

we proceeded thither, and soon found that the husband, who admitted us, was perfectly willing to comply with our wishes, but not being master his good-will availed us little, and we had still to await the decision of his "missis." On opening negotiations with the lady, she became perfectly furious, rejecting our proposal with a degree of indignation, that was quite incomprehensible in a person, who was known to be in the habit of taking in lodgers!

There being evidently abundance of room in the house, while no more reason was assigned for our rejection, than the man who hated Dr. Fell could give for his dislike of that venerable Divine, we grew desperate, and determined to persevere, knowing we had no other chance of beds. Sometimes we joked, sometimes we entreated, throwing in a hint now and then, that if we were absolutely compelled to sleep in the streets, it would hardly be creditable to the hospitality of the good people of Priego, nor should we be able to give our friends in England, on returning home, so favourable a report of them, as we could wish. The husband from the beginning had been on our side, and finding his wife's objections gradually giving way under the fierceness of our assaults, he now ventured

openly to advocate our cause, until at length grievously beset, and hemmed-in by a circle of entreating faces, the fat old soul melted into hospitality, placed the house and all its contents at our disposal, and lent herself heartily to make us comfortable!

It turned out afterwards, that from the first she had been labouring under an entire misconception, fancying we were a party of French bagmen, the only species of the genus traveller, with which the population of this out-of-the-way region has any acquaintance. These people are by no means a popular class of lodgers, as they give an infinity of trouble wherever they are taken in, extemporizing their apartment into show-rooms, for the various articles they carry with them, and receiving all sorts of customers for their wares. No wonder, then, the old lady should have declined to entertain us, as long as she mistook us for a party of *commis-voyageurs*.

Having thus provided for our most pressing necessities, we had now leisure to attend to matters in general, and on inquiring what had brought together that concourse of men we had passed in the market-place, were told, that two ladies having completed their noviciate, had to-day taken the black veil at a nunnery in the



town. This event, combined with the impending war against Morocco, which most Spaniards of the middle and lower classes regard as a new Crusade, had produced a profound impression in the neighbourhood, kindling a fervour of religious enthusiasm, which, however misdirected, is very refreshing in these days of sceptical indifference. Unluckily for us, England being supposed to have a direct interest in thwarting the expedition against Morocco, partly on Protestant, partly on political grounds, our countrymen at the moment were more than commonly unpopular in Spain, and we naturally came in for our share, so that while we were on our way through the market-place at Priego, the countenances of the crowd wore anything but a friendly expression. One individual went so far in his zeal against us poor "heretics," as to say, though not in our hearing, that we "ought to be presented with a blossom," a playful figure of speech, which, when translated into less poetical language, intimated his conscientious conviction, that we deserved to be stabbed!

We were then going to see the "lion" of the place, at the particular request of our host, who seemed very anxious to obliterate the recollection of any previous *désagrémens*. This proved to

be a very pretty kind of fountain, or rather water-basin, oblong in form, with curved sides, of marble, through which flowed a spring of limpid purity and considerable volume, falling eventually in a fairy-like cascade over a slope of the same material, in its downward course towards the town. Lime-trees with seats underneath, are planted all round, and in warm weather a more delicious lounge cannot be imagined. The whole of this highland district might be described in the language of Scripture, as "a land of brooks of water, of fountains and depths, that spring out of valleys and hills," and from that circumstance and its comparative coolness, it might well be visited even in summer, and early autumn.

We returned to our quarters followed by a troop of boys, a species of escort, to which we were becoming accustomed by frequent use. Indeed, without departing from historical accuracy, I may say we were objects of curiosity to every class and age. Not even

" the Anthropophagi,  
And the men, whose heads do grow  
Beneath their shoulders,"

could have produced a greater sensation, than our appearance in the streets; whichever way



we turned, doors and windows were crowded with eager faces, so that we were not sorry to escape into a less-conspicuous position. Our landlady was delighted to find one of the party was a clergyman, both she and her goodman having, she told us, a great respect for the order. In consequence of this prepossession, her attentions to me became so marked and particular, that I should have been completely overwhelmed, had I not felt the distinction was owing to no merit of my own, but because I had been elevated for the moment to the dignity of a "Representative Man." It seemed to afford her special gratification to pat me on the back in most maternal fashion, following up the action with a sort of purring accompaniment of "O Padre Cura! O Padre Cura!"

