

the wall behind him with a great crash, and poured a deluge of blood-red liquid over his neck, shoulders, and white vestments. In a trice he sprang up, a gory figure instead of a clean and trim little man; and rushing upon the mozo with a howl of rage, the twain grappled together in the true worrying style. The rest of the company as quickly jumped to their feet, and throwing themselves upon the pair, endeavoured to part them; but in trying to effect this, they only impeded each other's efforts, and for the next two minutes a mass of ten or twelve human beings might be seen tugging, hauling, and straining at each other's throats, apparently for no conceivable object, and all the while reeling about the room. To complete the effect of the scene, the terrified hostess revolved round the struggling group with a sort of dancing step, uttering doleful "Ayes de mi!" and putting up many a prayer to the Virgin. All this was highly diverting to me, until the mass surged into my corner, and, upsetting the table, scattered my breakfast on the floor: then, indeed, the whole affair assumed quite a different aspect, and I thought it shameful that people could not meet in a venta without engaging in unseemly brawls, and, what was worse, depriving me of my repast. At last the fray was brought to a close: the originators of it, being drawn asunder by two or three peacemakers, were held apart at a few paces from each other, and stood breathing hard from their exertions, and with countenances less wrathful than before.

"Are you friends?" was the inquiry made them by some of the bystanders, in the way in which that question is put to children who have squabbled and fought with each other—"Are you friends now?"

The pair intimated their assent; and then being re-

leased, rushed once more into each other's arms, not to renew the combat, but to embrace as brothers.

"Moriré por él!" (I will die for him) shouted the little man, as he caught up his tall antagonist, and swung him round and round in a fit of ardent affection; then the company resumed their seats, and peace was re-established.

As we wended our way from the venta, I questioned my muleteer as to what he would have done had the brawlers used their navajas, and the life of one been taken.

"I would have made off as quickly as possible," said he; "and the same would all the others have done."

"And would you have left the man weltering in his blood?"

"Without doubt," he replied.

There was reason in this. According to the old law of Spain, he who was found in the vicinity of a murdered man was liable to be considered as the guilty person, and had to prove his innocence ere he recovered his liberty. From this it followed, that as soon as a man fell wounded in some broil, everybody fled from the spot—the innocent bystanders as well as the murderer—lest the justicia should bear them to prison: even those who might have wished to act the part of good Samaritans, were deterred by like apprehensions from drawing nigh, so that the stricken wretch not unfrequently perished from want of timely assistance. I am not aware if this law has been altered, but the feeling it engendered yet exists, and people are rather shy of meddling with the bleeding work of assassins or brawlers.

The road from Baza to Guadix is marked in the map as a royal highway, and practicable for carriages; and

truly we did meet one solitary vehicle, a tartana, or light covered cart, the sight of which being a rarity in these regions, so startled my mule that she sprang down a steep slope, and the rider being carelessly seated sideways, sent him rolling down the declivity. Nevertheless, I would counsel no four-wheeled vehicle to try this route, which only differs from a mule-track in being a little wider, and in displaying a little less of the staircase fashion by which these paths ascend and descend the mountain acclivities. The scenery at the same time began to smooth its rugged front, and the grim sierras, which we had unceasingly encountered during the preceding days, now ceased to cross our way; the slopes became longer, and were sprinkled with olive woods; and for the last hour of our journey we moved along a valley, glimpses of an open country extending before us.

At length Guadix came into view, being, like Baza, invisible until close at hand, and for the same reason: its site lay in a hollow sunk beneath the level of the surrounding expanse, and the first objects that one beheld were its grey roofs covering an irregular space in the midst of fruit-trees and foliage. Both this town and Baza were places of note during the last days of the Moorish kingdom, and enthusiastically supported the cause of Abdalah el Zagal against his nephew, Boabdil the Unlucky. The fiery spirit of the Zagal appears to have been more congenial to their population than the weak and vacillating temper of Boabdil, for both places resisted their fate with a valour worthy of their conquering founders. Baza capitulated after a six months' siege; and although Guadix was not exposed to similar trial, being surrendered without a struggle by the Zagal, its warlike renown secured it favourable terms, and it

had the honour of being the last but one of the Moslem cities to strike the Crescent to the Cross : the last was the capital itself.

Once more in Granada, after a twelve hours' march under a fiery sun. How enchanting was the brilliant green of its vega, to eyes which for hours had contended with the dazzling light, and shrunk from the hot glare reflected by naked and tawny rocks and withered steeps ! All day long our route was by the base of a sierra, which, rising less abruptly than the others in this region, presented none of the bold features by which they are converted from desolate elevations into striking mountain masses : its aspect was therefore uninteresting and drear, and as we slowly advanced, the effect of its presence was as if we were linked to a cheerless but inseparable companion. Again, to the south swelled upwards the Sierra Nevada, vast, soaring, and dark : from this, the northern side, its aspect is far more imposing than from the other ; the precipices are loftier, the slopes more abrupt, and the towering Veleta itself shoots upwards with a bolder front. No mountain that I have yet seen rests so completely as does this upon mere vastness and altitude for the impression it creates. It disdains the effects derived from the usual embellishments of mountain scenery : vainly does the eye search for the pine-clad steeps, the shady glens, the torrents and foaming cascades, the purple heaths, and the ruined castles that diversify the stony exterior of other alpine heights ; neither were glaciers to be seen, nor snowy peaks with their cold brightness and reflected gleams ; but the blackness of night clothed the mountain from the base to the summit, and it rose grandly in a succession of stupendous walls, till a solitary pinnacle alone pierced the deep blue of heaven. The effect of

a lofty elevation thus dressed as it were in a sable pall from head to foot was indescribably striking, and as a picture of mournful sublimity it would be difficult to find its parallel.

To the southward and eastward of the Veleta lay the district of the Alpuxarras, as it is defined by Spanish geographers; and within its limits are comprehended the highest ranges of the Sierra Nevada. Desirous as I was of penetrating into this rugged region, I found it closed to me by the intense heat which reigned in its narrow valleys. I was compelled, therefore, to depart from my original intention, and to limit my wanderings to the lower elevations that surround its confines. Even then the hardships one suffered sometimes overpowered every other consideration, and the scenery was occasionally forgotten while passing through the fiery furnace of some ravine, or scaling a rocky steep in the full blaze of the sun.

