

Romantic Legends of Spain

By

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***Free*editorial** 

MASTER PÉREZ THE ORGANIST

In Seville, in the very portico of Santa Inés, and while, on Christmas Eve, I was waiting for the Midnight Mass to begin, I heard this tradition from a lay-sister of the convent.

As was natural, after hearing it, I waited impatiently for the ceremony to commence, eager to be present at a miracle.

Nothing could be less miraculous, however, than the organ of Santa Inés, and nothing more vulgar than the insipid motets with which that night the organist regaled us.

On going out from the mass, I could not resist asking the lay-sister mischievously:

“How does it happen that the organ of Master Pérez is so unmusical at present?”

“Why!” replied the old woman. “Because it isn’t his.”

“Not his? What has become of it?”

“It fell to pieces from sheer old age, a number of years ago.”

“And the soul of the organist?”

“It has not appeared again since the new organ was set up in place of his own.”

If anyone of my readers, after perusing this history, should be moved to ask the same question, now he knows why the notable miracle has not continued into our own time.

I.

“Do you see that man with the scarlet cloak and the white plume in his hat,—the one who seems to wear on his waistcoat all the gold of the galleons of the Indies,—that man, I mean, just stepping down from his litter to give his hand to the lady there, who, now that she is out of hers, is coming our way, preceded by four pages with torches? Well, that is the Marquis of Moscoso, suitor to the widowed Countess of Villapineda. They say that before setting his eyes upon this lady, he had asked in marriage the daughter of a man of large fortune, but the girl’s father, of whom the rumor goes that he is a bit of a miser,—but hush! Speaking of the devil—do you see that man coming on foot under the arch of San Felipe, all muffled up in a dark cloak and attended by a single servant carrying a lantern? Now he is in front of the outer shrine.

“Do you notice, as his cloak falls back while he salutes the image, the embroidered cross that sparkles on his breast?”

“If it were not for this noble decoration, one would take him for a shop-keeper from Culebras street. Well, that is the father in question. See how the people make way for him and lift their hats.

“Everybody in Seville knows him on account of his immense fortune. That one man has more golden ducats in his chests than our lord King Philip maintains soldiers, and with his merchantmen he could form a squadron equal to that of the Grand Turk——

“Look, look at that group of stately cavaliers! Those are the four and twenty knights. Aha, aha! There goes that precious Fleming, too, whom, they say, the gentlemen of the green cross have not challenged for heresy yet, thanks to his influence with the magnates of Madrid. All he comes to church for is to hear the music. But if Master Pérez does not draw from him with his organ tears as big as fists, then sure it is that his soul isn’t under his doublet, but sizzles in the Devil’s frying-pan. Alack, neighbor! Trouble, trouble! I fear there is going to be a fight. I shall take refuge in the church; for, from what I see, there will be hereabouts more blows than Pater Nosters. Look, look! The Duke of Alcalá’s people are coming round the corner of San Pedro’s square, and I think I spy the Duke of Medinasidonia’s men in Dueñas alley. Didn’t I tell you?”

“Now they have caught sight of each other, now the two parties stop short, without breaking their order, the groups of bystanders dissolve, the police, who on these occasions get pounded by both sides, slip away, even the prefect, staff of office and all, seeks the shelter of the portico,—and yet they say that there is law to be had.

“For the poor——

“There, there! already shields are shining through the dark. Our Lord Jesus of All Power deliver us! Now the blows are beginning. Neighbor, neighbor! this way—before they close the doors. But hush! What is this? Hardly have they begun when they leave off. What light is that? Blazing torches! A litter! It’s His Reverence the Bishop.

“The most holy Virgin of Protection, on whom this very instant I was calling in my heart, brings him to my aid. Ah! But nobody knows what I owe to that Blessed Lady,—how richly she pays me back for the little candles that I burn to her every Saturday.—See him! How beautiful he is with his purple vestments and his red cardinal’s cap! God preserve him in his sacred chair as many centuries as I wish to live myself! If it were not for him, half Seville would have been burned up by this time with these quarrels of the dukes. See

them, see them, the great hypocrites, how they both press close to the litter of the prelate to kiss his ring! How they drop behind and, mingling with his household attendants, follow in his train! Who would dream that those two who appear on such good terms, if within the half hour they should meet in a dark street—that is, the dukes themselves—God deliver me from thinking them cowards; good proof have they given of valor, warring more than once against the enemies of Our Lord; but the truth remains, that if they should seek each other—and seek with the wish to find—they would find each other, putting end once for all to these continuous scuffles, in which those who really do the fighting are their kinsmen, their friends and their servants.

