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AURORA LA CUJIÑI

R. B. CUNNINGHAME GRAHAM



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AURORA LA CUJIÑI

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AURORA LA CUJIÑI

A REALISTIC SKETCH IN SEVILLE

BY

R. B. CUNNINGHAME GRAHAM

WITH A FRONTISPIECE

LONDON

LEONARD SMITHERS

ROYAL ARCADE W

1898

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Si escribo veras nadie las entiende
Si burlas me prohíbe que las haga
Si alabanzas nadie me las paga
Pues que tengo de hacer si todo ofende.

Lic^{do} Burguillos.

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AURORA LA CUJIÑI

ISBILIEH, as the Moors called Seville, had never looked more Moorish. The scent of Azahar hung in the air; from patio and from balcony floated the perfume of Albahaca and Almoradux, plants brought to Seville by the Moors from Nabotha. The city of the royal line of the Beni-Abbad was as if filled with a reminiscence of its past of sensuality and blood. The mountains of the Axarafe seemed to stand in a violet haze, a mile outside the town, instead of five leagues distant. The far-off sierras above Ronda looked jagged, and as if crenellated by the hand of man to serve as ramparts against the invasion of the African from his corresponding

sierra in the country of the Angera across the straits. Over the Giralda came the faint pink tinge which evening imparts, in Seville, to all the still remaining Moorish work, making that finest specimen of the architecture of the Moors in Spain look delicate and new, as when the builder, he who in his life built at Rabat and at Marakesh, two other towers of similar design, completed it to the glory of the One God, and of Mohammed. Down the great river for which the Christians never found a better name than that left by the Moorish dogs, the yellow tide ran lazily, swaying alike the feluccas with their pointed tapering yards, the white Norwegian fruit schooners, and the sea coffins from the port of London, tramps out of Glasgow, and steam colliers from the Hartlepoons or Newcastle-on-Tyne. The great cathedral in which lies Ferdinand Columbus, the most southern Gothic building in all Europe, built on the site of the great mosque said to have been as large as that of Cordoba, rose from the court of oranges silent as a vast tomb, and seemed protected from the town by its raised walk, fenced in with marble pillars taken from the ancient mosque. The Alcazar, Tower of Gold,

the churches, especially St. John's beside the Palm, seemed to regret their builders, as I fancy do all the Saracenic buildings throughout Spain. Though ignorant of all the plastic arts, taking their architecture chiefly from the two forms of tent and palm-tree, their literature so constituted as to be almost incomprehensible to the people of the north, the tribes who came from the Hedjaz, the Yemen, and beyond Hadramut have left their imprint on whatever land they passed. They comprehended that life is first, the chiefest business which man has to do, and so subordinated to it all the rest. Their eyes, their feet, their verse, and their materialistic view of everything have proved indelible wherever they have camped. They and their horses have stamped themselves for ever on the world. Even to-day their language, with English, Spanish, and Chinese, alone of all the speeches of mankind, gains ground.

Notable things have passed in Seville since Ojeda, before he sailed for the new-found Indies, ran along the beam fixed at a giddy height in the Giralda and threw a tennis-ball over the weather-vane, to show the Catholic Kings and the assembled crowd,

the firmness of his head. Since San Fernando drove out the royal house of the Beni-Abbad, and Motamid, the poet king, took refuge in Mequinez, as Abd-el-Wahed chronicles in his veracious history of the times, much has occurred. In the Alcazar, Pedro el Justiciero had loved Maria Padilla ; in it he had made the fishpond where the degenerate Charles the Second sat fishing whilst his empire slipped out of his hands. The Caloró from Hind, Multan, or from whatever Trans-Caucasian or Cis-Himalayan province they set out from, ages ago, had come, and spreading over Spain, fixed themselves firmly in the part of Seville called the Triana, after the Emperor Trajan, who was born there as some say, and where to-day they chatter Romany, deal in horses, tell fortunes, and behave as if the entire world was a great oyster to be opened by their wheedling tongues.

So on the evening of which I speak, a Sunday in the month of May, the bull-fight was just over, leaving behind it that mixed air of sensuousness and blood which seems to hover over Seville after each show of bulls, as it may once have hovered over Italica, the Roman city outside Seville, after a show of gladiators.

