

Other circumstances, especially the frescoes still extant on the walls of the Alhambra, may be cited as corroborative of the conclusions afforded by the *romances*, implying a latitude in the privileges accorded to the sex, similar to that in Christian countries, and altogether alien from the genius of Mahometanism.³¹ The chivalrous character ascribed

Chivalry.

other than a very slippery foundation for history. The most beautiful portion perhaps of the Moorish ballads, for example, is taken up with the feuds of the Abencerrages in the latter days of Granada. Yet this family, whose romantic story is still repeated to the traveler amid the ruins of the Alhambra, is scarcely noticed, as far as I am aware, by contemporary writers, foreign or domestic, and would seem to owe its chief celebrity to the apocryphal version of Ginés Perez de Hyta, whose "Milesian tales," according to the severe sentence of Nic. Antonio, "are fit only to amuse the lazy and the listless." (Bibliotheca Nova, tom. i. p. 536.)

But, although the Spanish ballads are not entitled to the credit of strict historical documents, they may yet perhaps be received in evidence of the prevailing character of the social relations of the age; a remark indeed predicable of most works of fiction, written by authors contemporary with the events they describe, and more especially so of that popular minstrelsy, which, emanating from a simple, uncorrupted class, is less likely to swerve from truth, than more ostentatious works of art. The long cohabitation of the Saracens with the Christians, (full evidence of which is afforded by Capmany, (Mem. de Barcelona, tom. iv. Apend. no. 11,) who quotes a document from the public archives of Catalonia, show-

ing the great number of Saracens residing in Aragon even in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, the most flourishing period of the Granadian empire,) had enabled many of them confessedly to speak and write the Spanish language with purity and elegance. Some of the graceful little songs, which are still chanted, by the peasantry of Spain in their dances, to the accompaniment of the castanet, are referred by a competent critic (Conde, De la Poesía Oriental, MS.) to an Arabian origin. There can be little hazard, therefore, in imputing much of this peculiar minstrelsy to the Arabians themselves, the contemporaries, and perhaps the eyewitnesses of the events they celebrate.

³¹ Casiri (Bibliotheca Escurialensis, tom. ii. p. 259,) has transcribed a passage from an Arabian author of the fourteenth century, inveighing bitterly against the luxury of the Moorish ladies, their gorgeous apparel and habits of expense, "amounting almost to insanity," in a tone which may remind one of the similar philippic by his contemporary Dante, against his fair countrywomen of Florence:—Two ordinances of a king of Granada, cited by Conde in his History, prescribe the separation of the women from the men in the mosques; and prohibit their attendance on certain festivals, without the protection of their husbands or some near relative.—Their *femmes savantes*, as we have seen,

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to the Spanish Moslems appears, moreover, in perfect conformity to this. Thus some of their sovereigns, we are told, after the fatigues of the tournament, were wont to recreate their spirits with "elegant poetry, and florid discourses of amorous and knightly history." The ten qualities, enumerated as essential to a true knight, were "piety, valor, courtesy, prowess, the gifts of poetry and eloquence, and dexterity in the management of the horse, the sword, lance, and bow."³² The history of the Spanish Arabs, especially in the latter wars of Granada, furnishes repeated examples, not merely of the heroism, which distinguished the European chivalry of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, but occasionally of a polished courtesy, that might have graced a Bayard or a Sidney. This combination of oriental magnificence and knightly prowess shed a ray of glory over the closing days of the Arabian empire in Spain, and served to conceal, though it could not correct, the vices which it possessed in common with all Mahometan institutions.

Unsettled
state of
Granada.

The government of Granada was not administered with the same tranquillity as that of Cordova. Revolutions were perpetually occurring, which may be traced sometimes to the tyranny of the prince, but more frequently to the factions of the seraglio, the soldiery, or the licentious populace of

were in the habit of conferring freely with men of letters, and of assisting in person at the academical *stances*. — And lastly, the frescoes alluded to in the text represent the presence of females at

the tournaments, and the fortunate knight receiving the palm of victory from their hands.

