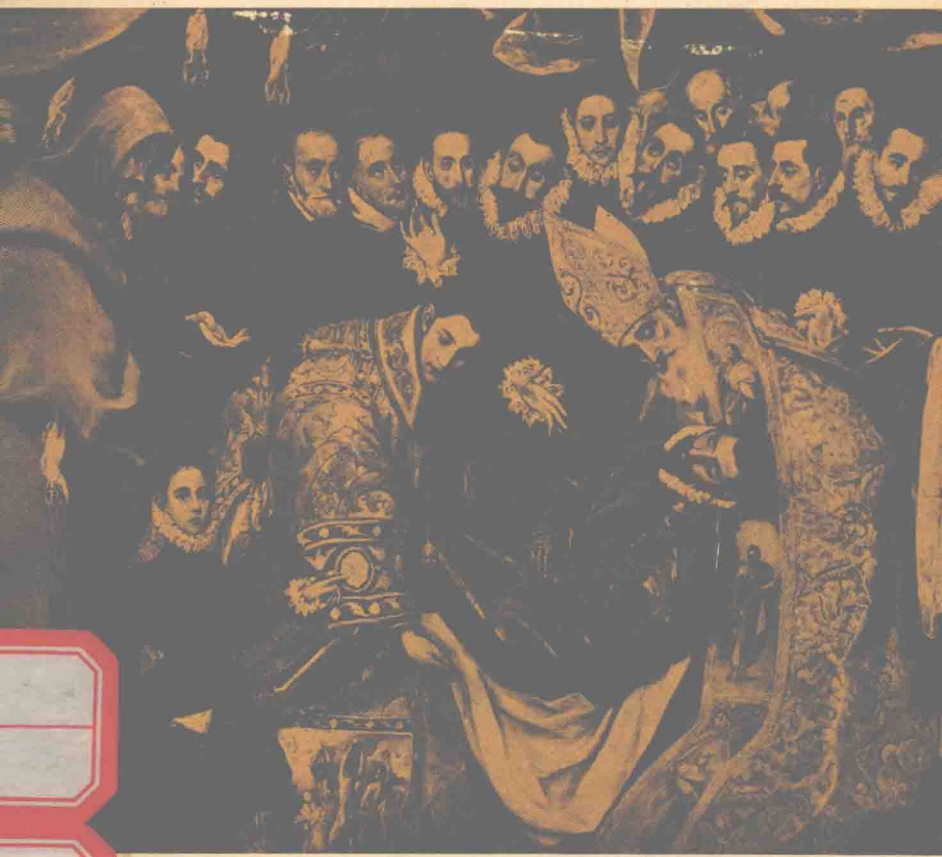
OPUS 19

The Civilization of Spain



J. B. Trend

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J. B. TREND

The Civilization of Spain

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The Civilization of Spain

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1

The Discovery of Spain

SPAIN, which was to play so great a part in the discovery and colonization of the New World, was once discovered and colonized itself.

