The Highlands of Cantabria.

By W. RICKMER RICKMERS.

THE Notes on the Picos de Europa, by Mr. W. T. Elmslie ('A.J.' **39,** 287–90; **43,** 396–7), encourage me to supplement his appreciation.

Cantabria, covering the Spanish provinces of Asturias and Galicia, is the country between the Cantabrian range and the Atlantic. The landscape is fashioned by the working together of the mountain and the sea. For the wanderer who crosses to and fro, Cantabria includes its southern foreland—that is to say, the northern strip of Old Castilia (Leon).

Cantabria belongs to what I call the Biscayan Fringe, with certain geological and climatic features common to Bretagne, Cornwall, South Ireland and Northern Spain. These features are summed up in the words granite, fjords, rainfall, plant life. Compared with the centre of Spain, which is a desert, Cantabria may be called rather wet. Its average annual rainfall classes it with Scotland and such like, with this notable exception, that the months of July and August are reasonably dry (2 ins. of rainfall) and thus distinctly better than Scotland (4 ins.). June and September with their 3 ins. or more are already much wetter, and the rest of them simply soaking. Santiago da Compostela or 'True St. James,' the famous place of pilgrimage is popularly known as the emergency vessel of Spain (60 ins. annually).

Thus the tourist and climber should go during July and August. He need not fear the heat, for he will find the rainy days as chilly and the fine days no hotter than in any Alpine valley. Beware of bright autumnal memories in the Dolomites. During October the Cantabrian skies with a whacking 5 or 6 ins. of water will drive you to the southern flanks of the ranges.

In 1925 my wife and I decided that something must at last be done after ten years of imprisonment. Where was there a 'wild' country within easy and inexpensive reach, something where one could explore? Then I remembered a book I had read forty years ago: *The Highlands of Cantabria*, by Ross and Stonehewer-Cooper (1885). It was one of those first impressions that haunt you for ever with a sense of glamour and mystery which seek realization. Reality came as near to the dream as one may ever expect.

Photo, W. R. Rickmers.]

ATLANTIC WEATHER DRAWING IN OVER THE PEÑA UBINA.

[*To face p.* 216.

Photo, C. Mabel Rickmers.]

A TYPICAL VILLAGE CHURCH NEAR THE RED ROCKS (CARUCEDO).

We took steamer from Bremen to La Coruña. Our route by rail, 'bus and on foot was as follows: La Coruña, Lugo, El Barco de Valdeorras, Villafranca del Vierzo, Piedrafita, Ponferrada, Carucedo, Ponferrada, Leon, Puerto de Pajares (the local 'St. Gotthard'), Campomanes, Peña Ubiña, Oviedo, Gijon, Cangas de Onis, Covadonga (with National Park), Carreña de Cabrales, Picos de Europa, then back to Vigo and home by ship.

During six weeks we spent £35 and never met a foreign tourist, only here and there a rich Spaniard motoring to San Sebastian and taking in some of the sights on his way.

Thus we sampled many landscapes, unspoilt folk and some treasures of antiquity. You never feel as if the whole thing had been staged for you. This is the subconscious inversion from which I suffer in Switzerland and elsewhere. Everything being done to shift my body into the various positions best fit for subjective reception, I cannot get rid of the fixed idea as if the objective phenomenon had been created by that enterprising firm known as the Tourist-Industry or business of travel.

The coast-line of Spanish Galicia reminds me of Bantry Bay in Ireland, with a touch of the Mediterranean. Inlets branch antlerwise between pine-clad hills and granite cockscombs. Cabbages 15 ft. high raise their heads above the vines and fig trees. Inland an unconventional garden, half cultivated, half running wild, undulates towards the foothills. Through this we travelled to Lugo, the capital of Galicia.

We were lucky enough to get a train with third-class carriages of the new American type. Their appeal lies in the fact that they contain the acid test of civilization. Some of us remember Switzerland of the days long past with the notice '*Cabinet au fourgon.*' It cannot be said that the state of this locality is always all that can be desired, but there are things whose mere existence comforts the mind. In the country the vast expanse of nature enables this question, which is ultimately one of space, to be solved with ease. But the town is the final expression of the artificial mode of life. Cleanliness becomes difficult and must be assured by technical means. An inferior civilization therefore means unclean town life, whereas the village can get along quite sweetly with primitive institutions. The town is the acid test of civilization. And the acid test of the town is that quiet cell where man alone and undisturbed amid the vast human throng is reabsorbed in nature.

In the midst of a granite land stands Lugo grimly built of

granite blocks, roofed in with slabs of rock, every surface mellow with a patina of brown and yellow lichen. A Roman wall, on which you might drive a car, encircles the city. From its battlements we look down upon the roofs of cottages and into many a queer street. One of these, peopled with children, we called the *Calle de los Excrementos*. Memory responds to humble things. Here was Turkistan. O, incense of the Magi! O, perfume of the East!

An incessant clanging of bells invaded our slumbers next morning in Lugo. An early, frosty mist hung about the lichen-sprinkled roofs. About nine o'clock we went in search of breakfast, an hour considered normal elsewhere. But the public rooms greeted us with the untidy pallor of the morning, for the Spaniard breakfasts frugally in his bedroom. In the dining-room a solitary, collarless commercial traveller in felt slippers had just finished his morning wash in one of the stately china lavatory-basins with which the dining-rooms of Spanish hotels are usually provided.

The traveller aired his few scraps of English to tell us that the coffee was bad, and that it always rained in Lugo. The first of these misfortunes could be overcome; the second statement did not tally with the facts.

At last our breakfast was brought in—a tiny cup of flour-thickened chocolate, a glass of milk and a piece of bread to which cheese was added as an extra. We should have got butter if it had been there, but neither climate nor the custom of the country favours fresh butter. When it is to be had it appears as a shapeless mass much cut about with many knives until it is eaten up. But tinned butter from the alps of Leon can be bought in the shops and is excellent.

Lunch proved a pleasant contrast. The dining-room had doffed its nightdress and looked spruce and clean. The square tables were placed lozenge-wise, thus preventing collision with neighbours' backs. Each snowy cloth had its vase of flowers. A stack of six plates in front of each seat revealed the number of courses to be got through. This custom is probably not so much one of convenience as a traditional symbol of abundance and of primitive joy in eating.

First as clear soup the *caldo gallego*. The solid portion of this, served as the second course, is a mixture of *garbanzos* (chick-peas), cabbage, potato, bacon and sausage. It is our old friend of book-lore, the *olla podrida*. The somewhat tasteless chick-pea is the only dish for which I cannot get up enthusiasm. Then followed fish baked with egg, mutton cutlets,

pastry, cheese and fruit. As drink the claret of the country, acid and wholesome. The service is far quicker than in our restaurants. I mention these details because they struck us in a purely provincial town entirely unsophisticated by foreign visitors.

If you skip a course the waitress comes to you with the solicitude of a nurse and asks if you wish eggs instead. The Spaniards suffer a lot from indigestion, probably because they drink so much water on top of the olive oil. Wine is taken moderately, although it stands about *ad libitum*. Olive oil only disturbed us by its pungent smell as we passed the kitchen. When you leave in the morning or go out for the day you are given a whacking bag of lunch (*merienda*), often with wine.

We travel S. through Galician scenery. Beyond the castled heights of Monforte the train climbs to bare, hilly country. Parched slopes, yellowed meadows and fields of stubble with solitary trees, tracts of brushwood and thickets of briar recall the middle heights of Monte Baldo in Southern Tyrol. Along the fields run mighty ramparts—the stones from which bread has been wrung. Opposite rise the vast undulations of the Sierra de Peña Negra.

