England at dear old Christmas-tide! On the evening before Christmas Eve I was journeying down the wild and lovely line of railway from Cordoba to the wilds of the interior. Cordoba certainly needs no Christmas decorations. Nature has bestowed them upon her with no grudging hand, in the spacious patio (or quadrangle) of her magnificent mosque, in the gardens of her ancient houses, in the cemeterio, and, peeping above her old Moorish city walls, the orange-trees were to be seen simply laden with fruit, the dark green foliage presenting a strange contrast to the clusters of rich yellow fruit. How beautiful are her old grey towers, and seminaries, and convents! How striking is the contrast between their crumbling walls and the dark leaf and golden clustering fruit of the orange-trees that grow under their shade! But how different from an English Christmas landscape—I mean, of a typical Christmas, when the leafless trees are white with hoar-frost, and the moon shines clear and cold overhead, and even the grass is crisp under the traveller's hasty homeward feet. A few miles from Cordoba the orange-trees are gone, and nothing is seen for miles and miles but undulating hills, to all appearance barren, and certainly treeless. These plains and slopes are now, owing to the lack of rain this season, as hard and dry and full of cracks as in the heat of summer; but they are covered with the growth of a peculiar weed, something like a dry thistle—so dry that the spark from a cigar will kindle half an acre into a blaze. Wild and desolate indeed are these undulating steppes, and one can hardly believe that crops of wheat have even been garnered in from them—at present, I can compare them to nothing but the skeleton of a wheat-field; while stand-

ing up out of these tall thistles every now and then you come upon ten or twelve low, clumsy, shapeless pillars of stone, each about eight feet high, planted in an oval shape. For what purpose they were originally used I know not, but they lend a strange picturesqueness to the wildness of the scene. Here are one or two Christmas landscapes as we pass along. On one side, purple and hazy in the dim distance, stretches the wild range of the Sierra Morena; all around you are slopes upon slopes, naked, save from the spectral thistles that clothe their sides; the winter sun is just sinking with a red defiant glare, behind yon thistled hill; one or two stars are just showing in the cold, blue, steely, cloudless sky; just at your feet, abutting on the railway, are the crumbling ruins of some old Moorish building, the past and the present blended in a grotesque union; along the one winding path across the brow of a hill, a goatherd is leading his flock of kids and goats; his wife, in bright yellow (Judas's colour!) dress of flannel, is riding on her ass a few paces behind. It is Christmas, yet their forms are half lost in a cloud of dust; the air is dry, steely, and cold, and they are anxious to get to their little home beneath the old Moorish tower of El Carpio.

By moonlight, seen from the railway, the town of El Carpio is exceedingly picturesque. I saw it once—a dull group of stone houses clustering around its huge quaint Moorish tower, the crescent moon just rising behind the barren hill on whose summit it stands. For miles and miles around are undulating hills, covered with dusky olive-groves. Those who expect great beauty in the olive-groves will be wofully disappointed; there is nothing to see in the grey-leaved, the nutrient olive, but long, regular rows of

runty trees, something like the pollard-willows of English home scenery, standing in plains of red sand scantily covered with withered grass. Here is another scene, that shall bring me to my subject, for it was the first little herald of Christmas drawing near. At a small station, not far from Pedro Abad, a grey-haired mother came with her son—her *boy* she called him, though he was a manly-looking young giant of five or six and twenty summers—who was going to pass (so she said) his first Christmas away from home. "We shall miss you, dear boy, on Noche-Buena; but we shall pray for you on that sacred night in church." She clasped "her boy" in her arms ere he got into the carriage, and mother and son had a last kiss! It was a touching sight this: her pale, care-worn face, set in rich iron-grey hair, her glistening eye, and her last words,—"Mind you write to papa every week, at least, by 'post'; he will look for a letter so anxiously. *Con Dios.*" It brought back to my own mind the memory of other days, and of a mother's tenderness, and anxious care, and parting words, when she too—I mean my own mother—had brought *her* boy to the station, and given much the same parting instructions, and the self-same blessing, "*Con Dios*"—God be with thee, my son! After that, into our carriage jumped a family of the lower class—a father and mother, and three children — going to spend their Pascua with friends at a distance. Each child had a little tambor, like our tambourine, with tinkling bells, and the noise they made was most discordant; for twenty miles they never ceased. We could not hear the sound of our own voices. Here was Christmas on the horizon with a vengeance! Then came in a young artisan, off to spend his Pascua at his own home, his pockets,

