fast I hired a guide and went out to explore the city. I found the same dead and decaying look, the same stagnation, as at Toledo. It is scarcely possible to believe that this was the large and beautiful city of the Moors, with nearly a million inhabitants, 600 great mosques, 4000 minarets, and 900 public baths. Making every allowance for exaggeration, it must have been a magnificent city. There are now only about 35,000 inhabitants—not a public work, or the least sign of industry; and, were it not for the great mosque, which is now their cathedral—an unrivalled specimen of Moorish art, taste, and magnificence—there is not another object in the town that is worth a day's detention. This great building must cover, with the garden or court-yard, ten acres of ground. It is divided into long and transverse aisles, with marble, porphyry, and jasper columns, from which there spring double arches. These columns attest the antiquity of the materials at least, for many are evidently the remains of Roman temples of an early date: scarcely two are alike; and, to make them fit the elevation, some are sunk in the ground, and others have an additional block to raise the capital. Here you may wander all day in the cool shade, seeing new objects at every turn, and reading, mentally, the history of this strange city for more than two thousand years, with the material evidences before you. Round the four side aisles are about forty altars, with some good pictures and a great many daubs, and any amount of bronze and gilding, which is not in keeping with the Moorish architecture around. In the centre of the building they have raised a chapel and choir in the extravagant style of Charles v, or a sort of renaissance run mad, with gilding and ornament. In one of the side altars the beautiful arabesque of the Moors is still retained in all its pristine simplicity and richly blended colours. This was the Mihrab, or recess in which the Koran was kept. In the outer court is still the beautiful garden of orange and palm trees and fountains, in which the Moors delighted, and which they understood so well how to cultivate. Ascend the Giralda, or great tower, and take a view of the country round.

I have referred to the palace, church, and prison of the Inquisition at Valladolid. Cordova had also its feast of human sufferings, "to make a Roman holiday." The Alcazar, once the magnificent palace of the Moorish kings, became the residence and prison of the Inquisition. This building lies outside the town, and, but for the associations connected with its history, we might pass it without notice; but it is one of the land-marks that indicate the ruin and downfall of Spain. I think it was Philip II, in the midst of his cruel persecution, that exclaimed, "Better have no subjects than rule over heretics." One is inclined to reverse this maxim, and say, "Better have no subjects than the poor, indolent, bigoted, and slavish remnant, a pitiful wreck of mind and matter, which he and his immediate successors have left behind them. Round the building are suspended in festoons the chains of the captives delivered from the "Infidel Moors." The cloisters of the convent, which are still in good preservation, are magnificent specimens of the elaborate Gothic of the fifteenth century, with their high pointed arches, rich carvings, figures, and niche-work. The garden of the old convent is now overrun with weeds, and the surrounding scene is one of decay and desolation.

Making the circuit of the city, I found, as in Toledo, a number of the old Moorish quadrangular houses, the garden of fruit trees, and fountain in the centre, in the true Oriental style. There is still a portion of the old Moorish wall standing, and a few of the mosques are turned into Christian places of worship. But here the Mosque Cathedral forms the great object of attraction. There must have been upwards of twenty priests officiating at the altars the second morning I visited the place. They had no congregation, with the exception of a few old women, and they did not seem to pay them any attention. Each one, if I may use a profane expression, seemed to be working on his own hook.

These Cordovese should have been sun-worshippers; for as soon as they have mumbled over the morning service, and had their late breakfast, they are off to the alamedas and plazas with a southern aspect. There they sit in their mantles, basking in the solar rays, without a book or even a newspaper, moving about or sitting on the stone benches, and looking the picture of vacancy. Lay and clerical are all sun-worshippers, as if there were no call for their efforts in this world. I confess I have some sympathy with their love of out-door enjoyment. The warm, genial sun at this season, and the bright blue sky, would draw forth the severest anchorite from his cell to worship at this glorious shrine. When you have seen the old Roman bridge, and the Doric gate, called Roman, but of the period of Philip II, there is scarcely anything else to detain you. It is very disappointing to have all your reading and early romance dispelled in a few hours, and to see before you such a picture of desolation. During the prosperous and active period of the Moors, there were in Cordova three handicrafts alone—viz., dressers of Morocco skins and other leathers; workers in silver and filigree, and transcribers of scientific books, who amounted to nearly as many as the present population of that city. An Arab writer of that period says, "This city and its suburbs is six miles by twenty. This great space is covered with houses, palaces, mosques, and gardens spread along the banks of the Guadalquiver. In all the west there is no city compared to it, either for population, extent, markets, religious edifices, or number of baths and inns." This was the Cordova of the Moors; what the Austrio-Spanish sovereigns, the chivalry of the court, and the *auto de fé* of the Inquisition has made it, is one of the saddest chapters in Spanish history.

