

THE
LIFE OF A ROCK SCORPION.

A Fable.

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'REMINISCENCES OF GIBRALTAR,' 'HOLIDAY AMUSEMENTS,' ETC.

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AN ADDRESS TO THE READER.

DEAR READER,

Pray do not suppose that all persons residing at Gibraltar resemble the Beaumonts of this story. Neither are all the officers like those whose portraits I have here shown you ; on the contrary, most of the residents on the Rock, both military and civil, are examples of all that is worthy of imitation. But at Gibraltar, as in all large towns, at home and abroad, there are, of course, good and bad persons to be found.

This story was written with a view to warning young ladies who are about to take up a residence with their families on the Rock of the many dangerous companions they may be thrown amongst,

should they trust too much to their own sagacity in choosing their acquaintances, refusing to listen, as Eva did, to the wise counsels of a mother.

As I have lived several years on the Rock, I have seen many sad events brought about solely by the youthful follies of young men and maidens, and by the carelessness of their parents, by whom they were allowed to have entirely their own way.

The Beaumonts were of this class, and were much to blame for all their children's wickedness; for they had neglected to show them the right path, either by setting them a good example themselves, or by giving them a proper education. Severe, then, will be their future punishment, we may be sure.

Trusting you will profit by my advice, and also find some amusement in this story,

I am,

Your friend, and well-wisher,

THE AUTHOR.

CHAPTER III.

GIBRALTAR, AS IT WAS—AND IS STILL PROBABLY.

THE city of Gibraltar presents nothing interesting beyond its situation and commercial position. The streets are constructed along the sides of the Rock, in parallel lines up to the point where further building becomes impracticable.

The 'main street' contains the principal shops, and every inch of ground in it is devoted to commercial purposes, the smallest alley or corner being occupied by some itinerant Jew, of which persuasion there are a vast number in Gibraltar. The 'Southport Gate' presents an old piece of sculpture with the arms and supporters of

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Charles V., who built the fine old wall that divides the north from the south district, and which extends up to the very summit of the Rock, and is called to this day 'Charles V.'s Wall.'

There is also a very interesting Moorish castle still remaining on the northern part of the town—now a civil prison for debtors; and there are few prettier places to be found than the 'Alameda,' or public gardens, filled as it is with the gay wild flowers and shrubs belonging to a semi-tropical climate.

Actual living is cheap on the Rock, but articles of luxury and clothing are dear and of inferior quality, as being (they say) the damaged articles sent out from English shops when 'selling off.'

It is far better to get one's friends at home to send out a box of wearing apparel, etc., once or twice a year, as there is no duty to pay on English goods.

Gibraltar's extreme length is only three miles and a half from N. to S., by about

three-quarters of a mile broad, and it has a circuit of about seven miles. At the 'Rock Gun,' on the north, it is 1,350 feet high, 1,276 feet high at the 'Signal Station,' in the centre, and 1,439 feet at 'O'Hara's Tower,' on the south, above 'Europa Point,' which is its highest elevation. Small as the place is, however, it contains about 15,000 souls, exclusive of the troops stationed in the garrison, who muster some 5,000 or 6,000 more.

The population of the town is of a very miscellaneous description, and people of every nation under the sun almost may be met with in its markets, on the Exchange square, and quays, etc.

The variety of costume may be imagined, for we meet in these places turbaned Moors, who are amongst the cleanest and best-behaved men on the Rock, Barbary Jews in fez caps, and fearfully dirty brown and black bernouses, without under garments of any sort, besides dirty white 'pyjamas;' the handsome and manly

Spaniard, in 'majo costume;' the lively little Genoese fishermen, in long white or red night-caps. Then we stumble on a sharp-featured and elegant Greek in his native dress; the sturdy beef-eating Englishman, together with his dark-looking sons, the fruit of his union with some pretty Spanish 'Hija de aqui,' or daughter of this place, as translators render these words. The reader may fancy the motley appearance of this assembly when it is further enlivened by the presence of British soldiers of every branch of the service almost, including generally a kilted regiment of Highlanders, 'with their tartan plaids and philabegs,' who for many years have been styled 'Los Naguetes,' or 'the petticoaters,' by the 'Rock Scorpions,' as they in their gross ignorance imagine that the men of these regiments during the Peninsular war fled before the face of the enemy, and were condemned by their exasperated countrymen to wear 'petticoats' ever after as a punishment for their cowardice. *And,*

moreover, nothing anyone can say will root this absurd idea out of their heads.

But notwithstanding this erroneous notion 'Los Naguetes' are always the 'prime favourites' with the black-eyed damsels of the place.

We remember one highland regiment in particular, which by some oversight had remained a year or two over its proper time on the Rock, whose departure caused the most heart-rending distress when they *did* at last 'march off,' for most of the men had taken to themselves Spanish wives, and more than half these poor girls, with their infants and sucklings, had to be left behind, as, according to the rules of the service, a certain number of women only can be allowed to accompany their husbands when they get the 'route,' and the regiment 'marches off.'