“But come, neighbor, come into the church, before it is packed full. Some nights like this it is so crowded that there is not room left for a grain of wheat. The nuns have a prize in their organist. When has the convent ever been in such high favor as now? I can tell you that the other sisterhoods have made Master Pérez magnificent offers, but there is nothing strange about that, for the Lord Archbishop himself has offered him mountains of gold to entice him to the cathedral,—but he, not a bit of it! He would sooner give up his life than his beloved organ. You don’t know Master Pérez? True enough, you are a newcomer in this neighborhood. Well, he is a saint; poor, but the most charitable man alive. With no other relative than his daughter and no other friend than his organ, he devotes all his life to watching over the innocence of the one and patching up the registers of the other. Mind that the organ is old. But that counts for nothing, he is so handy in mending it and caring for it that its sound is a marvel. For he knows it so perfectly that only by touch,—for I am not sure that I have told you the poor gentleman is blind from his birth. And how patiently he bears his misfortune! When people ask him how much he would give to see, he replies: ‘Much, but not as much as you think, for I have hopes.’ ‘Hopes of seeing?’ ‘Yes, and very soon,’ he adds, smiling like an angel. ‘Already I number seventy-six years; however long my life may be, soon I shall see God.’

“Poor dear! And he will see Him, for he is humble as the stones of the street, which let all the world trample on them. He always says that he is only a poor convent organist, when the fact is he could give lessons in harmony to the very chapel master of the Cathedral, for he was, as it were, born to the art. His father held the same position before him; I did not know the father, but my mother—God rest her soul!—says that he always had the boy at the organ with him to blow the bellows. Then the lad developed such talent that, as was natural, he succeeded to the position on the death of his father. And what a touch is in his hands, God bless them! They deserve to be taken to Chicarreros street and there enchased in gold. He always plays well, always, but on a night like this he is a wonder. He has the greatest devotion for this ceremony of the Midnight Mass, and when the Host is elevated, precisely at twelve o’clock,

which is the moment Our Lord Jesus Christ came into the world, the tones of his organ are the voices of angels.

“But, after all, why should I praise to you what you will hear to-night? It is enough to see that all the most distinguished people of Seville, even the Lord Archbishop himself, come to a humble convent to listen to him; and don’t suppose that it is only the learned people and those who are versed in music that appreciate his genius, but the very rabble of the streets. All these groups that you see arriving with pine-torches ablaze, chorusing popular songs, broken by rude outcries, to the accompaniment of timbrels, tambourines and rustic drums, these, contrary to their custom, which is to make disturbance in the churches, are still as the dead when Master Pérez lays his hands upon the organ, and when the Host is elevated, you can’t hear a fly; great tears roll down from the eyes of all, and at the end is heard a sound like an immense sigh, which is nothing else than the expulsion of the breath of the multitude, held in while the music lasts. But come, come! The bells have stopped ringing, and the mass is going to begin. Come inside.

“This night is Christmas Eve for all the world, but for nobody more than for us.”

So saying, the good woman who had been acting as cicerone for her neighbor pressed through the portico of the Convent of Santa Inés, and by dint of elbowing and pushing succeeded in getting inside the church, disappearing amid the multitude which thronged the inner spaces near the doors.

II.

The church was illuminated with astonishing brilliancy. The flood of light which spread from the altars through all its compass sparkled on the rich jewels of the ladies who, kneeling on the velvet cushions placed before them by their pages and taking their prayer-books from the hands of their duennas, formed a brilliant circle around the choir-screen. Grouped just behind them, on foot, wrapped in bright-lined cloaks garnished with gold-lace, with studied carelessness letting glimpses of their red and green crosses be seen, in one hand the hat, whose plumes kissed the carpet, the other hand resting upon the polished hilt of a rapier or caressing the handle of an ornate dagger, the four and twenty knights, with a large proportion of the highest nobility of Seville, seemed to form a wall for the purpose of protecting their daughters and their wives from contact with the populace. This, swaying back and forth at the rear of the nave, with a murmur like that of a surging sea, broke out into a joyous acclaim, accompanied by the discordant sounds of the timbrels and tambourines, at the appearance of the archbishop, who, after seating himself, surrounded by his attendants, near the High Altar under a scarlet canopy, thrice blessed the assembled people.

