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A SOLDIER OF HUMOUR

by Wyndham Lewis

PART I

S PAIN is an overflow of sombreness. 'Africa commences at the Pyrenees.' Spain is a check-board of Black and Goth, on which primitive gallic chivalry played its most brilliant games. At the gates of Spain the landscape gradually becomes comes historic with Roland. His fame dies as difficultly as the flourish of the cor de chasse. It lives like a superfine antelope in the gorges of the Pyrenees, becoming more and more ethereal and gentle. Charlemagne moves Knights and Queens beneath that tree; there is something eternal and rembrandtesque about his proceedings. A stormy and threatening tide of history meets you at the frontier.

Several summers ago I was cast by fate for a fierce and prolonged little comedy—an essentially spanish comedy. It appropriately began at Bayonne, where Spain, not Africa, begins.

I am a large blond clown, ever so vaguely reminiscent (in person) of William Blake, and some great american boxer whose name I forget. I have large strong teeth which I gnash and flash when I laugh. But usually a look of settled and aggressive naïveté rests on my face. I know much more about myself than people generally do. For instance I am aware that I am a barbarian. By rights I should be paddling about in a coracle. My body is large, white and savage. But all the fierceness has become transformed into *laughter*. It still looks like a visi-gothic fighting-machine, but it is in reality a *laughing* machine. As I have remarked, when I laugh I gnash my teeth, which is another brutal survival and a thing laughter has taken over from war. Everywhere where formerly I would fly at throats, I now howl with laughter. That is me.

So I have never forgotten that I am really a barbarian. I have clung coldly to this consciousness. I realize, similarly, the uncivilized nature of my laughter. It does not easily climb into the neat japanese box, which is the cosa salada of the Spaniard, or become french esprit. It sprawls into everything. It has become my life. The result is that I am *never* serious about anything. I simply cannot help converting everything into burlesque patterns. And I admit that I am disposed to forget that people are real—that they are, that is, not subjective patterns belonging specifically to me, in the course of this joke-life, which indeed has for its very principle a denial of the accepted actual.

My father is a family doctor on the Clyde. The Ker-Orrs have been doctors usually. I have not seen him for some time: my mother, who is separated from him, lives with a noted hungarian physician. She gives me money that she gets from the physician, and it is she that I recognize as my principal parent. It is owing to this conjunction of circumstances that I am able to move about so much, and to feed the beast of humour that is within me with such a variety of dishes.

My mother is short and dark: it is from my father that I have my stature, and this strange northern appearance.

Vom Vater hab' ich die Statur . . .

It must be from my mother that I get the *Lust zu fabulieren*. I experience no embarrassment in following the promptings of my fine physique. My sense of humour in its mature phase has arisen in this very acute consciousness of what is *me*. In playing that off against another hostile *me*, that does not like the smell of mine, probably finds my large teeth, height and so forth abominable, I am in a sense working off my alarm at myself. So I move on a more primitive level than most men, I expose my essential *me* quite coolly, and all men shy a little. This forked, strange-scented, blond-skinned gut-bag, with its two bright rolling marbles with which it sees, bull's-eyes full of mockery and madness, is my stalking-horse. I hang somewhere in its midst operating it with detachment.

I snatch this great body out of their reach when they grow dangerously enraged at the sight of it, and laugh at them. And what I would insist upon is that at the bottom of the chemistry of my sense of humour is some philosopher's stone. A primitive unity is there, to which, with my laughter, I am appealing. Freud explains everything by *sex*: I explain everything by *laughter*. So in these accounts of my adventures there is no sex interest at all: only over and over again what is perhaps the natural enemy of sex: so I must apologize. 'Sex' makes me yawn my head off; but my eye sparkles at once if I catch sight of some stylistic anomaly that will provide me with a new pattern for my grotesque realism. The

sex-specialist or the sex-snob hates what I like, and calls his occupation the only *real* one. No compromise, I fear, is possible between him and me, and people will continue to call 'real' what interests them most. I boldly pit my major interest against the sex-appeal, which will restrict me to a masculine audience, but I shall not complain whatever happens.

I am quite sure that many of the soldiers and adventurers of the Middle Ages were really *Soldiers of Humour*, unrecognized and unclassified. I know that many a duel has been fought in this solemn cause. A man of this temper and category will, perhaps, carefully cherish a wide circle of accessible enemies, that his sword may not rust. Any other quarrel may be patched up. But what can be described as a *quarrel of humour* divides men for ever. That is my english creed.

I could fill pages with descriptions of myself and my ways. But such abstractions from the life lived are apt to be misleading, because most men do not easily detach the principle from the living thing in that manner, and so when handed the abstraction alone do not know what to do with it, or they apply it wrongly. I exist with an equal ease in the abstract world of principle and in the concrete world of fact. As I can express myself equally well in either, I will stick to the latter here, as then I am more likely to be understood. So I will show you myself in action, manoeuvring in the heart of the reality. But before proceeding, this qualification of the above account of myself is necessary: owing to protracted foreign travel at an early age, following my mother's change of husbands, I have known french very well since boyhood. Most other Western languages I am fairly familiar with. This has a considerable bearing on the reception accorded to me by the general run of people in the countries where these scenes are laid.

There is some local genius or god of adventure haunting the soil of Spain, of an especially active and resourceful type. I have seen people that have personified him. In Spain it is safer to seek adventures than to avoid them. That is at least the sensation you will have if you are sensitive to this national principle, which is impregnated with *burla*, or burlesque excipients. It certainly requires *horse-play*, and it is even safer not to attempt to evade it. Should you refrain from charging the windmills, they are capable of charging you, you come to understand: in short, you will in the end wonder less at Don Quixote's behaviour. But the deity of this volcanic soil has become civilized. My analysis of myself would serve equally well for him in this respect. Your life is no longer one of the materials he asks for to supply you with constant entertainment, as the conjurer asks for the gentleman's silk hat. Not your life,—but a rib or two, your comfort, or a five-pound note, are all he politely begs or rudely snatches. With these he juggles and conjures from morning till night, keeping you perpetually amused and on the *qui vive*.

It might have been a friend, but as it happened it was the most implacable enemy I have ever had that Providence provided me with, as her agent and representative for this journey. The comedy I took part in was a spanish one, then, at once piquant and elemental. But a Frenchman filled the principal rôle. When I add that this Frenchman was convinced the greater part of the time that he was taking part in a tragedy, and was perpetually on the point of transplanting my adventure bodily into that other category, and that although his actions drew their vehemence from the virgin source of a racial hatred, yet it was not as a Frenchman or a Spaniard that he acted, then you will conceive what extremely complex and unmanageable forces were about to be set in motion for my edification.

What I have said about my barbarism and my laughter is a key to the militant figure chosen at the head of this account. In those modifications of the primitive such another extravagant warrior as Don Quixote is produced, existing in a vortex of strenuous and burlesque encounters. Mystical and humorous, astonished at everything at bottom (the settled naïveté I have noted) he inclines to worship and deride, to pursue like a riotous moth the comic and unconscious luminary he discovers; to make war on it and to cherish it like a lover, at once.

PART II

IT was about eleven o'clock at night when I reached Bayonne. I had started from Paris the evening before. In the market square adjoining the station the traveller is immediately solicited by a row of rather obscene little hotels, crudely painted. Each frail structure shines and sparkles with a hard, livid and disreputable electricity, every floor illuminated.

The blazonry of cheap ice-cream wells, under a striped umbrella, is what they suggest: and as I stepped into this place all that was not a small, sparkling, competitive universe, inviting the stranger to pass into it, was spangled with the vivid spanish stars. 'Fonda del Universo,' 'Fonda del Mundo': Universal Inn and World Inn, two of these places were called, I noticed. I was tired and not particular as to which universe I entered. They all looked the same. To keep up a show of discrimination I chose the second, not the first. I advanced along a narrow passage-way and found myself suddenly in the heart of the Fonda del Mundo. On the left lay the dining-room in which sat two travellers. I was standing in the kitchen: this was a large courtyard, the rest of the hotel and several houses at the back were built round it. It had a glass roof on a level with the house proper, which was of two storeys only.

