

protected by the sheltering rock, we passed the night very comfortably beneath the vaulted canopy of heaven—with this exception, however, that so much had been said about being amply provided with cloaks to guard us against the cold, that we fell into the opposite extreme, and at midnight a universal exclamation arose, “really the heat is quite oppressive;” and strange as it may appear, it is not more strange than true, that two of our party were quite glad to have recourse to the fan in regular Spanish fashion.

Our old friend Francisco was in high force, declaring that he loved the Choza far better even than his native village, for here he was “monarch of all he surveyed,” and at this height there were no unwelcome insects to disturb his rest, and no women or children to drive him distracted. Alas for the morn! as usual our intentions were frustrated, as those of people generally are who take the trouble of climbing a mountain to see the sun rise. On this occasion the sun declined to rise, or at least came forth curtained by such heavy clouds, that after a serious discussion on the subject, we resolved on not attempting the ascent until the day was more advanced. It was something like a conversation previous to undertaking a pic-nic on a cloudy English day, when everybody’s opinion is in accordance with his wishes, and against the very evidence of his senses, some of us maintaining the clouds would disperse, others declaring it was hopeless; at length we found it was time to make preparations for breakfast, and after having satisfactorily concluded that very important commencement of a fatiguing excursion, the sun shone forth in all his splendour, and we started for the summit. Again we stood upon one of the loftiest points of the Sierra, the grand panorama bursting upon our view in all its solemn grandeur.

Having already ascended this height, I must not detain my readers a second time, and after numerous observations with aneroid and thermometer had been taken, we retraced our steps towards Granada. Not more than an hour had passed after we left the Choza, when we met the Neveros coming up to fetch their nightly cargo of snow. After the usual friendly salutation, they paused, as if uncertain what to do; at length beckoning one of the party aside, a mysterious conversation in an under tone commenced; and we were told that we had better not proceed, for a band of "ladrones" were waiting for us at the Puche, a well-selected spot for a robbers' haunt, about half way down the Sierra. Eighteen well-armed, determined brigands, who had resolved on capturing the "rich English," who had been foolish enough to wander into such elevated regions. They also told us that they had already a few days before captured an officer, who had gone on a shooting excursion to the mountains, and kept him for ten days in a cave, whence he had contrived to escape.

In short, the men looked grave; and incredulous though we all were about robbers, we began to feel that sort of indefinable sensation which follows upon a well-told ghost story. We began by thinking there might be some truth in it, and ended in feeling convinced that there was. And now commenced the grand cabinet council; what was to be done? After all it might be a false alarm; we had but one alternative, either to brave the danger or make a *détour* by Guejar, a village in the valley of the Xenil, which was quite safe, but a desperately bad road, and an immense way round. Some thought the road too bad, and fancied it better to brave the danger; others wished to go round; at one moment it was better to go, and then it was better to stay—in short, it appeared as if the knotty point would never be settled, when one of the



gentlemen boldly taking upon himself to decide our fate, pronounced that we should not show the white feather, but proceed without delay, only taking the precaution to hurry on, that we might pass the dreaded place before nightfall, for it was already late.

Francisco, nimble as a deer, and perfectly acquainted with every nook and corner of the Sierra, darted off to be on the look-out, announcing his intention of seeking assistance in the cortijos of the Xenil, if he saw any suspicious personages in the distance. All was arranged, and on we went in solemn silence, speculating on the pleasant prospect of passing a week in some dark cave. We had nothing to lose, for we had no money with us, consequently a ransom could be their only hope of making money. We all had our own thoughts and occupations; and my fair companion sought to bury her gold chain and eye-glass in the folds of her dress, that she might have some chance of preserving her most valued friends in case of accident; I was calculating what they would value us at; and as to our escort, I shall charitably conclude that the gentlemen were meditating how they could best protect the ladies under their charge. On we went, and saw nothing, and heard nothing; and when we reached the dreaded Puche, everything was remarkably quiet. All hopes or fears of an adventure were at an end; the Rubicon was passed; when, to our horror, we heard the man, who was leading one of the horses in front, exclaim: "Aqui están," (here they are.) A huge rock had concealed them from us; and one moment told us that we had been discovered. By an involuntary impulse, we checked our horses, but then made the best of it; and putting a bold front upon the matter, we were in a moment face to face with the enemy.