It was time for the mass to begin.

There passed, nevertheless, several minutes without the appearance of the celebrant. The throng commenced to stir about impatiently; the knights exchanged low-toned words with one another, and the archbishop sent one of his attendants to the sacristy to inquire the cause of the delay.

“Master Pérez has been taken ill, very ill, and it will be impossible for him to come to the Midnight Mass.”

This was the word brought back by the attendant.

The news spread instantly through the multitude. It would be impossible to depict the dismay which it caused; suffice it to say that such a clamor began to arise in the church that the prefect sprang to his feet, and the police came in to enforce silence, mingling with the close-pressed, surging crowd.

At that moment, a man with unpleasant features, thin, bony, and cross-eyed, too, hurriedly made his way to the place where the prelate was sitting.

“Master Pérez is sick,” he said. “The ceremony cannot begin. If it is your pleasure, I will play the organ in his absence; for neither is Master Pérez the first organist of the world, nor at his death need this instrument be left unused for lack of skill.”

The archbishop gave a nod of assent, and already some of the faithful, who recognized in that strange personage an envious rival of the organist of Santa Inés, were breaking out in exclamations of displeasure, when suddenly a startling uproar was heard in the portico.

“Master Pérez is here! Master Pérez is here!”

At these cries from the press in the doorway, every one looked around.

Master Pérez, his face pallid and drawn, was in fact entering the church, brought in a chair about which all were contending for the honor of carrying it upon their shoulders.

The commands of the physicians, the tears of his daughter had not been able to keep him in bed.

“No,” he had said. “This is the end, I know it, I know it, and I would not die without visiting my organ, and this night above all, Christmas Eve. Come, I wish it, I command it; let us go to the church.”

His desire had been fulfilled. The people carried him in their arms to the organ-loft, and the mass began.

At that instant the cathedral clock struck twelve.

The introit passed, and the Gospel, and the offertory, and then came the

solemn moment in which the priest, after having blessed the Sacred Wafer, took it in the tips of his fingers and began to elevate it.

A cloud of incense, rolling forth in azure waves, filled the length and breadth of the church; the little bells rang out with silvery vibrations, and Master Pérez placed his quivering hands upon the keys of the organ.

The hundred voices of its metal tubes resounded in a prolonged, majestic chord, which died away little by little, as if a gentle breeze had stolen its last echoes.

To this opening chord, that seemed a voice lifted from earth to heaven, responded a sweet and distant note, which went on swelling and swelling in volume until it became a torrent of pealing harmony.

It was the song of the angels, which, traversing the ethereal spaces, had reached the world.

Then there began to be heard a sound as of far-off hymns entoned by the hierarchies of seraphim, a thousand hymns at once, melting into one, which, nevertheless, was no more than accompaniment to a strange melody,—a melody that seemed to float above that ocean of mysterious echoes as a strip of fog above the billows of the sea.

One anthem after another died away; the movement grew simpler; now there were but two voices, whose echoes blended; then one alone remained, sustaining a note as brilliant as a thread of light. The priest bowed his face, and above his gray head, across an azure mist made by the smoke of the incense, appeared to the eyes of the faithful the uplifted Host. At that instant the thrilling note which Master Pérez was holding began to swell and swell until an outburst of colossal harmony shook the church, in whose corners the straitened air vibrated and whose stained glass shivered in its narrow Moorish embrasures.

From each of the notes forming that magnificent chord a theme was developed,—some near, some far, these keen, those muffled, until one would have said that the waters and the birds, the winds and the woods, men and angels, earth and heaven, were chanting, each in its own tongue, an anthem of praise for the Redeemer's birth.

The multitude listened in amazement and suspense. In all eyes were tears, in all spirits a profound realization of the divine.

The officiating priest felt his hands trembling, for the Holy One whom they upheld, the Holy One to whom men and archangels did reverence, was God, was very God, and it seemed to the priest that he had beheld the heavens open and the Host become transfigured.

The organ still sounded, but its music was gradually sinking away, like a tone dropping from echo to echo, ever more remote, ever fainter with the remoteness, when suddenly a cry rang out in the organ-loft, shrill, piercing, the cry of a woman.

The organ gave forth a strange, discordant sound, like a sob, and then was still.