as he said, "full of money." He was overflowing with good-humour, and jumped out at every station to buy a fresh bottle of white aguardiente, which is a kind of brandy and aniseed. It is the spirit chiefly drunk by the middle and lower classes in Spain, and is, when good, a capital cordial. Fishermen, and miners, and other labourers, like to have a glass of this, which is so cheap as to be within the reach of all, before commencing work in the morning. This young fellow walked round and round the carriage, and, getting over the partitions, insisted on every one drinking out of his bottle. He always gave me the first sip, because, as he said, "You are a stranger." When are the Spanish poor anything but courteous? Again and again I begged off; but, no, drink I must. "Come, señor, señor, just a drop more; Christmas is coming, and it only 'comes once a year.'" I did not like it; but I like still less the thought of offending a good-natured friend, so I took a pull at each of the *five* fresh bottles, each, as he said, with a shout of triumph, "better than the last." I thought differently, and could only think of Mr. Curzon's adventure, recounted in his interesting work on monasteries, when the Prior pressed him to eat some particularly delicious soup. Mr. Curzon tasted one mouthful—it was nauseous in the extreme—and then professed *he could not think of depriving his host of such a treat*, "it was so good." "For that very reason I insist upon your eating *every morsel*, adorable friend; I will even stand by and see you eat it to the last drop." My own case, I thought, was a similar one.

On the morning of Noche-Buena I awoke, despite the aguardiente, in a little township of the interior, ready to see and observe all that was to be seen and

observed. It is a busy little town this whence I write, and the streets and Plaza were crowded with buyers and sellers; the boot shops were crammed, as also were the linen-drapers' stores, and the sweetmeat and grocery shops. From all the country round the poor had come to buy their clothes, and boots, and Christmas dinner. Truly it was a most picturesque and motley crowd through which I had to thread my way. All down the streets, squatting on the narrow strips of pavement, where there was any pavement, were the beggars, most of them wrapped in their huge woollen mantas, or rugs, with a coloured handkerchief pinned over their heads—a very dirty one, in most cases. One showed the half-raw stump of an amputated leg; another, a scalded arm; a third was blind. From one and all arose the same cry, "Give me, sir, for the love of God, a trifle, and may He grant you for ever good health. I haven't got a cuarto (farthing) for my Christmas dinner." Giving to beggars in Spain is more desirable than giving in England, I always have considered, for, in the first place, they have not always the chance of a meal and shelter in the workhouse (such as it is) of their districts; and, in the second, they are recognized as an institution.

Time was when "begging-tickets" were given, although that system has been since discontinued. I make it a rule to give sometimes, and ask in return that they will remember me in their prayers, and perhaps they do. At any rate, I often feel that other hands are paddling my little canoe when I am too weak to paddle it for myself. Perhaps the poor Spanish beggar's prayers are offered and prevail; who knows? Here was a Valencian peasant, in his canvas suit, with his wife in glaring yellow dress,

buying boots for their young ones; here, in the sweetmeat shop, were mothers and nurses buying lumps of turron for their pets at home; here, in the grocery shop, was a swarm of working-men buying goats'-milk cheese. Donkeys laden with panniers full of gaudy cloths and flannels, or with pitchers of water, or oil, or vinegar, or with baskets of fruit, or cheese, or turron, all were standing about the street. The whole scene may best be described thus :—clouds of dust blowing; hundreds of women in dresses of the coarsest, but most gaudy—bright yellow and red predominated—in colour, all shouting and screaming to get their needs supplied at the lowest price; heaps of fruit, chestnuts, walnuts, pomegranates, potatoes, sweet batatas of Malaga, lying at every street corner; a blazing hot sun, but bitter, searching east wind; men in every variety of uncouth dress, all, without exception, smoking and shouting,—this, with numbers of children sucking turron and sugar-plums, and playing upon their tambores and zambombas, was the sight that greeted my eyes on the morning of Christmas-Eve. Every woman had a red or yellow kerchief as head-dress, every child a tambor or zambomba in its hands; all were laughing, screaming, elbowing, bargaining, or smoking—such a busy, gaudy, animated scene I never before have witnessed. The turron and zambomba are characteristic of a Spanish Christmas, and must have a few lines devoted to them in this place. "Turron" is much the same as the Turkish sweetmeat called "halvak": it is a kind of white rock, made of pressed almonds, sugar, and meal, and is the great Spanish sweetmeat. In all the sweetmeat shops you can buy it by the ounce or

pound at Christmas time. Sometimes it is flavoured with one thing, sometimes with another. It is always a most luscious mouthful, but too clogging for an English palate. The best is the "turron de alicante"; but the kind bought by the lower orders is made in a homely way of honey, barley-meal, and whole almonds stuck in it. The love of sugar-plums and all sorts of sweetmeats is quite a passion with Spanish ladies. They eat a great deal of sweet things and drink a great deal of water; and, as a rule, when they get to about forty, they become very stout—the sweetmeats are fattening, I suppose.

