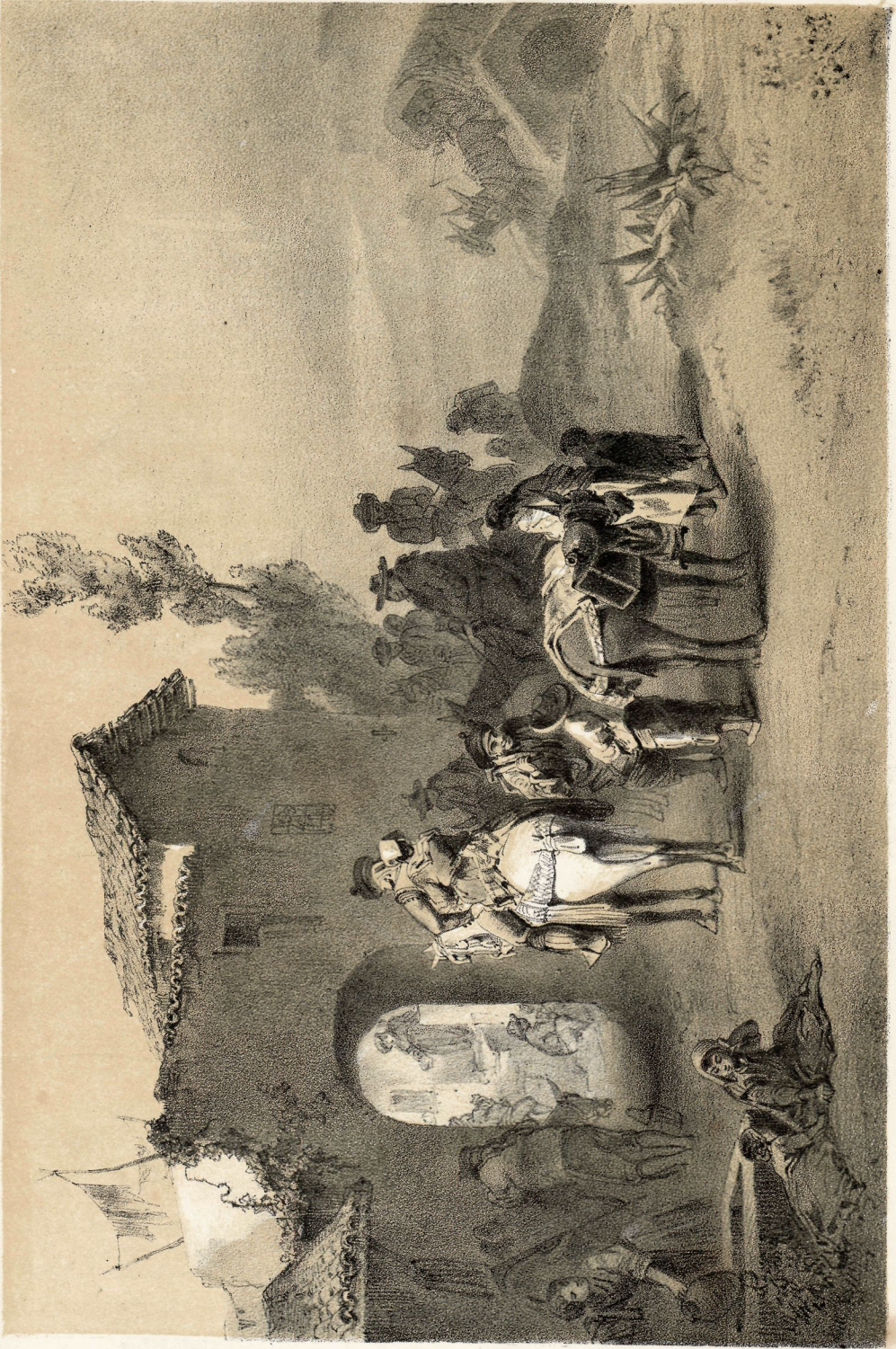


clean beds, although the cookery was, as usual, not much to be commended.

In the morning, we walked up to the old castle, of which only one small tower and some ruined walls remain. It commands a splendid view over the fertile Vega and the Mediterranean beyond.