In long loops the railway descends to the rushing Sil. There is more of poetic licence than of truth in the adorning word, for the gently gurgling streamlet can be waded at almost any point. Its power belongs to the rainy season, as witnessed by water-worn rock and polished river terrace. Now we are in Italy. In the bed of the valley gardens and fields of maize, on the warm slopes vineyards, in the ravines chestnut groves, on the stony river banks scattered olive trees. It is the region of Valdeorras, famed for its fruit and grapes. Finally, through rocky gorges we emerge upon the lowland of the Sil, a basin filled with the alluvial deposits of the waters of the Vierzo. From Toral de los Vados runs a light railway to Villafranca among whale-back hills.

What high-sounding names all these tiny places have! How meagre sounds 'Madrid' compared with Toral de los Vados or El Barco de Valdeorras—somewhat like London compared with Ashby-de-la-Zouch! It is surely no mere chance that names most frequently used, such as those of capital towns, have become clipped by world intercourse, worn down like much-used coin. We are too hurried for *Lutetia Parisiorum*.

I should be running no great risk if I were to wager that my readers have never heard of Villafranca del Vierzo. Yet the

place must have been well known some hundreds of years ago, for it lies on the old pilgrim road to the 'True St. James' (Santiago), across the mountains of Cebrero. Among well-known writers only Borrow of Bible fame mentions this district. To-day the place is again within the lines of communication, owing to travel by car. Hence we find a comfortable hotel called quite shortly 'The Countess.' A guess at the distinguished patroness—La Condesa de Peña Ramiro—is made easy by a glance at the massive four-square and four-turreted castle on top of the town.

Next day to the Pass of Piedrafita. At a height of 3600 ft. the road crosses the range. On a milestone we read that Lugo is 60, La Coruña 120 miles distant. Our 'bus did the 15 miles to the top in an hour and a half. The road is quite good, but not smooth enough for great speed. We got violently jolted; but as if to make amends, a pretty girl, shot into the air, landed several times on my lap.

At first one passes through forest-like plantations. In the gully of the brook cows feed on the lush green of watered meadows. Slender-snouted pigs run about the hamlets, and brown goats, like ibex, scramble about the slopes. The saddle-bags of the people riding to market are the same as the donkey-bags of Asia Minor. A narrow two-wheeled cart reminds me of the Caucasian arba. No less than six animals are harnessed to it—a mule in the shafts, in front of the mule a yoke of oxen, and in front of them three mules driven tandem.

At the top of the bleak pass lies the village of Piedrafita, where the stone houses have pointed roofs of straw. Some are nearly round with a roof reaching down, tent-like, to the ground. We are in the legendary mountains of Cebrero, called so after the shrine of El Cebrero. In La Coruña we mountain seekers had been told about this mysterious region where the houses have steep roofs as they would otherwise be crushed flat by the snow. A scholar, too, had discovered that Montserrat, the mountain of the Holy Grail, was really situated here.

We climbed a hill for the view. Here it dawned upon me that hunting 'sierras' on the map may let you in for a wild-goose chase, especially in this neighbourhood. From what we have learnt at school, we take a rocky saw for granted—and a very ugly one too, we hope—when we read 'Sierra' in the book or on the map. Often they are nothing but downs. There are big saws and small saws, however. Along the ridge of these hills there generally runs an outcrop forming a back-

bone which looks from afar like a very fine fret-saw. But finally *sierra* has come to mean any uplift, even when with ripe old age it has entirely lost its chief attraction for mountaineers, the bristles on the hog's-back.

And here we are in the midst of the Mediterranean scrub (*maquis, macchia*). The botanist knows it as an association of hard-leaved plants; to me it is simply the Spanish heath. It is composed of heather, holly, broom, holly-oak, bracken, myrtle, rosemary, thyme, lavender, sage, laurel, pistachio, daphne, arbutus, azalea and similar tough or aromatic plants. Sometimes it comes up to your knees, sometimes it meets above your head.

The Spanish heath spells romance, especially where it cloaks the crags and sink-holes, grooved slabs and pitfalls of broken limestone (*Karst*). To make a bee-line through it towards the top of a knoll requires patience and strong puttees. Late summer does not favour animal life here. Except village swallows we saw singularly few birds. For lizards, snakes and beetles we searched in vain. Now and again a battered and shabby butterfly would float past. Animal life is adapted to vegetable life whose blossoming time is crowded into a lengthened spring. The picture is that of the steppe, where summer means the first stage of winter.

Sweeping the horizon towards the Peña Negra with my field-glasses I came upon an astounding sight. Somewhere scarlet fangs gleamed from green billows. Here indeed Percival had knocked out the teeth of a giant. They had fallen into a forest, their bloody roots pointing heavenwards. Thither let us hie! But the natives did not know where lay the Blood-red Cliffs, nor how to get there. They had not even noticed them before. After much groping we made our way to Ponferrada, and thence by a loose-limbed Ford to the lake and village of Carucedo (1700 ft.).

At one of the post-stations a peasant spoke to us in fluent Americanese. Obviously he hoped to earn a few dollars. His home struck us as undesirable, for he had not picked up a sense of order and cleanliness in the New World. So on to Carucedo, where we claimed hospitality as paying guests, as is the custom in places without an inn. Don Ramiro Orcazberro, the merchant prince of the village, bade us welcome. A carmine finger beckoning over the roofs let us know that the Red Rocks could not be far off.

A walk of an hour and a quarter brings us to the village of Las Medulas. '*Anejo de Lago de Carucedo, Partido de Ponfer-*

rada, Provincia de Leon,' we read on a notice board. We dived into the chestnut forest whence scarlet spears stabbed the blue. Then into Laurin's Garden of Roses or the Garden of the Gods. Its fantastic shapes and weird pinnacles are of the most glaring brick-red. Petrified flame flashes from a bed of green into the azure sky. Here was discovery. Surely, a sight not mentioned and starred in Baedeker, a sight which in central Europe would be known to millions, not to speak of untold picture cards, such a sight *is* a discovery.

The Red Spires are the eroded remains of a bed of conglomerate (*Nagelfluh*) settled in a sheltered bay between ridges of the older rock. Elsewhere this vermilion conglomerate has vanished almost entirely. Only here and there on distant hills one spies insignificant patches which have remained after the general wash-out. Geological research into the origin, former spread and gradual abrasion of these deposits should prove fascinating. Owing to their bright colour the scattered clues are easily found, however small.

South-east of Carucedo a rugged limestone ridge rises to a pyramid whose height may be about 5000 ft. To my questions no other name was forthcoming but that of the Peña Ferradillo. This turned out to be the village whose cornfields tint the sloping plain yellow and send their offshoots as far as the rocks above. Peasants have little use for summits, and thus seldom give them special names. Let this be the Ferradillo, unless the Spanish General Staff knows better.

Owing to a horizontal distance of 7 miles as compared with a rise of 3000 ft., we decided on a night march. Finding the path by lantern light, we sauntered through the mild air under the stars. A great stillness pervaded everything. No ripple of water, no whisper of woods, no barking of dogs or chirping of crickets. Only at daybreak we heard the groaning of a cart that two oxen were dragging round a corner where the mule track runs for a space over the naked rock. With sighs and moans, wobbling and rumbling, the wheels—discs of solid wood—turned in the ruts which their forerunners had worn during centuries into the knobbly, smoothly polished rock.

