

answered by another that was unseen. Hardly had I taken a hundred steps, when the valley, suddenly growing broader, showed me a sort of natural circus, perfectly shaded by the high escarpments surrounding it. It would be impossible to find a spot promising a more agreeable halting-place for a traveller. At the foot of the perpendicular rocks the spring bubbled forth and fell into a little basin carpeted with snow-white sand, five or six magnificent green oaks sheltering it with their dense foliage, while around the basin, fine, rich grass offered a better bed than could have been found in any inn for ten leagues around. But the honour of discovering so charming a resting-place did not belong to me, for a man was already reposing there when I reached it. Awakened by the neighing of the animals, he had risen and approached his horse, which had profited by his master's sleep to make a good repast of the herbage. The young fellow was of middle size, his appearance denoting great strength, and with a sombre, proud look; his complexion, once fresh, had become, through exposure to the sun, darker than his hair. In one hand he held the animal's halter, in the other a carbine, and I acknowledge that at first his weapon and wild air somewhat surprised me; but I no longer believed in robbers, by reason of constantly hearing of them and never meeting them. Moreover, I had seen so many honest farmers armed to the teeth to go to market, that the sight of this firearm did not justify me in questioning the morality of its bearer. "And then," I said to myself, "what would he do with my shirts and my Elzevir Commentaries?" I therefore saluted him with a familiar nod, and asked smilingly if I had disturbed his slumbers. Without replying he eyed me from head to foot, and, as if satisfied with his examination, bestowed the same attention on my guide, who now appeared. I saw the latter grow pale, and stop in evident terror. "An unlucky meeting," I said to myself: but prudence immediately counselled me to manifest no uneasiness, so alighting, I told the guide to unbridle my horse, and kneeling on the brink of the streamlet I plunged my head and hands in its delicious coolness, then took a long draught flat on my face, like the wicked soldiers of Gideon. Meanwhile I observed my guide and our unknown companion, and while the former approached with evident unwillingness, the other seemed to have no evil designs against us, for he restored his horse to liberty, and his weapon, at first held horizontally, was now pointed to the ground. It being unnecessary to take offence at the slight attention paid to my presence, I stretched myself on the grass and with an unconstrained air asked the man if he had a tinder box, at the same time drawing out my cigar case. Still without speaking, he found the tinder in his pocket and hastened to strike me a light, evidently softened by my manner, for he seated himself opposite to me, nevertheless without laying aside his weapon. Having lighted my cigar, I chose the best one remaining and asked him if he smoked. "Yes, Señor," he replied. They were the first words he had spoken, and I remarked that he did not pronounce the *s* in the Andalusian way,* whence I concluded that he was merely a traveller like myself, only less archæological.

"You will find this quite good," I said, presenting him a genuine Havana regalia. He made a slight inclination of the head, lighted his cigar by mine, thanked me with another nod, and began to smoke with evidently keen pleasure.

"Ah!" he exclaimed, allowing the first whiff of smoke to escape slowly through mouth and nostrils, "how long it is since I have smoked!"

In Spain a cigar given and accepted establishes relations of hospitality, as it does in the Orient to partake of bread and salt. My new friend showed himself more talkative than I could have anticipated, but although he professed to be an inhabitant of this region, he seemed to know but little of the country; was ignorant of the name of the charming valley in which we were, could not name any village of the neighbourhood, and at length, questioned as to having seen ruined walls, large brimmed tiles and sculptured stones in the environs, he confessed that he had never paid attention to such matters. In return, however, he showed himself an expert as regarded horses, criticising mine, which was not a difficult task, then giving me the pedigree of his own, that came from the famous Cordovan stud: a noble animal indeed, so insensible to fatigue, his master claimed, as once to have made thirty leagues in one day at gallop and full trot. In the midst of this tirade my unknown friend abruptly stopped, as if surprised and vexed at having said so much, and resumed with some embarrassment: "I was in urgent haste to reach Cordova, having to appeal to the judges respecting a law-suit." While speaking, he looked at my guide Antonio, who lowered his eyes.

The shade and the spring were so charming, that remembering some slices of excellent ham placed by my Montilla friends in my guide's wallet, I ordered them to be brought, and invited the stranger to take part in the impromptu collation. If he had been long without smoking, it seemed probable that he had fasted for at least forty-eight hours; he devoured like a famished wolf, and I could but think that our meeting had been providential for the poor devil. My guide, on the contrary, ate little, drank still less, and did not speak at all, although since the beginning of our journey he had revealed himself to me as an unparalleled chatterer. The presence of our guest was evidently a constraint, and a certain distrust, of which I could not positively discern the cause, seemed to keep them aloof from each other.

The last crumbs of bread and ham had disappeared, we had each smoked a second cigar, I had ordered the guide to bridle our horses, and was about to take leave of my new friend, when he asked where I designed passing the night. Before noticing a sign from my guide I replied that I should go to the Cuervo inn.

"A sorry lodging for a person like you, Monsieur. I also am going there, and if you will permit me to accompany you, we will travel together."