The multitude surged toward the stair leading up to the organ-loft, in whose direction all the faithful, startled out of their religious ecstasy, were turning anxious looks.

“What has happened?” “What is the matter?” they asked one of another, and none knew what to reply, and all strove to conjecture, and the confusion increased, and the excitement began to rise to a height which threatened to disturb the order and decorum fitting within a church.

“What was it?” asked the great ladies of the prefect who, attended by his officers, had been one of the first to mount to the loft, and now, pale and showing signs of deep grief, was making his way to the archbishop, waiting in anxiety, like all the rest, to know the cause of that disturbance.

“What has occurred?”

“Master Pérez has just died.”

In fact, when the foremost of the faithful, after pressing up the stairway, had reached the organ-loft, they saw the poor organist fallen face down upon the keys of his old instrument, which was still faintly murmuring, while his daughter, kneeling at his feet, was vainly calling to him amid sighs and sobs.

III.

“Good evening, my dear Doña Baltasara. Are you, too, going to-night to the Christmas Eve Mass? For my part, I was intending to go to the parish church to hear it, but after what has happened—‘where goes John? With all the town.’ And the truth, if I must tell it, is that since Master Pérez died, a marble slab seems to fall on my heart whenever I enter Santa Inés.—Poor dear man! He was a saint. I assure you that I keep a piece of his doublet as a relic, and he deserves it, for by God and my soul it is certain that if our Lord Archbishop would stir in the matter, our grandchildren would see the image of Master Pérez upon an altar. But what hope of it? ‘The dead and the gone are let alone.’ We’re all for the latest thing now-a-days; you understand me. No? You haven’t an inkling of what has happened? It’s true we are alike in this,—from house to church, and from church to house, without concerning ourselves about what is said or isn’t said—except that I, as it were, on the wing, a word here, another there, without the least curiosity whatever, usually run across

any news that may be going. Well, then! It seems to be settled that the organist of San Román, that squint-eye, who is always throwing out slurs against the other organists, that great sloven, who looks more like a butcher from the slaughter-house than a professor of music, is going to play this Christmas Eve in place of Master Pérez. Now you must know, for all the world knows and it is a public matter in Seville, that nobody was willing to attempt it. Not even his daughter, though she is herself an expert, and after her father's death entered the convent as a novice. And naturally enough; accustomed to hear those marvellous performances, any other playing whatever must seem poor to us, however much we would like to avoid comparisons. But no sooner had the sisterhood decided that, in honor of the dead and as a token of respect to his memory, the organ should be silent to-night, than—look you!—here comes along our modest friend, saying that he is ready to play it. Nothing is bolder than ignorance. It is true the fault is not so much his as theirs who have consented to this profanation, but so goes the world. I say, it's no trifle—this crowd that is coming. One would think nothing had changed since last year. The same great people, the same magnificence, the same pushing in the doorway, the same excitement in the portico, the same throng in the church. Ah, if the dead should rise, he would die again rather than hear his organ played by hands like those. The fact is, if what the people of the neighborhood have told me is true, they are preparing a fine reception for the intruder. When the moment comes for placing the hand upon the keys, there is going to break out such a racket of timbrels, tambourines and rustic drums that nothing else can be heard. But hush! there's the hero of the occasion just going into the church. Jesus! what a showy jacket, what a fluted ruff, what a high and mighty air! Come, come, the archbishop arrived a minute ago, and the mass is going to begin. Come; it looks as though this night would give us something to talk about for many a day."

With these words the worthy woman, whom our readers recognize by her disconnected loquacity, entered Santa Inés, opening a way through the press, as usual, by dint of shoving and elbowing.

Already the ceremony had begun.

The church was as brilliant as the year before.

The new organist, after passing through the midst of the faithful who thronged the nave, on his way to kiss the ring of the prelate, had mounted to the organ-loft, where he was trying one stop of the organ after another with a solicitous gravity as affected as it was ridiculous.

Among the common people clustered at the rear of the church was heard a murmur, muffled and confused, sure augury of the coming storm which would not be long in breaking.

“He’s a clown, who doesn’t know how to do anything, not even to look straight,” said some.

“He’s an ignoramus, who after having made the organ in his own parish church worse than a rattle comes here to profane Master Pérez’s,” said others.