We had scarcely finished dinner, when such a *posse* of townsmen, and neighbours were announced (professedly to pay their respects to the *Señores Ingleses*, but really to gratify their curiosity to greater advantage), that we had to hold quite a *levée*; and the old lady's best parlour was soon filled with a goodly company of grave personages, who behaved with exemplary propriety and decorum. We did our best to entertain them, though from our ignorance of Spanish it

was somewhat after the fashion of Captain Cook, and other circumnavigators, receiving the islanders of the Pacific. There happened to be an old piano in the room, the bequest of an organist, who had once lodged there, and on this instrument, whose best melody was a mere metallic vibration, Lord Portarlington played several tunes; while I exhibited my compass, and a pocket-knife fitted up with various appliances, one of which, a lancet, as might be expected from so blood-letting a population, excited particular admiration. By this time it was getting late, and as the Spaniards have an unlimited power of sitting, we were at our wits' end how to bring our *soirée* to a conclusion, without giving offence to the company; and it was only after a considerable expenditure of palaver and circumlocution, that we effected this object, and parted with many expressions of good-will.

I was out of doors betimes, next morning, having sat up nearly all night, in consequence of a damp bed (the only occasion, by the way, on which such an incident befel me, during the whole expedition); and though sitting up in a hard-bottomed chair is not the most agreeable method of passing "the small hours," it is, at



any rate, preferable to the contingencies of a pair of damp sheets.

Soon after sunrise, I found myself on the town walls, and anything more lovely, than the prospect that met the eye on every side, I never saw. Priego stands on the extreme edge of a precipice, overhanging a deep ravine, laid out in garden-plots, and strips of bright green meadow, through which the Xenil, a new-born stream, struggles forth into the lowlands, on its way to the Vega of Granada. To the left, rose a most picturesque range of mountains, their sides seamed with many a ruddy line, which wintry torrents had ploughed in the ochreous soil, while the whole landscape was flooded with morning sunshine, and an atmosphere of such perfect transparency as brought the most distant objects into startling proximity and distinctness.

## CHAPTER XXXV.

**I**T was with many tender adieux and good wishes, that we parted after breakfast from our host and hostess, who assured us with much earnestness, that should we ever chance to be passing through Priego on any future occasion, they would be delighted to receive us again.

We had a long ride before us, wishing on the morrow, November 30th, to reach Granada early in the afternoon, so as to enjoy the beautiful scenery by which it is environed. Our course lay entirely among the mountains which enclose the Vega to the north-west, and was of a very different description from any we had yet travelled. For a considerable distance we skirted precipices, that reminded me of the old road from Visp to Zermatt, where a single false step would carry horse and rider a good deal further than would be pleasant, landing them at last, it might be, on the roof of one of the picturesque



old mills, green with damp and moss, which the Moors of by-gone days had perched here and there, upon many a ledge of rock, over the streams of this wild district.

One such spot we particularly noticed, just where the summit of a mountain opposite is crowned with a cross, to commemorate the death of a man, whose horse having run away, carried him sheer down the precipice. A similar monument stood by the wayside on our approach to Cabra, recording the death of a gentleman, who with his horse was killed near the spot during a thunder-storm. Most travels in Spain make frequent mention of what Wordsworth calls "the votive death-cross," indicating the scene of a murder, or some other violent death, and we fully expected, that in Andalusia at least, such memorials would be as common as milestones. Ford speaks of having once counted fifteen crosses within a space of fifty yards. We saw very few in any part of the country, owing probably to the comparative suppression of brigandage.

The mountain-tracks being very intricate, we engaged a man to pilot us to-day, and he must either have undertaken more than he could accomplish, as had been the case with previous

guides, and so through ignorance led us astray, or else in this neighbourhood a road does not signify the same thing as in other parts of the globe. For miles we had to follow the bed of a torrent, which happening to be dry was at our service for the nonce, scrambling up such stairs and ledges of rock, and then plunging again into such deep holes and narrow gullies, as no quadruped that had not received the special education of a smuggler's horse, could ever traverse in safety. Had we chanced to be overtaken by a thunder-storm, while struggling through these difficulties, the donkeys must inevitably have been swept away by the torrent, the wide strips of sand and stones, that lay here and there in the more open spaces, giving a plain proof of the violence with which it occasionally dashes down the defile. Happily no such catastrophe occurred, the day being beautiful; and having at last overcome all difficulties, we soon reached a village at the top of the pass.

