

which diminish the monotonous effect. On the right are seen at some distance the wooded hills of Xeres; but for scores of miles, on the opposite side, all is either marsh, or half-inundated pasture, with here and there some thinly-scattered olive trees, and herds of oxen for its sole living occupants. At a few leagues from Seville, the increased frequency of the olive grounds—a few villages and convents, and at length the darker green masses of the orange groves, give rapidly strengthening indications of approaching civilization; and you are landed a short distance below the town, to reach which, it is necessary to traverse the Christina Gardens. The cathedral occupies this southern extremity of the city; and on your way to the inn, you may make an estimate of the length of one side of its immense quadrangular enclosure. Immediately beyond this you are received into the inevitable labyrinth of crooked lanes, peculiar to an Arab town.

The steam trip from Cadiz is so easy a day's journey, that no necessity for repose or refitting interferes with the impatience of those who arrive to explore the external town. You speedily, therefore, sally forth, and thread a few of the mazy streets; but without venturing too far, on account of the evident risk of losing your way. Should

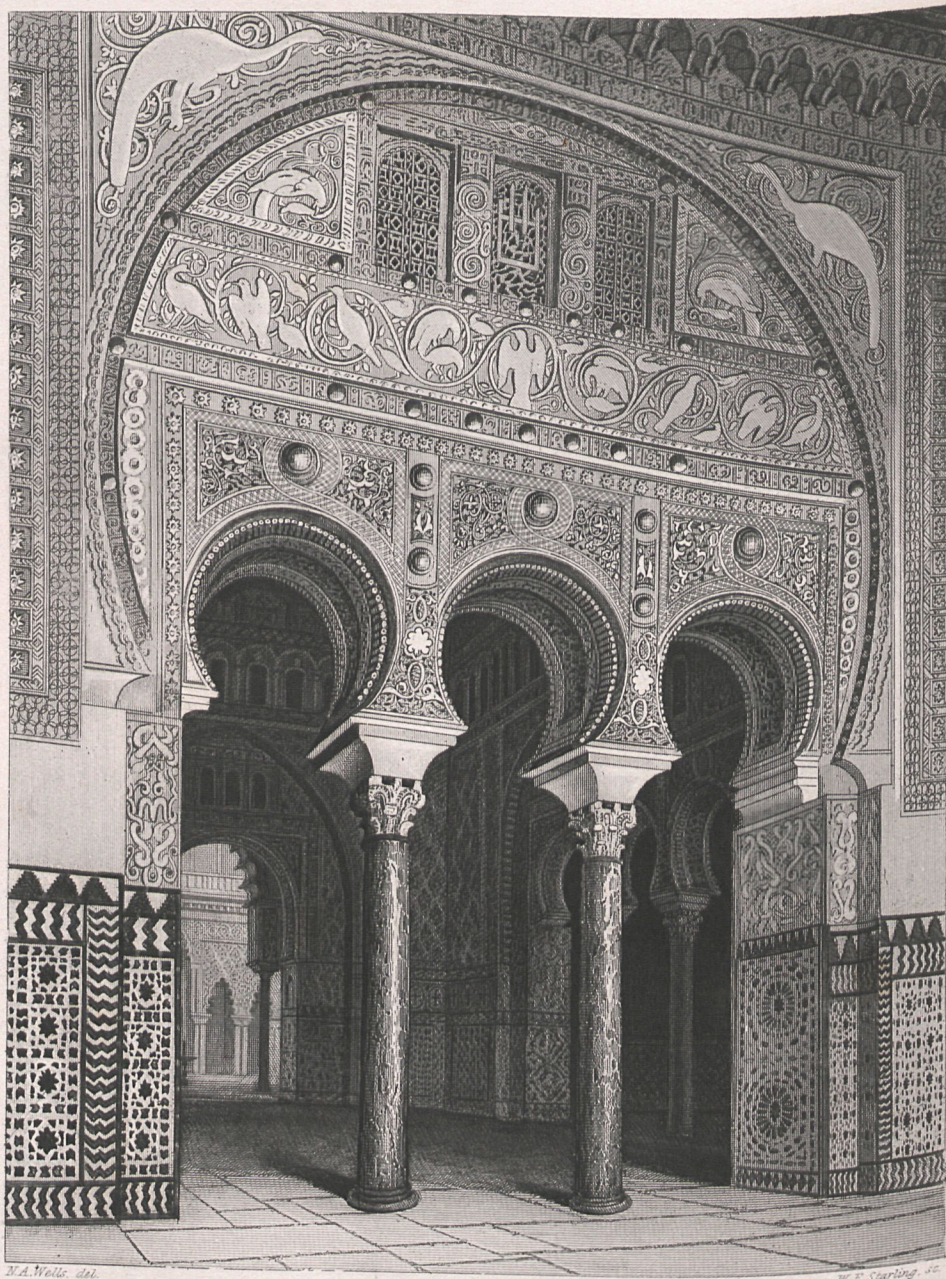
you chance to stumble on the Plaza Mayor,—called Plaza de San Francisco,—you are at once rewarded by the view of the *ayuntamiento*, one of the most elegant edifices in Spain: otherwise the extreme simplicity of the bare, irregular, but monotonous white houses, will create disappointment—you will stare about in the vain search of the magnificence, so much extolled, of this semi-Moorish capital, and discover, that nothing can be plainer, more simple, more ugly, than the exterior of the Seville habitations. At length, however, some open door, or iron grille, placed on a line with an inner court, will operate a sudden change in your ideas, and afford a clue to the mystery. Through this railing, generally of an elegant form, is discovered a delicious vista, in which are visible, fountains, white marble colonnades, pomegranate and sweet lemon-trees, sofas and chairs (if in summer), and two or three steps of a porcelain staircase.