A Moorish legend tells that the present is not the original site of the town of Velez. In the days of Almanzor, the town was governed by a Moorish prince, who had an only daughter, renowned for her beauty, and on whom he lavished all his treasures. He built for her, on the verdant slopes of the Sierra, a magnificent palace, where she resided. It happened, that the Alcalde of Velez, inflamed with the glowing descriptions he was continually hearing of her charms, determined to avail himself of her father's temporary absence, and carry her off. He succeeded in doing so ; but most fatal were the results which followed his treachery. Scarcely had intelligence of the outrage reached her father's ears, when marching to Velez at the head of such troops as he could hastily gather, he assaulted and carried the town. The Alcalde and all his family were massacred, and the castle and town razed to the ground. The wretched inhabitants soon began to rebuild ; but the calamitous spot was shunned, and the new foundations were laid on the site of the present town. Velez bears for arms the figure of a king on horseback slaying the Moors, with a groom lying dead at his feet. They were given in commemoration of Ferdinand having performed the feat of killing with his own hand a Moor in a skirmish during the siege. El Zagal having been defeated in a nocturnal attack he made upon the Christian army, the inhabitants resolved to surrender. They obtained, however, an honourable capitulation, and the city was taken possession of by Ferdinand, who





ARRIVING AT A POSADA.

Disignated by the Fifth.

advanced immediately after with his whole army to lay siege to Málaga.

From Velez the road winds up along the river, and enters the valleys and mountain passes. It skirts along by numerous orange groves, which at this season were just coming into flower, and diffusing around a delicious perfume. We passed several picturesque points of view before we came to a wretched village called Viñuelas, after which the aspect of the country gradually changed. The richly cultivated valleys gave place to more barren scenery; to the right rose the arid slopes of the Tejada, with several villages perched along the heights, and the sides furrowed with numerous ravines, channels worn, as it were, by devastating torrents in the sandy soil. Before us towered a vast wall of rock, through a wide fissure in which we had to pass to reach the high lands on the northern side of the mountain. This pass is called the Puerta de Zaffaraya, derived from an Arabic word, meaning, the field of the shepherds. There is here a Venta, or village inn, by the wayside, which presented, as we rode by, a gayer appearance than we could have looked for in so wild and desolate a situation. A number of peasants, and a family of gipsies, had just arrived down the mountain road, and as they grouped around the entrance of the old tumble-down house, their gay and varied costume, the trappings of the mules and horses, the gesticulations of the owners, all afforded us a scene exceedingly animated and picturesque.

The road now began gradually to ascend, but we had not proceeded far, when a thick mist came rolling down from the mountains and completely enveloped us. Night was likewise coming on, so we deemed it more prudent to return to Zaffaraya, and put up there for the night. When we again arrived, there was no

appearance of life or animation about the place ; the peasants had all departed, and everything around looked dark and lonely. The house itself consisted of one long room with its mud floor ; a partition separated us from the horses ; while our guides and ourselves shared the remainder with the owners of the house. Such were the accommodations we enjoyed in passing our first night in a regular *venta* ; and yet, as we gathered round the fire, and partook of the provisions which the guides had unpacked, and chatted with our companions, the novelty of the scene would have more than balanced its privations, were it not that a feeling of insecurity crept upon our minds. Nothing certainly could be more unpromising or more forbidding than the aspect of the place ; and the suspicion, that it was little better than a haunt of *contrabandistas* and robbers, was more than sanctioned by the old woman who kept it informing me she had two sons, who were both at Ceuta, the fortress to which many of the Spanish convicts of the worst grade were sent. Wrapped in our *mantas*, we slept through the night as best we could ; and none of us were sorry when the dawn of day gave us notice we might prepare for our departure. It was still drizzling rain, but the morning cleared up after we had been about an hour on the road. We crossed a flat high-land where corn was growing under the shade of evergreen oaks, which, scattered here and there, gave it quite a park-like appearance.

