

## Literature, &amp;c.

Blackwood's Magazine for January.

## THE SPY.

THE perils incurred by a spy in watching the movements and entering the camp of a foreign enemy, are far from equalling the dangers of similar occupations during a civil war. To the risk of detection by some former acquaintance or friend, must be added the difficulty of deceiving men of the same country and habits, speaking the same language, and prepared to seize on the smallest incongruity of speech or action as a motive for suspicion. Yet individuals are always to be found, who, for gold, and now and then from motives of enthusiasm for their cause will run all risks, and put themselves in positions of imminent peril, in order to obtain or convey information. During the wild war between Carlists and Christinos, innumerable strange incidents occurred, arising out of the great extent to which the system of espionage was carried by both parties. In this the partizans of Don Carlos had the advantage, at least in the Basque provinces; for there the peasants, devoted to the cause of the Pretender, gratuitously acted as spies, or conveyed despatches across districts held by the enemy. A man would set out at the smart run which those light footed mountaineers will keep up nearly as long as a dweller in the plain could walk; when fatigued, he would hand over his despatch, or perhaps verbal message, to the first intelligent and active peasant he met, and thus from one hand to another till the mission was accomplished. Curious means were sometimes resorted to, in order to conceal a letter, in case of the messenger being met by the enemy. Like the old man, condemned by Sancho Panza, who had hidden his neighbor's money in a hollow staff, despatches were sometimes placed in sticks prepared for this purpose; but this was a stale device, and often detected. A fragment of bread in a peasant's jacket could scarcely excite suspicion, yet in this bread was often baked a slip of paper, which, if found, would have cost the bearer his life. A picket of Christino cavalry was patrolling a road in Navarre, and, as dusk came on, stopped a peasant. After many questions, the man replied satisfactorily, his person underwent a rigid search. Half a dozen dollars were in the worsted sash round his waist, and taking them in his hand he humbly offered them to the subaltern commanding the party. 'No *somes ladrones,*' was the angry reply.—'We are not robbers, keep your money.' The man pursued his journey, and three hours afterwards placed a small thin paper in the hands of a Carlist general. It had been concealed in one of the coins refused by the Christino officer.

The persons who acted as spies were usually, but not always, peasants or muleteers. Soldiers who had deserted to the enemy, expressing themselves disgusted with the party they had left, would sometimes, after a few days or weeks' stay with their new friends, return to their former colors, taking with them all the information they could collect. Not unfrequently a column on the line of march was joined by a miserable beggar woman, perhaps with a child in her arms, who would keep up with the troops for a few hours, alternately chatting with the soldiers, and listening to their conversation among themselves. At the passage of some water course or ravine, she would leave them without any one remarking when or where she had gone; and even when they found that the foe they were marching to attack had disappeared, or when they themselves were surprised in the same night's bivouac, scarcely a man thought of attributing their discomfiture to intelligence conveyed to the enemy by the ragged companion of their morning's march.

Towards the latter part of the year 183—, on a fine autumnal morning, a scene of some dramatic interest was enacting in a field about half musket shot from a hamlet of northern Alava. Several companies of infantry, and some cavalry, was drawn up, their basque berets, worn by officers as well as men, and some other peculiarities of costume, marking them as Carlist troops. At a score of paces in front of the line, a mounted officer, whose richly embroidered cuffs showed him to be of high rank, was conversing with others of inferior grade. A short distance from the group, and in charge of a guard, stood a young man in the uniform of a cavalry officer; and rather more in the back ground were assembled several women,

and persons in citizen and peasant garb.

'Valentin Rojas!' cried the general. The guard surrounded the prisoner opened its files, and the young officer, advancing to within a few paces of the chief in command, there halted, and respectfully saluted,

'Valentin Rojas! you have been guilty of gross neglect of duty in allowing your picket to be surprised last night for want of proper vigilance. The drumhead court martial has condemned you to death, but not without a recommendation to mercy, founded on your wellproved courage and zeal for the true cause.—Neither do I forget the services of your gallant father, slain at the side of the great Zumalacarregruy. Your fault, however must be expiated; and if I extend to you the mercy, which, by his Majesty's commission, I am empowered to do, it will be on one condition.

And beckoning the prisoner to draw nearer, he leaned over the saddle bow, and spoke a few words in a low tone of voice.

A strong expression of disgust, came over the handsome countenance of the young soldier.

'Your excellency alluded to my father and his glorious death. I should be doing little honor to his memory in taking my life on the terms you propose.

'There is no disgrace in serving the King, in whatever way it may be,' said the general sternly. 'Take your choice, however; that, or *cautro tiros.*'

'The latter, then,' replied the young man, doggedly.

