CHAPTER 30

Autumnal Morning - The World's End - Corcuvion - Duyo - The Cape - A Whale - The Outer Bay - The Arrest - The Fisher- Magistrate - Calros Rey - Hard of Belief - Where is your Passport? - The Beach - A Mighty Liberal - The Handmaid - The Grand Baintham - Eccentric Book - Hospitality.

It was a beautiful autumnal morning when we left the choza and pursued our way to Corcuvion. I satisfied our host by presenting him with a couple of pesetas, and he requested as a favour, that if on our return we passed that way, and were overtaken by the night, we would again take up our abode beneath his roof. This I promised, at the same time determining to do my best to guard against the contingency; as sleeping in the loft of a Gallegan hut, though preferable to passing the night on a moor or mountain, is anything but desirable.

So we again started at a rapid pace along rough bridle-ways and footpaths, amidst furze and brushwood. In about an hour we obtained a view of the sea, and directed by a lad, whom we found on the moor employed in tending a few miserable sheep, we bent our course to the north-west, and at length reached the brow of an eminence, where we stopped for some time to survey the prospect which opened before us.[1]

30.1 Cape Finisterre from the north-east side of the bay
(picture by Jo Iwasaki)

[1] It is impossible to determine where Borrow finally reached the coast. He himself probably never knew. The journalist Cristobal Ramírez, in a speech of 10 December 2012 in Coruña, thought he must have come down from the mountains at a spot called Cruz de Armada.

It was not without reason that the Latins gave the name of *Finis terrae* to this district.[2] We had arrived exactly at such a place as in my boyhood I had pictured to myself as the termination of the world, beyond which there was a wild sea, or abyss, or chaos. I now saw far before me an immense ocean, and below me a long and irregular line of lofty and precipitous coast. Certainly in the whole world there is no bolder coast than the Gallegan shore, from the debouchement of the Minho to Cape Finisterra. It consists of a granite wall of savage mountains, for the most part serrated at the top, and occasionally broken, where bays and firths like those of Vigo and Pontevedra intervene, running deep into the land. These bays and firths are invariably of an immense depth, and sufficiently capacious to shelter the navies of the proudest maritime nations.

There is an air of stern and savage grandeur in everything around, which strongly captivates the imagination. This savage coast is the first glimpse of Spain which the voyager from the north catches, or he who has ploughed his way across the wide Atlantic: and well does it seem to realize all his visions of this strange land. "Yes," he exclaims, "this is indeed Spain - stern flinty Spain - land emblematic of those spirits to which she has given birth. From what land but that before me could have proceeded those portentous beings, who astounded the Old World and filled the New with horror and blood: Alba and Philip, Cortez and Pizarro: stern colossal spectres looming through the gloom of bygone years, like yonder granite mountains through the haze, upon the eye of the mariner. Yes, yonder is indeed Spain; flinty, indomitable Spain; land emblematic of its sons!"

As for myself, when I viewed that wide ocean and its savage shore, I cried, "Such is the grave, and such are its terrific sides; those moors and wilds, over which I have passed, are the rough and dreary journey of life. Cheered with hope, we struggle along through all the difficulties of moor, bog, and mountain, to arrive at - what? The grave and its dreary sides. Oh, may hope not desert us in the last hour: hope in the Redeemer and in God!"

We descended from the eminence, and again lost sight of the sea amidst ravines and dingles, amongst which patches of pine were occasionally seen. Continuing to descend, we at last came, not to the sea, but to the extremity of a long narrow firth, where stood a village or hamlet; whilst at a small distance, on the Western side of the firth, appeared one considerably larger, which was indeed almost entitled to the appellation of town. This last was Corcuvion; the first, if I forget not, was called Ria de Silla.[3] We hastened on to Corcuvion, where I bade my guide make inquiries respecting Finisterra. He entered the door of a wine-house, from which proceeded much noise and vociferation, and presently returned, informing me that the village of Finisterra was distant about a league and a half. A man, evidently in a state of intoxication, followed him to the door: "Are you bound for Finisterra, Cavalheiros?" he shouted.

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[2] So spelled in the 'Definitive' Murray edition of 1912. The name of the cape – which means 'End of the Earth' - varies widely, depending on the language. English and Castilian write *Finisterre*; Gallego, however, uses *Finisterra*. Note that there are at least three other 'Land's End's' on Europe's western, Celtic coast: in Brittany, on Cornwall and in Ireland.

[3] More likely it was Cée, on the northern tip of the bay.

"Yes, my friend," I replied, "we are going thither."

"Then you are going amongst a flock of drunkards (*fato de borrachos*)[4]," he answered. "Take care that they do not play you a trick."

We passed on, and striking across a sandy peninsula at the back of the town, soon reached the shore of an immense bay[5], the north-westernmost end of which was formed by the far-famed cape of Finisterra, which we now saw before us stretching far into the sea.

Along a beach of dazzling white sand[6], we advanced towards the cape, the bourne of our journey. The sun was shining brightly, and every object was illumined by his beams. The sea lay before us like a vast mirror, and the waves which broke upon the shore were so tiny as scarcely to produce a murmur. On we sped along the deep winding bay, overhung by gigantic hills and mountains. Strange recollections began to throng upon my mind. It was upon this beach that, according to the tradition of all ancient Christendom, Saint James, the patron saint of Spain, preached the Gospel to the heathen Spaniards. Upon this beach had once stood an immense commercial city, the proudest in all Spain. This now desolate bay had once resounded with the voices of myriads, when the keels and commerce of all the then known world were wafted to Duyo.

"What is the name of this village?" said I to a woman, as we passed by five or six ruinous houses at the bend of the bay, ere we entered upon the peninsula of Finisterra.

"This is no village," said the Gallegan, "this is no village, Sir Cavalier, this is a city, this is Duyo."

