

uneasiness was abated this year, when I saw how naturally and rankly the practice appeared to flourish, and how much the exercise and the prevention of it seemed to constitute the business of life, in the parts of Spain farthest removed from our influence. A traveller in this country is led to believe that revenue laws must be a necessary part of the general system of things, since the absence of them would frustrate a law of nature by which man is impelled to smuggle.

The rural inn of Gavarnie is a great resort of tourists, and gives itself the town air of offering Champagne, Sauterne, and Madeira. On no road in the Pyrenees did I see so many travellers with horse and guide as between Gavarnie and Luz.



P.C. Monumental de la Alhambra y Generalife
CONSEJERÍA DE CULTURA

LETTER XXVIII.

Journey from Luchon to the Port de Venasque — Maladetta Mountain — Return by the Port de la Picade — Luchon to Toulouse.

Bagnères de Luchon, July 21st.

I HAVE performed the pilgrimage of the Maladetta.* I set out this morning, on horseback, with Mr. —— and my guide, soon after six, for the pass into Spain called the Port de Venasque. The day was glorious, but we had shade for the first few miles. After resting good part of an hour at the Hospice, a lone-built venta, and in winter a kind of charitable refuge, but well frequented at this touring season, we set ourselves to clamber a very steep ascent, which presently grew rugged as well, into the bosom of the mountains on the right-hand side of a high rocky pyramid called Le Pic de la Picade. We fell in with another travelling party, and the trouble of the equestrians was a good deal increased by our getting mixed with a string of bedizened Spanish mules, animals

* So called, though the proper Spanish name would seem to be Maldita.

which it is not very easy to deal with in a narrow way on the edge of a steep declivity. The drivers (men in sandals and with coloured handkerchiefs round their heads) were very goodhumoured and accommodating, and one handed round his leather wine-bottle. I partook, but forgot the ceremony of squirting into the mouth, though I could have done it very well. This was my adieu to Spaniards, though not quite to Spain.

We had to scramble over several snow-beds, deep but much trampled and ploughed up, and, as we ascended, looked down upon several little tarns formed of the snow-water: one seemed half congealed still, and its water, over snow, looked as blue as the ink I am writing with. The last scene of the ascent was a kind of bason, or cul-de-sac, of snow and the ruggedest mountain, where it certainly is difficult to see how you are to get any farther, though I, who had often read about the place, soon made it out.* You begin a new climb up a staircase of rock, in a corner where a gap opens, no wider than a narrow street of London. It looks as if the rocks had rent amidst some fearful commotion of nature, or under the rod of a prophet. This is the pass where, it is said, in bad weather, the father does not wait for his son, nor the son for his father.

* With attention, a gleam of light might be seen piercing the barrier of rock which appeared to deny further passage.

New air and light seemed to burst on us as we struggled through, and when we gained the top of the gap there was a new wild world opened. Right opposite was the great Spanish mountain Maladetta, with its immense breadth of snow-beds and glaciers, and its summits bristling above them in naked black points and ridges; from the snow downwards, a vast depth and breadth of russet and rocky mountain, scattered thinly with great fir-trees, and stretching down into a ravine, which from this point cannot be fathomed. Words cannot describe the sublime, mingled mass that glares upon you under this "accursed" name. There is nothing I could so much liken it to as the pictures of the moon seen through a strong telescope.* When you recover a little from the sudden presence of this giant figure, your eye wanders to the more distant mountains of Aragon, as far as a grand snowy height called, I think, the Pic de Mungari; to the pass by which you have presently to round the Picade, and beyond which you see some of the Catalonian mountain-tops; and to the fountain-head of the Garonne; a cascade con-

* The dreary, chaotic scene, with its inauspicious name, seems as if it had just come out of the convulsion described by the Psalmist,—

"The springs of waters were seen, and the foundations of the round world were discovered at thy chiding, O Lord: at the blasting of the breath of thy displeasure."
Ps. xviii. 15.

spicuous from a distance, but which immediately loses itself in the ground, and comes out again, it is said, on the other side of the mountains, so flowing into France. The vanishing point is called le Trou du Taureau ; I do not know why.

From the Port de Venasque we descended and ascended again some way into the grassy and snowy hollow which runs behind the Pic de la Picade. On looking back, the gap you came through in mounting seems a more strangely splintered rent than when you were near it ; indeed, you would hardly make it out but for a lofty mass of rock, called the Sauvegarde, at its entrance, which looks like the shapeless ruin of a huge tower. When we got to a place where there were grass and water, we opened our packs and made our luncheon, in no great comfort, on the provisions we had brought with us.

We then moved on to the Port de la Picade, which brings you back to France (for at the Venasque port you enter Spain) on the opposite side of the Pic to that by which you went up. From this Port there is another fine view, an ocean of mountain-tops, snowy and stony, the Pyrenees of Catalonia.

For these glorious sights we had a new and a heavy tribute to pay in riding and walking, by détours and zigzags that seemed interminable, down to the Hospice, where we had to lounge and rest the horses for an hour. Among the scrawls upon the outside plaster of the house

I noticed one in red chalk, which an imaginative tourist might dwell upon with profit: "Notre Dame de Laurette (Lorette), le ciel est noir." It seems the ejaculation of some poor fellow who was going up one of these awful passes in a day that threatened bad weather: an occasion when a man might well utter invocations.

We got home very well, though much tired with the motion of descending (the most tedious thing in all these Pyrenean expeditions), by a little after five.

NOTE.

I left the pretty but insipid watering-place of Bag-nères de Luchon without much regret, after a few days' residence, and rumbled and jingled over the plains of the Garonne in one of the numerous Luchon diligences to Toulouse; an orderly and not unpleasant journey of twelve daylight hours. At Toulouse the railway welcomes you home.

THE END.