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THE BROCHURE SERIES

Spanish Wrought-Iron Screens

XII. Century Capitals from the  
Benedictine Monastery, Monreale

MARCH, 1900



PLATE XIX

SCREEN, ROYAL CHAPEL, GRANADA CATHEDRAL



## SPANISH WROUGHT-IRON SCREENS

FROM earliest times the numerous iron mines which exist in Spain, especially in the Cantabrian provinces, have been worked, and their presence has developed in that country excellent objects of art in metal at all times; but owing to the perishable character of iron, the slight intrinsic value of the material, and the little care taken of such fabrics, examples of very early specimens, with the exception of a few interesting ones which have reached us from the Spanish Arabs, have disappeared. The most interesting examples of Moorish manufacture which have survived are some iron keys of most delicate tracery. Their perfect state of preservation shows that they were used only as symbols of cities or fortresses, and, on given occasions, offered to kings or great people, and even in the present day in Spain this ceremony is kept up, and a key signifying the freedom of the palace, is offered to the foreign princes who stay at the royal residence in Madrid. In a similar manner, as far back as the middle ages, keys have been presented to Spanish sovereigns on occasions of their visits to such towns as Toledo and Seville; and a ceremony of swearing them to uphold the accorded privilege is gone through with, - a reminiscence probably of what occurred when these towns were conquered from the Moors. One of these keys at Valencia, belonging to Count de Trignona, measures nine and-a-half inches long, and was originally gilt. Its handle is closed and covered with delicate work in relief, and the wards are ornamented in the same manner with a combination of several words written in Cufic letters of difficult interpretation; but around the

handle we can read distinctly in arabic the name of the artist: "It was made by Ahmel Ahsan." This key appears to date from the thirteenth or early fourteenth century, and two similar ones exist in the Town Hall of Valencia.

Worthy objects of iron work must have been made by Christian artists of this period in Spain, for, although no specimens have come down to us, we have historical information which confirms such a conclusion. In the ordinances of Barcelona we find it recorded that the iron-smiths formed an extensive guild in the thirteenth century, and that in 1257 four of its members were officers of the Chief Municipal Council; and other similar records substantiate the fact that this guild increased in importance during the succeeding centuries. The ordinances of Seville of the fifteenth century, which were reformed in 1502, and those of Toledo, also revised in 1582, will give the student an idea of what was done by workers of metals at this period, the method of workmanship and other interesting details. The ordinances of Seville mention rejas made in Biscay, and give a good idea of the styles adopted by the iron-masters there, and the ordinances of Granada repeat, almost exactly, the former descriptions.

The modern history of iron work in Spain begins, however, with the second half of the fifteenth century. From this period on, the art continued to progress, and in the sixteenth century Spain produced works of art in wrought iron which were unrivalled in Europe.