

the street, with stone bases and small projecting roofs, all whitewashed, which, combined with quantities of flowers within the rejas, gives a remarkably fresh appearance to the town. The Alameda hangs over the cliff as it sweeps round the Tajo, and commands a panorama of the distant mountains, crowned by the Cristobal, almost unique in beauty. The market-place, overhanging the Tajo, above the bridge, is scrupulously clean, and filled with the most delicious fruit, the orchards near Ronda being famed throughout Andalucia for their produce. One remarkable old spot is worthy of a visit, the Casa del Rey Moro; the house itself has no traces of antiquity, but you descend to the bed of the river by means of stairs cut in the rock, and in the descent pass some large rooms, all hollowed out of the solid cliff, looking as if they had been intended for dungeons. A small doorway opens on the river, but the cliffs descend so perpendicularly, that they only allow room for the torrent to rush between them, effectually stopping all egress in that direction.

Ronda is famed for being the head-quarters of all the smugglers who used formerly to find the neighbourhood of Gibraltar convenient; but they and their trade are both diminishing. Still the fair of Ronda and the throng of people who flock to it are talked of as one of the sights of Andalucia, and its bull-fights are far-famed. The population seem rather disposed to be quarrelsome, if one may judge from the multiplicity of crosses which ornament the walls of the houses, recording with the usual inscription the tragic fate of some victim to the "narvaja." The principal church is said to have been a mosque, but there is small appearance of Moorish work about it now; it is, however, evidently a patched-up building, for on entering, it appears to have two high altars, and you hardly know which is the principal one. Of the castle there is but little left. Ronda was once the key to

these mountain fastnesses, whence its inhabitants could issue forth to sweep the rich valleys towards Cadiz, and retreat again undisturbed to their stronghold. It was taken by Ferdinand in 1485, when its governor, the bold Hamet el Zegri, was absent; he who afterwards so gallantly defended the Gibralfaro at Málaga. He had gone to the relief of Coin; and when he returned, he found his eagle's nest was already in the hands of the Christians.

A charming expedition may be made from Ronda to the Cueva del Gato, a cavern about two leagues distant. We left the town by the same bleak, dreary path by which we entered it, descending the valley to the left, and skirted the stream for some time with a steep mountain on our right. A sharp turn brought us suddenly in front of the cavern, from which a river was rushing forth out of the very depths of the mountain: the entrance, like a lofty porch, is in the face of a perpendicular cliff, and unapproachable except by climbing over rather precipitous rocks. The stately flower of the acanthus rose in all the crevices, its classic leaves falling over the grey stones, and the wild vine and fig-tree entwined their branches across the entrance. We penetrated about a hundred yards, the water bounding along beneath and around us, the footing in many places being far from secure. The peasants say it continues for the space of a league into the mountain; stalactites hang from the lofty roof, and the whole presents a very grand and wild appearance. From the furthest point to which we penetrated, I sat down to sketch the entrance; and we were joined by a fine-looking peasant, who entered into conversation with us, and told us many tales of the way those caves had served the people for refuge in times of war. He was a manly-looking fellow, and talked with that ease and independence, yet almost chivalrous courtesy, which

characterise these Andalucian peasants. The stream which gushes forth from this cavern flows into the one whose course we had been following; united, they receive another tributary, and then, as our companion informed us, disappear in the earth about a league to the southward; but where they issue forth again was more than he could tell.

The day for our departure had arrived; we bade adieu to Ronda, and found ourselves once more on the road. The arches of a Moorish aqueduct, now all in ruins, were scattered along the side of our path. An uninteresting ride lay before us, tame, and flat, and monotonous after the superb forest scenery through which we had passed between Grazalema and Ronda. But we were enlivened by the society of a very Quixotic-looking Spaniard, who was travelling in the same direction. He passed us at first, but we soon joined forces, and became great friends, in that frank and easy manner with which one makes acquaintance in such unfrequented places. In the wild mountain tract and desert fastness, all soon become friends, and even our own countrymen contrive in these uncivilized districts to commence conversation without the formality of an introduction. Our friend's costume was singular, large leather sleeves laced on to a very shabby, faded green velvet jacket, crowned, alas! by a wide-awake, instead of a "sombbrero calañes," his cloak strapped on in front to his saddle, his double-barelled gun hanging at the flank of his powerful grey charger, and an armed servant following on a mule with his luggage.

He jogged on leisurely by our side, and the bleak and barren road was rendered shorter and less tiresome by his anecdotes of Ronda and its vicinity.

