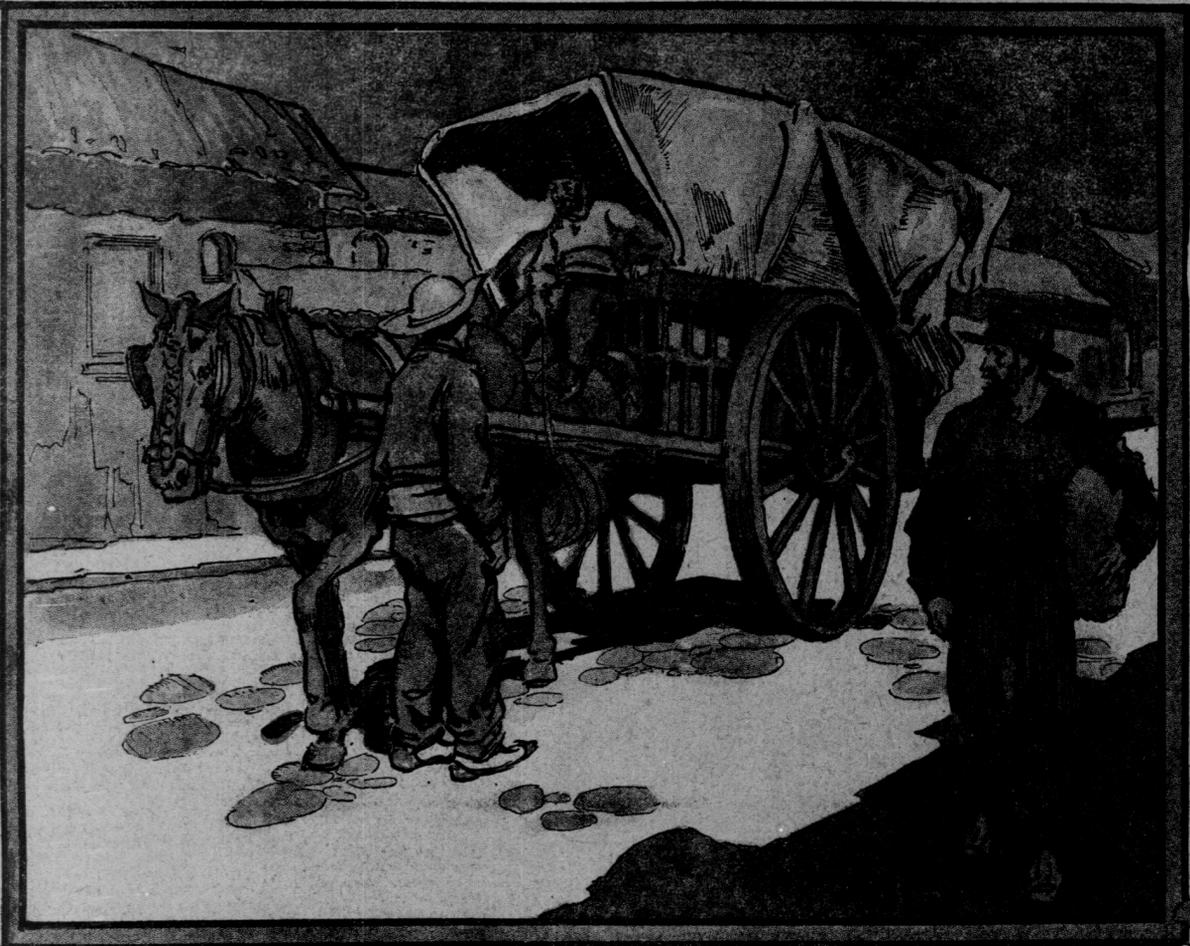


SPAIN IN A JIFFY



By Arthur Wa'bidge North
Author of "Camp and Camino,"
"Mother of California," Etc.

Hall of Ambassadors,
Alhambra Palace, Madrid.

