



part of Toledo. The rage for founding religious houses in olden times reached a dangerous extent ; Mendoza would not allow of any being erected during his pre-lacy, considering that the practice had attained a height which was injurious alike to the welfare of the town and the true interests of religion ; but after his death they greatly increased in number, and half the area of Toledo was soon covered with monastic buildings, a circumstance which has very materially contributed to accelerate its fall. The nuns in this convent wear the cross of Calatrava embroidered on their black robes ; there are but six remaining, and they have the privilege of returning to their houses in case of illness.

The Plaza of the Zocodover is charmingly picturesque ; its houses are ornamented with wooden balconies, which seem in a very dilapidated condition ; but a desire to improve has even reached Toledo. One side has been recently modernised, and painted, and arranged in the most approved modern taste. Just outside the town is the noble hospital commenced by Archbishop Tavera, one of the great primates who shed lustre on the reign of Charles V. He died, however, before this building was far advanced, and it was completed by his heirs. Tavera's sepulchre of white marble reposes in front of the high altar of the church, a chef-d'œuvre of Berruguete, and a monument worthy of the founder of the hospital. The patio is magnificent, crossed by a covered colonnade from the great portal to the entrance of the church. Such institutions as these will long preserve the memory of the prelates, whose enormous treasures were always lavished on some object which might embellish the seat of their diocese, or benefit its inhabitants.

Many Moorish remains may still be seen here ; the two most important, perhaps from their size, are the

ancient synagogues, now called the Santa Maria la Blanca and the Transito : the former bears more the form of a basilica than of a synagogue, but the horse-shoe arches, and the strange capitals of the columns are evidently Moorish. It is now in a deplorable state of dilapidation. An inscription over the doorway details all the various changes it has suffered, and the different purposes to which it has been destined.

It would take pages to describe all the different objects of interest in this town ; every street presents something to arrest the eye, and those who have time to wander about, and penetrate into out-of-the-way corners, may find much to reward their curiosity. In the church of Santo Tome hangs the master-piece of El Greco ; and the old Arabic tower, with its horse-shoe arches, is extremely picturesque. Here and there some ruined archway or richly-decorated ceiling, some noble saloon with its arabesque patterns, or graceful window with its marble column, reminds one of the Arab rule.

Our tour in Castile was at an end : we had visited most of the principal cities of this portion of the Peninsula, and were going to retrace our steps to Andalusia.

The plains of Castile present little to interest the traveller. Wide and solitary steppes, as lonely almost as the Desert—affording indeed signs of cultivation, but scarcely a trace of the hand which tills them—meet the eye in every direction, and render a journey through them one of dull and unvarying monotony ; but though the rural districts of Castile offer little to call forth one's admiration, her cities are replete with interest.

Burgos, with her royal sepulchres ; Leon, with her elegant cathedral ; Valladolid, with her mediæval edifices ; Segovia, with her Roman aqueduct and Moorish Alcazar ; Salamanca, with her noble colleges ; Toledo, with her palaces, her convents, and her hospitals, all in turn arrest

attention: the Escorial on the terraced slopes of its granite mountains, the proudest religious monument in the world; and in the plains below, Madrid, the modern capital, which has usurped the place of all those venerable towns. But with all these charms, although we could linger long in Castile to study her noble edifices, and admire and appreciate the more quiet and sterling character of her inhabitants, still for a residence, Andalusia is far preferable, where the towns do not wear the air of loneliness and ruin that stamps the cities of Castile, and where all is still clothed with a certain character of nationality.