So the fight was over, and the British tourists, after condemning Spanish barbarism, had taken boxes to a man, and come away delighted with the picturesque-ness of the show. In the arena the pæderastic-looking Chulos, dressed in their majo clothes, had capered nimbly before the bull, placing their banderillas deftly in his neck ; waiting until the bull had lowered his head, they had placed one foot upon his forehead, and stepping across the horn had executed what is called 'el salto de trascuerno' ; they had jumped with a pole over the bull, alighting on the other side like thistledown, dived behind the screen, caught and held the furious beast an instant by the tail, and after having played a thousand antics, running the gamut known to the 'intelligent' as 'volapie,' 'gallico,' 'tijerilla,' 'veronica,' and 'chatre,' escaped as usual with their worthless lives, for fortune, Providence, or the great motive but ill-regulated power which some think rules the world comes to the assistance of the strong, invariably. Perhaps Providence cares nothing, or perhaps, as bull-fighters, like other men, are all made in His image, is careful to protect what He has made, that men may see His image in themselves. Trumpets had sounded ; and the horses, all

of which had done more service to mankind than any fifty men, and each of which had as much right, by every law of logic and anatomy, to have a soul, if souls exist, as have the wisest of philosophers, had suffered martyrdom. Hungry and ragged, they had trodden on their entrails, received their wounds without a groan, without a tear, without a murmur, faithful to the end; had borne their riders out of danger, falling upon the bloody sand at last, with quivering tails, and, biting their poor parched and bleeding tongues, had died just as the martyrs died at Lyons or in Rome, as dumb and brave as they.

The 'espada' had come forward, mumbled his boniment in Andaluz, swung his montera over his shoulder upon the ground, and after sticking his sword in every quarter of the bull had butchered him at last amid the applause of the assembled populace. Blood on the sand; sun on the white plaza; upon the women's faces 'cascarilla'; scarlet and yellow fans, and white mantillas with 'fleco y alamares' in the antique style, and recognized by the discerning tourist as national because unseen except at bull-fights, and made in France or

Germany ; women selling water, calling out 'aguá !' in so guttural a voice it seemed like Arabic ; Cordobese hats, short jackets, and from the plaza a scent of blood and sweat acting like a rank aphrodisiac upon the crowd, and making the women squeeze each other's sweating hands, and look ambiguously at one another, as they were men ; and causing the youths, with swaying hips and with their hair cut low upon their foreheads, to smile with open lips and eyes that met your glance, as they had been half women.

Blood, harlotry, sun, gay colours, flowers and waving palm-trees, women with roses stuck behind their ears, mules covered up in harness of red worsted, cigar girls, gipsies, tourists, soldiers, and the little villainous-looking urchins, who, though born old, do duty as children in the South. The plaza vomits out the crowd, just as the Roman amphitheatre through its 'vomitorium' expelled its crowd of blood-delighting Roman citizens. "Civis Romanus sum," and all the rest of it.

The stiff dead horses were piled into a cart, their legs sticking out, pathetic and grotesque, between the bars. A cart of sand was emptied on the

blood, then the 'espada,' some 'Culo Ancho,' or 'Lagartijillo,' got into his brougham, and all was done.

In the dark streets the women swarmed, in the Calle de la Pasion they stood against the open but barred windows, all freshly painted and expecting work.

In the dark lanes which lead in a sort of maze out of the 'Calle Sierpes' lovers stood talking from the streets to girls upon the balconies, whose mothers and the intervening distance of a storey guarded their virtue.

In the great palm-tree planted square, hard by the Casa Consistorial, the finest building of the Renaissance in Southern Spain, the salmon-coloured plaster seats were filled with men who seem to live there day and night, contributing their quota to the ceaseless national expenditure of talk. On this occasion they discussed, being all 'intelligent' (intelligentes), every incident of the recent fight, the old men deprecating modern innovation and sighing for the times and style of Cuchares, and of 'el Seño Romero,' he who first brought the art of bull-fighting from heaven, as his admirers say. If a woman, rich

or poor, a Countess from Madrid, or maiden of the Caloró from the Triana, chanced to pass, they criticized her as a prospective buyer does a horse at Tattersall's. Her eyes, her feet, her air, everything about her, were freely commented on, and if found pleasing then came the approving "blessed be your mother!" with other compliments of a nature to make a singer at a Paris café concert blush. The recipients took it all as a matter of every-day occurrence, and, with a smile or word of thanks, according to their rank, pursued the uneven tenour of their way with heightened colour and perhaps a little more of what the Spaniards call 'menco' of their hips.

