

UNEXPLORED SPAIN



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CHAPTER XXVIII

AFTER CHAMOIS IN THE ASTURIAS

PICOS DE EUROPA

AT the château of Nuévos, hidden away amidst Cantabrian hills, hard by where the "Picos de Europa" form the most prominent feature of that 100-mile range, we were welcomed by the Conde de la Vega de Sella, whom we had met the previous year in Norway, and his friend Bernaldo de Quirós. Our host was a bachelor and the menage curiously mixed; there was a wild Mexican-Indian servant, but more alarming still, a tame wolf prowled free about the house—none too tame either, as testified by a half-healed wound on his master's arm. The bedrooms in the corridor which we occupied had no doors, merely curtains hanging across the doorway, and all night long that wolf pattered up and down the passage outside. My own feelings will not be described—there was an ominous mien in that wolf's eye and in those immense jaws.

Beyond patches of maize and other minute crops grown in infinitesimal fields divided by stone walls and surrounded by woods of chestnut and hazel, the whole landscape surrounding the château was composed of towering grey mountains. It was from this point that with our kind host we had projected an expedition to form acquaintance with chamois, and to see the system of a *montería* as practised in the Biscayan mountains. The month was September.



The first stage—on wheels—brought us to the village of Arénas de Cabrales, where a gipsy fair or *Romería* was raging, affording striking display of local customs and fashion. The girls, handsome though somewhat stalwart, wearing on their heads bright-coloured kerchiefs (instead of, as in Andalusia, flowers in the hair), danced strange steps to the music of a drum and a sort of bagpipe called the *Gaita*. Cider here replaced wine as a beverage, and wooden sabots are worn instead of the hempen sandals of the south.

Maize is the chief crop, and women work hard, doing, except the ploughing, most of the field labour.

The hill-country around belonged chiefly to our host, who was received with a sort of feudal respect. Ancient rights included (this we were told, but did not see enforced) the privilege of kissing all pretty daughters of the estate. The region is primitive enough even for the survival of so agreeable a custom. Such detail in a serious work must appear frivolous by comparison, yet it reflects the *genius loci*.

This was the point at which we had to take the hill.

Our outfit was packed on ponies, and being joined by three of the chamois-hunters, we set out, following the course of the river Cares. This gorge of the Cares, along with its sister-valley the Desfiladero de la Deva, form two of the most magnificent canyons in all the Asturias, and perhaps have few equals in the wider world outside. The bridle-track led along rock-shelves on the hanging mountain-side, presently falling again till we rode close by the torrent of the Cares, here swirling in foaming rapids with alternations of deep pools of such crystalline water that trout could be discerned swimming twenty feet below the surface. The water varied between a diamond-white and an emerald-green, according as the stream flowed over the white limestone or rocks of darker shade.

Approaching Bulnes, the track became absolutely appalling, zigzagging to right and left up an almost perpendicular mountain. Riding was here out of the question. It was giddy work enough on foot, rounding corners where the outer rim overhung a sheer drop of hundreds of feet to the torrent below, and with no protection to save horse or man in the event of a slip or false step. Not without mental tremors we surmounted it and reached Bulnes, a dozen stone, windowless houses clustered on an escarpment. This is facetiously called the "Upper Town," and we

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presumed that another group of hovels hidden somewhere beneath our sight formed Lower Bulnes.

We entered the best looking of these stone-age abodes, and discovered that it formed the presbytery of the Cura of Bulnes, a strange mixture of alpine hut with Gothic hermitage. Slabs of rough stone projecting from unhewn walls served as tables, while rudely carved oak-chests did double duty as seats or wardrobes in turn. The Cura's bed occupied one corner, and from the walls hung gun and rifle, together with accoutrements of the chase—satchels, belts, and pouches, all made of chamois-skin. At first sight indeed the whole presbytery reeked rather of hunting than of holiness—it is scarce too strong to say it smelt of game. An inner apartment, windowless and lit by the feeble flicker of a *mariposa*, that recalled the reed-lights of mediaeval history (and to which, by the way, access was only gained past other cells which appeared to be the abode of cows and of the cook respectively), was assigned to us.

The Padre himself was away on the cliffs above cutting hay, for he combines agriculture with the care of souls, owns many cows, and makes the celebrated cheese known as "Cabrales." Presently he joined us in his stone chamber, and at once showed himself to be, by his frank and genuine manner, what later experience proved him, a true sportsman and a most unselfish companion. His Reverence at once set about the details of organising our hunt, sent his nephew to round-up the mountain lads, some being sent off at once to spend that night, how, we know not, in crags of the Peña Vieja, while others were instructed to join us there in the morning.

