

NOTES OF TRAVEL I

DAYS IN SPAIN (3)

(By J.K.)



GATE AND TOWER OF ST. MARY,
BURGOS.

In Madrid one enjoys the good air and the sunshine of the beautiful streets. There are several churches worth visiting, notably San Francisco and the crypt of the future cathedral, now in the course of construction.

En passant, let me remark that a visitor cannot help being impressed by the large congregations at the Masses and also by the numbers of men and women who during the hours of the afternoon turn into the churches for visits to the Blessed Sacrament. Spain is in every sense a Catholic country. There is no doubt about that.

Even when one has grown almost tired of art, after Rome and Florence and Venice, the Prado cannot be overlooked. I spent a morning there, confining myself solely to the great Spanish painters, and principally to Ribera, Del Greco, and Goya. To Murillo I did not pay much attention, as one sees his masterpieces all over Europe. But Madrid is the place to study the others in.

Del Greco was of course an Italian who painted in Spain. Indeed he is so closely associated with Toledo that he is to be considered a Castilian artist. The wonderful browns and greens of the Toledo landscape are in all his pictures, and to the present day, in the streets of that ancient city, you will see men of the same aquiline features as you find in his pictures. In fact, to understand and appreciate him you must go to Toledo.

And it is worth while visiting. There you will find traces of Roman, Visigoth, Moorish, and Norman civilisation. You will see the famous steel-workers making the celebrated Toledo swords or inlaying with gold works of art which wealthy visitors purchase as souvenirs of their visit. But above all you will see that wonderful cathedral, which no picture can represent and which words are inadequate to describe. Music alone could convey an impression of Toledo, with its moonlight, its romance, and the ineffable

poem in stone of its dim, beautiful cathedral.

Near Madrid, is the Escorial, at once a palace, a monastery, and a treasure-house of art. It is a wonderful spot, perched up there among the hills of Spain, three thousand feet over the sea, with the rolling valleys below and the snowy peaks of the Sierras above it. I can recall no experience so moving as walking in the mausoleum of the dead kings and queens of Spain, and reading the great names of those whose glory is now dust. Down there, too, I came upon the white marble figure of Don John of Austria—stretched upon his stone sarcophagus, with his sword clasped in his hands. And it brought back to me that wonderful day in the past when this hero of Christianity—for all his bar sinister on his shield—raised aloft the banner that brought men marching to him down all these mountain pathways, and set sailors busy in the ports from Gibraltar to Venice, preparing for the onslaught which he was to lead against the Turks. The name of "Lepanto," where the Crescent went down for ever before the Cross that Don John so nobly bore, ought to be the one word engraved on his tomb.

Later, I left Central Spain behind and crossed the country into Burgos. The train wound its way high up among the hills, and we passed for hours among snowy peaks before we descended into the vast plain that extends from the mountains to La Mancha. The fields were all ploughed, ready to bear the wheat of next summer. There were few trees and few towns all along the line, and we wondered where the men who ploughed these plains lived, for they were as hard to see as are now Don Quixote and his faithful Sancho, who once rode from dawn to sunset across this very country.

In the evening came Burgos, high among the hills, with the enchanted towers of its great cathedral raised in benediction over the country. For two days I stayed at Burgos, where the air is cold and pure, like it is at Queenstown in winter, and all the time the wonder of the glorious cathedral increased. Its façade recalls Rheims, and its interior has the dreamy, devotional beauty of Toledo. But it has a character all its own, and its numerous side-chapels are rich in works of imperishable art. There are a dozen other churches, many of them remarkable enough, but they are all overshadowed by the mighty Gothic temple which ranks with those of Toledo and Seville as the grandest monuments of old Catholic Spain.

Finally to San Sebastian, a beautiful city, close to the French frontiers at Hendaye. There, the travellers from New Zealand had a few days' rest beside the sea, in this sheltered corner of the Bay of Biscay; and there one of them, at least, was content to wander by the shore and ponder over those days in Spain which were all too brief.

In this corner, where the hills of Spain



THE PROMENADES, BURGOS.

slope down to the ocean, the people are surely Celtic. I have noticed the Celtic type here often, and more than one Spaniard has recalled to us our affinity in the distant past. Our fathers probably only passed through on their way westward, but there is a great deal to be said for the old tradition which Moore has made immortal:

"They came from a land beyond the sea,
—Far o'er the western main."

Again, one must not forget that in those dark doys of the past when Catholic Ireland was under the heel of the tyrant, her exiled sons always found a hospitable welcome in Spain. The kindness of this grand Catholic people made less bitter the bread of exile and less hard the stairs of the stranger for many of our race who came hither and often gave their lives in gratitude to the land of their adoption.

The swords of the O'Neills and the O'Donnells flamed in Spain's wars no less gloriously than did those of the O'Briens and the Dillons and the Kellys in France. There is a street in the capital called O'Donnell Street, and a bearer of that noble name ranks among the nobles of Spain to-day.

And, so, here by the sea at San Sebastian, an Irish wanderer says reluctantly enough his farewell to a land of sunshine and romance which still retains its old spirit of courtesy and hospitality. And, now, by devious paths, three New Zealanders are going northward, and soon, from London Bridge, may be sketching the ruins of St. Paul's Cathedral. You *Tablet* readers have heard that it is in danger of falling. I hope we shall be there to see the crash.

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