The path bent into a gully filled with good soil just beneath the village of Ferradillo. Walnut, elm, ash and chestnut took advantage of the moister earth. A spring under the trees warned us to imitate the camel by a timely taking in of supplies. Through vine-roofed lanes between stone huts we came out upon the endlessly long and gently sloping fields leading

towards the top. This generous ski-slope filled us with joy—although we were not sure whether snow ever falls here.

Just below the summit we came upon a belt of burnt-up heather, the passage of which left us looking something like charcoal burners. As we had the whole day before us we rested on the saddle, where we found couches waiting for us. If one lies down on top of the bushes which bulge like feather beds, the branches yield to the body like springs. Thus one fits into the best spring mattress ever invented.

The base of the summit consists of deeply scored *Karst* blocks, to which stunted pines give the semblance of a Japanese garden. Funnels and cracks enforce a roundabout way. At last we climbed a ridge that continues eastwards with many pinnacles, turning a rugged rampart to the plain of the Sil. This is the wall seen by the traveller in the Vierzo. In the S. rose the Peña Trevinca (7000 ft.), highest of the vast undulations of the Peña Negra.

With His Spanish Majesty's Mail—in other words with Rufus's motor lorry—we were driven back to Ponferrada. Rufus is El Rojon (Redbeard), who keeps an excellent inn which he has quite simply called by his nickname the ' Fonda del Rojon.' There the visitor should not forget to order *cruchos*, a speciality of Ponferrada. These ingeniously shaped structures of puff pastry make a welcome addition to one's morning coffee.

Thence on to Leon, one of the highest cities in Europe (824 m. ; 2670 ft.), and quite nippy at night, though the bugs do not seem to mind. Here we found the finest cathedral and struck our only bad quarters, a palatial double-bedded room full of confused reeks. On the walls the maps of the world outlined in mildew, grease and spittle ; hundreds of dead ants in the water jug ; from fly-blown bulbs a murky sheen fell upon the incrustations of ages ; a polecat had seemingly died in the little brown house ; and from the ewer there rose the full flavour of the hyena's maw. I never smelt a hyena in the mouth, but intuition bridges the gaps of knowledge.[1]

But let us be just : the beds were excellent. I tinted them saffron with Persian pollen, and next morning we counted with derisive glee the corpses of the hemiptera. Insect powder, if it is genuine and, above all, dry, at least disables fleas and bugs, while the tougher louse demands stronger measures.

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[1] Recalling a visit to Leon in 1881, Dr. Rickmers's impressions coincide exactly with our own.—*Editor.*

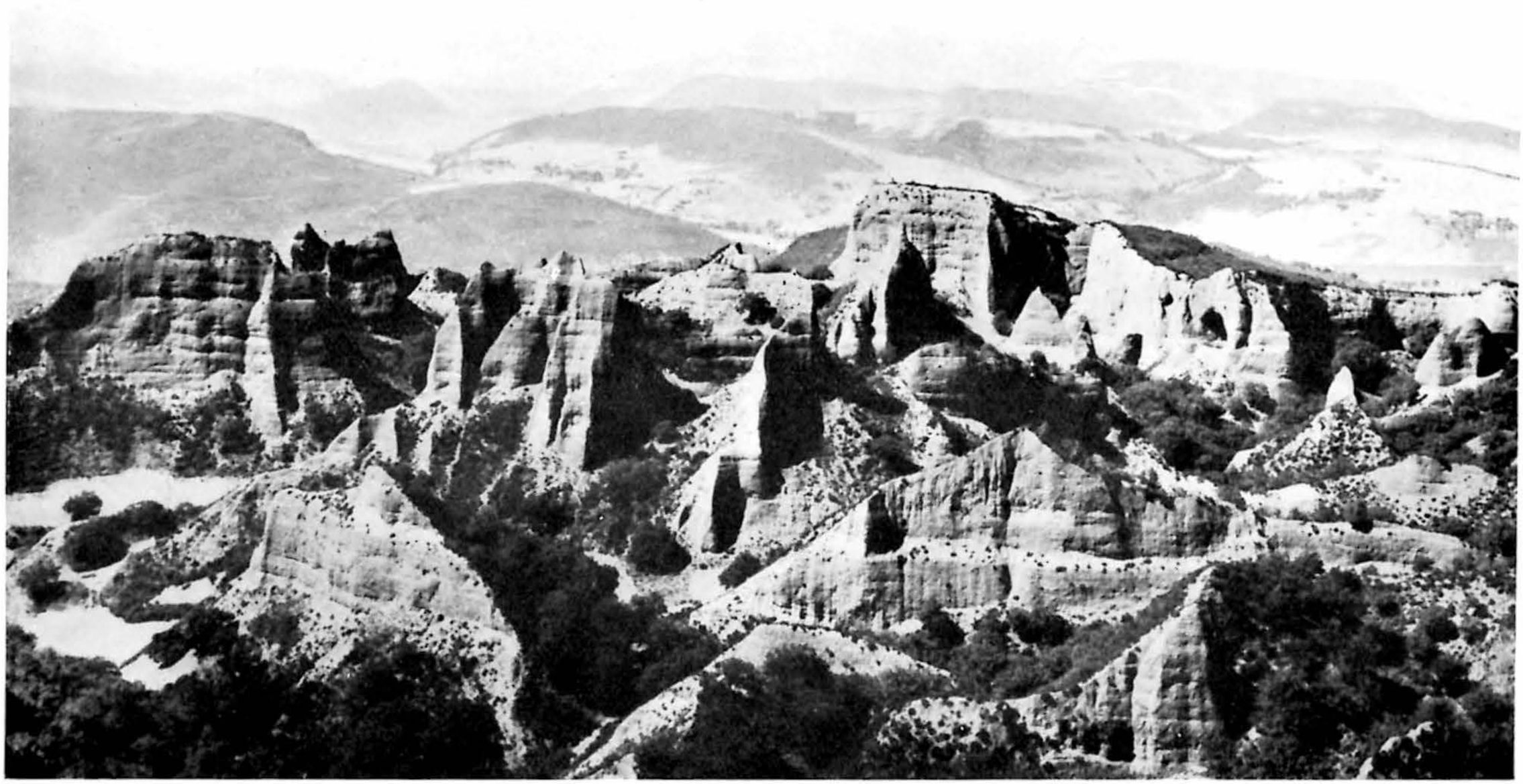
Though the dining-room furniture was restricted to the absolutely indispensable, the formation of crust was being steadily encouraged according to the simple law that the energy of scrubbing diminishes with the square of decreasing surface. The artistic play of colour on the table-cloths turned out to be *batik* of wine and grease. The floor was obviously awaiting the municipal dustcart. However, the little Andalusian waitress with the rose in her hair was pretty. As the poor thing was housemaid as well, it was impossible to scold her. She was chased about the whole day like a hunted weasel. Once more let Justice have her say. The food was tasty; the baked sardines worthy of a lasting monument.

The guests were quiet and well-behaved. Some did nothing, others spat secretly under the table; others again supported the toothpick industry by diligent exploration of cavities.

