

CHAPTER XXI.

IT was on a lovely morning that we visited Yuste, under the guidance of the good Cura. The day and season were in perfect harmony with the object of our pilgrimage, where the greatest monarch of his age had sought a brief breathing-space between the world and the grave. The late autumn, with its gentle sunshine and perfect stillness, realized to us with peculiar force the motives that induced Charles to retire to such a spot, contrasting so strongly by its seclusion and repose with the turmoil and disquietude of his previous career.

Yuste stands a full mile above Cuacos, just where the steeper slopes of the mountain, that shelters it from the northern blast, subside towards the plain. Eastward a tract of upland cuts off all prospect in that direction, only to enhance the delight with which the eye turns

to the south-western expanse, where copse-wood, and vineyard, green bank and rocky knoll, mountain-glen and shining river, terminate in the broad plain of the Tagus, with its glittering villages, and dark groves of ilex. In the silvery thread of water intersecting the landscape we recognize the river Tiedar, crossed by us yesterday, and on the extreme horizon we trace the purple mountain-range, through which we hope to make our way to Seville.

Lord Portarlington and I were reminded of the hills behind Powerscourt, both in their form and colour, by the range that overhangs the convent, clothed with its autumnal drapery of heather, and fern, and looking to English eyes so natural and home-like.

It was delicious to sit in Charles's favourite balcony enjoying the pleasant sunshine, as he had often done, and gazing on the same landscape that once was the companion of his solitude. The very air seems redolent of peace and tranquillity; for without bearing any impress of that loneliness and desolation characteristic of so many a scene in Spain, Yuste is pervaded with a soothing influence sequestering the mind from worldly associations, and drawing it into communion with better things. I

never saw any spot commanding so extensive a prospect, fraught with such an atmosphere of repose, as it lay basking in the October sunshine. You see, it is true, indications of man's presence in vineyard and cornfield, but he occupies a retiring position, in modest subordination to Nature, as one owning her supremacy over that fair region, and unwilling to obtrude even his humble dwelling on the view; not a single cottage being discernible as the eye glances over the broad tank, where Charles used to fish, downward into the bosom of the Vera.

We found the convent a complete ruin, its central court filled with a chaos of *débris*, out of which fig-tree, myrtle, and box, unpruned and wild, struggle forth into open day. The Church has sustained little substantial injury, the massive solidity of its masonry having happily defeated every attempt the French made to demolish it, and a few repairs now being carried on, will soon render it as sound as ever. It is a remarkably fine specimen of the Florid Gothic so often seen in Spain, with a noble chancel-arch, and an altar of high elevation.

A considerable portion of the west end is





CHARLES VTHS BALCONY. YUSTE.

occupied by a stone gallery, with a low pierced screen in front, a feature not uncommon in Spanish churches.

Against the south wall of the Church stand the apartments built for Charles's reception, consisting of only two stories, with four rooms in each, his bed-chamber having a window opening directly into the chancel, which enabled him to witness the celebration of mass, when too unwell to leave his bed. It was here Charles died, September 21st, 1558, having felt the first approach of death on the 31st August, as he sat sunning himself in his favourite western balcony.

We saw the coffin, a rude chest of chestnut-wood, in which his remains reposed for sixteen years, before their ultimate removal to the Escorial.

Nothing can be simpler or more unpretending than the Imperial apartments, which remain substantially very much as they were at Charles's death, and we thought ourselves fortunate in the moment of our visit. For the present proprietor is going to restore the building, in consequence, it is said, of the interest excited in the spot by recent writers, more especially Stirling in his "Cloister Life of

Charles V.," the scaffolding and building materials being all prepared when we were there.

The intention is certainly most praiseworthy, but it is to be hoped, nothing will be attempted beyond necessary repairs.

We duly visited all Charles's haunts, and were especially struck with the situation of his summer balcony, with its umbrageous belt of trees, and cool northern aspect. We then descended the sloping causeway constructed to save him the fatigue of going up and down stairs, an exertion which his frequent attacks of gout must have rendered very trying.