A half-dozen stoves with sinks, each managed by a separate crew of grim, oily workers, formed a semi-circle. Hands were as cheap, and every bit as dirty, as dirt; you felt that the lowest scullery-maid could afford a servant to do the roughest of her work, and that girl in turn another. The abundance of cheap beings was of the same meridional order as the wine and food. Instead of buying a wheelbarrow, would not you attach a man to your business; instead of hiring a removing van, engage a gang of carriers? In every way that man could replace the implement that here would be done. An air of leisurely but continual activity pervaded this precinct. Cooking on the grand scale was going forward. Later on I learnt that this was a preparation for the market on the following day. But to enter at eleven in the evening this large and apparently empty building, as far as customers went, and find a methodically busy population in its midst, cooking a nameless feast, was impressive. A broad staircase was the only avenue in this building to the sleeping apartments; a shining cut-glass door beneath it seemed the direction I ought to take when I should have made up my mind to advance. This door, the stairs, the bread given you at the table d'hôte, all had the same unsubstantial pretentiously new appearance.

So I stood unnoticed in an indifferent enigmatical universe, to which yet I had no clue, my rug on my arm. I certainly had reached immediately the most intimate centre of it, without ceremony. Perhaps there were other entrances, which I had not observed? I was turning back when the hostess appeared through the glass door—a very stout woman in a garment like a dressing-gown. She had that air of sinking into herself as if into a hot, enervating bath, with the sleepy, leaden intensity of expression belonging to many Spaniards. Her face was so still and impassible, that the ready and apt answers coming to your questions were startling, her *si señors* and *como nons*. However, I knew this kind of patronne; and the air of dull resentment would mean nothing except that I was indifferent to her. I was one of those troublesome people she only had to see twice—when they arrived, and when they came to pay at the end of their stay.

She turned to the busy scene at our right and poured out a few guttural remarks (it was a spanish staff), all having some bearing on my fate, some connected with my supper, the others with my sleeping accommodation or luggage. They fell on the crowd of leisurely workers without ruffling the surface. Gradually they reached their destination, however. First, I noticed a significant stir and a dull flare rose in the murky atmosphere, a stove lid had been slid back; great copper pans were disturbed, their covers wrenched up: some morsel was to be fished out for me, swimming in oil. Elsewhere a slim, handsome young witch left her cauldron and passed me, going into the dining-room. I followed her, and the hostess went back through the cut-glass door. It was behind that that she lived.

The dining-room was compact with hard light. Nothing in its glare could escape detection, so it symbolized *honesty* on the one hand, and *newness* on the other. There was nothing at all you could not *see*, and scrutinize, only too well. Everything within sight was totally unconscious of its cheapness or of any limitation at all. Inspect me! Inspect me!—exclaimed the coarse white linen upon the table, the Condy's fluid in the decanter, the paper-bread, the hideous mouldings on the wall.—I am the goods!

I took my seat at the long table. Of the two diners, only one was left. I poured myself out a glass of the wine *rosé* of Nowhere, set it to my lips, drank and shuddered. Two spoonfuls of a nameless soup, and the edge of my appetite was, it seemed, for ever blunted. Bacallao, or cod, that nightmare of the Spaniard of the Atlantic sea-board, followed. Its white and tasteless leather remained on my plate, with the markings of my white teeth all over it, like a cast of a dentist. I was really hungry and the stew that came next found its way inside me in gluttonous draughts. The preserved fruit in syrup was eaten too. Heladas came next, no doubt frozen up from stinking water. Then I fell back in my chair, my coffee in front of me, and stared round at the other occupant of the dining-room. He stared blankly back at me. When I had turned my head away, as though the words had been mechanically released in response to my wish, he exclaimed:

'Il fait beau ce soir!'

I took no notice: but after a few moments I turned in his direction again. He was staring at me without anything more than a little surprise. Immediately his lips opened again, and he exclaimed dogmatically, loudly (was I deaf, he had no doubt thought):

'Il fait beau ce soir!'

'Not at all. It's by no means a fine night. It's cold, and what's more it's going to rain.'

I cannot say why I contradicted him in this fashion. Perhaps the insolent and mystical gage of drollery his appearance generally flung down was the cause. I had no reason for supposing that the weather at Bayonne was anything but fine and settled.

I had made my rejoinder as though I were a Frenchman, and I concluded my neighbour would take me for that.

He accepted my response quite stolidly. This initial rudeness of mine would probably have had no effect whatever on him, had not a revelation made shortly afterwards at once changed our relative positions, and caused him to regard me with changed eyes. He then went back, remembered this first incivility of mine, and took it, retrospectively, in a different spirit to that shown contemporaneously. He now merely enquired:

'You have come far?'

'From Paris,' I answered, my eyes fixed on a piece of cheese which the high voltage of the electricity revealed in all its instability. I reflected how bad the food was here compared to its Spanish counterpart, and wondered if I should have time to go into the town before my train left. I then looked at my neighbour, and wondered what sort of stomach he could have. He showed every sign of the extremest hardness. He lay back in his chair, his hat on the back of his head, finishing a bottle of wine with bravado. His waistcoat was open, and this was the only thing about him that did not denote the most facile of victories. This, equivalent to rolling up the sleeves, might be accepted as showing that he respected his enemy.

His straw hat served rather as a heavy coffee-coloured nimbus—such as some browningsque Florentine painter, the worse for drink, might have placed behind the head of his saint. Above his veined and redly sunburnt forehead gushed a ragged volute of dry black hair. His face had the vexed wolfish look of the grimy commercial Midi. It was full of character, certainly, but it had been niggled at and worked all over, at once minutely and loosely, by a hundred little blows and chisellings of fretful passion. His beard did not sprout with any shape or symmetry. Yet in an odd and baffling way there was a breadth, a look of possible largeness somewhere. You were forced at length to attribute it to just that *blankness* of expression I have mentioned. This sort of blank intensity spoke of a possibility of real passion, of the sublime. (It was this sublime quality that I was about to waken, and was going to have an excellent opportunity of studying.)

He was dressed with sombre floridity. In his dark purple-slate suit with thin crimson lines, in his dark red hat-band, in his rose-buff tie, swarming with cerulean fire-flies, in his stormily flowered waistcoat, you felt that his taste for the violent and sumptuous had everywhere struggled to assert itself, and everywhere been overcome. But by what? That was the important secret of this man's entire machine, a secret unfolded by his subsequent conduct. Had I been of a superior penetration the cut of his clothes in their awkward amplitude, with their unorthodox shoulders and belling hams, might have given me the key. He was not a commercial traveller. I was sure of that. For me, he issued from a void. I rejected in turn his claim, on the strength of his appearance, to be a small vineyard owner, a man in the automobile business and a *rentier*. He was part of the mystery of this hotel; his loneliness, his aplomb, his hardy appetite.

In the meantime his small sunken eyes were fixed on me imperturbably, with the blankness of two metal discs.

'I was in Paris last week,' he suddenly announced. 'I don't like Paris. Why should I?' I thought he was working up for something now. He had had a good think. He took me for a Parisian, I supposed. 'They think they are up-to-date. Go and get a parcel sent you from abroad, then go and try and get it at the Station Dépôt. Only see how many hours you will pass there trotting from one bureau clerk to another before they give it you! Then go to a café and ask for a drink!—Are you Parisian?' He asked this in the same tone, the blankness slightly deepening.

'No, I'm English,' I answered.

He looked at me steadfastly. This evidently at first seemed to him untrue. Then he suddenly appeared to accept it implicitly. His incredulity and belief appeared to be one block of the same material, or two sides of the same absolute coin. There was not room for a hair between these two states. They were not two, but one.

Several minutes of dead silence elapsed. His eyes had never winked. His changes had all occurred within one block of concrete undifferentiated blankness. At this period you became aware of a change: but when you looked at him he was completely uniform from moment to moment.

He now addressed me, to my surprise, in my own language. There was every evidence that it had crossed the Atlantic at least once since it had been in his possession; he had not inherited it, but acquired it with the sweat of his brow, it was clear.

'Oh! you're English? It's fine day!'

Now, we are going to begin all over again! And we are going to start, as before, with the weather. But I did not contradict him this time. My opinion of the weather had in no way changed. But for some reason I withdrew from my former perverse attitude.

'Yes,' I agreed.

Our eyes met, doubtfully. He had not forgotten my late incivility, and I remembered it at the same time. He was silent again. Evidently he was turning over dully in his mind the signification of this change on my part. My changes I expect presented themselves as occurring in as unruffled uniform a medium as his.