My diary was beginning to fill up with entries from every sphere of knowledge. On one point alone was it dumb. To fill the gap as quickly as possible I asked the girl to tell me something about love in Spain—a question she took as harmlessly as it was meant. She herself had no sweetheart, only a worshipper at a safe distance. For the rest I should ask the priests, to whom all things are revealed. As it happened, one was in the room. Armed with the fattest of dictionaries I approached the jolly gentleman, to whom his superiors had doubtless made over their department for the pleasures of life. Division of labour was no secret to the Church at least a thousand years before Taylor and Ford. His expert information tuned to a stiff key would blister the paper, I fear.

Leon has many venerable buildings as well as fragments of a Roman wall. The splendid cathedral has been renovated —to its disadvantage. Its appearance suggests that a conscientious charwoman has scrubbed every stone. The health officers in the neighbouring quarter, on the other hand, seem to be permanently on leave. Money will always be forthcoming for spring-cleaning the witnesses to the Past. The Present goes on reproducing itself in dirt, and dreams of a time when *its* bones will be polished.

We boarded a mixed passenger and goods train with ancient carriages whose compartments betrayed direct descent from the post-chaise. It took us to Busdongo, where the line slips through a hole in the hedge separating the Kingdom of Leon from Asturias. The pass is called Puerto de Pajares, and earns the name of the 'Spanish St. Gotthard' from its spiral tunnels. Busdongo, a dreary hovel with much coal and few



Photo, W. R. Rickmers.]

THE RED CLIFFS.

[*To face p.* 224.

Photo, W. R. Rickmers.]

THE PEÑA UBIÑA FROM ABOVE TINZA.

houses, lies in a groove without either charm or view. Here at last we met what we had long sought—a Spaniard both stupid and rude. He was the railway monarch of Busdongo, probably placed there purposely by higher authorities to illustrate for us the idea of the *cacique*. To a polite inquiry about forwarding luggage he replied: '*No tengo tiempo para occuparme de Usted*' ('I have no time to trouble myself about you'). May this meet his eye!

Continuing along the highroad for a mile and a quarter we reached the pass, Puerto de Pajares (4470 ft.). The landscape widens out to pastures rich in grass. So far we had never seen so many cows, and we now understood why Leon belongs to butter just as Switzerland to cheese. Fine old granite pillars stand along the edge of the road; still more of them lie broken on the ground, for the traveller needs them no longer to find his way through the snowdrifts of winter.

Half-way up we are greeted by the tiny church of Arbas. An ox and a bear have lent their heads as capitals for two pillars of the nave. The bear had devoured the ox which helped the pious builder to carry his stones. What more natural than that the bear should yoke himself to the cart? Become what you eat. The fear of roast beef shown by vegetarians would seem to be not quite groundless.

We arrived in time for the evening view. The setting sun worked wonders with the seaward ranges set like stage wings. Shadowy spectres rose out of vague, dark depths where wooded ravines were lost in the misty twilight or in the black night of the lowest abyss: the pinnacles of Creation's dawn ascending from the underworld. North-west of us loomed the Peña Ubiña, our next goal.

Pola de Lena, on the other side, seemed a good centre. But our choice was unlucky, every room being taken on account of the market the following day. So we treated the children to a theatrical performance by taking coffee at Señora Candida's. It was dark when we took the train for Campomanes, which lies twenty minutes further up the valley. As this village could hardly boast of an inn, we decided to throw ourselves on the mercy of the famous Civil Guard who swim as twin crystals of order in the turbid fluid of the traffic. These *guardie civile*, or gendarmes, are fine fellows both in uniform and conduct. Those at Campomanes found us bed and board with one Señor Don José M. Diaz.

El Aramo (6000 ft.), a longish limestone bulk W. of the village, lures the mountaineer to his first excursion. Near

the top lies a table-land with quite extraordinary park-like landscape. Masses of holly grow on the undulating pasture, not irregularly nor mingled with other shrubs, but forming neatly clipped puddings and pillars. Between these green porcupines all is bare. Goats are the creators of this conventional rococo garden. The only flower we found was a short-stemmed blue thistle.

For getting further inland we needed transport. We asked in the first place about a donkey, fearing to awake lust for pesetas by inquiries after the nobler animal. Moreover, the donkey, being low, is easier to load. The management of big pack-horses is very tiring. At length a yellow pony was brought to us, offering the desired advantage in that it reached to my chest and was to serve us for two shillings a day. We had, however, to lead it and feed it ourselves. We loaded up our bags, one pulled at the rein in front, the other prodded from behind with a staff. Thus we set out for Telledo, 10 miles along a road of the second order. It ascends the valley of a river nameless on the map.

Just before Telledo, in the deep of a fork, is Pontones, a big caravanserai where meets the traffic from the higher valleys. Thickly wooded slopes, a rare sight in Spain, deploy into the higher parkland with its meadows ; clusters of holly-oak and scattered crags set up for romantic effect. The holly-oak always makes me think of Ruskin. The landscape is the very model on which the old masters must have fashioned their quaint settings of grottos, rocks and trees.

Now began the steeper paths often paved with well-worn cobbles where slippered Spaniards scoffed at hobnailed hikers. Once the pony and I in fond embrace slithered down a paved incline which might have done for a ski-jump. We saw no signposts, seats, lemonade stalls, tins, bottles, litter. It was like the Caucasus forty years, or Tyrol a hundred years ago. The villagers stared politely. Yet here and there one would meet a rustic maiden with short skirts, bobbed hair and silken legs. Fashion travels faster than the explorer.

Twilight found us among the crooked lanes of Tuiza, the highest hamlet, asking to be shown to the house of Don Antonio. We passed an old hag who with deft finger-nails made sharp cracks on the tousled head of a girl. But although eye, ear and nose warn you under southern skies, they should not nag. Don Antonio lived in a squat stronghold of rough stone. He received us in the hall, a wooden shed with ploughs and carts, for scant tillage is practised and heroic efforts are made to

grow vegetables. He spoke a few curt words, threw out a command to his wenches and, pointing to a party of travellers, bade us wait. On a low bench sat four men and two women eating bread with cheese and drinking wine from a goatskin, while their horses munched barley outside. How like the Caucasus ! They had come over the mountains from a funeral, and were to proceed by moonlight.

We waited. I really did not know if there was any definite understanding or contract, but the East has taught me that everything comes to him who waits—that is to say, when instinct and experience tell me that the tree of patience will bear fruit. We sat, smoked and watched the pigs, those born chemists, who debated gruntingly whether the dumps of metabolism might yield to another turnover. After two hours the horsemen faded into the dusk and Don Antonio beckoned. Our chamber was a rocky cell almost entirely filled by the Babylonian luxuriance of the bed. Between grey cliffs there lay a snow-field, with the family name in red letters at the corners. The window, an unglazed loophole, promised the benefit of fresh air. Fragments of mirror, half a comb and a pot of ointment on the sill, a bulging curtain hiding clothes, betrayed the womenfolk as the givers of friendly shelter in a straitened world.

Clean bedding is the great point of honour in Spanish hospitality, however poor the home. This type of bed shows a north-south trend of peaceful penetration—England-France-Spain—unless France was the original centre. But some eastern bulkhead separates this distribution of the species from that of the narrow German bed with its horrible wedge instead of the bolster. Altogether too much is made of a general contrast between north and south or east and west. Some things trickle this way, some that. Moreover, to us east and south are the same when speaking of the outer fringe of the Occidental type of landscape or civilization. We may refer to a common viewpoint which is both north and west. Call it London, draw a radius to Moscow and sweep the horizon down to Marrakesh. This quadrant is the ' Orient.' Hence the word ' Oriental ' describes an angle of vision of 90 degrees.

