

**AMERICAN TRAVELLERS
IN SPAIN: THE SPANISH
INNS, 1776-1867**

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American Travellers in Spain: The Spanish Inns, 1776-1867 by C. Evangeline Farnham

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Cover

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THE SPANISH INNS 1776-1867

BY

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THE SPANISH INNS, 1777-1867

I.—PRIMITIVE CONSTRUCTION OF THE INNS

THE American traveller's impressions of the inns were quite as unfavorable as were his impressions of the roads and conveyances. The earlier travellers tell us that in the more primitive houses there were no windows, the only light coming from the open door or the opening in the roof above the hearth.¹ Adams writes from Bilbao, January 15, 1780:

"The houses, as well as everywhere else, were without chimneys, fires or windows; and we could find none of those comforts and conveniences to which we all had been accustomed from the cradle, nor any of that sweet and quiet repose in sleep, upon which health and happiness so much depend."

Even where there were windows, there was in many cases no glass, nothing but the wooden shutter to be opened or closed at will. Adams describes the two windows in his room at Castellano as "port holes, without any glass" with two wooden doors to open and shut before them.² In the houses of the villages through which Mrs. Cushing passed on her way from Irún to Tolosa there was no glass. Sometimes there was an iron grating, but usually she found only chinks cut in the wall to admit light.³ Even at the *Fonda del Obispo* in Toledo there was no glass in the windows. When the shutters were closed the room was perfectly dark and when opened thoroughly chilled.⁴ While she found that the houses of the better class had balconies, the windows opening upon these did not always

¹ John Adams and Mrs. A. Adams, *Familiar letters of John Adams and his wife*, New York, 1876, p. 376.

² John Adams, *The works of John Adams*, Boston, 1850-56, vol. iii, p. 242.

³ Caroline Elizabeth Cushing, *Letters, descriptive of public monuments, scenery, and manners in France and Spain*, Newburyport, 1832, vol. ii, p. 10; cf. Joseph Townsend, *A Journey through Spain in the years 1786 and 1787*, London, 1791, vol. i, p. 92.

⁴ C. E. Cushing, vol. ii, p. 154.

have glass.⁵ At the village inn of La Puebla the windows consisted of several panels opening separately, so that one could let in as little or as much light and air as desired. On a journey from Granada to Barcelona in 1829, Irving makes the following entry in his journal at Lorca on the third of August: "No glass in these parts of Spain."⁶ In the miserable *venta* of Esteras where the anonymous author of *Scenes in Spain* stopped in 1831 there was but one small window and this was of oiled parchment.⁷ Cheever tells us that the room he occupied at one of the inns between Colmenar and Granada had only one grated window. This was without glass but had a wooden shutter to keep out the damp air.⁸ Sometimes there were small panes of glass set in the wooden shutters. The sitting-room of a *venta* where Bryant stopped in 1857 was so lighted but the sleeping rooms were dark.⁹

The discomfort caused by the lack of windows was augmented in many cases by the peculiar arrangement of stable and living rooms. Frequently in the *ventas*, mules and other animals were kept in the same room as the guests, and during the greater part of the period we are studying, the stable, even in the cities, was usually found under the same roof as the living rooms. Arthur Lee was much disgusted during his short visit to Spain in 1777 at finding the living rooms over the stables.¹⁰ Adams found in Galicia a similar arrangement of the kitchen on the same floor as the stable.

"On the same floor with the kitchen was the stable, but this was always open, and the floor of the stable was covered with miry straw like the kitchen. I went into the stable, and saw it filled on

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 49.

⁶ *The Journals of Washington Irving* (from July, 1815, to July, 1842); ed. by William P. Trent and George Hellman, Boston, 1919.

⁷ *Scenes in Spain*, New York, 1837, p. 220.

⁸ *Knickerbocker Magazine*, vol. xix, p. 122; cf. C. E. Cushing, vol. ii, p. 232.