In the Calle Sierpes, the main artery and chief bazaar, roofed with an awning from end to end, the people swarmed. The cafés were gorged with clients, all talking about the bull-fight, the Government, or disputing of the beauty and the nature of the women of their respective towns. The clubs, with windows of plate glass down to the ground, showed the 'haute gomme' lounging in luxury upon their plush upholstered chairs, stiff in their English clothes, and sweating blood and water in the attempt to look

like Englishmen or like Frenchmen, and to keep up an unconcerned appearance under the public gaze. Girls selling lemonade, 'Horchata,' 'Agraz,' and the thick, sticky sweetmeats and white flaky pastry flavoured with fennel and angelica, left by the Moors in Spain, went up and down selling their wares and offering themselves to anyone who wished to venture half a dollar on the chance. The shops were full of all those unconsidered trifles which in Spain alone can find a market, cheap and abominably nasty, making one think that our manufactories must be kept running with a view to furnish idiots or blind men with things they do not want.

After the gospel, sermon, sherry after soup, so, in like manner, after a bull-fight the 'Burero' comes.

Theatres in Spain, in spite of Lope, Calderon, Echegaray, and the interminable plays of Moratin, of Ramon de la Cruz, and the immediate translation of every pornographic piece from Paris, never seem to thrive. Whether it is the badness of the scenery, or the casual manners of the actors, who stroll about and talk to one another without the slightest pretence of being letter-perfect, or from whatever cause it comes, I do not know.

Bull-fights and dancing-houses alone make money in a land where the inhabitants of Madrid hissed Sarah Bernhardt in "La Tosca," because they found the piece too quiet for their taste.

So on this evening the 'Burero' was packed with men. From the narrow doors, where old women sat selling flowers and obscenely-painted match-boxes, through the narrow passage, specially contrived as a death-trap in a case of fire, the people strove to push inside. An enormous music-hall, without a looking-glass, without a bar, without a velvet-cushioned seat, half lit by miserable oil-lamps, and bare enough of scenery to please a 'symboliste.' In the middle, rows of cane chairs opposite little bare wooden tables, at which sat drinking the flower of the rascality of Spain. In the gallery more cane chairs and wooden tables, three or four boxes in which, on this occasion, sat some foreign ladies come to see life, and over all the smoke of cigarettes filling the temple as with the fumes of incense. The audience almost mediæval as to type—Chulos and Chalanes, that is (*Arabic*) loafers and horse-dealers, men with their hair drawn forward on the forehead, plastered to the head,

close-shaved, dressed in the tightest of tight trousers, short jackets, stiff round felt hats, frilled shirts, and necktie like a shoe-string. Others, again, in tattered cloaks, and mixed with them some shepherds and herdsmen, and the not too anthropomorphic-looking scum which swarms in Seville and in every Southern Spanish town. Upon the stage eight or ten women, dressed in gay print dresses, Manilla shawls, boots with cloth tops, and highest of high heels, their hair dressed each one after her own idea, but generally high, sometimes hanging forward to hide the ears, and again in curls to almost cover up the eyes; flowers stuck about it, their faces painted in the Spanish fashion, without concealment of the paint, a comb surmounting all, sat chatting, smoking, pinching one another, and exchanging jokes with their acquaintances in the front.

On one side of the stage sat the musicians, two at the guitar, and two playing small instruments known as 'bandurrias,' a cross between a mandolin and a guitar. The women suddenly began to clap their hands in a strange rhythm, monotonous at first, but which at length, like

the beating of a tom-tom, makes the blood boil, quiets the audience, stills the conversation, and focusses all eyes upon the stage. Then one breaks out into a harsh wild song, the interval so strange, the time so wavering, and so mixed up the rhythm, that at first it scarcely seems more pleasing than the howling of a wolf, but bit by bit goes to the soul, stirs up the middle marrow of the bones, and leaves all other music ever afterwards tame and unpalatable.