While we dined on smoked chamois and rough red wine he busied himself arranging weapons, ammunition, and mocassins for a few days' work on the crags. Our arrival having been prearranged, we were soon on our upward way, by sinous tracks which lead to the summits of the Picos de Europa, some altitudes of which are as follows: Peña Vieja, 10,046 feet; Picos de Hierro, 9610 feet; Pico de San Benigno, 9329 feet. All heavy baggage was left below; there only remained the tent, rugs, guns, and cartridges, and these were got up, heaven knows how, to about half the required height on the backs of two donkeys. For provisions we relied on the milk and bread of the cheese-makers who live up there, much in the style of the Norwegian peasants

at their *saeters*, or summer sheilings on the fjeld. Hard by the *cabaña*, or cabin, of these honest folks, our tent was pitched—altitude, 5800 feet.

With the first of the daylight, after a drink of milk, we started upwards, our host, the Cura, Bertie, and ourselves.

With us were ten goat-herds who had to flank the drive; the others would already be occupying allotted positions, we knew not where. Three hours' climbing—the usual struggle, only worse—took us to the first line of "passes," far above the last signs of vegetation and amidst what little snow remains here in summer. This "drive" had been reckoned a certainty, and four animals were reported seen in the mist, but no chamois came in to the guns, and yet another two-hours' climb had to be faced ere the second set of posts was reached.

This bit, however, definitely stopped for the moment my career as a chamois-hunter, such was the slippery, perpendicular, and utterly dangerous nature of the rocks. A fortnight before I had climbed the Plaza de Almanzór in the Sierra de Grédos, but these pinnacles of the Picos proved beyond my powers. The admission, beyond any words of mine, bespeaks the character of these Cantabrian peaks. Here on a dizzy ledge at 8000 feet I remained behind, while the rest of the party, filing up a rock-stair, were lost to sight within fifteen yards.

Before me stretched away peak beyond peak in emulating altitudes the whole vast cordillera of Cantabria—a glory of mountain-forms.

. . . the things which tower, which shine,
Whose smile makes glad, whose frown is terrible.

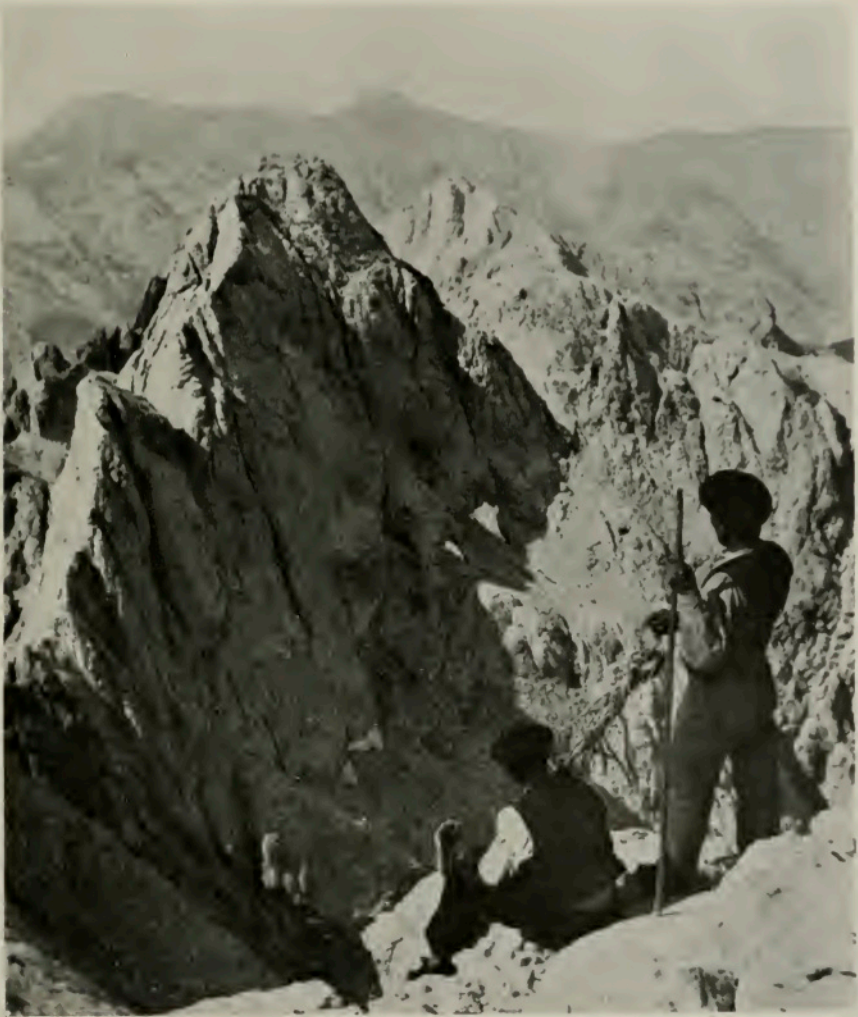
In majestic array, pinnacles and crannied summits, flecked and streaked with glistening snows, enthral and subdued. The giants Peña Vieja, Urriales, Garnizo, lift their heads above the rest, piercing the blue ether—fancied spires in some celestial shrine.