"Very willingly," I said, mounting my horse. Antonio, who held my stirrup, again made signs with his eyes, to which I replied by a shrug, as if to assure him that I was perfectly at ease, and we proceeded on our way. Antonio's mysterious signals, his disquietude, some words that had escaped from the stranger, especially his race of thirty leagues and its little plausible explanation, had already decided my opinion as to the status of our travelling companion. There was no doubt that I had to deal with a smuggler, perhaps

a robber. What mattered it to me? I knew enough of the Spanish character to be very certain of having no reason to fear a man who had eaten and smoked with me. His presence itself was a sure protection against an ill adventure. Besides, I was very glad of the chance of knowing what a brigand really was; for they are not encountered every day, and there is a certain charm in finding one's self near a dangerous creature, especially when one discovers him to be mild and companionable. I hoped by degrees to lead the stranger to confide his secret to me, and in spite of my guide's winks I turned the conversation to highway robbers, of whom, be it understood, I spoke with respect. There was then in Andalusia a notorious bandit, José-Marie, whose exploits were in every mouth. "If I were then by his side!" I said to myself. I related the wonderful stories that I had heard of this hero—all in his favour, moreover—and boldly expressed my admiration for his bravery and generosity.

"José-Marie is merely a sharp fellow (*drole*)," coldly said the stranger.

Is he doing himself justice, or is it merely an excess of modesty on his part? I mentally questioned; for, by dint of closely observing my companion, I became convinced that the description of José-Marie that I had seen posted on the gates of many Andalusian towns applied in every detail to him. Yes, certainly, he it was—fair hair, blue eyes, large mouth, beautiful teeth, small hands: a fine shirt, a velvet jacket with silver buttons, leggings of white leather, a bay horse—not a shadow of doubt!

We reached the inn, which was such as he had described; that is to say, one of the most wretched that I had as yet seen in Spain. A large room served as kitchen, dining-hall and sleeping-room, and on a flat stone in the centre was the fire, the smoke of which escaped through an aperture in the roof, or rather settled down in a cloud a few feet above the ground, while five or six old mule-blankets did duty as beds for travellers.

Twenty steps from the house, or rather the single apartment just described, was a sort of wood-shed, used also as a stable. In this charming retreat there were no human beings except an old woman and a young girl of ten years, both of the colour of soot, and clothed in horrible tatters. Behold all that remains, I said to myself, of the ancient Munda Bœtica! Oh, Cæsar! oh, Sextus Pompey! how amazed would you be, could you return to this world!

On perceiving my companion, the old woman allowed an exclamation of surprise to escape:

"Ah, Señor don José!" she cried.

Don José knit his brows, and raised his hand with a gesture of authority that at once silenced her. I turned towards my guide, and with an imperceptible sign made him understand that I was perfectly aware of the manner of man with whom I was to pass the night. The supper, which was served on a little table a foot high, was better than I expected, and consisted of an old cock fricasseed with rice and an abundance of allspice, then pimenta in oil, followed by some *gaspacho*, a species of salad of pimenta; which three highly spiced dishes obliged us to have frequent recourse to a leather bottle of Montilla wine, that proved to be delicious. Our repast over, I espied a mandolin hanging against the wall—mandolins being found everywhere throughout Spain—and asked the little girl if she knew how to play.

"No Señor; but Don José plays it so well!"

"Be good enough to sing me something," I said to him; "I passionately love your national music."

"I can refuse nothing to so civil a gentleman, who gives me such good cigars," exclaimed Don José with a good-humored air, and the mandolin being handed to him, he sang to his own accompaniment. His voice was a little harsh, nevertheless agreeable, the air odd and melancholy, but of the words I did not understand a single one.

"If am not mistaken, that is not a Spanish melody. It resembles the *zorricos* that I have heard in the *Provinces*,* and the words must be in the Basque tongue."

"Yes," rejoined Don José with a gloomy air, as, placing the mandolin on the ground, he folded his arms, and with a singular expression of sadness fixed his eyes on the glimmer of the fading fire. Lighted by a lamp on the little table, his face, at once noble and fierce, reminded me of Milton's Satan; like him, perhaps, my companion was dreaming of the abode he had forfeited, of the exile incurred by transgression. I essayed to revive the conversation, but he made no reply, absorbed as he was in melancholy thought. The old woman had already sought her couch in a corner of the room, screened by a ragged blanket hung on a cord, and the girl had followed her to this retreat reserved for the fair sex. My guide, now rising, requested me to follow him to the stable, but at this word Don José, as if suddenly awakened from sleep, started up and sharply inquired where he was going.

"To the stable," replied the guide.

"What to do? The horses are fed. Sleep here; Monsieur will allow it."

"I fear that Monsieur's horse is ill; I should like Monsieur to see it; he will know what it is best to do."

It was evident that Antonio wished to speak to me in private, but I did not care to arouse Don José's suspicions; and situated as we were, it appeared to me that the wiser plan would be to manifest the most perfect confidence in him. I therefore told Antonio that I understood nothing about horses, and was anxious to sleep. Don José followed him to the stable, whence he soon returned alone, and told me that nothing ailed the horse; but my guide considered him so precious an animal that he was rubbing him down with his jacket to make him sweat, and proposed to pass the night in this gentle occupation. I had, meanwhile, extended myself on the mule-blanket, to avoid contact with which I carefully wrapped myself in my cloak. After asking pardon for the liberty of placing himself near me, Don José lay down before the door, first renewing the priming of his weapon, which he was careful to place under the wallet that served him as a pillow. Five minutes after, wishing each other good-night, we were both in a deep sleep. I thought myself sufficiently wearied to be able to rest even in such a den; but at the end of an hour, very disagreeable sensations snatched me from my first sleep, and as soon as I understood the nature of the attacks, I rose, persuaded that it would be

* The Andalusians aspirate the *s*, and in pronunciation confound it with the soft *c* and *z*, which the Spaniards pronounce like the English *th*. By the single word *Señor* one may recognize an Andalusian.

* The privileged provinces, enjoying special *fueros* (civil rights) that is to say: Alava, Biscay, Guipuscoa, and a portion of Navarre. Basque is the language of the country.