Kindly cared for, we awoke refreshed from a flealess and bugless night. The air was crisp and clear as we struck into the upper pastures hedged in by limestone crags and screes. At the foot of a rock-slide nestled tiny shepherds' huts with conical roofs of sods. The stream hides underground before we have filled our bottles from it, but higher up horses grazing

near a green spot betray the presence of water. A spring runs in the gully. We wash off the traces of sleep and take in supplies. In the moist channel we find moss, orpine, valerian, crane's-bill, potentilla and colt's-foot flourishing. A few gentian and the withered tufts of peony leaves are all that is left on the dry meadows.

At midday we reach the plateau of the pass, which here deserves the plural of *puertos* or gates, a descent into three valleys being possible. Now among steep rocks such saddles and their approaches offer the only grazing ground for cows and horses. In Cantabria therefore 'puertos' is often synonymous with pastures. Here we are on the Puertos de la Mesa, the Table Alp. We meet a weatherbeaten shepherd with the inseparable hatchet in his belt which in the total absence of trees makes a warlike impression.

From here it is an easy climb to the top of the Peña Ubiña (2417 m.; 7855 ft.). It belongs to the type we know so well from the northern ranges of the Alps, such as the Karwendel. Traversing ribs, crawling round corners, diving in and out of gullies, we went on leisurely wherever there was hope of advance. Then came a bit along the south-eastern ridge, airy but easy. On the top stood a monumental cairn. On its slabs we read names in gigantic red letters showing that the paint-pot is a necessary part of a mountaineer's equipment. Later we regretted not having left our cards, for the natives in the valley did not believe in our ascent. There was, however, no bottle in the cairn, for the simple reason that the western precipice was made for bottle-smashing. The unspoilt mind cannot think of any other reason for its existence.

But I should advise the local Burgeners and Andereggs to send a boy secretly in front to drive away the goats, six of which greeted us on the summit of this Matterhorn. Their presence might leave a painful impression, and any flattering allusion to their climbing skill would avail little: for, while humans delight in being compared with the nimble chamois, they resent relationship with domestic animals. Far above circled four vultures. A flight of Alpine choughs pried with much chatter into the crumbs of our meal.

Seen from the S.W. the Ubiña must look magnificent, for there she stands without a peer. One looks below over wide-spread foothills which lose themselves in the Vierzo. The wall drops sheer hundreds of feet to a soft green basin dotted with scarlet villages. On our other side a silent, surging sea of milk-white cloud rolled into the bays of the Cantabrian rampart.

As we returned over the Mesa, the sea wind blew its damp veil about our ears, and we sought our way back to Tuiza in fog.

We at once loaded up the yellow pony, whose hooves grew wings. Stored energy acted in the same direction as the call of home. Hurrying on, it tripped and slid and stumbled over the fog-moistened stones. The coming rain had lured a salamander from its lair. He stays in my memory as the last amphibian after some frogs at Las Medulas. Beneath the clouds it was sultry, and the path seemed twice the length it had been the day before. Yet we took half an hour less. This proves the truth of Einstein's relativity, for there was shrinkage of time in inverse ratio to the increased distance of an unevenly accelerated mass moving towards an exchanged frame of reference.

When we reached Pontones (Telledo) at nine in the evening the landlady regretted having no beds to offer us. We pointed to our sleeping-bags and begged for a bit of floor. We had space enough in the small room which served us—distinguished guests—as dining-room and was seemingly the best parlour of the family. Four whitewashed walls, a large table, three chairs. As cabinet a kitchen dresser. In its upper part behind glass doors much crockery and glass amongst which a few pieces were nearly whole. On the shelf a crowded still-life of linen, sewing material, a dried-up ink-bottle with pen-holder, hammer, toothbrush and two books. On the wall the picture of a saint and one of those devastating moments in human life to whose artistic power only modern reproduction can do justice : oleograph poachers surprised by an oleograph gamekeeper tremble under his oleograph wrath.

We cleared half of the table by removing to the other corner the exhibition of arts and crafts spread over its surface. The finest specimen was an earthenware pug in begging posture who had undergone trepanning to open his inside to useful purposes. He served us as water jug. We had to lift him carefully with both hands, an accident having deprived him of his tail which in a utilitarian environment had acquired the quality of handle.

With delicate reserve we examined a Gothic altar shrine, behind whose doors we imagined some saint for the worship of the household. In an unguarded moment there was revealed to the explorer's touch a superb plaster-of-Paris acolyte, whose censer some ingenious spirit had not been able to resist turning into an electric lamp. We were deprived of our chief joy by

its failure to function. Long we sat wrapt in contemplation until an inscription solved the mystery : 'Cognac Torres.'

While we were busy over supper, building operations were going on at full speed. Our room had no door. It had been removed to make traffic easier, as it opened on to a narrow passage. Our lack of shelter from prying eyes offended the landlady's sense of propriety. Two men fetched the door and sawed off part of the bottom, as it jammed on the floor.

We did not hurry next morning for it was pouring, pouring in a business-like fashion, steadily, seriously, impressively. Rain is, no doubt, indispensable for fostering the beauties of nature, but as far as I am concerned it might keep away. I should prefer a better method of watering the soil, by pressure from inside the earth, for instance. The bulk of our sorrows would cease with this inverted rain.

We indulge such fancies because mankind, stupidly enough, bars the way to simple remedies. If one might go naked to keep one's clothes dry ! Instead of this, convention forces us to get wet from both sides. Why not pyjamas in this tepid rain bath ? As long as it is only water that pours from the sky the active man will not freeze. In a chilly rain-storm he will run the faster without having to perspire.

Finally we waded through the morass of the stable-yard, fighting our way between the hinder parts of mulish brutes and the front parts of brutish dogs. The pony was loaded. One last glance at the trepanned pug and the brandy acolyte, then a plunge into the Roman-Irish bath, whence we emerged four hours later in Campomanes, where we found the ladies of fashion barging about the street in clattering clogs.

We continued to the Picos de Europa by way of Gijon, a busy fishing port, where we saw the day's catch sent to Madrid in powdered ice.

In the train we had found an advertisement by 'Mercedes,' offering her '*Habitaciones esplendidas y magnificas*' in addition to sumptuous fare. Mercedes had not lied. Her ample form banished doubt from the start. A figure which extracts such fullness from her own cooking-pot does not cook for others only. Her husband too was a bank of compound interest in fat saved from the bill of fare. Side by side they strode together, walking towers of confidence. The room dazzled by its cleanliness. Among various foods we also tried cuttle-fish or ink-fish. In small quantities the little creature goes a long way. There's pep in it. But as the ink or sepia slowly begins to obtrude its misplaced literary ambition, a whole

Photo, W. R. Rickmers.]

THE LLAMBRION GROUP AS SEEN FROM THE ORIELLOS.

Photo, W. R. Rickmers.]

IN THE NATIONAL PARK NEAR COVADONGA.
Western Picos in background.

[*To face p.* 230.

Photo, W. R. Rickmers.]

HOLLY-OAK.

Photo, W. R. Rickmers.]

AT CARREÑA.

Slabs with holly-oak. Cordillera de Cuera in the distance.

dish was too much. Fortunately a begging dog provided what was over with decent and honourable burial.

There is a very fine beach. Adaptable Britons, dreaming of the seaside, could choose worse between the extremes of cheap Margate and expensive San Sebastian.