Of course we did not fail to go to the great walnut-tree, under which the Emperor used to sit, and which even in his day was famous for its size and patriarchal age. The steward gathered for us some of its fruit, and we carried them away as a *souvenir* of one of the most interesting places I ever had the happiness to visit. It was a great advantage to have the Cura's company, introducing us as it did to every civility and attention on the part of the good-natured steward, who did the honours in a very pleasing manner, and, what is even more worthy of record, declined accepting any pecu-

niary acknowledgment of his services, though evidently gratified by the offer.

In going to Yuste we had a good deal of fragmentary conversation with the Cura, partly in Latin, and partly in the few scraps of Spanish we had managed to pick up, eked out by an occasional bit of pantomime, when all other expedients failed to convey our meaning. He was very much surprised at an English Prayer-book I showed him, having hitherto never heard that the Church of England possesses a regular Liturgy, with various services and forms of devotion, drawn from "the pure well" of Catholic Antiquity, and that she does not leave her people at the mercy of extemporized effusions, as is the case with so many of the sects into which Protestantism is divided.

The walk from Yuste to Cuacos is so very pretty that, as we emerged from the hollow in which the convent nestles, I lingered behind my companions to enjoy for a longer space the eastward view, on which, as yet, I had hardly looked. Here and there stand small homesteads scattered over the mountain-side, each under a group of chestnuts, while every rocky ledge, and natural terrace, has its narrow strip of green corn or ruddy vineyard sloping to the

south. The wind came gently soughing up the valley, mingled with the sounds of distant waters, that added to the quiet sadness of the scene, which I gazed upon with the conviction I should never see it again.

On returning to the Cura's house, we found the servants had been holding quite a reception during our absence, the villagers feeling a very natural curiosity to see, and hear something more of the strangers whose arrival had caused quite a sensation in that secluded community. The servants very good-naturedly showed everything that could interest them, more especially the India-rubber sponging-baths, which they inflated in their sight to their great wonderment and delight.

In Charles's day the people of Cuacos did not bear the best character, and it is quite amusing to find that the greatest monarch of the age, whose word was law to so many millions, was utterly unable to keep them, his nearest neighbours, in anything like order. They seem actually to have given him far more trouble and worry than all the rest of his dominions. They poached his trout, drove away his small dairy of two cows, and pelted his son Don John of Austria, the future hero of Lepanto, because,

like a boy of enterprise, he made inroads upon their cherry-trees. Charles seems at last to have been fairly at his wits' end, and held solemn consultations with the gentlemen of his suite, as to the best method of bringing them to a sense of their duty.

There is a vague tradition, that the name of the place, Cuacos, was first suggested by some enormity of theirs, which the Emperor happened to witness. Some assert that they had just broken Don John's head, when his Imperial father came up, very wroth no doubt at such an outrage, and while on the point of venting his indignation, a duck chancing to quack, a sudden inspiration seized him at the sound, and he declared such people no longer deserved to be treated as men, being in fact no better than ducks, or such-like irrational creatures.

Stirling disbelieves the story for the best of all reasons—Cuacos was so called before Charles ever went to Yuste, though he allows it may have had its origin in some previous incident; it being quite certain that even in the present day, any allusion to the name Cuacos is highly offensive to the villagers, producing upon their minds very much the same sensation felt by certain good people in the county of Dorset

at the slightest reference to the history of the Shapwick Monster!

However, we had every reason to speak favourably of the whole population, with the excellent Cura at their head, for they showed us every civility, and were evidently much pleased and not a little flattered by our visit.

CHAPTER XXII.

IT was with much regret that we said good-bye to our worthy host the Cura of Cuacos, having first induced him to accept some return for the trouble and expense our visit had occasioned in his quiet household. This he received with unembarrassed simplicity of manner, as if, like a man of sense, he felt it to be no discredit to possess such slender means, as would make the exercise of unrequited hospitality impossible.

