

Reminiscences of Gibraltar

by

“Flora Calpensis”



A Reprint with Additional Material

Edited by

Peter L. Fishback

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Reprint of the 1880 Book19
(Plus added Illustrations, Maps, and Commentary.)

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Cover illustration, unattributed, from Frederick Sayer, *History of Gibraltar*, (London: Saunders, Otley & Co., 1862).

Introduction

“Flora Calpensis” wrote her memoirs of Gibraltar in the late 1870s, many years after she was there as a teenager. Calpensis was Eliza Frankland of the notable Frankland baronets of North Yorkshire, England. That family was of the elite gentry and many of Eliza’s ancestors married into the peerage. Eliza’s father was the 8th Baronet of Thirkleby.

Eliza Frankland’s reminiscences reflect the prejudices of her nationality and class and she writes exclusively of life among Gibraltar’s social elite: The garrison’s officers. More particularly, life among the social *crème-de-la-crème* of Gibraltar: Members of the Calpe Hunt. The Calpe Hunt was founded in 1812 by the garrison’s chaplain, the Rev. Mark Mackareth. Its members were army officers with substantial, private incomes who could afford to keep horses and pay the Hunt’s dues.^a Her father, as a titled Englishman and former infantry officer who served at Waterloo, was naturally invited by the Hunt to become a member.

Frankland’s memory is error-prone, as is apparent from the first pages of her book. She writes that she arrived at Gibraltar in 1845 aboard the Paddle Steamer *Ripon*. That vessel; however, first entered service in October 1846. The *Ripon* attained some notoriety as on its maiden voyage to Alexandria, Egypt it suffered gale damage and put in at Torbay, 165 kilometers west of

Southampton, for repairs. The *Ripon* returned to service in January 1847. From then until 1870, it plied the Mediterranean route as a carrier of the Royal Mail, stopping at Gibraltar, Malta, Greek ports and Alexandria.^b

PS *Ripon* at Southampton, 1854



Peter L. Fishback
October 1, 2024

^a Jennifer Ballantine Perera, “Pablo Larios and the Royal Calpe Hunt,” *Historia Contemporánea* 41 (2010): 345-71.

^b *Illustrated London News*, October 24, 1846; *West Briton and Cornwall Advertiser*, October 30, 1846.

The Author: “Flora Calpensis”

In 1880, Samuel Tinsley & Co., London, published *Reminiscences of Gibraltar*, a non-fiction work by a little-known author who used the pen name “Flora Calpensis.”¹ Tinsley printed on the book’s title page that Calpensis had written “The Life of a Rock Scorpion,” and “Amusements for the Holidays.” The first book had been published earlier in the year by Charing Cross Publishing Co., and the second book in 1869 by William Freeman.² Charing Cross, a minor publisher located in London, never released a notable book and derived some of its income from vanity publishing.³ The Calpensis book published by Freeman was a companion piece to *Amusements for Wet Mornings*. E. H. A. Frankland is the author of both *Amusements* books.⁴ She was a daughter of Frederick William Frankland, 8th Baronet of Thirkleby, York. Sir Frederick had been an army officer for fourteen years, afterward a country gentleman, and later in life was employed in Gibraltar for sixteen years by the Barracks Department.

¹ The ancient classical name for the Rock of Gibraltar was *Mons Calpe*. Hence, she named herself the “flower of Gibraltar.”

² University of Cambridge Libraries, Book Catalogue Entries.

³ Troy Bassett, “An Author Born Every Minute: The Charing Cross Publishing Company and Its Successors,” *Publishing History* 69 (2011): 19-40.

⁴ *The Publishers Circular*, September 15, 1869; *The British Museum Catalogue of Printed Books* (London: British Museum, 1887).

Pages 4-19 not included in this sample.

REMINISCENCES OF GIBRALTAR.

BY

FLORA CALPENSIS,

AUTHOR OF "THE LIFE OF A ROCK SCORPION,
AMUSEMENTS FOR THE HOLIDAYS," ETC.



London:
SAMUEL TINSLEY & CO.,
31, SOUTHAMPTON STREET, STRAND.
1880.

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REMINISCENCES OF GIBRALTAR.