'Order out the firing party,' said the general, in a vexed and hurried tone, to one of his aides-de-camp.

A piercing shriek was heard, there was a movement amongst the bystanders and a young and beautiful girl, her hair hanging loose upon her shoulders, broke away from those who sought to restrain her, and rushing up to the prisoner, fell fainting into his arms.

'*Todavia es tiempo,*' said the general, turning to Rojas. 'Poor Doleres!' added he, casting a look of compassion on the inanimate form that the young man was sustaining.

Rojas was deadly pale, and the muscles of his countenance were working violently. He gazed intently on the lovely creature of whom the women had now taken charge, and were trying every means to restore to consciousness. At this moment she half opened her eyes and in a faint voice uttered the word 'Valentin.'

'I accept,' grasped the prisoner.

Ten minutes afterwards the troops were in their quarters, and Rojas was closeted with the general commanding the Carlist troops on the lines of Alava.

The convent of Santa Domingo at Vittoria situate a few yards within the Bilbao gate of that city, has of late years like most edifices of its class in the north of Spain, been converted into barracks for troops. It was during the hottest part at the Carlist war, that on an October evening, the massive portico of the principal entrance to the convent was led up by a large fire, which partially illuminated also the broad earth floored corridor leading into the interior of the building, and caused the slime and damp which hung upon the walls to glisten in the flickering blaze. The retreat had not yet sounded, and independently of the men on guard, a number of the Queen's soldiers were grouped round the fire, waiting the signal to retire to their straw mattresses, and mean while employing their leisure in singing, chatting, and laughing, so as to create a most Babel like din. It was during a momentary lull that a small gap in the circle was filled up by a person who squeezed in, making himself as small as he could, and extended his hands over the fire, on which he fixed his eyes with a vacant stare, and as though unconscious of being an intruder, or of the presence of the soldiery. The new comer was a lad about twenty years of age, whose countenance of an exceeding brown hue, was rendered singularly inexpressive and stolid looking by a mouth constantly half open, and by the manner in which his hair was brought forward over his forehead, so low as almost to cover his eyes. His dress was a jacket and trousers of the rough brown cloth with the Alavese peasants manufacture themselves from the coarse wool of their sheep, and a broad brimmed grey hat, placed quite on the back of the head, increased the *naisoria* of his whole appearance.

'*Carembai!*' cried a joyous looking corporal, who, to judge from the ready laugh with which his comrades welcomed

\* There is still time.

his most trifling sallies, was a wit of no small consideration.

'*Que hayaquit?*' 'whom have we here, and whence come? Assuredly he must be alcaide of some Biscayan city. Behold his sapient look, and dignified manner of wearing his sombrero!'

The sneer was followed by many similar ones from the soldiers, who, for the most part Castilians, entertained a proper degree of contempt for every thing Basque.

'*Vamon! Camarado,*' said one, seeing that the stranger took no notice of the jests for which he supplied the materials: 'you have taken a place at our fire, without so much as a 'by your leave.' The least you can do in return is to give us some account of yourself.'

No reply was made by the peasant, and his interlocutor, irritated at his obstinate silence, prepared to arouse him from his apathy by a process likely to be more effectual than agreeable. Unsheathing his bayonet he introduced its point into the seam of a peasant's jacket. But scarcely had the keen weapon found its way through the cloth, when the Biscayan turned sharply round, and in an instant the aggressor was at the feet of his antagonist. The soldiers then bent forward to help their comrade, but the stranger threw down the bayonet, and burst into a volley of those strange inarticulate sounds which the deaf and dumb emit in their vain attempts to express anger or violent passion.

'*Es mudo;*' 'he is dumb!' exclaimed the soldiers keeping back their comrade, who had risen to his feet, and having picked up the bayonet, seemed disposed to avenge his overthrow.

They now began to hold conversation with the dumb peasant by means of signs and gestures, which he, however, showed little quickness in comprehending, and it soon became evident that the poor wretch was nearly an idiot.

The rattle of drums, and the shrill yet mellow sound of bugles now became audible; soldiers came hurrying into barracks, and each man on guard arranged himself in the best position he could, in order to snatch a little repose before his turn for sentry arrived. The *mudo* remained a short time cowering over the embers of the fire, but finally lounged awkwardly away, probably to seek some softer bed than was afforded him by the granite flags of the convent portico.

The following morning, however, he returned, and for many days continued to pay long and frequent visits to the barracks. The soldiers amused themselves with his uncouth gestures, and by endeavoring to talk to him by signs, and at length became so accustomed to his presence, that he began to share their affections with the regimental dog, Cranuja, a most intelligent animal, always ready with a leap for the Queen, and a growl for Don Carlos, and who had moreover suffered in the cause, having received a graze from a musket ball in a recent skirmish.