Placentia was our next destination, a distance of about thirty miles, and as the route is very intricate, abounding with what the Spaniards call "partridge-paths," we engaged a guide at Cuacos, who slung a couple of hams at his saddle-bow, intending therewith to do a little business on his own account, after piloting us through the wilds that intervene between his

native village and the principal town of the district.

Having, as we calculated, ridden more than a hundred miles since leaving Toledo, we had gained sufficient experience to understand the necessities and requirements of our journey, and began to look forward hopefully to its successful accomplishment, now that we knew what man and beast could perform.

Our road to-day (October 31st) skirted the lower slopes of the Yuste chain, its terrace-like windings bringing us continually upon some display of autumnal beauty, that would enchant an English water-colourist. I never remember to have seen anywhere such a perfect blaze of colour, as met the eye along this road, from the ruby and lemon of the vine, to the soberer hues of the oak, while the distant mountains of Guadalupe toned down the picture with rich shades of indigo and purple. It was a most enjoyable ride, the day being everything we could desire, warm and sunshiny, yet fresh; and when our path left the cultivated dells and ascended the mountain-side along the banks of a lovely trout-stream, that would have converted even old Johnson himself into a fisherman, we once more caught sight of Yuste, refreshing our

impressions of yesterday, and stamping them deeper on the tablets of memory. We passed through masses of Spanish chestnut, green as "in the leafy month of June," contrasting most effectively with the brown fern out of which they grew.

It was indeed a feast of beauty, and one longed to summon to it, by some magic power, all who could appreciate such an entertainment.

Through oak woods and orchards we descended upon Pasaron, which Ford describes as "a picturesque old town of Prout-like houses, with toppling balconies, overhanging a brawling brook." Here we took a hasty luncheon, while the horses were feeding, and the good people having apparently no important business on hand at that particular moment, clustered like bees round the inn-door, headed by the Cura, a brisk little man, of decidedly controversial turn. He soon accosted me, and before we had exchanged half a dozen words, he plunged headlong into polemics, and tried to draw me after him; asserting that there was one faith and one Church, and that within the pale of the Romish Communion alone were

these essentials to be found. Had I accepted his challenge, we might have been at it till now, with perhaps more than the usual fruitlessness of controversy; so I contented myself with remarking that the Church of England holds no more and no less, than "the faith once delivered to the Saints" in Apostolic times. Though we parted very graciously, I fear the little man was disappointed at my non-combativeness, he being one of those pugnacious spirits to whom a passage of arms is a real enjoyment, more especially amid the stagnation of a secluded neighbourhood.

We now entered upon a new line of country, *dehesas* (sheep-walks) consisting of uncultivated wastes, with extensive tracts of oak-scrub watered here and there by shallow brooks, and this continued nearly the whole way to Placentia. In Estremadura vast districts have been in this condition, ever since the expulsion of the Moors, and what was once called in Arabic, as Ford states, "the land of corn," is now reduced in great measure to a mere barren desert, producing nothing but scanty pasturage for sheep, and those very few compared with the immense area over which they range. To English eyes,

however, such regions of solitude are as striking as happily they are novel, and we journeyed on through them with much enjoyment, arriving at Placentia, of which we had a lovely sunset view from the vine-clad height, Calzones, shortly after nightfall.

Fr. ^{Sept. 1815.} ~~T~~ Military Chronicle Vol. X. p 347. Art. Original Letters
 fr. Officers in Portugal - Spain - Salamanca 26 Nov 1808

I never beheld a more beautiful morning [than that on which we left Plasencia]... I am told that the air around this ^{Salamanca} delightful spot is almost always serene & heavenly. Tho' now far advanced in month Nov. nothing but more & that ungenial season is known here. The softest air & sweetest summer day cd not be more balmy than that wh. met our freened senses on turning out for march. ... On distant heights, sun glittered on cold snow we were destined cross. C. l. Aldea Nueva ... After a few hours patient endurance of the bitter blast & driving snow, we descended, mtn ... & got into rich valley, whose autumnal warm tints were a pleasing change to late pale monst'g scene. ... Even this valley ... was rendered indescribably chill by blasts from mtns. Perhaps you will scarcely credit it that at Aldea Nueva we felt 8 degrees of frost.

