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THE BRIDGE OF PINOS

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## A PASSING GLANCE *at* SPAIN

Random Sketches *and* flighty first Impressions *by* Samuel Chamberlain



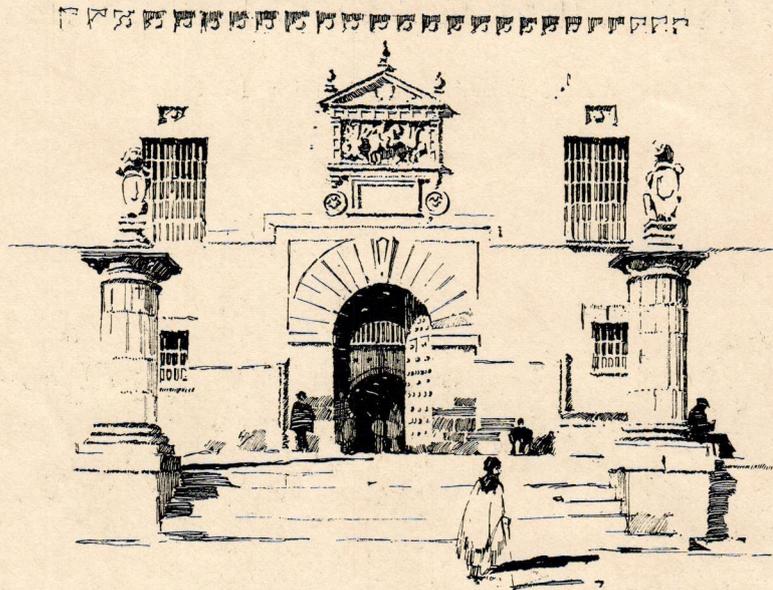
ALPITANT architects on a maiden trip to Spain are due for many a surprise. However vague may be one's actual knowledge of that intriguing country, there is usually that preconceived and often preposterous picture: glistening, sun-bathed castles, blossoming orange trees, the caressing warmth of an Andalusian sun, bullfights, fandangos, gay, agile villains with daggers and castanets, mantillas and roses in clenched teeth. The cold reality, one is startled to find, is that Spain is too cold in the Winter and most of the Fall and too hot in the Summer for comfort—(Moral: go in the Springtime)—that, compared to France it is a very expensive place in which to travel; that bleak, barren hills usually substitute for orange blossoms, and that the enchanting

señoritas of the flowing mantilla and the rose, clenched teeth and other properties, are either non-existent or safely behind bolt, bar and blinder.

Sufficiently hard boiled travellers who adapt themselves readily to the life of primitive man find little to complain about in the Spanish comforts of life. The feminine angle, however, holds the hotels to be vile, the food to be execrable, the climate inexcusable, the people rude and staring, the railroads an exasperating joke. Strange, poignant odors permeate the corridors of all too many Spanish hotels, it is true. As nearly as the most predominant perfume can be pinned down with mere words, it resembles allspice thrown into the heavy atmosphere of an operating room. And the beds, from the point of view of repose afforded, have progressed little beyond

those of the stone age. But what of that? Spanish meals consist principally of meat and more meat, and still more meat during the bullfighting season, it appears, and they are savored a bit too strongly with rancid olive oil, it is true. The Spanish trains offer very nearly the ultimate in leisurely and sordid travel. A "de luxe" express (the quotation marks are sarcastic), has the relative dispatch of a Stamford local. The vision of a second class compartment at mealtime is not pleasing. Greasy fingers, stuffy fumes of garlic and red wine, egg shells, fish bones, nut shells, orange peelings under foot. Also the art of frank and merciless staring is by no means a lost one in Spain. The shrinking violet almost withers and passes out. But when all these indictments are banded in one,

it, must find a happy hunting ground there. Another decided surprise comes as soon as one steps from the railway station in Madrid, harassed by gilt lettered porters, pestered by baggage scorpions, but enchanted by the sight of that forgotten flower, a genuine yellow taxi. Civilization, as exemplified by subways, skyscrapers, adding machines, typewriters and shouting newsboys is flourishing in a most fertile oasis, that much is evident. College cake eaters and the gay social bloods who have mastered the manual of polite Spanish conversation and are possessed of a plump pocket-book could have a wonderful time in Madrid. It has all the jazz, the luxurious apartments, the cabarets and the cut-throat cab drivers that can be found in the lower fifties of New York. It is distinctly a modern



THE HOSPITAL AT UBEDA



PUERTA DE LA ALMOCABAR - RONDA

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they present a very weak argument to detain an architect from the trip through Spain. The same bristling source of opinion that condemns the comforts of the place admits without qualification that an architect, if he chose to look for

city. Every music store has elaborate displays of—dare I repeat the wearisome words?—"Yes, We Have No Bananas," which was respectably recent at that time. The old streets have been slashed and sliced and scraped to make way for

new boulevards of faultless asphalt. Skyscrapers, in the modest sense of the word twenty years ago, are rising up as they are in no other city in Europe. One of the newly created boulevards is lined with them, all in various stages of com-

less. The vast pyramids, spheres, leaping horses, gilded chariots and conglomerate gewgaws which are so much in favor here, possess an almost negligible *raison d'être*. There are other architectural phenomena to be found, most notably and



FROM THE ORIGINAL DRAWING BY SAMUEL CHAMBERLAIN

pletion. Some of them rise up a full thirteen or fourteen stories. As debutantes at this sort of thing, the Spanish naturally commit some rather terrible affairs. Most noticeable is the violent lack of scale of the elaborate and junky cresting which, like a rooster's comb, is apparently meant to lend a telling touch of elegance. This sort of thing is quite all right on a Riviera hotel, and it goes admirably with baby's building blocks, but on an office building it is entirely meaning-

notoriously a squad of caryatides in phalanx formation, each elbowing the other out of the way. But skyscrapers in Madrid were a surprise. One had a repeated presentiment that Park Avenue would be just around the corner. Those in quest of an old world atmosphere will find about as much of it here as in Gary, Indiana. Possessed of a fortune and a back slapping acquaintance with Alphonso XIII, it might be jolly to have an apartment at the Ritz for a month or so, other-