Granada I had left as stirless and lethargic as a venerable capital ought to be; but on my return there was so unusual an excitement and bustle observable, that it seemed as if the genius of the Albaycin, that focus of revolt during the Moorish domination, had suddenly awakened from his sleep of centuries, and breathed his spirit into the gesticulating groups that occupied the plazas and corners of the streets. For, perhaps, the twentieth time in its short constitutional existence, it had "pronounced" in favour of some question of national policy, and against the administration, so that its present attitude was that of declared hostility to the ruling powers. Accordingly its worthy citizens had voted themselves into a state of war; and great were their preparations in consequence. There was much beating of drums in various quarters of the city,

and columns of "nacionales" were tramping through the streets every half hour; the shops were shut at an earlier hour than usual, the city gates doubly guarded, and all who entered rigorously examined. All this had been effected without bloodshed—if we except one citizen soldier, accidentally slain by a brother "nacional;" and, in truth, it is rare to hear of a "pronunciamento" being accompanied with the realities of a conflict. If the movement corresponds with the general tone of feeling in the country, similar demonstrations are sure to take place in the other large towns, and then the fate of the administration may be considered as decided; but if it is only an isolated expression of sentiment, which fails to elicit support from its neighbours, the "pronouncers," who are generally peace-loving shopkeepers, on seeing this, drop the musket and their politics, return to the counter, and submit to anything rather than fight for their opinions. A few years ago the city of Seville pronounced and declared, by the voices of some thousands of her national guards, that she wished a change of ministry. In a few days she perceived that she stood alone; and her citizens did not well know what to do, until the Governor of Cadiz settled the matter. He despatched four hundred of the regular troops, whose appearance worked like a charm upon the thousands of brave "nationals." Not a shot was fired in anger; and when this handful of men entered the city, the "pronouncers" were nowhere to be seen, having acted upon the principle, that "He who runs away, may live to 'pronounce' another day."

CHAPTER XVIII.

ROUTE TO RONDA.—ARCHIDONA.—THE CLOTH-MERCHANT.—ANTEQUERA.—THE KIDNAPPERS DISCOVERED.—THE MOORISH LOVERS.—SALT LAKE.—CAMPILLOS.—THE DEATH OF THE DOUGLAS.—THE SHRINE.—ASPECT OF RONDA.—THE CHASM.—THE MINA.—CHARACTER OF THE SERRANOS.—THE DISMANTLED VENTA.

NEXT day I was traversing the vega, Gibraltar being my bourne. My muleteer was a Granadino who had accompanied me on ascending the Veleta, and on that occasion, as well as some others, proved himself worthy of confidence. I shall pass over the vega in silence, being now thrice-trodden ground, and begin my comments at a point a short way to the westward of Loxa. Between that town and Archidona extends an undulating country abandoned to cheerless wastes, which sometimes give place to groves of the sombre olive. As we neared the latter town, Juan pointed out a rugged track ascending the mountain by which it is overshadowed. This he said was once a road, and was constructed in one night by the forces of Ferdinand and Isabella, in order to facilitate the transport of the artillery employed in battering the castle, which crowns an isolated peak rising from the skirts of the mountain. The town is situated on a slope, and boasts of something more than a principal street, for on traversing this, between convents on either side, we passed under an arch, and entered a tolerably handsome plaza, of an octagon shape. Here was

situated the posada, which was rather superior to the generality of Andalusian inns.

In the course of the evening, as I was sitting in my apartment, there entered a stranger, whom I recognised as an itinerant cloth-merchant I had seen below, tending the mules on which his bales were conveyed. "Usted está solico, señor," said he, in a tone that expressed pity for my loneliness; and then, without further preface, took possession of the other end of the wooden bench on which I was seated; and which, by the way, together with a table, completed the whole furniture of the room.

"Voy á hacer á usted dos o tres preguntitas"—(I am going to ask you two or three little questions)—"I have got some cargas of Spanish cloth, and I wish to know if it would sell to advantage in the Plaza" (Gibraltar). I replied, that I could not give him the information he desired, as I had never visited the fortress, and was only on my way thither; but knowing the inferiority of Spanish to English cloth, I recommended him not to make the attempt. His system of business was a simple one. At the commencement of summer he started with his cargas of cloth from Catalonia, and wandered from town to town to the furthest limits of the kingdom. When the stock was all disposed of, he then sold his mules, returned homewards to spend the winter, and on the following summer started with a fresh cargo. "Now," continued he, "I am going to count my money: that I dare not do in presence of the gente below, in case—" and thereupon, drawing his hand in a significant manner across his throat, he indicated the fate that awaited it should he display his gold before their eyes. Unwinding the long sash round his waist, he extracted a leathern bag from a pouch at one end,

and poured its glittering contents on the table. I remarked among the gold pieces a goodly number of onzas, and drew the inference that his wanderings had not been unprofitable. Then restoring the bag to its place in the girdle, the usual purse of Spaniards in his rank of life, he folded it round his body, and wishing me a journey on the morrow "without novelty," took his departure.

On the following morning we were skirting a portion of the great plain of the Guadalquivir. On the left hand stretched the precipitous ranges by which it is bounded on the south, but in the opposite direction the horizon receded into the far distance, enclosing a wide tract of the level but fertile region. About a league from Archidona a lonely mass of rock rises loftily from the plain, and presents on the western side a perpendicular cliff. This is called the "Peña de los Enamorados," the "Rock of the Lovers;" and though I questioned Juan and some other travellers who had joined us regarding the origin of this romantic title, neither legend nor moving incident could I elicit, and, in default thereof, I must leave the reader's imagination to supply one. Then, a league further on, came Antequera, picturesquely resting in a hollow between two mountain ridges; on its northern side extended a broad belt of olive plantations, among which white cottages gleamed; and on the outskirts of the dark mass of foliage there were scattered farm-houses, each one a picture of rural wealth and security. Such a prospect is rare in Andalucia, and was the more striking here from its contrast to the general aspect of the country on the right, which, though fertile, had all the features of a weary land, wherein no green leaf nor great rock threw its friendly shade.

The inhabitants of Antequera enjoy the reputation of being "muy mala gente"—so affirmed a couple of farmers who rode beside us, and vied with each other in recounting tales of their lawless deeds. Robbery, in all its branches, was the favourite profession of the sons of Antequera; and besides being proficient in the usual methods of gaining a livelihood by this means, they had displayed an adroitness, peculiar to themselves, in kidnapping travellers and residents, in order to extract a ransom from their friends. Sometimes, but very rarely, it happened that discovery followed their attempts, so ingeniously were their plans laid; but on one occasion, when an abduction had been successfully effected, the perpetrators were detected in the following manner.