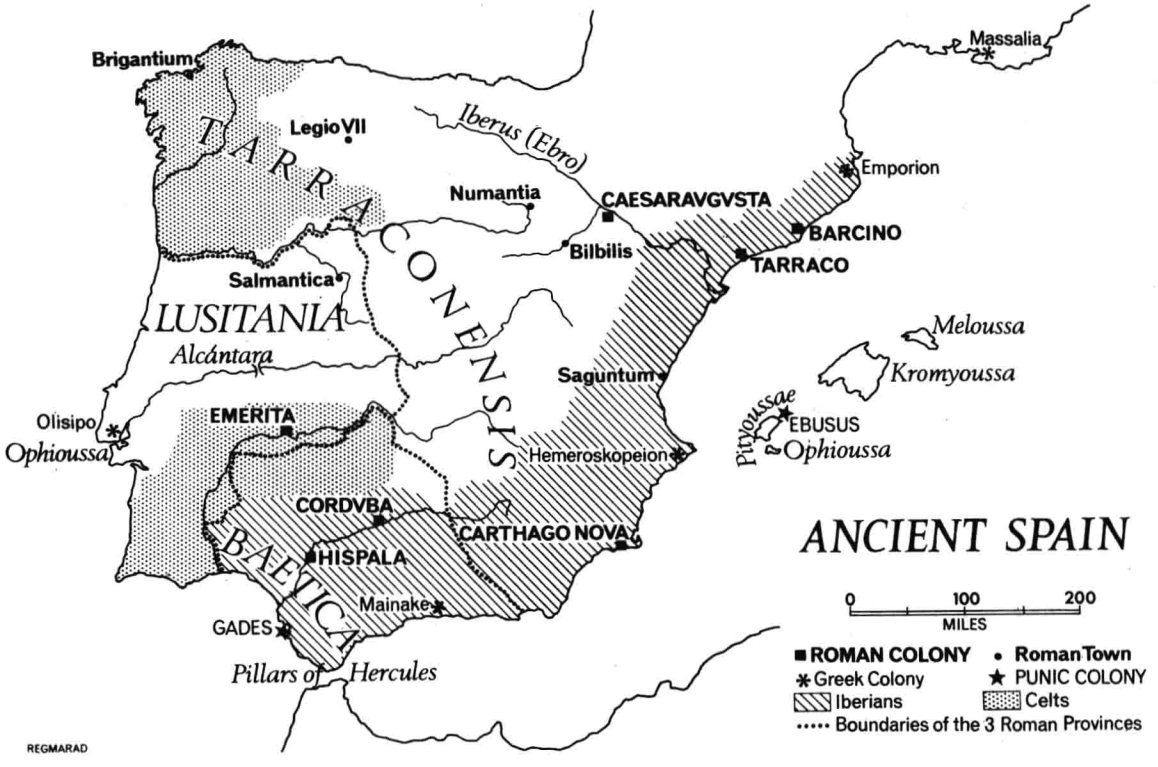
Phoenicians had been to Spain soon after the siege of Troy; later, they had even sailed out into the Atlantic and founded a trading-post at Gades (Cadiz) at a time when a voyage to Spain was as great an adventure as the voyage of Ulysses. The Phoenicians were not so much colonists and settlers as merchants and seamen. Like many European businessmen in later times, interested in the development of Spain and Spanish America, their chief concern was with mining. It was they who in ages already remote had found sailors ready to venture out of the Mediterranean, even further than Cadiz, to the lands where the summer nights were shorter, to fetch tin from the mines in Cornwall—the Cassiterides. Cornish tin and Spanish copper made bronze. It was the Bronze Age; and as early as the eighth century B.C. the Phoenicians were buying the copper of Río Tinto. They also salted Spanish fish and dyed Spanish wool with the purple of Tyre, brought from the other end of the Mediterranean; and, as Herodotus tells us, they provided Spanish esparto-grass for the ropes used in Xerxes' bridge across the Hellespont, in 481 B.C. They, and their African colonists the Carthaginians, held the naval and commercial hegemony of the Far West from the eighth to the third centuries B.C. Beyond the Pillars of Hercules (the Straits of Gibraltar) the sea could not be crossed or sounded, Plato says, because of the thick mud which came up from the sunken island of Atlantis. Yarns like these, and the tales of the Sargasso weed choking the same waters, or of the sea-monsters which infested them, were probably put about by the Phoenicians and Carthaginians to keep the Greeks away.

If the Phoenicians were the first to discover Spain, the first to write about it were the Greeks. Homer knew the sound of the west

wind as it blew in steadily from the ocean outside the Pillars of Hercules; Hesiod, whose brother was a sailor, had heard of the golden apples of the Hesperides—perhaps nuggets of the Spanish gold which the Phoenicians mixed with silver to make *elektron*. The first Greek discoverers of Spain were Ionians. Herodotus describes how a ship from Samos, sailing to Egypt (her captain was Colaeus), was driven out of her course and carried right past the Pillars to Tartēssos (the Tarshish of the Bible, somewhere in southern Spain), at that time a virgin port which no Greek had ever visited (*c.* 630 B.C.): 'The Samians brought back greater profits than any Greeks of whom we have record.'

The earliest Greeks to make long voyages deliberately were the Phocaeans. They reached Tartēssos in the sixth century B.C., sailing not in merchant ships but in penteconters, fifty-oared men-of-war. They made friends with the king of the Tartessians, Arganthonius, who (it is recorded) ruled Tartēssos for eighty years and lived to be one hundred and twenty. He first entreated them to leave Ionia and stay in Spain; and then, when he could not persuade them to do that, and learnt from them how the Persian power was increasing, he gave them money to build a wall round their city. But in 540 Phocaea fell to the Persians, and a group of Phocaeans sailed for Spain as refugees. They may be regarded as the first Pilgrim Fathers, bringing to a new world beliefs and institutions which, in their own country, had become impossible. They founded Hēmeroskopeion (the 'Watch-tower of the Morning', at Denia or Ifach), and other colonies along the east coast of Spain; and their colony at Marseilles founded a daughter city, Emporion (Ampurias), in northern Catalonia (535–520 B.C.). To this city the natives of the country came down from the hills to market their goods; and as the place increased in size they were given streets of their own, separated by a wall and shut off from the Greek quarter at night.

