

magical ; for the rest of the building is enveloped in the deepest gloom, and the altar itself stands out like a pyramid of light amid the darkness which surrounds it. It is beautiful at all times ; it leads the mind to contemplation ; a sentiment of religious awe takes possession of the soul, and you feel it a privilege to worship the Almighty in such a temple.

Behind the Capilla Mayor, in a large and lofty chapel, but not of Gothic architecture, repose the ashes of Saint Ferdinand, who won Seville from the Moor. He died here soon after the Conquest in 1252. His son, Alfonso el Sabio, is likewise buried here, as well as Maria de Padilla, the celebrated mistress of Pedro the Cruel. The body of Saint Ferdinand lies before the high altar, and in the retablo is placed an image of the Virgen de los Reyes, the favourite guardian of the pious monarch. Another smaller image of the Virgin, called St. Maria de la Sede, to whom the cathedral is dedicated, stands upon the high altar in the Capilla Mayor. The Virgen de los Reyes is said to be of miraculous origin.

During the siege, Saint Ferdinand dreamed of a lovely statue of the Madonna, and summoned all the artists of his court to realise the vision of celestial beauty which had appeared to him. Many tried to satisfy their sovereign, but in vain ; at length one presented himself, and promised to produce a statue such as was required. He stipulated that he should have a house to himself and provisions for a fortnight, and that no one should disturb him during that period. The given time elapsed, even more passed away, but there were not any signs of the sculptor, and the impatient sovereign ordered the house to be broken into ; the provisions were found untouched, and the image of the Virgin completed, identical with the one

which had appeared to Saint Ferdinand in his dream. But the artist was gone, no trace of him could be discovered, and the natural conclusion arrived at was that it had been the work of supernatural hands, and the image was revered accordingly. No one has ever ventured to examine this statue, to discover of what material it is made ; and although Spaniards are on rather free and easy terms with such images in general, they have left this one untouched. Scandal, however, whispers that, once upon a time, an inquisitive canon, blessed with a curiosity, most unfairly considered an essential attribute of the weaker sex, actually dared to take an unholy peep and touch the embroidered garments : his temerity was punished with an attack of blindness, which put an effectual end to his discoveries.

In the adjoining chapel of San Pedro is a retablo containing some beautiful pictures by Zurbaran, but this part of the cathedral, in particular, is so dreadfully dark, that it is quite impossible to see them properly. A small altar, near the principal entrance from the Orange Court, in the north transept, contains a lovely painting of the Virgin and Child by Cano. This is one of the gems of the Cathedral—a heavenly spiritualised Virgin, like the Madonnas of the Italian school, ideal and beautiful ; a countenance such as becomes the blessed mother of our Lord. On the same side, in the chapel containing the baptismal font, is the celebrated St. Anthony of Murillo, by many considered his *chef-d'œuvre*. The Infant Saviour appears to the Saint amid a glory of cherubs, lovely as such creations of Murillo's generally are ; the Saint kneels before the holy vision.

Over an altar near the grand entrance is a lovely picture by the same great master ; the Guardian Angel, who is leading a child by the hand. The child is

exquisite, looking up with a sweet confiding expression to the angel, who points with his hand to heaven. None of these pictures can, however, be really seen and examined ; the darkness in the Cathedral may add to its grandeur as a whole, but it effectually conceals the beauty of the paintings which adorn its chapels. There are likewise two remarkable pictures by Luis de Vargas, one of the Nativity, the other called, "La Generacion," representing Adam and the patriarchs looking up to the Virgin, who appears with her Son in the clouds. It is better known by the name of "La Gamba," from the masterly foreshortening of Adam's leg. Vargas was born in 1502, and studied for many years in Italy ; he is one of the earliest painters of renown in the Seville school, and his works bear more the stamp of the Italian style than the generality of those of Spanish masters.

A gigantic San Cristobal adorns the wall, close to the altar, over which the Gamba is painted. It is the production of one Mateo Perey Alesio, and is upwards of thirty feet in height. This Saint is always represented crossing a river, with a palm-branch in his right hand, bearing the Infant Christ on his shoulder, and a hermitage visible in the distance. The figure of this Saint is frequently painted at the entrance of churches, for when St. Christopher was martyred, he prayed that all who were present and believed in the Saviour should not suffer from tempest, earthquake, or fire. Hence, sprung up the superstition that, "Whosoever shall behold the image of St. Christopher, on that day shall not faint nor fail." The legend, which has given rise to the generally received representation of him, is perhaps one of the most beautiful allegories portrayed by Christian Art. It is charmingly described by Mrs. Jameson in her "Sacred and Legendary Art."

It is strange how few interest themselves in these legends of the early Christian Church ; and how we pass, unheeded, subjects which have engrossed the pencil of the greatest painters, with the satisfactory reflection, that "they refer to some saint or another," never caring to know the origin of the story, or learn what beautiful allegory may lie concealed beneath the tale these paintings are meant to illustrate.