A party had seized and carried off the son of a gentleman in the neighbourhood, and had succeeded in conveying him without discovery to a house in the town. By blindfolding the individuals thus seized, and conducting them by circuitous routes, and under cover of night, it was rendered impossible for the keenest eye to trace their retreat; and the individuals themselves, on being released, were equally at a loss to know where they had been confined, for the same precautions were taken on their being set at liberty. In like manner, no clue likely to lead to detection was to be obtained within the place of durance itself, as the captives were confined to a chamber from which every prospect was carefully excluded. So it fared ill with this young man, who wearily passed some days and nights in his darkened apartment, seeing nothing, hearing nothing, and a prey to anxiety regarding his fate. One day, however, he heard a scream in the adjoining house, where hitherto all had been silence; and putting his ear to the wall, was enabled to distinguish the voices and even the

words of the speakers. The outcry arose from a woman having fallen on the staircase and broken a leg. Among the various directions and orders to which the accident gave rise, his ear caught the command to run for the doctor, whose name was mentioned at length. This information he treasured up, and so on being liberated it was no difficult matter to ascertain the address of the doctor, and from him learn where the accident had occurred. Afterwards the justicia were put upon the scent; and "por fin," added my informant, the evildoers were recognised and condemned to ten years of presidio.

I had, however, been accustomed to connect Antequera in my thoughts with associations of a very different and more pleasing character than those suggested by such stories as the preceding, and could not so readily bring my mind to admit the idea that it was little better than a den of thieves and kidnappers. My prepossessions were founded on the following touching incident of the olden times, in which the name of the town is introduced. The tale is related by Conde at the conclusion of his *Historia de la Dominacion de los Arabes en España*.

At the time when Antequera was in possession of the Christians, and was a frontier post against the kingdom of Granada, its alcaide was a caballero named Narvaez. As was customary, he made inroads upon the territory of Granada, sometimes in person, but at other times by followers whom he despatched for that end; the same custom prevailed among the Granadinos upon that frontier district. It came to pass on one occasion, that Narvaez despatched certain horsemen to scour the country; and these, setting forth at a suitable hour, penetrated far within the confines of Granada. Through-

out their journey they found no other prize than a valiant youth, who was proceeding in the manner that shall be here told; and, as it was night, he was prevented from escaping, for he unexpectedly encountered the horsemen of Narvaez: and so, as they perceived that no more prey was to be gained, and being furthermore apprised by their captive that the campiña was cleared, on the following morning they returned to Ronda and presented him to their chief. The youth was of the age of twenty-two or twenty-three years, a caballero, and of graceful appearance; he wore a surcoat of purple silk elegantly ornamented, and a short but very fine toque over a scarlet bonnet; his horse was of the best, and he bore a lance and target wrought in the style of those carried by the principal Moors. Narvaez inquired of him who he was, and he replied that he was the son of the alcaide of Ronda, who was well known to the Christians for a valiant warrior. Being questioned whither he was proceeding, he returned no answer, but wept so much that tears impeded his utterance. Said Narvaez, "I marvel much that thou, who art a cavalier, and the son of so valiant a father, shouldst be so overcome, and, knowing that these are the ordinary misfortunes of war, shouldst thus weep like a woman, while thy mien is that of a soldier and caballero."

"I do not weep," answered the Moor, "because I am in captivity, nor for being thy prisoner, nor are these tears for the loss of my liberty; but for another and a greater loss, which afflicts me more than the state in which I now see myself."

On hearing these words, Narvaez pressed him to unfold the cause of his grief, and the Moor continued:

"Know, then, that for a long time I have loved the

daughter of the alcaide of such a castle, and have served her loyally, many times fighting in her behalf against you Christians; and she, recognising these obligations, was resolved to become my bride, and had intimated to me her willingness to accompany me to my home, leaving that of her father for the love of me; and while I was proceeding, overjoyed, and anticipating the completion of my happiness, it so pleased my evil destiny that I should be surprised by your horsemen, and should be bereft of liberty, and the happiness and good fortune I promised myself. If this appears to thee a thing unworthy of tears, I know not how to show the sorrow that fills me."

So great was the commiseration felt by Narvaez, that he said, "Thou art a caballero; and if as a cavalier thou engagest to return to duresse, I will grant thee leave upon thy word and honour."

The Moor assented, and, giving his parole, departed; and that night reached the castle where his lady was, and found means to apprise her that he had arrived. She, on her part, contrived to afford him an opportunity of conversing privately; but all the discourse of the Moor was a torrent of tears, unaccompanied by words. The lady, amazed at the sight, said, "How is this? Dost thou lament now that thy wishes may be realised, and thou hast it in thy power to bear me hence?"

But the Moor answered: "Know, that as I was coming to see thee, I was captured by the horsemen of Ronda, who carried me to Narvaez; and he, like a worthy caballero, on learning my evil fate, took compassion on me, and on my word of honour granted me leave to see thee. And thus I come, not as a free man, but as a slave: and since my liberty is gone, God forbid that, loving you as I do, I should bear thee

where thine would be lost also ; I will return, for I have pledged my word, and will seek to ransom myself and visit thee again."

The Moorish lady then said : " Hitherto thou hast testified thy affection, and now thou givest the best proof of it, having so deep a regard for my liberty ; but since thou art so worthy a caballero as to study what is due to me and to thy plighted word, God forbid that I should be the wife of any one but thee. And although thou mayest refuse, I will yet accompany thee ; and if thou art to be a slave, I shall be one also ; and if God shall give thee liberty, he will give it to me likewise. Here is a coffer with very precious jewels : take me behind thee on thy steed, for I am well pleased to become the companion of thy misfortunes."

Having said this, she quitted the castle, and he raised her to the croup of his horse ; and on the following day they reached Ronda, and presented themselves before Narvaez, who received them with distinction and entertained them with festivities, making them presents, and celebrating the love of the Moorish lady and the honour and truth of the Moor ; and on the following day he gave them licence to return in freedom to their own land, and caused them to be escorted until they were placed in safety. This adventure—the affection of the damsel and of the Granadino, and, above all, the generosity of Narvaez, was much celebrated by the good cavaliers of Granada, and was sung to verses of the most famous poets of the times.