But there was a change now in him. I could both feel and see it. My weak withdrawal, I thought, had been unfortunate. Remembering my wounding obstinacy of five minutes before, a strong resentment took possession of him, swelling his person as it entered. I watched it enter him. It was as though the two sides of his sprawling portmanteau-body had tightened up, and his eyes drew in till he squinted.

Almost threateningly, then, he continued,—heavily, pointedly, steadily, as though to see if there were a spark of resistance anywhere left in me, that would spit up, under his trampling words.

'I guess eet's darn fi' weather, and goin' to laast. A friend of mine, who ees skeeper, sailing for Bilbao this afternoon, said that mighty little sea was out zere, and all fine weather for his run. A skipper ought' know, I guess, ought'n he? Zey know sight more about zee weader than most. I guess zat's deir trade,—an't I right?'

Speaking the tongue of New York evidently injected him with a personal emotion that would not have been suspected, even, in the Frenchman. The strange blankness and impersonality had gone, or rather it had *woken up*, if one may so describe this phenomenon. He now looked at me with awakened eyes, coldly, judicially, fixedly. They were faceted eyes—the eyes of the forty-eight States of the Union. Considering he had crushed me enough, no doubt, he began talking about Paris, just as he had done in french. The one thing linguistically he had brought away from the United States intact was an american accent of almost alarming perfection. Whatever word or phrase he knew, in however mutilated a form, had this stamp of colloquialism and air of being the real thing. He spoke english with a careless impudence at which I was not surprised; but the powerful consciousness of the authentic nature of his *accent* made him still more insolently heedless of the faults of his speech, it seemed, and rendered him immune from all care as to the correctness of the mere english. He was evidently to the full the american, or anglo-saxon american, state of mind: a colossal disdain for everything that does not possess in one way or another an american accent. My english, grammatically regular though it was, lacking the american accent was but a poor vehicle for thought compared with his most blundering sentence.

Before going further I must make quite clear that I have no dislike of the american way of accenting english. American possesses an indolent vigour and dryness which is a most cunning arm when it snarls out its ironies. That accent is the language of Mark Twain, and is the tongue, at once naïve and cynical, of a thousand inimitable humourists. To my mind it is a better accent than the sentimental whimsicality of the Irish.

An illusion of superiority, at the expense of citizens of other states, the American shares with the Englishman. So the

'God's Own Country' attitude of some Americans is more anglo-saxon than their blood. I have met many outlandish Americans, from such unamerican cities as Odessa, Trieste and Barcelona. America had done them little good, they tended to become dreamers, drunken with geographical immensities and opportunities they had never had. This man at once resembled and was different from them. The reason for this difference, I concluded, was explained when he informed me that he was a United States citizen. I believed him on the spot, unreservedly. Some air of security in him that only such a ratification can give convinced me.

He did not tell me at once. Between his commencing to speak in english and his announcing his citizenship, came an indetermined phase in our relations. During this phase he knew what he possessed, but he knew I was not yet aware of it. This caused him to make some allowance; since, undivulged, this fact was, for me at least, not yet a full fact. He was constrained, but the situation had not yet, he felt, fully matured.

In the same order as in our conversation in french, we progressed then, from the weather topic (a delicate subject with us) to Paris. Our acquaintance was by this time—scarcely ten minutes had elapsed—painfully ripe. I already felt instinctively that certain subjects of conversation were to be avoided. I knew already what shade of expression would cause suspicion, what hatred, and what snorting disdain. He, for his part, evidently with the intention of eschewing a subject fraught with dangers, did not once speak of England. It was as though England were a subject that no one could expect him to keep his temper about. Should any one, as I did, come from England, he would naturally resent being reminded of it. The other, obviously, would be seeking to take an unfair advantage of him. In fact for the moment the assumption was—that was the only issue from this difficulty—that I was an American.

'Guess you' goin' to Spain?' he said. 'Waal, Americans are not like' very much in that country. That country, sir, is barb'rous; you *kant* believe how behind in everything that country is! All you have to do is to *look* smart there to make money. No need to worry there. No, by gosh! Just sit round and ye'll do bett' dan zee durn dagos!'

The american citizenship wiped out the repulsive fact of his southern birth, otherwise, being a Gascon, he would have been almost a dago himself.

'In Guadalquivere—wall—kind of state-cap'tle, some manzanas, a bunch shacks, get me?—waal——'

I make these sentences of my neighbour's much more lucid than they in reality were. But he now plunged into this obscure and whirling idiom with a story to tell. The story was drowned; but I gathered it told of how, travelling in a motor car, he could find no petrol anywhere in a town of some importance. He was so interested in the telling of this story that I was thrown a little off my guard, and once or twice showed that I did not quite follow him. I did not understand his english, that is what unguardedly I showed. He finished his story rather abruptly. There was a deep silence.—It was after this silence that he divulged the fact of his american citizenship.

And now things began to wear at once an exceedingly gloomy and unpromising look.

With the revelation of this staggering fact I lost at one blow all the benefit of that convenient fiction in which we had temporarily indulged—namely, that I was American. It was now incumbent upon him to adopt an air of increased arrogance. The representative of the United States—there was no evading it, that was the dignity that the evulgation of his legal nationality imposed on him. All compromise, all courteous resolve to ignore painful facts, was past. Things must stand out in their true colours, and men too.

As a result of this heightened attitude, he appeared to doubt the sincerity or exactitude of everything I said. His beard bristled round his drawling mouth, his thumbs sought his arm-pits, his varnished patterned shoes stood up erect and aggressive upon his heels. An insidious attempt on my part to induct the conversation back into french, unhappily detected, caused in him an alarming indignation. I was curious to see the change that would occur in my companion if I could trap him into using again his native speech. The sensation of the humbler tongue upon his lips would have, I was sure, an immediate effect. The perfidy of my intention only gradually dawned upon him. He seemed taken aback. For a few minutes he was silent as though stunned. The subtleties, the *ironies* to which the American is exposed!

'Oui, c'est vrai,' I went on, taking a frowning, business-like air, affecting a great absorption in the subject we were discussing, and to have overlooked the fact that I had changed to french, 'les Espagnols ont du chic à se chausser. D'ailleurs, c'est tout ce qu'ils savent, en fait de toilette. C'est les Américains surtout qui savent s'habiller!'

His eyes at this became terrible. He had seen through the *manège*, had he not: and now *par surcroît de perfidie*, was I not *flattering* him—flattering Americans; and above all, praising their way of dressing! His cigar protruded from the right-hand corner of his mouth. He now with a gnashing and rolling movement conveyed it, in a series of revolutions, to the left-hand corner. He eyed me with a most unorthodox fierceness. In the language of his adopted land, but with an imported wildness in the dry figure that he must affect, he ground out, spitting with it the moist *débris* of the cigar:

'Yes, *sirr*, and that's more'n zee durn English do!'

No doubt, in his perfect americanism—and at this ticklish moment, his impeccable accent threatened by an unscrupulous foe, who was attempting to stifle it temporarily—a definite analogy arose in his mind. The Redskin and his wiles, the hereditary and cunning foe of the american citizen, came vividly perhaps to his mind. Yes, wiles of that familiar sort were being used against him, Sioux-like, Blackfeet-like manoeuvres. He must meet them as the american citizen had always met them. He had at length overcome the Sioux and Cherokee. He turned on me a look as though I had been unmasked, and his accent became more raucous and formidable. The elemental that he contained and that often woke in him, I expect, manifested itself in his american accent, the capital vessel of his vitality.

After another significant pause he brusquely chose a new subject of conversation. It was a subject upon which, it was evident, he was persuaded that it would be quite impossible for us to agree. He took a long draught of the powerful fluid served to each diner. I disagreed with him at first out of politeness. But as he seemed resolved to work himself up slowly into a national passion, I changed round, and agreed with him. For a moment he glared at me. He felt at bay before this dreadful subtlety to which his americanism exposed him: then he warily changed his position in the argument, taking up the point of view he had begun by attacking.

We changed about alternately for a while. It was a most diverting game. At one time in taking my new stand, and asserting something, either I had changed too quickly, or he had not done so quite quickly enough. At all events, when he began speaking he found himself *agreeing* with me. This was a breathless moment. It was very close quarters indeed. I felt as one does at a show, standing on the same chair with an uncertain-tempered person. With an anxious swiftness I threw myself into the opposite opinion. The situation, for that time at least, was saved. A moment more, and we should have fallen on each other, or rather, he on me.