CHAPTER I

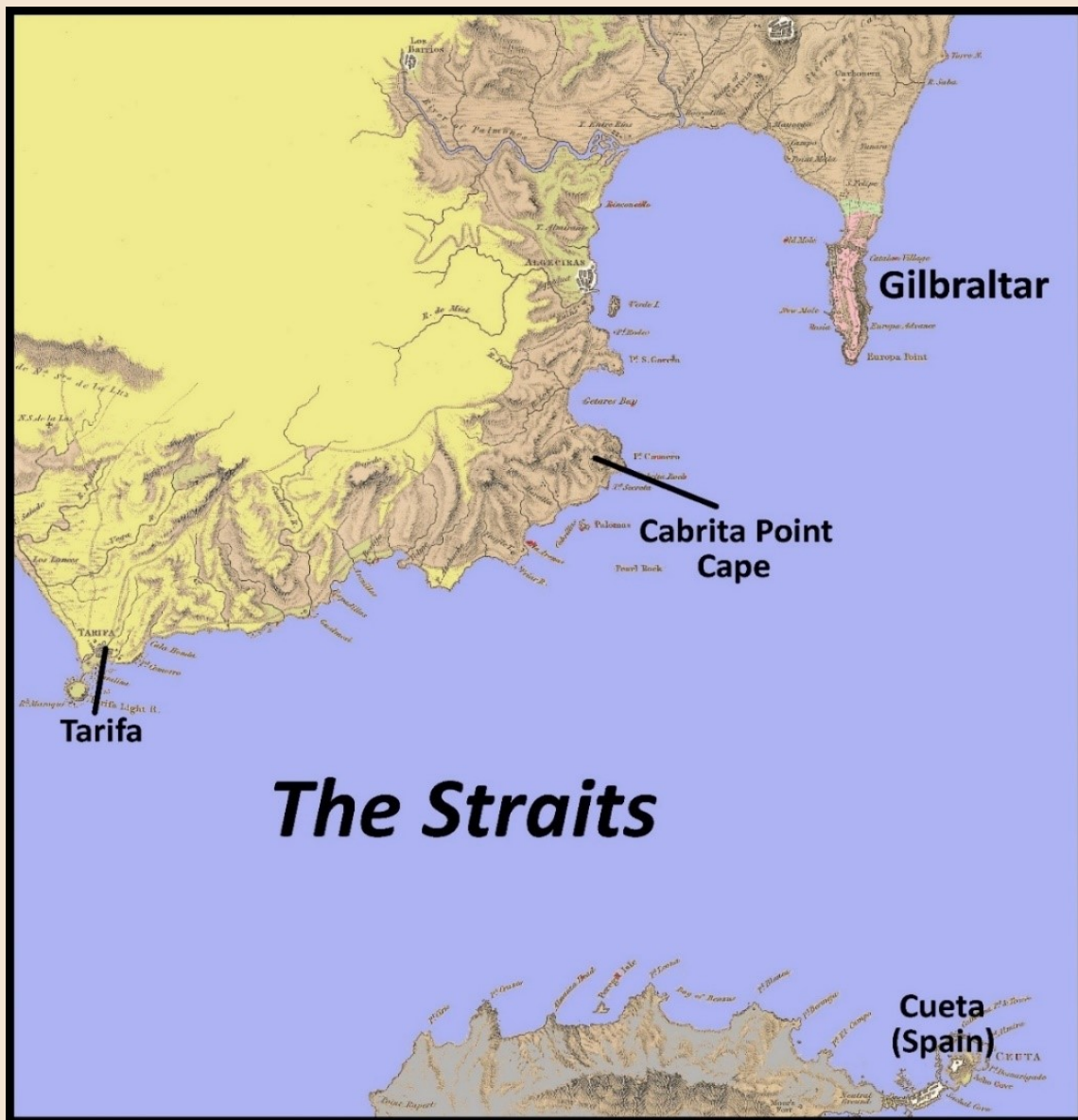
REMINISCENCES OF GIBRALTAR

HAVING lived formerly for many years on the dear “old rock” — that most jolly of all colonial stations to which we of the army are sent, I have thought it might afford a little amusement, if not instruction, to a general reader, if I were to relate some few facts connected with this grand old fortress. To begin then: in 1845 I left the Southampton waters in the P. O. Steamer *Ripon* bound for Gibraltar. We had a splendid passage, and on the evening. of the sixth day after passing Tarifa came in sight of Gibraltar. How well do I remember my delight when, as leaning over the bulwarks with one of my *compagnons de voyage*, the ancient city and

fortress came in view as we rounded the cape. Nothing can surpass the extraordinary wildness and magnificence of the scene which then burst upon our sight; of the vast chain of the snowy Alpujarras, and of the Sierra Morena, which terminates only at the west coast of the Bay of Gibraltar. Aye; there stands the famous promontory; rising majestically from the bosom of the sea, blue as any turquoise. Well has the outline of the “old rock” been likened to the figure of a monstrous “lion couchant” such as heralds delight to emblazon.