It was chiefly the longing for a bath which had driven us hither. Nothing but the ocean would do. On the beach a huge open-air boiler with smoke-stack drew us to a building where they gave hot sweet water for soaping and hot salt water for soaking.

On to Covadonga, the other great place of pilgrimage, and rival to Santiago. Although, owing to heavy boots, everywhere a subject of subdued curiosity and hidden mirth, we found ourselves particularly out of place in a swell hotel with Spaniards and Spaniardesses severely black in honour of the Virgin. For we happened on her annual festival.

As we neared Covadonga we heard the preparations which sounded like a defence against air attack. Sky rockets whizzed from the church parapet, doing their duty by loud reports for the Lady of the Battles who helped Pelayo to withstand the Moors. Unlike children, these rockets are made to be heard without being seen. Next morning the pilgrim crowd was at its height. Sombrely clad, with dirge-like chant, it wound its way to the church on the hill. The Virgin was brought out for fresh air and a walk to which she had looked forward for a whole year.

The day's task fulfilled, people gave themselves up to pleasure. Murray, writing in 1882 (*Handbook for Spain*), says: 'The people do not behave in an edifying manner; they dance, eat and drink all night.' Who would not like to see an orgy? So down at nightfall to the meadows under the trees. Eat, drink and dance they did, but with such an absence of what is unedifying that, if they had been Cockneys, one would have diagnosed an epidemic of melancholy. They took their pleasures sadly as the Britons of old. The only orgy was that of the bagpipes.

Covadonga is the gate to the western outrunners of the Picos de Europa. We walked as far as Lake Enol in the National Park which gives sanctuary to bears, wolves, chamois, eagles and capercailzies.

Back to Cangas de Onis and by 'bus through the long valley of Cabrales, a trough between the main block and a coastal range, the Cordillera de Cuera. It is a valley with a watershed across like the Engadine or the Pustertal. A fine drive. We

clung to the narrow seat on the roof, and had the time of our lives when the 'bus suddenly swept round a corner and dived into a fearsome gorge, Las Estazadas. The road is a mere ledge cut into the vertical cliff. As the railings were hidden from view our gaze fell 'straight as a beggar can spit.' At each jolt the lumbering car seemed to take off for a header into the chasm.

We spent a few days at Carreña de Cabrales, a delightful spot, famous for its cheese similar to Roquefort. My first question was about caves, for many holes in the limestone promised subterranean adventure. The answer was that caves were there and that bountiful nature had provided them for the storage of cheese. Having seen one of these cellars, we asked for a less mercantile example. As it was raining just then, our desire was to the depths where it was probably drier, and where in any case it could not be wetter than above ground.

Don Francisco, our host, routed out an old man who had been a miner once. He also lent us two acetylene lamps and a huge ball of twine as Ariadne clue, for fearful is the fate of those lost in the nether world. But our guide, for reasons unknown, did not seem to feel happy. So after a few hundred yards devoid of thrills we fell in with his suggestion and turned back. Afterwards we went secretly on our own and spent some back-aching hours in the bowels of earth exploring sundry passages and precipices, until a curtain of heavy stalactites and stalagmites barred our way. Only dynamite could have helped us on. We sniffed into the cracks, but nothing betrayed a possible connexion with the cheese-caves.

The Picos de Europa have caused keen disputes as to the origin of their name. It seems probable that the Basque whale fishers called them thus, because it was from them that at sea they got the first and last greeting from their native land. But would simple fisher folk speak of their home as 'Europe'? They would be much more likely to use the name of their province or of the Basque country or of Spain. It is from strangers and school books that the inhabitants of South Tyrol have learnt to speak of the Dolomites, a term invented by scholars and geologists.

It is, however, possible that an educated ship's captain, having invented the name, communicated it to a map-maker who asked him about landmarks. I believe the name was given by a single individual, just as the German cosmographer, Waltzemüller, was responsible for that of 'America.' The oldest known form is the 'Montes de Europa' on a Spanish

map of the year 1696. Then follow alternately the 'Monts d'Europe' (French, 1704), 'Peñas de Europa' (1774), and 'Picos de Europa,' with which the 'Peña de Urrieles' is often associated. Now and again we read simply Urrieles as the name of the mountains. It seems to be the older form.

The Urrieles or Oriellos (8500 ft.) are a jagged block in the true centre of the main group, just where the heads of three important valleys meet and where in consequence there are passes in three directions. We may therefore safely assume that this is one of the few spots for which the same name would take root in the surrounding villages. In contrast to pastures, woods, chamois corries and paths, the actual mountain summits are a matter of indifference to the hillman. A pass may for long be called differently from each side. But if there is on the top a neutral and distinguishing landmark, a cross, a convent, or a bold rock, it may often merge all the names into one.

It is easy to fancy that the old explorers of the country heard most often of the Urrieles when they asked for information about the highest and most distant parts of the mountains. Here to-day, too, is the official meeting-place of the provinces Leon, Oviedo and Santander. Its clear scientific delineation is only the final result of a natural process along natural guiding lines. The authorities, seeking administrative boundaries up the valleys, pushed their surveyors ever forward until they met where three ridges form a knot.

Amongst the natives westwards (Cangas, Covadonga) Saint-Saud found a general term without local associations—the 'Picos de Cornion,' or 'The Horns,' a comprehensive term embracing the horizon, as one might expect. When asked about the 'Picos de Europa,' they answered: 'Oh, we know that educated people call them so, but for us they are the "Picos de Cornion."'

The Picos form a block of typical *Karst* mountains akin to the Julian Alps: peaks set close together; gloomy clefts for valleys; sink-holes or cave-ins (*dolinas*, here called *hoyos*); no water above the level of the springs; many rock faces beautifully polished and with delightful cracks as on the Totenkirchl. The highest is the Torre de Cerredo (2642 m.; 8590 ft.); the most famous the Naranjo de Bulnes (2516 m.; 8180 ft.), first climbed by Pedro Pidal, Marqués de Villaviciosa, with Gregorio Perez of Cain, a local cragsman (August 5, 1904).[2]