The singing terminates abruptly, as it seems, for no set reason, and dies away in a prolonged high shake, and then a girl stands up, encouraged by her fellows with shouts of "Venga Juana," "Vaya querida," and a cross fire of hats thrown on the stage, and interjections from the audience of "preciosita," "retrechera," and the inspiriting clap of hands, which never ceases till the dancer, exhausted, sinks into a chair. Amongst the audience, drinking their manzanilla in little tumblers about the thickness of a piece of sugar-cane, eating their 'boquerones,' ground nuts, and salted olives, the fire of criticism never stops, as everyone in Seville of the lower classes is a keen critic both of dancing-girls and bulls.

Of the elder men, a gipsy, though shouting out "salero" in a perfunctory manner, seemed discontented, and recalled the prowess of a gipsy long since dead, by name Aurora, surnamed La Cujíñi, and gave it as his faith that since her time no girl had ever mastered all the mysteries of the dance. The Caloró, who always muster strong at the 'Bureró,' were on his side, and seemed inclined to enforce their arguments with their shears, which, as most of them maintain themselves by clipping mules, they always carry in their sash.

But just as the discussion seemed about to end in a free fight, a girl stepped out to dance. None had remarked her sitting quietly beside the rest; still, she was slightly different in appearance from them all. A gipsy at first sight, with the full lustrous eyes her people brought from Multan, dressed in a somewhat older fashion than the others, her hair brought low upon her forehead and straying on her shoulders in the style of 1840, her skirt much flounced, low shoes tied round the ankles, a Chinese shawl across her shoulders, and a look about her, as she walked into the middle of the stage, as of a mare about to kick. A whisper to the first guitar causes him with

a smile to break into the Olé, his instrument well 'requintado,' and his fingers flying across the cords as the old Moorish melody jarred and jingled out. She stands a moment motionless, her eyes distending slowly and focussing the attention of the audience on her, and then a sort of shiver seems to run over her, the feet begin to gently scrape along the floor, her naked arms move slowly, with her fingers curiously bent and meant perhaps to indicate by their position the symbols of the oldest of religions, and, as the gipsies say, she draws the hearts of every onlooker into her net. She twists her hips till they seem ready to disjoin, wriggles in a snake-like fashion, drags her skirt upon the stage, draws herself up to her full height, bends double, thrusts all her body forward, her hands move faster, and the short sleeves slip back exhibiting black tufts of hair under her arms, glued to her skin with sweat. Then she slides forwards, backwards, looks at the audience with defiance, takes a man's hat from off the stage, places it on her head, puts both her arms akimbo, sways to and fro, but still keeps writhing as if her veins were full of quicksilver. Little by little the frenzy dies away, her eyes grow dimmer, and

the movements of the body slower, and with a final stamp, and a hoarse guttural cry, she stands a moment quiet, as it is called 'dormida,' that is, asleep, looking a very statue of impudicity. The audience remained a moment spellbound, with open mouths like Satyrs, and in the box where sat the foreign ladies, one has turned pale and rests her head upon the other's shoulder, who holds her round the waist. Then with a mighty shout the applause breaks forth, hats rain upon the stage, 'vivas' and 'vayas' rend the air, and the old gipsy bounds upon a table with a shout, "One God, one Cujíñi." But in the tumult La Cujíñi had disappeared, gone from the eyes of Caloró and of Busné, Gipsy and Gentile, and none saw her more.

Perhaps at witches' sabbaths she still dances, or perhaps in that strange Limbo where the souls of gipsies and their donkeys dree their weird, she writhes and dislocates herself in the Romalis.

Sometimes the curious may see her still dancing before a Venta, in the woolly outline of a Spanish lithograph, her head thrown back, her hair *au catagon*, with one foot pointing to a hat to show her power over, and her contempt for, all the sons

of men, just as she did upon that evening when she took a brief and fleeting reincarnation to breathe once more the air of Seville, heavy with perfume of spring flowers mixed with the scent of blood.

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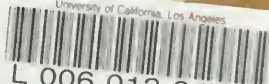
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