This smiling noontide an all-pervading spirit of peace reigns; the sublimity of solitude generates reverence and awe, the voice of the Creator seems audible amidst encompassing silence.

Far away below, as in another world, lie outspread champagnes; sunlit stubbles, newly stripped of autumnal crops, form chequers of contrasted colour that set off with golden background the dark



CHAMOIS FROM LIFE ON LA LLOROSA, PEÑA VIEJA.



EL CORROBLE, PICOS DE EUROPA, ASTURIAS.

THE HOME OF THE CHAMOIS.

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Asturian woods, while fresh green pastures blend in harmony with the riant foliage of the vine.

Presently, following my companion, a goat-herd, who had been left with me, by slow degrees we reached the spot appointed to await our party's return.

Hours went by and six o'clock came before, on the skyline above, they appeared, five of the *monteros* each bearing a chamois on his shoulder. Then, in the 2000-foot ravine towards the north, a third drive was attempted for my special benefit; but the day was far spent, and during the crucial half-hour snow-clouds skurrying along the crests shut out all chance of seeing game. The beaters reported enclosing quite forty chamois, some of which broke downwards through the flankers, the rest passing a trifle wide of the guns. This beat is termed "El Arbol."

Long and weary was the descent, and fiendish places we had to pass ere the welcome camp-fires loomed up through gathering darkness. Those who wish to shoot chamois should commence the undertaking before they have passed the half-century.

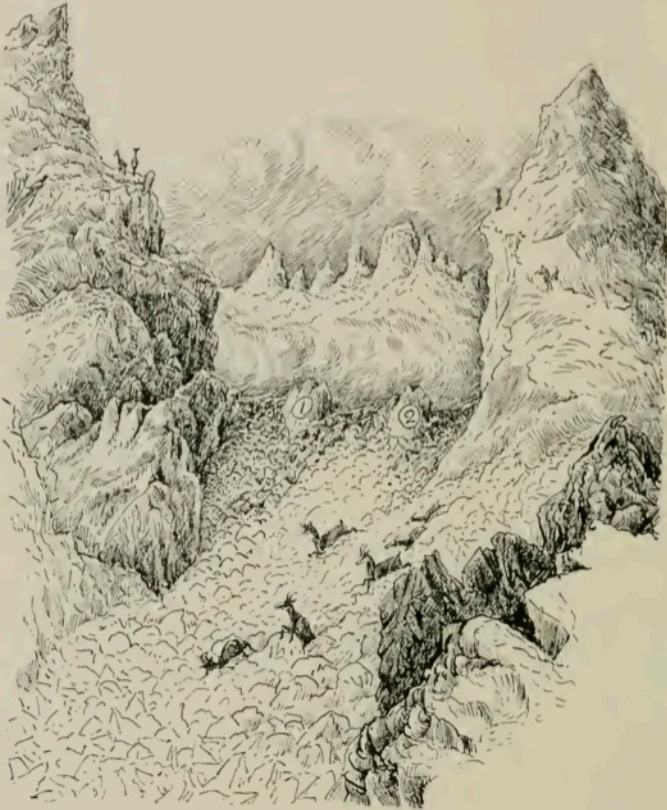
The successful drive that was thus missed by No. 1 is hereunder described by No. 2. We give the narrative in detail, inasmuch as this day's operation was typical of the system of chamois-shooting as practised in the Asturian mountains.

After leaving No. 1 as mentioned, and while proceeding to our next position, a number of chamois were viewed scattered in three groups on the hanging screes of a second gorge, a mile beyond that which we had intended to beat. After consultation held, it was decided to alter the plan and to send the guns completely round the outer periphery of encircling heights so as to command the passes immediately above the game. This involved two hours' climbing and incidentally three detours, scrambling each time down the precipitous moraine to avoid showing in sight of the chamois.