And there they were, looking so delightfully pic-

turesque, about twenty men leaning on their muskets, dotted about at equal distances along the road, evidently awaiting our arrival. They closed round us in a friendly manner, at the same time quietly, but most determinately impeding our onward progress. We exchanged the most loving salutations; and then they asked us, what we were doing there, and where we had been. We assured them, we had only been to see the sun rise from the Picacho, and having been frustrated in our purpose, we had taken a bird's-eye view of their most lovely land, and were quietly returning to Granada.

"And who was the man, who passed about a quarter of an hour ago? Did he belong to you?"

"He was our guide," replied the man belonging to the horses, who was trembling with fear from head to foot. "He went on to give the alarm, as we were told a band of robbers were waiting for us here."

"And how did you hear of the robbers?" asked a man who evidently seemed to be the leader of the party.

"The neveros told us," we replied; "and our guide went on to seek assistance."

"Well, it is true," said their leader, "there are plenty of robbers about, and I am the Alcalde of Monachil, come up with a party of men to look for these robbers; we are the Justicia, and are going up the Sierra in search of them."

Alas! and this was to be the finale of our adventure with robbers. To find the romance of the thing turned into the matter-of-fact reality of a few villagers with their chief magistrate at their head, wandering about in pursuit of the bandits. I continued talking to the old man, who was most liberal in giving us very good advice, at the same time refusing us any assistance, and assuring us that we should inevitably fall in with them lower down the

mountain on our way to Granada; he also informed us that he and his men were going to look for them higher up. This seemed rather inconsistent; however, we made each other many civil speeches, and with a mutual "Vayan V^{ds} con Dios!" we parted, and they were soon lost to view as they scrambled over the rocks. We had hardly parted five minutes, when we were hailed by Francisco, who came breathless up from the valley of the Xenil, accompanied by several men with their muskets over their shoulders; he expected to find us already in the power of the robbers, for he told us, that when he turned the self-same rock where we first perceived them, he saw two men with muskets creep out of a cavern, and without waiting for more information, he took to his heels to spread the alarm. They fired upon him, but missed, and he flew on the wings, not of love, but of fear to rouse the country. It was now quite dark, and we had yet some leagues to go; the countrymen, who had come to our assistance, declined accompanying us, preferring to stay and defend their homes and families, instead of risking their lives in the cause of the foreigners.

Our guides enjoined silence, and a solemn party we were winding down those rugged paths in the dead of night, fearing that the slightest sound might betray us to the dreaded bandits, who were doubtless waiting for our approach behind some hidden rock. At last we were in the vega, and our brave companions pronounced that we were out of danger, and might speak with perfect safety; and at midnight we arrived at Granada. On the following day, Francisco informed us that the people we met were really the robbers; but that, on hearing from us that he had escaped, and that the alarm was given, they had wisely passed on, announcing themselves as the "Justicia."

This naturally excited great discussion ; there was an irresistible fascination in the idea, that we really had met live banditti, seen them, spoken to them, and, what was more, escaped from them. Each advocated a different view of the subject ; one took up this side of the question, another that, and the case was so long and so eloquently argued, that we ended by not any of us knowing what opinion we really entertained. We consulted several Spaniards, who came to the wise conclusion, that it was in all probability, the Justicia we met ; but as the Justicia in Spain are nearly as great thieves as the robbers themselves, we might consider we had had a very fortunate escape.