The enterprising Don Francisco directed us to the hut

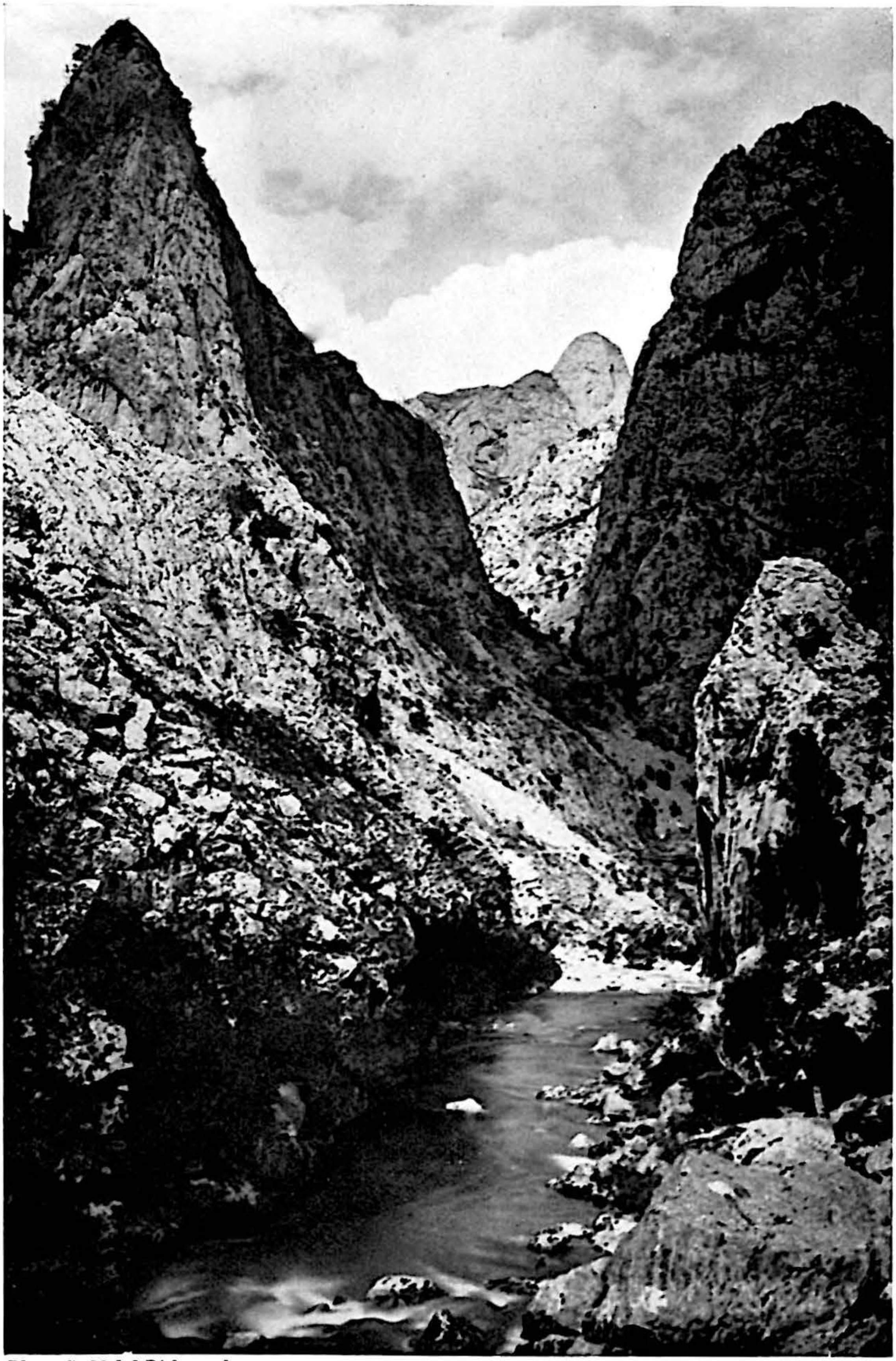
[2] For illustrations see *A.J.* **39,** facing pp. 287, 288 and 289.

(*refugio*) which he has built in the Canal de Camburero at a height of 1375 m. or 4470 ft. This we reached from Carreña by way of Arenas, the gorge of Camarmeña (Cares River), the power station of Poncebos, the village of Bulnes and finally the aptly named Ditch of Camburero. The hut is a solid, two-storeyed building. Mattresses can be spread in the kitchen and sitting-room on the ground floor. The more luxurious quarters are in the upper single room with four double or maybe treble beds. The Spanish mind, like every other, has two sides. One has to learn the simple fact that the *honi soit* sides of the various national minds do not coincide. The pleasant caretaker had a plentiful store of tins, soups, maccaroni, eggs, wine and cider. A herd of goats supplied milk. Considering first cost, height, transport, the charges were very moderate, and even ridiculous when compared with those of Swiss huts enjoying a constant stream of visitors.

Climbing into the Hoyo de los Boches and out of it we gained the top of one of the Oriellos or Urrieles (*ca.* 8200 ft.) opposite the Llambrion group. We saw many chamois. There was no water anywhere, but as we carried an aluminium cooker we had only to seek one of the many snow patches preserved in sheltered nooks. They are likely to hold out to the end of the climbing season.

From here let us hurry back to Vigo, and so home. I only wished to sketch the possibilities of a most delightful country for tramping and the enjoyment of rustic hospitality. Let my Spanish friends rest assured that deep gratitude lies hidden under the chaff about a few peculiarities of their country. We wish them luck and an inflow of visitors. But rather let us have Cantabria with all its little curiosities than Cantabria reformed by tourist industrialism.

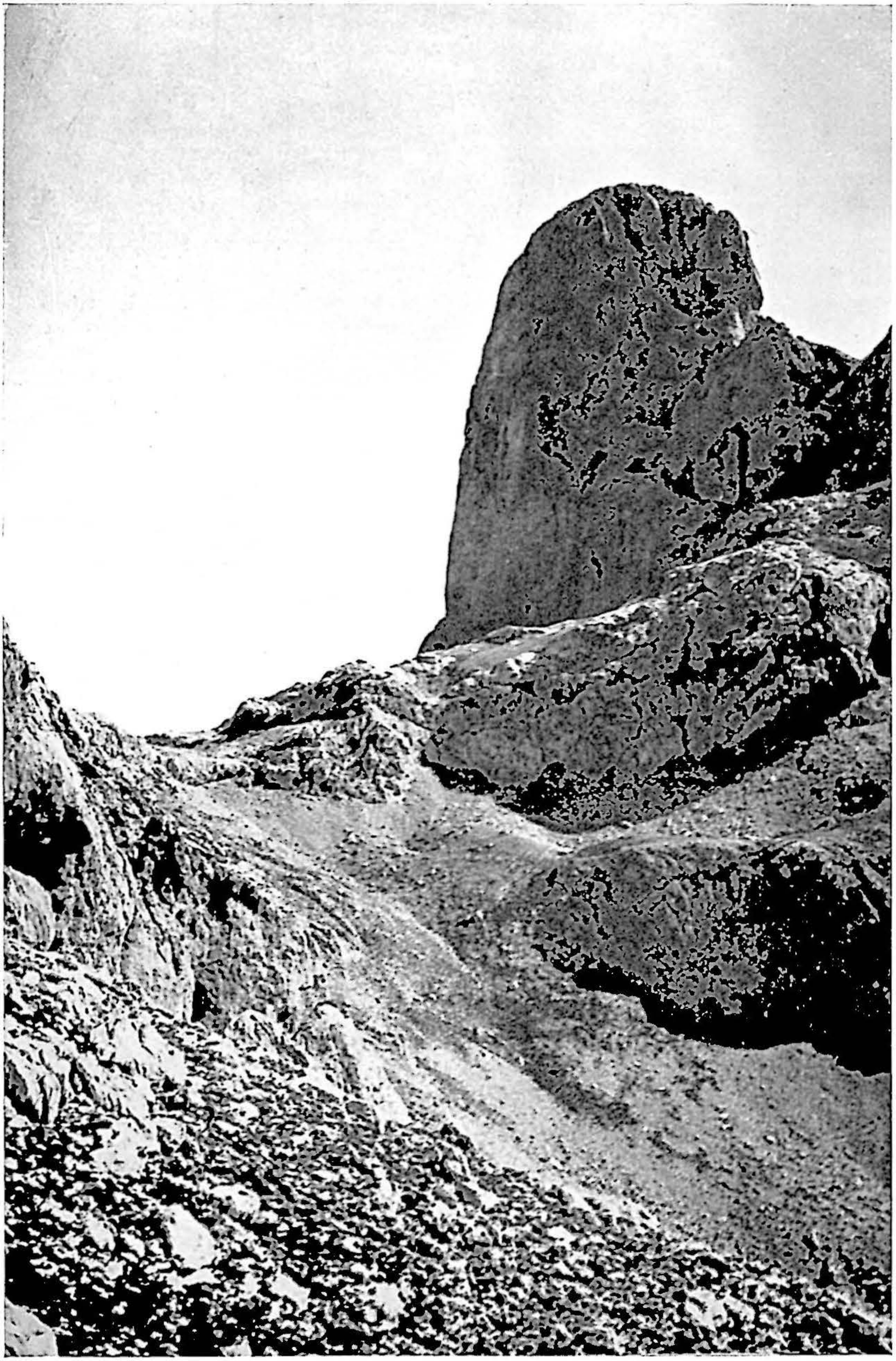
The best plan would be to form a party of four or six who could hire a mule or two for tents and bags. Additional outfit for climbing can be limited to ropes, rock slippers and one axe. Take alpenstocks for comfort. The time you lose by not being able to use motor 'buses is easily made up for by not having to wait for arrangements, animals and porters at various places. Moreover, the big roads do not penetrate into the most interesting nooks. I draw special attention to the isolated groups to the S. of the Picos: Picos de Mampodre, 2197 m.; Peña Espiguete, 2458 m.; Peña Prieta, 2533 m.; Pico de Curabacas, 2517 m. Santander might prove a good port, as many tramp steamers go there from England.



