

SECTION IV.

ESTREMADURA.

La Provincia de Estremadura was so called (like Etruria—the *ἔτραρα ὄρια*) from being the *Extrema Ora*, the last and *extreme* conquest of Alonso IX., made in 1228. It lies to the W. of the Castiles, on the Portuguese frontier. The average length is some 190 miles, and breadth 90. The Tagus and Guadiana flow E. and W.; noble rivers, which might be rendered navigable, and would be made so in any other country. Under the Romans and Moors this province was both a granary and a garden, and it is still called by the gipsies *Chin del Manro*, “the land of corn.” The want of population has almost converted this Arabia Felix into a desert, but the railways which have been opened in 1881, which pass through the most fertile parts of the province, enable visitors to go in 21½ hours from Madrid to Lisbon, and the great impetus produced by the mines of Almaden and Caceres, will undoubtedly shortly bring Estremadura on a level with other provinces of Spain. At present it is sadly backward. Except in the immediate vicinity of towns, so few labourers appear, that production, be it of weed or grain, seems rather the caprice or bounty of Nature than the work of man; meantime the lonely *dehesas y despoblados* are absolute preserves for the naturalist and sportsman: everything displays the exuberant vigour of the sun, and a soil teeming with life and food, and neglected, as it were, out of pure abundance. The swampy banks of the Guadiana offer good wild-fowl shooting in winter, but in summer are infected with fever and agues, mosquitoes, and other light militia of the air and earth.

In proportion as the animal creature abounds, man is rare, and the scanty population of Estremadura ranges at about 725,984. The cities are few and dull: the roads are made by sheep, not men. The inns are mere stables for *beasts*.

The **Estremeños** live in little intercommunication with the rest of mankind. They are simple, indolent, kind-hearted, and courteous.

The province has produced two historical characters, Pizarro and Cortés, who were swineherds of Trujillo and Medellin. These truly great men—called for and created by great times—sallied forth to conquer and Christianise a new world; and thousands of their *paisanos*, or fellow-countrymen, allured by their success and by visions of red gold, followed their example. Bad government, civil and religious, has been a great cause of the abomination of desolation which is everywhere visible in Estremadura; but a peculiar curse was superadded in the *mesta* or migratory system of Merino sheep, which are the true flocks of the nomad Bedouin. The origin of this system is stated to have been after this wise: when the Spaniards in the thirteenth century expelled from these parts the industrious Moors, they razed the cities and razzia'd the country, while those inhabitants who were not massacred were driven away to die in slavery: thus the conquerors made a solitude, calling it pacification. Vast tracts previously in cultivation were then abandoned, and nature, here prolific, soon obliterating the furrows of men, gave it up to the wild birds and beasts. Such was the *talas*, a true Moorish word *talah*, “death, extermination.” Only a portion of the country was recultivated by the lazy soldier conquerors, and the new population, scanty as it was, was almost swept away by a plague in 1348,