A very handsome chapel is dedicated to the Virgen de la Antigua. The silver railings, and other ornaments of the altar, are very costly. In the retablo is an old Byzantine picture, which is said to have remained in the Mosque during the whole of the Moorish dominion. In an adjoining chapel is a fine old tomb of a prelate, and the retablo is decorated with a statue of St. Hermenegild, by Montañes.

In the nave, between the grand entrance and the choir, in that portion of the church which they call in Spain the *trascoro*, lie the ashes of Fernando, the son of Christopher Columbus. On a marble slab let into the pavement is a Latin epitaph, and, beneath, the arms, with the well-known inscription, "A Castilla y á Leon nuevo mundo dió Colon." These words have given rise to the often-repeated assertion that Columbus himself was buried here, whereas his bones really rest in the Havannah, in the new world which he discovered. On each side of the stone are engraved two strange-looking ships, copies of the caravels which bore the great navigator across the waters of the Atlantic.

Such are some of the principal objects of interest of which this wondrous edifice can boast ; and besides these, are the Chapter-house and Sacristy. In the latter may still be found some remains of the treasures it once contained, of jewels, and gold and silver plate,

before the hand of the invader despoiled the churches of their wealth. The Sacristy is a fine building in the Græco-romano style. Here is kept the beautiful silver Custodia of Juan de Arfe. It is in the form of a temple, and of exquisite workmanship. The Arfes were the Cellinis of Spain : they flourished in Valladolid about the middle of the sixteenth century. In almost all the cathedrals some trace of their workmanship is preserved. Much, however, was destroyed during the French invasion, when master-pieces of art, which can never be replaced, were melted down or carried away. The Custodia is the tabernacle in which the host is deposited on Holy Thursday, and where it is carried in procession through the streets on the Festival of the Corpus. There are some beautiful chalices and reliquaries of elaborate workmanship ; and, amongst many valuable objects, the most interesting are the keys presented to Saint Ferdinand upon the surrender of Seville.

The identical key said to have been delivered up by the Moslem chieftain is made of iron, and contains the following inscription in Arabic :—“May Allah permit the empire of Islam to endure for ever in this city.” Ancient authorities say the purport of the inscription is the same as that upon the silver key, which has in Spanish, “Dios abrirá, Rey entrará.” The latter was presented to Ferdinand by the Jews after the conquest. The former interpretation seems far more suitable to an Arabic inscription, and such it has been decided to be by that celebrated scholar Don Pascual de Gayangos, according to the statement of Amador de los Rios, in his “Sevilla Pintoresca.”

A splendid cross used for grand ceremonies, the superb stand for the candles used during matins on the three last days of the Holy Week, and the gorgeous vestments of the clergy with the frontals of the altar,

are among the things worth examining in this museum of art. The Chapter-house is a beautiful plateresque saloon of the same date as the Sacristy, and is adorned with paintings by Murillo, Cespedes, and Pacheco. At the opposite corner of the Cathedral stands the Sagrario, or parish church. It is a large oblong building, not remarkable for anything particular.

There is one most singular ceremony which takes place in this cathedral, and one quite peculiar to Seville—that is, the dancing before the high altar during the octaves of the Festivals of the Corpus and the Conception, and the three last days of carnival. The principal actors in this extraordinary scene are the Seises; boys belonging to the cathedral, whose number was originally six, as their name indicates, but they consist in reality of ten. They are placed in the open space in front of the altar within the iron screens. Five stand on either side, opposite to each other; they begin a slow and measured movement, singing hymns to the patroness of Spain, and keep time with their ivory castanets, which form a strange accompaniment to the orchestra and strike one as very discordant with the holiness of the building. They dance for about half-an-hour, and then the magnificent organs pour forth their swelling notes through the vaulted aisles, the curtain veils the host, and the bells of the Giralda ring, while the throng who had assembled to witness the dancing leave the Cathedral. These boys are dressed in the costume of the seventeenth century; they wear tunics of white and blue silk, their hats are looped up with a plume of feathers, a scarf is fastened across their shoulders, and a silk mantle hangs behind.

The Cathedral of Seville boasts of being the only one where dancing is permitted, but there does not seem any authentic account of how such a singular custom

originated. A tradition in the town traces it to the time of the conquest of Seville by the Moors ; they say that as the infidels entered the church, a party of young men commenced dancing before them and continued dancing until they reached the high altar, whence one of them took the host, and concealing it in his dress, contrived thus to rescue it from the hands of the Moslem ; in memory of which they have been allowed to dance before it. This is, however, but a doubtful legend ; the practice is more generally supposed to be a relic of the dances which accompanied the Procession of the Corpus in early times. They are mentioned, as existing in the Cathedral, in a Papal Bull dated 1439. Another story says, that an archbishop of Seville, who lived towards the close of the seventeenth century, was very anxious to do away with the dancing of the Seises as an exhibition unbecoming the sanctity of the Cathedral, when the Dean and Chapter were so indignant that they sent them all off in a ship to Rome to dance before his Holiness, in order that he might judge from personal experience whether there was anything indecorous in their performances. They were allowed to continue, and confirmed in their privilege of dancing, with their heads covered, before the Sacrament ; but this privilege was only to continue so long as the dresses they then wore should last, for which reason their costume is never entirely renewed, some little patch of the old garments still remaining.