So much for the glory of the world! These huts were all that the roaring sea and the tooth of time had left of Duyo, the great city! Onward now to Finisterra.[7]

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[4] 'Fato' is the Portuguese and Gallego form of Spanish '*hato'*, a herd or multitude [Burke, Glossary]

[5] The Sardiñeiro bay [Casas, 40].

[6] The Langosteira beach [Casas, 40].

[7] The notion that Duyo – in the 1830s a speck of sixty houses spread thin over miles of hinterland [Burke, footnote to 436] and nowadays two tiny hamlets lost amid a flotilla of modern villas built in bad taste - was ever a great mercantile city, belongs to the romantic fancies of 18th century archaeology. However, there seems to have existed a 16th or 17th century tradition that Saint James lived here, and even that his corpse was landed here instead of at Padron. How Borrow knew of this remains unclear. Note that he gives a slightly different version of this same episode in his letter to Hasfeld of 20 November 1838, quoted below.

[**From: letter to Hasfeld of 20 November 1838 from London, in: Fraser, *Hasfeld*, 28**]

> For more than a league before arriving at the Cape the traveller has to proceed along the shore of a bay perhaps the most magnificent in the world, treading on a flooring of beautiful sand, firm and moist against which the billow breaks with their wild unearthly tune. But this bay is not merely interesting from its appearance and the melody of its waves (…) Pursuing your way at some distance from the water's edge you stumble over ruins all but concealed by the whelming sand; and you ask some fisher-boy if one be near at hand, what are these ruins? And he will tell you that those ruins once formed part of the walls and houses of an immense city which was destroyed and buried by an irruption of the sea; and he tells the truth for the lone bay once echoed with the voices of miriads and vessels from all countries visited it for the purpose of traffic, and upon the shore towered in pomp and pride the famous city of Duyo the principle one in Galicia when the Romans were Lords in Spain and it was there that Saint James is said to have first landed when he repaired to Spain for the purpose of propagating there the Gospel of his Master. Knowing all this I did not pace the beach without emotion and on arriving at the ruins I repeated though a Protestant portions of the hymn which on the eve of the Saint and Patron of Spain is chanted in the Cathedral of Compostela to 'The Child of Thunder, the blessed Saint James'.[8]

[Chapter 30 continued]

It was midday when we reached the village of Finisterra, consisting of about one hundred houses[9], and built on the southern side of the peninsula, just before it rises into the huge bluff head which is called the Cape. We sought in vain for an inn or venta, where we might stable our beast; at one moment we thought that we had found one, and had even tied the animal to the manger. Upon our going out, however, he was instantly untied and driven forth into the street. The few people whom we saw appeared to gaze upon us in a singular manner. We, however, took little notice of these circumstances, and proceeded along the straggling street until we found shelter in the house of a Castilian shopkeeper, whom some chance had brought to this corner of Galicia[10], - this end of the world. Our first care was to feed the animal, who now began to exhibit considerable symptoms of fatigue. We then requested some refreshment for ourselves; and in about an hour a tolerably savoury fish, weighing about three pounds, and fresh from the bay, was prepared for us by an old woman who appeared to officiate as house-keeper. Having finished our meal, I and my uncouth companion went forth and prepared to ascend the mountain.

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[8] See Borrow's translation of this hymn in chapter 27 above.

[9] In 1837 there were in fact 124 houses, home to some 1,000 inhabitants [Casas, 42 and 46]. Madoz, [*DG*, vol. 8, 101] gives 220 householders and 1,105 inhabitants for the mid 1840s.

[10] Probably this was the dry goods store (*ultramarinos*) of Francisco González, who inherited the nickname '*El Castellano'* from his father, who himself acquired it because he moved to Castile every summer as a migrant reaper. Alvaro de las Casas, the schoolmaster who investigated Borrow's visit in 1935, rejects the possibility because both father and son were village-born – but this merely shows that Casas still took Borrow too literally. Borrow was surely told to go ask for a room in the shop of 'El Castellano', and himself made the inference that this person had come to Finisterre from Castile. The only alternative Casas proposes – there being no ethnic Castilians in the village at the time – is one Joaquin Riestra, an Asturias-born merchant in textiles, in whose shop travellers occasionally stayed. [Casas, 47 & 49.]

30.2 The Castillo de San Carlos

We stopped to examine a small dismantled fort or battery facing the bay[11]; and whilst engaged in this examination, it more than once occurred to me that we were ourselves the objects of scrutiny and investigation: indeed I caught a glimpse of more than one countenance peering upon us through the holes and chasms of the walls. We now commenced ascending Finisterra; and making numerous and long detours, we wound our way up its flinty sides.[12] The sun had reached the top of heaven, whence he showered upon us perpendicularly his brightest and fiercest rays. My boots were torn, my feet cut, and the perspiration streamed from my brow. To my guide, however, the ascent appeared to be neither toilsome nor difficult. The heat of the day for him had no terrors, no moisture was wrung from his tanned countenance; he drew not one short breath; and hopped upon the stones and rocks with all the provoking agility of a mountain goat. Before we had accomplished one half of the ascent, I felt myself quite exhausted. I reeled and staggered. "Cheer up, master mine, be of good cheer, and have no care," said the guide. "Yonder I see a wall of stones; lie down beneath it in the shade." He put his long and strong arm round my waist, and though his stature compared with mine was that of a dwarf, he supported me, as if I had been a child, to a rude wall which seemed to traverse the greatest part of the hill, and served probably as a kind of boundary. It was difficult to find a shady spot: at last he perceived a small chasm, perhaps scooped by some shepherd as a couch, in which to enjoy his siesta. In this he laid me gently down, and taking off his enormous hat, commenced farming me with great assiduity. By degrees I revived, and after having rested for a considerable time, I again attempted the ascent, which, with the assistance of my guide, I at length accomplished.