We may wonder how the Greek pilots ever managed to find Spain at all: they had neither the navigating instruments nor the geographical knowledge of Columbus or the Portuguese. For coastal sailing, their chief standby was a *periplus*, a sailing-book, giving every cape and harbour or other landmark useful for navigation. There is in existence a *periplus* of Spain made by a sailor from Marseilles before 530 B.C., and now preserved in a much later Latin poem by Avienus. It mentions the native tribes and towns of the coast, and tells us much of what Spain was like in the sixth century B.C. The course of the Phocaean sailors across the open sea, before they reached the coast,


Brigantium
Legio VII
Iberus (Ebro)
Massalia
Emporion
Numantia
CAESARAVGVSTA
BARCINO
Bilbilis
TARRACO
TARRACONENSIS
Salmantica
LUSITANIA
Alcántara
Meloussa
Kromyoussa
Saguntum
Olisipo
Ophioussa
EMERITA
Pityoussae
EBUSUS
Ophioussa
Hemeroskopeion
CORDVBA
CARTHAGO NOVA
HISPALA
BAETICA
Mainake
GADES
Pillars of Hercules
ANCIENT SPAIN
0
100
200
MILES
ROMAN COLONY
Roman Town
Greek Colony
PUNIC COLONY
Iberians
Celts
Boundaries of the 3 Roman Provinces
REGMARAD

can be traced in another way: by a line of Phocaean place-names ending in *-oussa*. They sailed from island to island: Pithēkoussa (Ischia), Ichnoussa (Sardinia), Meloussa (Minorca?), Kromyoussa (Majorca), Pityoussa (Ibiza), and so to Hēmeroskopeion, whence they might coast along to Kontinoussa (Cadiz) and finally to Ophioussa (Cabo da Roca, at the mouth of the Tagus).

When they got there, what kind of country and people did they find? The southern and eastern coasts of Spain—which were all the Greeks knew—are not unlike the coasts they knew all over the Mediterranean, in their own country, in Italy, and in Libya. But the whole Spanish peninsula contains many types of land and climate, from the olives and vineyards of the Catalonian seaboard to the hot ricefields of the lower Guadalquivir, and from the wet granite hills of Galicia to the Valencian orange-groves or the palm-trees of Elche, where it seldom rains. Between these coasts lies the great stretch of the lion-coloured *meseta* or table-land, crossed by bright green stripes along the rivers. Some of these rivers have made broad basins of deep soil. Wheat and fruit, as well as olives and vines, will grow in the wide Guadalquivir valley, and the middle Douro irrigates cornfields like the cornfields of Lombardy. But the common idea of Spain as a fertile, lazy land of summer is true only in very few parts. Over most of the country life is difficult, strenuous, and poor. Ploughs which would scarcely dent the rich soil of England scratch the thin, stony earth of Castile to grow barley; earth is carried up on the backs of men, in baskets, to make a pocket for a vine near Denia; water is brought for miles or pumped laboriously by a donkey. The shepherds of Andalusia and Estremadura drive their flocks 200 miles every spring, and back again in autumn, to find summer pastures. Even in rainy Galicia, cattle are fed through the winter on gorse, beaten into a pulp with sticks by the farmer and his family. Over the inlands the climate swings between blazing, waterless heat and a long winter of bitter winds, with storms and floods of devastating violence. The land has bred people of different sorts, but nearly all of them stubborn; the sea has had less influence, except on the coast of Biscay, where a sailor race, the Basques, signed with Edward III of England the treaty which first established the principle of the freedom of the seas.

Besides differences of climate, Spain is everywhere cut up by mountains, and the mountains have tended to divide the people into small independent groups. This geographical condition of the land has been responsible for the most deeply rooted Spanish tradition, the tradition

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on which nearly all the other Spanish traditions depend: political separatism.