Here we wished to feed the horses, but our guide being of a different mind posted onwards down the mountain-side, with an obscure intimation, not very palatable to hungry men, ignorant of his vernacular, that further on there



was a *venta*, where we should halt to greater advantage. Nor did we question the judiciousness of the arrangement, when having quitted the mule-track we found ourselves entering the courtyard of a solitary farm-house, with the snow-clad chain of the Sierra Nevada rising before us in cloudless majesty, at a distance of about forty miles. It was our first view of the Spanish Alps, which in the Picacho Mulahacen attain a culminating elevation of 12,762 feet, and although they exhibit neither the massive grandeur, nor the variety and gracefulness of outline that distinguish the mountains of the Oberland, Zermatt, and Chamouni, they still possess attractions of their own, imparting to the moment they are first sighted, an interest never to be forgotten.

Granada, with all its associations of chivalry and romance, was no longer a dim and shadowy picture sketched by the imagination, but a substantial and visible reality, and we were now in sight of a region where some of the most remarkable events of Spanish history had been transacted. Even the grassy slopes, and undulating sweep of the mountain plateau, that stretched before us in all the commonplace tameness of an upland farm, had once formed a

portion of the Border-land, which Christian and Moslem for so many ages had made their battle-field, and over this very ground had the flower of Spanish knighthood descended oftentimes in sudden raid upon the villages of the Vega.

We had not, however, much leisure for day-dreaming, and after a hasty meal were once more on horseback, having still an unknown distance to travel, before we could hope to find a halting-place for the night. In fact, among the mountains you can form no estimate of distances, the league of a Spanish mountaineer being quite as indefinite a measurement, as the aggravating "bittuck" so heartily anathematized by pedestrians in the Highlands. From Cabra to Priego is called three leagues, but they must have been estimated on a very liberal scale, as it took us a whole day's travelling of average speed to accomplish the journey. At this moment, while descending the mountain-side, we had very little idea where we were going, beyond a vague belief that we were on our way to Granada. Our guide, if he could be dignified with such a title, was hardly better informed than ourselves, having evidently nothing but the faintest apprehension of the route, and so reserved in speech was he, that question



after question elicited only the briefest replies. From time to time we heard mention of Casa Lope, but whether it was a posada, or merely a private house, where we might receive admission for the night as a favour, seemed enveloped in the profoundest mystery.

The donkeys and mules had become very disorderly this afternoon, owing to the vivacious sallies of an undisciplined young jackass (a recent purchase, it appeared, at Cordova), which, being exempted from carrying a load in consideration of his tender years, was named by us "the donkey of respect," because, like the unoccupied "coach of respect," that makes such a figure in the royal retinue of Spain, he had nothing to do. He was continually breaking out into some juvenile extravagance, leaving the beaten path and walking in self-chosen ways, to the serious demoralization of the other donkeys, and then, for his pains, getting a sound cudgelling from the irate Marcos. As it takes some time to catch, on rough ground, a nimble Spanish donkey "without encumbrance," and with a thrashing in prospect, we did not get on very fast this afternoon, and so were too late to see the snow-crested peaks of the Sierra Nevada lighted up with the rosy flush of sunset, as we had

fondly hoped. This was very provoking, there being every probability, that had we been more advanced on our way, we might have reached such a point of view as would have enabled us to enjoy the glorious spectacle of an Alpine sunset.

Night soon overtook us picking our way, as best we could, through puddle and mire, under the light of a young moon, whose slender crescent seemed an appropriate sign to meet the eye of travellers on their road to the classic ground of Western Mahometanism. Thus passed two or three hours, the night-air among the mountains, at the end of November, making the prospect of a warm chimney-corner especially attractive. Still no token of village or posada appeared, and, to mend matters, our guide became confused, and having lost all recollection of the route, left us, drawn up in the middle of the road, while he went to make inquiries at a farm-house. This interval we naturally devoted to the exercise of a privilege seldom left long in abeyance (say the critics), by our countrymen, Lords and Commons alike, and for which there is little need "to search for precedents." In the midst, however, of our growling and discontent, to which hunger was beginning to im-



part additional acerbity, we could not help admiring the beauty of the shepherds' watch-fires, as they flashed up fitfully against the murky sky, from mountain slope and moorland; nor could we recollect without some feeling of self-rebuke, the hardships of those poor men, who, every night of the year, winter and summer alike, take their turn in watching their flocks, and, like Jacob of old, are "consumed with drought by day, and with frost by night, while sleep departs from their eyes," with no Rachels, moreover, to sweeten their labours. For the shepherds of Spain are an almost wifeless brotherhood, their way of life seldom permitting them to marry.

