

Bernard Meakin in Spain and France 1908

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Bernard was my grandfather, born 5 Mar 1885 at Darlaston Hall, Stone, Staffordshire, England, died 17 Feb 1964 at Dunsfold, Surrey, England. He was sometime a Cambridge University cricket blue, a captain in the Army Service Corps during World War I and chairman of J&G Meakin earthenware manufacturers in Hanley, Staffordshire, England. He is in my family tree at <http://www.meakinatelmstead.me.uk/>

The following is my transcription of his diary during his holiday in Spain and France during 1908. A few words were not legible or do not make sense. "WM" was his elder brother Walter Meakin.

Bernard Meakin's Diary

April 8th. St Pierre des Corps [Main railway station at Tours] to Burgos.

From Irun till after R. Ebro wild hills covered with snow; afterwards bare plateau.

Burgos 3.23. Very cold. All peasants carrying rugs en toga. Did the Cartuja convent; good dinner Hotel de Paris; early bed; rained hard most of day & horribly cold. WM constat & wanted to take my blister remedy as a cure.

April 9th. Burgos to Segovia.

First acquaintance with Spanish sun. Beautiful day & night. Did cathedral, a church (iglesia) or two, & convent of Las Huelgas: latin does fairly well for Spanish. Left Burgos at 3.23 & arrived Segovia about 9. Plateau all the way. Fearful drive in omnibus to Hotel Europeo, & had 1st real difficulty in making ourselves understood. Saw aqueduct by moonlight, & early bed in same room as WM, whose feet smelt.

April 10th. Segovia.

Slept well but awoken by an old watchman: awkward breakfast of v thick chocolate. Sallying out saw cathedral & alcazar (both magnificently situated): very dull about finding latter, WM very bright: rest of day sloped about the town, self much more energetic than WM. Meals at 1 & 8: very hungry all day: small boy of about 13 as waiter: after dinner too cold to go out, no salon, abominable light in bedroom, so bed at 9.30. Should like to play centre forward in billiard room at home.

April 11th. Segovia to Madrid.

Found WM playing football with a bag in middle of night. Fine pair of mules 1 v big 1 v small to take us to station: left S at 8.0 arrived M 12.0. Crossing S. Guaderrama v pretty; other side v desolate & sandy. Lunch and 4th (long delayed) at Maison Royale; afterwards moved to Hotel Ingles. Saw armoury (v.g) & walked in the parks: found dictum re 40th May & a coat quite false: night however, as hitherto v cool: no sweating apparently owing to dry air: bought pommade hongroise for moustaches, & on trying it had to wash it off.

April 12th Sunday. Madrid.

Sallied out about 9.45 & saw the picture gallery; Velasquez & Murillo (+ 1 Rafael) excellent, rest, to me, un peu wearisome: saw zoo, mostly hens, 1 mandril: lunch strange dish of cockles. 4.0 bullfight: picturesque sight but disgusting: saw 1 bull killed and 3 horses (all killed by 2nd bull

within five minutes); fountains of blood & entrails, so came out: WM indignant. Saw football match: play goodish, but ground like a road. Excellent tea at cafe Idéal (c. Alcala) & promenade in the poorer quarters: wild strawberries & cream for dinner: two meals in Spain at 1.30 & 8.30: all small children & nursemaids play diablo.

April 13th. Madrid. El Escorial.

Left M. at 9.15: arrived at El. E. at 11.30: touted by guide whom we finally had to take: rather a good sort: did Escorial morning & afternoon with interval for lunch: large party of French tourists, touts all: got back to Madrid at 7.30. Vain attempt to get bath: rang 3 times but no answer: gave it up: interesting day & lovely fresh weather: bitten by flea: must change shirt.

April 14th. Madrid - Aranjuez.

Changed shirt & pyjams & flea seems to have departed. Spent a small dog (perro chico) or 5 cents on a couvre-siège: rather good invention: sloped about buying fans etc & visiting musées till departure for A. at 5.30: arrived unexpectedly at A at 7.0: dull country & rain: drove up to hotel with quack doctor, one Don José Bellver, who gave us his prospectus: hotel (Hotel Pastor), apparently once flourishing, but now a little dilapidated, rooms however look pretty good.