The first known inhabitants of Spain have been given the names of *Capsienses* and *Cantabro-Pyreneans*, the former having come originally from North Africa and the latter from the south of France. Spain possesses one of the most splendid memorials of primitive man to be found anywhere in the world: the rock-paintings in caves, and particularly those in the Cave of Altamira in the province of Santander.

By the time the Phocaeans came, however, Spain was dominated by two other races, Iberians and Celts. The Iberians, invading from North Africa, had taken possession of the richest portions of the peninsula: Andalusia, and the east coastal rim, along as far as the Rhône. These are the only parts that can be called Mediterranean in type; and the Iberians were a Mediterranean people, sophisticated, commercial, and artistic. The more warlike Iberians of the north-east were the ancestors of the Catalans; the Iberians of Valencia were the most gifted sculptors and vase painters; the Tartessians of Andalusia were luxurious, clean, highly civilized, and strongly averse from fighting: *maxime imbelles*, Livy calls them. They had laws written in verse, and their chiefs, according to Polybius, lived in sumptuous palaces like those of the Phaeacian king in Homer, and ate off gold and silver plate. Their dancers were famous, and might, as the poet Martial said, have made even the austere Hippolytus lose his self-control.

Iberian artists learnt much from the Greeks, but they gave a Spanish twist to all their work. They liked to represent animals, flowers, and natural subjects, and already showed the abiding Spanish passion for bulls. The little bronze figures from the sanctuary of Cerro de los Santos, the strange stone beasts of the Murcian region, the delicate vase-paintings, and above all the magnificent bust of 'The Lady of Elche', all show how quick the Iberians were to feel Greek influence, and how sensitive they were to beautiful things.

The Celts, who invaded Spain in the seventh century B.C., made their lasting home in the west and northwest—an Atlantic type of country like Brittany or Cornwall. Strange tales were told to Strabo of these remote north-western regions, where the sun fell into the sea with a sizzle, logan-stones could be set rocking on the coast, the people performed moonlight dances, and were bestial in their habits and fierce to strangers. On the central plateau, inhabited by mixed Celtic and Iberian tribes, the Celts dominated the rest by their vigour and managing instincts. Some scholars believe that they almost achieved

the unity of Spain under the rule of a single people. 'Perhaps the Celts had a greater sense of political cohesion than the other peoples of Spain, a greater capacity for ruling over others, or even certain tendencies towards that wider view found in the political undertakings of the Castilian states in more recent times.' But the attempt failed, though the Celts were excellent fighters; it was usual for their warriors to swear to follow their chief unconditionally and uncritically, in the Germanic style, and not to survive his death. Some of the qualities for which both Iberians and Celts were noted in Strabo's time can still be recognized today: their hospitality, their grand manners, their arrogance, and above all, their love of freedom, which was shown in fierce resistance to conquerors and fanatical defence of beleaguered cities: Saguntum and Numantia begin the long list of famous sieges in Spanish history.

After the fall of Tyre, Carthage had picked up the Spanish markets of the Phoenicians, and in the third century B.C. the family of Hannibal began to pursue a new imperialist policy in Spain, to get money and men for a second war against Rome. The Carthaginian merchants lived on in the cities of the south, contributing much to the life of Spain, as Oriental or African peoples have so often done; but the Carthaginian armies were destroyed. When Hannibal's Spanish Empire crossed the Ebro, Rome intervened, and a new epoch began in which Spain was to be painfully subdued to Roman domination.

The long resistance of Spain produced many heroic figures: Viriathus the Lusitanian, whom Livy describes in terms that might have applied to the Mexican Pancho Villa—a shepherd turned poacher and bandit, and at last the leader of an army which kept Rome at bay all over western Spain for eight years (147–139 B.C.); then the Numantines, who broke two Roman armies before Scipio starved them out (133), and whose example (portrayed in Cervantes' monumental drama *The Siege of Numantia*) helped to keep up the spirits of Madrid in the long siege of 1936–39; and finally the anonymous fighters of Galicia and Asturias who defied Agrippa in their mountains (27–16 B.C.). These splendid enemies fired the imagination even of Roman historians, and tradition has exaggerated the cruelties and extortions of the earlier Romans in Spain, without remembering their later benefits.