About two leagues from Antequera appeared the village of Fuente de la Piedra, embosomed in olive woods, which are abundant here ; the country around was well cultivated, and now began to undulate and to rise into gentle slopes, for we were approaching a moun-

tain district. A short way from the last-named village, a lake came into view—a rare sight in Andalusia, and, indeed, in other provinces of Spain; but even had it been less unfrequent, the singular spectacle it exhibited would have attracted the most careless eye. It was a lake of salt, whose surface was covered with a saline incrustation white as snow, that sparkled and glanced in the sunshine as if strewn with diamonds. As salt is a monopoly in the hands of government, this natural manufactory was carefully watched by a band of guardas—Juan said as many as three hundred—lest the article should be abstracted by the surrounding population, and the revenue thereby injured. Such a restriction, like the whole prohibitory system of Spain, only tended to foster smuggling, without benefiting the nation; and here its effects were manifest: we ourselves espied a peasant ensconced along with his burro in a bush, evidently with the design of stealing down to the lake on the first favourable opportunity, and filling the sacks his animal carried. Sometimes the cordon has been broken in a more audacious style. A few years ago there was a rising *en masse* of the country people, by whom the guardas were overpowered and expelled from their stations. Every one then helped himself, and continued to do so for the space of three weeks, during which time there was free access to the lake; at last a detachment of troops came up from Malaga, by whom affairs were restored to their former footing. Such are the “*cosas de España!*” Two leagues more concluded the journey for the day, which terminated at the clean little town of Campillos; its posada was no exception to the general appearance of the pueblo, and proved to be one of the best in Andalusia.

Next morning, after traversing a wide open plain,

with low hills in the distance, we reached the frontier sierras of the mountainous region of Bonda; thenceforward the bold and picturesque replaced the tame scenery of the plain. Our way wound up a pass by a rugged bridle-road, each step of the ascent revealing some new feature of the varied prospect—some peak, crag, or ravine, that had been invisible from below. On looking back, the great plain of the Guadalquivir presented a magnificent panorama of richness and fertility, its broad tracts of cultivation being mingled with gently rising eminences, and the whole diversified with hamlets and villages. At the summit of the pass a new scene was unfolded to our eyes. We looked down upon a deep circular valley, teeming with the signs of successful industry. Olive plantations and orchards clung to its sides; snug farmhouses, shaded by forest trees, occupied conspicuous positions; and surrounding the whole rose a rugged wall of craggy ridges and naked peaks, as barren and sunburnt as the hollow at their feet was green and fruitful. Then, as we proceeded, the castle of this mountain valley made itself visible, perched on the summit of a singular mass of rock that overhung the woody vale below. Its roofless towers and ruined battlements betokened that danger had ceased to lower above the peaceful scene, and that the husbandman no longer sought their shelter from the storm of war; behind it a few cottages peeped forth, half hidden by its dark walls, which concealed from view the pueblo to which they belonged. The name of this fortress and pueblo is Teba Coud; and, uncouth as the words sound, there is to a Scotchman an historic interest connected with them that must make them dear to his national pride. By some writers this secluded vale is made the scene of the gallant achieve-

ment that closed the eventful life of Douglas, the friend and companion in arms of Robert the Bruce. Conde, however, places it before the pueblo of Teba de Ardales, about a league to the southward of this spot. At the time I passed by this route I was unaware of this fact, or even of the existence of another Teba, as the pueblo he mentions is designated in Spanish maps by no other title than Ardales; but though pressed for time, I could not have denied myself the gratification of seeking the field where the "good Sir James" shouted for the last time the war-cry of his house, and resigned his life to the chivalrous impulses of his nature. "Observing a knight of his own company to be surrounded by a body of Moors, who had suddenly rallied, 'Alas!' said he, 'yonder worthy knight shall perish but for present help;' and with the few men who now attended him, amounting to no more than ten, he turned hastily to attempt his rescue. He soon found himself hard pressed by the numbers who thronged upon him. Taking from his neck the silver casquet which contained the heart of Bruce, he threw it before him among the thickest of the enemy, saying, 'Now pass thou onward before us as thou wert wont, and I will follow thee or die.' Douglas and almost the whole of the brave men who fought by his side were here slain. His body and the casquet containing the embalmed heart of Bruce were found together upon the field, and were by his surviving companions conveyed with great care and reverence into Scotland."

The scenery which succeeds this romantic valley is strikingly beautiful, and incomparably superior to anything of the kind in Andalucia. For many a mile it presents a series of unequalled prospects, which, as the track generally led along the summit of elevated ridges,

were at once varied and commanding. Deep valleys clothed with vineyards, corn-fields, and olive-groves, tempted the eye to look down and survey their beauties: and when sated with the smiling scene, it had only to direct a glance upwards to behold villages nestling high among crags and glens, or perched upon woody terraces projecting from the sides of the mountains; or, if willing to rove further, there were picturesque peaks in the distance, blue as the heavens above them, and divested of their natural wildness by the celestial hue they wore. After a ride of six hours I alighted at the Venta del Ciego, feeling somewhat acutely the effects of mountain air upon the appetite. The usual query, "Have you any eggs?" was answered in the negative. "What else?" "Bacalao." Not being disposed to try the stockfish, which in the ventas is more famous for its "ancient and fishlike smell" than for its savoury qualities, I contented myself with a frugal repast of melons and bread, washed down by the strong wine of the neighbourhood. While thus engaged, a peasant entered, and placed in the hands of the host a box of rude workmanship, one side of which was formed of glass instead of wood. The whole company burst out into raptures of admiration at the beauty of the object the case contained. Mine host kissed it reverently, his spouse and children did the same, and all testified the highest veneration for so wonderful a work of art. After being sufficiently lauded, the image—for it was an image of the Virgin that the box enshrined—was handed to me; and my heretical eyes discovered it to be a common doll, imbedded in a profusion of artificial flowers, which, to all appearance, had at one time adorned some fair one's bonnet. The image was highly esteemed for its medical virtues and

was a sovereign remedy against the ills to which cattle, horses, and pigs were subject.