April 15th. Aranjuez - Toledo.

Primitive 4th: was too strong with my approach. Rained most of day; so gardens were not at best: saw palace & gardens in morning: after almuerza went & had café with Don José B, who beat me at chess: I threw away the game but rather glad: funny old buffer, not a tout. Walked in gardens del Principe (very muddy) & along top of hills: shook hands with, & patted on back by head waiter; tender farewell with Don J. Left A at 7.40 arrived Toledo 9.10: moonlight view of T from bus: got ripping little bedroom & antichamber at hotel del Lino.

April 16th (Maunday Thursday). Toledo.

2 breakfasts, one coffee one chocolate: spitting rain most of day & streets v muddy but occasional glimpses of sun - saw cathedral 4 times, but could not enter the sidechapels: columns magnificent: priests looked prize shits: saw nearly all the old buildings & gates, which the sun would have improved: heaps of people in streets but no procession: all children demanded 5 centimes, & were a nuisance; also innumerable beggars: children nearly all provided with rattles, & many women & girls with pansies in mouth, don't know why.

April 17th (Good Friday). Toledo - Cordova.

Went into cathedral 4 more times today, & were able to see chapels & sala capitulator through a little bribery: took longish walk on left bank of Tagus (Tajo), during which it rained hard for most of time; curse the weather this is the 4th day more or less wet: at 5.30 saw procession (3 times altogether): picturesque sight, men in armour & in dress of inquisition. Left T at 8.15 & boarded trian to Cordova at Castillejo at 9.35; got into carriage with old man with bad asthma: moderately comfortable but could not sleep much. Wish I had a sound pair of boots.

April 18th. Cordova.

Arrived at C at 6.15: pain in chest & sides: very dull & not too well: slept in clothes till 9.0. (Hotel Suizo, good but staff very surly): saw mosque, or rather cathedral (brothel, or lewd laugh amidst meditation & prayer: Hutton) & old bridge: both fine but weather carramba bad: had difficulty preventing WM from kicking muchachos, who pestered us continually: wandered about town, losing way continually: Spanish youth here delight in slinging & of course diablo, but nobody seems to do anything: early bed, feeling v dull.

April 19th (Easter Sunday). Cordova.

Quite fit again: started out for walk among Sierra Cordoba (a spur of S. Morena) taking lunch with us: worried by muchachos but finally got right up in hills & had good walk, self v fit thanks to podène fédère: followed all the way by a bitch (his name Towser) cross between irish terrier & wolf with 2 d-s like cricket stumps. Excellent though dry lunch: on way back won a perro grandé from WM on account of rain: glorious evening & after tea a short walk over bridge: interesting conglomeration of people at dinner.

April 20th. Cordova - Seville.

Glorious morning & after a final walk round the mosque left at 11.10: lunch off pastry & oranges: saw lots of bulls specially bred for fights, on journey. Arrived at S. at 3.10: Spanish porters don't hurry with registered luggage: first, tried at Hotel Oriente, but finally housed at Hotel Inglaterra. Walk round parks & into a beast show: stallions & bulls v fine: returned through town & got letters from C.B.M; H.A.P; & M.W.P: Seville mixture of Cordova & Madrid, rather fashionable. Sent boots to be mended & garments to wash: sleep with WM: one blister on small left toe.

April 21st. Seville.

Worried by mosquito in night, but slept well: did most of town, 3 chief points of interest to me being view from top of Giralda, organ in cathedral, & gardens of Alcazar. Went after dinner to see dancing etc at Novedades (just off Sierpes): dancing quite decent but audience not too respectable: am not struck like Mr Hutton with Sevillian beauties, but almost all Spanish women have beautiful eyes. Notice of one, Dr Polo, healer of malos secretos, rather amusing.

April 22nd. Seville - Utrera.

Intended to go on to Granada but express running only 3 times a week, at 9.0 found only train started at 10.0: no room for us at any hotel, so finally decided to go on to Utrera for the night: bummed around S in the morning, WM feeling dull: left S at 3.24 & arrived at U at 4.15: pub, León de Oro, quaint inn with open patio: hotel people all v civil & nice: kids letting off squibs in streets rather disconcerted me, but no one else, not even the mokes. Fairish dinner, beef or horse v tough: bedroom pitch dark, but no fleas.

