

CHAPTER VIII.

A PEEP INTO THE "ORIENTAL SALOONS"—EXTRAORDINARY FEMALE VISITATION—OUR PRESENTATION AT COURT—DINNER WITH THE PRIME MINISTER, AND BALL AT THE PALACE OF QUEEN CHRISTINA.

DAYS and weeks passed by, and I still lingered in the Spanish metropolis, reluctant to tear myself away from its numerous enchantments and pleasures. One day, while taking my regular dancing lesson with my companions, a most unexpected visit was paid me. An old school-fellow had recently arrived in Madrid, and having ascertained from a member of our club the place of our rendezvous, had thus suddenly presented himself before me. He was certainly one of the drollest and best-hearted of mortals. I was delighted to

meet him, and the more so as he was almost the only one of my own countrymen whom I had encountered in Spain. Returning immediately with him to my rooms, he entered into an elaborate detail of his travels, winding up by telling me that he was on his way to Egypt and Jerusalem, and conjuring me by all the memories of former times to accompany him. I assured him that this would be impossible, though nothing could give me more delight than his agreeable society. I told him that I had resolved to see as much of Spain as possible, now that the opportunity was offered me, and could not give up my prospects of Spanish adventure for any considerations whatever. He then generously replied that, on condition I would leave Madrid in the course of a few weeks, he would abandon for the present all his plans of Eastern travel, and proceed with me leisurely through the southern provinces of Spain. To this proposition I gave a joyful assent, and was highly pleased with the prospect of having so lively and vivacious a companion.

I moreover made him a member of our dancing club, and persuaded him to enlist himself without delay among the favoured pupils of Don

Philippe, our accomplished and jovial teacher of the Spanish language. My companion applied himself with such assiduity, that although by no means studiously inclined, he made such extraordinary progress in his new pursuit, that in about two weeks Don Philippe assured him he was amply qualified to commence a courtship, if not to carry one forward to a successful termination. However, as my friend was too inveterate in his bachelor principles to attempt or even to think of anything of the kind, he seemed in but little danger of being presented with a volume or even bundle of "Rejected Addresses!"

Being gregariously disposed, our friendly visitations were numerous. Every evening we had quite an extensive social gathering in our own apartments, which were in fact the headquarters of all the English and Americans in the city. Our nocturnal amusements consisted chiefly in singing, guitar-playing, dancing, smoking, and easy conversation. Those pleasant evenings, I venture to say, will never be erased from the memory of any one of us. How sweetly and quickly the hours slipped by, and how brightly glimmered the moments as the restless wheel of time rolled on! Among the

number of our guests was a Spaniard, who afforded us much entertainment by the prodigal display of his musical powers. He was a skilful master of the guitar, as well as a vocalist of remarkable merit. He and Don Philippe occasionally favoured us with a national duet, and such was the enthusiasm generally created, that most of us were accustomed to join uproariously in the different choruses.

A visit of so peculiar a character was made us one morning, that I cannot resist the temptation of recording it. Its only premonition was a gentle tapping at our chamber door. On investigating the cause of this slight disturbance, what was our surprise and consternation, on beholding two young ladies at the threshold of our apartment, who after saluting us in a respectful manner, requested of us the favour of a private interview. This we readily granted. Though nearly paralyzed with astonishment, we summoned sufficient resolution to invite the damsels into our room, where, having seated themselves at our request, we begged of them, without fear or reserve, to communicate in what manner we could be of service to them. They returned us a thousand

thanks, with that irresistible grace and eloquence of style for which the damsels of Spain are so remarkable, and then proceeded in a calm and methodical course of conversation, to unfold to us the secret cause which had prompted their present visit. The elder of them, who acted in the capacity of chief orator, stated that they had been particularly desirous, and had instituted manifold inquiries for some time past, in order to meet with some person who was acquainted with the Spanish and English languages, and that they had at last been directed to us. Fearing that we might disregard or misunderstand a written communication on the subject, they had resolved, upon mature deliberation, to call upon us personally. She then introduced herself as the wife of Col.—, and stated that the young lady who accompanied her, was her sister-in-law. Having advanced thus far, without losing her self-possession, she went on to say, that she had an English relative in London (a godfather I believe) to whom she wished to write an English letter, at the same time informing me that she had been taking lessons in the English language for several months, with the especial view of