The Rock of Gibraltar towers abruptly from the narrow sandy Isthmus, called the 'Neutral Ground,' which connects it with the Continent. The Eastern side, or the

'back of the Rock,' is almost inaccessible—and on the West is the singular cavern called 'St. Michael's Cave,' said to be 1,110 feet above the horizon. This cave was, during the siege of Gibraltar, the abode of many of the natives, who fled here for shelter on account of their houses in the town being entirely battered down about their ears by the fearful bombardment they sustained from the French and Spanish fleets, and the fire-ships. In these days it is often lighted up with blue lights and torches, for the entertainment of distinguished foreigners, or for picnic parties, at the expense of some one of the rich people on the Rock, perhaps; and a lovely sight it is, this 'lighting up of St. Michael's.' A military band plays a choice selection of music down in the 'First Hall' of the cave, whilst the guests flit about here and there on the green short grass which grows on the plateau just outside the mouth of the cavern, in evident enjoyment of the lovely view all around, the ladies, many of them

pretty and young, in cool muslins and becoming straw hats, looking like summer butterflies of every colour.

The scene as we look down into this deep cavern is like one in Fairy-land. At the bottom of it is stationed the band ; their figures and those of the ladies and gentlemen, who stand grouped round about, are rendered so small from the distance as to be hardly made out ; while over their heads, perched on spire-like pinnacles composed of shining stalactites, sit men of the Royal Artillery, holding high aloft 'blue lights,' and 'red torches ;' the glare from these is most refulgent, belonging seemingly to another world. After gazing on this picture for a little space, turning ourselves round, while yet in the dark mouth of 'St. Michael's,' we behold in a blaze of sunshine the lovely hills which surround our Bay—its intensely blue waters, dotted all over with vessels, whose snow-like sails and diminished size, cause them to look like white sea-gulls just folding in

their wings, as they settle themselves down on the water—and at once we feel we have returned home again, after having had a peep into an Enchanter's Cavern—nothing loath to enjoy the good things the giver of the fête has provided for us in the shape of a 'Déjeûné à la fourchette,' with which to refresh his guests after their long and somewhat hot walk. In the cool of the evening the young people generally dance to the strains of the band, on the short grass outside the cave, and at 'Gunfire' the happy party return home, much delighted with this 'Lighting up of St. Michael's Cave.'

From the appearance of apes, of a species not known in Spain, amongst the precipices, and in the caves of the Rock, and also of strange birds, it was conjectured from fabulous traditions that there existed some subterrene communication between Europe and Africa. And indeed it is pretty well ascertained at the present time that 'St. Michael's' has some outlet into the open air.

and there is a plan on foot for its being fully explored.

The 'Rock monkeys' however, have nearly all disappeared now ; a circumstance much to be regretted, as a study of their habits and 'manners,' as they leaped about from among bushes and rocks, often carrying their 'babies' on their backs, in the most approved 'gipsy fashion,' frequently formed an agreeable pastime to the military students of natural history, during the time they serve in the garrison of Gibraltar.

From a place just above 'Town Range,' called the 'Devil's Gap,' a noble view is had of the Town, Harbour—Alameda, with the Straits and the African coast, in the distance towards the south—while on the north we see the Spanish town of 'St. Roque,' and the range of the snowy Alpuxarras.

The town, which trades a great deal with the surrounding countries, presents a most busy scene of active industry.

The military music, perpetual parades, the fine appearance of the troops, the variety

of tongues spoken and dresses worn, give an animation to the scene, most interesting to every stranger.

A good writer has thus described what he felt while on the Rock: 'We were startled during the night with the frequent passing of the patrols, and the "All's well" of the sentries, running like a train of fire round the lines of fortifications; this cry is taken up by one man from the other, and repeated every quarter of an hour. It seemed strange to hear English spoken in the streets, to read it on sign-boards, and to meet many English faces. I should have forgotten how far I was from home, had I not been reminded of the latitude by the brilliant clearness of the deep blue sky, and the sight of Mount Abyla, and a great part of the Barbary coast, distinctly seen by the naked eye.'

The breadth of the Straits is about eleven or twelve miles. As the bay is subject to violent eddies of wind, or 'young tornâdos' as they are called, which rush down the

gullies of the Rock, in a most sudden manner, without previous warning; the harbour is not a safe one by any means—witness the many ships which drag their anchors, and come ashore all round the coast—many a sad boat accident has happened, too, during these whirlwinds.

We need not here describe the ‘upper and lower galleries,’ which are batteries cut into the Rock itself, and extend more than half a mile round the head of the Rock at the north front. These excavations present a view inside very similar to that of the ‘main gun-deck’ of a first-rate liner, for the guns appear to gape out of port-holes just in the same manner as they do on board a man-of-war; and sometimes when the gunners are exercising these big guns in a northerly wind, the galleries become so full of smoke that the men can scarcely work the guns for fear of suffocation. This seldom happens, however, and ‘the galleries’ did right good service during the siege.

We have now given a slight account of the Rock, and our readers will understand this tale a good deal better if they will take the trouble to peruse it.