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[11] The *Castillo de San Carlos*, on the eastern tip of the harbour.

[12] Strictly speaking: the *Monte San Guillermo*, the bulk of Cape Finisterre which juts out south of the village. Today a road leads along the east side of this bulging mountain to the tip of the Cape, where the lighthouse stands. Both lighthouse and road were not, however, constructed until the 1850s. Hence Borrow has no choice but to climb to the top of the mountain, possibly by the old Roman road that led up there, towards the small hermitage of San Guillermo.

We were now standing at a great altitude between two bays: the wilderness of waters before us. Of all the ten thousand barks which annually plough those seas in sight of that old cape, not one was to be descried. It was a blue shiny waste, broken by no object save the black head of a spermaceti whale, which would occasionally show itself at the top, casting up thin jets of brine. The principal bay, that of Finisterra, as far as the entrance, was beautifully variegated by an immense shoal of sardinhas, on whose extreme skirts the monster was probably feasting.[13] From the northern side of the cape we looked down upon a smaller bay, the shore of which was overhung by rocks of various and grotesque shapes; this is called the outer bay, or, in the language of the country, *Praia do Mar de Fora*: a fearful place in seasons of wind and tempest, when the long swell of the Atlantic pouring in, is broken into surf and foam by the sunken rocks with which it abounds. Even in the calmest day there is a rumbling and a hollow roar in that bay which fill the heart with uneasy sensations.

On all sides there was grandeur and sublimity. After gazing from the summit of the Cape for nearly an hour we descended.

30.3 The view from the top of Cape Finisterre

[13] Whales are rare in this area now, but frequent in Borrow's day. Frederic Simms, in his 1845 travelogue 'From England to Calcutta in 1845', writes that 'On the evening of the 21st [of July], we entered upon the Bay of Biscay, which was smooth and calm, and continued so until the following night. This interval was enlivened by the sight of a whale, and abundance of porpoises sporting about the ship. We again saw land a little before dusk on the 23rd; this was Cape Finisteire.'

On reaching the house where we had taken up our temporary habitation, we perceived that the portal was occupied by several men, some of whom were reclining on the floor drinking wine out of small earthen pans, which are much used in this part of Galicia[14]. With a civil salutation I passed on, and ascended the staircase to the room in which we had taken our repast. Here there was a rude and dirty bed, on which I flung myself, exhausted with fatigue. I determined to take a little repose, and in the evening to call the people of the place together, to read a few chapters of the Scripture, and then to address them with a little Christian exhortation. I was soon asleep, but my slumbers were by no means tranquil. I thought I was surrounded with difficulties of various kinds amongst rocks and ravines, vainly endeavouring to extricate myself; uncouth visages showed themselves amidst the trees and in the hollows, thrusting out cloven tongues and uttering angry cries. I looked around for my guide, but could not find him; methought, however, that I heard his voice down a deep dingle. He appeared to be talking of me. How long I might have continued in these wild dreams I know not. I was suddenly, however, seized roughly by the shoulder and nearly dragged from the bed. I looked up in amazement, and by the light of the descending sun I beheld hanging over me a wild and uncouth figure; it was that of an elderly man, built as strong as a giant, with much beard and whiskers, and huge bushy eyebrows, dressed in the habiliments of a fisherman; in his hand was a rusty musket.

MYSELF. - Who are you and what do you want?

FIGURE. - Who I am matters but little. Get up and follow me; it is you I want.

MYSELF. - By what authority do you thus presume to interfere with me?

FIGURE. - By the authority of the justicia of Finisterra. Follow me peaceably, Calros, or it will be the worse for you.

"Calros," said I, "what does the person mean?" I thought it, however, most prudent to obey his command, and followed him down the staircase. The shop and the portal were now thronged with the inhabitants of Finisterra, men, women, and children; the latter for the most part in a state of nudity, and with bodies wet and dripping, having been probably summoned in haste from their gambols in the brine. Through this crowd the figure whom I have attempted to describe pushed his way with an air of authority.

On arriving in the street, he laid his heavy hand upon my arm, not roughly however. "It is Calros! it is Calros!" said a hundred voices; "he has come to Finisterra at last, and the justicia have now got hold of him." Wondering what all this could mean, I attended my strange conductor down the street. As we proceeded, the crowd increased every moment, following and vociferating. Even the sick were brought to the door to obtain a view of what was going forward and a glance at the redoubtable Calros. I was particularly struck by the eagerness displayed by one man, a cripple, who, in spite of the entreaties of his wife, mixed with the crowd, and having lost his crutch, hopped forward on one leg, exclaiming, - *"Carracho! Tambien voy yo!"*[15]

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[14] Country wine in traditional Galician bars still gets served in such porcelain saucers.

[15] Something like: “Blast! I’m gonna go as well!”

We at last reached a house of rather larger size than the rest; my guide having led me into a long low room, placed me in the middle of the floor, and then hurrying to the door, he endeavoured to repulse the crowd who strove to enter with us. This he effected, though not without considerable difficulty, being once or twice compelled to have recourse to the butt of his musket, to drive back unauthorized intruders. I now looked round the room. It was rather scantily furnished: I could see nothing but some tubs and barrels, the mast of a boat, and a sail or two. Seated upon the tubs were three or four men coarsely dressed, like fishermen or shipwrights. The principal personage was a surly ill-tempered-looking fellow of about thirty-five, whom eventually I discovered to be the alcalde of Finisterra, and lord of the house in which we now were[16]. In a corner I caught a glimpse of my guide, who was evidently in durance, two stout fishermen standing before him, one with a musket and the other with a boat-hook. After I had looked about me for a minute, the alcalde, giving his whiskers a twist, thus addressed me: "Who are you, where is your passport, and what brings you to Finisterra?"

MYSELF. - I am an Englishman. Here is my passport, and I came to see Finisterra.