Still, whether we grumbled or philosophized, it was all one. Casa Lope remained provokingly unapproachable, and beginning to regard its existence as a myth, we quite expected we should soon have to follow the example of the shepherds, and bivouac for the night by the wayside. At last we discovered a cottage, and on making the usual inquiry, "How far is it to Casa Lope?" were answered in tones which struggled forth with a muffled sound, apparently from under heaps of bed-clothes, "that we must ford a brook, climb a hill, and then

we should speedily find ourselves at our destination."

In the course of half an hour this prediction was satisfactorily fulfilled, and we entered the gateway of a building, which looked gaunt and spectral in the uncertain light, just as the young moon was sinking over the western hills.

This was Casa Lope, and though we were never very critical of appearances, much less after a ride of thirteen hours, a more deplorable-looking place cannot well be imagined. Judging from its extent and proportions, we concluded it had been built long before the formation of new roads had drained the general stream of traffic from the Pass of Puerto Lope, on the ancient highway between Cordova and Granada. But now its roomy stables were untenanted, the lofty chambers dismantled of their furniture, and our footsteps echoed mournfully along the spacious corridor, into which the rooms on the first floor opened. Having nothing antique or venerable in its appearance, it gave one, on a small scale, a very good idea of the condition and aspect our cavalry-barracks would exhibit after about twenty years' ascendancy of the Peace Society. Happily as we entered there was a good blaze on the hearth, and though the people of the



house were by no means kindly disposed, or even civil, they could not deny us seats among the muleteers, who surrounded the fire. The only beds available were shake-downs on the brick floor, in one of the upstairs rooms, of which Lord Portarlington and Mr. Sykes took advantage. I preferred an arrangement of three chairs, which, if hard, were at any rate clean, and inodorous, and I managed in this way to get a brief doze, in spite of the gusty draughts, that eddied through the long corridor, where by choice I had taken my station. It required no great persuasion to start us betimes next morning, and soon after seven we had bidden (let us hope) an eternal farewell to Casa Lope, a bourne to which no traveller would willingly return.

The ground was crisp with hoar-frost, and the transparent clearness of the fresh morning air brought the glittering crest of the Sierra Nevada, and the snow-white villages of the Vega into a proximity that cheated the eye of half the distance. It now became evident how fortunate we had been yesterday in our view of the principal peaks of the great chain, Picacho Mulahacen, and Picacho de Veleta. As we then saw them they were noble objects, while the greensward of the pastures over which we looked at them, formed

a foreground that threw them out to the greatest advantage. But to-day our point of view being changed, other ranges of far more picturesque form, and varied outline, came into sight on the north-east, though none of them was crowned with a diadem of snow.

With Illora on a hill to our right, we could now distinctly make out the buildings of Granada on the opposite side of the Vega, clinging to the lowest terraces of the Sierra Nevada, and it was with the pleasant feeling of having prosperously accomplished a long-cherished design (seasoned, I trust, with a spirit of thankfulness), that we descended the paved causeway leading to the village of Pinos.

Purkiss had ridden on before, to see what he could provide for our mid-day meal, and on dismounting at the cleanliest and neatest of posadas, which after Casa Lope looked like a traveller's Paradise, we found with much satisfaction he had been most successful in his catering, and we now made ample amends for the scantiness of yesternight's supper. The old lady of the house, finding we were going to Granada, volunteered some very maternal advice respecting its inhabitants, whom she did not seem to regard as the most virtuous community in the world; and



though, from our very limited acquaintance with Spanish, she did not succeed in conveying to us any very distinct idea of the perils that awaited us in the old Moorish capital, her kindness and good-will were equally manifested, and appreciated accordingly.

Just outside the village we passed a spot of far deeper interest (to my mind) than most of the scenes that history has ennobled. It was on the bridge, which here spans one of the tributaries of the Xenil, that Queen Isabella's messenger overtook Columbus, when, disgusted with the delays and disappointments he had so long encountered at the Spanish Court, he set out in February, 1492, to quit Spain for ever, on his way to offer his services to our Henry VII. For seven years he had been seeking in vain for that assistance from Ferdinand, which was necessary to the success of his grand project; and when now at last Isabella, larger-hearted and more prescient than her husband, offered her aid, it was almost too late, and Columbus, warned by bitter experience, hesitated to expose himself anew to the vexatious intrigues of a Court, that had already wasted some of the best years of his life.

It was a moment of intense interest. How