And thither our steps were now turned, and gladly we found ourselves again at the rocky defiles of the Sierra Morena. The prospect is enchanting, as one leaves dull La Mancha behind, and the fertile valleys and olive-crowned hills of Andalusia appear in the distance. All looks bright and sunny, and the distant ranges of the Sierras, covered with their snowy mantle, bound the blue horizon. Winter has been exchanged for spring; for even in December, nature has assumed a verdant garb, young corn is sprouting up, and small irises cover the sides of the road with their deep-blue flowers. Bailen, Andujar, are passed, and at length after a journey of eight-and-forty hours, the towers of Cordoba break upon the view, backed by the villa-covered heights of the Sierra Morena, and washed by the waters of the Guadalquivir. All breathes an air of oriental luxury and enjoyment, after the stern capital of the Goths; the granite rocks are exchanged for feathery palms, the stony gorge of the Tagus for plains where the orange and the lemon perfume the air, and the aloe and cactus border the wayside, while the bright green of the pine clothes the neighbouring hills.

Cordoba retains but small traces of her former grandeur.

The traveller laments to find that the far-famed city of the Caliphs has degenerated into a third-rate provincial town; its population rapidly decreasing, and nothing within its walls to attract even a passing notice, save the half-Moorish, half-Christian pile, which once was classed as second only in sanctity to the great mosque of Mecca itself.

The accounts handed down to posterity by the Arab historians of the splendour of Cordoba in the reign of the Abdurrahmans seem to border on the fabulous; but making due allowance for eastern exaggeration, we may believe that the Moslem court in those days, both in costly magnificence and in the learning of those who flocked to it, must have been far beyond those of cotemporary European nations. In the universities of Cordoba and of Fez, the sciences were sedulously cultivated, and the monarchs themselves encouraged the pursuit of knowledge, both by precept and example.

Cordoba lies on the north bank of the Guadalquivir, in the midst of a wide and fertile plain, covered with olive-trees, backed by the undulating range of the Sierra Morena, whose dusky hue is produced by the profuse quantity of underwood with which it is covered. Within it is lonely and deserted; and although the circuit of the walls is larger than that of Seville, Cordoba can only count about one-third of the population of the latter—not more than thirty or forty thousand inhabitants, where once dwelt above a million. The houses are low, carefully whitewashed, the streets wretchedly paved, and but few windows looking into them; in fact dead walls in many places face the street, in this respect offering even a more oriental appearance than Seville. Many of the old grandees still reside here: proud and uneducated, they pass their lives in ignorance of the world around them. This town had formerly a convent in nearly every street, buildings which are now mouldering into decay, or

converted into barracks and other government offices. There is an enormous plaza, which might be handsome from the size and regularity of its houses, were it kept in anything approaching to order, but it is a dirty, untidy place; its very uniformity preventing its even laying claim to being picturesque.

Everything in this ancient city sinks into utter insignificance when compared with the one centre of attraction, the Mosque. A lofty Moorish arch leads into a court, planted with orange-trees and adorned with fountains. Beautiful as this orange court still is, how much more beautiful must it have been before the large doors which led into the building were blocked up, when through them could be seen the opening vista of the temple, supported by its thousand columns. Then, myriads of lamps, scented with the perfumes of aloes and precious woods, shed light through the edifice, foreshadowing in their brilliancy the paradise in store for the followers of the Prophet. Within stood the Mihrab, the chapel in which the copy of the Koran was guarded, where lay the sacred volume written by the Caliph Othman, enshrined in its golden case, studded with emeralds and rubies; the ceiling formed of one solid piece of marble, sculptured in the form of a shell; and around, columns and interlacing arches and walls resplendent with gold and rich mosaics.

Where now are the followers of the Prophet? Another race and another faith have appropriated the structure to their service; but the sacred mosque of the children of Ishmael and the effeminate luxury which became their sensual creed do not harmonize with the severity of a Christian temple. It has lost the beauty and splendour with which it was clothed, and the worship to which it is now dedicated seems out of place within its walls.