Be it as it may, there they are dancing, as each festival returns, before the altar of the Cathedral, to the music of the castanets. They belong chiefly to the middle class, the sons of tradesmen. They cannot aspire to the post of seises after they are ten years old ; it seems the Chapter are not such good judges of

music as formerly, for the voices of the seises do not now reflect much credit upon their selection, and they used to be the best voices in the choir.

The services in the Cathedral are performed with all becoming solemnity. There is generally a sermon preached on Sunday morning during the celebration of high mass : these discourses are generally very good, and the text is almost always taken from the Gospel for the day, the preacher seldom touching on any polemical point. Sermons of the latter description are generally reserved for the Novenarios, or nine days celebration of particular festivals, when the most eloquent preachers are selected. Of all European languages, perhaps Spanish is that which strikes the ear as being the noblest in the pulpit. The grandeur of its sound, its majestic high-flown phrases, the gravity and solemnity of its tone, render it indeed the language for oratory. The very grandiloquent style, which sounds to English ears so absurd in the common affairs of life, becomes an additional beauty in fervid discourse. Some of their preachers can boast of wonderful eloquence ; they work upon the imagination by their poetical and enthusiastic language, which carries one away at the moment, although, upon reflection, there is little substance in their sermons. Indeed, the critical and argumentative does not suit the genius of the language. They are all delivered as if extempore, but in many instances prepared with great care and study.

There are two very interesting historical sermons preached during the year, the one on the anniversary of the surrender of Seville, the other on the Sunday following the proclamation of the Bull of the Santa Cruzada. Both these occasions give the preacher ample field for enlarging on the ancient glories of Spain,



the triumph of Castilian arms, and the untiring zeal which never relaxed in its efforts until the Crescent was subdued, and which obtained for her inhabitants favours not granted to any other European nation. The Bull of the Santa Cruzada was granted by Innocent III. to the Spanish crusaders, and is a dispensation which allows of Spaniards eating meat in Lent and other fast days. It is generally bought for the enormous sum of five reals, about a shilling, but the amount should vary according to the income. The money thus raised went at first to the objects of the crusade, and subsequently to the Church; but it now forms no inconsiderable item in the yearly budget, swelling considerably the coffers of the State. A Spaniard has defined this Bull to be "the worst and dearest paper sold in Spain."

The clergy may boast in their pulpits of the manner in which Spain still upholds the faith of her ancestors. In name, it is true, it does; but in deed, alas! how little of its purity remains. Among the lower classes it may still linger, and in early morn the country churches may yet be crowded with devotees; but in the towns, and among the upper and middle classes, all true religious feeling seems almost dead. To outward ceremonial they still conform; but, as to faith and real belief, they have little now remaining; the influence of the clergy has passed away, and Spaniards who were never loth to indulge in a laugh at the priesthood, have ended by looking with indifference on religion itself. The tone of their conversation is sad to listen to. Many may have been the causes, but surely a great deal must be attributed to the clergy themselves; were their own conduct what it ought to be, had they inculcated the spirit of their faith by their words and illustrated it by their actions, they would not have fallen so low as they have done; nor would they have

brought such discredit on the religion they profess. I speak of course of the body, for, doubtless, there always have been among them, and still are, many estimable men.

The spirit of intolerance which has forbidden the outward exercise of any but the dominant faith in Spain, has forced those who could not bow with true belief to its doctrines to become quite incredulous, veiling their unbelief by an outward regard to ceremonial, while scepticism had taken possession of their hearts. Let all be allowed the free exercise of their opinions and the country would gain in many respects. The clergy would become more circumspect in their conduct, and cast off a thousand idle practices which disfigure the Church of Spain. They are fatally mistaken if they imagine by encouraging such things, they gain more hold of the people, even apart from the immorality of deception. They may over the ignorant who believe all they are told, but those who have sense and judgment of their own, begin to doubt; and when doubt has once entered into the human mind, who can tell where it will stop? Will it be content to brush away the mere idle practices, and leave the essence untouched? The Bravo Murillo government have been endeavouring to revert, at least to some extent, to the former state of things, and restore the power of the clergy by re-establishing the regular orders. For this purpose peace was made with Rome, whose Sovereign Pontiff had not looked upon Spain with a very favourable eye since the period when Church property had been confiscated. A concordat has been signed; convents and monasteries are to be allowed in Spain, and the nunneries are once more permitted to receive inmates within their walls.

A perfect mania has seized on all the young ladies since the late permission was accorded, and the convents are now filling fast. Between three and four hundred have