He buried his face again in the sinister potion in front of him, and consumed the last vestiges of the fearful food at his elbow. During these happenings we had not been interrupted. A dark figure, that of a Spaniard, I thought, had passed into the kitchen along the passage. From within the muffled uproar of the machinery of the kitchen reached us uninterruptedly.

He now with a snarling drawl engaged in a new discussion on another and still more delicate subject. I renewed my tactics, he his. Subject after subject was chosen. His volte-face, his change of attitude in the argument, became less and less leisurely. But my skill in reversing remained more than a match for his methods. At length, whatever I said he said the opposite, brutally and at once. At last, pushing his chair back violently with a frightful grating sound, and thrusting both his hands in his pockets—at this supreme moment the sort of blank look came back to his face again—he said slowly:

'Waal, zat may be so—you say so—waal! But what say you to England, hein? England! England! England!'

At last it had come! He repeated 'England' as though that word in itself were a question—an unanswerable question. 'England' was a form of question that a man could only ask when every device of normal courtesy had been exhausted. But it was a thing hanging over every Englishman, at any moment he might be silenced with it.

'England! ha! England! England!' he repeated, as though hypnotized by this word; as though pressing me harder and harder, and finally 'chawing me up' with the mere utterance of it.

'Why, mon vieux!' I said suddenly, getting up, 'how about the South of France, for that matter—the South of France! the South of France! The bloody Midi, your home-land, you poor bum!' I gnashed my teeth as I said this.

If I had said 'America,' he would have responded at once, no doubt. But 'the South of France!' A look of unspeakable vagueness came into his face. The South of France! This was at once without meaning, a stab in the back, an unfair blow, the sort of thing that was not said, some sort of paralysing nonsense, that robbed a man of the power of speech. I seemed

to have drawn a chilly pall with glove-tight tightness suddenly over the whole of his mind.

I fully expected to be forced to fight my way out of the *salle à manger*, and was wondering whether his pugilistic methods would be those of Chicago or Toulouse—whether he would skip round me, his fists working like piston rods, or whether he would plunge his head into the pit of my stomach, kick me on the chin and follow up with the 'coup de la fourchette,' which consists in doubling up one's fist, but allowing the index and little finger to protrude, so that they may enter the eyes on either side of the bridge of the nose.

But I had laid him out quite flat. The situation was totally outside his compass. And the word 'bum' lay like a load of dough upon his spirit. My last word had been *american!* As I made for the door, he sat first quite still. Then, slightly writhing on his chair, with a painful slowness, his face passed through a few degrees of the compass in an attempt to reach me in spite of the spell I had laid upon him. The fact of my leaving the room seemed to find him still more unprepared. My answer to his final apostrophe was a blow below the belt: I was following it up by vanishing from the ring altogether, as though the contest were over, while he lay paralysed in the centre of the picture. It had never occurred to him, apparently, that I might perhaps get up and leave the dining-room.—Sounds came from him, words too—hybrid syllables lost on the borderland between french and english, which appeared to signify protest, pure astonishment, alarmed question. But I had disappeared. I got safely into the kitchen. I sank into that deep hum of internal life, my eye glittering with the battle light of humour.

In the act of taking my candle from the hand of a chambermaid, I heard a nasal roar behind me. I mounted the stairs three steps at a time, the hotel boy at my heels, and the chambermaid breathlessly rushing up in his rear. Swiftly ushered into my room, I thrust outside the panting servants and locked and bolted the door.

Flinging myself on the bed, my blond poll rolling about in ecstasy upon the pillow, I howled like an exultant wolf. This penetrating howl of my kind—the humorous kind—shook the cardboard walls of the room, rattled the stucco frames; but the tumult beneath of the hotel staff must have prevented this sound from getting farther than the area of the bedrooms. My orgasm left me weak, and I lay conventionally mopping my brow, and affectedly gasping. Then, as usually happened with me, I began sentimentally pitying my victim. Poor little chap! My conduct had been unpardonable! I had brutalized this tender flower of the prairies of the West! Why had I dragged in the 'bloody Midi' after all? It was too bad altogether. I had certainly behaved very badly. I had a movement to go down immediately and apologize to him, a tear of laughter still hanging from a mournful lash.

My room was at the back. The window looked on to the kitchen; it was just over the stairs leading to the bedrooms. I now got up, for I imagined I heard some intemperate sound thrusting into the general *mêlée* of mechanical noise. From the naturally unsavoury and depressing porthole of my room, immediately above the main cauldrons, I was able, I found, to observe my opponent in the murky half-court, half-kitchen, beneath. There he was: by pointing my ear down I could catch sometimes what he was saying. But I found that the noise I had attributed to him had been my fancy only.

Inspected from this height he looked very different. I had not till then seen him on his feet. His yankee clothes, evidently cut beneath his direction by a gascon tailor, made him look as broad as he was long. His violently animated leanness imparted a precarious and toppling appearance to his architecture. He was performing a war-dance in this soft national armour just at present, beneath the sodden eyes of the proprietress. It had shuffling, vehement, jazz elements, aided by the gesticulation of the Gaul. This did not seem the same man I had been talking to before. He evidently, in this enchanted hotel, possessed a variety of personalities. It was *not* the same man. Somebody else had leapt into his clothes—which hardly fitted the newcomer—and was carrying on his quarrel. The original and more imposing man had disappeared. I had slain him. This little fellow had taken up his disorganized and overwrought life at that precise moment and place where I had left him knocked out in the dining-room, at identically the same pitch of passion, only with fresher nerves, and with the same racial sentiments as the man he had succeeded.

He was talking in spanish—much more correctly than he did in english. She listened with her leaden eyes crawling swiftly and sullenly over his person, with an air of angrily and lazily making an inventory. In his fiery attack on the depths of languor behind which her spirit lived, he would occasionally turn and appeal to one of the nearest of the servants, as though seeking corroboration of something. Of what crime was I being accused? I muttered rapid prayers to the effect that that sultry reserve of the proprietress might prove impregnable. Otherwise I might be cast bodily out of the

Fonda del Mundo, and, in my present worn-out state, have to seek another and distant roof. I knew that I was the object of his discourse. What effectively could be said about me on so short an acquaintance? He would, though, certainly affirm that I was a designing ruffian of some sort; such a person as no respectable hotel would consent to harbour, or if it did, would do so at its peril. Probably he might be saying it was my intention to hold up the hotel later on, or he might have influence with the proprietress, be a regular customer and old friend. He might only be saying, 'I object to that person; I cannot express to you how I object to that person! I have never objected to any one to the same fearful degree. All my organs boil at the thought of him. I cannot explain to you how that island organism tears my members this way and that. Out with this abomination! Oh! out with it before I die at your feet from the fever of my *mauvais sang!*'

That personal appeal might prove effective. I went to bed with a feeling of extreme insecurity. I thought that, if nothing else happened, he might set fire to the hotel. But in spite of the dangers by which I was, manifestly, beset in this ill-starred establishment, I slept soundly enough. In the morning an overwhelming din shook me, and I rose with the stink of southern food in my nose.

Breakfast passed off without incident. I concluded that the Complete American was part of the night-time aspect of the Fonda del Mundo and had no part in its more normal day-life.

The square was full of peasants, the men wearing dark blouses and the *béret basque*. Several groups were sitting near me in the *salle à manger*. An intricate arrangement of chairs and tables, like an extensive man-trap, lay outside the hotel, extending a little distance into the square. From time to time one or more clumsy peasant would appear to become stuck or somehow involved in these iron contrivances. They would then, with becoming fatalism, sit down and call for a drink. Such was the impression conveyed, at least, by their embarrassed and reluctant movements in choosing a seat. I watched several parties come into this dangerous extension of the Fonda del Mundo. The proprietress would come out occasionally and stare moodily at them. She never looked at me.

A train would shortly leave for the frontier. I bade farewell to the patrona, and asked her if she could recommend me a hotel in Burgos or in Pontaisandra. When I mentioned Pontaisandra, she said at once, 'You are going to Pontaisandra?' With a sluggish ghost of a smile she turned to a loitering servant and then said, 'Yes, you can go to the Burgaleza at Pontaisandra. That is a good hotel.' They both showed a few ragged discoloured teeth, only appearing in moments of crafty burlesque. The night before I had told her that my destination was Pontaisandra, and she had looked at me steadfastly and resentfully, as though I had said that my destination was Paradise, and that I intended to occupy the seat reserved for her. But that was the night before: and now Pontaisandra appeared to mean something different to her. The episode of the supper-room the night before I now regarded as an emanation of that place. The Fonda del Mundo was a mysterious hotel, though in the day its secrets seemed more obvious. I imagined it inhabited by solitary and hallucinated beings, like my friend the Perfect American—or such as I myself might have become. The large kitchen staff was occupied far into the night in preparing a strange and excessive table d'hôte. The explanation of this afforded in the morning by the sight of the crowding peasants did not efface that impression of midnight though it mitigated it. Perhaps the dreams caused by its lunches, the visions conjured up by its suppers, haunted the place. That was the spirit in which I remembered my over-night affair.