April 23rd. Utrera - Granada.

Dressed with door open, only way of getting decent light: offended porter who had ordered a coche, & who was so sick that he refused tip: made it up with him afterwards: fearful dialogue between WM and porter about sending on luggage, self inactive. Left U at 10.0, arrived Seville about 11.0: cheap (2ps) & good lunch at railway restaurant: saw feria & bought a few easy things: society (tuctullias) in great form: left S at 3.24. Weather lovely & country v pretty: at Bobadilla dinner of 7 courses & dessert in 1/4 hr; WM had to change carriages not long afterwards. Arrived at G at 11.24: what a hill up to Pension Carmona, the Alhambra: slept same room as WM, lulled by murmuring waters.

April 24th. Granada.

Honey for breakfast!! Had to change room, but little, if any, loss: Blessed Alhambra that has no beggars & few guides: expected to be disappointed with the A - but wasn't: palace priceless: garden in alcazaba priceless: alameda priceless: everything priceless. Lunch with pension inmates, mostly Americans: cats & hens, but lady next me quite nice: WM in his element. Cathedral, good perhaps, especially capilla real: bored with tour & caught in storm: 2nd visit to the A palace: area in garden adorned one side orange tree, other side caballeros: walk to silla del mas, sheltered from bad storm with gypsies: conversed with surdite lady at dinner, but what a wait during desert. Help!

April 25th. Granada.

Awoke in middle of night by WM, who having dreamed of a 'goat charging him', was rather restless: walk up through Albaicin: severe skirmish with a dozen muchachos: WM hit twice with stones: entangles in narrow streets, but got finally out of town, & enemy routed by a soldier: Damn muchachos. Descent into gypsy quarter, & ascent to Generalife, gardens v pleasant: after lunch 3rd visit to A.P: walk (WM twice out of bounds with drink) up Darro valley: trousers done for: no expedition on mokes possible owing to unsettled weather: WM loves talking to one, so called May, awful wimp: nights v chilly: WM finds he has 12 ps of bad money: rather bored at A.

April 26th. Granada.

After breakfast 4th & last visit to A.P. - grand place: walk in spurs of Sierra Nevada from 9.30 till 5.30: rather a sweat going, but delicious solitary slack after lunch with fine view of Granada & its vega: decided not to become school-master: returned at smart pace: sponge down & tea: sunset from Torre del Vela: conversed at dinner with old person who knew PWHK, & who advised me not to give up greek - good advice: bill rather more than necessary but not large: really sorry to leave this place.

April 27th. Granada towards Valencia.

Up with the lark & caught 8.10 from G: great barge on train, & in carriage old lady who talked incessantly; felt bad owing to my duties being hurried: arrived Bobadilla 11.54: from B to Cordova travelled with family Summers of Stalybridge: youth wanted his hair cut: from Cordova (4.15) to Alcazar (2.45) had carriage to ourselves: dinner, needlessly hurried, at Espeluy: WM felt baddish & f---d incessantly: WM's manners in this respect are not what they should be. At Alcazar shunted about & awoken: cup of tea, very good.

April 28th. Valencia (at last).

Left Alcazar at 3.15 & had good sleep in train: 2 hurried duties & 2 light breakfasts at wayside stations: I have no shame in Spain. Passed through La Mancha: felt dull & not too fit. Encina at 11.20: booking clerk in no hurry & in consequence hurried almuerza: from E to Valencia beautiful wild scenery, & at end in the huerta orange groves, date trees & fine crops: slowest train ever been in, but V at last at 5.30. V excessively dull town, dusty & smelly: shaved off 2 1/2 days growth, & dinner at Grand Hotel calle del Vicente (blood street): looking forward to bed: great keenness of crowd over band, which certainly was good.

April 29th. Valencia - Tarragona.

Arose 6.30: visit to cathedral which was not striking, & ascent of el Miguelete, from which fine view: water closets duchias & stomachial elixir favourite advertisements on trams: left V. at 9.8, arrived T at 3.58: on way view of Sagunto, Mediterranean on right, hills on left, orange trees & crops: excellent almuerza at Tortosa, prawns: at Tarragona, hotel de Paris: snug little room, doves & peroquettes outside on balcony & 1 palm in distance: cathedral silent, beautiful & impressive: cloisters hallowed: saw sunset from advantageous position: town very ancient looking & peaceful, no beggars: excellent dinner: T to my mind next only to Alhambra: good chance of cold bath tomorrow.

