

Before a stone of the new edifice was laid, Philip had taken care to provide himself with the tenants who were to occupy it. At a general chapter of the Jeronymite fraternity, a prior was chosen for the convent of the Escorial, which was to consist of fifty members, soon increased to double that number. Philip had been induced to give the preference to the Jeronymite order, partly from their general reputation for ascetic piety, and in part from the regard shown for them by his father, who had chosen a convent of that order as the place of his last retreat. The monks were speedily transferred to the village of the Escorial, where they continued to dwell until accommodations were prepared for them in the magnificent pile which they were thenceforth to occupy.

Their temporary habitation was of the meanest kind, like most of the buildings in the hamlet. It was without window or chimney, and the rain found its way through the dilapidated roof of the apartment which they used as a chapel, so that they were obliged to protect themselves by a coverlet stretched above their heads. A rude altar was raised at one end of the chapel, over which was scrawled on the wall with charcoal the figure of a crucifix.¹⁵

The king, on his visits to the place, was lodged in the house of the curate, in not much better repair than the other dwellings in the hamlet. While there he was punctual in his attendance at mass, when a rude seat was prepared for him near the choir, consisting of a

¹⁵ Siguença, *Hist. de la Orden de San Geronimo*, tom. iii. p. 549.
—*Memorias de Fray Juan de San Geronimo*, Documentos inéditos, tom. vii. p. 22.