

CHAPTER XIV.

INVESTMENT OF SEVILLE — ALL SPAIN AROUSED TO ARMS — SURRENDER OF ALCALA DEL RIO — THE FLEET OF ADMIRAL RAMON BONIFAZ ADVANCES UP THE GUADALQUIVIR — DON PELAYO CORREA, MASTER OF SANTIAGO — HIS VALOROUS DEEDS AND THE MIRACLES WROUGHT IN HIS BEHALF.

WHEN it was bruited about that King Fernando the Saint intended to besiege the great city of Seville, all Spain was roused to arms. The masters of the various military and religious orders, the ricos hombres, the princes, cavaliers, hidalgos, and every one of Castile and Leon capable of bearing arms, prepared to take the field. Many of the nobility of Catalonia and Portugal repaired to the standard of the king, as did other cavaliers of worth and prowess from lands far beyond the Pyrenees.

Prelates, priests, and monks likewise thronged to the army — some to take care of the souls of those who hazarded their lives in this holy enterprise, others with a zealous determination to grasp buckler and lance, and battle with the arm of flesh against the enemies of God and the Church.

At the opening of spring the assembled host issued forth in shining array from the gates of Cordova. After having gained possession of Carmona, and Lora, and Aleolea, and of other neighboring places — some by voluntary surrender, others by force of arms — the king crossed the Guadalquivir, with great difficulty and peril, and made himself master of several of the most important posts in the neighborhood of Seville. Among these was Alcala del Rio, a place of great consequence, through which passed all the succors from the mountains to the city. This place was bravely defended by Axataf in person, the commander of Seville. He remained in Alcala with three hundred Moorish cavaliers, making frequent sallies upon the Christians, and effecting great slaughter. At length he beheld all the country around laid waste, the grain burnt or trampled down, the vineyards torn up, the cattle driven away and the villages consumed; so that nothing remained to give sustenance to the garrison or the inhabitants. Not daring to linger there any longer, he departed secretly in the night and retired to Seville, and the town surrendered to King Fernando.

While the king was putting Alcala del Rio in a state of de-