But the *mudo* did not confine his visits to the convent, although he appeared to make it his head quarters. During the day he would roam from one barrack to another, affording amusement to the soldiery, ever disposed to be diverted by the smallest incident which varies the monotony of their life; and at length El Mudo di Santa Domingo became as well known to the garrison, as the governor of the town himself.

The month of December had set in cold and wintry, and with the exception of an occasional reconnoissance or foraging party, active military operations were likely to be for some time suspended. One night, however an order was given for the troops quartered in the St. Domingo convent to hold themselves in readiness to march the following morning; and it was rumored that some convoy or post of the enemy was to be surprised. Soon afterwards several officers came to the barracks, and having ascertained that all was in readiness for the march, stopped for a moment to light their cigars at the guard fire.

'We shall have a better blaze than this to warm ourselves by ere twelve hours are past,' said a young lieutenant, stamping his feet as he spoke, to get more warmth than he could obtain from the smoky green wood.

'By the bye,' cried another, 'how far is it to the powder mill. I do not remember seeing it in any of our sorties or foraging parties.'

'It is off the high road, not more than five or six leagues distant from Vittoria. The roads are good, thanks

to the frost; and if we start early, we may get there, blow up the place, and be back to our *puchero* by an hour after noon.'

'Hush,' said an old captain, with a thick grizzled mustache, 'you know not who may be within hearing; and though the gates are shut, they say there are Carlists in Vittoria who communicate with the enemy, by lights and other signals.'

'Pshaw,' cried the young officer who had first spoken, 'you are over cautious my captain.—There is no one near but the men on guard, and that wretched dumb idiot.'

'Walls have sometimes ears,' replied the captain. 'At any rate, all our secret expeditions during the last month or two have been failures.—Either our spies do not earn their money, or there is treachery within the walls. But it is growing late, so *buenos noches, Senores.*'

'*Buenos noches! buenos noches,*' and the officers walked away in the direction of their respective billets.

Scarcely had the sound of their footsteps become inaudible, when a head was slowly raised from among the mass of confused forms that were lying huddled about the fire, and the black eyes of the *mudo* peered keenly around from under the bush tangled hair that overshadowed them. The centry had his back turned, and was leaning on his musket, doubtless waiting with patience to be relieved from his wearisome duty, rendered doubly disagreeable by the coldness of the night. With noiseless step the *mudo* crept along in the shadow of the convent wall, and in the direction of the ramparts, which at that time were in a most dilapidated condition. The darkness enabled him to pass within a short distance of more than one sentinel, and to arrive unobserved at a place where the slight earthen wall, broken and crumbling, offered an easy egress from the town. The *mudo* dropt lightly into the shallow moat, and scrambling up the opposite side, disappeared in the obscurity.

A few hours after this escapade, a body of troops marched out of the Bilbao gate. It was a clear starlight morning, but bitterly cold, and the soldiers, mostly from the south, and as yet accustomed to the severity of a Basque winter, seemed but moderately rejoiced at the biting frost, which congealed my breath into icicles on their mustaches, and caused the road to ring like iron under their measured tramp. Such a temperature was no temptation to laggards, and at so brisk a pace did the men advance that when day broke there was little more than a league between them and the object of their expedition. The high road had been already abandoned, and they were traversing a flat country having little appearance of recent cultivation, partly overgrown with gorse and broom, and intersected with ravines and broad ditches, from whose banks innumerable snipes and water hens would whirl away on the approach of the column.

At length the ground began to rise, and after a tolerably long but very gentle ascent, the troop of cavalry composing the advanced guard halted on the top of a long ridge, extended on either hand for a mile or more. On the opposite side of this ridge the ground gradually descended and from thence to the foot of a range of mountains which rose two or three leagues off, the country appeared far less wild, and better cultivated, than that which the column had as yet crossed.

About half a league off, and in front of a thick wood, composed in great part of evergreen trees, stood a tolerable well constructed building, having in its neighborhood a few scattered cottages, and flanked by several earthen parapets, equidistant from one another, and *echeloned* in an oblique direction; so that whilst the two hindermost nearly touched the outer corners of the building, the most advanced were at some distance to the right and left of the same points. Here it was that powder, ball, and cartridges were fabricated in large quantities for the use of carlists. The lead was brought from mines in the neighborhood; and the cartridges, as soon as made, were sent off to some of the Pretender's strong holds. The military authorities of Vittoria had long been anxious to destroy this establishment, and, having ascertained by their spies that no Carlist force of importance was within three hours' march of the place, they sent out the small column whose progress we have followed, the officer commanding which had orders to destroy, burn, and blow up every thing, and return immediately to his garrison. [To be concluded.]