

and the situation admirably adapted for setting it off to every advantage. But in winter it seems more fit to be the palace of an ice-king, than the abode of flesh-and-blood royalty; and so fearfully exposed is it to the blasts sweeping down at that season from the Guadarrama mountains, that sentinels stationed at one point have been frozen to death, while on duty. In cold weather they are changed every ten minutes, and when its severity increases seriously, they are altogether withdrawn, and Spanish royalty is left to the guardianship of its own circumambient divinity!

CHAPTER XIII.

TUESDAY and Wednesday, the 18th and 19th of October, were devoted to visiting the Escorial. We had intended to have gone there by one of the diligences, which pass daily through the adjoining village, on their way to Segovia. But, on making inquiries, we found they started at such inconvenient hours, that it became necessary to hire a carriage on purpose, going one day and returning the next.

The weather, which, during the previous week, was rainy and tempestuous, had now become all we could desire, and the sun shone forth in his brightness, as we crossed the Manzanares, Madrid's only stream, its shallow current beset by hundreds of washerwomen, glad to take advantage of so fine a day, while its banks were sheeted, far and near, with linen of all sorts, our own probably contributing its

contingent to make up that miscellaneous collection of drapery.

In the immediate neighbourhood of Madrid the road is execrable, and its broad surface, seamed with holes, and ruts, makes any pace quicker than a walk a perilous venture to the bones. As the road improves, on clearing the suburbs, the country becomes deplorable, and we soon found ourselves surrounded by a wild waste, exceeding, in aridity and utter absence of trees and vegetation, anything we had yet encountered—a desert, in fact, of baked earth and sand, with nothing to give it variety but rain-worn, calcined ravines, bestridden here and there, as the highway approaches them, by those characteristic features of a Castilian landscape—bridges without a stream. Not that their channels are always waterless; for during the tremendous down-pours of the rainy season, the sun-scorched *barranco*, “where no water is,” becomes in a few hours the bed of a roaring torrent, which, if left unbridged, would for the time render the road perfectly impassable.

The drive through such a blank, where the most patient and hopeful of tourists looks in vain for anything to attract his attention, is tedious to a degree; and as the road ascends a great

part of the thirty miles between Madrid and the Escorial, you cannot even enjoy the satisfaction of shortening the tedium of such a journey by going fast. When, however, we had performed rather more than half the distance, the monotony of the scene was somewhat mitigated by the first glimpse of the Escorial, of which we caught sight on reaching the summit of a long ascent; and though we must still have been some twelve or fourteen miles off, yet even there its vast size asserted itself, as it rose, a gaunt, frowning pile, against the mountain side, forbidding, more than inviting, our nearer approach.

It was quite a relief, when, having at length traversed those dreary plains, we entered the royal domain, about two leagues from the Escorial, though for a considerable time we had nothing better to look at than the walls of the park, *El Pardo la Zarzuela*, with an occasional glimpse of the ilices scattered here and there, in straggling groups over its surface. This total want of interest in the route to the Escorial tells immensely to its advantage, and prepares the mind unconsciously for a favourable impression.

For a long time after you have entered the

royal domain, on the side towards Madrid, the building itself remains concealed, owing to the inequality of the ground; and when, wearied with that monotonous drive, you begin to feel impatient to see something, the park wall suddenly terminates, the road traverses an open space, studded with primeval boulder-stones, and before you have had time to realize the transition, you find yourself face to face with the eighth wonder of the world!

In a moment we were out of the carriage. Mounting the grassy pedestal of an enormous boulder, which, weather-stained, and lichen-marked, towered like a monarch over the rest, we commanded at one glance the whole extent of the south front, and the eye, fatigued so long with barrenness, rested gladly on the long-drawn ranges of terrace-garden, and the groves that fringe the precincts of the palace; while, as if to greet us with pleasant welcome, the mellow glow of sunset burst forth, diffusing an atmosphere of beauty on every side, and casting upon tower and dome a warmth, and richness of colouring, that overcame, for the moment, the chilling sternness of that granite pile.

We could not possibly have seen it to greater advantage. Not only was the whole landscape

bathed in sunshine, but the stately avenues of poplar beneath the terrace, were all golden with the tints of autumn, while along the slopes of the westward hills gleamed many a hue from copse-wood, fern, and lava-coloured soil, contrasting most effectively with the sober green of the ilex in the park below.

All this beauty took us completely by surprise; for most descriptions of the Escorial represent it as environed by the bleakest of landscapes, extending to its very walls, in unmitigated barrenness.

