

Madrid. The healthiness of the place and its convenient distance from the capital combined with the stern and solitary character of the region, so congenial to his taste, to give it the preference over other spots which might have found more favor with persons of a different nature. Encompassed by rude and rocky hills, which sometimes soar to the gigantic elevation of mountains, it seemed to be shut out completely from the world. The vegetation was of a thin and stunted growth, seldom spreading out into the luxuriant foliage of the lower regions; and the winds swept down from the neighboring sierra with the violence of a hurricane. Yet the air was salubrious, and the soil was nourished by springs of the purest water. To add to its recommendations, a quarry, close at hand, of excellent stone somewhat resembling granite in appearance, readily supplied the materials for building,—a circumstance, considering the vastness of the work, of no little importance.

The architect who furnished the plans, and on whom the king relied for superintending their execution, was Juan Bautista de Toledo. He was born in Spain, and, early discovering uncommon talents for his profession, was sent to Italy. Here he studied the principles of his art, under the great masters who were then filling their native land with those monuments of genius that furnished the best study to the artist. Toledo imbibed their spirit, and under their tuition acquired that simple, indeed severe, taste which formed a contrast to the prevalent tone of Spanish architecture, but which, happily, found favor with his royal patron.