There is not anything to which the Mosque of Cordoba can be compared. As you enter, the multitude of columns have an almost bewildering effect; there is no one particular object on which to dwell, aisle after aisle appears, long vistas of columns intersect each other, and the double horse-shoe arches, on which the roof is supported, increase the seeming confusion. The building is low—a defect rendered still more striking by the vast area of the edifice; and the artesonado ceiling, which once glittered like those of the Alhambra, has given place to a vaulted whitewashed roof. The columns, although composed of costly marbles, and brought with vast expense and trouble from different lands, yet from having been originally taken from still more ancient temples, they present a want of uniformity, which considerably detracts from the harmony of the entire building. They have no pedestals or bases, but spring straight out of the pavement, which is composed of coarse common flags. The eye is intercepted, as it tries in vain to sweep through the centre aisles; and when you advance to discover the cause of the obstruction, you suddenly find yourself in a lofty Gothic church, its upward lines soaring high above the low domes which encircle it.

It is much to be regretted that any part of the ancient mosque should have been removed, and that rather a new and suitable cathedral had not been erected on some other site. Yet we may console ourselves with the reflection, that if it had not been converted to its present purpose, it would probably have been lost to posterity.

The Mihrab is now carefully surrounded by iron railings, and although they mar the effect, they preserve it from destruction. It has not been converted into a chapel, and may still be contemplated as a mere object of art. The adjacent archway has been sadly interfered with, and a large painting by Cespedes covers



CATHEDRAL, CORDOBA.

Dickinson, Bro. & Hill.





the elegant arabesques. The ceiling over the entrance to the Mihrab is beautiful, and the mosaics within give it a very Byzantine appearance; and were it not for the presence of the horse-shoe arch, one would be reminded of the ancient Greek churches, which are so richly adorned with this style of ornament.

The Christian addition taken by itself is rather fine, and the carved seats of the choir are exquisite. There is a small sacristy behind the high altar, and the old man who conducted us through the mosque seemed to treat the things contained in it with very little respect. He was a strange character, and said he had belonged to the cathedral for the last thirty years. He told us that he had been a prisoner in France, and gave us a long account of all that the French troops had stolen from the cathedral, and told us how Murat had entertained serious thoughts of making the custodia a centre-piece for his dining-table. I never was in a church which seemed to have so little religious reverence attached to it, either in the conduct of the people, who made it a mere thoroughfare, or in that of the sacristans and those connected with the building.

In the sacristy is a heavy-looking monument of one of the prelates, displaying a greater expenditure of money than good taste; and in the room where the church plate is preserved is an exquisite custodia, another masterpiece of the Arfes, who, fortunately for Spain, flourished just at the right period to fashion into forms of elegance and beauty the wealth which the discovery of a new world was bringing to her shores. Covered with silver-gilt statues, it is very similar in design to the one at Toledo. There are some very beautiful crosses likewise preserved here. On the staircase, descending to a subterranean chapel, is the white banner borne by St. Ferdinand at the conquest of the city.

Day after day we returned to this cathedral to contemplate its wilderness of arches and columns. It was erected on the site of an ancient Christian church. When the Arabs conquered Cordoba, they pursued their usual custom of dividing with the inhabitants their principal place of worship, and dedicating one half of it to their own faith. But the Moslem population increased so rapidly, that their portion of the building became too small, and the additions constantly made to it rendered it so inconvenient, that when Abdurrahman ascended the throne, he expressed a wish to raze it to the ground and build a new one in its place. To this, the Christians demurred as being a violation of the treaty agreed to on the capitulation of the city; but at length the caliph succeeded in gaining what he required, by giving them money to erect another church wholly for themselves.

This mosque, commenced in the eighth century, was embellished by each succeeding monarch, and received its largest addition in the days of Almansur. It remained in all its splendour until the conquest of Saint Ferdinand, and was then converted into a cathedral; but it was reserved for the days of Charles V. to see the vandalism committed, which destroyed the centre of the Moorish portion in order to adapt it better to Christian worship.

The orange court is now filled with loiterers who sit basking in the sunshine, or stand grouped around the fountains, filling their jars with water. It is a pity that the tower should be of such modern date, and not more in keeping with the scene than the present erection. The eye would willingly rest on a tower, such as the Giralda of Seville, or one of those exquisite minarets, which contribute so much to adorn the city of Cairo.

The mosque stands not far from the bridge, which is likewise Moorish, and which is guarded at one end