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SOME ACCOUNT OF
GOTHIC
ARCHITECTURE
IN SPAIN

VOLUME 2

GEORGE EDMUND STREET
EDITED BY
GEORGIANA GODDARD KING



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An architect and architectural theorist, George Edmund Street (1824–81) was one of the key proponents of the ‘High Victorian’ Gothic style in nineteenth-century Britain. He is best known as the mind behind London’s Royal Courts of Justice. Elected an associate of the Royal Academy in 1866, Street became its professor of architecture in 1880. In 1874 he received the gold medal of the Royal Institute of British Architects, and he served as the Institute’s president in 1881. This two-volume work was first published in 1865, and is reissued here in its 1914 version, edited by the American art historian Georgiana Goddard King (1871–1939), who reminds her readers that Street’s guide was pioneering in its time, and remains indispensable to the understanding of the Gothic era in Europe. The work takes the reader on a tour of Spain’s most ancient and architecturally important towns and cities.

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Street

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BY
GEORGE EDMUND STREET, F.S.A.

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SEGOVIA FROM THE ALCAZAR

VOL. II

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GOTHIC ARCHITECTURE IN SPAIN

CHAPTER XII

VALENCIA

FROM Toledo I took the railway to Valencia. But as the junction of the Toledo branch with the main line is a small station of the meanest description, and as there were three or four hours to dispose of before the mail train passed, I went back as far as Aranjuez, intending to dine there. The station is close to the palace, a large, bald, and uninteresting pile. The principal inn is kept by an Englishman with a French wife, and as it was not the right season for Aranjuez we had great difficulty in getting anything. In truth the French wife was a tartar, and advised us to go back again; but finally, the husband having interceded, she relented so far as to produce some eggs and bacon.

Aranjuez seemed to consist mainly of the palace and its stables, and to be afflicted with even more than the usual plague of dust: but in the spring no doubt it is in a more pleasant state, and may, I hope, justify the landlord's assertion that there is nothing in the world to compare with it!

Late in the evening we started for Valencia: it was a bright moonlight night, so that I was able, when I woke and looked out, to see that the country we traversed was an endless plain of extremely uninteresting character and that we lost little by not seeing it. I should have preferred leaving the railway altogether, and going by Cuença on my way to Valencia; but time was altogether wanting for this détour, though I have no doubt that Cuença would well repay a visit.

At Almanza, where the lines for Alicante and Valencia separate, there is a very picturesque castle perched upon a rock above the town, and here the dreary, uninteresting country, which extends with but short intervals all the way from Vitoria, is changed for the somewhat mountainous Valencian district, which everywhere shows signs of the highest luxuriance and

cultivation, resulting almost entirely from the extreme care and industry with which the artificial irrigation is managed. The villages are numerous, and around them are beautiful vineyards, groves of orange-trees, and rice-fields; whilst here and there clumps of tall palm-trees give a very Eastern aspect to the landscape. The churches seemed, as far as I could judge, to be all modern and most uninteresting. After passing the hilly country, a broad plain is crossed to Valencia. Here the system of irrigation, said to be an inheritance from the Moors, is evidently most complete. Every field has its stream of water running rapidly along, and the main drawback to such a system, so completely carried out, is that the beds of the rivers are generally all but dry, their water being all diverted into other and more useful channels. The Valencian farm-labourers' dress is quite worth looking at. They wear short, loose, white linen trousers and jackets, brilliantly coloured *mantas*—generally scarlet—thrown over their shoulders, coloured handkerchiefs over their heads, and violet scarfs round their waists. They have a quaint way of sitting at work in the fields, with their knees up to their ears, like so many grasshoppers; and their skin is so well bronzed that one can hardly believe them to be of European blood. They are said to be vindictive and passionate, but they are also, so far as I saw them, very lively, merry, and talkative. The farms appear to be very large, and when I passed the farmers were hard at work threshing their rice. This is all done by horses and mules on circular threshing-floors. In many of the farms eight or ten pairs of horse may be seen at work at the same time on as many threshing-floors, and the effect of such a scene is striking and novel.

As we went into Valencia we passed on the right the enormous new Plaza de Toros, said to be the finest in Spain. Railroads will, I suppose, rather tend to develop the national love for this institution, and this theatre must have been built with some such impression, for otherwise it is difficult to believe that a city of a hundred and twenty thousand inhabitants could build a theatre capable of containing about a tenth of the whole population!

The national vehicle of Valencia is the *tariana*, a covered cart on two wheels, with a slight attempt only at springs, and rendered gay by the crimson curtains which are hung across the front. Jumping into one of these, we soon found ourselves at the excellent Fonda del Cid, whose title reminds us that we are on classic ground in this city of Valencia del Cid.