Passing over a mountain-path, the distant range of the Sierra Nevada soon burst upon our view, one wall of snow. The northern sides of the Tejada were still covered with their wintry mantle. Nothing could exceed the dreariness of the ride for the two hours which elapsed before reaching Alhama. There was

nought to relieve the monotony of the scene, save the agreeable reflections suggested by the sight of the small low crosses, with their heaps of stones beside them, telling of the lonely wayfarers who have fallen victims to robbers in these mountain fastnesses. "Aquí mataron"—here they slew so and so—is always the commencement of the inscription, the name and date following, with an adjuration to the passers-by to pray for his soul. Mournfully they strike upon the mind in these lonely and deserted paths, where, far from all human assistance, the unhappy victim fell beneath the knife of his murderer. But these sad mementos need not alarm the traveller much : in these days one must be peculiarly unfortunate to fall into the hands of banditti ; and even if such a fate should by ill-luck attend him, his captors would find it more profitable to carry him off to the mountains, until they obtained a heavy ransom, than put him out of the way and give his friends the trouble of erecting a cross over his remains.

I was much disappointed at the first view of Alhama. The houses appear the same colour as the soil on which they stand, and coming down upon it from the high grounds, it is impossible to form any idea of its singular situation. It stands on the edge of one of those rents in the mountains, which form a very striking feature in the scenery of Andalusia ; and it must have been in former days an almost impregnable fortress. From the valley beneath, it is seen to most advantage. The rocks, which form the sides of the gorge, rise almost perpendicularly from the bed of the river gliding at their feet ; while above their beetling crests, appears an uneven line of houses, built on the very verge of the precipice. On the mountain side, it was defended by a long line of walls and

towers. Its tortuous and narrow streets still retain a very Oriental appearance. Some distance up the river are the sulphureous warm baths, from which its Arabic name is derived.

Alhama is familiar to the English reader from the description of its famous surprise by the Christians, and Byron's translation of the well-known ballad, which speaks of the excitement caused in Granada when the news of this unlooked-for assault reached the Moslem capital. This event was the more remarkable, as the place was the first taken during the war which ended with the extermination of the Moors from the Peninsula. The Marquis of Cadiz, assembling some of his followers, attacked Alhama in the dead of night, and after a desperate resistance, succeeded in taking it. The loss of this important port, long considered one of the keys of the kingdom of Granada, spread consternation among the Moors. Muley Hacén, rousing himself, flew to wrest it from the conquerors. The few who were within the fortress were sorely pressed, and many a chivalrous deed was performed in attempting to relieve them. This was at length accomplished by the Duke of Medina Sidonia, who, forgetting the feuds which had long subsisted between his house and that of Ponce de Leon, went out at the head of the flower of the Andalusian chivalry, and throwing himself into Alhama, Muley Hacén was compelled to raise the siege. He returned, however, shortly afterwards; but losing some of his bravest warriors in a midnight assault, was again compelled to retreat. Still, from its being situated in the heart of the enemy's country, Alhama was considered dangerous and difficult to retain, and discussions were raised as to the propriety of dismantling its fortifications and evacuating it. But when the idea was suggested to Isabella, she indig-

nantly rejected it, and resolved on keeping a fortress the acquisition of which had cost so much blood. This resolution led to the appearance of a new hero on the stage. Alhama, as had been anticipated, was not allowed to enjoy repose, and a third time the Moorish troops lay encamped before it. On this occasion, however, it owed its safety, not to the great houses of Medina Sidonia or Ponce de Leon, but to the courageous efforts of a humble squire, Fernando del Pulgar, the Bayard of Spanish chivalry, who here commenced that daring and romantic career which won him the designation of "El de las Hazanas"—He of the Exploits. The deeds related of this *preux chevalier* during the continuance of the war, from his relief of Alhama and taking of Salar, to his grand achievement of entering Granada while still in possession of the Moors, and planting with his dagger an inscription on the door of the Mosque, dedicating it thenceforth to the honour of the Virgin, exceed almost the bounds of credence, and have generally been ascribed to the exaggerations of the ballad poetry. But a very interesting little work—the "Life of Pulgar"—has recently been published by Martinez de la Rosa, in which that distinguished writer shows, from authentic sources, that they are no exaggerations, and that Pulgar was not only the hero of every hair-brained adventure during the war, but that he was also an accomplished scholar, as profound and sagacious in council as he was reckless in the field, and was frequently selected by the wily Ferdinand to conduct affairs requiring the greatest prudence and judgment. We may have occasion to refer to him again in describing the Cathedral of Granada, where he is the only subject who has had the honour of being interred within its precincts.