inditing this projected epistle. However, having some doubts of her own ability to accomplish this in a manner satisfactory to herself, and not wishing to let her teacher into the secret, she had decided to write the letter in Spanish, and then get some kind and accommodating gentleman to translate it for her into good Anglo-Saxon. In this way she thought to produce such a profound impression upon the tender heart of her old godfather, as to induce him, in a paroxysm of generosity, to make her some substantial acknowledgment immediately, and perhaps afterwards tenderly to remember her in his last will and testament. Of course her modesty did not allow her actually to say as much as this to a perfect stranger, yet the tenor of her note and the explanatory commentaries she made upon it, were sufficient to convince any one of the slightest penetration, that the real object for which it was written, was—money. I took her neatly folded epistle, and having conned it, told her that if she would wait, I would translate it for her at once, or send it to her on the following day. She said that she would remain if it was convenient for me to attend to the matter at that time. I replied that it would

afford me a sincere gratification to fulfil her wishes, without a moment's delay. I then proceeded to make a free translation of the touching document, which doubtless must have amused the old fellow exceedingly, in case he ever received it. It was a chain of bombastic eulogies and enthusiastic compliments, from beginning to end. As soon as I had completed the epistle, I presented it to the lady, who was so overwhelmed with gratitude, that she gave us her address, and invited us most cordially to visit her whenever we felt inclined, assuring us of as hospitable a reception as it would be in her power to give. They then took leave of us, evidently well pleased with the result of their visit. When our club assembled in the evening, this incident and many sage speculations were brought forward, which however were not confined to this particular matter, but were extended to the general state of society in the metropolis.

“Come,” said Don Philippe to us one evening, “come with me to a ball at the Salon de Oriente, where you will see a picture of Madrilenian life, too characteristic to be overlooked—a miniature of its beauty, its taste, and its profligacy

combined, which no stranger who visits the metropolis should fail to note, and studiously observe." Having nothing of greater importance before us, we assented forthwith to the proposal of our entertaining teacher, who escorted us thither, as soon as we had put ourselves in proper trim for the occasion. The first glimpse of the ball-room was like a fairy scene. It was built in imitation of an Oriental palace, tastefully painted and illuminated with glittering chandeliers, in the most brilliant manner. The hall was quite thronged with persons of both sexes, a large proportion of whom were engaged in dancing the "Polka Mazurka," to the inspiring music of a full and splendid band. So exciting was the spectacle, that it was with the greatest difficulty we restrained ourselves for a few moments from rushing into the midst of the throng, and finally we broke from all restraint, and bade defiance to the counsels of Don Philippe, who evidently regarded us in the light of a couple of hot-headed youths, whose harvest of wild oats had not yet been fully gathered. Away we dashed into the very midst of the merry sport, as if with military ardour, we intended to carry the place by storm; having secured a pair of female prizes, whose

brilliant eyes, like loadstones, had drawn us towards them, while under our sudden spell of excitement we mingled with the concourse of laughing dancers and became ourselves the gayest of the gay. The bright glances which gleamed around us, from every female eye, were softer than the blushes of the moonbeams! Every cheek was flushed with pleasure; every lip was red with joy! The men were wild with frolic, and the youthful damsels intoxicated with delight. Among the former, whom should I recognise, to my infinite surprise and astonishment, but my faithful guide to Segovia and the Escorial. In his dress he was completely metamorphosed into a fashionable gentleman, with white waistcoat and gloves, and the remainder of his suit of fine black broad-cloth. In manners, he had not a superior in the room. Approaching me with respect, but with the polished ease of a man well acquainted with the world, he saluted us with unaffected cordiality, and then invited us to partake of some refreshments with him in an adjoining apartment, expressly intended and adapted for this purpose. We did not wish to offend him by a refusal, and therefore assented to his desire. Seating