Not any of us being apprized that we shd encounter such severity, I fear, that all officers are in a similar predicament with myself; & I have not brought an article of warm clothing with me ... Indeed, ignoramuses that we were, we did not harbour a thought that in a country so famous for glowing suns we cd ever experience such hyperborean blasts.

CHAPTER XXIII.

WE had formed great hopes of this place, with its population of 6000, and exquisite position in the teeming valley of the Xerte. Our stores had fallen into reduced circumstances, and we now fondly flattered ourselves, that in so considerable a town, the centre of a very extensive district, there would be no difficulty in restoring them to their former abundance. But there is nothing so disappointing as a Spanish town. Shops there were in plenty, but not of the sort we required, with their bright array of *mantas*, and flashy kerchiefs that seemed to flaunt our hunger, as if colour could feed the ravenous appetite we had picked up in Estremenian wilds. What the inhabitants live on remains to the present hour as great a mystery to us, as when we first arrived in the town. A vague rumour reached us that an ox is killed once a year, in June, on the Feast of St. John

the Baptist; but we derived little comfort from the information, seeing it wanted nearly eight months before the next victim could become available for our necessities, and a "Midsummer Night's Dream" could hardly be more unsubstantial, than our prospects of relief from that quarter.

We had found, with much difficulty, a very primitive posada just below the Cathedral, where we purposed taking "such ease" as could be had for a couple of nights; but when I sallied forth with Purkiss on a shopping expedition, partly in the hope of seeing Spanish life in its more intimate haunts, and partly out of deference to the ancient proverb, "Two heads are better than one," we might almost as well have gone foraging into the wilderness, so unsuccessful did our search prove after the commonest necessaries of life. Grave doubts respecting the sinfulness of eating anything but bread and garlic began to arise in my mind, as we wandered like beggars from house to house, so much out of fashion did every other species of food seem in this Cathedral town; and when at last some good-natured people told us that neighbour Rodriguez had just killed a nice pig, we felt ready, had it been necessary, to go to the ends

of the earth in compliance with the welcome intelligence, though it would have been a trying journey just at that moment, 7.30 P.M., for men who had ridden all day through the keen air of Estremadura.

Happily the goodman Rodriguez lived at no great distance, down a narrow lane, and having descended under the chaperonage of his sturdy wife into the cellar, where the defunct porker lay in state, we soon purchased a goodly quantity of spare-rib, and returned in triumph to the posada, having previously met with several bottles of Manzanilla, which Mr. Sykes and I hailed as a boon, though Lord Portarlington vowed it was no better than physic.

Only one of the rooms at the posada had glass in the window, and it was altogether one of those hostelries that carry back the mind to the simplicity of medieval accommodation. In my bedroom, which was fortunately large, I counted fifty-eight melons laid up for winter use, five frying-pans, with a supplement of half-a-dozen other culinary items, representing, we may suppose, the useful arts of life, while a couple of guitars suggested the ornamental, and completed the picture.

As a set-off against the comestible disadvan-

tages of Placentia, few towns can boast a situation of rarer beauty, which more than satisfies the expectations called forth by the alleged derivation of its name. It is well remarked by Ford, "Placentia seen from outside is indeed most *pleasing*; here river, rock, and mountain—city, castle, and aqueduct, under a heaven of purest ultramarine, combine to enchant the artist." The stateliest city indeed might be proud of such a site.

The Xerte, clear as crystal, sweeps round three sides, reflecting on its broad bosom the western portion of the picturesque old Roman wall, with its massive semicircular towers; and then through a rugged belt of rock, that recalled some exquisite river-scenery in North Wales, it passes onward to "fresh fields, and pastures new," falling eventually into the Tagus near Alcantara. Three fine bridges span the stream within the space of a mile, adding greatly to the architectural pretensions of the place. To the north, far up the valley, rises a snow-capped range of mountains, while the southeastern hills are covered with olive-groves, vineyards, and gardens, in pleasant contrast to the grey rocks and naked soil that bound the prospect westward.