When eventually I started for the frontier, hoping by the inhalation of a picadura to dispose my tongue to the ordeal of framing passable castilian, I did not realize that the american adventure was the progenitor of other adventures; nor that the dreams of the Fonda del Mundo were to go with me into the heart of Spain.

PART III

BURGOS, I had intended, should be my first stopping place. But I decided afterwards that San Sebastian and Leon would be better.

This four days' journeying was an *entr'acte* filled with appropriate music; the lugubrious and splendid landscapes of Castile, the extremely self-conscious, pedantic and independent spirit of its inhabitants, met with en route. Fate was marking time, merely. With the second day's journey I changed trains and dined at Venta de Baños, the junction for the line that branches off in the direction of Palencia, Leon and the galician country.

While travelling, the Spanish peasant has a marked preference for the next compartment to his own. No sooner has the train started, than, one after another, heads, arms, and shoulders appear above the wooden partition. There are times when you have all the members of the neighbouring compartment gazing with the melancholy stolidity of cattle into your own. In the case of some theatrical savage of the Sierras, who rears a dishevelled head before you in a pose of fierce abandon, and hangs there smoking like a chimney, you know that it may be some grandiose recoil of pride that prevents him from remaining in an undignified position huddled in a narrow carriage. In other cases it is probably a simple conviction that the occupants of other compartments are likely to be more interesting.

The whole way from Venta de Baños to Palencia the carriage was dense with people. Crowds of peasants poured into the train, loaded with their heavy vivid horse-rugs, gaudy bundles and baskets; which profusion of mere matter, combined with their exuberance, made the carriage appear positively to swarm with animal life. They would crowd in at one little station and out at another a short way along the line, where they were met by hordes of their relations awaiting them. They would rush or swing out of the door, charged with their property or recent purchases, and catch the nearest man or woman of their blood in their arms, with a turbulence that outdid our Northern people's most vehement occasions. The waiting group became twice as vital as average mankind upon the train's arrival, as though so much more blood had poured into their veins. Gradually we got beyond the sphere of this Fiesta, and in the small hours of the morning arrived at Leon.

Next day came the final stages of the journey to the Atlantic sea-board. We arrived within sight of the town that evening, just as the sun was setting. With its houses of green, rose, and white, in general effect a faded bouquet, its tints a scarcely coloured reminiscence, it looked like some oriental city represented in the nerveless tempera of an old wall. Its bay stretched between hills for many miles to the ocean, which lay beyond an island of scarcely visible rocks.

On the train drawing up in the central station, the shock troops furnished by every little ragamuffin café as well as stately hotel in the town were hurled against us. I had mislaid the address given me at Bayonne. I wished to find a hotel of medium luxury. The different hotel-attendants called hotly out their prices at me. I selected one who named a sum for board and lodging that only the frenzy of competition could have fathered, I thought. Also the name of this hotel was, it seemed to me, the one the patrona at Bayonne had mentioned. I had not then learnt to connect Burgaleza with Burgos: this was my first long visit to Spain. With this man I took a cab and was left seated in it at the door of the station, while he went after the heavy luggage. Now one by one, the hotel emissaries came up; their fury of a few minutes before contrasted oddly with their present listless calm. Putting themselves civilly at my disposition, they thrust forward matter-of-factly the card of their establishment, adding that they were sure that I would find out my mistake.

I now felt in a vague manner a tightening of the machinery of Fate—a certain uneasiness and strangeness, in the march and succession of facts and impressions, like a trembling of a decrepit motor-bus about to start again. The interlude was over. After a long delay the hotel tout returned and we started. My misgivings were of a practical order. The price named was very low, too low perhaps. But I had found it a capital plan on former occasions to go to a cheap hotel and pay a few pesetas more a day for 'extras.' My palate was so conservative, that I found in any case that my main fare lay outside the Spanish menu. Extras are very satisfactory. You always feel that a single individual has bent over the extra and carefully cooked it, and that it has not been bought in too wholesale a manner. I wished to live on extras—a privileged existence: and extras are much the same in one place as another. So I reassured myself.

The cabman and the hotel man were discussing some local event. But we penetrated farther and farther into a dismal and shabby quarter of the town. My misgivings began to revive. I asked the representative of the Burgaleza if he were sure that his house was a clean and comfortable house. He dismissed my doubtful glance with a gesture full of assurance. 'It's a splendid place! You wait and see; we shall be there directly,' he added.

We suddenly emerged into a broad and imposing street, on one side of which was a public garden, 'El Paseo,' I found out afterwards, the Town Promenade. Gazing idly at a palatial white building with a hotel omnibus drawn up before it, to my astonishment I found our driver also stopping at its door. A few minutes later, still scarcely able to credit my eyes, I got out and entered this palace, noticing 'Burgaleza' on the board of the omnibus as I passed. I followed the tout, having glimpses in passing of a superbly arrayed table with serviettes that were each a work of art, that one of the splendid guests entertained at this establishment (should I not be among them?) would soon haughtily pull to pieces to wipe his mouth on—tables groaning beneath gilded baskets tottering with a lavish variety of choice fruit. Then came a long hall,

darkly panelled, at the end of which I could see several white-capped men shouting fiercely and clashing knives, women answering shrilly and juggling with crashing dishes; a kitchen—the most diabolically noisy and malodorous I had ever approached. We went straight on towards it. Were we going through it? At the very threshold we stopped, and opening the panel-like door in the wall, the porter disappeared with my portmanteau, appearing again without my portmanteau, and hurried away. At this moment my eye caught something else, a door ajar on the other side of the passage and a heavy, wooden, clothless table, with several squares of bread upon it, and a fork or two. In Spain there is a sort of bread for the rich, and a forbidding juiceless papery bread for the humble. The bread on that table was of the latter category, far more like paper than that I had had at Bayonne.

Suddenly the truth flashed upon me. With a theatrical gesture I dashed open again the panel and passed into the pitchy gloom within. I struck a match. It was a cupboard, quite windowless, with just enough room for a little bed; I was standing on my luggage. No doubt in the room across the passage I should be given some cod soup, permanganate of potash and artificial bread. Then, extremely tired after my journey, I should crawl into my kennel, the pandemonium of the kitchen at my ear for several hours.

In the central hall I found the smiling proprietor. He seemed to regard his boarders generally as a gentle joke, and those who slept in the cupboard near the kitchen a particularly good but rather low one. I informed him that I would pay the regular sum for a day's board and lodging, and said I must have another room. A valet accepted the responsibility of seeing that I was given a bedroom. The landlord walked slowly away, his iron-grey side-whiskers, with their traditional air of respectability, giving a disguised look to his rogue's face. I was transferred from one cupboard to another; or rather, I had exchanged a cupboard for a wardrobe—reduced to just half its size by a thick layer of skirts and cloaks, twenty deep, that protruded from all four walls. But still the little open space left in the centre ensured a square foot to wash and dress in, with a quite distinct square foot or two for sleep. And it was upstairs.

A quarter of an hour later, wandering along a dark passage on the way back to the hotel lounge, a door opened in a very violent and living way that made me start and look up, and a short rectangular figure, the size of a big square trunk, issued forth, just ahead of me. I recognized this figure fragmentarily—first, with a cold shudder, I recognized an excrescence of hair; then with a jump I recognized a hat held in its hand; then, with an instinctive shrinking, I realized that I had seen these flat traditional pseudo-american shoulders before. With a really comprehensive throb of universal emotion, I then recognized the whole man.

It was the implacable figure of my neighbour at dinner, of the Fonda del Mundo.