You now first appreciate the utility of the more than plain exteriors of the houses of this town; and you admire an invention, which adds to the already charming objects, composing the interior of these miniature palaces, a beauty still greater than that which they actually possess, lent by the effect of contrast. It is calculated that there are more than eighty thousand white marble pillars in Seville. For this

luxury the inhabitants are indebted in a great measure to the Romans, whose town, Italica, seated, in ancient times, on the opposite bank of the river, four miles above Seville, and since entirely buried, furnished the Arab architects with a considerable portion of their decorating materials.

In a future letter I hope to introduce you to the interior of some of these abodes, where we shall discover that their inhabitants prove themselves not unworthy of them, by the perfect taste and conception of civilized life, with which their mode of existence is regulated.





HALL OF AMBASSADORS, ALCAZAR, SEVILLE.

LETTER XVIII.

THE ARABS IN SPAIN. ALCAZAR OF SEVILLE.

Seville.

THE chief attraction of this most interesting of the provinces of the Peninsula, consists in the numerous well preserved remains of Arab art. The most sumptuous of their palaces are, it is true, no longer in existence, nor the principal mosques, with the exception of the metropolitan temple of Cordova: but there remain sufficient specimens to shew, that their architecture had attained the highest excellence in two of the principal requisites for excellence in that science—solidity and beauty.

The superiority of the Arabs in this branch of science and taste is so striking, that all other departments of art, as well as the customs and peculiarities of that race, and the events of their dominion in this country, become at once the subjects of interest and inquiry. It is consequently very satisfactory to discover that one can examine almost

face to face that people,—probably the most advanced in science and civilization that ever set foot in Europe ; so little are the traces of their influence worn away, and so predominant is the portion of it still discernible in the customs, manners, and race of the population of this province, and even to a considerable extent in their language.

There is something so brilliant in the career of the Arab people, as to justify the interest excited by the romantic and picturesque (if the expression may be allowed), points of their character and customs. Their civilization appears to have advanced abreast with their conquests, and with the same prodigious rapidity ; supposing, that is, that previously to their issuing from their peninsula, they were as backward as historians state them to have been : a point not sufficiently established. Sallying forth, under the immediate successors of Mahomet, they commenced, in obedience to the injunction of their new faith, a course of conquest unrivalled in rapidity. Their happy physical and mental organization, enabled them to appropriate whatever was superior in the arts and customs of the conquered nations ; and whatever they imitated acquired during the process of adaptation, new and more graceful modifications. It has been asserted that they owed their civilization to the Greeks ; and, certainly, the

first subjected provinces being Greek, their customs could not but receive some impression from the contact: but it is not probable that the Greeks were altogether their instructors in civilization. Had such been the case their language would probably have undergone a change, instead of continuing totally independent of the Greek, and attaining to greater richness. They are known to have possessed poets of eminence before the appearance of Mahomet, consequently before they had any communication with the Greeks; shortly after the commencement of their intercourse with them, they shewed a marked superiority over them in geometry, in astronomy, architecture, and medicine, and it would probably be found, but for the destruction of so many Arab libraries, that they did not yield to them in eloquence and poetic genius.

Established in Spain, they carried the arts of civilization—the useful no less than the elegant, to the highest perfection. They introduced principles of agriculture adapted to the peculiarities of the country. The chief requisite for a country, parched by a cloudless sun, being water—they put in practice a complete system of irrigation, to which the Spaniards are still indebted for the extraordinary fertility of their soil. Many other arts that have since been permitted to dwindle into insignificance,

and some altogether to disappear, were bequeathed by them. The Morocco preparation of leather is an instance of these last.

Their high chivalry, added to their moderation after victory, would have divested even war of much of its barbarism, had they had to do with a race less impenetrable, and more susceptible of polish than were the iron legions of their Gothic antagonists. The persevering and repeated acts of treachery practised by these, at last drew their civilized adversaries, forcibly into the commission of acts of a similar nature—it being frequently necessary in self-defence to adopt the same weapons as one's enemy. When firmly settled in Spain, the Arabs no longer appear to have taken the field with a view to conquest. Abderahman the First, Almansor, and other conquerors, returned from their victories to repose in their capital; contenting themselves with founding schools and hospitals to commemorate their successes, without making them instrumental to the increase of their domination. After this time campaigns seem frequently to have been undertaken from motives of emulation, and for the purpose of affording them opportunities for a display of their prowess, and giving vent to their military ardour. They considered an irruption on the hostile territory, or an attack on a town, in the light of a tour-

nament. The Christians, on the contrary, fought with a view to exterminate, and without ever losing sight of their main object—the expulsion of the Arabs and Moors from the Peninsula. It was thus that they ultimately succeeded—a result they probably would not have attained, had the Moorish leaders been actuated by similar views, and displayed less forbearance.

