

his presence was observed, when the monks conducted him to his tribune.¹⁸

On the twenty-third of April, 1563, the first stone of the monastery was laid. On the twentieth of August following, the corner-stone of the church was also laid, with still greater pomp and solemnity. The royal confessor, the bishop of Cuença, arrayed in his pontificals, presided over the ceremonies. The king was present, and laid the stone with his own hands. The principal nobles of the court were in attendance, and there was a great concourse of spectators, both ecclesiastics and laymen; the solemn services were concluded by the brotherhood, who joined in an anthem of thanksgiving and praise to the Almighty, to whom so glorious a monument was to be reared in this mountain-wilderness.¹⁹

The rude sierra now swarmed with life. The ground was covered with tents and huts. The busy hum of labor mingled with the songs of the laborers, which, from their various dialects, betrayed the different, and oftentimes distant, provinces from which they had come. In this motley host the greatest order and decorum prevailed; nor were the peaceful occupations of the day interrupted by any indecent brawls.

As the work advanced, Philip's visits to the Escorial were longer and more frequent. He had always shown his love for the retirement of the cloister, by passing some days of every year in it. Indeed, he was in the

¹⁸ "¡ Para levantar tanta fábrica menester eran actos de humildad tan profunda!" *Memorias de Fray Juan de San Geronimo*, Documentos inéditos, tom. vii. p. 23.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 25, et seq.—*Sigüenza*, *Hist. de la Orden de San Geronimo*, tom. 'ii. p. 546.