ourselves at a table together, we called for a favourite beverage among the Spaniards, composed of small-beer and lemon, mixed in proportions to suit the taste of those desiring it. An immense bowl, supplied with a certain quantity of iced lemonade, was first brought and placed in the centre of the table before us. Two or three bottles of beer were then opened and poured into this general receptacle, the contents of which were stirred up briskly with a kind of ladle or large spoon. Each of us then helped himself to the frothy compound, which, at the same time that it is very agreeable to the palate, does not produce the slightest inebriating effect.

Turning to me, my quondam guide asked if I had passed a pleasant evening. I replied in the affirmative, and told him I had been much struck with his skilful performance upon "the light fantastic toe." He seemed delighted with the compliment, and praised us highly in return, for the manner in which we had conducted ourselves throughout the entertainment. "These saloons," said he, "are resorted to by all classes of gentlemen in the metropolis, without distinction of rank or station, though they do not sustain so high a public reputation now as they possessed

in former years. This is owing to the fact, that ladies of station no longer honour them with their presence, save during the period of the "masquerades," when it is said that even the Queen herself has mingled among the general throng, confident that her disguise would secure her from either scrutiny or recognition. The females whom you have seen here to night," continued my guide, "notwithstanding their modest appearance and genteel manners, are most of them either kept-mistresses or public courtezans, while the younger ones, apparently under the protection of their mothers and aunts, by whom they are accompanied, have been brought hither as to a market, in order to secure an "*amante*" or lover, and make the most profitable sale of their charms! This may sound very horrible to your ears, yet I assure you that it is truth. You can scarcely have any conception of the extent of vice which prevails in Madrid, nor of the lightness and indifference with which it is regarded by the community. She who would be called by an evil name in any other country, is only regarded as a gay and lively girl in Spain, so low is the general standard of women. Absolute pe-

nury, and the want of respectable employment, have tended to produce this deplorable result, which must necessarily ensue, wherever the poverty and mismanagement of a Government, and the consequent inactivity of industry and commerce, does not create sufficient occupation for the poorer classes, to keep them above starvation, without having recourse to vice. It really offends me," continued my guide, with considerable warmth, "to hear a noble people abused for the existence of faults which do not properly belong to them." "Bravo," cried Don Philippe, "good, good, good! Down with the government! Send the cursed ministers to the infernals, and we'll have a grand Spanish republic. Then you'll see if the Spaniards are not as industrious and brave, and the women as virtuous and chaste, as those of any other land under the sun. Give the people a fair chance, and they will rise, like the bird you call a phoenix, and become a great and powerful nation. Success, I say, to the glorious cause of liberty and republicanism in Spain!"

"What a couple of orators you have become!" burst out Ronalds. "Verily, a modern Demosthenes and a Cicero! Ay, methinks," said he,

“you imbibed too potently of that lemon beer ; and as for you, Don Philippe, if you don't join a temperance society, I'll not take another lesson of you, by Jove ! You are both of you addled ; I wouldn't give a fig for the republicanism or morality of either of you. You talk loudly, but your talk is nothing but gas ; or the effervescing of stomachs filled with acid, and craniums overflowing with the fumes of wine !”

My two companions burst into a hearty laugh at this speech, and told Ronalds he was rather hard upon them, for their ebullition of philanthropy and moral zeal.

We then left the hall. In our course to our lodgings, we crossed the large central square, which may be said to constitute the heart of the city, and is called the “Puerta del Sol.” The moon was full and shone brightly, and the scene was strikingly impressive ; a picture of quiet grandeur and repose. The strain of a solitary guitar alone fell upon our ears, while the only human objects we beheld were the muffled forms of the “Serenos,” or watchmen, standing with their spears and lanterns at the corner of every street. Nothing could be more picturesque or for-

midable than the appearance which they thus presented !

