

ushered into a large and comfortless room, where he sat in a stiff arm-chair behind a table covered with old worm-eaten books. There were a few bookcases and engravings of religious subjects round the walls; amongst others one of the late Bishop of Cadiz, who had once been Abbot of Silos. His bed was in a small alcove, and he had another inner room, where he kept many books and manuscripts. A small lamp shed a gloomy light over the apartment. We were lodged in one of the cells; and one might have expected to see the ghost of some Benedictine monk pacing the deserted corridor out of which our habitation opened. We had capital beds, and the chocolate prepared by the hands of a nice good-natured little girl, who acted as servant, was quite delicious.

The convent of Santo Domingo de Silos claims to have been founded in the sixth century by Recaredo, the Gothic King who abjured the Arian heresy, and did so much to promote Christianity within his dominions. Already possessed of considerable fame, large grants of land were conferred upon the monks by that hero of early Castilian history, the Great Conde Fernan Gonzalez. The superiors of this convent exercised a jurisdiction of life and death, until these rights were sold by one of the abbots to the Conde de Haro in 1431. The monks protested, in the reign of John II., against such an abandonment of their privileges, and it was finally arranged by the family of the Count paying them an annual tribute of one thousand three hundred and sixty reals, and as many maravedis. This establishment belonged to the Benedictine order, who founded their first monastery in Spain, in the Rioja, at the San Millan de Cogulla, and hence came the saint to whom that of Silos was to owe its renown.

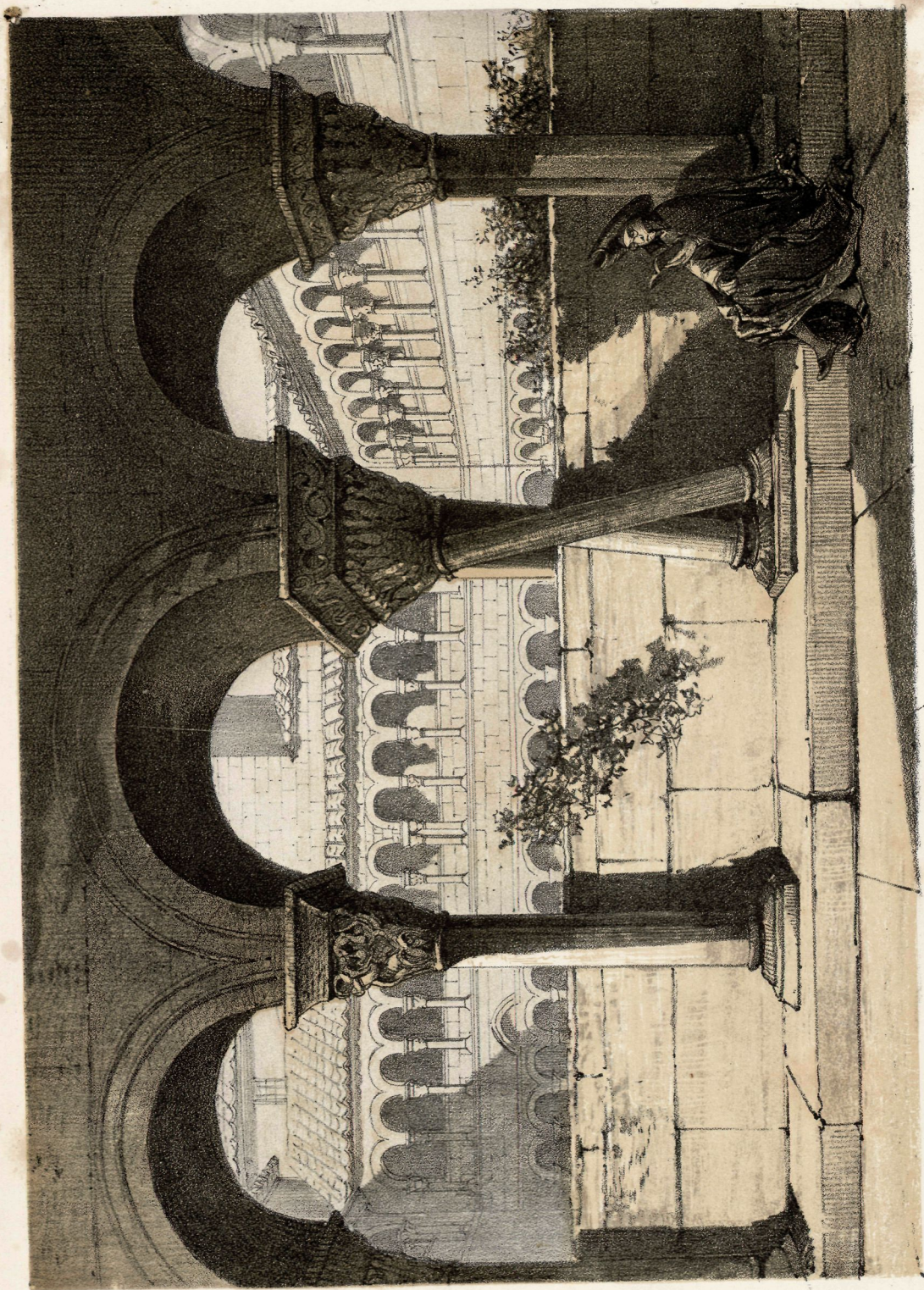
Santo Domingo de Silos must be distinguished from the