⁹ William Cullen Bryant, *Letters of a Traveller*, New York, 1859, p. 116; cf. Alexandre Dumas, *Impressions de Voyage*, Paris, 1854, vol. ii, p. 43. This absence of glass in the windows was noted also by Gautier. He writes of a village he visited in 1846: "Torquemada est remarquable par l'absence complète de vitres." The inn he tells us was the only building which had this "luxe inouï." Théophile Gautier, *Voyage en Espagne*, Paris, 1875, p. 58.

¹⁰ Arthur Lee, *Journal* (MS.), Manuscript Division L. C.; cf. Henry Swinburne, *Travels through Spain in the years 1775 and 1776*, London, 1779, p. 117.

both sides with mules belonging to us and several other travellers, who were obliged to put up by the rain."¹¹

At Villafranca he writes in his diary :

"The houses are uniformly the same through the whole country, hitherto—common habitations for men and beasts; the same smoky, filthy holes; not one decent house have I seen from Corunna."¹²

Jay found the same arrangement at the inns on the road from Cádiz to Madrid in 1780. "The mules were generally lodged under the same roof, and my bedroom has frequently been divided from them by only a common partition."¹³ Monroe during his journey from Irún to Madrid in 1804, and Ticknor, while travelling from Barcelona to the capital in 1818, were impressed by this same peculiar plan of living rooms and stable under one roof. Monroe writes of the inn at Irún in 1804: "I entered the best tavern with our mules, the ground floor of which was given up to them." Just before reaching Madrid he enters in his diary :

"The first floor in every house was occupied by the mules, and the second by the proprietors. I am now within 28 leagues of Madrid and I have lodged every night in the house with the mules who have been the companions of my journey."¹⁴

Ticknor in a letter dated Madrid, May 23, 1818, says: "Since I left Barcelona I have not been in a single inn where the lower story was not a stable." "Twice," he adds, "I have dined in the very place with the mules."¹⁵ Mackenzie stopped for a night at a *posada* where the stable under the living rooms was lighted by holes pierced through the ceiling.¹⁶ Mrs. Cushing, like Ticknor, once dined in the same place as the mules. In one of her letters she writes of a *venta* between Burgos and Madrid :

¹¹ Adams, *Works*, vol. iii, p. 241; cf. *ibid.*, p. 242.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 246.

¹³ John Jay, *Correspondence and public papers*, New York, 1890, vol. i, p. 335; cf. Swinburn, p. 80.

¹⁴ James Monroe, *Diary* (MS.), Manuscript Division, N. Y. P. L.

¹⁵ George Ticknor, *Life, Letters and Journals*, Boston and New York, 1909, vol. i, p. 185. Other travellers had similar experiences on this route.

¹⁶ Alexander Slidell Mackenzie, *A year in Spain*, New York, 1836, vol. iii, p. 177. Cf. *ibid.*, vol. i, pp. 59, 60; Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, *Life*, Boston and New York, 1893, vol. i, p. 126.

"The apartment, into which we were shown as our dining-room, was so dark, damp, and gloomy, that we insisted upon the table's being set in the front part of the house, in a large court, which served as a common passage for man and beast, and a portion of which was actually occupied as the stable. This was much the most comfortable place that the house afforded, and here we sat down to a most miserable dinner, which scarcely sufficed to appease our hunger for the remaining four hours of the day, in which we were to continue on the road. Just as we were finishing the dessert, a demure, staid-looking *borrica* marched up to the table, and stood close at my side, waiting with all possible patience for its expected share of the fruit."¹⁷

