

of them got to the rock ; some were cut off by the Moors, and died like valiant knights, fighting to the last gasp.

When the Moorish king saw the daring of these cavaliers, and that they had succeeded in re-enforcing the garrison, he despaired of gaining the castle without much time, trouble, and loss of blood. He persuaded himself, therefore, that it was not worth the price, and, striking his tents, abandoned the siege. Thus the rock of Martos was saved by the sagacity of the countess and the prowess of Diego Perez de Vargas, surnamed the Smasher.

In the mean time, Don Alvar Perez de Castro arrived in presence of the king at Hutiél. King Fernando received him with benignity, but seemed to think his zeal beyond his prudence ; leaving so important a frontier so weakly guarded, sinking the viceroy in the courier, and coming so far to give by word of mouth what might easily have been communicated by letter. He felt the value, however, of his loyalty and devotion, but, furnishing him with ample funds, requested him to lose no time in getting back to his post. The count set out on his return, but it is probable the ardor and excitement of his spirit proved fatal to him, for he was seized with a violent fever when on the journey, and died in the town of Orgaz.

CHAPTER XI.

ABEN HUDIEL, THE MOORISH KING OF MURCIA, BECOMES THE VASSAL OF KING FERNANDO — ABEN ALHAMAR SEEKS TO DRIVE THE CHRISTIANS OUT OF ANDALUSIA — FERNANDO TAKES THE FIELD AGAINST HIM — RAVAGES OF THE KING — HIS LAST MEETING WITH THE QUEEN-MOTHER.

THE death of Count Alvar Perez de Castro caused deep affliction to King Fernando, for he considered him the shield of the frontier. While he was at Cordova, or at his rock of Martos, the king felt as assured of the safety of the border as though he had been there himself. As soon as he could be spared from Castile and Leon, he hastened to Cordova, to supply the loss the frontier had sustained in the person of his vigilant lieutenant. One of his first measures was to effect a truce of one year with the king of Granada — a measure which each adopted with great regret, compelled by his several policy : King Fernando to organize and secure his recent conquests ; Aben Alhamar to