far-famed Santo Domingo, who preached the crusade against the Albigenses, and whose followers lighted the fires of the Inquisition. The former was only a humble shepherd in the Rioja, a native of Cañas, near Nájera. He first became a hermit, and then entered the Abbey of San Millan de la Cogulla, of which he ultimately became the superior. More than once he resisted the encroachments of Garcia, King of Navarre, who sought to lay heavy impositions on the convent. On one occasion the church plate was demanded, which the Saint at last promised to have ready to deliver up to him on a certain day. When Garcia appeared, he found the Host manifested on the altar, upon which all the treasures of the church were displayed, and Santo Domingo informed him, he might take them if he chose; but his sacrilegious hands did not dare to touch the wealth thus guarded. Santo Domingo was, however, disgraced and removed from the priory, and subsequently he sought refuge at Burgos. The fame of his piety had preceded him, and Ferdinand I., Sovereign of Castile, received him with open arms, and shortly after made him Abbot of Silos, in the year 1046. He ruled the convent for two-and-thirty years, during which period, it is said, he worked innumerable miracles, and dying in 1073, was subsequently canonized by Urban II.

The line of abbots continued without intermission, until the final destruction of the religious orders in 1835, when Silos shared the fate of the remaining monastic establishments. At that period, our host, Don Rodrigo Echevarria, the last abbot, was made curate of the parish; and he still resides in his old convent, amid the solitude of its lonely and deserted halls.

The exterior does not present any architectural beauty; it is a heavy pile of buildings, with an enormous church erected towards the close of the last century. The walls





CLOISTER, CONVENT, ST DOMINGO DE SILOS.

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are bare and whitewashed, and in the centre a slab marks the burial-place of the patron saint; he was removed here from the cloister, where he had been originally interred. An iron gate leads into the sacristy, and beyond is a small private chapel; the walls are hung round with massive chains, the offerings of Christian captives, who had been released from prison by the miracles or the prayers of the saint. The rejas and other iron-work of the building were made out of chains thus procured; many have disappeared, but the number sent as votive offerings was so great that it became a proverb in Spain, when a person required an inordinate quantity of anything, "No te bastaran los hierros de Santo Domingo," (the chains of Saint Dominick could not suffice you). Some pictures representing his miracles still remain upon the walls, but there is not anything remarkable in an artistic point of view.

From this chapel, a richly ornamented Gothic portal leads into the cloisters, the great object of interest which this edifice still retains. They must be of considerable antiquity, and are generally supposed to be of the tenth or eleventh century, although there is not any authentic record of the date of their erection. They form a large quadrangle, ninety-two feet by one hundred and seven. The round-headed arches are supported by double columns, not more than six feet high. Their elaborately sculptured Byzantine capitals are exquisite, and display an endless variety of design, scarcely any two resembling each other. Seventeen double columns adorn two of the sides, and fifteen on the others; the centre group of columns on each side, differing from the remainder, and consisting of four and even five, most singularly twisted. The spaces between the arches are walled up to more than half the height, which gives the cloisters a very heavy appearance. The upper gallery is evidently of

much more modern date than the lower ; the capitals are imitations, and executed in a very inferior style ; it is likewise walled up in the same manner. There is a singular statue of the Virgin, of great antiquity and of colossal dimensions, and some curious ancient bas-reliefs representing the Crucifixion, the twelve Apostles, and scenes from Scripture, specimens of the infancy of art.