Much of the misapprehension which exists in Europe respecting this race is attributable to the exaggerations of writers; much more to the absence of reflection in readers, and to the almost universal practice of bringing every act related of personages inhabiting remote and half-known climes, to the test of the only customs and manners with which we are familiar, and which we consider, for no other reason, superior to all others—making no allowance for difference of education, climate, tradition, race. An European, subjected to a similar process of criticism, on the part of an inhabitant of the East, would certainly not recognise his own portrait—a new disposition of light bearing upon peculiarities, the existence of which had hitherto been unsuspected by their owner; and he would manifest a surprise as unfeigned, as a Frenchman once expressed in my hearing, on finding himself in a situation almost parallel. Conversing on the subject

of a play, acted in Paris, in which an Englishman cut a ridiculous figure—a lady present remarked, that, no doubt, in the London theatres the French were not spared; upon which the Frenchman I allude to—a person possessed of superior intelligence—exclaimed: “How could that be, since there was nothing about a Frenchman that could be laughed at?”

On reading of a reprehensible act attributed to a Mahometan, some will brand Mahometanism in general, and of all times and places, with the commission of the like crimes, placing the event at a distance of a thousand leagues, or of a thousand years from its real place and date: forgetting that power has been abused under all religions; and that we only hear one side of the question with respect to all that relates to the Oriental races—our information only reaching us through the medium of writers of different and hostile faith. It is a singular fact that the popular terror, which so long attached itself to the idea of a Saracen, and which derived its origin from the conquests of the Mahometans, has its equivalent in certain Mahometan countries. In some parts of the empire of Morocco, the idea of a Christian is that of a ruffian of immense stature and terrific features; calculated to inspire the utmost fear in the breasts of all who approach him.

Such is their notion of his ferocity, that one of the emperors, Muley Ismael, in order to terrify his refractory subjects into obedience, was in the habit of threatening to have them eaten up by the Christians.

From the inferior value set on human life by the races of the East, we accuse them of barbarity: forgetting, that, owing to the absence of all analogy between our origin, races, and education, we are incompetent to appreciate their feelings, and the motives of their conduct, and have consequently no right to condemn them. If we abstain from taking our neighbour's life, we set also a proportionate value on our own: a native of the East displays, it is true, less veneration for his own species. Deeply impressed with the dogmas of his religion, which form the guide of his every day life, the habit of acting up to the doctrines which he has been taught to believe, diminishes his estimate of the value of temporal life, whether that of others, or his own, which he exposes on occasions on which we should not be inclined to do so. He does not take life for cruelty's sake, nor without provocation. Were he to be furnished with Arabian accounts of the treatment of a London or Paris hackney-coach horse, he would think of the noble and friendly animal which carries him to battle, and turn in disgust from such a page.

The system practised at Constantinople of nailing to his door-post the ear of the culprit detected in the employment of false weights, is, no doubt, very discordant with our customs; but this mode of punishment is said to be attended with such success, as to do away almost entirely with the occasion for it. Were it adopted in some other capitals, it would certainly at first disfigure many a neatly adorned entrance, and give additional occupation to painters; but the result might possibly be a more universal observance of the injunction contained in the eighth commandment. As far as regards the Arabs of Spain, it may be securely affirmed, that, during the course of their triumphs, and long before they had attained their highest civilization, no cruelties were exercised by them, which came near to the barbarity of those practised subsequently by their Christian adversaries on victims of a different creed, when in their power. We may instance the example set by St. Ferdinand, who, it is said, when burning some Moors, piously stirred up the fire himself in the public place of Palencia.

It cannot, however, be denied that cases of cruelty have occurred, and are related in history of the Arabs, although they are rare among those of Spain; but, if cruel, the Arab never added hypocrisy to his cruelty. After having ravaged all Andalucia with

fire and famine, St. Ferdinand formed the project of proceeding to Africa the following year, in order to attack the inhabitants of that country. His death interrupted the course of these humane projects. Being dropsical, and feeling his end approaching, he called for his son Alphonso, afterwards his successor, to whom this prince—cut off in the midst of his thirsty longings for blood and slaughter—is related to have given “the counsels, which the sentiments of piety, justice, and love for mankind, with which he was filled, inspired so great a monarch.”

As for the degenerate modern tribes, descendants of some of the most civilized of former days, we have witnessed their contest, *pro aris et focis*, during the last few years, against a sample of the Christians of to-day: the mode of making war is perfectly similar on both sides.

It is a no less curious *travers* of human nature, from its being an almost universal one—that of which the modern Spaniards afford an example. They apply the term “barbarians” to the descendants of their Moorish compatriots, although they themselves have scarcely advanced a step in civilization since the day that, in the public place of Granada, Ferdinand the Catholic burned one million five thousand Arab books, being all he could collect