As to the "zambomba," one of which is now lying on my table, it is the most primitive musical instrument you ever saw. It is an earthen pot, something like a flower-pot, varying in size from very small to very large and unwieldy. One end of this little earthen vessel is open to the air, over the other end is stretched a piece of parchment; a hole is cut in the parchment, and a reed, that is, about six or eight inches of the stem of a strong reed, is inserted into the hole, and hermetically sealed. You carry the zambomba by the reed, which sticks out. All you have to do to play this instrument is to wet your fingers with water, (must I say spittle?) and rub them up and down the protruding stem of the reed; a hollow, rumbling, hideous noise, called in Spain "rom, rom, rom," is produced. So popular is this instrument, that as you pass up and down a Spanish street, you hear in almost every house the "rom, rom, rom" of the zambombas. These can be bought at any little stall in the market, and they only cost from twopence to two shillings. The noise of the zambombas, the wild Andalucian ditties,

the laughter and shouts from every house, as you pass up a Spanish street after nightfall on Christmas-Eve, are most striking. In the Plaza, or market-square, the stalls of fruit, toys, and sweetmeats are all decked out with gay ribbons and artificial flowers. The piles of pomegranates show a little more than formerly of their russet hue, the piles of melons are supplanted by chestnuts and batatas, but of fruit there is still no lack. But the buying and selling of the little sucking-kids is a noticeable feature—"cabritas," they are called; and here is a drove of the pretty little animals being handled, petted, weighed, bargained for, and then driven or carried home. This is the poor man's Christmas dinner,—with herbs and good cooking a savoury morsel. One of them can be bought for about three pesetas and a half, *i.e.*, about three English shillings. The churches were decked with gay ribbons and artificial flowers, the bells were clanging throughout the day for the frequent services. Let me mention two more Christmas dishes in Spain, the "pavo trufado," or truffled turkey, and the heaps of almonds and cocoa-nut biscuits. The luscious comestibles are, from their rich oily nature, to the Spaniard, in his dry but cold winter, what the rich blubber is to the Esquimaux in the far and frozen north. Nature (*dux optima*) teaches both the unlettered folks what the special need of their bodies is at each special season of the year.

Evening drew on, and about four some of the shops began to close; the streets gradually grew quieter and quieter; women were walking slowly home, basket on arm, laden with fruit, and meat, and boots, and at the top of each basket lay what appeared to be a white stocking stuffed full of something. This is the little

Christmas present laid upon the child's pillow at early morning; and when the little thing with waking eyes first opens its treasure, it looks up, and says "Thanks to Father Christmas for that." Boot, biscuits, and ripe apples were the contents of one stocking I opened. But every foot was homeward turned to eat the Christmas evening meal before going to the midnight misa at the churches. As a rule, the Spaniard does not drink heavily at this season, but eats his meals peacefully with his wife and children, and spends the evening with them over the glowing embers of the brasero, until his church-bell at midnight summons him to prayers. At half-past ten, after smoking a peaceful pipe with a friend, I walked up the deserted and dark, but far from silent, streets. The night was pitch dark, the east wind blowing bitterly; the tiny oil lamps, stuck here and there, were showing their sickly light; from every house came gay, wild ditties, and the scraping "rom, rom, rom" of the zambombas, and the tinkle of guitar, or the rattle of the tambores, half drowned in shouts of joyous laughter. One or two noisy men were quarrelling at the door of a wine-shop, whom I avoided with hasty steps. Services were being held in the churches.