³² Conde, *Dominacion de los Arabes*, tom. i. p. 340; tom. iii. p. 119.

the capital. The latter, indeed, more volatile than the sands of the deserts from which they originally sprung, were driven by every gust of passion into the most frightful excesses, deposing and even assassinating their monarchs, violating their palaces, and scattering abroad their beautiful collections and libraries; while the kingdom, unlike that of Cordova, was so contracted in its extent, that every convulsion of the capital was felt to its farthest extremities. Still, however, it held out, almost miraculously, against the Christian arms, and the storms that beat upon it incessantly, for more than two centuries, scarcely wore away any thing from its original limits.

Several circumstances may be pointed out as enabling Granada to maintain this protracted resistance. Its concentrated population furnished such abundant supplies of soldiers, that its sovereigns could bring into the field an army of a hundred thousand men.³³ Many of these were drawn from the regions of the Alpuxarras, whose rugged inhabitants had not been corrupted by the soft effeminacy of the plains. The ranks were occasionally recruited, moreover, from the warlike tribes of Africa. The Moors of Granada are praised by their enemies for their skill with the cross-bow, to the use of which they were trained from childhood.³⁴ But their strength lay chiefly in their cavalry. Their spacious vegas afforded an ample field for the

Causes of
her success-
ful resist-
ance.

³³ Casiri, on Arabian authority, computes it at 200,000 men. Bibliotheca Escorialensis, tom. i. p. 338.

³⁴ Pulgar, Reyes Católicos, p. 250.

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display of their matchless horsemanship ; while the face of the country, intersected by mountains and intricate defiles, gave a manifest advantage to the Arabian light-horse over the steel-clad cavalry of the Christians, and was particularly suited to the wild *guerrilla* warfare, in which the Moors so much excelled. During the long hostilities of the country, almost every city had been converted into a fortress. The number of these fortified places in the territory of Granada was ten times as great as is now to be found throughout the whole Peninsula.³⁵ Lastly, in addition to these means of defence, may be mentioned their early acquaintance with gunpowder, which, like the Greek fire of Constantinople, contributed perhaps in some degree to prolong their precarious existence beyond its natural term.

But after all, the strength of Granada, like that of Constantinople, lay less in its own resources than in the weakness of its enemies, who, distracted by the feuds of a turbulent aristocracy, especially during the long minorities with which Castile was afflicted, perhaps more than any other nation in Europe, seemed to be more remote from the conquest of Granada at the death of Henry the Fourth, than at that of St. Ferdinand in the thirteenth century. Before entering on the achievement of this conquest by Ferdinand and Isabella, it may not be amiss to notice the probable influence

³⁵ Mem. de la Acad. de Hist., tom. vi. p. 169. — These ruined fortifications still thickly stud the border territories of Granada ; and many an Andalusian mill, along the banks of the Guadaya and Guadalquivir, retains its battlemented tower, which served for the defence of its inmates against the forays of the enemy.

exerted by the Spanish Arabs on European civilization.

CHAPTER
VIII.

Literature
of the Span-
ish Arabs.

Notwithstanding the high advances made by the Arabians in almost every branch of learning, and the liberal import of certain imputed traditions of Mahomet, the spirit of his religion was eminently unfavorable to letters. The Koran, whatever be the merit of its literary execution, does not, we believe, contain a single precept in favor of general science.³⁶ Indeed during the first century after its promulgation, almost as little attention was bestowed upon this by the Saracens, as in their "days of ignorance," as the period is stigmatized which preceded the advent of their apostle.³⁷ But, after the nation had reposed from its tumultuous military career, the taste for elegant pleasures, which naturally results from opulence and leisure, began to flow in upon it. It entered upon this new field with all its characteristic enthusiasm, and seemed ambitious of attaining the same preëminence in science, that it had already reached in arms.