From the venta the track still continued to wind among the finest mountain scenery imaginable, until, on gaining the crest of a high ridge, the towers and spires of Ronda were distinguished. We had, however, ere reaching it, to traverse a broad plain thickly clothed with vineyards and olive-grounds, particularly the latter, which in the vicinity of the town supersede every other description of tree. From this, the northern side, the aspect of Ronda is far from striking, and fails to realise one's ideal of a mountain capital. Its outline of dark walls rises but little above the level of the fertile basin in which it stands; and but for the lofty circle of sierras in the background, and the remembrance of the rugged path he has pursued with hazard and toil, the spectator might fancy it a city of a plain, rather than the metropolis of a wild assemblage of elevations. Yet, although the ground in the vicinity tends to favour this resemblance, its altitude above the level of the sea cannot be less than fifteen hundred feet; and of this the traveller becomes painfully conscious as he climbs the rapid and precipitous ascents which form its only approaches. It is, however, after entering the gates of Ronda, that one is introduced to the extraordinary natural wonder which proclaims it to be one of the most singular of European towns. Let the reader imagine a compact and walled town cloven in twain by a fearful chasm nigh three hundred feet deep, from the bottom of which a foaming and boiling stream sends its roar upwards. All communication between the divided portions is as effectually cut off as if seas rolled between; and, but for a bridge that spans the void at its narrowest part, the inhabitants on one side would be de-

nied all intercourse with those on the other, except by the toilsome mode of descending by circuitous paths to the bed of the stream, and ascending in a similar fashion the opposite cliff. Standing on this bridge, the spectacle in sight is one that excites mingled sensations of dread, awe, and wonder. The spectator overhangs a dark and narrow gulf at a giddy height, and from that position, perilous, as fancy calls it, scans with unwonted feelings the yawning fissure over which he is suspended. The precipices of solid rock that enclose it, the deep-sunk bed of the river, the hollow murmurs it gives forth, the gloom that shrouds its waters, and the strange echoes reflected from the cliffs, all leave the most vivid impressions upon his senses, and stamp the scene as one that equals in its reality the pictures which his imagination may have sometimes drawn of a "gulf profound." These are the chief features of the prospect looking towards the east: in the opposite direction the eye commands a wider range, and overlooks the vale to which the river far below is impetuously rushing. It is a sunlit cavity in the heart of rude inequalities; and, bounteously adorned as it is with natural beauties, there floats over it a serenity derived from its lowly position, that gives an exquisite effect to each charm. The river now winds in slackened course between steep though verdant banks; gardens and vineyards cling to the slopes; cottages embowered in orange-groves rise picturesquely upon projecting points, or occupy sunny nooks: all this forms a scene which a painter would select to represent seclusion and peace blended with patient industry and humble happiness. Descending to the bed of the river by a steep and winding path on the western side of the bridge, the view, again looking towards the east, is little less striking than from above.

In front rises the ponderous bridge—so massive in its construction as to seem rather placed for the purpose of preventing the sides of the chasm from collapsing, than for arching the intervening space. Over the rocks at its foundation a stream of foam is precipitated in the form of a cascade, and falls but a short distance from an antique mill, apparently about to be crushed by the huge rocks that overhang it. Then looking through the arch of the bridge as through a portal, the eye travels up the river-worn pass, and sees it bounded by precipices whose foundations are laid in unbroken gloom: on their summits, however, the sunbeams strike, and along the dangerous verge rises a succession of dwellings, whose white walls, pierced by windows, appear to lean over the abyss. The whole scene is a combination of savage grandeur and picturesque effect, which far surpasses the power of words to describe; but, with its gloom, its lofty walls of rock, and wild features, often rises before the memory of the spectator.

From the summit of the precipice on the southern side, a staircase cut out of the solid rock descends to the bed of the river, and ranks among the wonders of Ronda. This, which is called the Mina, has its entrance from a dwelling styled the Casa Real. The old housekeeper who opened the door showed me into the sala, while she went to procure a lantern, and summon a servant to conduct me down the ancient and now disused communication. In the room my attention was struck by an old-fashioned door, upon which was painted a likeness of Queen Isabella the Catholic, and apparently of an ancient date: in her right hand she bore the sceptre of state, and in the left hand corner of the picture the arms of Castile were distinguishable. When the old lady returned, I inquired if there was any history at-

tached to this venerable portrait of the Queen Isabel. "La Reina Isabel!" exclaimed she and her handmaiden, with broad smiles on their countenances; "that is a picture of Santa Barbara, and she is the patron saint of the house. Ave Maria! what a strange mistake!" And upon this their merriment at my expense broke out anew. It would have been cruel to have shaken their belief in what was manifestly an article of their faith, so I contented myself with indulging my mirth at their expense as soon as the door closed behind me. It was nothing, however, to that of the worshippers of Santa Barbara, for as I crossed the court I could hear them giving free vent to their amusement at the ludicrous error into which they supposed I had fallen.

In a small garden on the brink of the precipice was the entrance to the staircase: after descending a few yards, every appearance of steps was lost, and in their place an inclined plane of rubbish presented itself. Down this we slid or stumbled, having on the one side massive walls with loopholes for the admission of light, and, as we descended lower, on either hand a variety of dungeons, small, dismal, and dark. At the bottom a door gave egress; and stepping out, we stood in the bed of the river: its waters, imprisoned between the lofty precipices that excluded all but a narrow strip of heaven from our eyes, had a sullen aspect, and moved sluggishly among the masses of rock that encumbered their channel. Their olive-green hue recalled the epithet of "verdé," which is given to this stream in the well-known ballad commencing with:—

Rio verde, rio verde,
Tinto vas en sangre viva.
Entre ti y Sierra Bermeja
Murio gran cavalleria.

O río verde, river green,
All dark with life's blood is thy flow,
The red sierra and thee between
A gallant chivalry lies low.

From the river the prospect was imposing in the extreme: the lofty walls of rock that rose frowningly in the air, the gloom and silence brooding over the spot, and the dark stream at our feet, all mingled with the prison-like air of the dwellings visible to impress the mind with awe; and recollecting the blood-stained history of the town, it was not difficult to fancy that the sullen river had witnessed many a deed in keeping with the character of the scenery. From this point it is seen, that of the Mina the upper part alone is hewn out of the rock. About half way down, a natural cleft occurs in the precipice, of which advantage has been taken; and being enclosed with solid masonry, it was an easy matter to carry the staircase downwards. According to tradition, it was the weary task of the Christian captives to carry up supplies of water by this passage to the town above; and there are shown on the sides of the staircase certain crosses, said to have been engraved by the nails of the captives thus employed. This is a favourite legend in Andalusia, and there are several places where the traveller sees crosses, alleged, like those in the Mina, to have been the work of pious nails; in particular, there is one in the mosque at Cordova, which tradition affirms to have been wrought in this manner by a captive, who was chained for many years to the pillar upon which it occurs. Regarding this instance, it is scarcely necessary to point out the improbability of the tale; as the well-known prejudice of Mahomedans against the admission of Christians into their temples renders it far from likely that, in the days

of Moorish fanaticism, a dog of a Christian captive would be permitted to outrage their most holy fane with his presence, far less to sculpture within its precincts the hated emblem of Christianity.

