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Part XXI
TRUJILLO

④ 14,000 to

"OLD SPAIN" 1936
M & G BONE

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(Caceris)



'THE RELIQUARY OF HISTORY'

AS one drives along the Cáceres road across a plain full of light and as wide as the sea, where strange spurred mountains rise like islands in the glimmer, where feathered clouds float like medusae in transparent waters, and the distant Sierras de Gredos purify the horizon with snow, to discover the dead forsaken end of Trujillo rising on its hill of granite is like the sudden lighting upon some ancient acropolis, some remote dead city in the sunlight, the abandoned temples of a vanished people, 'the reliquary of a race'.

At first sight the towers and walls seem but a more laboured placing together of the rocks which cover the plain. The Arab towers, squat in ruin, running round the circumference of the hill, have scarcely more importance than the enormous boulders which cover its slope. Yet never was town built with so definite an ambition as this cradle of Conquistadores. Back from victory, with a new continent at their feet, the dividing of lands in their native province, and the devising of palaces

suitable for the great, the legitimizing of the illegitimate, became their preoccupation. Throughout the upper part of the town—the ancient *villa*—the splendid Renaissance palaces built by the returned Conquerors show the importance of the town after the Conquests. The towers of granite rise in lordly dilapidation above the Plaza Mayor, where once the tale of notable families was enough to people Spain with hidalgos and heroes. The house of Francisco Pizarro, the conqueror of Peru, has barely enough wall left to carry his belated coat of arms, and only the shell of the castle of the Altamiranos traces the outline of a medieval power.

The town, of course, placed as it is in the centre of the plain, the hub of diverging roads, had a strategic importance long before the conquest of Peru and the Indies. Arab and Roman impressions still are there, but its history began for Spain with the Conquistadores. Its privileges were enormous, each king adding one more, until the affairs of 'Montagues and Capulets' between the powerful

TRUJILLO

Drawings (retratos)

THE RUINED ALCAZAR, TRUJILLO (*Headpiece*)

CASA DE LA ESCALERA, TRUJILLO

SANTA MARIA LA MAYOR, THE STATUE OF PIZARRO
AND THE PLAZA, TRUJILLO

LOOKING FROM THE ALCAZAR, TRUJILLO

THE HOUSE OF THE PIZARROS



Manfred



B-1 122



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Casa de los Olivos

Trajillo

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ruling families brought about another settlement by Charles V with order and a municipal government. The palaces, built to impress, are some of them gigantic. The Plateresque corner window and detail of doorways have a delightful effect in the narrow uphill streets where, were it not for this architectural device, they would present a high cliff to the eye from the footways. Some—that of the seignorial house known as the 'House of the Staircase'—are beautiful, some dignified, some—that of the Pizarros with a coat of arms such as a savage might choose, of Indians led in chains and Atahualpa carrying his chest of treasure—portentous. Relics of medieval powers linger in some—a thick heavy chain hung within the great doorway of the house 'Orellanas-Chavis' stood for the right of asylum granted to its lords. The name 'Merced' on a street corner recalls the history of the house of Franciscans which sheltered the Molière-like poet-monk 'Tirso de Molina', and whose work was the raising of money for the redemption of Christian slaves from the Moorish galleys.

Only one church has anything of much value within it, but that of Santa María la Mayor has so beautiful a painted *retablo* in the early Flemish style that a painter might well turn aside to meditate. Either the convents and churches were emptied by the French or the devotion of the Conquistadores went to Guadalupe.

Trujillo seems a tiny place, as it stands isolated in the plain, for so much to have resulted there. It must now, one thinks, be the largest town in Spain unvisited by any railway. The roads, setting off in every direction from the hill, or reaching it from circular horizons, are still of first importance, since every one must come in and out by them, and the variety of travellers is as great as the measure of Spain. On this day of our visit the town has attained a superlative cleanliness. Streets are being washed. Man, woman, and child is sweeping and scouring. The King is driving over the plain to-morrow to visit the town of the Conquistadores, and as the small girl from out of her attendant clouds of dust explained to me, 'His Majesty comes to-morrow, so we are doing a little cleaning'.

Along the Cáceres road, stone dykes separate pasture from pasture (with the wide grass margins

for travelling flocks), and if it were not for this abundant sun which even in mid-November fills a cloudless canopy with a white glare, the immediate landscape brings a reminder of Yorkshire or Cumberland fells. The sheep feeding, some white, some black, bring the dowry of Catherine of Lancaster to the recollection—'so many white sheep', the profitable source of England's wealth in her day.

The King's way lay through a modest suburb of the town, and here a little arch of palm leaves spanned the road—(not quite high enough to clear the King's carriage, for some of the greenery lay on its roof when he drove to the Plaza). All was running in and out and shaking of gay mantones of silk from their folds to hang as flags above the roads. The boys arranged them with long poles. The girls chattered and laughed; the Guardia Civil admired and suggested. Perhaps the King missed most of the fun when he arrived to find it all ready, but the girls and boys would hardly have had it otherwise.

Now he is escorted to see the new gift to the town—the statue of Francisco Pizarro, Conquistador of Peru, sculptured by the sculptor Rumsey and cast in bronze in Paris. It is a romantic conception and well placed in the Plaza beneath the steps of the Plateresque church of San Martín. The Conquistador rides on his horse, his lance in rest, the feathers on his helmet flying—a Mambrino of conquerors. The accomplishment of the group is not equal to its conception, unfortunately, but it has the merits as a sculptured heroic group of ambition, effort, and effect.

From above, the medieval *villa* of dark granite, rusty with lichen and clustered against the plain like a group of watchmen, shows all the suspicions and dangers of its period. The towers stand close, the roofs press in upon them. One can hardly suspect other footways than galleries for men-at-arms between them. Close, secretive, with Moorish signs in the towers, the streets climb between high walls to the Arab citadel (not in itself remarkable save for its dominance of so superb a panorama and its own area) past a square ancient bathing-pool, said to be of Arab origin, to the broken house of Pizarro, his coat of arms hanging to a ruinous

wall, his conquest an episode in history. An old woman climbs the street laboriously. Pushing open the gate beneath the *escudo* of Pizarro the Conqueror she throws corn to her fowls. A cat runs after her, peering beneath the shut gate. Footsteps ring on a stone floor behind the gate of the convent at our back. Some one inside turns a key with a loud noise. Then the footsteps retreat again to some buried and far-away interior. The old woman comes out to the street again. She looks round at the roofless houses, the ruined walls, and up at the *escudo* of Pizarro. 'Es muy histórica, pero falta mucho,' she sighs, 'falta mucho.' A little

light twinkles at dusk in the highest point of the citadel where the Virgin of Victory has a chapel. Of the towers looking down on the wide Plaza one is given over to the meditations of nuns, others are silent and empty. Clustered in a grave group against the landscape, their suspicions and silences as much for defence from within as from without, dovecotes, nunneries, bell-towers, they wait their dissolution in the background of the Plaza where rides the new statue of Francisco Pizarro, Conquistador, the feathers of his helmet flying airily against the stars, his lance couched and tilting at the unattainable Pleiades.