April 30th. Tarragona - Barcelona.

Arose 7: cold bath & head wash, 1st & last in Spain: bliss: walk to Aqueduct (v.g) very hot although so early: on way back walked round walls: bathe off rocks in the Mediterranean so blue, blue, blue: top-hole & quite warm: after lunch 2nd visit to cathedral & cloisters, 1 beggar but no muchachos: was sorry to leave at 4.20, arriving at B. at 6.15: scenery in between pretty. Hotel Falcon on the Rambla: walk on the Rambla before, & to harbour after dinner: B. finely

built town, best shops in Spain, but very modern & commercial looking, except near cathedral: in this coast district train crosses most bridges at walking pace.

May 1st. Barcelona - Montserrat.

Arose 6: walk up Montjuich, from which fine view of B, though rather hazy: walk fatiguing & glad to get breakfast about 9.0: walk in B: cathedral v fine but v dark: geese in cloister: Sta Maria del Mar in same style, striking: gardens well laid out, image of mammoth: zoo, perhaps best in Spain, but not good: 1 smallish elephant. Pressed to catch train at 1.30 to M, at which arrived 5.0: mountain railway jerky: rocks of M fine: put up in monastery at hostel of Sta Teresa de Jesus, marked by tresses of hair: room 6 with private 4th of same number: small walk to neighbouring chapels & bed rather tired: WM & self both talking in sleep.

May 2nd. Montserrat.

Lack of washing materials: started with lunch about 8.30, & by long detour reached San Jeronimo at 11.30: lunch & good water: reached top after lunch: glorious view of all Catalonia & part of Aragon: Pyrenees capped with snow, sea, & lumpy sandy desert in between: roche of M very imposing & fantastic: more hermitages & return 4.30: tea & conversation with waiter from Liverpool: impressive service in chapel, singing & music excellent: wish I had stayed till end: room like a pig-sty; not a chance of beds being made or slops cleared: fashion apparently to empty them out of the window: like this place: WM very keen on it.

May 3rd. Montserrat - Barcelona.

Restless night: WM made great noise in turning over, while my skin v irritable: both cursed each other half in sleep. Arose 7.0: slops nearly overflowing: WM sallied out in pyjamas for water: loafed, & saw a service: walk of about 2 hrs, WM affected by sun. WM's trousers (brown) done for: returned about 11.30 & saw procession of monks: impressive but what mummerly! Left M at 3.37, arrived B at 6.30: Hotel Falcon again, & find have to sleep with WM once more ---- : fearful work of packing: last night in Spain & in same room as WM.

May 4th. Barcelona - Narbonne.

Peaceful night for a change: left B at 9.40: arrived N at 4.0: rather hazy & Pyrenees not too clear: v fine however. Said a dios to WM: hied me to Hotel de la Dorade: good room over murmuring weir of canal (de la) Robine: hair cut (oh how nice) & walk round town: climbed tower of what was once a cathedral, now merely a church: Narbonne dull town, but ancient & peaceful: shops good & people affable: bursting braces.

May 5th. Narbonne - Carcassonne.

Left N at 9.48, arrived C at 10.46: Hotel Bernard, old fashioned with carriage yard in the middle, & very comfortable: in afternoon examined citadel, which is v fine & v interesting: guardians on walls agreeable old fellows: magnificent stained glass in citadel church, St Nazaire. Nougat & asparagus at lunch & dinner. Tried to send off parcel to England, but find must have wooden box & sealing wax.

May 6th. Carcassonne - Cette [now Sète].

Awoke by thunder storm in night; looked out & saw a torrent au lieu d'un street: another visit to city, & this time saw Pyrenees fairly well. Left C at 11.15, arrived Beziers 1.17: B. is un trou, very windy & dusty, well situated however: left (fed up) B at 4.18 arrived Cette 5.6: Grand Hotel, rather good: walked up Mt St Clair, from which good view: C mostly canals but clean: Hotel managers seem v agreeable.