Photo, C. Mabel Rickmers.]

LIMESTONE GORGE IN THE PICOS DE EUROPA.

[*To face p.* 234.



Photo, C. Mabel Rickmers.]

NARANJO DE BULNES IN THE PICOS DE EUROPA.

The Spaniards of the North (seaports apart) are an honest lot, very reserved, even gruff at first. They will thaw when you approach them naturally and without prejudice. The value of money is known; bargains are kept. Ladies, other than wives and sisters, walk apart in public. But you may shoot pleasant, pointed and strictly audible remarks about their shape. Accept puzzles; do not try to solve them from our point of view. In one house access to our room was through the bedchamber of a young woman who did not care a rap how I found her when passing through.

Nearly all the inns were pleasant and clean. Already in our time motorists were beginning to improve those along the main roads. Insect powder kills the occasional bug or flea. They belong to the climate. There remains, of course, that eternally weak spot of the Oriental fringe, the back seat of the front show, so to speak. Lucky the man with plenty of landscape around him. Upon inquiry his host will often sweep the horizon and answer: '*Al campo, señor.*' At one hotel the lock of the hermitage was broken. The quickest remedy that suggested itself to the proprietor was a long bean-pole from the garden. Using this as a jousting knight would his lance, you were supposed to tilt it against the door. I made sure from the maid that there were no stronger men than myself in the house.

Travelling third class is great fun. It begins by everybody getting in and out at the same time. As likely as not you with your rucksack and a woman with a bag of potatoes will get jammed in the passage. Once under way you will enjoy the fellowship of a sympathetic crowd eager to teach you the language. Do not mind a littered floor, hot baby, or that man who explores his inner consciousness by the shortest way through the nose. Soon baskets are opened and wine-skins unscrewed. Refuse unless you are very hungry with no provender of your own. If you tackle the contents of your rucksack, do not forget to offer to your neighbours: it is good form. Do not worry about ventilation. The Spaniards keep all the windows open, even too much so during a chilly night across the bleak highlands. Owing to extremes of temperature a warm coat should be your constant companion.

It seems the custom and at least does no harm to greet every passer-by with a hearty '*Buenos dias*' ('Good day'). But the Spaniard adjusts speech with such nicety to the position of the sun that from midday onwards '*Buenas tardes*' ('Good afternoon') is the proper greeting.

It was inevitable that people should frequently speak to us, and our only regret was our inability to return the compliment by a similar flow of speech. We therefore thought out a formula for escape under the cloak of courtesy. With a gesture embracing the landscape—'*La España muy bonita, muy hermosa, muy preciosa, muy grandiosa!*' Then quickly: '*Hasta la vista!*' ('So long!'), and we fled. Thus we covered a hasty retreat.

A well-meaning friend suggests that too much space is devoted to the pleasures and pains of the earthly body. The educated reader wants to be borne aloft to where brows dwell high above the tummy. Then why go abroad? Speaking artistically, it comes to the same thing whether I sing of Primrose Hill or of Aconcagua, whether I paint a Welsh or a Chinese town. To rise vertically to the height of the soul or spirit, I need not make a horizontal change of place.

On every spot it is possible to rear a structure of reflection or speculation which loses itself in the ether of words. The mind soars upwards; the tangible differences keep to the ground. As I am not a walking tower of intellectuality or uplift, I try to understand geographical differences unhindered by spiritual prejudice or obfuscation. I can soar aloft at home, and if I fly high enough I have the whole world at my feet. If I crawl over the surface of earth then, it is because of the pleasurable sensations which meet me *there* and which stimulate my curiosity or other susceptibilities. Here I am stirred by other obstacles and a new freedom. Here the main thing is that the landscape looks different, that food tastes differently. I have not come to make them look differently to myself, to paint them differently, to think about them differently. That I can do at home when tied to one place. The hermit gets the true uplift, not the horizontal worm. On this plane of progression the attentive cook does more for mankind than the poet.

A quick survey of literature,[3] and I must stop:

Ross and Stonehewer-Cooper, *The Highlands of Cantabria*;
Aubrey Bell, *Spanish Galicia* (1922, Lane);
Pedro Pidal, *Contribucion al Estudio de las Montañas Españolas* (Madrid, 1918);

and the great monograph on the Picos by the Comte de Saint-Saud, *Monographie des Picos de Europa* (Paris, 1922, Barrère),

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[3] Cf. *A.J.* **39,** 290.

with many excellent large-scale maps. Indispensable! Otherwise such maps as one can readily obtain are useless for finding one's way. I have not seen those of the General Staff. The so-called provincial maps (1 : *ca.* 500,000) are obtainable from Alberto Martin, Barcelona, Consejo de Ciento 140. And there is, of course, Baedeker's *Spain and Portugal*, or Murray, whichever may have produced the latest edition. The publications of the Club Alpino Español are full of information and suggestions.

Remember that Cantabria is only a part of the Peninsula. The whole of Spain and Portugal simply teems with secluded titbits in the way of mountains, hills and wondrous crags. They should appeal to the elderly but still romantic mountaineer who hankers after the joys of real exploration and adventure without the ice avalanches of Kangchenjunga. Even the young steeplejack with short holiday and shorter purse will find rocks worthy of his mettle, such as the weird granite spires of Las Batuecas in the Sierra de Gata. Here the dry climate would favour a students' camp. I believe Central Spain is very kind to the lover of granite, the noblest of the rocks.

The Upper Shyok Glaciers.[1]

By KENNETH MASON.

WITH the bursting of the Chong Kumdan Glacier dam in the early morning of July 11, 1932, it is interesting to review the information now available concerning the upper Shyok glaciers and to deduce some lessons from the floods of the last few years.

The upper Shyok glaciers lie in the heart of the Karakoram, and drain the north-eastern flank of the Muztagh range. The northernmost glacier, the Rimo, is a compound one with three large tributaries, the northern of which throws a tongue over the Central Asian watershed to form one source of the Yarkand River. By far the greater part of the Rimo drainage, however, feeds the Shyok River and is the main source of it. The stream from the Rimo Glacier flows in a broad flood-plain south-eastwards for about 9 miles to meet the Chip-chap River, of small dimensions and carrying little water from the barren

[1] See the late Major Minchinton's sketch map, *A.J.* **39,** facing 210.