This reply seemed to discomfit them for a moment. They looked at each other, then at my passport. At length the alcalde, striking it with his finger, bellowed forth:

"This is no Spanish passport; it appears to be written in French."

MYSELF. - I have already told you that I am a foreigner. I of course carry a foreign passport[17].

ALCALDE. - Then you mean to assert that you are not Calros Rey.

MYSELF. - I never heard before of such a king, nor indeed of such a name.[18]

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[16] This was Don Juan de Lires, born on 23 December 1812, so in reality only 25 years old at the time. His house, slightly better than most in the village, was in the *Calle de Arriba* [Casas, 44].

[17] Foreign travellers could either use a temporary Spanish passport issued by the Spanish Interior Ministry or a more expensive but permanent one issued by their own Foreign Office in London. Borrow used the latter, written in French, and legalized by the famous signature of 'Lord *Balmerson*' printed at the bottom (see chapters 10 and 43) [Robertson, *Ford*, 236]. Ford [*HB,* 14 & 16] says these passports cost a hefty 2 pounds and 7 shillings. Permanent as they might be, such documents still had to be '*visé-ed*' by an official for every trip, not only to travel the roads between towns, but also to remain in a town or city overnight. Thus everywhere one stopped one had to present it – immediately on arrival - to the pertinent official and pay the corresponding dues of 20 to 40 *reales*. This is of course the rub here: Borrow was arrested because he failed to have his passport signed. Unfortunately his document, which would have given us the exact chronology of all Borrow's Spanish travels, has not survived.

[18] The politically correct answer. The mayor here means Don Carlos Isidro, the Pretender to the Spanish throne. Borrow underlines his loyalty to the liberal regime, and denies that this person is king. Note that Borrow probably took the odd pronunciation 'Calros' for 'Carlos' from *La Tertulia de Picaños*, that same fictitious dialogue in Gallego that informed him of the enmity between Santiago and Coruña (see notes 12 and 25 to chapter 27). There - and in no other contemporary source I know of - the peasants also call the pretender *Calros*.

ALCALDE. - Hark to the fellow: he has the audacity to say that he has never heard of Calros the pretender, who calls himself king.

MYSELF. - If you mean by Calros, the pretender Don Carlos, all I can reply is, that you can scarcely be serious. You might as well assert that yonder poor fellow, my guide, whom I see you have made prisoner, is his nephew, the infante Don Sebastian.[19]

ALCALDE. - See, you have betrayed yourself; that is the very person we suppose him to be.

30.4 Don Carlos (l) and Don Sebastian (r)

MYSELF. - It is true that they are both hunchbacks. But how can I be like Don Carlos? I have nothing the appearance of a Spaniard, and am nearly a foot taller than the pretender.

ALCALDE. - That makes no difference; you of course carry many waistcoats about you, by means of which you disguise yourself, and appear tall or low according to your pleasure.[20]

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[19] The Infante Sebastian Gabriel de Borbón y Braganza, son by an earlier marriage of Don Carlos's second wife, the Princess of Beira, as well as a nephew of the Pretender. Around this time he functioned as Commander-in-Chief of the Carlist armies.

[20] A similar, semi-magical feat was credited to Vidocq by his underworld foes. Unless the mayor really came up with this remarkable notion himself, it is likely that Borrow – an admirer of the Paris police sleuth - invented it on the basis of Vidocq's memoirs, which he had certainly read. Knapp [II : 362] even thought that an early English edition of the Frenchman's *Memoirs* had been translated by the young Borrow, but that is uncertain [Collie, *Eccentric*, 38; Shorter, *Circle*, 136 and note 82]. In April 1844, shortly after he published *The Bible in Spain*, Borrow met the famous French detective in Paris when on his way to Hungary and Constantinople [Jenkins 361f; Collie, *Eccentric*, 193; Ridler, *GBaaL*, 108].

This last was so conclusive an argument that I had of course nothing to reply to it. The alcalde looked around him in triumph, as if he had made some notable discovery. "Yes, it is Calros; it is Calros," said the crowd at the door[21]. "It will be as well to have these men shot instantly," continued the alcalde; "if they are not the two pretenders, they are at any rate two of the factious."

"I am by no means certain that they are either one or the other," said a gruff voice.

The justicia of Finisterra turned their eyes in the direction from which these words proceeded, and so did I. Our glances rested upon the figure who held watch at the door. He had planted the barrel of his musket on the floor, and was now leaning his chin against the butt.

"I am by no means certain that they are either one or the other," repeated he, advancing forward. "I have been examining this man," pointing to myself, "and listening whilst he spoke, and it appears to me that after all he may prove an Englishman; he has their very look and voice. Who knows the English better than Antonio de la Trava[22], and who has a better right? Has he not sailed in their ships; has he not eaten their biscuit; and did he not stand by Nelson when he was shot dead?"

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[21] The Hottenton credulity of the inhabitants of Finisterre is, of course, a later addition of Borrow's. In his letter to Hasfeld of 20 November 1838 [Fraser, *Hasfeld*, 29], he gives a more modest and trustworthy version of the affair: 'On my descent from the summit of the Cape I was seized by the fishermen of the village as a Carlist spy. These honest people dragged me and my guide into a wigwam, where after a consultation they came to a determination of shooting us before the door'; and in his letter to Brandram of 15 September 1837 [Darlow, 249] he writes: 'Arrived at Finisterre we were seized as Carlist spies by the fishermen of the place, who determined at first on shooting us'. In neither version is there any sign of the inhabitants mistaking him for the Carlist Pretender. The notion was clearly invented to spice up the narrative; and tellingly, the first time it is ever found in Borrow's writings is in a manuscript press-release (spuriously assigned to another anonymous person) which Borrow penned in May 1838 from the Madrid jail for foreign journalists to use in their reporting [Fraser, *Sleeping,* Annex 3]. There Borrow writes about himself: 'Amongst his other feats he explored every nook of the wild country of Galicia penetrating even to Cape Finisterre whose lofty brow he climbed. (…) On his descent however he was nearly paying a heavy penalty for his love of adventure, being seized by the fishermen of the coast, who mistook him for Don Carlos himself. These honest people at first determined on shooting him, but on reflection conveyed him to a town up the country, where he was recognised and set at liberty.'