THE MINT.

In a recent number (p. 193, No. 848), we gave the coinage of the Mint for the year 1866, in gold, silver, and copper.* During the year 1867 no gold coin was issued, a fact unprecedented in the history of the Mint. It was thought, after the panic of 1866, that more money would be required, but so far from this being the case, not only was there no call for gold, but the demand for silver coins was remarkably diminished, as if the Mint shared in the general dulness and depression of all trade and manufacture. An article in the "Times," referring to this, contained some curious statements,† which we extract for the amusement of our readers:

There is a popular notion that any one taking gold,

* Gold, £5,076,676; Silver, £493,416; Copper, £50,624.

† The "Times" article describes the concentration of the various mints—London, Chester, Winchester, York—in one office in the Tower, where the works were carried on till the erection of the present building in 1806. It is then stated that: "Since 1806, the New Mint has been the sole coining centre for the British empire, where not only all the coins, from farthings to pounds, are struck, but where all commemoration medals and decorations awarded by the Government are made." By "the British Empire" is here meant the British Islands only; for Imperial mints exist in the colonies, and in all three Indian presidencies. The Calcutta people are rather proud of telling that their Mint Master, Colonel Forbes, of the Bengal Engineers, was deputed, about twenty years ago, by permission of the Court of Directors, to come to England to organise the new machinery then introduced at the London Mint.

silver, or copper to the Mint can have it at once made into an equal weight of pounds, shillings, or pence, and this at one time was the fact. But it is not so now, except with respect to gold. Time was when silver plate and bars of copper, gold ornaments, and gold trinkets used to be left for coinage. Now, however, the practice has sunk into desuetude, for the Mint is not bound to return coin for bullion in less than twenty days, and not now bound to take private consignments of silver or copper at all. People find it much more advantageous to dispose of their metals through the ordinary metal and bullion agents, who pay on the spot, and from these again the bullion agents of the Mint buy, according as silver or copper is needed. The Act of the Mint still binds them to take gold from any who bring it to them in coin, though, as a rule, these transactions are done through the Bank of England, which, of course, has to buy gold in ingots, dust, bars, or foreign coin, and which either sends it to the Mint for its own purposes, or sells it to the Mint as it may be wanted. As a fact, however, any one taking gold to the Mint can have it made into sovereigns, and the country bears the whole expense of the coinage. The very last private application which was made to the Mint came from Mr. Peabody, who sent about £10,000 of old gold of all kinds to be made into sovereigns. This was the only application of the kind that has been made for years past. It is a singular fact that, for the first time in the history of the Mint, not a single sovereign was struck there during the whole of last year, nor has one yet been struck there during this. During nearly fifteen months, in fact, not a pound sterling in gold has been added to the currency of the kingdom. It was thought after the panic of 1866, that the Mint would have to coin more money; but the very reverse has been the case. The Mint itself is suffering from the depression which has for a time overtaken all trades and occupations. The demand there now is not for pounds, but for shillings and sixpences, and even at the manufacture of these the men are only working half-time, and at little more than half wages.