It was at the commencement of this period of intellectual fermentation, that the last of the

³⁶ D'Herbelot, (Bib. Orientale, tom. i. p. 630,) among other authentic traditions of Mahomet, quotes one as indicating his encouragement of letters, viz. "That the ink of the doctors and the blood of the martyrs are of equal price." M. Celsner (Des Effets de la Religion de Mohammed, Paris, 1810,) has cited several others of the same liberal import. But such traditions cannot be received in evidence of the original doctrine of the prophet. They are

rejected as apocryphal by the Persians and the whole sect of the Shiites, and are entitled to little weight with a European.

³⁷ When the caliph Al Mamon encouraged, by his example as well as patronage, a more enlightened policy, he was accused by the more orthodox Mussulmans of attempting to subvert the principles of their religion. See Pococke, Spec. Hist. Arabum, (Oxon. 1650,) p. 166.

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Omeyades, escaping into Spain, established there the kingdom of Cordova, and imported along with him the fondness for luxury and letters, that had begun to display itself in the capitals of the east. His munificent spirit descended upon his successors; and, on the breaking up of the empire, the various capitals, Seville, Murcia, Malaga, Granada, and others, which rose upon its ruins, became the centres of so many intellectual systems, that continued to emit a steady lustre through the clouds and darkness of succeeding centuries. The period of this literary civilization, reached far into the fourteenth century, and thus, embracing an interval of six hundred years, may be said to have exceeded in duration that of any other literature ancient or modern.

Circumstances favorable to it.

There were several auspicious circumstances in the condition of the Spanish Arabs, which distinguished them from their Mahometan brethren. The temperate climate of Spain was far more propitious to robustness and elasticity of intellect than the sultry regions of Arabia and Africa. Its long line of coast and convenient havens opened to it an enlarged commerce. Its number of rival states encouraged a generous emulation, like that which glowed in ancient Greece and modern Italy; and was infinitely more favorable to the developement of the mental powers than the far-extended and sluggish empires of Asia. Lastly, a familiar intercourse with the Europeans served to mitigate in the Spanish Arabs some of the more degrading superstitions incident to their religion, and to im-

part to them nobler ideas of the independence and moral dignity of man, than are to be found in the slaves of eastern despotism.

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Under these favorable circumstances, provisions for education were liberally multiplied, colleges, academies, and gymnasiums springing up spontaneously, as it were, not merely in the principal cities, but in the most obscure villages of the country. No less than fifty of these colleges or schools could be discerned scattered over the suburbs and populous plain of Granada. Seventy public libraries are enumerated in Spain by a contemporary, at the beginning of the fourteenth century. Every place of note seems to have furnished materials for a literary history. The copious catalogues of writers, still extant in the Escorial, show how extensively the cultivation of science was pursued, even through its minutest subdivisions; while a biographical notice of blind men, eminent for their scholarship in Spain, proves how far the general avidity for knowledge triumphed over the most discouraging obstacles of nature.³⁸

Provisions
for learning.

The Spanish Arabs emulated their countrymen of the east in their devotion to natural and mathematical science. They penetrated into the remotest regions of Africa and Asia, transmitting an exact account of their proceedings to the national academies. They contributed to astronomical knowledge by the number and accuracy of their observations, and by the improvement of

³⁸ Andres, *Letteratura*, part. 1, Escorialensis, tom. ii. pp. 71, 251, cap. 8, 10. — Casiri, *Bibliotheca* et passim.

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instruments and the erection of observatories, of which the noble tower of Seville is one of the earliest examples. They furnished their full proportion in the department of history, which, according to an Arabian author cited by D'Herbelot, could boast of thirteen hundred writers. The treatises on logic and metaphysics amount to one ninth of the surviving treasures of the Escorial; and, to conclude this summary of naked details, some of their scholars appear to have entered upon as various a field of philosophical inquiry, as would be crowded into a modern encyclopædia.³⁹

The actual results.