There is one feature I will notice before passing on to the midnight misa of the Church. In the interior, many of the houses have one window, generally a small bow-window, fronting the street. The strictly religious put in it the image of some saint who is their patron, or from whom they have received a benefit; and on every night of a Saint's Day, and sometimes in the day-time, two or four candles burn at the side of the image. The passer-by can either doff his hat, cross himself, or

take no heed. This showed that the house is the home of a religious Catholic. Need I say that on Christmas-Eve these little glass temples were all lighted up? I could not attend the midnight service, so I asked a friend who dwelt hard by the church to go for me. He went at a little before twelve. The church was full; the service orderly; the people of all classes. There were muleteers, wrapped in their blue and white checked rugs; here, Spanish gentlemen, enveloped in their graceful capas, or capes, the universal great-coat of the interior, a long cape reaching to his ankles, lined with rich fur or velvet, wrapped and buckled round the body, and then, with a twist, thrown over the shoulder; here, again, were crowds of the commonest people,—miners, fruit-sellers, servants, and the like,—the women kneeling on the rush matting of the dimly-lit church, the men standing in dark masses behind, or clustering in groups round every pillar. Each one, as he entered, dipped his hand into the little vessel at the door, and reverently crossed himself with holy water. The most noticeable features were the several altars in a blaze of light; the rich, or at least gaudy, dresses of the officiating priests; and the whirr—I can call it nothing else—of hundreds of nimble fingers, as of one crossing the forehead, at every most solemn part of the service. At last, from under the altar, the senior priest (I take it to have been the senior) took out the image of the Babe New-born reverently and slowly, and held it up in his hands for adoration. Instantly every one crossed himself, and fell on his knees in silent worship. A few moments were allowed for silent prayer. Of music there was little. The priest, kneeling at the altar, offered aloud his supplications

for all, and Noche-Buena was over. Slowly, and in groups of three or four, the worshippers left the church, and picked their dark road home.

Wherever one is, it is dear to one to see honour done to Him who brought "peace" on the earth, and goodwill to men! Yes; and far more than peace and goodwill. To Him who taught us that mankind are brethren, and their God is Love; to Him who bade us regard *all* men as brothers; to Him, who, coming as a poor man, has shed everlasting honour on the lot of poverty—a lot, until His time, despised and rejected of men; to Him who has for ever sanctified toil, and trial, and disappointment, and suffering; to Him who has brought us near to our loved and lost ones, and shown men how to work, and suffer, and pray,

> "Till with the morn those angel faces smile
> Which we have loved long since, and lost awhile,"—

yes, it is sweet to see honour done to Him, whether it be in the simple and intelligible services of our dear old English ivy-wreathed church, or by the whirr of speechless hands, where the cloaked crowd of Spaniards stand in mute worship in the dark aisles. Wherever it be, it is sweet to see honour done to Him. Life's cheerful halting-places at best are few, and of short duration. Noche-Buena had soon fled by, and on Christmas-Day I strolled out once more. The market-place was more busy than ever, every shop was loud with traffic; but the bells were clanging still, and I joined the throng that pressed towards the principal church. It was dark, but its altars were lit. Its aisles and nave were about half full. There were the same dark, kneeling forms of women in front, the

same motley crowd of men, who came and went out at pleasure, behind. Suddenly a little bell rang—I know not for what—and the whirr and rustle of hundreds of crossing hands was like the sound of a flight of doves, when one scares them at night from the bare trees of the wintry wood. All through Christmas-Day the shops were crowded with buyers, all through Christmas-Day the streets rang with wild music. At night I said to an old Spanish peasant, "Haven't you had enough holiday?"—"No, Señor," said he; "there are other Saints' Days coming, and when you think that at this time God Himself came down to give us 'liberty,' *you* will not think it too much."

"Vaya usted con Dios" is my New Year's wish, for you, gentle reader, whoever you are.

CHAPTER XXV.

"PEACE ON EARTH, GOODWILL TO MEN."

"PEACE on earth, goodwill to men" was not, alas! the burden of our Christmas carol and our New Year's greeting in the wilds of the interior. How often, since that day when the angels sang songs of peace and joy, has the Divine Christmas greeting seemed an idle mockery, when the pale moon is looking down on fields of the suffering and the slain; or on the widow and the orphan crouching over the half-empty grate; or, as was the case but just now in Spain, on disquietude, and plotting, and anxiety of every sort, misrule, disorder, and conspiracy, "men's hearts failing them for fear."

A few Christmas episodes in our life in the interior might, I have thought, prove of sufficient interest to warrant me in jotting them down, without comment or adornment.