The conquest had been forced on Rome, in the first place, by military necessity, to secure Italy against Carthage. Then came the knowledge of the silver of Cartagena and the Pyrenees, the gold of Calatayud and Río Tinto; and gradually all the Spanish metals and

mines were exploited. In many important Spanish mines the traces of Roman workings are still visible; sometimes the soil has been entirely removed, and the course of rivers changed; in most places the veins of precious metals have been exhausted. But when the Romans had time to think of other things besides soldiering and getting rich, they did much for the Spanish people. It was two centuries before they had conquered Spain, but a century after the conquest was complete a Spaniard, Trajan, was chosen to be ruler of the Roman Empire. Spaniards were filling high military and civil offices, and the leading Latin writers were Spanish as often as Italian. From a Spanish point of view, this was a great period in the history of the country, and one of the few periods in which the Spaniards have been politically happy and successful.

Spain has always had certain never-ending problems which different governments have faced in different ways: some well and some badly. The chief of these enduring problems is usually described as Spanish individualism. 'The proud Spaniard', it is often said by foreign observers, 'will never submit to this or that régime.' Strabo put this view more accurately when he said the Spaniards were 'bad mixers', or hard to unite. Many subsequent administrations have tried to cure this by over-centralization. Augustus, more wisely, cured it by granting an unusual degree of local autonomy, both in the larger divisions of Spain and in the towns. He had divided the peninsula into three provinces: Tarraconensis, Baetica (which is roughly Andalusia), and Lusitania (which, with some changes, has survived as Portugal). Within the provinces were smaller districts called *conventus*, which were elsewhere mere juridical divisions, but in Spain had some organization and sentiment of their own, like an English shire.

The Romans also had to adapt their central government to the strong local patriotism of the Spanish town or clan. The Iberians had a municipal system of their own, which fitted in very well with the Roman idea; for the Roman Empire, having grown up out of a city, still liked to work through a cell-system of provincial towns. Spain has always been a land of small towns with vigorous local feeling, as may be seen in Lope de Vega's great play *Fuente Ovejuna*—said to be the favourite play of the Russian army[1]—in which the hero is the whole village. As late as 1924, in Jimena de la Frontera in Andalusia, there was an unofficial sovereign village council; and something similar has been reported from Mexico, where a legally elected

[1] Publisher's note: J. B. Trend was writing at the time of the Second World War.

municipal council existed as a shadow beside the traditional council which had come down from primitive times. But at first the Iberian towns were not at all what a Roman meant by a town: they were little independent forts on hill-tops, pugnacious and poor. They had to be brought down on to richer and lower land, pacified, and finally made 'Latin' by being given a municipal charter. The failure of the Moslems, in later times, was largely due to their lack of municipal development; the success of the Romans was to take over the Iberian municipal tradition and recast it in a richer and more developed Latin form.

The Celts, on the other hand, had few or no towns. Strabo says they lived by stealing one another's sheep, and ate butter instead of olive oil. The reference to butter shows that they were not agricultural but pastoral. In the Roman view, agriculture was the first condition of a peaceful society, and towns a mark of higher civilization. Strabo, in a happy phrase, describes the Roman achievement among the Spanish Celts as 'making them not only peaceful, but some of them *political*'—i.e. *bourgeois* or town-dwelling. It would be difficult to find a better description of what Romanization in Spain meant. In particular, peace and local autonomy made the Spaniards able to combine, as they had never done before. A memorable example is the great Roman bridge over the Tagus—now known by its Arabic name of Alcántara—which was built by subscription among eleven small, undistinguished towns in Lusitania. Then there were the great provincial councils of elected Spanish representatives from the towns, meeting to discuss such problems as military service, which affected them all. Finally, Spain was bound together by a common Roman law, and by the Latin language, which was spoken by the richer Spaniards everywhere and by the whole people in some parts, until the influence of the Church made it universal.

Spain is full of great Roman monuments, some of which were built by rich individual Spaniards—for the principle of public service by rich local citizens was fundamental in Greece and Rome as it is in the United States of America, and the Spaniards quickly caught the Roman habit. Other great works were built in Roman colonies such as Emerita (Mérida)—a magnificent city which shows the Roman passion for civilizing unlikely places, regardless of their economic value as sites. Emerita had to have three long aqueducts to make it habitable. Augustus in Lusitania, like the builders of the Dnieperstroi dam in Russia, thought first and foremost in terms of a political and social mission, and then created the economic conditions for its fulfilment. But modern Portugal moved its backbone to the coast—to

the rich trading cities of Lisbon and Oporto—and Mérida sank into insignificance.