When, however, having entered its vast courts, now silent and untrodden, we began to examine the building more closely, I must confess my disappointment. Prepared though we were to admire, no amount of prepossession in its favour could transmute such unmistakable ugliness into beauty. Its gridiron ground-plan (an inspiration of pedantry and superstition combined) is fatal to simplicity and grandeur of design, and although no building of its vast proportions can be altogether destitute of a certain grandiose majesty, you still feel it has nothing to recommend it to your admiration, beyond mere bulk.

The windows, of which it is said to contain

about 4000, are positively hideous, the least objectionable of them having the form of those in a modern dwelling-house, while the upper stories are lighted by apertures, that resemble nothing so much as the port-holes in a man-of-war.

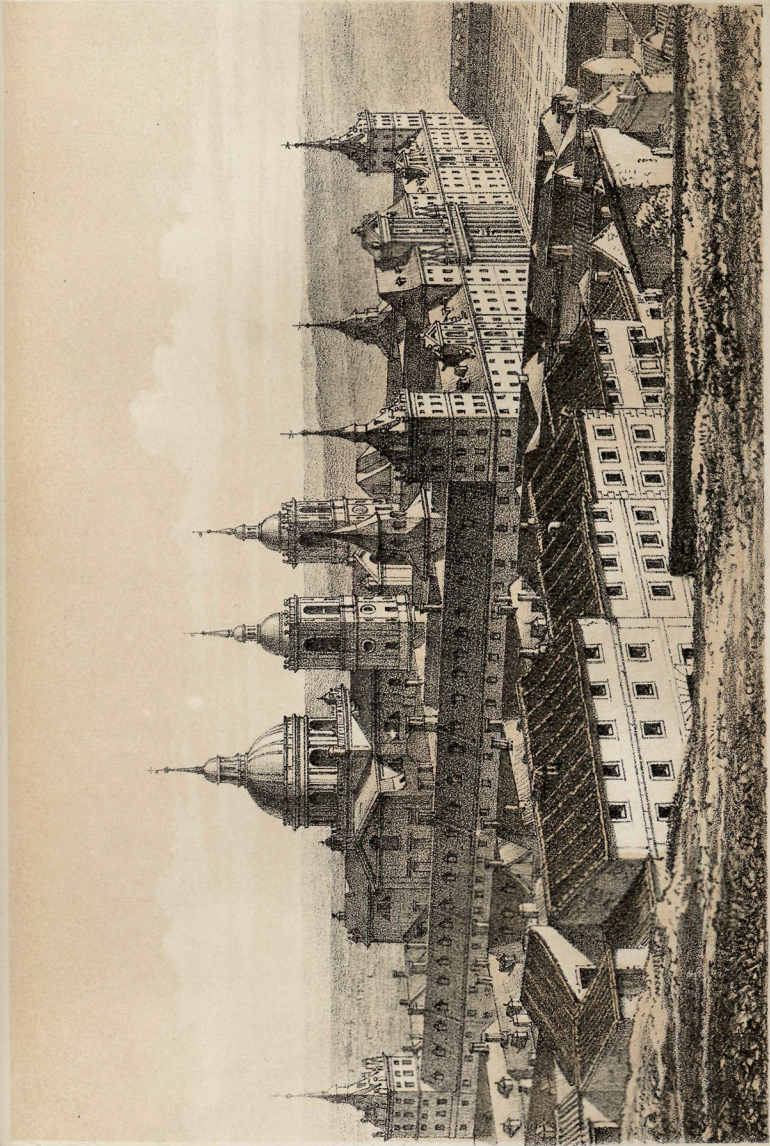
In fact, when I thought of the sums spent upon it, not less, it is said, than £10,000,000, and the different results that an architect of the 13th century would have achieved with such means, I could only lament so golden an opportunity had been thrown away, and a building worthy of that magnificent site had not been erected, which, not owing its effectiveness to sheer mass, would have combined in harmonious proportions those united elements of grandeur and beauty, characteristic of the best Pointed Architecture.

The effect on the mind is simply oppressive, without one grain of the elevating influence, that animates the creations of the great mediæval builders. Nor does this impression wear away, as you become more familiar with the various features of the edifice, and next day it was as much felt by us, as when we first trod its courts.

The situation, however, is superb. Backed by a noble mountain, an offshoot of the Guadarrama range, the Escorial stands in an attitude

of observation (so to speak), surveying the whole land, with the stamp of Spanish royalty, cold, ponderous, and stately, marked indelibly on all its features, while its mixed character of convent and palace, typifies the intimate connection between the Throne and the Church, existing in the days of its founder.