Dimly we can see this “king of the forest” reposing; yet still narrowly watching after the interests of *Britannia*, his royal mistress, as he sits dozing, and sleepily closing his eyes in the evening sun, at the entrance of the Mediterranean.

On our left as we enter this noble bay, second only to that of Naples, we see the far-famed town (in ancient days) of Algeciras, as it stands just opposite the rock, and distant from it across the bay about five miles and a half. This town was built in 714 by the Saracens, and well known as the place



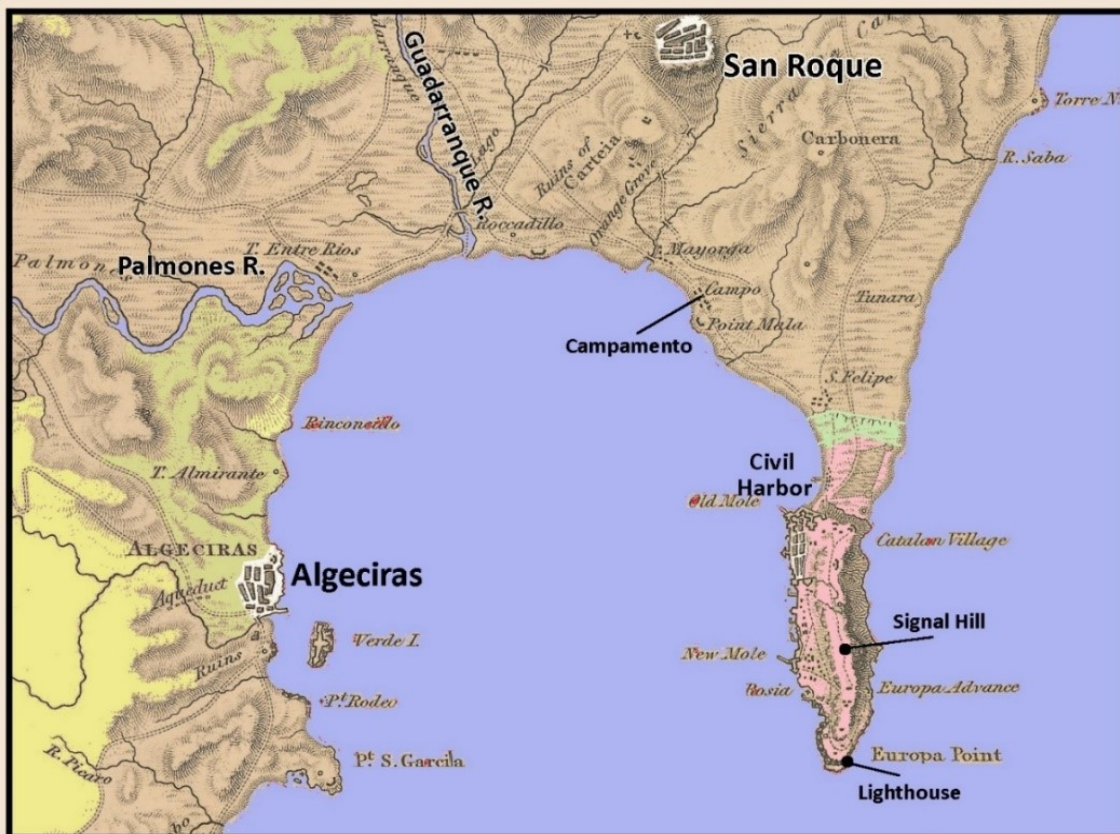
where those invaders landed when they so rapidly overturned the kingdom of Rhoderic the last of the Goths, The town fell into ruins when the Moors took possession of Gibraltar, and remained so until the beginning of the 18th century, when the Spanish Government repeopled and secured it by building a few batteries and sending cruisers to look after their interests in that quarter. And now, in consequence of its great trade with Gibraltar, it is a town of some wealth. The lands all round it are fertile and much cultivated, and it was a very pretty object that March evening as we steamed past it.