Upon reaching the reverse point, the Conde and I were assigned the most likely posts; and these being also the highest, a final heart-breaking climb up a thousand feet of loose rocks succeeded. Chamois, like ibex, when disturbed instinctively make for the highest ground, hence our occupation of the topmost passes. Cheered on by the Conde, himself as hard as steel, the effort was accomplished, and I sank down, breathless, parched, and exhausted, behind a big rock that was indicated as my position.

The lower passes had meanwhile been occupied by the Padre and by sundry shepherds armed with primitive-looking guns.

On recovering some degree of breath and strength, I surveyed my surroundings. We were both stationed on the topmost arête, in a nick that broke for 80 or 100 yards the rim of a knife-



A CHAMOIS DRIVE—PICOS DE EUROPA

Diagram illustrative of text. Our positions on arête marked (1) and (2); "Cathedral" on right. Valley beyond full of driving mist (passing our power to depict).

edged ridge that separated two stupendous gorges. On my right, while facing the beat, and not 30 yards away, the nick was terminated by a rock-mass perpendicular and four-square as a cathedral tower, that uprose some 100 feet sheer. On the left also rose cliffs though not quite so abrupt. The position was such that any game attempting to pass the nick must appear within 50 or 60 yards—so, in our simplicity, we thought.

Behind us dipped away the long moraine of loose rocks by

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which we had ascended; while in front, by stepping but a few paces across the narrow neck, we could look down into the depths of the gorge whence the quarry was to approach, as we feebly attempt to show in diagram annexed.

The panorama from these altitudes was superb beyond words. We were here far above the stratum of mist which enshrouded our camp and the sierra for some distance above it. We looked down upon a billowy sea of white clouds pierced here and there by the summits and ridges of outstanding crags like islands on a surf-swept coast.

Of bird-life there was no sign beyond choughs and a soaring eagle that our guides called *aguila pintada* (*Aquila bonelli*, immature). There are wild-boar in the forests far below, with occasional wolves and yet more occasional bear.

Hark! the distant cries of beaters break the solemn silence and announce that operations have begun. Almost instantly thereafter the rattle of loose stones dislodged by the feet of moving chamois came up from beneath our eyrie. So near was the sound that expectation waxed tense and eyes scanned each possible exit.

Then from the heights on the left, and already above us, sprang into view a band of five chamois lightly skipping from ledge to ledge with an agility that cannot be conveyed in words. The Conde and I fired simultaneously. The beast I had selected pulled himself convulsively together, sprang in air, and then fell backwards down the abyss whence he had just emerged. So abrupt was the skyline that no second barrel was possible; but while we yet gazed into space the rattle of falling stones right *behind* attracted attention in that direction, and a chamois was bounding across that loose moraine (or "canal" as it is here called) by which we had ascended. He flew those jumbled rocks as though they were a ballroom floor, offering at best but a snapshot, and the bullet found the beast already protected by a rock. Hardly, however, had cartridges been replaced than three more *Rebecos* followed along precisely the same track, and this time each gun secured one buck.

Note that all these last four animals had come in from our *right*, that is, they had escalated the "cathedral"; though by what earthly means they could surmount sheer rock-walls devoid of visible crack or crevice passes human comprehension. For

myself, having regarded the cathedral as impassable, I had kept no watch on that side.

For the next half-hour all was quiet. Then we heard again the rattle of hoofs somewhere down under, and on the sound ceasing, had gently raised ourselves to peer over into the ceric abyss in front, when a chamois suddenly poked his head over the rocks within fifteen yards, only to vanish like a flash.

From this advanced position, in the far distance we could now distinguish the beaters, looking like flies as they descended the opposite circle of crests, and could hear their cries and the reverberation of the rocks they dislodged to start the game. An extra burst of clamour denoted game afoot, and a few seconds later another chamois (having once more mocked the cathedral barrier) darted across the moraine behind and fell within a score of yards of the previous pair, though all three were finally recovered several hundred feet below, having rolled down these precipitous screees. The first chamois I had shot had fallen even farther—at one point over a sheer drop that could not be less than 100 feet. His body was smashed into pulp, every bone broken, but curiously the horns had escaped intact. We were much struck by the clear emerald-green light in the eyes of newly killed chamois.

The beaters being now close at hand, we scrambled down to rejoin the Padre who had occupied the *puesto* next below ours. We found that worthy man very happy as he had succeeded in putting two slugs into a chamois-buck, to which the *coup de grâce* had been given by Don Serafin lower down.

A curious incident occurred as we made our way to the next beat where "No. 1" was to rejoin us. Suddenly the rugged stones that surrounded us were vivified by a herd of bouncing chamois—they had presumably been disturbed elsewhere and several came our way. A buck fell to a long shot of our host; while another suddenly sprang into view right under the Padre's feet. This, he averred, he would certainly have killed had he been loaded with slugs (*postas*) instead of ball.