And while one was throwing off his coat so as to beat his drum to better advantage, and another was trying his timbrels, and the clatter was increasing more and more, only here and there could one be found to defend in lukewarm fashion that alien personage, whose pompous and pedantic bearing formed so strong a contrast to the modest manner and kindly courtesy of the dead Master Pérez.

At last the looked-for moment came, the solemn moment when the priest, after bowing low and murmuring the sacred words, took the Host in his hands. The little bells rang out, their chime like a rain of crystal notes; the translucent waves of incense rose, and the organ sounded.

At that instant a horrible din filled the compass of the church, drowning the first chord.

Bagpipes, horns, timbrels, drums, all the instruments of the populace raised their discordant voices at once, but the confusion and the clang lasted but a few seconds. All at once as the tumult had begun, so all at once it ceased.

The second chord, full, bold, magnificent, sustained itself, still pouring from the organ’s metal tubes like a cascade of inexhaustible, sonorous harmony.

Celestial songs like those that caress the ear in moments of ecstasy, songs which the spirit perceives but the lip cannot repeat; fugitive notes of a far-off melody, which reach us at intervals, sounding in the bugles of the wind; the rustle of leaves kissing one another on the trees with a murmur like rain; trills of larks which rise warbling from among the flowers like a flight of arrows to the clouds; nameless crashes, overwhelming as the thunders of a tempest; a chorus of seraphim without rhythm or cadence, unknown harmony of heaven which only the imagination understands; soaring hymns, that seem to mount to the throne of God like a fountain of light and sound—all this was expressed by the organ’s hundred voices, with more vigor, more mystic poetry, more weird coloring than had ever been known before.

When the organist came down from the loft, the crowd which pressed up to the stairway was so great, and their eagerness to see and praise him so intense, that the prefect, fearing, and not without reason, that he would be suffocated among them all, commanded some of the police to open, by their staves, a path for him that he might reach the High Altar where the prelate waited his arrival.

“You perceive,” said the archbishop, when the musician was brought into his presence, “that I have come all the way from my palace hither only to hear you. Will you be as cruel as Master Pérez, who would never save me the journey by playing the Midnight Mass in the cathedral?”

“Next year,” responded the organist, “I promise to give you that pleasure, for not all the gold of the earth would induce me to play this organ again.”

“And why not?” interrupted the prelate.

“Because,” replied the organist, striving to repress the agitation revealed in the pallor of his face,—“because it is old and poor, and one cannot express on it all that one would.”

The archbishop retired, followed by his attendants. One by one, the litters of the great folk went filing away, lost to sight in the windings of the neighboring streets; the groups of the portico melted, as the faithful dispersed in different directions; and already the lay-sister who acted as gate-keeper was about to lock the vestibule doors, when there appeared two women, who, after crossing themselves and muttering a prayer before the arched shrine of Saint Philip, went their way, turning into Dueñas alley.

“What would you have, my dear Doña Baltasara?” one of them was saying. “That’s the way I’m made. Every fool has his fancy. The barefooted Capuchins might assure me that it was so and I wouldn’t believe it in the least. That man cannot have played what we have just been hearing. A thousand times have I heard him in San Bartolomé, his parish church, from which the priest had to send him away for his bad playing,—enough to make you stop your ears with cotton. Besides, all you need is to look at his face, which, they say, is the mirror of the soul. I remember, poor dear man, as if I were seeing him now,—I remember Master Pérez’s look when, on a night like this, he would come down from the organ loft, after having entranced the audience with his marvels. What a gracious smile, what a happy glow on his face! Old as he was, he seemed like an angel. But this fellow came plunging down the stairs as if a dog were barking at him on the landing, his face the color of the dead, and—come now, my dear Doña Baltasara, believe me, believe me with all your soul. I suspect a mystery in this.”

With these last words, the two women turned the corner of the street and disappeared.

We count it needless to inform our readers who one of them was.

IV.

Another year had gone by. The abbess of the convent of Santa Inés and the daughter of Master Pérez, half hidden in the shadows of the church choir, were

talking in low tones. The peremptory voice of the bell was calling from its tower to the faithful, and occasionally an individual would cross the portico, silent and deserted now, and after taking the holy water at the door, would choose a place in a corner of the nave, where a few residents of the neighborhood were quietly waiting for the Midnight Mass to begin.

“There, you see,” the mother superior was saying, “your fear is excessively childish. There is nobody in the church. All Seville is trooping to the cathedral to-night. Play the organ and play it without the least uneasiness. We are only the sisterhood here. Well? Still you are silent, still your breaths are like sighs. What is it? What is the matter?”