Its closely-crowded houses appeared to be of all colours, pink, yellow, green, and grey, with here and there a purely white one, with its red tiles clearly defined in the evening sun, which makes the windows twinkle and glisten as much nearly as do the eyes of the pretty *senoritas* who sit behind the bright green Venetian blinds of some of these houses, some playing their guitars and *castanetas*, while others sit by and flirt their fans in time with the tunes and *encore* them, with merry laughter; no one can forget the magnificent

Gibraltar from the Sea



Drawing by Lt. H.E. Allen in G.N. Wright, *The Shores and Islands of the Mediterranean* (London: Fisher, 1848).



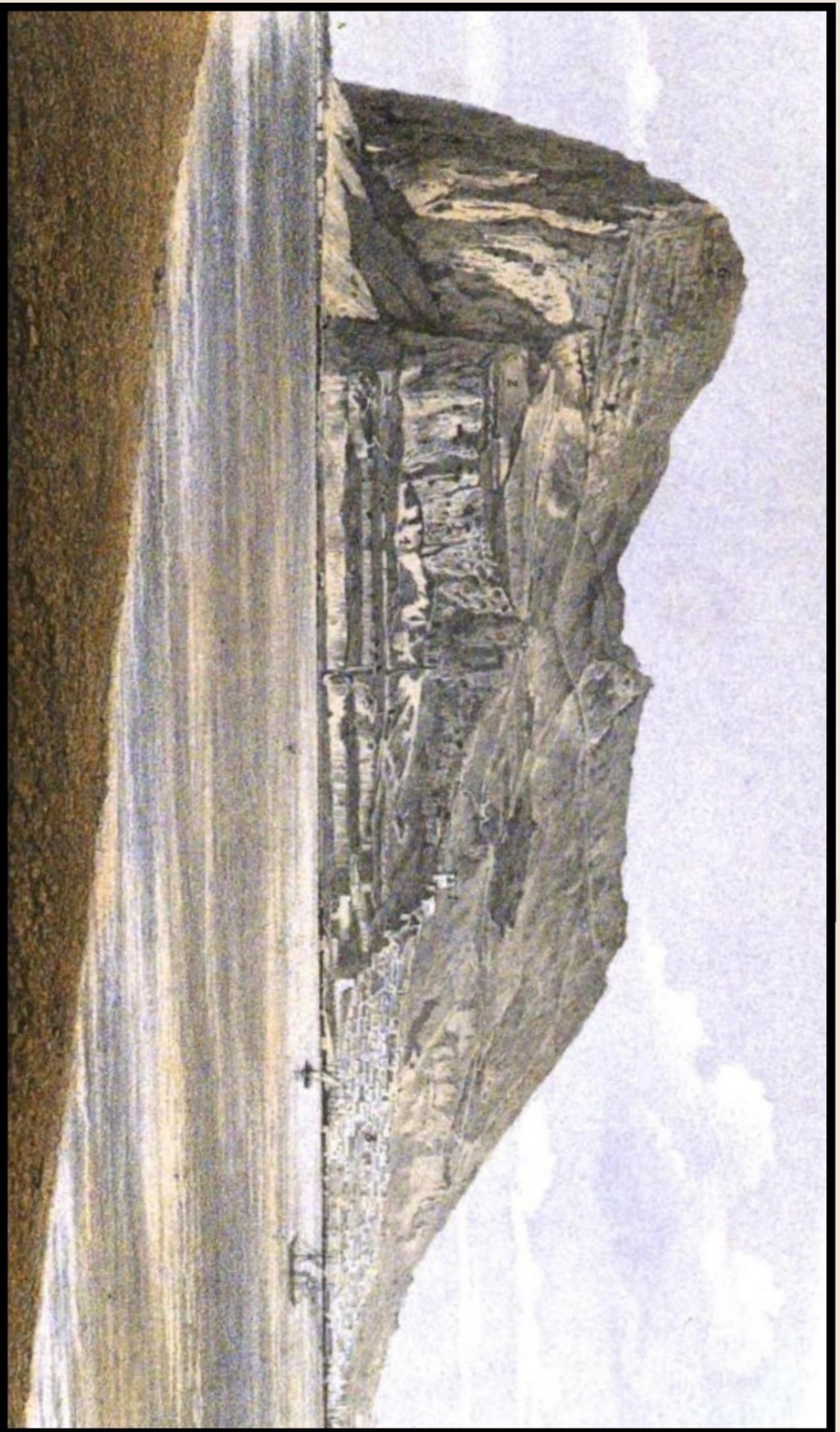
view of Algeciras from the rock, with its background of the *Sierras* as they lift their heads, varying their shapes and hues so often in the changing lights of evening that it is seldom they look two hours alike, and the view of the coast of Africa and of the straits on whose waters we were now floating.