The six chamois brought into camp to-night included four bucks and two does. We had not ourselves found it possible to distinguish the sexes in life, though long practice enabled the Conde to do so when within moderate distance. All six were of

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a foxy-red colour, and the horns measured from seven to eight inches over the bend.

Chamois are certainly very much easier to obtain than ibex. Not only are they tenfold more abundant, but, owing to their diurnal habits, they are easily seen while feeding in broad daylight (often in large herds) on the open hillsides. They never enter caves or crevices of the rocks as ibex habitually do.

Chamois might undoubtedly be obtained by stalking, though that art is not practised in Spain. The excessively rugged nature of the ground is rather against it; for one's view being often so restricted, there is danger while stalking chamois, which have been espied from a distance, of "jumping" others previously unseen though much nearer. Driving, as above described, is the method usually adopted. Few beaters comparatively are required; the positions of flankers and stops are often clearly indicated by the natural configuration of the crests.

Dogs are occasionally employed. The game, in their terror of canine pursuers, will push forward into precipices whence there is no exit; and then, rather than attempt to turn, will spring down to certain death.

The best foot-gear is the Spanish *alpargata*, or hemp-soled sandal. They will withstand two or three days' wear on the roughest of rocks and only cost some eighteenpence a pair. Nailed boots are useless and dangerous.

Similar days followed, some more successful, others less, but all laborious in the last degree. Both limbs and lungs had well-nigh given out ere the time arrived to strike camp and abandon our eyrie.

During the descent to Bulnes we noticed a goat which, in feeding along the crags, had reached a spot whence it could neither retreat nor escape, and by bleating cries distinctly displayed its fear. Now that goat was only worth one dollar, yet its owner spent a solid hour, risking his own life, in crawling along ledges and shelves of a fearful rock-wall (*pared*) to save the wretched animal. We looked on speechless, fascinated with horror—at times pulses well-nigh stood still; even our hunters recognised that this was a rash performance. Yet that goat was reached, a lasso attached to its neck, and it was drawn upwards to safety.

This incident occurred on the Naranjo de Bulnes, a dolomite

mountain which stands out like a perpendicular and four-square tower, in the central group or *massif* of the Picos—that known as Urriales. The actual height of the Naranjo is given as 9424 feet, which is exceeded by those of either of the other two groups to east and west respectively. But its abrupt configuration gives the Naranjo by far the most imposing, indeed appalling appearance, far surpassing all its rivals, while its lateral walls of sheer rock, some of which reach 1500 to 2000 feet vertically, long lent this peak the reputation of being absolutely unscalable. That feat has, however (after countless failures), been accomplished, in the first instance by Don Pedro Pidal, Marquis de Villaviciosa de Asturias, who was accompanied in the ascent by Gregorio Perez, a famous chamois-hunter of Caín.

At Arénas de Cabrales we bade farewell to our kind host, despatched Caraballo with the baggage to Santander, thence to find his way to Jerez as best he might, by sea; and ourselves drove off through the hills forty miles to the railway at Cabezón de la Sal, there to entrain for Bilbao, Paris, and London.

On August 19, 1881, at a royal *montería* above Aliva and Andara H.M. Don Alfonso XII. recovered the same evening (lying dead around his post) no less than twenty-one chamois. Thirteen more, which had fallen into the abyss beneath, were brought in next morning, and nine others later, making a total of forty-three chamois actually recovered, besides those that had lodged in such inaccessible spots that their bodies could not be reached.

At another royal shoot held 1st and 2nd September 1905 H.M. King Alfonso XIII. killed five chamois, the total bag on that occasion being twenty-three.

THE PICOS DE EUROPA DECLARED A ROYAL PRESERVE

In 1905 the freeholders of those villages in the three provinces of Santander, León, and Asturias, which lie encircling the Picos de Europa, offered to H.M. King Alfonso XIII. the exclusive rights of hunting the chamois throughout the whole "Central Group." His Majesty was pleased to accept the offer, and in the following year commissioned the Marquis of Villaviciosa de Asturias (the intrepid conqueror of the Naranjo) to appoint guards to preserve the game.

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Five such guards were appointed in 1906, their chief being the aforementioned Gregorio Perez, representing the region of Caín, the other four representing those of Bulnes, Sotres, Espiñama, and Valdeón.

The chamois in the four regions named can be counted in thousands.



TYPES OF SPANISH BIRD-LIFE

HOOPOE (*Upupa epops*)

The crest normally folds flat, backwards (as shown at p. 69), but at intervals flashes upright like a halo.