“I am—afraid,” exclaimed the girl, in a tone of the deepest agitation.

“Afraid? Of what?”

“I don’t know—of something supernatural. Last night, see, I had heard you say that you earnestly wished me to play the organ for the mass and, pleased with this honor, I thought I would look to the stops and tune it, so as to give you a surprise to-day. I went into the choir—alone—I opened the door which leads to the organ-loft. At that moment the clock of the cathedral struck the hour—what hour, I do not know. The peals were exceedingly mournful, and many—many. They kept on sounding all the time that I stood as if nailed to the threshold, and that time seemed to me a century.

“The church was empty and dark. Far away, in the hollow depth, there gleamed, like a single star lost in the sky of night, a feeble light, the light of the lamp which burns on the High Altar. By its faint rays, which only served to make more visible all the deep horror of the darkness, I saw—I saw—mother, do not disbelieve it—I saw a man who, in silence and with his back turned toward the place where I stood, was running over the organ-keys with one hand, while he tried the stops with the other. And the organ sounded, but it sounded in a manner indescribable. It seemed as if each of its notes were a sob smothered within the metal tube which vibrated with its burden of compressed air, and gave forth a muffled tone, almost inaudible, yet exact and true.

“And the cathedral clock kept on striking, and that man kept on running over the keys. I heard his very breathing.

“The horror of it had frozen the blood in my veins. In my body I felt an icy chill and in my temples fire. Then I longed to cry out, but could not. That man had turned his face and looked at me,—no, not looked at me, for he was blind. It was my father.”

“Bah, sister! Put away these fancies with which the wicked enemy tries to trouble weak imaginations. Pray a Pater Noster and an Ave Maria to the archangel Saint Michael, captain of the celestial hosts, that he may aid you to

resist the evil spirits. Wear on your neck a scapulary which has been touched to the relics of Saint Pacomio, our advocate against temptations, and go, go in power to the organ-loft. The mass is about to begin, and the faithful are growing impatient. Your father is in heaven, and thence, instead of giving you a fright, he will descend to inspire his daughter in this solemn service which he so especially loved.”

The prioress went to occupy her seat in the choir in the centre of the sisterhood. The daughter of Master Pérez opened the door of the loft with trembling hand, sat down at the organ, and the mass began.

The mass began, and continued without any unusual occurrence until the consecration. Then the organ sounded, and at the same time came a scream from the daughter of Master Pérez.

The mother superior, the nuns, and some of the faithful rushed up to the organ-loft.

“Look at him! look at him!” cried the girl, fixing her eyes, starting from their sockets, upon the organ-bench, from which she had risen in terror, clinging with convulsed hands to the railing of the organ-loft.

All eyes were fixed upon the spot to which her gaze was turned. No one was at the organ, yet it went on sounding—sounding as the archangels sing in their raptures of mystic ecstasy.

“Didn’t I tell you so a thousand times, my dear Doña Baltasara—didn’t I tell you so? There is a mystery here. What? You were not at the Christmas Eve Mass last night? But, for all that, you must know what happened. Nothing else is talked about in all Seville. The archbishop is furious, and with good reason. To have missed going to Santa Inés—to have missed being present at the miracle! And for what? To hear a charivari, a rattle-go-bang, for people who heard it tell me that what the inspired organist of San Bartolomé did in the cathedral was just that. I told you so. The squint-eye could never have played that divine music of last year, never. There is mystery about all this, a mystery that is, in truth, the soul of Master Pérez.”

THE EMERALD EYES

For a long time I have desired to write something with this title. Now that the opportunity has come, I have inscribed it in capital letters at the top of the page and have let my pen run at will.

I believe that I have seen eyes like those I have painted in this legend. It

may have been in my dreams, but I have seen them. Too true it is that I shall not be able to describe them as they were, luminous, transparent as drops of rain slipping over the leaves of the trees after a summer shower. At all events, I count upon the imagination of my readers to understand me in what we might call a sketch for a picture which I will paint some day.

I.

“The stag is wounded—he is wounded; no doubt of it. There are traces of his blood on the mountain shrubs, and in trying to leap one of those mastic trees his legs failed him. Our young lord begins where others end. In my forty years as huntsman I have not seen a better shot. But by Saint Saturio, patron of Soria, cut him off at these hollies, urge on the dogs, blow the horns till your lungs are empty, and bury your spurs in the flanks of the horses. Do you not see that he is going toward the fountain of the Poplars, and if he lives to reach it we must give him up for lost?”