As we did not arrive at the Escorial until sunset, we made no attempt that evening to explore any portion of its interior, contenting ourselves with looking at it from various points of view, while the deepening gloom gradually descending on tower, and dome, veiled its ungainliness and lack of beauty, and imparted to the silent, darkling pile, a solemn, unearthly aspect, that harmonized perfectly with its double destination, as a sepulchre of Kings, and a refuge from the vanities of the world.



THE ESCORIAL.



CHAPTER XIV.

WE lodged at a very tidy little inn in the village, and our dinner introduced us, for the first time in Spain, to fresh pork, which was to be henceforward our almost daily *pièce de résistance*. The village, which stands under the very shadow of the Escorial, though small, seems to abound in posadas and lodging-houses, being a favourite resort for the gentry of Madrid during the intense heats of summer, when its fresh mountain-air and comparative coolness, make the neighbourhood a delicious retreat from the sweltering temperature of the capital.

In winter it must be frightfully bleak, exposed as it is to those terrific blasts from the Guadarrama chain, which, according to all accounts, can be scarcely less formidable than the hurricanes of the Andes. Stories almost incredible are told of the violence, with which the wind sweeps down upon the Escorial through a gap in the

mountains, to the north-west, eddying through its courts like some whirlpool of air, and upsetting everything it encounters. Ford mentions that upon one occasion an Ambassador's coach, a vehicle of some substance and weight in the last century, was turned topsy-turvy by one of those rushing mighty winds. In fact, so much did the inmates suffer from this cause, that in 1770 a subterraneous gallery, communicating with the village, was constructed by the monks. The Duc de St. Simon, who, in 1715, spent some part of the winter at the Escorial, speaks of its intense cold, and yet, though it froze fourteen or fifteen hours out of the twenty-four, the sun was so powerful from 11 A.M. to 4 P.M., that it was too hot for walking, while the sky was at all times perfectly serene and cloudless.

Next morning, taking my customary stroll before breakfast, and passing westward through the grove of English elms, planted by Philip, I presently found myself in front of the southwestern façade, and on the brink of a magnificent granite tank, some 400 feet long by 200 wide, spacious as the pools of Solomon, and fed by a perennial rill, whose pleasant murmur alone broke the silence of the scene.

It was a lovely morning, the atmosphere of

crystal transparency, and the landscape flooded with unbroken sunshine; nor did I wonder, as so many have done, while I walked up and down the warm, sequestered terrace, that Philip should have chosen such a spot for his home.

Whatever may be said against the dreariness of the road from Madrid, the immediate vicinity of the Escorial, as we saw it, is extremely beautiful. Close at hand, as I have already mentioned, rises a mountain range, highly picturesque in form and outline, and of a colouring singularly rich and vivid; while many of the upland slopes are clothed with thickets, and bosky patches of copse-wood, their autumnal tints thrown out into bright relief by the dark gray rocks cropping out here and there, along the face of the mountain. Immediately below, lies the park we skirted on our arrival, with its dark foliage of ilex, and quercus robur, sombre-hued amid the glories of the Fall, while eastward a tiny lake, where, in bygone days, the monks used to catch the finest tench in the world, glistens—the eye of the landscape—under the early sunbeams.

It was sad to see the fruit-trees on the terrace walls, once tended so carefully, now drooping in straggling, unpruned neglect, each in its niche

or alcove, with folding-doors to shelter it from the severity of the winter, as in this elevated situation even peach and apricot trees cannot exist without such protection.

Looking westward, you perceive near the base of the mountain, at a distance of more than a mile from the palace, the *Silla del Rey*, or "King's Seat," where Philip used to sit and watch the progress of the Escorial. Out of the same mountain, all the stone required for the building was quarried, and transported to the site along a platform of wood, which bridged over the intervening space. This fabric, a remarkable work for that age, was constructed with a gentle slope towards the Escorial, so as to lessen the draught; and such was its size, that when its purpose had been served by the completion of the palace, it was removed with very great difficulty.

Having enjoyed the tranquillity and sunshine of the terrace for a good hour, I set out on my return to the inn. Wishing to see the other side of the Escorial, I descended into an orchard lying under the terrace, where some peasants were digging potatoes, and made for the high wall by which it is bounded, hoping to find some friendly outlet in that direction. In the

midst of the orchard I was attacked by a dog belonging to one of the potato-diggers, and having no stick (which, by the way, is always a desirable companion for a country walk in Spain, where dogs abound), I was obliged to have recourse to Dr. Parr's expedient, and *inflicted* my eye on the foe, so as to keep him from a breach of the peace, until his master called him off, which he did with provoking deliberation.