There is a something very melancholy about these cloisters. The hand of time has stamped them with characters peculiarly its own ; and the dampness of the climate has added not a little to the look of antiquity which they wear. The fine rich-coloured stone is tinged with a yellow and a reddish hue, and the gloomy aspect of the place suits well with the decay of all around. The court is filled with weeds, green moss is creeping over the walls, and the cloisters of Silos are silently hastening to destruction.

The bad weather forced us to remain here longer than we had intended. The old Abbot was a well-informed man, and we spent our time very agreeably, listening to his tales about the convent, the long lapse of years during which it had enjoyed so much splendour, and its present ruin. It was sad to hear him moan over its fall, and point to the fruitful orchards around, which once belonged to his order. He gave us some of the most delicious pears I ever tasted, grown in the convent garden ; but, "I have to buy them now," he added. He drew us a melancholy picture of the fall of the regular clergy ; but, of course, as an interested party, his statement could not be considered wholly unprejudiced ; and bitterly he complained of the manner in which the poor were neglected, and the insufficiency of the salary of the clergy, which prevented their doing so much good as they might in the way of charity. His pay as curate of the parish, was eight reals a-day (about eighteen pence) ; he told

us of all the dependents of the convent, who were formerly supported by the brotherhood, and who had now lost their means of subsistence. He was very anxious to hear all the news of the outer world, whose din and bustle but faintly reached his secluded dwelling, and talked with great delight about that "prenda nuestra," as he called Cardinal Wiseman; he seemed likewise much interested in a body of Spanish missionaries, who had lately gone to Australia, among them several of his old companions at Silos.

The poor Abbot was in a state of great distress about the village barber, who had died a few days before. There had been a grand "junta" of the village worthies, and on the following morning, to his great delight, one was to appear; for he had not been able to get shaved during this long interregnum. All these simple details amused us not a little. We walked through Silos; it did not look to advantage in the dense mist which shrouded the mountains, but the situation is very pretty. In these secluded valleys, removed from the high road, there are many convents scattered about. At the distance of a league and a half from Silos, in a wild glen, stand the ruins of San Pedro de Arlanza, likewise belonging to the Benedictines. It was the burial-place of the great Count Fernan Gonzalez, the founder of Castilian independence. Several ballads give the story of its origin; it was erected in fulfilment of a vow made by Gonzalez in one of his expeditions against the Moors. The building is fast falling to ruin, and we much regretted not being able to visit his sepulchre.

This great hero of early times seems to have been a very troublesome personage to the Kings of Leon and Navarre, who reigned at that time, and his numerous imprisonments and romantic escapes form the subject of many an old ballad. The Counts of Castile held their court

in Burgos; they were tributaries to the Kings of Leon, to whom they seem to have proved very turbulent vassals. Gonzalez having been taken prisoner by Ramiro, peace was made between them by the marriage of the Count's daughter, Urraca, to the heir of the throne. Civil wars ensued; and when Sancho succeeded, by the aid of the Moslem, in recovering Leon, in return for the support he had received, and to revenge himself on Fernan Gonzalez, he gave them full permission to ravage the Count's territories. The latter defeated them in many engagements, always, of course, opposing them with a very inferior force; but the disparity of numbers, which the Christian historians were wont to record in order to enhance their own victories, led them to the conclusion at which one of the chroniclers of Gonzalez arrives, when he says :

"La Rota de Cascajares  
Es argumento evidente,  
Que vale mas poca gente  
Con Dios, que sin Dios millares."

After the Count's victories, Sancho sought to disguise his enmity, and sent to congratulate him, summoning him at the same time to attend the Cortes at Leon. Here, in order to get him once more imprisoned, he proposed his marrying Sancha of Navarre, whereupon the Count proceeded to Pampluna to claim his bride at the hand of her brother Garcia, little dreaming of treachery. On his arrival, he was thrown into prison, by order of the King, according to the arrangement that had been previously made with Sancho; he was, however, released by his intended bride, and they fled together to Burgos. Garcia, enraged at this, declared war against Fernan Gonzalez, but was defeated and taken prisoner, and was afterwards liberated at the intercession of his sister. The Count was once more entrapped by the King of Leon, and again



taken prisoner, when his wife flew to his rescue. Pretending to be on a pilgrimage to Santiago, she passed through Leon, and on her way asked to see her husband, which permission was granted. She then exchanged clothes with him, and remained captive while he escaped; but the King of Leon, on discovering the deception, sent her back, with all honour, to Burgos.