Ronda is supposed to occupy the site of the Arunda of the Romans, by whom its importance as a defensible position could hardly have been overlooked. After the Arabs became masters of the province, it rose from its ruins into a town of note, and was then, as now, the capital of the mountain community who dwell in the surrounding fastnesses. These observations, however, apply only to that portion of the town which lies on the southern side of the Guadiaro; the edifices in the opposite quarter are of a more modern character than those in the old town, and, it is probable, date only from the days of the conquistadores. On the decline of the kingdom of Granada, the surrounding district was dismembered from its territories in 1328, and for a time converted into a separate kingdom, of which Ronda was the head. The head of this petty state was an African prince, who appears to have wrested it by force of arms from the native monarchs; but on the accession of Muley Mahomed the Fourth to the throne of Granada, the invaders were expelled, and Ronda was again incorporated with the last of the Andalusian monarchies. Thenceforward its name occurs but seldom in the Moorish chronicles until the era of Ferdinand and Isabella again brings it forward, in the year 1485, to maintain an obstinate defence against its Christian assailants. The valour of its inhabitants, however, was of little avail against the overpowering forces of the besiegers; and after having vainly sought succour from Granada, they were constrained to yield the town to their foes.

The population of Ronda now amounts to nearly

14,000 inhabitants. Trade and manufactures are despised by its citizens, whose chief occupation is to smuggle goods from Gibraltar into the interior of the province. For this the position of their native town is admirably adapted; surrounded by wild sierras, which are traversed in every direction by multitudes of mountain paths, it is as well fitted to receive as it is to convey to other districts the cargoes of the contrabandista. Hence the population of the Serrania bear a reputation for lawlessness, which is not wholly undeserved. Their dusky sierras have not only fostered the wild love of independence characteristic of mountaineers, but, from being the theatre of an open warfare against the laws, have engendered a turbulent spirit, which it is at all times difficult for the Spanish Government to repress, and which occasionally sets its utmost powers at defiance. During the Guerra de Independencia, the Serranos kept their French invaders in a state of continual disquietude—sometimes by open resistance, sometimes by a hollow submission, which rose into revolt on the first favourable opportunity. M. Rocca, in his graphic account of the operations of the French in the Serrania, faithfully paints the savage characters of the mountaineers, and their unconquerable hostility to the Gavachos—the term of contempt invariably applied by Spaniards to his countrymen. On one occasion their detestation took a ludicrous turn, and at the village of Olbera, to the northward of Ronda, some of his compatriots were treated to a repast which consisted of asses' flesh. The Frenchmen found the veal, as it was called, rather tough, but did not discover the mistake until some time afterwards, when it was necessary to meet their entertainers in warlike fashion; they were then saluted with the cry, "You ate asses' flesh at Olbera!"

and from that time every other taunt they had been accustomed to hear was supplanted by this one, in the application of which their mountain opponents appeared to derive an exquisite satisfaction.

Besides a plaza de toros, said to be one of the best in Spain, Ronda possesses an Alameda, the site of which is picturesque in the extreme. Its shady walks extend along the brow of a precipice, from whence, as he inhales the western breeze, the spectator casts his eye over an unequalled prospect of valley, river, and mountain. Far below him winds the Guadiaro amid the softest features of a vale—verdant slopes, hanging groves, cottages embowered in orchards, and grey mills leaning over its stream: as the view widens, its expression becomes more wildly beautiful; an amphitheatre of mountains encloses this rejoicing Eden, their acclivities diversified by glens and woody dells with which the sunshine plays capriciously; and beyond their broken outlines are seen those distant blue peaks which are seldom wanting in an Andalusian landscape, and here remind the observer that he is in the heart of an alpine region.

The departure of a couple of mules is an hourly occurrence at large inns, yet it had not lost the charm of novelty for that host of idlers who are to be met with in Ronda as in all Spanish towns. On descending to the street, I found Juan in the centre of a group of men in tattered brown cloaks, whose eyes followed his movements as he loaded the animals, while their lips were occupied with paper cigars. One, who was distinguished from the others by smoking a "puro," had got hold of my double-barreled gun, and was showing to a circle of listeners how it was fired. "You see, when you fire the right barrel, you must put the gun to the

right shoulder; but when you fire the left, then you must put it to the left shoulder." The explanation appeared quite satisfactory to his audience. With one voice they exclaimed, "What a wonderful gun!" and regarded the speaker as an oracle of knowledge. The same individual, a swarthy little man, in whose piercing eye there was expressed fully as much cunning as intelligence, then accosted Juan. The method he took to ingratiate himself with that trusty personage, proved that he was better acquainted with the road to Spanish sympathies than with the mode of discharging double-barrels. His first query related to the birth-place of my mozo. "I am from Santo Cruz," said Juan. "Well, how strange!" added the other; "I am from the same town." "But I was brought up in Granada." "Well, still more strange! I was brought up there also. *Vamos, paysano, vamos á la bodega!*" (Come, my countryman, let us go to the tavern.) Juan, however, turned a deaf ear to this invitation, which he well knew concealed some sinister purpose either towards himself or his master, and bluntly bade his paysano stand aside.

Passing down a long and narrow street adorned with some handsome houses, we quitted the town by a road which was bounded on one side by an ancient Moorish wall. This quarter had been fortified by the Moors with more than usual care, as was evident from the abundant remains of the defences with which they had surrounded it. Of these there appeared to have been three separate lines, each one capable of opposing an effectual resistance to an enemy, and thus triply guarding what was naturally the weakest point of the city; for on this side are wanting the crags and precipices which everywhere else defy the approach of war. Seen

from the southward, the position of Ronda is far more characteristic of the mountain kingdom it represents than from the opposite direction. The fruitful basin still meets the eye, its surface shadowed with foliage or yellow with corn-fields; but in the midst rises a rocky height, upon which the city stands in conscious security. Begirt with inaccessible steeps, whose summits are surmounted by walls of massive strength, it looks the war-loving stronghold, the citadel of a fierce mountain race, to whom warfare was once the breath of their nostrils, and whose descendants even yet retain the unquiet spirit of their fiery ancestors.

