

simply to lay before the reader such an account of the execution of this great work as would enable him to form some idea of the object to which Philip devoted so large a portion of his time, and which so eminently reflected his peculiar cast of mind.

Critics have greatly differed from each other in their judgments of the Escorial. Few foreigners have been found to acquiesce in the undiluted panegyric of those Castilians who pronounce it the eighth wonder of the world.* Yet it cannot be denied that few foreigners are qualified to decide on the merits of a work, to judge of which correctly requires a perfect understanding of the character of the country in which it was built, and of the monarch who built it. The traveller who gazes on its long lines of cold gray stone, scarcely broken by an ornament, feels a dreary sensation creeping over him, while he contrasts it with the lighter and more graceful edifices to which his eye has been accustomed. But he may read in this the true expression of the founder's character. Philip did not aim at the beautiful, much less at the festive and cheerful. The feelings which he desired to raise in the spectator were of that solemn, indeed sombre complexion which corresponded best with his own religious faith.

Whatever defects may be charged on the Escorial, it is impossible to view it from a distance, and see the mighty pile as it emerges from the gloomy depths of the mountains, without feeling how perfectly it conforms in its aspect to the wild and melancholy scenery

* One of its historians, Father Francisco de los Santos, styles it, on his title-page, "*Unica Maravilla del Mundo.*" *Descripcion del Real Monasterio de San Lorenzo de el Escorial* (Madrid, 1698).