AWAKENED abruptly, I thrust aside a compartment curtain, then, face hard against the pane, stared wonderingly. Luminous in the tender sunlight an unbroken grove of orange trees, studded with yellow fruit, stretched away to the northern Sierras. Here and there stilled up on gaunt stems, bushy palms did shepherd duty over the golden flock. I had a glimpse of a man close wrapped in blue serapa, a mere glimpse, for an added rocking jolt threw me across the compartment. With a sigh I picked myself up, as I did so absently glancing out of the adjacent window. Here, too, was a serapa man, this one riding a gaudily decked pack burro. Yesterday about Toulouse and Sarbonne the natives wore blue blouses and traveled with heavy wheeled carts drawn by shaggy ponies. But over night the Pyrenees had intervened. With equal effectiveness, moreover, changing cars at the frontier we had passed to a different trackage, the Spanish gauge being less than the French, lest some new Napoleon be forgetful about keeping his military cars in the home round-house.

Another jolt. The little train stopped before a neat blue and white adobe. "Sarunto," a Spanish voice cried. Contenting shades of Hannibal and Scipio, Saguntum now a railway station! "Gentlemen travelers to the train," cried a voice in Spanish, whereupon some one tinkled a dinkey bell, the dinkey engine gave an answering toot and our dinkey train was again on its desultory way. Toward noon, our course after Valencia having been northwesterly, sharp, rugged hills, like the western buttes anywhere from Montana to Arizona, broke the rich plain. Presently, on the crest of one of these I saw a castle. None of your tinsel, shop worn French castles, but a sure enough historic, time and battle worn, 140 cents on the

dollar castle. Then came another and another—a whole flock of castles. The skyline became jagged with them. Certainly down in Catalonia and Valencia "Castles in Spain" are a material reality, only as yet the tourist has not discovered this semitropical, fascinating portion of Spain.

Already I was half out of the window when the voice cried, "Jatiba!" Jatiba, the seat of the Phoenicians, sending forth its fine Tyrian handkerchiefs to the grand dames of Egypt, Athens and Rome, Jatiba! When the dinkey engine tooted away responsive to the dinkey bell, I was no longer on the train.

Through narrow winding streets, past fifteenth century homes with their great brass knockers, iron studded doors and armorial crests, through the town and up past monasteries, once Roman temples, and fountains and ancient terraced orchards beyond all semblance of street or road, up a deep worn winding trail, a Roman wall to the left, the rugged butte, castle crested, towering high above. Before an iron and oak portal we paused, knocking loudly. A wizened dame threw the bolt and shouldering open a lesser door within the greater we entered.

Thus within the walls we climbed yet higher, along winding worn stone steps, through portals, peering frequently into dark mysterious rooms. When did the Phoenicians, tramping inland from their many oared galleys, lay the first stone, what portion did the great caesar add, in which retreat were the dark eyed princesses, the infantas now asleep these seven centuries, imprisoned by their uncle, the fiery Sancho el Bravo, what tower restrained the shrewd Caesar Borgia? Looking about me, or across at other castle crowned buttes, or glancing down upon the rich vega with its orchards and villages, such thoughts as these gave way to yet others. Now I was stretched beneath cottonwood trees, beside a bubbling hot spring in far away Mexico, an old Indian squat, cross legged high me.

"Senor," he is saying, "the tradition is, and my grandfather, himself, gave it to me, that years ago to this spring came a Spanish soldier. Then there

were two thousand of our people hereabouts. Later, he returned to Spain, to Jatiba, his home. There he served a grand senora, very devout, to whom he told concerning this place, Adac our people called it. So when she died she left many pesos for missions. The Iglesia here first of all was built there-with, being named for her parents, Senor San Francisco de Borgia, a very good saint."

This Fatiba reaches even to California. But, indeed, in appearance and in its tremendous agricultural and mineral wealth Spain is most like California. Arriving at the fonda, or village inn, I found my garb the worse for the climb to the castle. A native boot-black entered the patio. I pointed to my dusty shoes.