May 7th. Cette - Nîmes.

Arose 7.30 & bummed around town till 10.5, when started for Montpellier, at which arrived at 10.45. M has some good streets & promenades but rather dull. Overate myself at déjeuner & was slack all afternoon. Did picture gallery in 20 mins: found a big fair in Esplanade, & had ride in motor merry-go-round: children rather sweet: woman with child a bit shameless. Left M 4.15 arrived Nîmes 6.6: Hotel Maneviet good enough: window donnant sur maison carrée & arène: after dinner agreeable walk in jardin de la fontaine.

May 8th. Nîmes.

Awoke in media nocte by horrid people shouting; slept lightly. Saw diligence between Nîmes & Beaucaire: determined to go by it: top-hole day: left N at 9.50 arrived Remoulins 10.24: drove to Pont du Gard: fine, but prefer aqueduct of Segovia: excellent lunch in open air shed: fowls & dogs innumerable: wine beautifully cool & wild strawberries: hostess a bit of a belle with golden hair. Got back to N about 4: impossible to send a silver brooch to England: fine view from tour de la magne: and so to bed at 10.0.

May 9th. Nîmes - Arles.

The gardens & boulevards of Nîmes are excellent places to loaf about in. Very nice looking head waiter in hotel. 4.0 left N for Beaucaire (6.50) by diligence: seat on box with driver who was v affable: diligence packed as far as Jonquières (Saint Vincent): amusing, but can't understand Provençal. Crossed into Tarascon by famous bridge: beautiful sunset behind château of Beaucaire. Dined at station buffet & left T at 8.25: Arles at 8.45: Hotel Nord-Pinus: fair in boulevard: women's coiffure picturesque.

May 10th. Arles.

Awoken à minuit by rockets & squibs in square: rather alarmed, but learnt in morning that a mayor is to be elected to-day, & that à minuit to-night there will be a coupe de poing. Did arènes & saw théâtre; dozens of first communicants abroad. Went to Aigues Mortes; fortifications v fine, plenty of 4ths: sales betes 2 little girls: crossed île de Camargues on way: returned Arles about 7.0: dear old lady in librairie just outside hotel: 2 notices in square: Mr Granaud says all Mr Sixte Quenin says is a lie: M. Quenin calls M. Granaud un maquignon électorale & accuses him of bribing some nuns: "citoyens Arlésiens not bestiaux à vendre". "Fair" once more: nice looking girls.

May 11th. Arles - Avignon.

In truth much disturbed by fireworks & shouts from 12 - 1, but no coupe de poing: saw hurriedly St Trophime & l'allée des tombeaux: Arles interesting place. Left at 9.50, arrived Avignon 1.44, stopping for 2 1/2 hrs at Tarascon, a dirty lazy place, but quaint: T & Beaucaire both picturesque from river: Avignon delightful, high gardens beautiful: did cathedral, palace of popes (small girl conducting me) & old bridge, très intéressant: views on all sides lovely. Dinner in garden of hôtel Crillon (v.g): met an old Newcastle high school mistress (Wallis). Hear Hilda [Hilda Meakin, his elder sister] & Herbert [Minton-Senhouse] have done it: good! [Presumably this was their engagement before their wedding in 1909]. Wrote letters & bed 11.15 v tired.

May 12th. Avignon.

Lovely morning: went over to Villeneuve-lès-Avignon & shown round by girl who told me 2 Englishmen had given her 10 frs each: was not having any; she rather fed with 1 fr: very hot, & welcome orangeade at café des vieux moulins: after lunch excursion to fountain of Vaucluse; very sleepy: fountain (source of Sorgues) interesting, & lovely water into which dropped cigarette case: café de Pétanque good: day of heat & cafés.

May 13th. Avignon - Lyon.

Very hot & slept fitfully: found cockroach drowned in fumes of asperges: horrid death: very loose: saw Calvet museum & slacked in gardens on the rock. Left A at 11.50: stopped at Orange to see Roman theatre & arch: poisonous lunch snatched from flies at café de la gare & town v dusty. Arrived Lyon 6.52: scenery all way very pretty, but weather cloudy, quite chilly here. Hotel des beaux arts (rue de l'hotel de V): used hair-brush of concierge: music hall in evening.