Before proceeding to describe how the money itself is manufactured, it may not be out of place to say a few words as to how currencies die out, and how certain coins are popular or unpopular for years. The guinea and the half-crown were always popular; the five-shilling piece, the florin, and the fourpenny piece were always unpopular. The guinea was first coined in Charles II's reign, and derived its name from the Guinea Company, which used sometimes to stamp on it the elephant, as symbolical of its African origin. The guinea was so popular that its successor, the sovereign, was for a long time looked on with dislike. It may surprise the reader to hear that any coins of the realm were ever looked on with disfavour, but the records of the Mint show that the public are as fastidious in their coins as in their food; and there are some which are regarded with such dislike that the public will not take them till they see they can get no others. In this way the coinage of guineas was stopped, and the sovereign forced upon the public, who have now taken to it very kindly indeed. But this has not been the case with either the five-shilling or fourpenny pieces. The former were old institutions of long standing unpopularity. Many, even in the simplest retail transactions, refused to receive them. But they were driven out of circulation by the bankers, who sent to the Mint for silver, and the employers, who sent to their banks for silver, both of whom so constantly stipulated against taking five-shilling pieces that they remained on the hands of the Mint. Yet about £2,000 worth of these coins are made every year to go to the Falkland Islands. There the whalers, English, Germans, Swedes, and Americans, assemble to pass the winter in harbour, and among them the only accepted currency is the English five-shilling piece; for them, therefore, it is manufactured, and to the Falkland Islands it is sent. This noble coin, therefore—by far the handsomest in our currency—is now no longer issued in this country, and will soon become as much a thing of the past as guineas. The fourpenny piece, which was introduced for the first time in 1836, has always been so unpopular that its coinage has been discontinued, and for the last twelve years not one has been struck. The favourite half-crown, too, has gone the same way, though not without a struggle for its retention on the part of bankers and employers, who took a great aversion to the florin. But it was useless coining two-shilling pieces and two-and-sixpenny pieces at the same time, so the latter have been discontinued, and now only florins, shillings, sixpences, and threepenny-pieces are struck. What are called the garter sovereigns, the lion shillings, the rose, thistle, and shamrock shillings have all nearly disappeared from circulation, not only because they come into the Mint and are remelted and reissued in a more modern guise, but because from their scarcity there is a belief or kind of general notion that a sort of "luck" attaches to them; so they are kept to an extent that has made good impressions very scarce indeed, and when they do appear the cleanness and sharpness of their outline show at once how little they have been in circulation. A curious illustration of this may be found even so recently as in the history of florins. The first issue of these were small in size, and the usual letters F. D. had to be omitted from their circumference. A sort of protest was raised against this coinage, which at once received the name of the "graceless florin." Public attention was thus directed to them; they were kept as specimens, and though 750,000 were issued, hardly any are in circulation, and none are returned to the Mint.

The amount of damage sustained by spurious coinage is very small. There are only a very few coiners or "smashers" in London, and as they have to manufacture by hand—that is to say, to cast each piece separately in plaster moulds, and afterwards electrotype it—the process is very slow, and is entirely limited to the silver coinage, and more especially the florin and the shilling. Coiners never make money to pass themselves. They make it and sell it in dozens to those willing to undertake the risk of palming it off on the unwary; and the price of these counterfeits is in exact proportion to the risk incurred in passing them. Thus, counterfeit florins of the best class cost as much as 12*s.* a dozen, and the best class of shillings 6*s.* a dozen; and these coins, unless minutely examined, would be taken off-hand by any one. On the other hand, shillings can be got as low as 2*s.* a dozen, and common florins for 3*s.* a dozen. The "smashers" are a peculiar set of rogues, the number of whom has not much increased or diminished for the last fifty years. There is a kind of "cutler's law" among them, never to tell from whom they buy the coin, though the Mint police would rather catch one maker of counterfeit coin than twenty utterers. Only one formidable attempt against the gold coin was ever made, and this was some three or four years ago. A party of Germans established themselves secretly at Hamburg, and entered into a well considered and deliberate plan for making English sovereigns. These conspirators did not fall into the vulgar error of our native "smashers" in making actually bad sovereigns. They simply put so much additional alloy into the pure

gold as to make its value 17*s.* instead of 20*s.* These adventurers made proper steel dies, erected presses, and had all the appurtenances for the processes which are gone through in the English Mint—in fact, they established a private mint at Hamburg. Many thousands of their sovereigns got into circulation on the continent; for, in fact, none but the Mint authorities could detect them except by weight. By this test, however, they were at last discovered, the coiners traced, and their place of business seized. The chief conspirators escaped, but all their dies, machines, and a very considerable sum in pure and adulterated gold fell into the hands of the Hamburg authorities, so that the speculation, though boldly conceived and skilfully carried out, was a ruinous one after all. Not half as many sovereigns were put into circulation as would pay the first cost of the plant employed in their manufacture. Yet within the last few days one of these sovereigns was sent back to the Mint from Devonshire, simply on account of its extraordinary lightness, without apparent wear, and the tests showing it to be to all appearance standard gold. Of course, at Tower-hill it was at once recognised and destroyed.

Those who have now and then to pay in sovereigns at the Bank of England know how often one or two or more light sovereigns are rejected—that is to say, not returned, but cut into two or three pieces, 4*d.*, 6*d.*, or 8*d.*, according to the deficiency of the piece, being charged for the unpleasant process. The popular impression is that these cut sovereigns go back to the Mint to be remelted and recoined. But there are a vast number of trades in England which require standard gold for all sorts of purposes, and these regularly go to the Bank to buy these cut sovereigns. The reason is obvious; few trades use so much gold at once as to require an ingot, which weighs from 250 to 300 ounces, and if they did they have seldom the means necessary to melt it. But they can buy the cut sovereigns by the ounce or the pound, and though as *coins* they may have been light, yet as *metal* they are known to be pure. In this manner, between the gilding and porcelain trades, an immense amount of gold is annually absorbed. The porcelain trade alone takes nearly £50,000 worth of gold a year, and between gilding and porcelain the annual consumption of England and France is estimated at not less than 40,000 ounces, which is lost to currency for ever.