How far, it may be asked, did Rome affect the minds and ideas of ordinary people in Spain? The answer is different in different parts of the country, for Romanization, whatever else it was, was elastic. But Rome attempted no deep intellectual conversion, and did not want to make everybody speak and think like Italians. For a true picture of life in the small places of Roman Spain, we might turn to the Spanish poet, Martial, who came back to the primitive simplicity of his country home near Bilbilis (Calatayud) in Aragon, after a gay bohemian life in Rome:

'Here we live lazily and work pleasantly in Boterdum and Platea—these are our rough Celtiberian place-names—and I enjoy a vast and shameless sleep. Often I don't wake up till after ten, and I'm making up all the sleep I've lost for thirty years. We know no such thing as a toga: if you want one, they give you the nearest rug off a broken chair. I get up to a glorious fire, heaped with logs from the oak-forest; and the land-agent's wife crowns it with her pots and pans. Then the beautiful young huntsman comes, and the land-agent doles out rations to the boys, and asks leave to have his long hair cut. This is how I love to live and die.'

There is also the other side to the picture: the letter Martial wrote on another day, saying that Bilbilis was a stupid little place, with no good conversation, no books, no theatres, and spite instead of literary taste. Yet that, too, corresponds with Strabo's modest description of Roman aims: to make people peaceful and *bourgeois*—while expecting them to live up to a Roman standard of public service. In that sense, the rough little towns which combined to build the great bridge of Alcántara were highly Romanized, and the people who ploughed the land outside the towns, instead of fighting one another, were Romanized too.

The elder Pliny, writing in the first century A.D., describes the country and its men in words which we should scarcely alter today: 'Next to Italy I myself should rank the coastal regions of Spain. Some parts of Spain are wretchedly poor; but where the land does yield, it is fertile in wheat, oil, wine, horses, and all kinds of metals. As far as that goes, it is equalled by Gaul, but in its barren places Spain wins, with its esparto, its mica, the lovely colours of its dyes, the ardour of its workmen, the skill of its slaves, the bodily endurance of its people, and their vehement spirit.'

The outstanding men of Spain were naturally more Roman in their

culture and ideas than the ordinary people: yet they, too, sometimes show qualities which can be recognized in the Spaniards of later history. Besides emperors, generals, and civil servants, Roman Spain produced writers and thinkers. Martial's satirical humour and delight in country people reappear in later Spanish literature. A different school of writing flourished in Córdoba, a brilliant city in Roman times, as it was under the Moslems, and famous for its poetry and its olive oil. Cicero said the poetry sounded as if it had got mixed with the oil; and much Spanish verse has been written in the staccato, clashing, declamatory vein of Lucan, parodied by Petronius in his *Satyricon*. Lucan is Spanish, too, in his passionate political feeling, his hatred of tyranny and of emperor-worship, which brought him an early death at the hands of Nero.

The younger Seneca, who also came from Córdoba, was a Stoic teacher of the best type, with clearly defined methods of physical, intellectual, and moral education. Reason, he held, was the infallible light which guided man on his path, and distinguished not only between truth and error but also between right and wrong. Virtue was not a gift: it was the result of an effort of will. Moral education, therefore, was not the teaching of duties but the training of the will. The basis of education was the curiosity of the child, but the process of learning went on as long as life lasted, though it was essential to make full use of time and not postpone work until tomorrow. 'Would anyone believe that this was said by a Spaniard?' a modern Spanish educator has asked. But there was something curiously Spanish in Seneca's famous and rather theatrical suicide, at the command of his least creditable pupil, Nero.

Quintilian was a man of another mould. He came from the valley of the Ebro, 'a country of sobriety, obstinacy, and common sense'. He was a teacher at Rome, and Vespasian endowed him with a chair of rhetoric out of public funds. Quintilian had to give rules for the training of public speakers, and in doing so he composed the first text-book of education: 'a practical guide, free from abstruse philosophical and psychological theories, revealing a shrewd teacher seriously at work'.

After the introduction of Christianity, Spain began to feel some separate national consciousness, apart from the Roman Empire. There have been no more typical Spaniards than Hosius, Bishop of Córdoba, writing firmly to forbid an emperor to meddle in matters concerning the Church[1]; Prudentius the poet, author of 'truculent

[1] *μὴ τίθει σεαυτὸν εἰς τὰ ἐκκλησιαστικά.*

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