These Serenos, in spite of their terrible aspect, are exceedingly kind to strangers who have mistaken their way, and not unfrequently accompany them for some distance, to the street, and even the house, of which they are in search. On these occasions, they generally expect a trifling remuneration for their trouble ; and if it is convenient for you to present them with a choice cigar, do so, without fail, and you may depend upon it that they will always stand ready to manifest their gratitude for your kindness, should the circumstances of the uncertain future ever afford them an opportunity. It is not the value of a gift, but the manner in which it is given, that finds its way to the heart of a Spaniard. You may present him with a heavy purse of gold, or a casket of diamonds, but if it is done with the show of ostentation, or for the sinister purpose of requiring certain services from him in return, he will despise you with his whole soul ; and though stern necessity may prevent him from casting your treasure to the dogs, yet no grateful recollection will linger in his mind, but on

the contrary, he will never think of your base and selfish hypocrisy, without feelings of the utmost contempt. On the other hand, any trifling act of genuine kindness, however insignificant it may appear to you, will enshrine itself in his bosom for an everlasting remembrance. He looks not so much at the *gift* as the *motive*, and his judgment of the donor is formed accordingly. Character shows itself as decisively in small things as in great ones, and is far less liable to be misunderstood or confounded with the numerous imitations of it, so commonly circulated among mankind.

On the following week, Victor B— and myself were presented to the Queen. As the Court was in mourning, and her Majesty in a condition of *peculiar interest* to the Spanish nation, our presentation was in consequence rather a private affair. Her Majesty received us without any of her ministers or usual attendants on such an occasion, in a small drawing-room, where our interview was as brief as the polite formalities of bowing in and backing out would allow. Had one of us tripped on our swords, while making retrograde movements towards the door, I am inclined to imagine that the catastrophe

would somewhat have effected the solemnity of Her Majesty's countenance. As it was, she maintained the most stoical gravity of demeanour, and merely said a few words, expressive of the intense degree of honour and delight she experienced in welcoming such illustrious personages to her palace. We were glad enough to get back to our humble habitations, and disrobe ourselves of the official harness in which we had been fettered; and having gathered the members of the club together, we gave them an account of the ordeal through which we had recently passed. The Queen, her history, and intrigues, were of course the chief topics of conversation during the evening; and to my mind, these subjects were rather roughly and freely handled. If one-tenth of the stories circulated about her Majesty in Madrid be true, her personal character cannot, to say the least, be much above that of the generality of the young ladies who frequent the "Oriental Saloons." Change positions, and the difference could not easily be perceived; but upon this point we will not enlarge—our respect for the Queen far transcends our opinion of the *woman*. That she may live, however, to repent

of the follies and indiscretions of youth, and become a model and ornament to her sex, like the lovely monarch of Britain's realm, is our sincere and ardent prayer.

Soon after our presentation at Court, we were invited to dine with General Narvaez, the Prime Minister of the Queen. The entertainment was in every respect superb, and worthy of the distinguished personage by whom it was given. Every thing was in the French style, and of the most superior quality. Though I made an exceedingly moderate repast, scarcely touching an article that was placed before me, yet I venture to say that my plate was changed at least *thirty* times. The service was of the most beautiful china, while the knives, forks, and spoons of the dessert, were of solid gold. The general effect of the table was both that of taste and elegance. The banquetting-room was illuminated by an infinite number of candles, and, though unpretending in its decorations, was nevertheless very rich and appropriate. The conduct of our host was characterized by a remarkable degree of good breeding. Though no toasts were given or healths drunk, yet conviviality and lively conversation prevailed,