[22] Marcos Antonio da Traba, whose storybook life is too full of dramatic incident to be summarized in a footnote, was born of 18 August 1791 and died on 9 March 1861. Borrow's portrait of him is in perfect keeping with the many sensational stories which Alvaro de las Casas collected about him a century later from his descendants. He was violent, magnanimous, brutish, boastful and unstoppable throughout his life; or, as has been written: 'a noble savage with a golden heart, but shockingly little sophistication; a man devoid of a mean streak, but quick to use violence and slow to show pity.' During the Peninsular War he joined the anti-French *guerrilleros* and killed several Frenchmen with his bare hands, as much, one feels, from patriotism as from love of loot and killing. [For his full life's story: Casas, 55ff; Campos Calvo-Sotelo and Missler, 'Antonio da Traba, El Valiente de Finisterra', in *GBB* 20, 8-20; Campos, *Naufragos*, chapter 1.]

Here the alcalde became violently incensed. "He is no more an Englishman than yourself," he exclaimed; "if he were an Englishman would he have come in this manner, skulking across the land? Not so I trow. He would have come in a ship, recommended to some of us, or to the Catalans. He would have come to trade, to buy; but nobody knows him in Finisterra, nor does he know anybody: and the first thing, moreover, that he does when he reaches this place is to inspect the fort, and to ascend the mountain where, no doubt, he has been marking out a camp. What brings him to Finisterra if he is neither Calros nor a bribon of a faccioso?" [23]

I felt that there was a good deal of justice in some of these remarks, and I was aware, for the first time, that I had, indeed, committed a great imprudence in coming to this wild place, and among these barbarous people, without being able to assign any motive which could appear at all valid in their eyes.[24] I endeavoured to convince the alcalde that I had come across the country for the purpose of making myself acquainted with the many remarkable objects which it contained, and of obtaining information respecting the character and condition of the inhabitants. He could understand no such motives. "What did you ascend the mountain for?" "To see prospects." "Disparate! I have lived at Finisterra forty years and never ascended that mountain. I would not do it in a day like this for two ounces of gold. You went to take altitudes, and to mark out a camp." I had, however, a staunch friend in old Antonio, who insisted, from his knowledge of the English, that all I had said might very possibly be true. "The English," said he, "have more money than they know what to do with, and on that account they wander all over the world, paying dearly for what no other people care a groat for." He then proceeded, notwithstanding the frowns of the alcalde, to examine me in the English language. His own entire knowledge of this tongue was confined to two words - KNIFE and FORK, which words I rendered into Spanish by their equivalents, and was forthwith pronounced an Englishman by the old fellow[25], who, brandishing his musket, exclaimed:-

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[23] The argument is reasonable enough. Just before the Napoleonic invasion, the French army had dispatched a great number of 'artists' to Spain to map and draw every strategic point and fortress in the country. Ford [*Gatherings*, chapter 20] writes: 'One of the many fatal legacies left to Spain by the French was an increased suspicion of men with the pencil and notebook. Previously to their invasion spies and agents were sent, who, under the guise of travellers, reconnoitred the land; and then, casting off the clothing of sheep, guided in the wolves to plunder and destruction.' As they knew more of the military installations of Spain than the Spanish Army and government combined, this '*Description d'Espagne'* helped the French tremendously in their Blitzkrieg to occupy the land in 1808-1809.

[24] Many foreigners who could not properly explain their presence in these decades suffered such preventive arrests. Thus, the same fate befell Henry John George Herbert, the later Lord Carnarvon, various times in 1827 in Spain and Portugal [Carnarvon, chapters 5-6 & 13] and, 15 years later, in 1843, when the war was over, it still happened to Samuel Widdrington in Pontevedra [Widdrington, vol. 2, 208ff]. Ford himself was questioned for sketching a Roman ruin [Ford, *Gatherings*, chapter 20], while Hughes [*Overland*, vol. 1, chapter 24, 318] was bothered by two Burgos cobblers who demanded what he was doing as soon as he scribbled a few lines in a notebook.

[25] The 'Old Fellow' had just turned 46 at the time, and was only 12 years older than Borrow himself. Note, by the way, that the use of forks was unusual aboard the ships of the English navy. James Dugan, *The Great Mutiny*, New York 1967, 57 writes: '[Sailors] ate with work knives, wooden bowls, leather cans and tarry hands. Forks and spoons were not fashionable.'

"This man is not Calros; he is what he declares himself to be, an Englishman, and whosoever seeks to injure him, shall have to do with Antonio de la Trava *el valiente de Finisterra*.[26]" No person sought to impugn this verdict, and it was at length determined that I should be sent to Corcuvion, to be examined by the alcalde mayor of the district. "But," said the alcalde of Finisterra, "what is to be done with the other fellow? He at least is no Englishman. Bring him forward, and let us hear what he has to say for himself. Now, fellow, who are you, and what is your master?"

30.5 The remains of the birth house of Antonio da Traba

GUIDE. - I am Sebastianillo, a poor broken mariner of Padron, and my master for the present is the gentleman whom you see, the most valiant and wealthy of all the English. He has two ships at Vigo laden with riches. I told you so when you first seized me up there in our posada.

ALCALDE. - Where is your passport?

GUIDE. - I have no passport. Who would think of bringing a passport to such a place as this, where I don't suppose there are two individuals who can read? I have no passport; my master's passport of course includes me.