The sea that evening was of a most lovely blue, and just slightly rippled by the cool westerly breeze. And this is the pleasantest time of the year at Gibraltar, my fellow-passenger informs me, as he continues kindly to tell me the names of all the places we are approaching, with their histories. Everything looked animated, and wore a fresh and green appearance, for Dame Nature had just clothed the old Rock in a new Spring garment; and the sun was still a welcome guest after the late rains and equinoctial gales, accompanied by sharp March winds and “Levanter;” and now we can see the whole compass of the Bay formed by the headlands of “Cabrita point,” a bold rocky promontory, where stands a battery *en barbet*, and a watch tower; and by “Europa Point,” on which is erected a fine Lighthouse,

which has saved many a brave seaman from being dashed on the rocks below, and finding a watery grave, in a place where there is no bottom to be found by the soundings.

In a few minutes more we are off the mouths of the rivers Palmones and Guadarranque, which run down from amongst the streams in the “Sierra Ronda.” The former is the broader and deeper of the two; and years ago a dear friend of mine was drowned while fording it after heavy rains. Here is the grand retreat of the smugglers on dark nights. Next we see the little mountain villages of Gancin and Castellar, celebrated for deeds of blood committed by brigands and desperadoes a few years since, as the many little roadside ✠ can testify.

Lower down we see the town of St. Roque with the descent into the Lines, *Los Barrios*, *El Campa-mento* and other little villages. As I gazed on these scenes with intense pleasure, I thought how lucky I was in having as a companion such a pleasant person as Mr. C—, one who was intimately acquainted with that (to me) unknown part of the globe; one thoroughly familiar with the



Unattributed illustration from Frederick Sayer, *History of Gibraltar*, 1st Ed. (London: Saunders, Otley, 1862).

“locale,” its charms, and likewise with all its drawbacks. With what interest did I listen to the account of the place. And as he had much knowledge of life and character, he was able to fill up the picture he had sketched for me, with people then living on the spot; giving me a lively description of them, and of their individual peculiarities, of course offering me the while introductions to his “clique,” which he said was the best on the Rock; naturally. *Cela va sans dire*. The *Ripon* was by this time close to her moorings in the Bay.