The remainder of his life was employed in wars against the Moors, who were gaining ground considerably in Castile; but at length worn out by age and infirmities, he died in 970, leaving Castile to his son Garcia Fernandez, and his country quite independent of the King of Leon. The romantic adventures in the life of this Castilian hero have been recorded in several ballads, and also in a rhymed chronicle. From being regarded as the real founder of the Castilian monarchy, his name is always recurring in this part of Spain, and his good sword is still preserved at Seville, as I have before mentioned.

The old priest said mass every morning at six o'clock in the little chapel leading out of the cloister, when in these short winter days it was barely light. Desolate were those cloisters in passing along them in the cold and wet, all in keeping with their ruined state. I have attended many grand ceremonials where pomp and grandeur displayed all that could captivate the imagination, but I never was present at so impressive a scene as that quiet early mass, offered up by this the last representative of a line of abbots who had governed Silos uninterruptedly for a thousand years. There was something so solemn, so calm, it inspired such true religious feeling; and around were numbers of country people, who came to worship before they commenced their labours for the day. The rain still continued, but we were obliged to leave; and it was with a feeling of regret that I left the convent of Silos, and



its secluded valley, so far from all the hum of the restless, busy world.

We rode along a pretty glen, passing one or two villages, but the weather was so bad, and the mist so thick, that we could not see any of the country round. It rained in fact as it only can rain in the South; where, when it does come down, it seems quite determined to make up for its rarity. The paths became regular mountain torrents, through which our horses waded up to the girths; and to make our ride still more pleasant, we lost our way. The man belonging to the horses had never been the road before, and we met no one to ask, while the various paths crossing each other made it very perplexing. After riding for some hours, we came to a village called Castrillo, which they informed us was considerably out of our way. However, they showed us the right road, and we were truly glad when we saw the town of Lerma in the distance. We arrived drenched, and not at all in a frame of mind, even had the weather permitted it, to do any sight-seeing in this ancient town. We preferred getting round the large and cheerful fire, which proved far more attractive than the deserted mansion of the great minister of Philip III.

For once all curiosity had vanished, and we were only anxious to get on to Burgos as quickly as we could. Riding is charming enough under a sunny sky, but in bad weather it is quite another thing, more particularly in a country where generally you have not any opportunity of drying your clothes, if you should be wet through. At Lerma, however, we were fortunate, and we found the advantage of those great bee-hive roofs which had attracted our attention so much in the Castilian villages. The room at the little posada in Lerma presented quite a joyous scene: on a raised platform, occupying a large space in the centre, was an enormous wood fire

crackling and blazing most cheerfully, the smoke escaping by the huge bell-shaped roof; several large saucepans, with the olla stewing, were ranged amid the ashes, and a large caldron full of water was suspended by a chain from the ceiling. We took our seats on the substantial wooden benches, arranged round the attractive centre, and joined the circle already assembled. We had a very tolerable dinner, and were glad enough to lie down upon the beds until the diligence passed. It passed through in the middle of the night; we lost no time in taking possession of the vacant seats, and were soon on our way to Burgos, where we arrived early in the morning.

Small and wretched as it is now, Burgos bears the impress of antiquity, and the grand gateway by which it is entered from the bridge, forms a fitting approach to so ancient a city. This is, nevertheless, a comparatively modern erection, of the time of Charles V., whose statue figures in the centre, supported on either side by Fernan Gonzalez and the Cid, while below are three other heroes of even earlier date in Castilian history. Its fine massive turrets give it an imposing appearance, and behind it rise the aerial pinnacles of the cathedral, with their exquisitely perforated stone-work. The exterior of this edifice is beautiful; a rich mass of florid Gothic, elaborately worked and overlaid with ornament, its lofty spires, and the dark-coloured stone of which it is built, make it very much resemble one of our own cathedrals. It is difficult to obtain any general view, from its being so crowded with old buildings. It was commenced in the reign of St. Ferdinand in 1221 on the site of the King's palace. The interior, as a whole, is very disappointing; it is narrow, and so choked up by the coro, and an unusual quantity of massive rejas, that it is quite impossible to embrace the whole. The church is in the form of a cross; it presents a strange mixture of plateresque