CHAPTER XXIX

HIGHLANDS OF ASTURIAS

(1) THE TROUT IN SPAIN

THE Asturian Highlands—a maze of mist-wreathed mountains forested with birch and pine, the home of brown bear and capercaillie, and on whose towering peaks roam herds of chamois by hundreds—form a region distinct from the rest of Spain.

Rushing rivers and mountain-torrents coursing down each rent in those rock-ramparts attracted our earliest angling ambitions. Some of those efforts—with rod and gun—are recorded in *Wild Spain*, and we purpose attempting no more—whether with pen or fly-rod. For the Spanish trout is given no sort of sporting chance, and lovely streams—a very epitome of trouting-water—that might make the world a pleasanter planet (and enrich their owners too) are abandoned to the assassin with dynamite and quicklime, or to villainous nets, cruives, and other engines of wholesale destruction with which we have no concern.

Never since the date of *Wild Spain* have we cast line on Spanish waters, nor ever again will we attempt it. Spain which, from her French frontier in the Pyrenees right across to that of Portugal on the west, might rival any European country in this respect stands well-nigh at the foot of the list. Not in the most harassed streams of Norway, nor in her hardest—"ottered" lakes, have the trout so damnable a fate dealt out to them as in northern Spain, and for twenty years we have abandoned it as an angling potentiality—or, to put it mildly, there are countries infinitely more attractive to the wandering fisherman.

The case of the Spanish trout as it stands to-day is summed up in the following letter, dated April 1910, from our friend Capt. F. J. Mitchell:—

I have tried a great many of the best rivers in northern Spain, and

have come to the conclusion that for angling purposes they have been hopelessly ruined—by dynamite, chloruro, lime, coca, and various other things. There may be deep pools here and there where fish have escaped, but they are very few. If your book is not finished you can put this in, as it is accurate, and may save many a disappointment to the free fisherman.

Farther south, in León and northern Estremadura, are also rivers of first-rate character. The Alagón, for example, with its tributaries, is well adapted for trout—dashing streams with alternate stretches of pool and rapid. These still hold trout in their head-waters among the mountains; but lower down the speckled beauties are well-nigh extirpated.

In this region one frequently observes, not without surprise, evidence of the introduction and acclimatisation of exotic products by old-time Moors—often in most outlandish nooks, wherever their keen eyes had spotted some fertile patch: probably, ere this, that energetic race would have preserved and cultivated the trout! The success of such enterprise in New Zealand and South Africa (it is even promising to succeed under the Equator in B.E. Africa), and indeed in Spain itself (at Algeciras), attests how easily these Iberian waters might be endowed with a new interest and a new value.

Such, however, is existent apathy that, although the local natives (N. Estremadura) were aware of the presence of fish in their rivers, and told us that some ran to 10 or 12 lbs. in weight (these were barbel), yet they knew no distinctive names for the various species. All fish, big or little, were merely *pesces*—*Muy buenas pesces*. None could describe them, whether as to appearance or habit, nor did they know whether some species were migratory or otherwise.

The only angling we have seen practised in this province was at Trujillo, where in some lakes adjoining that old-world city *Tencas* (we presume tench) up to 5 or 6 lbs. are taken with bait.

(2) SALMON

To such an extent used these to abound in Asturian streams that maid-servants stipulated on entering domestic service that they should not be given salmon more than twice a week. At the present day the pollution of rivers by coal-mining and other impurities has in some cases banished the salmon entirely, in

others greatly reduced their numbers. There yet remain, nevertheless, rivers in Asturias (such as the Deva and Cares) where salmon abound, and where numbers are still caught—chiefly by net, though rod-fishing is gradually extending its popularity, “owing to the glorious emotions it excites.”

A local method deserves a word of description. In the crystal-clear waters of N. Spain salmon are regularly captured by expert divers. Its exact position having been marked, the diver, swimming warily up from behind, slips a running noose over the salmon’s head. The noose draws tight as the fish begins to run; an attached line is then hauled upon by a second fisherman on the bank.

The Marquis de Villaviciosa de Asturias writes us:—

It is a common practice with the fishermen to dive and capture salmon in their arms (*à brazo*). My grandfather, the Marquis de Camposagrado, caught twelve thus in a single morning in the river Nalon in Asturias.

(3) BEAR-HUNTING IN ASTURIAS

To the same nobleman (one of the first sportsmen of Spain) we are indebted for the following note:—

As regards the chase of the bear in Asturias, where I have killed four, I may say that it commences in September, at which period the bears are in the habit of descending nightly from the higher mountain-forests to the lower ground in order to raid the maize-fields in the valleys. Expert trackers, sent out at daybreak, spoor the bear right up to whichever covert he may have entered, and from which no further tracks emerge beyond.