He moved along before me with wary rigidity, exhibiting none of the usual signs of recognition. He turned corners with difficulty, a rapid lurch precipitating him into the new path indicated when he reached the end of the wall. On the stairs he appeared to get stuck in much the way that a large american trunk would, borne by a sweating porter. At last he safely reached the hall. I was a yard or two behind him. He stopped to light a cigar, still taking up an unconscionable amount of space. I manoeuvred round him, and gained one of the doors of the *salle à manger*. But as I came within his range of vision, I also became aware that my presence in the house was not a surprise to this sandwich-man of Western citizenship. His eye fastened upon me with ruthless bloodshot indignation, an eye-blast as it were crystallized from the episode at Bayonne. But he was so dead and inactive that he seemed a phantom of his former self: and in all my subsequent dealings with him, this feeling of having to deal with a ghost, although a particularly mischievous one, persisted. If before my anger at the trick that had been played on me had dictated a speedy change of lodging, now my anxiety to quit this roof had, naturally, an overwhelming incentive.

After dinner I went forth boldly in search of the wonderful american enemy. Surely I had been condemned, in some indirect way, by him, to the cupboard beside the kitchen. No dungeon could have been worse. Had I then known, as I learnt later, that he was the owner of this hotel, the mediaeval analogy would have been still more complete. He now had me in his castle.

I found him seated, in sinister conjunction with the proprietor or manager, as I supposed he was, in the lobby of the hotel. He turned slightly away as I came up to him, with a sully indifference due to self-restraint. Evidently the time for action was not ripe. There was no pretence of not recognizing me. As though our conversation in the Fonda del Mundo had taken place a half-hour before, we acknowledged in no way a consciousness of the lapse of time, only of the shifted

scene.

'Well, colonel,' I said, adopting an allocution of the United States, 'taking the air?'

He went on smoking.

'This is a nice little town.'

'Vous vous plaisez ici, monsieur? C'est bien!' he replied in french, as though I were not worthy even to *hear* his american accent, and that, if any communication was to be held with me, french must serve.

'I shall make a stay of some weeks here,' I said, with indulgent defiance.

'Oui?'

'But not in this hotel.'

He got up with something of his Bayonne look about him.

'No, I shouldn't. You might not find it a very comfortable hotel,' he said vehemently in his mother-tongue.

He walked away hurriedly, as a powder magazine might walk away from a fuse, if it did not, for some reason, want to blow up just then.

That was our last encounter that day. The upstairs and less dreadful dungeon with its layer of clothes would have been an admirable place for a murder. Not a sound would have penetrated its woollen masses and the thick spanish walls enclosing it. But the next morning I was still alive. I set out after breakfast to look for new quarters. My practised eye had soon measured the inconsistencies of most of the Pensions of the town. But a place in the Calle Real suited me all right, and I decided to stop there for the time. There too the room was only a cupboard. But it was a human cupboard and not a clothes cupboard. It was one of the four tributaries of the dining-room. My bedroom door was just beside my place at table—I had simply to step out of bed in the right direction, and there was the morning coffee. The extracting of my baggage from the Burgaleza was easy enough, except that I was charged a heavy toll. I protested with the manager for some time, but he smiled and smiled. 'Those are our charges!' He shrugged his shoulders, dismissed the matter, and smiled absent-mindedly when I renewed my objections. As at Bayonne, there was no sign of the enemy in the morning. But I was not so sure this time that I had seen the last of him.

That evening I came amongst my new fellow-pensionnaires for the first time. This place had recommended itself to me, partly because the boarders would probably speak castilian, and so be practice for me. They were mostly not Gallegos, at least, who are the Bretons of Spain, and afford other Spaniards much amusement by their way of expressing themselves. My presence caused no stir whatever. Just as a stone dropped in a small pond which has long been untouched, and has an opaque coat of green decay, slips dully to the bottom, cutting a neat little hole on the surface, so I took my place at the bottom of the table. But as the pond will send up its personal odour at this intrusion, so these people revealed something of themselves in the first few minutes, in an illusive and immobile way. They must all have lived in that Pension together for an inconceivable length of time. My neighbour, however, promised to be a little El Dorado of spanish; a small mine of gossip, grammatical rules and willingness to impart these riches. I struck a deep shaft of friendship into him at once and began work without delay. Coming from Madrid, this ore was at least 30 carat, thoroughly thetaed and castilian stuff that he talked. What I gave him in exchange was insignificant. He knew several phrases in french and english, such as 'If you please,' and 'fine day'; I merely confirmed him in these. Every day he would hesitatingly say them over, and I would assent, 'quite right,' and 'very well pronounced.' He was a tall, bearded man, head of the orchestra of the principal Café in the town. Two large cuffs lay on either side of his plate during meals, the size of serviettes. Out of them his hands emerged without in any way disturbing them, and served him with his food as far as they could. But he had to remain with his mouth quite near his plate, for the cuffs would not move a hair's breadth. This somewhat annoyed me, as it muffled a little the steady flow of spanish, and even sometimes was a cause of considerable waste. Once or twice without success I attempted to move the cuff on my side away from the plate. Their ascendancy over him and their indolence was profound.

But I was not content merely to work him for his mother-tongue inertly, as it were. I wished to see it in use: to watch this

stream of castilian working the mill of general conversation, for instance. Although willing enough for himself, he had no chance in this Pension. On the third day, however, he invited me to come round to the Café after dinner and hear him play. Our dinners overlapped, he leaving early. So the meal over, I strolled round, alone.

The Café Pelayo was the only really parisian establishment in the town. It was the only one where the Madrilenos and the other Spaniards proper, resident in Pontaisandra, went regularly. I entered, peering round in a business-like way at its monotonously mirrored walls and gilded ceiling. I took up an advantageous position, and settled down to study the idiom.

In a lull of the music, my chef d'orchestre came over to me, and presented me to a large group of people, friends of his. It was an easy matter, from that moment, to become acquainted with everybody in the Café.

I did not approach Spaniards in general, I may say, with any very romantic emotion. Each man I met possessed equally an ancient and admirable tongue, however degenerate himself. He often appeared like some rotten tree, in which a swarm of highly evocative admirable words had nested. I, like a bee-cultivator, found it my business to transplant this vagrant swarm to a hive prepared. A language has its habits and idiosyncrasies just like a species of insect, as my first professor comfortably explained; its little world of symbols and parts of speech have to be most carefully studied and manipulated. But above all it is important to observe their habits and idiosyncrasies, and the pitch and accent that naturally accompanies them. So I had my hands full.

When the Café closed, I went home with Don Pedro, chef d'orchestre, to the Pension. Every evening, after dinner—and at lunch-time as well—I repaired there. This lasted for three or four days. I now had plenty of opportunity of talking castilian Spanish. I had momentarily forgotten my american enemy.

On the fifth evening, I entered the Café as usual, making towards my most useful and intelligent group. But then, with a sinking of the heart, I saw the rectangular form of my ubiquitous enemy, quartered with an air of demoniac permanence in their midst. A mechanic who finds an unaccountable lump of some foreign substance stuck in the very heart of his machinery—what simile shall I use for my dismay? To proceed somewhat with this image, as this unhappy engineer might dash to the cranks or organ stops of his machine, so I dashed to several of my formerly most willing listeners and talkers. I gave one a wrench and another a screw, but I found that already the machine had become recalcitrant.

I need not enumerate the various stages of my defeat on that evening. It was more or less a passive and moral battle, rather than one with any evident show of the secretly bitter and desperate nature of the passions engaged. Of course, the inclusion of so many people unavoidably caused certain brusqueries here and there. The gradual cooling down of the whole room towards me, the disaffection that swept over the chain of little drinking groups from that centre of mystical hostility, that soul that recognized in me something icily antipodean too, no doubt; the immobile figure of America's newest and most mysterious child, apparently emitting these strong waves without effort, as naturally as a fountain: all this, with great vexation, I recognized from the moment of the intrusion of his presence. It almost seemed as though he had stayed away from this haunt of his foreseeing what would happen. He had waited until I had comfortably settled myself and there was something palpable to attack. His absence may have had some more accidental cause.

What exactly it was, again, he found to say as regards me I never discovered. As at Bayonne, I saw the mouth working and experienced the social effects, only. No doubt it was the subtlest and most electric thing that could be found; brief, searching and annihilating. Perhaps something seemingly crude—that I was a spy—may have recommended itself to his ingenuity. But I expect it was a meaningless blast of disapprobation that he blew upon me, an eerie and stinging wind of convincing hatred. He evidently enjoyed a great ascendancy in the Café Pelayo. This would be explained no doubt by his commercial prestige. But it was due, I am sure, even more to his extraordinary character—moulded by the sublime force of his illusion. His inscrutable immobility, his unaccountable self-control (for such a person, and feeling as he did towards me), were of course the american or anglo-saxon phlegm and sang-froid as reflected, or interpreted, in this violent human mirror.

