN SEBASTIAN

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this charming picture behind, we were soon in front of San Sebastian. Here again the castle-crowned cliff seems entirely to shut the town out from the sea, whilst only a narrow neck of land between the *embouchure* of the river on the one side, and a land-locked bay on the other, connects it with the mainland. We had been seven or eight hours *en route*, and were glad to hear of a halt for breakfast. Whilst it was being prepared I ran off to the church of San Vicente on the opposite side of the town to the Fonda. I found it to be a building of the sixteenth century—built in 1507—with a large western porch (8), open-arched on each face, a nave and aisles, and eastern apsidal choir. The end of this is filled with an enormous Retablo of Pagan character, reaching to the roof. The church is groined throughout, and all the light is admitted by very small windows in the clerestory. The aisles have altars in each bay, with Retablos facing north and south. There is little or no work of much architectural interest here; but it was almost my first Spanish church, and I had my first very vivid impression of the darkened interiors, lighted up here and there by some brilliant speck of sunshine, which are so characteristic of the country, and as lovely in their effects as they are aggravating to one who wants to be able to make sketches and notes within them.

Leaving San Sebastian at mid-day, we skirted the bay, busy with folk enjoying themselves in the water after the fashion of Biarritz. The country was wild, beautiful, and mountainous all the way to Mondragon. At Vergara there was a fair going on, and the narrow streets were crowded with picturesquely dressed peasants; everywhere in these parts fine, lusty, handsome, and clean, and to my mind the best looking peasantry I have ever seen. In the evening the villages were all alive, the young men and women dancing a wild, indescribable dance, rather gracefully, and with a good deal of waving about of their arms. The music generally consisted of a tambourine, but once of two drums and a flute; and the ball-room was the centre of the road, or the little *plaza* in the middle of the village. At midnight there was another halt at Vitoria, where an hour was whiled away over chocolate and *azucarillos*—delicate compositions of sugar which melt away rapidly in water, and make a superior kind of *eau sucré*; and again at sunrise we stopped at Miranda del Ebro for the examination of luggage before entering Castile.

Close to the bridge, on the opposite side of the Ebro to Miranda, is a church (9) of which I could just see by the dim light of the

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morning that it was of some value as an example of Romanesque and Early Pointed work. The apse, of five sides, has buttresses with two half-columns in front of each, and an arch thrown across from buttress to buttress carries the cornice and gives a great appearance of massiveness to the window arches with which it is concentric. The south doorway is of very fine Early Pointed style, with three shafts on each jamb, and five orders in the arch.

On the road from Miranda to Pancorbo there is a striking defile between massive limestone cliffs and rocks, through which the Madrid Railway is being constructed with no little difficulty, and where the road is carried up, until, at its summit, we found ourselves at the commencement of the arid, treeless, dusty, and eminently miserable plain of Castile, whilst we groaned not a little at the slow pace at which the ten or twelve horses and mules that drew us got over the ground. These Spanish diligences are certainly most amusing for a time, and thenceforward most wearying. They generally have a team of ten or twelve animals, mostly mules. The driver has a short whip and reins for the wheelers only; a boy, the *adalantero*, rides the leaders as postilion, and with a power of endurance which deserves record, the same boy having ridden with us all the way from San Sebastian to Burgos—twenty-five hours, with a halt of one hour only at Vitoria. The conductor, or *mayoral*, sits with the driver, and the two spend half their time in getting down from the box, rushing to the head of one of the mules, belabouring him heartily for two or three minutes till the whole train is in a mad gallop, and then climbing to the box to indulge in a succession of wild shrieks until the poor beasts have fallen again into their usual walk, when the performance is repeated. I believe that for a day and a half our *mayoral* never slept a wink, and spent something like a fourth of his time running with the mules: though I am bound to say that subsequent experience has convinced me that he was exceptionally lively and wakeful, for elsewhere, in travelling by night, I have generally found that the mules become their own masters after dark, walking or standing still as seemeth them best, and seldom getting over much more than half the ground they travel in the same number of hours of daylight.

A few miles before our arrival at Burgos, we caught the first sight of the three spires of the cathedral; and presently the whole mass stood out grandly, surmounted by the Castle hill on the right. One or two villages with large churches of little