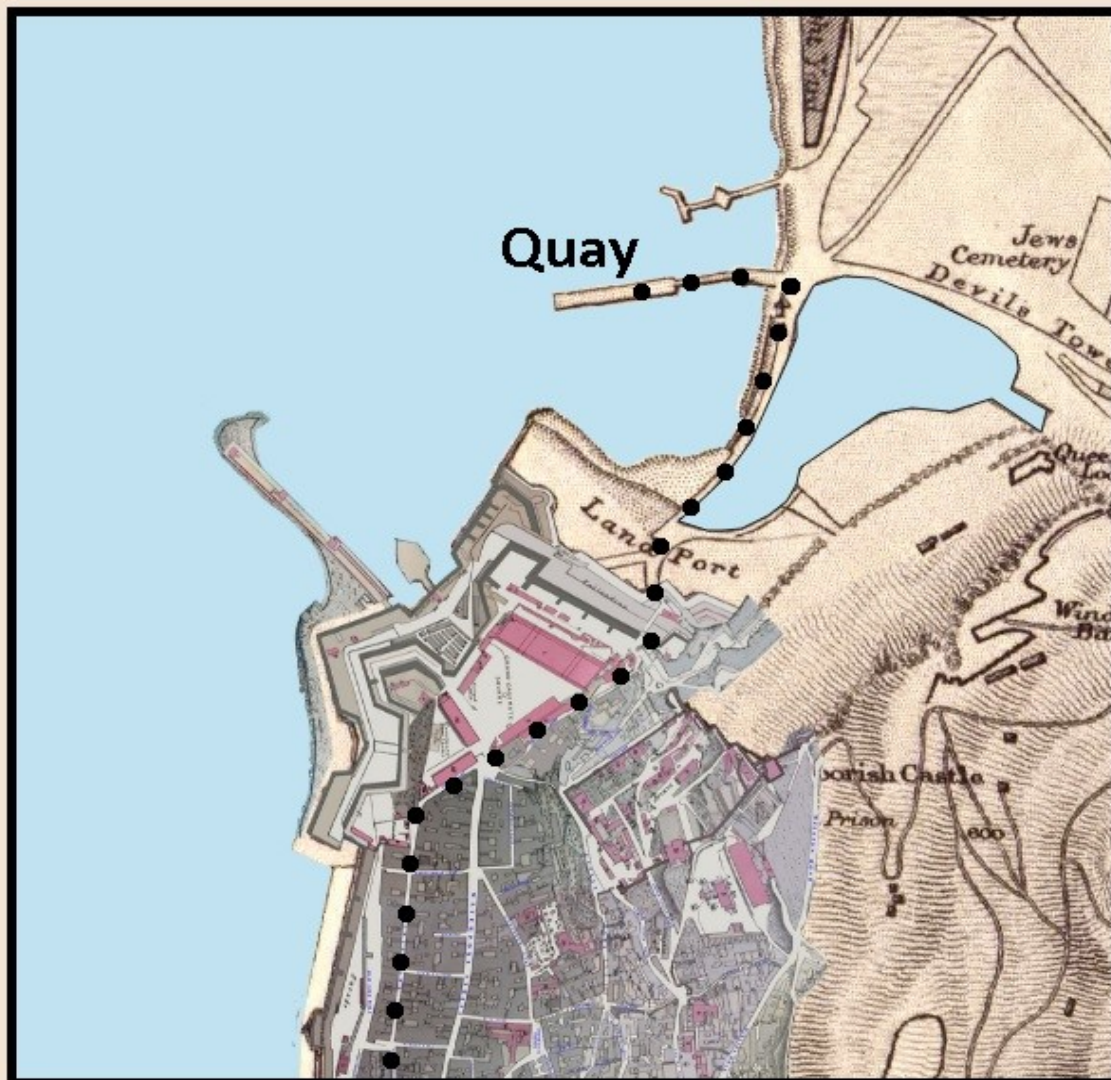
At the Signal Station, whence on a serene and clear day the Guard have an un-bounded view of the Mediterranean, and can just observe a part of the Atlantic Ocean over the Spanish Mountains, was displayed the Signal for the English Packet, viz., “The Black Ball” on the W. Yardarm with a white and red chequered Flag (the “Packet Flag” as it is called). And the inhabitants of the Rock were anxiously watching our approach, for we were bringing, I suppose, news, either good, bad, or indifferent, to almost every second English person in the fortress. And

now the smallest detail on shore stands out in strong relief; for sunset is near, and the shadows lengthen considerably. We hear the strains of a Military Band, as some Regiment is returning from a “field day” on the Neutral Ground; we even can discern the red-coated Britons and their flashing arms as they pace up and down on the Batteries of Montague Bastion, and of the Line Wall. Proudly and defiantly floats out the well blended Union Jack of Old England, from the “Montague Curtain,” ever a blessed sight, and “good for sore eyes.”

The town we perceive to be built at the foot of the North-west face of the hill; and to be irregularly fortified. The communication with it from the isthmus is by a narrow causeway, serving as a dam, and called “The Inundation,” which is defended by a curtain and two bastions mounting twenty-six pieces of the heaviest cannon; a dry ditch, covered way, and glacis well mined. These, with the causeway are well flanked by the King's, Queen's, and Prince's Lines; or the galleries, works cut into the solid rock, and scarped with immense labour and danger to