Jesting apart, we had really got off well ; for there is no doubt, there was a very formidable band of robbers in the mountain at that period, and we found, on referring the matter to the captain-general, that the story of the officer who had been taken prisoner, was really true. He went upon a shooting excursion alone, and as he was riding leisurely along, with his musket across his knees, smoking his cigar, he was accosted by two men, who introduced themselves as miners ; they offered to join him as they were going the same road, and one of them asking for a light, he loosed his musket for a moment, when the other seized it, and announced he was a prisoner. They carried him off to a cave, and demanded twelve thousand reals as his ransom, which was to be left at a certain spot, on a day fixed. The authorities sent out a number of the Guardia Civil, disguised, with the money ; but the robbers, discovering their danger, made off, leaving the poor man to make his escape and return to Granada as best he could.

A sudden plague of robbers seemed to have infested Andalucia this season, and the country was in a worse state than it had been for many years past. The

leader of the band was a man, nicknamed Chato, who kept all the country between Cordoba and Ronda in terror. He hardly condescended, however, to attack travellers; he came down and levied contributions on the farm-houses, carrying off hostages for the payment of the required sums. Some of his prisoners were very much edified by the devout manner in which he and his band observed Lent, for they fasted most religiously. It seemed almost impossible to put down these robbers; many of the villagers were in league with them, and the vast uninhabited tracts and mountainous country gave them ample opportunity of concealing themselves from their pursuers. Even the better class hardly venture to assist in their capture; their possessions in the country being at the mercy of these lawless bands, they find it less trouble to live on good terms with them, than to assist a government, whose arm is not sufficiently strong for protection.

Andalucia was proclaimed under martial law this last autumn, but even this did not succeed; Chato, as yet, having contrived to elude their vigilance. The papers were forbidden to allude to the subject, as their long existence unchecked, rather reflected on the government. Now and then rumours of his capture were spread, but as speedily contradicted. Once, they gave all the particulars of his having been murdered in a quarrel by an associate in crime, and when his murderer was arrested, and asked, why he had shot him, he replied with great sang froid, because he was such a thief (*muy ladron*). A few days after, however, the papers announced that the real Chato had appeared in Estremadura.

Our stay in Granada at length drew to a close; but these robbers interfered sadly with our plans, and many were the discussions which ensued as to the best means of getting to Cordoba, a distance in reality of only sixty

miles, and yet the journey thither appeared to be attended with difficulties almost as insurmountable as the discovering of the North-West Passage. All the high roads in this country branch from Madrid to the large provincial towns; and travelling by the regular diligences from one extremity to the other is easy enough, but to get from one intermediate town to another is a matter requiring serious consideration for those who are not sufficiently good equestrians to take a short cut across the mountains. The ride from Granada to Cordoba by Alcala is practicable enough on horseback, but in this instance we were debarred, not so much by the fatigue, as the dread of Chato and his followers, who were in that neighbourhood, and whose appearance would not have been a very agreeable addition to a party of "unprotected females." We had too lately escaped, voluntarily to run the risk of meeting with some real adventure. Visions of a cave in the mountains as a residence for even a limited period, with the more disagreeable penalty of handing out some thousands of reals or dollars before obtaining permission to depart, did not offer a very tempting prospect. Besides which, the captain-general would not hear of our going without an escort; and as the troops were then all engaged in pursuit of the robbers, he could only offer us a guard or two, and would not guarantee our safety unless we kept to the high road, thus giving us a pleasant little *détour* taking two sides of a triangle—thanks to Chato.

A ride, too, along a dusty high road is anything but amusing, however charming it may be in a wild mountainous district. The difficulty of getting places in the diligence to Baylen, combined with the uncertainty of finding others upon our arrival there in the down diligence from Madrid to Cordoba made us resign ourselves to the disagreeable alternative. All was put in

readiness, the saddle-bags were duly stored with provisions, large parasols bearing a strong resemblance to juvenile umbrellas, veils, sun-shades were called into requisition to protect our fair complexions from the scorching sun, and the jamugas, or saddles used by women in this country, were prepared with cushions and every little &c. that could add to the comfort of my companions. But, alas! all these precautionary arrangements were of no avail, the very day before our departure news arrived of a fight between some of the banditti and the Guardia Civil; and as the latter were worsted in the fray, prudence required we should change once more for the diligence.

