

lic affairs, of which she had always shared the burden with the king; she therefore signified her wish to retire to her convent, to pass the remnant of her days in holy repose. King Fernando, who had ever found in his mother his ablest counsellor and best support, entreated her not to leave his side in these arduous times, when the King of Granada on one side, and the King of Seville on the other, threatened to put all his courage and resources to the trial. A long and earnest, yet tender and affectionate, conversation succeeded between them, which resulted in the queen-mother's yielding to his solicitations. The illustrious son and mother remained together six weeks, enjoying each other's society, after which they separated—the king and queen for the frontier, and the queen-mother for Toledo. They were never to behold each other again upon earth, for the king never returned to Castile.

CHAPTER XII.

KING FERNANDO'S EXPEDITION TO ANDALUSIA—SIEGE OF JAEN
—SECRET DEPARTURE OF ABEN ALHAMAR FOR THE CHRISTIAN
CAMP—HE ACKNOWLEDGES HIMSELF THE VASSAL OF THE
KING, WHO ENTERS JAEN IN TRIUMPH.

It was in the middle of August, 1245, that King Fernando set out on his grand expedition to Andalusia, whence he was never to return. All that autumn he pursued the same destructive course as in his preceding campaigns, laying waste the country with fire and sword in the vicinity of Jaen and to Alcala la Real. The town, too, of Illora, built on a lofty rock and fancying itself secure, was captured and given a prey to flames, which was as a bale-fire to the country. Thence he descended into the beautiful Vega of Granada, ravaging that earthly paradise. Aben Alhamar sallied forth from Granada with what forces he could collect, and a bloody battle ensued about twelve miles from Granada. A part of the troops of Aben Alhamar were hasty levies, inhabitants of the city, and but little accustomed to combat; they lost courage, gave way, and threw the better part of the troops in disorder; a retreat took place, which ended in a headlong flight, in which there was great carnage.¹

¹ Cende, tom. iii. c. 5.