We made our mid-day halt in a venta on the road-side, where Don Rafael partook of our fare, and seemed

astonished at the exploits which were performed in the eating line by some of the party; how different to the simple gazpacho with which a Spaniard would refresh and cool himself during the heat of a summer sun! That cooling repast of which people, who think its contents must make so uninviting a whole, little know the luxury until they have divested themselves of their prejudices, and felt how grateful it is when exhausted by the heat of a Southern sun. The castle-crowned heights of Teba now appeared on a barren hill in the valley before us. Our friend parted from us here, never, probably, to meet again; and such is travelling, knowing people, joining in some far-away place, becoming friends, and sharing in all the varying circumstances that such a novel mode of life is sure to offer, and then comes the leave-taking, and you separate, to see and hear no more of those with whom you have passed many a merry hour.

The town of Teba was hardly visible, but a mountain road led along a gorge ascending to it. The castle was often taken and retaken in the Moorish wars, and on one remarkable occasion it was the scene of a most enterprising action of Rodrigo Narvaez, the chivalrous governor of Antequera. After that place had been conquered, a truce was agreed upon for a certain time, when Teba was in the hands of the Christians. The day before the truce was to commence, the Moors attacked, and took it by storm. Narvaez hearing of this the same night, and feeling that the enemy had taken advantage of his not having it in his power to recover it, the truce commencing next day, instantly sallied forth from Antequera with a few chosen followers. In the middle of the night he arrived before Teba, fell upon the unsuspecting garrison, who surrendered immediately, and when the day dawned on which the truce was to commence, Teba was once more in the hands of the Christians.

Soon the aspect of the country changed; again the road crossed verdant meadows, and wound through olive-crowned hills, and a charming ride in the soft moonlight brought us to Campillos, where we found a large and clean posada. This is a small village, with a straight, wide street, and a large church remarkably well kept. The road thence to Antequera was in first-rate order; but the heat was intense, and we were nearly roasted crossing those wide, unsheltered plains, covered with waving crops of the black-bearded wheat. The celebrated salt lake lay in that burning expanse, like a vast sheet of ice, round the edges of which the snow lay thick and heavy. This lake is a source of great profit, and is nourished by two streams highly impregnated with salt, which take their rise in the mountains near Antequera. This salt has always been highly prized, from its purity and the ease with which it is collected, and was much valued by the Moors, who trafficked in it largely.

The ride on was broiling. The bold crag of the Peña de los Enamorados formed a conspicuous object in the distance, but the projecting hilly ground concealed Antequera from our view, until we had approached nearly to it. The situation is very beautiful; the town backed by its old Moorish castle, and the grey rugged mountain peaks behind. We took refuge in the Posada de la Castaña, which I would commend to all future travellers, as one studiously to be avoided, although I cannot promise that the town affords a better. The court-yard presented the usual animated appearance, the muleteers arriving and departing, while some were taking a siesta on the benches, rolled up in their gay-coloured mantas.

The rooms looked clean as usual, but appearances were deceptive, and the slumbers of some of our party were considerably disturbed by the appearance of most unwelcome companions. Not light, active creatures, which hop





ANTEQUERA.

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about, never resting for a moment; but a steady and determined array of slow-creeping things, advancing gradually and tranquilly. They paid however dearly for their temerity, they little knew the spirit they had aroused; they were more persecuted than persecuting, at least, if the reports of individual prowess could be relied on, for a fair member of our party in the morning announced that eighty head, to her own score, had perished in the conflict.

The eating was worse, if possible, than the sleeping accommodation. Oil and garlic seemed to be the staple products of Antequera, and garnished the dishes to an extent rare even in this land, rendering still more unpalatable the tough, fibrous chickens. The despair of some of the party reached the highest pitch, when it was discovered that not even a drop of drinkable wine could be procured. Generally speaking, good wine is difficult to be obtained in the interior; as the consumption is small, but little care is bestowed on the manufacture of it, while the absence of all demand for the better qualities, and the difficulties of transport, render it almost impossible to procure the produce of Malaga or Xeres at any price.

Antequera, though evidently not offering much attraction to the lover of good fare, and not likely to tempt the traveller to a long residence from the comfort of its inns, is a most interesting town, both to the antiquarian and lover of the picturesque. The vega too was the scene of many a gallant rencontre between Moor and Christian, and some of the most romantic adventures of those days occurred under the shadow of the Lovers' Rock, the bold and lofty Peña de los Enamorados. The town is clustered round the hill, on which stands the dilapidated castle. A steep ascent leads up to an old arch—the Arco de los Gigantes—which admits you within the enclosure guarded

by the now ruined walls. This arch has a venerable appearance, which might induce one at a first and hasty glance to consider it some relic of Roman days, covered as it is with Latin inscriptions of great antiquity; but it only dates from 1585, when it was erected by the Ayuntamiento, who wisely turned it to account as a means of preserving some of the vast number of Roman inscriptions discovered in the neighbourhood. It would be well, if some of the corporations in Spain in these days, would take the same laudable interest in preserving the precious monuments existing in their towns.