It was just the season when all the public conveyances to Madrid are crowded with people returning from the baths, where they have been spending the summer months. In order to secure places for our numerous party to Baylen, we paid the fare the whole way to Madrid, foolishly confiding in Spanish promises, that if there were people going from Baylen to Madrid, the extra fare should be repaid. This important affair decided by the fact of having paid our money in advance, a most powerful preventive to people changing their minds, we waited with patience for the appointed day, and in the meantime indulged ourselves with taking a last farewell of our favourite haunts. Never does time hang so heavily on one's hands as during the interval which elapses after every preparation has been made for departure, when everything is packed up, and nothing left to afford one any occupation save the one book which may have been left to while away the many hours of the journey. The very idleness creates a feeling of sadness; how much more so when one is about to leave a place endeared by many a recollection, perhaps for ever.

The day of departure arrived at length, and at five in the morning we found ourselves settled in the interior of the heavy diligence, rolling over the very uneven pavement of the Granada streets, with two companions for our journey. One, a native of the town, who was going to travel for the first time in his life—that is to say, he was proceeding to Cordoba. The other was a sweet-looking Sister of Charity, who was returning to Madrid. Poor little thing! her seat with her back to the horses, which we in vain begged her to change, did not agree with her; she suffered dreadfully, but she bore it with such resignation that it seemed to be taken as a matter of course, and added only another to the many trials of this life which she had made up her mind to endure. She was consigned to the protection of the mayoral or coachman very much like a parcel, with care, to be delivered safely, and seemed to have a very vague idea of her journey, for when we arrived at Jaen she asked me if we were near Madrid. A Spanish diligence is a strange unwieldy affair, drawn by ten or twelve mules, whose united strength is sometimes insufficient to drag the cumbrous machine through the beds of rivers, or up the sides of steep acclivities. The mayoral has an attendant sprite, who knows all the mules by name, and when he wishes to urge them on to greater speed he jumps off the box, and by whip and voice induces them to accelerate their pace, running along by their side; the screeching with which he yells out their names being rather a preventive to the passengers, at least those who are in the coupé, enjoying any repose.

Our road lay through a portion of the vega planted with vines and olives, some parts of it having belonged to the Carthusian friars, but now in the possession of a rich capitalist, who is spending a great deal upon them.

Passing the Puerta de Cubillas we bade adieu to the richly-cultivated lands, and began to cross a wild mountainous tract, its bare stony heights relieved here and there by a few tufts of some low shrubs, without a tree to cast the slightest shade on the calcined dusty soil, all the same monotonous arid colour; a lonely venta in some deserted valley where we changed horses gave no variety to the scene, and we breakfasted at a small village called Campillos de Arenas. A little beyond Arenas a singular bare ridge of rocks strikes across the valley with a deep perpendicular cleft, through which the river rushes—when there is one, that is to say, for at present there was not much appearance of water. This forms a natural entrance to the kingdom of Granada; the road is tunnelled through the rocks on one side, and continues to bear the same character, until across a dusty plain the walls of the old Moorish Castle of Jaen are seen cresting the heights, with the town nestled in a hollow at its base. Two hills rise behind the town; between, the space is occupied by the two lofty towers of the cathedral, and, for a wonder, both of them are completed. Jaen contains nothing very remarkable, and therefore we had not much to regret in passing it so unceremoniously.

The two hills just alluded to are backed by a loftier ridge, while to the south there seems to be some fine mountain scenery; in spring it may be pretty, but now the whole country round has the same yellowish sandy tinge, and not even the desert itself can be more dreary than to country on to Baylen. Endless plains sweeping over low undulating hills, without a trace of anything green in their whole expanse; no signs of villages, not a hut to be seen; all the same dusty hue. The only trace of vegetation that met the eye was a few tufts of the caper-plant, which is peculiarly refreshing from the