I was travelling much, both by day and by night, about Christmas time, and the most unobservant eye could not fail to see sufficient indications of some extraordinary movement. The Guardias Civiles, preservers of law and order throughout Spain, were being shifted about in bodies from place to place. Here, a body of twenty, wrapped in their huge capas, rifle in hand and sword-bayonet by side, with their keen dark eyes scrutinizing every fresh face, would enter the railway carriage; at another station two, with a

prisoner, would join them, silent and stern as ever. Every honest man welcomes and respects these brave, clever, truthful, sober, indefatigable preservers of peace and justice; they are a terror only to evil-doers!

I have already given a slight sketch of the services which these men are ever ready to perform, but I will recur to the subject again. Before Señor Martinez de la Rosa, the well-known author of "Poems for Children," and other poems, came to be connected with the Cabinet of Christina, he was robbed on the highway. When he came into power he was instrumental in forming a body of guards who, mounted or on foot, should keep the roads free from banditti. They were dressed after the fashion of the French gendarmerie, probably owing to the French influence then prevailing at Court, and numbered, at first, some five or six thousand. These men are chosen for (1) having been steady and good soldiers; (2) height and strength; (3) education; but they have all served in the regular army for a certain time, and are equally able to hunt in couples as policemen, or in large bodies as regular troops. Their pay is two pesetas per diem, and an allowance, if mounted, for fodder for their horses. Their chief occupation, of late, has been not so much to suppress robbery in the camp as to quarter themselves in disaffected towns, and prevent outbreaks and licences.

Men *kept* their Christmas time as usual: outwardly all was noise, and festivity, and glitter; but every eye was looking forward to one day—the day on which the Cortes would re-assemble, and demand of Emilio Castelar an account of his arduous but nobly fulfilled stewardship.

Strange whispers went about. Every Spaniard is a

politician, whether he light his errant watch-fire, and strew his rough bed to leeward of a clump of prickly pear or aloe; or, wrapped in his manta, pass his nights on the stone floor of the roadside venta; or sip coffee in his casino among his sympathizers (for each casino is devoted to a separate phase of politics); or smoke his scented Havana over the brasero of his palacio—whatever be his rank or station, he is a politician, and believes it to be his duty to interfere in the affairs of his country.

I heard one poor man—very poor, very ignorant—say, "Castelar will come down. He promised to sever Church and State, and give us liberty of thought; *he has not done so!* He promised to do away—oh vast expense and useless tax!—with a standing army; *he has not done so.*" And the poor old fellow's tattered coat shook with indignation, and his eye grew moist with a tear as he said, "Poor Spain!" This sentiment about Castelar's non-fulfilment of his promise is a stereotyped one; I am constantly hearing it among the lower orders.

Speculations as to what change would take place on the 2nd and 3rd of January were rife among us. Some believed power would be left with the Intransigentes; some, but few, that Castelar would continue Dictator for a few weeks, provisionally; some, that the "Infant" would be placed upon the throne. "Pi y Margall and the Cantonal system" was the watch-word of the lower orders.

Strange photographs went up in the streets, the most remarkable of which I here transcribe: it is one of large dimensions, costing three or four pesetas. In one corner stands on a white pedestal a draped and graceful woman, flaring torch in hand, representing

Liberty; on the pedestal is written, in French, "Les droits de"—I cannot decipher; bareheaded, or waving hats in the air, comes to her feet a long winding procession of men, women, and children in working dress, the end of the long, snake-like line being lost in the distant hills; a church stands by—they disregard it; one solitary ploughman stops his oxen to wave his hat. Far away is the distant sea, with one or two flying sails and the smoke of a steamer upon its calm bosom. At intervals, to the very end of the long line of human beings, are carried banners; on the first is written "Francia" (considered by all Spaniards the champion of civil liberty); on the second, "España"; on the third, "Autriche"; on the fourth, "Siciles"; then "Romagna"; on the rest the letters are too dim to be deciphered.

In the foreground is a mass of crowns, sceptres, handcuffs, codes, &c., lying broken and in confusion on the ground, and looking like—what at first glance I deemed them to be—a heap of stones.

But the most striking feature of the photograph has yet to come. Borne on the clouds of heaven, float gently earthward hosts of angel-forms, some pen in hand, as though coming to chronicle the new era of *La Libertad;* some pouring upon earth their rich cornucopias of fruit and flowers. In the midst of this heavenly host, a huge lion crouching beneath His feet, which are half-veiled in clouds, stands in majestic repose the figure of our blessed Lord; His right hand is raised to bless; in His left hand He bears His cross; and upon His head is the crown of thorns. Above this Divine Rostro the clouds are bright, and in shadowy, yet plain, letters shines out of them the inscription—"Fraternité."