Nothing can be more wearying than the road from



Alhama to the Vega of Granada. For the greater part of the way, clayey, barren mountain sides alone meet the eye, save here and there, where tufts of rosemary and other aromatic plants spring up, and a few corn-fields show some feeble attempts at cultivation. The monotony was slightly relieved by the village of Cacin, situated in a deep valley, with a few trees clustered along the banks of a rivulet. Passing this, we ascended again, and continued over a similar dreary road, until we reached half a dozen miserable houses called the Ventas de Guelma. The road now crossed a treeless plain, one sheet of waving corn, without however any trace of population. It took us about two hours to reach La Malá, a wretched village surrounded by large salt-pits ; the low range of hills separating it from the Vega of Granada being chiefly composed of gypsum, highly impregnated with salt.

We rode up in haste to the brow of the hill before us, each anxious to obtain the first view of Granada ; and glorious indeed it was, for the setting sun was just gilding the distant towers of the Alhambra, and the queenly city rose before us, with her girdle of mountains, while the Vega was spread out as a verdant carpet at her feet. There can be few prospects more enchanting than this ; the fertile plain, extending for about thirty miles in length, seemed a very Paradise, after the dreary country we had been traversing. It looked like the bed of a lake, from which the waters had receded, leaving a vast plain of the richest verdure, encircled by lofty mountains. The eye wandered over every variety of undulating ground. From the low mounds on which we were standing, it swept round to the left—over hills, gradually rising in height, until they broke into the precipitous cliffs of Alfacar, which,

from this distance, appeared close behind the town ; while to our right rose the long chain of the Sierra Nevada, its alpine heights at this season one mass of snow.

The natural beauty of its situation, combined with all the thousand historic recollections which crowd round the very name of Granada, render this one of the most striking scenes which can be presented to the traveller.

The Arabs, whose thoughts were constantly recurring to the land from which they sprang, awarded the palm of beauty to Granada over their favourite cities of Damascus, Cairo, and Bagdad ; and as they loved to trace in the land of their adoption every possible similarity to the country they had left, they settled themselves in those scenes which recalled their own homes most vividly to their recollection. The wild hordes from the deserts of Palmyra were satisfied with the arid coasts of Almeria and the plains of Murcia. The legions from the hilly country of Palestine and Syria found a resemblance to their native mountains in the fastnesses of the Serrania of Ronda. The fields of Archidona were peopled by those who had pastured their flocks in the valley of the Jordan ; but the inhabitants of Damascus could find nothing to remind them of the Paradise they had quitted until they beheld Granada.

Here their willing fancies soon traced a resemblance to the home of their childhood ; the Sierra Nevada recalled the snowy summits of the Lebanon ; the city stood like their own on the edge of a fertile plain, while the Darro, Xenil, and other streams, rivalled the rivers of Damascus in the abundance of their waters ; countless gardens and orchards covered the Vega as in their own rich and smiling valley ; the sky

was as bright, and the air as pure ; and they settled themselves with rapture in a land they loved to call the Damascus of the west. And it was not difficult for their warm imaginations to discover this resemblance. From some of the slopes of the Sierra Nevada it has often struck me very forcibly ; with this difference, however, that while the Vega of Granada is enclosed on every side by mountains, the cultivated lands around Damascus lose themselves in the sand of the desert, one arid boundless plain stretching far away to the horizon.

The sun had set ; and our guides reminded us we had yet some distance to go before we reached the city, on which we were gazing with so much admiration. We accordingly descended the hill, and reached Gabilia Grande, a large village on the margin of the Vega. We now entered upon a wide road, with fields of corn and hemp on each side, interspersed with orchards, intersected by streams of water in every direction. Two hours' ride across the Vega brought us to Granada. It was night long before we reached it : but there was a certain charm in the darkness ; for, as we approached, the precipitous hills before us seemed illuminated with countless stars, and as we entered by the Alameda of the Xenil, the noise of rushing waters, the deep shadows of the trees, with the lights scattered amongst them, gave it an undefined fairy-like appearance which left upon the mind the most agreeable impressions. Under other circumstances, trees and water might not conjure up scenes of such rare beauty ; but any one who has resided six months at Málaga may be excused for the unwonted degree of pleasure they excited.

We stopped at the Fonda de la Amistad, an hotel near the theatre. After duly visiting the Alhambra