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"OLD SPAIN" 1936
H. & G. BONE

Part XX

GUADALUPE

③ 11.000, —

Caceres



ONE travels to the Royal Monastery of Guadalupe over hills so empty that even at midday one has the sensation of being up early in the morning before any one else is about; and through heaths as solitary as those of Jura and Skye. Startled animals shy at travellers. Sheep run trotting far from the road. Shepherds with conical velvet hats push through the cistus bushes to look their hardest at a stranger, and one remembers the rhyme of the corn-lands of the North. 'Already the shepherds are leaving Estremadura. Already they are forsaking their own lands so sad and dark.' Yet it is November and the sun is like a warm June day in England, and as one approaches the monastery the Sierras are cultivated to their summits. Olive gardens and eucalyptus plantations and orchards make a good home-coming from the bare Sierras with their cistus heaths and flocks of running sheep. Above the sobriety of the olive gardens are hill-tops of flame where the chestnuts are giving their gold to the sun. For the first settlers in the monastery were of the agricultural order of the Jeronimites, who, by the patronage of royal persons and the possession of an image of the Virgin given by Gregory the

Great to San Leandro, hidden in times of difficulty, and miraculously discovered by a shepherd, became rich and powerful, the monastery having in its great days a community of three hundred monks, a royal palace, a hospice for noble guests, an infirmary for pilgrims, and being as a matter of fact a small town full of arts and crafts and industry and schools. The illuminators and silversmiths of Guadalupe were especially famous, and the sumptuous grilles which remain in the church suggest of themselves the size of the monastery forges. The catalogue of the gifts of silver and precious stones and metals reads like the building of Solomon's temple. Queens embroidered robes for the small black image which is the centre of the cult, and every famous person in Spanish history sooner or later rode up the rocky road to the monastery to give homage to the Virgin of Guadalupe. Columbus offered prayers to her for nine days and vowed to call an island by her name. Cortés, being bitten by a scorpion and yet being delivered from death, had an emerald case made by Indians for its body and came to Guadalupe to present it to the Virgin. The explorers and conquerors of the New World carried her image and worship thither—to



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THE ROYAL MONASTERY OF GUADALUPE

Drawings W. H. D. G.

IN A COUNTRY MOTOR-BUS (*Headpiece*)

THE MONASTERY AND VILLAGE OF GUADALUPE

THE TEMPLETE AND MUDEJAR CLOISTER, GUADALUPE

THE VILLAGE FROM THE MONASTERY—NIGHT



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Peru, to Mexico, to La Plata and Cuzco—and it was in the monastery which holds her image that there took place this year (1928), on a day set apart in Spain, as among the Jews, to remember 'the pit whence they were digged', 'The Day of the Race' (the day, in fact, upon which Columbus discovered America), a solemn coronation of the tiny image by the King and the Cardinal Primate of Spain.

For the crown, an ornate and sumptuous jewel with a wide halo, jewels and gifts had been sent from all over the New World, and the 'Day of the Race' saw the consummation of something so much more Spanish than Spain itself, something indeed so much of race and racial expression, that it seems better to let a Spaniard speak than to offer an English comment. I quote from an article written in the *Estampa* by 'José Polo Benito, decano de la Catedral de Toledo': 'As the rays of the sun declined, the ancient stones on the monastery façade seemed fringed with gold. The sculptured figures in the gargoyles, the friezes, the capitals appeared to stir with the breath of life. In the wide circuit of the Plaza—market and forum, with the beautiful reminder of the atria of the great church above it—stirred and swayed the vast multitude of people. How many were there? Whence had they come? For only answer there are the words of Scripture, "Thy sons shall come from far, thy daughters from the ends of the earth". . . .

'Mass being finished the Cardinal took his crozier and advanced to the first step of the staircase. His voice, tremulous, full of feeling, fell on the hearts of the people slowly and with solemnity.

"The Virgin of Guadalupe," he said, "is our Mother! The Virgin of Guadalupe is our Queen! Sons of Spain, do you wish the Virgin of Guadalupe as your Mother and your Queen?"

'Unanimous, full, clamorous, the affirmation resounded, ringing the echoes of the valleys and mountains. He then continued:

"Interpreting the wish and spirit of our King, I have now to tell you that he is at this moment about to place his royal sceptre at the feet of the Virgin in submission to her as one day to Jesus Christ the Kingdom of Spain. For our King is the son of the Queen of Heaven, the Virgin of Guadalupe! Long live our Catholic Monarch!" . . .