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[26] One of the two nicknames by which Traba was known, meaning 'The Hero of Finisterre'. The other was 'O Campón', for being born in the Rua do Campo, near the upper fields of the village. This last nickname was even added in the burial register of the parish [Casas, 53].

ALCALDE. - It does not. And since you have no passport, and have confessed that your name is Sebastian, you shall be shot. Antonio de la Trava, do you and the musketeers lead this Sebastianillo forth, and shoot him before the door.

ANTONIO DE LA TRAVA. - With much pleasure, Señor Alcalde, since you order it. With respect to this fellow, I shall not trouble myself to interfere. He at least is no Englishman. He has more the look of a wizard or nuveiro; one of those devils who raise storms and sink launches. Moreover, he says he is from Padron, and those of that place are all thieves and drunkards. They once played me a trick, and I would gladly be at the shooting of the whole pueblo. [27]

I now interfered, and said that if they shot the guide they must shoot me too; expatiating at the same time on the cruelty and barbarity of taking away the life of a poor unfortunate fellow who, as might be seen at the first glance, was only half witted; adding, moreover, that if any person was guilty in this case it was myself, as the other could only be considered in the light of a servant acting under my orders.

"The safest plan after all," said the alcalde, "appears to be, to send you both prisoners to Corcuvion, where the head alcalde can dispose of you as he thinks proper. You must, however, pay for your escort; for it is not to be supposed that the housekeepers of Finisterra have nothing else to do than to ramble about the country with every chance fellow who finds his way to this town." "As for that matter," said Antonio, "I will take charge of them both. I am the valiente of Finisterra, and fear no two men living. Moreover, I am sure that the captain here will make it worth my while, else he is no Englishman. Therefore let us be quick and set out for Corcuvion at once, as it is getting late. First of all, however, captain, I must search you and your baggage. You have no arms, of course? But it is best to make all sure."

Long ere it was dark I found myself again on the pony, in company with my guide, wending our way along the beach in the direction of Corcuvion. Antonio de la Trava tramped heavily on before, his musket on his shoulder.

MYSELF. - Are you not afraid, Antonio, to be thus alone with two prisoners, one of whom is on horseback? If we were to try, I think we could overpower you.

ANTONIO DE LA TRAVA. - I am the valiente do Finisterra, and I fear no odds.

MYSELF. - Why do you call yourself the valiente of Finisterra?

ANTONIO DE LA TRAVA. - The whole district call me so. When the French came to Finisterra, and demolished the fort, three perished by my hand. I stood on the mountain, up where I saw you scrambling to-day. I continued firing at the enemy, until three detached themselves in pursuit of me. The fools! two perished amongst the rocks by the

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[27] In his letter to Hasfeld of 20 November 1838, however, Borrow implies that Traba actually stood up for both himself and Sebastianillo. He writes: '[The locals] were about to put their threat into execution, notwithstanding my protestations, when an old sailor by name Antoniou dela Trava who has served in the British Navy expressed his conviction of my being an Englishman, which his colleagues had disbelieved. As he was a man of some weight in the place, he saved both our lives' [Fraser, *Hasfeld*, 29].

fire of this musket, and as for the third, I beat his head to pieces with the stock. It is on that account that they call me the valiente of Finisterra.[28]

MYSELF. - How came you to serve with the English fleet? I think I heard you say that you were present when Nelson fell.

ANTONIO DE LA TRAVA. - I was captured by your countrymen, captain; and as I had been a sailor from my childhood, they were glad of my services. I was nine months with them, and assisted at Trafalgar. I saw the English admiral die[29]. You have something of his face, and your voice, when you spoke, sounded in my ears like his own[30]. I love the English, and on that account I saved you. Think not that I would toil along these sands with you if you were one of my own countrymen. Here we are at Duyo, captain. Shall we refresh?[31]

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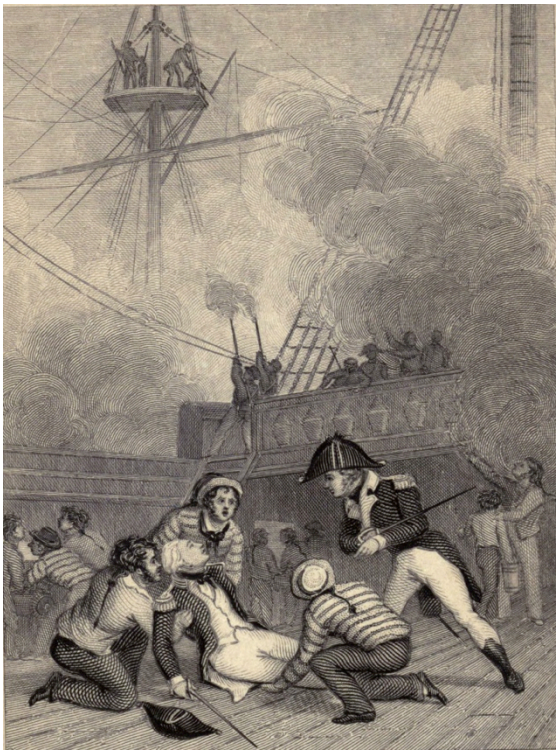
[28] Only one of his many war-stories. On another occasion, he stormed the rectory of the church of Ponte Olveira, where a group of French officers were playing cards. He killed two with an axe, and scared the others so much that they escaped through the windows, except one who had the unfortunate idea to hide up the chimney. This man Traba pulled down and strangled with his bare hands. On return from the massacre, Traba rode the horse of a French officer and had possibly dressed up in the man's coat, weapons and distinctions. Hence a fellow townsman – mistaking a hero for an invader - took a shot at him which only just missed him.