and the affair passed off to the entire satisfaction of every one present. The guests on this occasion, numbered about fifty, the greater part of whom were Spaniards and officers of the Government. General Narvaez played the agreeable in a gentlemanly manner, though he never for a moment departed from the high dignity due to his position, or the proud and lofty bearing so eminently characteristic of the man. In his personal appearance he is not above the middle height, rather inclined to stoutness, and possessing a stern and impressive countenance, set in a frame of raven whiskers, and lit up with a pair of keen and darkly-glittering eyes. He looks like a man of indomitable courage and changeless will; and seems admirably calculated to win the confidence and excite the admiration of a rude and resolute soldiery. Though not an orator, yet he has a deep and full-toned voice, which arrests the attention and falls upon the ear like the low booming of distant artillery. Since he has been in power, the condition of public affairs in Spain has been gradually improving; and a greater degree of security to life and property maintained. He is a strict

disciplinarian, a shrewd and accomplished statesman, a wily diplomatist, and a man of strong and well-balanced intellect. Of all the leading men in Spain, he appears the best adapted for the elevated post which he now occupies, and which I trust he will be enabled to hold for a long series of years.

A few days before my departure from Madrid, I attended a grand ball at the palace of Christina—the mother of the present Queen. The spectacle was the most splendid that it was ever my good fortune to behold. The number of gentlemen and ladies in attendance could not have been less than six hundred. The entrance hall was perfectly unique and beautiful. It was quadrangular, and surmounted in the middle with a small glass dome, from the centre of which was suspended an ornamental lamp. This cupola or dome was supported by marble columns, while, in the midst of the space thus enclosed, a miniature fountain was throwing into the air its playful waters, from amid the foliage of a little grove of orange and lemon trees tastefully arranged around it. The floor of the hall was composed of blocks of polished stone.

Passing the hall, we entered the first of a long suite of magnificently furnished apartments, where our names were announced to the officer at the door, and echoed from room to room, until we finally reached the grand chamber of reception, where we immediately paid our respects to the Queen Christina, who bowed gracefully in token of acknowledgment. Though a woman of large size, yet every motion she made was marked by a refined ease of manner and suavity of mien, which at once prepossessed us in her favour. She is a woman of powerful mind, and appears perfectly aware of the superior nature of her endowments. The Queen was likewise present, and, to my surprise, was decidedly the plainest dressed lady in the room: her dress was white, variegated with artificial leaves, while about her head was a chaplet of simple flowers. The only ornament she wore was a large diamond cross suspended from her neck. The entire simplicity of her appearance afforded a striking contrast to the gorgeous display of gauzes, and laces, and jewels, about her. Had I not known which of the ladies present was actually the Queen, I should have been at a great loss to

decide ; and the real Sovereign would probably have been the last one I should have selected. The entertainments of the evening were enlivened by the music of a fine band. Her Majesty, I observed, danced several times, with considerable skill and spirit, and opened the first quadrille of the evening, with Prince George of Prussia for her consort. The ladies generally exhibited an extraordinary degree of symmetry and beauty — they were exquisitely dressed, and their hair, in many instances, was most elaborately braided, and completely studded with diamonds and other precious stones. It was an hour or two beyond midnight before we retired ; we slept but little during the remainder of the night—our thoughts were too busily employed for slumber : the recent scene of voluptuous splendour which we had witnessed, and which constituted the last event of importance we experienced in Madrid, thronged our minds with images that murder sleep.

CHAPTER IX.

TRIP TO TOLEDO — THE “OLLA PODRIDA” — THE FAIR
TERESINA — THE CURIOSITIES AND WONDERS OF THE
CITY.