The locality at which the animal has laid up being thus ascertained, a *montería* (mountain-drive) is organised—the beaters being provided with crackers, empty tins, hunting-horns, and every sort of ear-splitting engine—even the services of the bagpiper¹ are requisitioned!

Three or four guns are usually required, and are posted along the line where the bear is most likely to break—such as where the forest runs out to a point; or where it is narrowed by some projecting spur of precipitous rocks; or a deep valley where the covert is flanked by a mountain-torrent that restricts and defines the probable line of escape.

The bear (which is in the habit of attacking and destroying much

¹ *Gaitero* is the word used. The *gaita* is a musical instrument which we may translate as bagpipes.

cattle) comes crashing through the brushwood, breaking down all obstacles, and giving ample notice by the noise of his advance. If wounded he will attack the aggressor; but otherwise bears only become dangerous when they have young or are hurt in some way. The picturesque nature of these mountain-forests lends a further fascination to the chase of the bear in Asturias. From twenty to thirty bears are killed here every year.

The following quaint paragraphs we extract from Spanish newspapers:—

FIGHT WITH A BEAR.—In the mountains of the Province of Lerida (Catalonia) a bear last week attacked and overpowered a muleteer, intending to devour him. A shepherd who happened to be in the neighbourhood, though at some little distance, witnessed the occurrence. Hastening with his utmost speed to the spot, he threw himself between the bear and its victim; and after a prolonged and strenuous combat (*lucha larga y esforzada*), the shepherd succeeded with his lance (*garrocha*) in killing the savage beast (*fiera*).

In his gratitude, the muleteer desired to present the shepherd with the best horse of his cavalcade, but this the latter declined.—*November 24, 1907.*

INCURSION OF A BEAR.—In the outskirts of the village of Parámo in the Province of Oviedo (Asturias) there has within the last few days made its presence felt an immense bear which continued to execute terrible destruction among the cattle belonging to the villagers. Fortunately the parish-priest, who is an expert shot, succeeded in killing the depredator. It weighed 140 kilograms (= 300 lbs.).—*April 25, 1908.* [Two others are recorded to weigh 400 and 440 lbs.]

CHASE OF A SHE-BEAR.—**SANTANDÉR, February 1909.** From Molledo an assemblage of the local peasantry, mustered for the purpose, and bearing every kind of weapon, sallied forth, to give battle to a bear which for some weeks had been working havoc among their flocks and herds. After traversing the mountains in all directions without result, they were already returning, dead-beat and disappointed, towards their village, when they suddenly descried the bear standing in the entrance to a cave. On observing the presence of hunters, the animal disappeared within. A shepherd named Melchor Martinez at once followed, penetrating the interior of the cavern which extends far into the mountain-side. Presently on indistinctly perceiving (*divisando*) the beast, Melchor gave it a shot—flying out himself with hair all standing on end (*encrespados*) at the roaring of the wild beast (*fiera*). Melchor, nevertheless, at once entered the den again and fired a second shot—jumping out immediately thereafter. After a short interval, the roars of the *fiera* within having ceased, the hunters in a body entered the cavern and found an enormous she-bear lying dead, together with four young, alive, which they carried away.

(Bravo, Melchor Martinez!)

(4) GAME-BIRDS OF CANTABRIA

Alike in its game-denizens with other physical features, Cantabria is differentiated from the rest of Spain, approximating rather to a north-European similitude. Thus the capercaillie is spread along the whole Biscayan range though nowhere numerous, and in appearance less so than in fact, owing to the density of these mountain-forests.

During our long but fruitless rambles after bear we raised but four; that, however, was in spring when these birds are apt to lie close.

In the Pyrenees (where the capercaillie is known as *Gallo de Bosque*) a certain number are shot every winter along with roebuck and pig in mountain-drives (*monterías*); but in the Asturias the pursuit of the *Gallo de Monte* is effected (as in Austria and northern Europe) during its courting-season in May. The system is well known. The opportunity occurs at dusk and dawn, the stalker advancing while the lovelorn male sings a frenzied epithalamium, halting instantly when the bird becomes silent.

Ptarmigan are found in the Pyrenees, but seem to extend no farther west than the Province of Navarre, which area also coincides roughly with the southern distribution of the hazel-grouse (*Tetrao bonasia*) though we had some suspicion (not since confirmed) that the latter may extend into Asturias.