[29] Although the Spanish author Juan Campos Calvo-Sotelo [*GBB* 20, 8-20; also Campos, *Naufragos*, chapter 1] makes as strong a case as possible for the truth of this claim of Traba's, it still awaits definite proof. The notion that a young Spanish sailor would be serving on the *Victory*, or any other British vessel, in a battle against his own navy (the Spanish and French fleet having combined at Trafalgar) defies belief. Neither Traba, not any other Spanish or Galician name figures in the surviving muster rolls of Nelson's fleet. Since the whole wild tale is reduced to the remark that Traba 'had served in the British Navy' in Borrow's letter to Hasfeld of 20 November 1838 [Fraser, *Hasfeld*, 29], it is far more likely that Traba had served on one of the British frigates – such as the *Lively*, under McKinley - which in 1809, when the Peninsular War broke out between France and Spain, carried arms to the Galician *guerrilleros* and provided fire-power for the siege of cities like Vigo. These are known to have taken aboard Spanish sailors to flesh out their dwindling crews, and Traba's length of service – nine months – is in keeping with the duration of the conflict in Galicia, which started in January 1809 and ended in July with the retreat of the French from the province.

[30] Possibly an addition of Borrow's. Nelson was, like Borrow, a Norfolk man, and they will have spoken with a similar accent.

[31] In the tavern of Ramon de Noya at San Martin de Duyo [Casas, 57]. It was indeed a habit of the Galicians to stop at every tavern along the way when travelling. Leopoldo Martinez, author of a solid contemporary description of Galicia, mentions that nearly half of the 9,000 shops of Galicia were *tavernas*. 'Because the peasants almost always travel on foot,' he explains, 'they drink at almost every step during their journeys, which does not however get them drunk, since the wine is very light'. Martinez also records that at various occasions the authorities tried to stop the practice (unsuccessfully) by reducing the frequency of bars in the countryside to a maximum of one every league (i.e. 5,5 km.) [Martinez de Padin, L.: *Historia politica, religiosa y descriptiva de Galicia*, vol. 1, Madrid 1849, 185; also Gil Rey, *Recuerdos de un viaje por Galicia*, 120.]



30.6 The Death of Nelson

We did refresh, or rather Antonio de la Trava refreshed, swallowing pan after pan of wine, with a thirst which seemed unquenchable. "That man was a greater wizard than myself," whispered Sebastian, my guide, "who told us that the drunkards of Finisterra would play us a trick." At length the old hero of the Cape slowly rose, saying, that we must hasten on to Corcuvion, or the night would overtake us by the way.[32]

"What kind of person is the alcalde to whom you are conducting me?" said I.

"Oh, very different from him of Finisterra," replied Antonio. "This is a young Señorito, lately arrived from Madrid. He is not even a Gallegan. He is a mighty liberal, and it is owing chiefly to his orders that we have lately been so much on the alert. It is said that the Carlists are meditating a descent on these parts of Galicia. Let them only come to Finisterra, we are liberals there to a man, and the old valiente is ready to play the same part as in the time of the French. But, as I was telling you before, the alcalde to whom I am conducting you is a young man, and very learned, and if he thinks proper, he can speak English to you, even better than myself, notwithstanding I was a friend of Nelson, and fought by his side at Trafalgar."

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[32] Casas, who calculated the hours it would take for the whole of the narrative in this chapter, expressed his surprise that the three men, at walking pace, might even reach Corcubion before midnight [Casas, 58]. And with good reason. In his letter to Hasfeld of 20 November 1838 Borrow says he arrived about noon in Finisterre [Fraser, *Hasfeld*, 28]. Lunch, sightseeing, climbing the mountain, a short siesta, and the court-martial must have taken several hours. They cannot have started before 6 p.m. on a 10 km journey…

It was dark night before we reached Corcuvion. Antonio again stopped to refresh at a wine-shop, after which he conducted us to the house of the alcalde. His steps were by this time not particularly steady, and on arriving at the gate of the house, he stumbled over the threshold and fell. He got up with an oath, and instantly commenced thundering at the door with the stock of his musket. "Who is it?" at length demanded a soft female voice in Gallegan. "The valiente of Finisterra," replied Antonio; whereupon the gate was unlocked, and we beheld before us a very pretty female with a candle in her hand. "What brings you here so late, Antonio?" she inquired. "I bring two prisoners, mi pulida," replied Antonio. "Ave Maria!" she exclaimed, "I hope they will do no harm." "I will answer for one," replied the old man; "but, as for the other, he is a nuveiro, and has sunk more ships than all his brethren in Galicia. But be not afraid, my beauty," he continued, as the female made the sign of the cross: "first lock the gate, and then show me the way to the alcalde. I have much to tell him." The gate was locked, and bidding us stay below in the court- yard, Antonio followed the young woman up a stone stair, whilst we remained in darkness below.

After the lapse of about a quarter of an hour we again saw the candle gleam upon the staircase, and the young female appeared. Coming up to me, she advanced the candle to my features, on which she gazed very intently. After a long scrutiny she went to my guide, and having surveyed him still more fixedly, she turned to me, and said, in her best Spanish, "Senhor Cavalier, I congratulate you on your servant. He is the best-looking mozo in all Galicia. Vaya! if he had but a coat to his back, and did not go barefoot, I would accept him at once as a novio; but I have unfortunately made a vow never to marry a poor man, but only one who has got a heavy purse and can buy me fine clothes. So you are a Carlist, I suppose? Vaya! I do not like you the worse for that. But, being so, how went you to Finisterra, where they are all Christinos and negros? Why did you not go to my village? None would have meddled with you there. Those of my village are of a different stamp to the drunkards of Finisterra. Those of my village never interfere with honest people. Vaya! how I hate that drunkard of Finisterra who brought you, he is so old and ugly; were it not for the love which I bear to the Senhor Alcalde, I would at once unlock the gate and bid you go forth, you and your servant, the buen mozo."[33]

Antonio now descended. "Follow me," said he; "his worship the alcalde will be ready to receive you in a moment." Sebastian and myself followed him upstairs to a room where, seated behind a table, we beheld a young man of low stature but handsome features and very fashionably dressed[34]. He appeared to be inditing a letter, which, when he had concluded, he delivered to a secretary to be transcribed. He then looked at me for a moment fixedly, and the following conversation ensued between us:-

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[33] Paradoxically, the maid of the famously liberal Alcalde proves to be an outspoken Carlist. This is, however, historic: for whatever precise Marxist reason, many domestic servants sympathised strongly with Carlism.