It was on a clear and transparent morning in the latter part of January, 1850, that we bade farewell to the enchantments of Madrid, and took our seats in the diligence for Toledo. This, the ancient and deeply interesting capital of the Goths, is distant about fifty miles from the Spanish metropolis, and is a place so peculiar in its present aspect, and characterized by such thrilling associations of the past, that no traveller should on any account neglect visiting it. As circumstances would only allow us to spend a day or two in that time-honoured city, we

engaged our places in the Seville diligence previous to leaving Madrid, intending to make our arrangements so as to join it at Aranjuez, and thus avoid the inconvenience of a return to the capital. Our journey was not marked with any incidents worthy of note; the country continued to wear an uninteresting and monotonous appearance, and scarcely an object did we encounter on the road in any degree calculated to impart a pleasing sense of variety to the scene. About midway on the route we passed through the royal town of Aranjuez, and were delighted with its beauty, even in the mournful desolation of winter. This spot, like La Granja, is a favourite resort of the Spanish court during the sultry months of summer, and is termed appropriately "the happy valley of Castile." We tarried only a few moments, merely to change our mules and refresh ourselves with a hasty repast. Proceeding on at a brisk pace for four or five hours, we at length beheld the famous city to which we were bound, standing in impressive majesty upon her seven hills of rock, and gilded around with the foaming waters of the Tagus, while from a deep gorge of the moun-

tains this angry river was dashing its raging torrent into the plain below with a loud gushing and murmuring sound.

Entering the city, we threaded our way slowly through the narrow streets, and finally stopped at an antiquated inn, where we succeeded in obtaining lodgings. Though as uncomfortable and gloomy in its internal arrangements, as establishments of this kind generally are in Spain, it was of enormous size and solid construction, and externally bore the impress of dilapidated grandeur and magnificence. Our landlady, who seemed a bustling, good-natured dame, desirous of gratifying her vanity by making a favourable impression upon her guests, escorted us triumphantly into a vast apartment, the only furniture of which appeared to consist of five or six worm-eaten chairs, a common brown table, and a couple of dirty-looking bedsteads. Being rather cool, we immediately ordered a *brasero*, which was brought to us after a short delay, by a young and laughing maid, who was evidently little afraid of foreigners, and moreover seemed not at all disinclined to enter into conversation with us. We gathered from her that she was only seventeen years of age, and that

she had spent her entire life thus far within the walls of Toledo, which in her estimation was the queen city of the world. She was quite contented with her humble lot, and nothing but the ungovernable power of *love* could have prevailed upon her to tear herself from the fond allurements of her native town and wander away into the cold solitude of unknown lands.

Lighting up our cigars, we sat near the brasero, and endeavoured to keep ourselves cheerful and warm, while the lovely damsel we have described was busily engaged in preparing an evening meal for us. These braseros emit much more heat than would be supposed, and in a small and close room are sufficient to maintain almost any degree of temperature, though in case the charcoal which is used is not previously burnt in the open air until its pernicious gases are entirely dissipated, the consequences must be certainly injurious, if not absolutely dangerous.

Instances of suffocation arising from an ignorant neglect of the proper precautions, or from too brief an exposure of the charcoal before bringing it into the house, are of occasional occurrence in the northern parts of Spain. The brasero usually consists of a heavy copper pan two feet in

diameter, with rings on two of its sides, and surrounded with a broad rim, by means of which it is sustained in a circular platform of wood, fitted for its reception, and sufficiently elevated upon wooden legs to prevent the metal pan from touching the floor. In the palaces of the nobility these vessels are made in an ornamental manner, and sometimes enclosed in an immense china vase, with numerous little holes at the top for the escape of the heated air. As for a stove, I never saw such an article in the country. At present it would be exceedingly difficult to transport them into the interior from abroad, but if a railroad be ever laid down from Cadiz to Madrid, a cargo of cooking stoves would prove a most profitable speculation.

The beautiful Teresina having announced to us that dinner was ready, we lost no time in seating ourselves at the table, for notwithstanding we were actually in a city so renowned in romance and poetry as Toledo, we were in spite of the association as rapacious as a couple of bears.

Spanish cookery is at best so abominable to the unaccustomed palate, that a keen appetite is indispensably necessary to the bare toleration