I left the Café earlier than usual, before the chef d'orchestre. It was the following morning at lunch when I next saw him. He was embarrassed. His eyes wavered in my direction, fascinated and inquisitive. He found it difficult to realize that his respect for me had to end and give place to another feeling.

'You know Monsieur de Valmore?' he asked.

'That little ape of a Frenchman, do you mean?'

I knew this description of my wonderful enemy was only vulgar and splenetic. But I was too discouraged to be more exact.

This way of describing Monsieur de Valmore appeared to the chef d'orchestre so eccentric, apart from its vulgarity, that I lost at once in Don Pedro's sympathy. He told me, however, all about him; details that did not touch on the real constituents of this life.

'He owns the Burgaleza and many houses in Pontaisandra. Ships, too—Es Americano,' he added.

Vexations and hindrances of all sorts now made my stay in Pontaisandra useless and depressing. Don Pedro had generally almost finished when we came to dinner, and I was forced to close down, so to say, the mine. Nothing more was to be extracted, at length, except disobliging monosyllables. The rest of the boarders remained morose and inaccessible. I went once more to the Café Pelayo, but the waiters even seemed to have come beneath the hostile spell. The new Café I chose yielded nothing but gallego chatter, and the garçon was not talkative.

There was little encouragement to try another Pension and stay on in Pontaisandra. I made up my mind to go to Corunna. This would waste time and I was short of money. But there is more gallego than spanish spoken in Galicia, even in the cities. Too easily automatic a conquest as it may seem, Monsieur de Valmore had left me nothing but the Gallegos. I was not getting the practice in spanish I needed, and this sudden deprivation of what I had mainly come into Spain for, poisoned for me the whole air of the place. The task of learning this tiresome language began to be burdensome. I even considered whether I should not take up gallego instead. But I decided finally to go to Corunna. On the following day, some hours before the time for the train, I paraded the line of streets towards the station, with the feeling that I was no longer there. The place seemed cooling down beneath my feet and growing prematurely strange. But the miracle happened. It declared itself with a smooth suddenness. A more exquisite checkmate never occurred in any record of such warfare.

The terrible ethnological difference that existed between Monsieur de Valmore and myself up till that moment, showed every sign of ending in a weird and revolting defeat for me. The 'moment' I refer to was that in which I turned out of the High Street, into the short hilly avenue where the post office lay. I thought I would go up to the Correo and see for the last time if a letter for which I had been waiting had arrived.

On turning the corner I at once became aware of three anomalous figures walking just in front of me. They were all three of the proportions known in America as 'husky.' When I say they were walking, I should describe their movements more accurately as *wading*—wading through the air, evidently towards the post office. Their carriage was slightly rolling, like a ship under way. They occasionally bumped into each other, but did not seem to mind this. Yet no one would have mistaken these three young men for drunkards. But I daresay you will have already guessed. It would under other circumstances have had no difficulty in entering my head. As it was, there seemed a certain impediment of consciousness or inhibition with me which prevented me from framing to myself the word 'American.' These three figures were three Americans! This seems very simple, I know: but this very ordinary fact trembled and lingered before completely entering into my consciousness. The extreme rapidity of my mind in another sense—in seeing all that this fact, if verified, might signify to me—may have been responsible for that. Then one of them, on turning his head, displays the familiar features of Taffany, a Mississippi friend of mine. I simultaneously recognized Blauenfeld and Morton, the other two members of a trio. A real trio, like real twins, is rarer than one thinks. This one was the remnant of a quartet, however. I had met it first in Paris. Poor Bill (Borden Henneker) was killed in a motor accident. These three had mourned him with insatiable drinking, to which I had been a party for some days the year before. And my first feeling was complicated with a sense of their forlornness, as I recognized their three backs, rolling heavily and mournfully.

In becoming, from any three Americans, three friends of mine, they precipitated in an immediate inrush of the most full-blooded hope the sense of what might be boldly anticipated from this meeting. Two steps brought me up with them: my cordiality if anything exceeded theirs.

'Why, if it isn't Cairo! Look at this! Off what Christmas-tree did you drop? Gee, I'm glad to see you, Kire!' shouted

Taffany. He was the irrepressible Irishman of the three.

'Why, it's you, that's swell. We looked out for you in Paris. You'd just left. How long have you been round here?' Blauenfeld ground out cordially. He was the rich melancholy one of the three.

'Come right up to the Correo and interpret for us, Cairo. You know the idioma, I guess. Feldie's a washout,' said Morton, who was the great debauchee of the three.

Optimism, consciousness of power (no wonder! I reflected) surged out of them, my simple-hearted friends. Ah, the kindness! the *overwhelming* kindness. I bathed voluptuously in this american greeting—this real american greeting. Nothing naturalized about *that*. At the same time I felt almost awe at the thought of the dangerous nationality. These good fellows I knew and liked so well, seemed for the moment to have some intermixture of the strangeness of Monsieur de Valmore. However, I measured with enthusiasm their egregious breadth of shoulder, the exorbitance of their 'pants.' I examined with some disappointment these signs of nationality. How english they looked, compared to de Valmore. They were by no means american enough for my taste. Had they appeared in a star-stripe swallow-tail suit like the cartoons of Uncle Sam, I should not have been satisfied.

But I felt rather like some ambitious eastern prince who, having been continually defeated in battle by a neighbour because of the presence in the latter's army of a half-dozen elephants, suddenly becomes possessed of a couple of dozen himself.

I must have behaved oddly. I enquired anxiously about their plans. They were not off at once? No. That was capital. I was most awfully glad that they were not departing at once. I was glad that they had decided to stop. They had booked their rooms? Yes. That was good. So they were here for the night at all events? That was as it should be! You should always stop the night. Yes, I would with very great pleasure interpret for them at the Correo.—I cherished my three Americans as no Americans before have ever been cherished. I was inclined to shelter them as though they were perishable, to see that they didn't get run over, or expose themselves unwisely to the midday sun. Each transatlantic peculiarity of speech or gesture I received with something approaching exultation. Morton was soon persuaded that I was tight. All thoughts of Corunna disappeared. I did not ask at the Poste Restante for my letter.

First of all, I took my trio into a little Café near the post office. There I told them briefly what was expected of them.

'You have a most distinguished compatriot here,' I said.

'Oh. An American?' Morton asked seriously.

'Well, he deserves to be. But he began too late in life, I think. He hails from the southern part of France, and americanism came to him as a revelation when youth had already passed. He repented sincerely of his misguided early nationality. But his years spent as a Frenchman have left their mark. In the meantime, he won't leave Englishmen alone. He persecutes them, apparently, wherever he finds them.'

'He mustn't do that!' Taffany said with resolution. 'That won't do at all.'

'Why, no, I guess he mustn't do that. What makes him want to do that? What's biting him anyway? Britishers are harmless enough, aren't they?' said Blauenfeld.

'I knew you'd look at the matter in that light,' I said. 'It's a rank abuse of authority; I knew it would be condemned at headquarters. Now if you could only be present, unseen, and witness how I, for instance, am oppressed by this fanatic fellow-citizen of yours, and if you could issue forth, and reprove him, and tell him not to do it again, I should bless the day on which you were born in America.'

'I wasn't born there anyway,' said Morton. 'But that's of no importance I suppose. Well, unfold your plan, Cairo.'

'I don't see yet what we can do. Do you owe the guy any money? How does it come that he persecutes you like this?' Taffany asked.

'I'm very sorry you should have to complain, Mr. Ker-Orr, of treatment of that sort—but what sort is it anyway?'

I gave a lurid picture of my tribulations, to the scandal and indignation of my friends. They at once placed themselves, and with a humorous modesty their americanism—any quantity of that mixture in their 'organisms'—at my disposal.

It appeared to me, to start with, of the first importance that Monsieur de Valmore should not get wind of what had happened. I took my three Americans cautiously out of the Café, reconnoitring before allowing them outside. As their hotel was near the station and not near the enemy's haunts, I encouraged their going back to it. I also supposed that they would wish to make some toilet for the evening, and relied on their good sense to put on their largest clothes, though Taffany was the only one of the three that seemed at all promising from that point of view. The scale of his buttocks did assure a certain outlandish girth that would at once reveal to M. de Valmore the presence of an American.