The results, it must be confessed, do not appear to have corresponded with this magnificent apparatus and unrivalled activity of research. The mind of the Arabians was distinguished by the most opposite characteristics, which sometimes, indeed, served to neutralize each other. An acute and subtle perception was often clouded by mysticism and abstraction. They combined a habit of classification and generalization, with a marvellous fondness for detail; a vivacious fancy with a patience of application, that a German of our day might envy; and, while in fiction they launched boldly into originality, indeed extravagance, they were content in philosophy to tread servilely in the track of their ancient masters. They derived their science

³⁹ Casiri mentions one of these universal geniuses, who published no less than a thousand and fifty treatises on the various topics of Ethics, History, Law, Medicine, &c. ! Bibliotheca Escorialensis, tom. ii. p. 107. — See also tom. i.

p. 370; tom. ii. p. 71 et alibi. — Zuñiga, *Annales de Seville*, p. 22. — D'Herbelot, *Bib. Orientale*, voce *Tarikh*. — Masdeu, *Historia Critica*, tom. xiii. pp. 203, 205. — Andres, *Letteratura*, part. 1, cap. 8.

from versions of the Greek philosophers; but, as their previous discipline had not prepared them for its reception, they were oppressed rather than stimulated by the weight of the inheritance. They possessed an indefinite power of accumulation, but they rarely ascended to general principles, or struck out new and important truths; at least, this is certain in regard to their metaphysical labors.

Hence Aristotle, who taught them to arrange what they had already acquired, rather than to advance to new discoveries, became the god of their idolatry. They piled commentary on commentary, and, in their blind admiration of his system, may be almost said to have been more of Peripatetics than the Stagirite himself. The Cordovan Averroes was the most eminent of his Arabian commentators, and undoubtedly contributed more than any other individual to establish the authority of Aristotle over the reason of mankind for so many ages. Yet his various illustrations have served, in the opinion of European critics, to darken rather than dissipate the ambiguities of his original, and have even led to the confident assertion that he was wholly unacquainted with the Greek language.⁴⁰

Averroes.

⁴⁰ Consult the sensible, though perhaps severe, remarks of Degerando on Arabian science. (*Hist. de la Philosophie*, tom. iv. cap. 24.) — The reader may also peruse with advantage a disquisition on Arabian metaphysics in Turner's *History of England*, (vol. iv. pp. 405–449.) — Brucker, *Hist. Philosophiæ*, tom. iii. p. 105.) — Ludovicus Vives seems to have been the author of the imputation in the text. (Nic. Antonio, *Bibliotheca Vetus*, tom. ii. p. 394.) Averroes translated some of the philosophical works of Aristotle from the Greek into Arabic; a Latin version of which translation was afterwards made. Though D'Herbelot is mistaken (*Bib. Orientale*, art. *Roschd.*) in saying that Averroes was the first, who translated Aristotle into Arabic; as this had been done two centuries before, at

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I

The Saracens gave an entirely new face to pharmacy and chemistry. They introduced a great variety of salutary medicaments into Europe. The Spanish Arabs, in particular, are commended by Sprengel above their brethren for their observations on the practice of medicine.⁴¹ But whatever real knowledge they possessed was corrupted by their inveterate propensity for mystical and occult science. They too often exhausted both health and fortune in fruitless researches after the elixir of life and the philosopher's stone. Their medical prescriptions were regulated by the aspect of the stars. Their physics were debased by magic, their chemistry degenerated into alchemy, their astronomy into astrology.

Their historical merits.

In the fruitful field of history, their success was even more equivocal. They seem to have been wholly destitute of the philosophical spirit, which gives life to this kind of composition. They were the disciples of fatalism and the subjects of a despotic government. Man appeared to them only in the contrasted aspects of slave and master. What could they know of the finer moral relations, or of the higher energies of the soul, which are developed only under free and beneficent institutions? Even could they have formed conceptions of these, how would they have dared to express them?

least, by Honain and others in the ninth century, (see Casiri, *Bibliotheca Escorialensis*, tom. i. p. 304,) and Bayle has shown that a Latin version of the Stagirite was used by the Europeans before the

alleged period. See art. *Averroes*.

⁴¹ Sprengel, *Histoire de la Médecine*, traduite par Jourdan, (Paris, 1815,) tom. ii. pp. 263 et seq.