I looked in vain for gate or door, by which to make my exit, and, as the wall was about twelve feet high, I gladly availed myself of a young tree, which grew *convanient*, as an Irishman would say, and soon clambered up to the top, only to find myself, however, confronted by a species of *chevaux de frise*, consisting of a thick stratum of dry brambles, with an upper crust of large stones to keep it firm, placed there, evidently with no small trouble, by the owner, for the safe-keeping of his apples and pears.

It required no great foresight to perceive that a yard or two of this coping would inevitably fall on my unlucky pate, were I to drop down to the other side from the spot where I then stood, and the peasants showed they anticipated some such result, by the eagerness with which

they drew near to see the sport. Having, however, in my school-boy days, acquired, among other useful accomplishments, the knack of walking on a black-thorn hedge without coming to grief like the immortal King of Sicily, I surmised their benevolent anticipations were not quite certain to be realized; and proceeding with as much caution as a man treading among eggs, I cleared in due time the forty or fifty yards of wall, over which the brambles and stones extended, and having made my bow to the select audience before whom I had to exhibit, in acknowledgment of their polite attentions, I dropped down comfortably on the other side, without bringing destruction on my own head; though I almost felt as if I owed an apology to the expectant potato-diggers, for so ruthlessly disappointing them of their hoped-for entertainment.

Breakfast became a pleasant episode between my morning ramble and our exploration of the Escorial, a very formidable undertaking, containing as it does, according to the guide-books, a palace, a convent, two colleges, for regulars and seculars respectively, three chapter-houses, and three libraries, with more halls, dormitories, refectories, and infirmaries, than I care to in-

troduce into my pages. There are no fewer than eighty staircases, and some one gifted with a turn for statistics, has calculated, that to visit every individual room, and to go up and down each staircase and corridor, would occupy four entire days, and carry the unhappy wight (should any such zealot for sight-seeing ever be discovered) over a distance of about a hundred and twenty English miles.

We meekly surrendered ourselves to the disposal of our guide, and he took us up and down so many staircases, along such a maze of corridors, and cloisters, and through such an endless succession of courts, and quadrangles, that ere long we subsided into the condition of machines, with the sensations of a vertiginous mill-horse, and the wayworn leg-weariness of the wandering Jew.

We began with the Church. In spite of Ford's eulogy, it gave me little pleasure, from its pagan, classical style, and the depressing, joyless influences brooding over its cold interior, which has more the air of a vast crypt, dedicated to the dark mysteries of some heathen superstition, than of a temple consecrated to the worship of Him, "Who brought life, and

immortality to light by the Gospel." At the same time it certainly possesses the merit of massive simplicity, and the noble flight of steps, in polished marble, ascending to the high altar, produces a very striking effect.

Before the French invasion, the Church teemed with treasures of Art—sacred vessels of gold and silver—multitudes of shrines—reliquaries—and a tabernacle of such exquisite workmanship, that it used to be spoken of as worthy to be one of the ornaments of the celestial altar.

All these were destroyed by La Houssaye's troopers, when they occupied the Escorial in 1808, by way of giving vent to their national feeling respecting the battle of St. Quentin, where the Spaniards, with the aid of some 8000 English, in addition to other foreigners, managed to defeat the French, on the Feast of St. Laurence, August 10th, 1557, the interval of two centuries and a half, which one might have supposed capable of serving as a sort of Statute of Limitation, not being a sufficient lapse of time (apparently), to erase the defeat out of the memories of Frenchmen, who are always sorer under a beating,

than any other nation, and cling to its recollection with a tenacity, that will neither forget nor forgive.

The Escorial sustained a still greater loss in 1837, during the Carlist war, when about a hundred of the choicest paintings were removed for safety's sake to the Museo at Madrid, where, being accessible to all comers daily, to be studied at leisure, they now afford a thousand-fold more gratification to lovers of pictures, and proportionate increase of benefit to Art, than they ever produced while lying entombed in the remote Escorial.

It is hardly necessary to mention here, that the building was erected by Philip II., in accomplishment of a vow addressed to Saint Lawrence, (the Spanish San Lorenzo,) during the battle of St. Quentin, and that the form of a gridiron, in commemoration of the Saint's martyrdom on an instrument of that description, was adopted for its ground-plan, in order to do him further honour.

We descended into the royal vault, called the Panteon, an octagon of polished marble, standing exactly under the high altar, and dark as Erebus. St. Simon says, "it frightened him by a sort of horror and majesty," and it has