Descending the other side of the heights from which we had surveyed this striking scene, we plunged deep among the roots of an assemblage of mountains, lofty, wild, and wrapped in the brown mantle of sterility. Our path was both execrable and dangerous; leading sometimes over the polished surface of the sloping rock, or winding between huge masses detached from the summits, with the occasional variety of a precipice on one hand to enhance its perils. As we came to the bottom of a wild hollow, it passed by a roofless dwelling. I inquired of a peasant, who had shortly before joined us, what the place had been; and was informed that it had once been a venta, and was demolished by authority.

“Why so?”

“When a venta is destroyed by authority,” replied the man, “everybody knows the reason; it was a notorious harbouring place for robbers, and was in consequence pulled down.”

In truth, a fitter spot for the outlaw's deeds could hardly be found: on either hand the venta commanded a view of the track as it wound by a long descent to its

door; and in front was the mouth of a narrow ravine, down which the robber could dive and in a few moments be lost to sight.

Gradually the scenery changed after we had passed the village of Atajate, about ten miles from Ronda; and the country, though still mountainous and rugged, wore the cheering smile of cultivation, and began to be diversified with woods and vegetation. Like the approach to Ronda from the north, the path led along the crest of a high ridge, from whence the eye scanned with ease the winding course of the picturesque valleys on either side, and through openings in the surrounding sierras caught glimpses of distant steeps upon which pine forests hung, or more rarely of mountain fortresses, capping with their weather-stained circlet of ruins some lonely crag. Within the valleys was to be seen a combination of natural beauties and the gladdening works of industry: now the path threaded an olive-grove, or skirted some sunny slope; now the vines hung their tempting clusters over our heads; and on mounting higher the scene was varied by the view of dark passes, wooded heights, and all the bolder features of a mountain landscape. What added to the animation of the prospect was the number of villages and hamlets which clung to the acclivities, each one within its own little domain of garden and foliage. Some lay deep in the valleys, and were only half seen amid a surrounding growth of trees, but the greater number had climbed to loftier sites, "adondese despeñan las palomas," as Juan poetically phrased it; and either crowned some craggy platform with white edifices, or retired within sheltered recesses overhung by cliffs, and accessible only by winding paths from below.

It was dark when we reached Gaucin and entered its

solitary posada, after traversing a long street through which the wind swept coldly. Indeed, from the moment the sun had descended beneath the horizon, we had felt the temperature sensibly lowered, and were glad to wrap ourselves in our mantas on account of the wind, which at the same time began to rise, and before we arrived at the inn was blowing down the ravines in sharp gusts. For the first time during my wanderings I felt chilled, and would have hailed a blazing fire with satisfaction. But no such welcome sight awaited us in the posada. Here, as in every posada in the province, the sole fireplace in the house was that which served for cooking the meals of the household and strangers ; and a more cheerless hearth can hardly be imagined. It was placed at one end of a large apartment, half stable, half kitchen, the floor of which seemed to have been modelled after the roughly-paved street outside, and was scarcely so clean. At first sight it appeared a mere mass of masonry built up against the wall to the height of three or four feet ; but on closer inspection the structure was seen to be perforated by a row of apertures, from which some heat was felt to proceed. These apertures are, in fact, furnaces on a diminutive scale, and when required for the purposes of cooking are filled with charcoal. This fuel, however, though it gives out a considerable degree of heat, demands constant nursing, so that half the time of the cook is consumed in coaxing it into a glow by means of primitive fans of esparto. Comfortless as it looked, this was the only place where some warmth was to be had ; and drawing my stool close to it, I endeavoured to fancy I was protected against the keenness of the mountain air that rushed in at the open gate and a hundred loopholes. Meanwhile, a slipshod damsel was preparing supper ;

Juan having opportunely purchased a rabbit from a boy who was hawking them about the street, and who had followed us into the posada. In a trice the animal was chopped into small pieces, and set to stew in an earthenware pipkin, alongside of another vessel of the same nature, in which our Maritornes proceeded to boil some rice. In due course her labours came to a conclusion: a brown bowl was produced, into which the contents of the pipkins were cast with but little ceremony; next she poured some boiling oil over the mess; and then setting the dish upon a stool, placed beside it a couple of crusts of bread. The latter, it is necessary to observe, were supplied as substitutes for knives, forks, and spoons, rather than as an addition to the edibles; and accordingly, while Juan seized one, I possessed myself of the other, and plunging it into the pilaw, contrived to extract a portion and to burn my fingers at the same time. The "rage of hunger," however, makes light of such obstacles: in a wonderfully short space of time our fingers met at the bottom of the bowl, having carried everything before them, and then we stopped; but this was not enough for Juan, for his last bone being picked, he finished off with devouring the faithful crust he wielded. This done, he proceeded to smoke his "papel," while I retreated to the chamber in the upper story, to which I climbed by rickety wooden stairs. "There," said Maritornes, who had shown the way, "there is a cama fit for gente decente." I ventured to question the fitness of the eulogium, after a slight inspection of the wretched apology for a bed to which she pointed. The coverlet and sheets had a wondrous dingy aspect, more especially the latter, which, besides, bore witness to the sanguinary attacks of the native population upon the per-

sons of the last occupants. This, however, was nothing new to my eyes; and moreover, having the prospect of sleeping beneath an English roof the following night, I was little inclined to be fastidious on the last occasion I was to encounter the discomforts of a Spanish posada. But, before stretching myself on a couch where it was manifest the pulga and chinche lorded it over the sleeper, I put in practice certain precautions which will explain to the reader why in these pages he has met with no such passages as "Passed a sleepless night, occasioned by the assaults of the carnivorous inhabitants of the bed. Rose early, glad to escape from the vampires who tenanted my couch," &c.

The truth is, that the writers of these complaints have themselves to blame in no small degree for undergoing the sufferings which they recount for the benefit of the public. They carry their English habits into pulga-ridden Spain, and dispose themselves to rest upon the notoriously populated beds in the same fashion in which they would court sleep in an English chamber. Now this is tantamount to offering themselves up to be sacrificed; and if it be done through an obstinate adherence to national customs, the complainers, I repeat, have little right to our sympathy for their murdered repose. Let them provide themselves, as some have done, with a huge sack, in which to encase their persons before lying down to rest—or, as I found equally effectual and much more convenient, with loose drawers, enclosing the feet, and drawn round the waist, by a cord—and I venture to predict their rest will be untroubled by nocturnal assailants. To this, if their quarters be very suspicious, let them add cotton gloves for the hands, nightcap, and neckcloth, and their armour is then complete. If the places of joining be

carefully secured, nothing can penetrate it; and they will enjoy the satisfaction, should they awake at night, of beholding their pillow beleaguered in vain by a multitude of nightly disturbers.