Even when Wallis was in Madrid in 1849 the ground floor of the largest tavern was given up to the mules.¹⁸ In the northwestern Pyrenees three years later Channing found pigs, mules, and hens in the wretched houses of the post towns.¹⁹ Taylor describes the *venta* at Gaucin, where he stopped for a night in 1852, as "one room—stable, kitchen, and dining-room all in one."²⁰ The *posada* where Schroeder stopped at Loja was built on the same plan.²¹ At Quintana in 1857 Bryant lodged at an inn which he says consisted like most Spanish inns of stables on the first floor and dwelling-rooms on the second.²² Pettigrew, like Adams, found the kitchen was sometimes on the lower floor where the mules were kept. He writes of his entrance into the *posada* at Alhama in 1859: "Pushing my way through the kitchen and among the mules I mounted to the first story to see the accommodations."²³

Not only American travellers but also those of other nationalities were impressed by this arrangement of stable and living rooms. Gautier writes of a *posada* in Castilla la Vieja:

¹⁷ C. E. Cushing, vol. ii, pp. 45, 46. Cf. *ibid.*, p. 181; *Scenes in Spain*, pp. 46, 222, 223. Other Americans and the well known English traveller, Richard Ford, give similar accounts.

¹⁸ Severn Teackle Wallis, *Spain*, Boston, 1853, p. 5. Other Americans make similar statements.

¹⁹ Walter Channing, *A physician's vacation*, Boston, 1856, p. 472.

²⁰ Bayard Taylor, *The lands of the Saracens*, New York, 1856, p. 444. Cf. *ibid.*, p. 405; *Knick. Mag.*, vol. xix, p. 124; Gautier, p. 197.

²¹ Francis Schroeder, *Shores of the Mediterranean*, New York, 1846, vol. ii, p. 109.

²² Bryant p. 111; cf. *ibid.*, p. 114.

²³ [James] [Johnston] P[ettigrew], *Notes on Spain and the Spaniards, in the summer of 1859*, Charleston, 1861, p. 249.

"La posada où l'on s'arrêta pour dîner avait pour vestibule une écurie. Cette disposition architecturale se reflète invariablement dans toutes les posadas espagnoles, et pour aller à sa chambre il faut passer derrière la croupe des mules."²⁴

II.—WRETCHED CONDITIONS OF CERTAIN INNS

As might well be expected, such an arrangement of the interior was not conducive to cleanliness. Consequently we find that not a few of the American travellers mention filthy conditions encountered.¹ No one was more impressed with the filth in Castilla la Vieja than was Lee in 1777: "From the stable which is the common receptacle of horses, asses, mules, dogs, hogs, beggars, and idlers," we read in his journal, "you ascend to your room, where you are received by all manner of vermin, and where everything is as dirty as if a general and constant hydrophobia possessed this detestable people."² His general impression of Guipúzcoa, however, seems to have been much better. In the first named province "pride, poverty and dirtiness reign absolute" while in the latter the people are "stout, well fed and clothed." Adams found the houses in Galicia and León quite as filthy. The first floor was nothing but the ground covered with straw trodden into mire; on the second floor, which was never swept or washed, smoke, soot, dirt and vermin were everywhere. The Maragato women he found more nasty than squaws.³ Like Lee, Adams seems to have been more favorably impressed by Guipúzcoa. He found the houses there and in Vizcaya larger and more convenient than those in Galicia, Castilla, or León, but the public houses were much the same. The inn at Brivesca was a large one with twelve good beds, but the house was, like all others he had seen, smoky and dirty. Bryant finds at this same place in 1857 a "decent spacious inn full of guests." The town itself, however, he describes as dirty and badly paved.⁴

²⁴ Gautier, p. 32. Cf. *ibid.*, p. 67; Richard Ford, *Gatherings from Spain*, London, 1846, p. 172.

¹ Cf. J. Fr. Bourgoing, *Tableau de l'Espagne Moderne*, Paris, 1797; George Borrow, *The Bible in Spain*, New York and London, 1896; [Julia Clara (Busk)] Byrne, *Cosas de España*, London and New York, 1866. Others, too numerous to mention here, found similar conditions.

² Lee, *Journal* (MS.).

³ Adams, *Works*, vol. iii, pp. 241, 242, 245-247, 250, 253, 254, 257.

⁴ Bryant, p. 89.