The view, looking through this arch down upon the town, is lovely; it makes such a pretty frame,* enclosing the quaint red tower of the Collegiate Church, which formed the principal object in the picture. Above are the ruined walls of the old Moorish fortress, with its tower now converted into a belfry. But little of it remains; the view, however, well repays the ascent. The town in front, with the luxuriant vega beyond; rising in the centre the fine crag, which strikes the eye from every point in this neighbourhood; the lofty mountains so close behind, their jagged peaks of cold, grey stone, and the wild and barren ravines which intersect them; the mountain torrent dashing over its stony bed, the tall masses of many ruined convents, and the salt lake glittering in the distance.

Antequera, like many other Spanish towns, claims Tubal as its founder, although one of its historians has the candour to admit that it is difficult to authenticate the fact of his ever having actually resided there. But the curious remnants of an earlier people, who preceded the Romans, may be seen in a chambered mound, which forms so peculiar a feature of interest to the antiquarian; while

* See Title-page.

the enormous number of Latin inscriptions prove it to have been a city of some importance in the days of the Romans. There seem to have been several towns congregated in this neighbourhood: at a "cortijo" in the neighbourhood, inscriptions of the Roman Singilia have been discovered, besides a great number of sepulchres; and in the course of cultivating the land, labourers are continually meeting with some trace of Roman antiquities.

Antequera has been the scene of stories told in many an ancient ballad; and who can help feeling an interest in recalling all those tales of chivalrous courtesy and knightly honour, in which Moor and Christian sought to rival and outvie each other? All who have read of these will recollect the generous conduct of Rodrigo Narvaez, when he took a Moorish chieftain prisoner; how, when he heard the tale of his sorrows, and that he was on his way to carry off a noble lady of Coin, whose affections he had gained, he allowed him to proceed upon his way, and claim his bride, upon the condition that he should return, and yield himself once more a prisoner: and he did return, accompanied by his fair Jarifa. Touched by this honourable conduct of the Moor, Narvaez gave him his liberty, and even commended him to the especial care of the King of Granada, imploring forgiveness for the lovers. And then the story of Don Tello, he who went forth before the siege commenced, to challenge to single combat some Moslem warrior; but none would venture to the encounter until Arabella, the bold Alcalde of Ronda, who happened to be within the fortress, took up the challenge, and left the town to fight the Christian. The Moor was defeated; and Don Tello, when he saw his adversary severely wounded and at his mercy, instead of killing him, took out bandages and ointments to cure him of his wounds. At the sight of their comrade's defeat, his friends sallied

forth to avenge it; but when Arabella told them how the Christian was his friend, and how, having met him in single combat, he had been vanquished and made his prisoner, he implored them to treat him as so gallant an enemy deserved, and escort him into the town; where Don Tello remained, honoured by his enemies, until such time as the wounds of the Alcalde of Ronda were cured. Such are the incidents immortalized in the ballad poetry of Spain, full of such strange courtesy, of such chivalrous traits, which show how even the barbarity of those deadly wars was tempered by conduct which would do honour to the highest civilization.

On the Castle hill is the old church of Santa Maria, one of the first parishes established on the taking of the town; it was considerably enlarged and embellished about the beginning of the sixteenth century, when it was made into a Collegiate Church; it has a most beautiful "artesonado" ceiling. Of the Church of San Salvador no vestige now remains; this was the original mosque consecrated by the Archbishop of Santiago in the presence of the Infante Fernando, and here the first Te Deum was sung in gratitude for the triumph which the Christian arms had obtained. Injured by the French, it was allowed to fall to ruin, like everything else—the same story always. Antequera is full of deserted convents, gradually falling to decay. In proportion to the number of these establishments formerly existing, is the air of desolation which now pervades Spanish towns. There are plenty of nunneries still standing, their latticed windows giving a gloomy appearance to the streets where they rear their prison-like walls.

Even the convent of Our Lady de los Remedios is rapidly decaying. This boasts of being one of the finest churches in the town. It was erected in honour of an image which appeared to the good people of Antequera,