Before daybreak I was on the way to Gibraltar, which it was necessary to reach before sunset. For more than an hour the path was a series of precipitous descents, down which our mules slid and scrambled, without however once missing their footing. At length we reached the bed of a torrent, and which thenceforward was our road. On looking back, as soon as the light permitted a view to be caught, the scene was strikingly beautiful. Lofty mountains rose in every variety of wild shape that crag and forest could compose; high among them was perched the village we had quitted, now glistening like a snow-patch, for the morning sun was shining strongly on its whitened dwellings, and adding to their brilliancy. Then, in a short time, the whole prospect underwent a transformation. A thunderstorm gathered upon the highest peaks, and slowly settling down upon the lower elevations, gradually buried each feature in darkness: the glistening village was blotted out by a gloomy mass of cloud; the crags around it lost their ragged outlines and became indistinct forms of vapour; while the sight of long columns of mist descending by the valleys and ravines was a pretty sure sign that, ere long, we too should feel the wrath of the elements. Juan, however, predicted that the storm would expend its fury on the mountains alone; but in half-an-hour it was upon us. The rain came down like a cascade, and drove so furiously against the faces of our animals, that instinctively they turned aside and buried their heads in a thicket of underwood by the bank of the torrent. For our-

selves, we followed their example ; or rather, wrapping our heads in our mantas, sat down under the bank to await the termination of the deluge. In another half-hour it had passed off, and we resumed our march down the stream. From this we diverged, ere long, to enter the noble forest of cork-trees that almost continuously stretches to San Roque, on the Bay of Gibraltar. On mounting a rising ground, the Rock itself came distinctly into view. At that distance its appearance resembled a huge wedge resting on its base, with an abrupt end turned towards Spain. We were, however, still a long way from it ; and it was a journey of many hours through the picturesque forest—which, however, enjoys but an indifferent reputation on the score of honesty—before we climbed the acclivity on which San Roque is situated. On the other side the waters of the bay spread out : and descending again to the sandy beach that bounds them, we urged our tired animals along this natural road, in order to reach the fortress before sunset, the hour at which the gates are closed. Half an hour before that time I had passed through the Spanish lines in front of the fortress ; and after having at the gate certified to the officer on guard that Juan meditated no villany against the Rock and its numerous garrison, I was suffered to pass in, and found myself in Gibraltar.

THE END.

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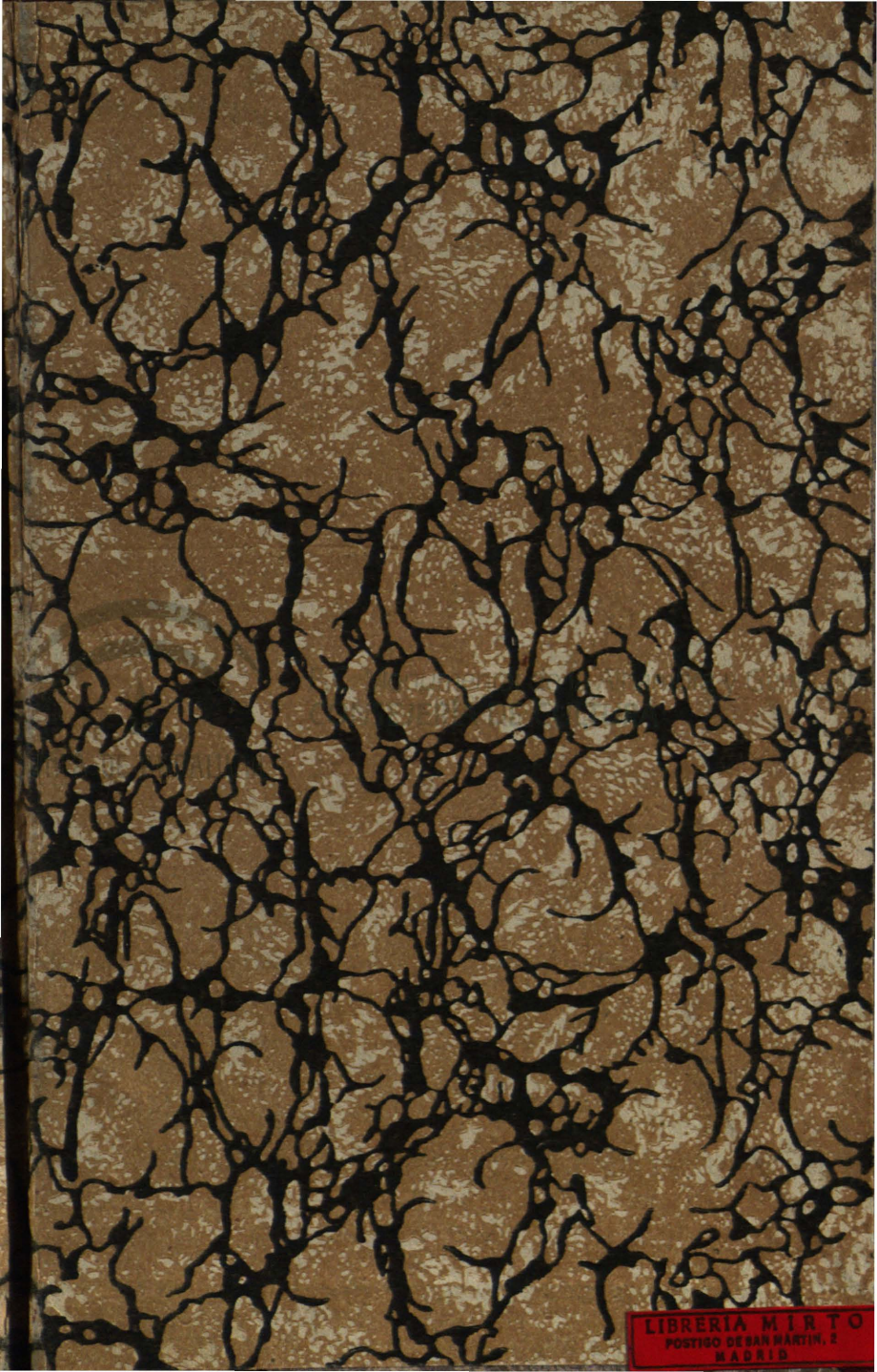
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