Our common grey partridge, unknown in S. Spain, occurs all along the Cantabrian highlands up to, but not beyond, the Cordillera de León. Here it descends to the foothills in winter, but is never found on the plains.

A bird peculiar to this region, though not game, deserves remark, the great black woodpecker, a subarctic species which we have observed in the Picos de Europa.

ANGLING IN RIVER AND SEA¹

Nearly all the Spanish rivers when they leave the sierras and dawdle through the plains degenerate into sluggish mud-charged streams; but most of them are well stocked with barbel, which may be caught by methods similar to those in vogue on the Thames, *i.e.* by float-fishing or ledgering with fine but strong tackle, as the first rush of a barbel is worthy of a trout. These

¹ For notes on these subjects, we are indebted to Mr. Carl D. Williams.

fish average about one pound in weight, but in favourable spots, such as mill-tails, run up to 10 lbs. and upwards.

The Spanish barbel has developed one trait in advance of its English cousins, for it will rise to a fly, or at least to a grasshopper. Owing to the abundance of these insects and of crickets along the river-banks in summer, the barbel have acquired a taste for such delicacies, and a hot June afternoon in Andalusia may be worse spent than in "dapping" beneath the trees that fringe the banks of Guadalete and similar rivers.

The *Boga*, a little fish of the roach or dace family, seldom exceeding a quarter pound, will afford amusement in all the smaller trout-streams of Spain and Portugal when trout are recusant. The *boga* is lured with a worm-tail (on finest gut and smallest hook) from each little run or cascade, whence five or six dozens may be extracted in an afternoon.

The Grey Mullet (Spanish, *Lisa*) is a good sporting fish ranging from half a pound up to four pounds weight, and caught readily in tidal rivers as it comes up from sea on the flood. Native anglers are often very successful, using long roach-poles and gear similar to that of the roach-fisher at home. The bait is either lug-worm or paste, and on favouring days as many as two dozen mullet are landed during the run of the flood-tide.

The Shad (Spanish, *Sabalo*), though not only the handsomest but also the best-eating of all tidal-river fish, is of no concern to the angler, since it refuses to look at lure of any kind.

The Tunny (Spanish, *Atun*) frequents the south-Spanish coasts and comes in millions to the mouths of the big rivers (especially the Guadalquivir) to spawn. The usual method of capture is by a huge fixed net called the *almadrava*, extending three miles out to sea, and placed at such an angle to the coast-line that the fish, on striking it, follow along to the inshore end, where they enter a *corral* or enclosed space about an acre in extent. Here the fishing-boats lie waiting, and when as many as 500 huge tunnies (they average 300 lbs. apiece) are enclosed at once, a scene of wild excitement and bloodshed ensues, the great fish darting and splashing around their prison, sending spray flying mast-high, while the fishermen yell and gaff and harpoon by turns.

The most successful *almadrava* is situate at Rota, some seven miles south of the mouth of Guadalquivir, the average catch for the season (May 1 till August 1) being about 20,000 tunnies. A

canning factory stands on the shore hard by, where the fish are boiled, potted, and shipped to Italy, whence (the tins being labelled "Italian Tunny") they are exported to all parts of the world! The flesh resembles veal, and is much appreciated in South America.

ROD-FISHING FOR TUNNY

At this period, when the tunny go to spawn (exclusively larger fish), they travel, as the Spaniards say, with their mouths shut, and nothing will induce them to look at a bait. There occurs, however, in winter (November to February) another "run" of smaller fish averaging 50 to 150 lbs. apiece, and these are amenable to temptation. Tarifa, in the Straits of Gibraltar, is a favourable point from which to attempt this sport. The system is to cruise about in a *falucho*, or sailing-boat, carrying a plentiful supply of sardines, mackerel, and other small fish to serve as bait. These, on arrival at likely waters, are thrown overboard one by one till at length they attract a roving tunny. The operation is repeated till the quarry is enticed close up to the vessel. A similar fish, impaled on a two-inch hook, is then offered him, dangling on the surface, and will probably be seized. The tunny on finding himself held, makes off in a bee-line at a mile a minute. Needless to say, the strongest tackle must be used, together with some hundreds of yards of line, and the fight will be severe and prolonged, for the tunny is one of the swiftest and most active of fish, and he weighs as much as an average man. Few amateurs have hitherto attempted this sport; but as large numbers of tunny are caught thus by professional fishermen with extremely coarse hand-lines, there seems to be no reason why "big-game fishing" in Spain, if scientifically pursued, might not rival that of California.

The Bonito is another fine game-fish which may be caught at sunrise at nearly any point on the Andalusian sea-board by trolling with a white fly.