The glens of the Moncayo flung from echo to echo the braying of the horns and barking of the unleashed pack of hounds; the shouts of the pages resounded with new vigor, while the confused throng of men, dogs and horses rushed toward the point which Iñigo, the head huntsman of the Marquises of Almenar, indicated as the one most favorable for intercepting the quarry.

But all was of no avail. When the fleetest of the greyhounds reached the hollies, panting, its jaws covered with foam, already the deer, swift as an arrow, had cleared them at a single bound, disappearing among the thickets of a narrow path which led to the fountain.

“Draw rein! draw rein, every man!” then cried Iñigo. “It was the will of God that he should escape.”

And the troop halted, the horns fell silent and the hounds, at the call of the hunters, abandoned, snarling, the trail.

At that moment, the lord of the festival, Fernando de Argensola, the heir of Almenar, came up with the company.

“What are you doing?” he exclaimed, addressing his huntsman, astonishment depicted on his features, anger burning in his eyes. “What are you doing, idiot? Do you see that the creature is wounded, that it is the first to fall by my hand, and yet you abandon the pursuit and let it give you the slip to die in the depths of the forest? Do you think perchance that I have come to kill deer for the banquets of wolves?”

“Señor,” murmured Iñigo between his teeth, “it is impossible to pass this point.”

“Impossible! And why?”

“Because this path,” continued the huntsman, “leads to the fountain of the Poplars, the fountain of the Poplars in whose waters dwells an evil spirit. He who dares trouble its flow pays dear for his rashness. Already the deer will have reached its borders; how will you take it without drawing on your head some fearful calamity? We hunters are kings of the Moncayo, but kings that pay a tribute. A quarry which takes refuge at this mysterious fountain is a quarry lost.”

“Lost! Sooner will I lose the seigniory of my fathers, sooner will I lose my soul into the hands of Satan than permit this stag to escape me, the only one my spear has wounded, the first fruits of my hunting. Do you see him? Do you see him? He can still at intervals be made out from here. His legs falter, his speed slackens; let me go, let me go! Drop this bridle or I roll you in the dust! Who knows if I will not run him down before he reaches the fountain? And if he should reach it, to the devil with it, its untroubled waters and its inhabitants! On, Lightning! on, my steed! If you overtake him, I will have the diamonds of my coronet set in a headstall all of gold for you.”

Horse and rider departed like a hurricane.

Iñigo followed them with his eyes till they disappeared in the brush. Then he looked about him: all like himself remained motionless, in consternation.

The huntsman exclaimed at last:

“Señores, you are my witnesses. I exposed myself to death under his horse’s hoofs to hold him back. I have fulfilled my duty. Against the devil heroism does not avail. To this point comes the huntsman with his crossbow; beyond this, it is for the chaplain with his holy water to attempt to pass.”

II.

“You are pale; you go about sad and gloomy. What afflicts you? From the day, which I shall ever hold in hate, on which you went to the fountain of the Poplars in chase of the wounded deer, I should say an evil sorceress had bewitched you with her enchantments.

“You do not go to the mountains now preceded by the clamorous pack of hounds, nor does the blare of your horns awake the echoes. Alone with these brooding fancies which beset you, every morning you take your crossbow only to plunge into the thickets and remain there until the sun goes down. And when night darkens and you return to the castle, white and weary, in vain I seek in the game-bag the spoils of the chase. What detains you so long far from those who love you most?”

While Iñigo was speaking, Fernando, absorbed in his thoughts, mechanically cut splinters from the ebony bench with his hunting knife.

After a long silence, which was interrupted only by the click of the blade as it slipped over the polished wood, the young man, addressing his servant as if he had not heard a single word, exclaimed:

“Iñigo, you who are an old man, you who know all the haunts of the Moncayo, who have lived on its slopes pursuing wild beasts and in your wandering hunting trips have more than once stood on its summit, tell me, have you ever by chance met a woman who dwells among its rocks?”

“A woman!” exclaimed the huntsman with astonishment, looking closely at him.