CHARACTERISTIC LETTERS.

COMMUNICATED BY THE AUTHOR OF "MEN I HAVE KNOWN."

JAMES SHERIDAN KNOWLES.

Of the impulsive in the poetical temperament I have said something in the introduction to the Ettrick Shepherd, and, what was characteristic of the Scottish minstrel, was true of the Irish bard Knowles who had a dash of the impetuousness native to his country. In earlier times, when ill-received by a Bath audience in the performance of the Hunchback in his own play, he next morning called on his friend Abbott, to shake, as he said, the dust off his feet against the City of the Sun, and bid him farewell. He was resolved that "no Bath idiots should have another opportunity to affront him." Abbott in vain endeavoured to persuade him to stop. "No, my dear fellow; nothing on earth could induce me. No, no. I'm off by the first coach. Can I take any letters for you?" "Where are you going?" innocently asked the good-humoured Abbott. "I don't know yet," was the reply.

But how the scene was changed, as years stole over the head of the gifted dramatist. The fervour of his mind developed in a new direction; and, as is well known from his publications, he became devoutly religious. I venture upon no comment, but offer the following letter in his later period, before his final exit from the stage of life, as one of the most striking and characteristic that ever could be written.

Port Bannatyne, Bute,
30 July, 1849.

My dear Jerdan,—I am indebted, and deeply, to the delay that has enriched me with so kind a letter. Did not I know that you loved old Knowles?

Indeed, dear friend, it was of the cause that I thought more than of myself. I thank God I think less about myself every day.

I am just concluding a reply to Dr. Wiseman's first lecture on the dogma of transubstantiation, a tissue of sophistry and execrable logic. But the poor man cannot help it; he is under the influence of that strong delusion with which God tells us that he visits those who do not receive the love of the truth—his holy word!

Farewell!—a thousand thanks. You know not how happy you have made your sincere and much-indebted friend,

James Sheridan Knowles

I trust to nothing in the controversy into which I am entering but the Word of God. I read no human work upon the subject, except such as I meet with in the mart of Antichrist.

Ah, Jerdan, I never was so happy as I am now, and yet I am writing in a fit of the gout. Depend upon it, my friend of many a year, my kind and ever steadfast friend—depend upon it that a man never begins to live indeed till he lives to die.

Have you lately seen old Forster? Jack, I mean.* I love old Jack, though we hardly ever meet but he snubs me; yet he can work for me like a Trojan when I require it. None like him, and no mistake.

In a huge hurry, expecting our morning post the very next moment.

Good bye!

BARBARA HOFLAND.

Of this popular novelist, poetess, and otherwise considerable writer, the biographies speak laudably, as the author of "Emily (4 vols.) and Beatrice," and the "Unloved One," and "The Son of Genius," and "Tales of the Priory," and "Self-denial," and "The Merchant's Widow," and "Decision," etc., etc., and which productions, as genuine pictures of life, ably constructed, and of excellent moral and social tendency, well merited the public approbation bestowed upon them. To be sure, this success was achieved before the *furore* of the sensation novel was sought and attained. Her poor invention (though she also published a volume of poems) did not reach to the creation and building-up of Frankensteins for her heroes, nor to the conception of heroines endowed as the Witch of Endor, and ten times more wicked. Her characters were only human beings, and engaged in human actions, and she was herself a kindly, good-natured woman, who thought no evil, and delighted in doing good. She was the wife of Hofland, one of the sweetest of our landscape painters; and both were amiable as their occupations.

The following letter was addressed to a literary lady, and only communicated to me with the view to enlist my services in the cause, in which, if I remember rightly, nothing was effected. Thelwall, it may be recollected, was one of the first and foremost of democratic reformers,

* "Jack," so called with his familiars, but not the less a heartfelt and a just compliment paid by the writer to his constant friend, John Forster, the author of so many admired historical and biographical works. That I somewhat deserved the similar sentiment expressed to myself, I am gratified to preserve the memory by stating that, on the death of my gifted friend I took the liberty of addressing a letter to Mr. William Cowper, with whom I had the honour of a slight previous acquaintance, the result of which was (as he kindly replied to my letter) that he recommended the case to Lord Palmerston, and the widow received the grant of a pension.