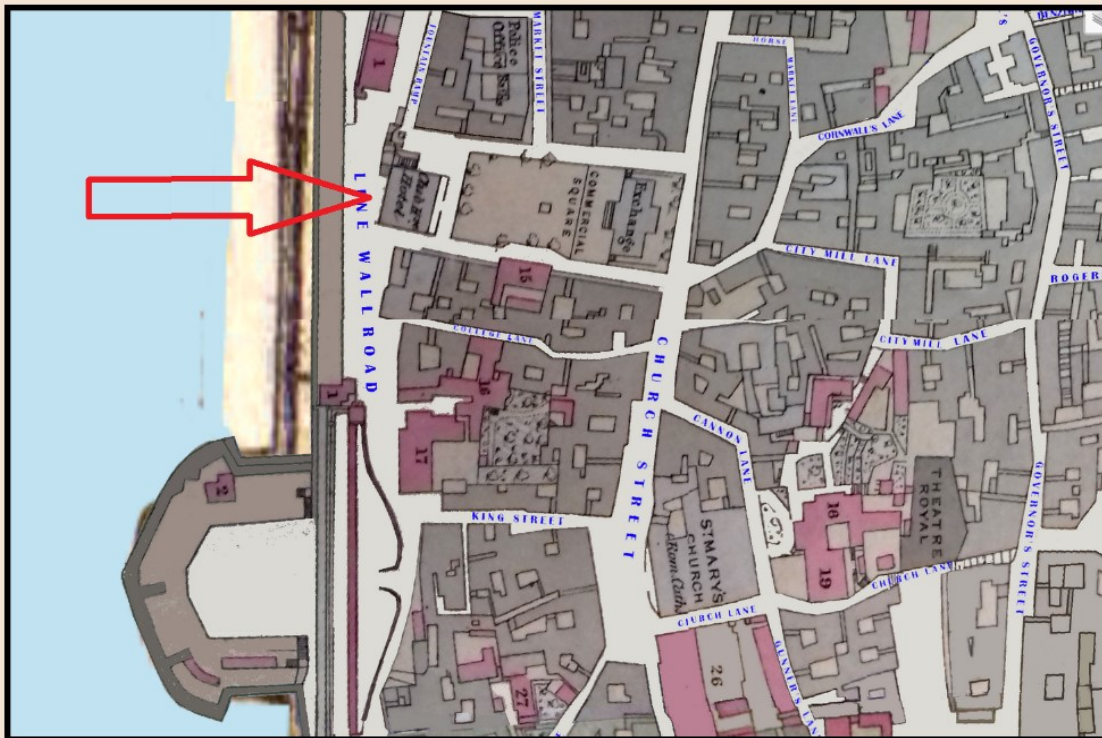
the convicts, whose energies are all directed to the strengthening of the works. Above these lines are the batteries at Willis's, and many others, which crown the summit of Calpe with mortars and guns of all sorts and sizes; the lowest Battery being placed upwards of four hundred feet above the Neutral Ground, and mounting between fifty or sixty pieces of heavy ordnance which completely command the sandy isthmus below. We must not forget that fine battery, the "Devil's Tongue" or *Bocca de Fuego*, the "Mouth of Fire," as the Spaniards called it when it so annoyed them during the siege. And whilst we gaze enraptured with the scene and take note of the mast-like aloes, now just bursting into flower with their dark brown seed-pods and spikes of yellow blossoms; and wonder to behold so much foliage and so many flowering shrubs on a rock we had been taught to think from infancy as "bare as the back of one's hand" and barren as a Wilderness; the "Pratique" boat comes on board, this delays us much; but at last we are allowed to land. After a somewhat tedious voyage in a sailing "shore boat," we



stand on the quay at Landport Gate, and passing through the fine markets, soon reach the Club-house Hotel. As I before said we were more and more astonished as we proceeded to behold how much verdure clad the face of the Rock; for as we approached it from the sea, it had a most barren appearance, but *now* we perceive that the hill is covered with palmettos.

The Rock of Gibraltar as we approach it from the sea has a most barren appearance; but ere we cast anchor in its lovely bay, we perceive that the face of the hill is covered with palmettos, gorse, and many other flowering shrubs, to say nothing of large bushes of red geraniums (such as we only see in England as bedding-out plants), the “peacock-eye” geranium, with Barbados aloes, and prickly pears, while amongst the interstices of the rock may be found singularly Sweet jonquils, fragrant herbs, periwinkles, and mesembryanthemums of many colours. These plants afford nourishment to herds of goats that browse all over the rock and supply the garrison with milk. Gibraltar indeed abounds with many interesting sub-

Location of Clubhouse Hotel



Clubhouse Hotel



Postcard by W. E. Cumbo.

Pages 35 - 122 (end of book) not included in this sample.