[34] In 1923 the newspaper *Voz de Galicia* asked its readers to discover who this mayor of Corcubion might have been. The results, published in the issues of May 16, May 31 and June 15 of 1923, was that the man Borrow met must have been the local Judge of Instruction, Don Laureano Maria Muñoz, born in Estramadura, married in Galicia and a long-time resident of Coruña. The formal mayor of the town was Don Diego de Figueroa y Porrúa, but he was over 60 years old and for reasons of health never took possession of his office. [Casas, 59f.]

ALCALDE. - I see that you are an Englishman, and my friend Antonio here informs me that you have been arrested at Finisterra.

MYSELF. - He tells you true; and but for him I believe that I should have fallen by the hands of those savage fishermen.

ALCALDE. - The inhabitants of Finisterra are brave, and are all liberals. Allow me to look at your passport? Yes, all in form. Truly it was very ridiculous that they should have arrested you as a Carlist.

MYSELF. - Not only as a Carlist, but as Don Carlos himself.

ALCALDE. - Oh! most ridiculous; mistake a countryman of the grand Baintham for such a Goth!

MYSELF. - Excuse me, Sir, you speak of the grand somebody.

ALCALDE. - The grand Baintham. He who has invented laws for all the world. I hope shortly to see them adopted in this unhappy country of ours.

MYSELF. - Oh! you mean Jeremy Bentham. Yes! a very remarkable man in his way.[35]

ALCALDE. - In his way! In all ways. The most universal genius which the world ever produced:- a Solon, a Plato, and a Lope de Vega.

MYSELF. - I have never read his writings. I have no doubt that he was a Solon; and as you say, a Plato. I should scarcely have thought, however, that he could be ranked as a poet with Lope de Vega.

ALCALDE. - How surprising! I see, indeed, that you know nothing of his writings, though an Englishman. Now, here am I, a simple alcalde of Galicia, yet I possess all the writings of Baintham on that shelf, and I study them day and night.

MYSELF. - You doubtless, Sir, possess the English Language.

ALCALDE. - I do. I mean that part of it which is contained in the writings of Baintham. I am most truly glad to see a countryman of his in these Gothic wildernesses. I understand and appreciate your motives for visiting them: excuse the incivility and rudeness which you have experienced. But we will endeavour to make you reparation. You are this moment free: but it is late; I must find you a lodging for the night. I know one close by which will just suit you. Let us repair thither this moment. Stay, I think I see a book in your hand.

MYSELF. - The New Testament.

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[35] Jeremy Bentham (1748 - 1832), philosopher, social reformer, and jurist. His ideas – which included freedom of expression, abolition of slavery, abolition of the death penalty, animal rights and even the decriminalisation of homosexual acts – were extremely progressive for his age. His works were indeed well-known and popular among the Spanish radical liberals.

ALCALDE. - What book is that?

MYSELF. - A portion of the sacred writings, the Bible.

ALCALDE. - Why do you carry such a book with you?

MYSELF. - One of my principal motives in visiting Finisterra was to carry this book to that wild place.

ALCALDE. - Ha, ha! how very singular. Yes, I remember. I have heard that the English highly prize this eccentric book. How very singular that the countrymen of the grand Baintham should set any value upon that old monkish book.

It was now late at night, and my new friend attended me to the lodging which he had destined for me, and which was at the house of a respectable old female, where I found a clean and comfortable room. On the way I slipped a gratuity into the hand of Antonio, and on my arrival, formally, and in the presence of the alcalde, presented him with the Testament, which I requested he would carry back to Finisterra, and keep in remembrance of the Englishman in whose behalf he had so effectually interposed.

ANTONIO. - I will do so, your worship; and when the winds blow from the north-west, preventing our launches from putting to sea, I will read your present[36]. Farewell, my captain, and when you next come to Finisterra I hope it will be in a valiant English bark, with plenty of contrabando on board, and not across the country on a pony, in company with nuveiros and men of Padron.

Presently arrived the handmaid of the alcalde with a basket, which she took into the kitchen, where she prepared an excellent supper for her master's friend. On its being served up the alcalde bade me farewell, having first demanded whether he could in any way forward my plans.

"I return to Saint James to-morrow," I replied, "and I sincerely hope that some occasion will occur which will enable me to acquaint the world with the hospitality which I have experienced from so accomplished a scholar as the Alcalde of Corcuvion."[37]

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[36] Although the descendants of Antonio da Traba are still living in Finisterra, and some of them have made a search, this copy of Borrow's Scio New Testament has never been found. Some doubt must remain, meanwhile, whether Traba would have been able to read…

[37] Borrow was one of the very few Englishmen alive who had seen Finisterre both from the land- and from the sea-side. Hence, in December 1846 he was summoned as a witness by the court which tried the civil case *Faeron vs. P & O* concerning the sinking of the *Great Liverpool* in the bay on 24 February of 1846. Unfortunately, his testimony does not seem to have survived, nor do we know whether he appeared for the passenger or for the shipping company [Campos, *Naufragos*, 76f; Missler, *GBB* II : 3, 15-23 & *GBB* II : 6, 15-18]. Incidentally, the captain of the *Great Liverpool* – Alexander MacLeod - may also have been the captain who in 1835 almost floundered the *Manchester* in the same place with Borrow aboard, as told in chapter 15 above. [Knapp, I : 257; Missler, *GBB* II : 3, 19f]