'It is twelve o'clock on this day—the "Day of the Race"! The Virgin who inspired explorers and colonizers sits on her throne. On either side are King and Cardinal and behind them the most genuine representatives of the nation. Already there lies at its feet the royal sceptre. The august hands now take the jewel made from offerings of gratitude and with it adorn the heavenly forehead of Our Lady. It is twelve o'clock of this day, the "Day of the Race".

'So, on this day and hour, Spain and Heaven have been joined in the maternal kiss of my Virgin of Guadalupe.'

'Yes, the Gothic is very fine, of course,' said a Spanish artist in the sacristy. 'But it is no longer our taste. We are no longer so spiritual as that. It is the Baroque which we admire now. Baroque is the real expression of our more modern and material religion.'

One is never sure in Spain whether the next moment one may not be taking part in a picture by Velasquez. Our arrival at the monastery preceded by a few hours that of the three Infantes who were spending the night in the hostel. Next morning, on entering the church, High Mass was being sung. The three sons of the King knelt at praying chairs with red silk cushions before them like Philip IV in Velasquez's picture. Groups of candles in heavy silver candlesticks lighted each step to the altar. The officers of the suite, their spurred heels clicking as they moved backwards and forwards, served the mass. High over the altar the Virgin's crown shone and faded as the light moved. The rich mantle embroidered and jewelled by Queen Isabella of Portugal made a discreet enrichment of colour beneath the crown. The tiny brown face of the image looked astonished and helpless.

In the museum are the few remaining riches of the monastery, once so wealthy that silver and gold vessels were melted down to supply the cost of wars or the extermination of heretics without much apparent depreciation of its store. The beautiful panels of blue enamel set on a casket by one of the friars were originally part of a throne of the Virgin whose silver was melted to defray the cost

of the battle of Aljubarrota, as was the great *retable* of silver in the church, and much disappeared to be remodelled and reset in yet costlier form in the monastery workshops. Works of art must have gone from this place in hundreds. One of the enormous illuminated choral books which is shown of the eighty-six which remain is a superb achievement, worthy of a place on the *facistol* in the choir, the largest and surely the finest choir desk of beaten bronze in Spain. The pearl-embroidered cloak of the Virgin made by the jewellers of the monastery in its very quietness and stillness of colour is like a breath from some triumphant age of art. There are gifts of kings still remaining. Mary Tudor presented an altar frontal. The triptych of the Flemish school given by the Catholic Kings lives in beauty long after the donors. The altar frontal of Henry II is of Gothic sweetness and grace. The frontal of 'La Pasión', a series of pictures of the Passion in work of applied silk and velvet, I have never seen equalled in any museum, save an English cope of the twelfth century in the museum of Madrid. But the tale of the treasures of Guadalupe and the Virgin's jewels is now only a tale to be read in an archive. In the sacristy of the church is a succession of pictures by Zurbarán which, since they were spared by the French, suggests the obscurity of his reputation in the days of Napoleon. The occasional paintings by Zurbarán scattered through European galleries give only a hint of this grave serene master. Seen in sequence, as at Guadalupe, these seemly pictures of the monastic life of his own Order, suffused with a sincerity of feeling which recalls Masaccio and painted with such fine mastery of colour, place Zurbarán very high among Spanish painters. The ideal painter of grave persons and gestures, he makes an extended

arm in a monk's habit as eloquent as a Raphael. These woollen draperies of monks speak like persons. The attractive qualities of the Spaniard, sobriety and sincerity, are wonderfully set forth by Zurbarán—not without a certain agreeable dryness. When the sequestration of the monasteries occurred in Spain the French Catholic soldiers had left little for the Spanish government.

Outside, the convent, which, once half fortified castle, half monastery, crowns the hill of Guadalupe, the little town walks on stilts up a steep rocky road which no wheeled vehicle ever attempts. One can walk dry under the arcades on which it is planted the whole length of the town. The middle of the streets, sloping to gutters, has as many nimble little black pigs scampering here and there, like puppies, as the dogs will allow. The slipping and scuffling of hoofs goes on all day, and the old road which leads up from the valley must be little changed since Isabella, Columbus, and half a hundred kings rode up it to the shrine of the Virgin of Guadalupe either to offer or to take, or since Richard Ford clattered up the inconvenient stony way to look at the then ruinous convent and to meditate on the enormities committed by French Catholics upon the precious things of their own faith. To-day, the monastery is in the hands of Franciscan monks who keep a free school for boys and a hostel for travellers, and new State roads curve in and out of the valleys with many dangerous zigzags. But the plaza below the church steps, with its round fountain at which women gather for water, and asses and cows and horses come to drink, has an ancient and chattering animation which lays asleep the sensation which goes with one all the time through modern Spain, that one is seeing the last of things.