Jose made a good job of it. "How much?" I inquired. "Two fat dogs," was his prompt reply.

Two fat dogs! Shades of waddling Fido and sleek Towser! "What! How much?" I gasped, for the lad seemed in earnest. "Don perros gordos, Senor."

No mistake. Even I understood those simple words. Was he perhaps interested in some sausage factory? "Awful sorry, but I left 'em all at home. Try coin." I held out some copper. From the lot he carefully selected two of the larger, ten centimo pieces valued at about two cents each.

Later, at the station copper change was passed to me. A five centimo piece fell to the floor. A bystander picking it up, exclaimed, "A thin dog, senor." An upright lion, in appearance resembling a dog, is a portion of the design on each Spanish copper coin. Accordingly the latter was termed, colloquially, "fat" and "thin" dogs. Next time you get a shine, however, figure your feelings were Sam to say "About four fat dogs, Cap."

In addition to her train service, Spain is assailed because of her cooks. Here I arise in defense of the senoras. A most excellent meal, well cooked, can be secured at from 20 to 30 cents, even in Madrid.

Madrid, by the way, is just another big city. Pardon, but somehow cities should be merely periodic. However, en route from the station the Prado Museo caught my attention, so thither I proceeded. Once within the great central hallway, focused by masterpieces of Titian, Van Dyck, Rubens, Murillo and Velasquez, I began to dwindle, feeling my insignificance. It was too much of an all star cast to be staring down on one at once. Even I, however, could not but enjoy some of the canvases. There was a Murillo—St. Somebody dipping a rebellious youngster's stained face into a much needed basin. Next, my fancy was taken by the clear blue effect in the distant sky of Velasquez' "Surrender of Breda," and in contrast with it the dark forest shadows of Rubens' "The Wild Boar Hunt." As for the rest, there were to the limit ladies, somewhat adipose in tissue and quite big enough to know better, prancing about in bathing suits of the antique fashion, and kings and kinglets galore, the major portion a bargain lot, mere links in the Imperial succession, now being saved from oblivion by the glory of the artist who placed them on lasting canvas.

From the Prado to the Palacio del Rey is but a brief drive, and "Bill," as I'd named my driver, covered the distance in short order. Very plainly something was on at the palace. Of course, in California, Utah and New York, the three places of my residence, Kings are out of season; but even a novice could see that the palace was having a very busy hour. At first I thought it might be pay day. Helmeted guards and troopers were in evi-

dence, fine equipages and motors stretched out in long line, while at a respectful distance grouped the populace who pay for the gilt.

I asked Bill what was on, but he didn't seem to have been invited, so I drew closer with my camera. As I approached the great portal of the palace, which is an immense substantial white affair, out came, in twos and threes and then in crowds, military officers, gorgeously robed church dignitaries, men in ordinary full dress and others in white satin with knee breeches and white silk stockings, and ladies in white and ladies in black with mantillas to match draped about their graceful heads. Not just knowing my part, I opened up with the camera, quite expecting arrest for less majestic until one, most gorgeous in attire, preened himself, nodding toward my Kodak. Well, between dukes and marquesses, captains general and grandees, I soon lost count. Say, you couldn't have heaved a stone without landing on at least a grandee. There were no loose ones around, however, stones I mean, for the grandees were just running over one. From a most friendly appearing don I learned that the latest little infanta of Spain had just been christened, with the czar's representative as godfather. Presently the most thrilling, watching music arose, and forth a marching came a file corps, gayly dressed boys, with drummers close after, and next a superbly drilled company of the famous royal halberdiers, their pole axes across their shoulders.

Here I am in a palace, writing in the hall of ambassadors, the very room where Columbus was commissioned by Queen Isabella to sail forth into the western sea. The Alhambra is wonderful, and all this hall and the Court of Lions have a charm beyond words.



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