My army was in excellent form. Robust high spirits possessed them. I kept them out of the way till nightfall, and then after an early dinner, by a circuitous route, approached the Café Pelayo.

Morton was by this time a little screwed: he showed signs that he might become difficult. He insisted on producing a packet of obscene photographs, which he held before him fan-wise, like a hand of cards, some of them upside down. The confused mass of bare legs and arms of the photographs, distorted by this method of holding them, with some highly indecent details occurring here and there, produced the effect of a siamese demon. Blauenfeld was grinning over his shoulder, and seemed likely to forget the purpose for which he was being brought to the Pelayo.

'I know that coon,' he insisted, pointing to one of the photos. 'I swear I know that coon.'

My idea was that the three Americans should enter the Café Pelayo without me. There they would establish themselves, and I had told them where to sit and how to spot their man. They should become acquainted with Monsieur de Valmore. Almost certainly the latter would approach his fellow citizens at once. But if there was any ice to break, it must be broken quickly by Taffany. They must ply him with imitation high-balls or some other national drink, which they must undertake to mix for him. For this they could hand the bill to me afterwards. When the ground was sufficiently prepared, Taffany was to sign to me from the door, and I would then, after a further interval, put in my appearance.

Morton was kissing one of the photographs. Should he continue to produce, in season and out of season, his objectionable purchases, and display them, perhaps, to the customers of the Pelayo, although he might gain an ill-deserved popularity, he would certainly convey an impression of a different sort to that planned by me for this all-american evening. After considerable drunken argument I persuaded him to let me hold the photographs until the *coup* had been brought off. That point of discipline enforced, I sent them forward, sheltering, myself, in an archway in an adjoining street, and watched them enter the swing door 'ra-raing,' as ordered. But I had the mortification of seeing Morton fall down as he got inside, tripping, apparently, over the mat. Cursing this intemperate clown, I moved with some stealth to a small gallego Café within sight of the door of the Pelayo to await events.

I fixed my eyes on the brilliantly lighted windows of the Café. I imagined the glow of national pride, the spasm of delighted recognition, that would invade Monsieur de Valmore, on hearing the 'ra-ra' chorus. Apart from the sentimental reason—its use as a kind of battle-song—was the practical one that this noisy entrance would at once attract my enemy's attention. Ten minutes passed. I knew that my friends had located Monsieur de Valmore, even if they had not begun operations. Else they would have returned to my place of waiting. I wallowed naïvely in a superb indifference. Having set the machinery going, I turned nonchalantly away, paying no more attention to it. But the stage analogy affected me, in the sense that I became rather conscious of my appearance. I must await my cue, but was sure of my reception. I was the great star that was not expected. I was the unknown quantity. Meantime I pulled out the photographs and arranged them fantastically as Morton had done. From time to time I glanced idly down the road. At last I saw Blauenfeld making towards me, his usual american swing of the body complicated by rhythmical upheavals of mirth into trappings, stumblings and slappings of his thigh. He was being very american in a traditional way as he approached me. He was a good actor, I thought: I was grateful to him. I paid for my coffee while he was coming up.

'Is it O.K.? Is he spitted?'

'Yep! we've got him fine! Come and have a look at him.'

'Did he carry out his part of the programme according to my arrangements?'

'Why, yes. We went right in, and all three spotted him at the same time. Taffany walked round and showed himself: he was the decoy. Morty and me coquetted round too, looking arch and *very american*. We could see his old pop-eyes beginning to stick out of his old head, and his old mouth watering. At last he could hold himself no longer. He roared at us. We bellowed at him. Gee, it was a great moment in american history! We just came together with a hiss and splutter of joy. He called up a trayful of drinks, to take off the rawness of our meeting. He can't have seen an American for months. He just gobbled us up. There isn't much left of poor old Taff. He likes him best and me next. Morty's on all fours at present, tickling his legs. He doesn't much care for Morty. He's made us promise to go to his hotel tonight.'

I approached the palmy terrace, my mouth a little drawn and pinched, eyebrows raised, like a fastidious expert called in at a decisive moment. I entered the swing door with Blauenfeld, and looked round in a cold and business-like way, as a doctor might, with the dignified enquiry, 'Where is the patient?' The patient was there right enough, surrounded by the nurses I had sent. There he sat in as defenceless a condition of beatitude as possible. He stared at me with an incredulous grin at first. I believe that in this moment he would have been willing to extend to me a temporary pardon—a passe-partout to his Café for the evening. He was so happy I became a bagatelle. Had I wished, an immediate reconciliation was waiting for me. But I approached him with impassive professional rapidity, my eye fixed on him, already making my diagnosis. I was so carried away by the figure of the physician, and adhered so faithfully to the bedside manner that I had decided upon as the most appropriate for the occasion, that I almost began things by asking him to put out his tongue. Instead I sat down carefully in front of him, pulling up my trousers meticulously at the knee. I examined his flushed and astounded face, his bristling moustache, his bloodshot eyes in silence. Then I very gravely shook my head.

No man surprised by his most mortal enemy in the midst of an enervating debauch, or barely convalescent from a bad illness, could have looked more nonplussed. But Monsieur de Valmore turned with a characteristic blank childish appeal to his nurses or boon companions for help, especially to Taffany. Perhaps he was shy or diffident of taking up actively his great rôle, when more truly great actors were present. Would not the divine America speak, or thunder, through them, at this intruder? He turned a pair of solemn, appealing, outraged dog's-eyes upon Taffany. Would not his master repulse and chastise this insolence?

'I guess you don't know each other,' said Taffany. 'Say, Monsieur de Valmore, here's a friend of mine, Mr. Ker-Orr from London.'

My enemy pulled himself together as though the different parts of his body all wanted to leap away in different directions, and he found it all he could do to prevent such disintegration. An attempt at a bow appeared as a chaotic movement, the various parts of his body could not come together for it. It had met other movements on the way, and never became a bow at all. An extraordinary confusion beset his body. The beginning for a score of actions ran over it blindly and disappeared.

'Guess Mr. de Valmore ain't quite comfortable in that chair, Morty. Give him yours.'

Then in this chaotic and unusual state he was hustled from one chair to the other, his muffled expostulations being in french, I noticed.

His racial instinct was undergoing the severest revolution it had yet known. An incarnation of sacred America herself had commanded him to take me to his bosom. And, as the scope of my victory dawned upon him, his personal mortification assumed the proportions of a national calamity. For the first time since the sealing of his citizenship he felt that he was only a Frenchman from the Midi—hardly as near an American, in point of fact, as is even a poor god-forsaken Britisher.

The Soldier of Humour is chivalrous, though implacable. I merely drank a bottle of champagne at his expense; made Don Pedro and his orchestra perform three extras, all made up of the most intensely national english light comedy music. Taffany, for whom Monsieur de Valmore entertained the maximum of respect, held him solemnly for some time with a detailed and fabulous enumeration of my virtues. Before long I withdrew with my forces to riot in barbarous triumph at my friends' hotel for the rest of the evening.

During the next two days I on several occasions visited the battlefield, but Monsieur de Valmore had vanished. His disappearance alone would have been sufficient to tell me that my visit to Spain was terminated. And in fact two days

later I left Pontaisandra with the Americans, parting with them at Tuy, and myself continuing on the Leon-San Sebastian route back to France, and eventually to Paris. The important letter which I had been expecting had arrived at last and contained most unexpected news. My presence was required, I learnt, in Budapest.

Arrived at Bayonne, I left the railway station with what people generally regard as a premonition. It was nothing of course but the usual mechanical working of inference within the fancy. It was already night-time. Stepping rapidly across the square, I hurried down the hall-way of the Fonda del Mundo. Turning brusquely and directly into the dining-room of the inn I gazed round me almost shocked not to find what I now associated with that particular scene. Although Monsieur de Valmore had not been there to greet me, as good or better than his presence seemed to be attending me on my withdrawal from Spain. I still heard in this naked little room, as the wash of the sea in the shell, the echo of the first whisperings of his weird displeasure. Next day I arrived in Paris, my spanish nightmare shuffled off long before I reached that humdrum spot.

TRANSCRIBER'S NOTE

Minor variations in spelling and punctuation have been preserved.

[End of *A Soldier of Humour*, by Wyndham Lewis]