

THROUGH A MONOCLE

SOME OBSERVATIONS IN SPAIN.

SOME time ago, we had Lord Northcliffe comparing the Inter-colonial with the Spanish railways. His Lordship had no intention of being complimentary; and, for a man in a hurry, the Spanish railways might seem a trifle leisurely. But who is in a hurry in Spain? Certainly not the visiting tourist, if he has really gone to see the country and not merely to make a record of ten towns in ten days—collecting hotel labels and distributing picture post cards. Spain is a land which repays slow travel. In parts, it is magnificently mountainous. In others, the rich "vega" pleases the eye like an English rural landscape. You run through orange and lemon groves for hours; and other hours are spent amidst the silver grey of the olive. The funeral plumes of the cypress rise in silent grace by the banks and swift, dark rivers. Cactus hedges line the track, and here and there rise the tall frouds of the palm. Who could be in a hurry through such a garden? Then the bare, grey hills with their incredible gorges and the "saw" of their sierras cutting the sky-line, are equally arresting. At the stations the halts are often long, but never dull. The peasants cluster about in typical groups—the men with broad hat brims, brilliant sashes, and handkerchiefs tied about their heads; the women, dark-eyed, often with singular regularity of feature and roses in their night-black hair. I don't believe that even Lord Northcliffe would want to hurry.

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THEN they have a checking system in Spain for your baggage.

You may have noticed the lack of one in England. True, it is not adapted to catching a train in ten seconds, but it rids you of the responsibility of watching your baggage. It is well to arrive at the station a little early when you have a suit case or two to register; for it is quite a business. You get a porter to carry your things into the baggage-room, and then he proceeds to try to worry the baggage-master into taking some notice of them. But usually that official is very busy registering other baggage. Finally, however, he delegates a subordinate to weigh your bags and look at your tickets. This is most carefully done and the result reported to the chief. Next he satisfies himself that your bags are locked. He does this by unstrapping them and snapping all the fastenings open, and then pulling away at the locks. The first time I saw this done to my bags, I did not understand it; and, leaping over the barrier, I demanded in excellent English what he wanted to open my baggage for when I was going away from his town; and at the same time offered my keys as a simpler method of breaking into the bags. He waved my keys aside, ignored my question and hurried off to plunge into the clerical part of this intricate business.

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THIS consists in first making out labels which are pasted onto your bags; and then preparing a receipt for them which states how many pieces you have, what your ticket is like, where you are going

and sundry other pertinent facts. This, I think, is made out in duplicate, one copy being given to you and the other preserved in the archives of the railway. This sounds complicated and it gives you time to become familiar with the baggage-room; but when it is done, your baggage is checked—something Lord Northcliffe could not get done in his own country for love or money. All this time, the porter has been energetically devoting himself to forwarding the process, chiefly by shouting at the baggage-master and alarming you by glancing apprehensively at the clock. When it is done, he seizes the rest of your *impedimenta* and rushes off to find you a seat in the train. There he lifts your things into the racks over-head, and sees you comfortably settled. You might fear by now that you owed him so much for his many and arduous services that they would be for nothing, as you would have to go home, all your money having been given to the porter; but if you bestow a big penny on him, he will be graciously thankful; and if you make it three cents, he will throw in a smile worth ten times the money.

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AN English cabman at Gibraltar advised me to go to Malaga by boat in order to escape the hardships of the Spanish railway thither. He said that the line would be all right as far as Bobadilla, for an English company ran it to that point; but that beyond Bobadilla it was Spanish. No other adjective was needed; that was damning enough to his mind. He was of the Northcliffe School. But he was wrong. There is no slump in the line or its rolling stock after Bobadilla. The train to Malaga was quite as good as that from Algeciras; and the train back from Malaga was much better. The "train de luxe"—i. e., express train—from Seville to Madrid is a first-class train judged by any standard; and it runs on time. The day coaches are much better adapted to day travel than ours are, and are much more frequently used for that purpose. The sleeping cars are built with an aisle down the side off which the "cabins" open. In fact, they are the regular Continental International "waggons-lit." As for speed, this express train does 274 miles in ten hours over a road that negotiates mountain ranges and is full of curves and grades. On the whole, it looks as if the English cabman and the English editor might have been a trifle hasty.

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OF course, a man can get a lot of material for cheap and easy criticism of the Spanish railways if he does not speak the language and tries to work them without knowing the ropes. He will try to do everything the wrong way and he will not understand when he is courteously put right. That reminds me of the English gentleman who was travelling in Canada with a large family and many trunks. An assiduous railway representative who was looking after his party checked his baggage for him, and gave him the checks. As the train jogged along that night, the said railway representative was surprised to find pieces of torn baggage checks in the corridor of the car. By piecing them together, he found out that they belonged to the gentleman with the large family and the "much luggage." "Oh, yes," said that gentleman when asked, "that's all right. I went into the luggage van with my little bits of paper and checked all the pieces off. They are all there, all right; so I threw away the checks." Now if that gentleman had not understood the language of the country and had not been in such good hands, he might have had some trouble and had some criticisms to offer of one of the best railways in Canada.

THE MONOCLE MAN.



His Majesty King Edward, photographed while shooting over his preserves at Sandringham; accompanied by his corps of attendants.—Illustrated London News.