“Yes,” said the youth. “It is a strange thing that has happened to me, very strange. I thought I could keep this secret always; but it is no longer possible. It overflows my heart and begins to reveal itself in my face. Therefore I am going to tell it to you. You will help me solve the mystery which enfolds this being who seems to exist only for me, since no one knows her or has seen her, or can give me any account of her.”

The huntsman, without opening his lips, drew forward his stool to place it near the ebony bench of his lord from whom he did not once remove his affrighted eyes. The youth, after arranging his thoughts, continued thus:

“From the day on which, notwithstanding your gloomy predictions, I went to the fountain of the Poplars, and crossing its waters recovered the stag which your superstition would have let escape, my soul has been filled with a desire for solitude.

“You do not know that place. See, the fountain springs from a hidden source in the cavity of a rock, and falls in trickling drops through the green, floating leaves of the plants that grow on the border of its cradle. These drops, which on falling glisten like points of gold and sound like the notes of a musical instrument, unite on the turf and murmuring, murmuring with a sound like that of bees humming about the flowers, glide on through the gravel, and form a rill and contend with the obstacles in their way, and gather volume and leap and flee and run, sometimes with a laugh, sometimes with sighs, until they fall into a lake. Into the lake they fall with an indescribable sound. Laments, words, names, songs, I know not what I have heard in that sound when I have sat, alone and fevered, upon the huge rock at whose feet the waters of that mysterious fountain leap to bury themselves in a deep pool whose still surface is scarcely rippled by the evening wind.

“Everything there is grand. Solitude with its thousand vague murmurs dwells in those places and transports the mind with a profound melancholy. In the silvered leaves of the poplars, in the hollows of the rocks, in the waves of the water it seems that the invisible spirits of nature talk with us, that they

recognize a brother in the immortal soul of man.

“When at break of dawn you would see me take my crossbow and go toward the mountain, it was never to lose myself among the thickets in pursuit of game. No, I went to sit on the rim of the fountain, to seek in its waves—I know not what—an absurdity! The day I leaped over it on my Lightning, I believed I saw glittering in its depths a marvel—truly a marvel—the eyes of a woman!

“Perhaps it may have been a fugitive ray of sunshine that wound, serpent like, through the foam; perhaps one of those flowers which float among the weeds of its bosom, flowers whose calyxes seem to be emeralds—I do not know. I thought I saw a gaze which fixed itself on mine, a look which kindled in my breast a desire absurd, impossible of realization, that of meeting a person with eyes like those.

“In my search, I went to that place day after day.

“At last, one afternoon—I thought myself the plaything of a dream—but no, it is the truth; I have spoken with her many times as I am now speaking with you—one afternoon I found, sitting where I had sat, clothed in a robe which reached to the waters and floated on their surface, a woman beautiful beyond all exaggeration. Her hair was like gold; her eyelashes shone like threads of light, and between the lashes flashed the restless eyes that I had seen—yes; for the eyes of that woman were the eyes which I bore stamped upon my mind, eyes of an impossible color, the color——”

“Green!” exclaimed Iñigo, in accents of profound terror, starting with a bound from his seat.

Fernando, in turn, looked at him as if astonished that Iñigo should supply what he was about to say, and asked him with mingled anxiety and joy:

“Do you know her?”

“Oh, no!” said the huntsman. “God save me from knowing her! But my parents, on forbidding me to go toward those places, told me a thousand times that the spirit, goblin, demon or woman, who dwells in those waters, has eyes of that color. I conjure you by that which you love most on earth not to return to the fountain of the Poplars. One day or another her vengeance will overtake you, and you will expiate in death the crime of having stained her waters.”

“By what I love most!” murmured the young man with a sad smile.

“Yes,” continued the elder. “By your parents, by your kindred, by the tears of her whom heaven destines for your wife, by those of a servant who watched beside your cradle.”

“Do you know what I love most in this world? Do you know for what I

would give the love of my father, the kisses of her who gave me life, and all the affection which all the women on earth can hold in store? For one look, for only one look of those eyes! How can I leave off seeking them?”

Fernando said these words in such a tone that the tear which trembled on the eyelids of Iñigo fell silently down his cheek, while he exclaimed with a mournful accent: “The will of Heaven be done!”

III.

“Who art thou? What is thy fatherland? Where dost thou dwell? Day after day I come seeking thee, and see neither the palfrey that brings thee hither, nor the servants who bear thy litter. Rend once for all the veil of mystery in which thou dost enfold thyself as in the heart of night. I love thee and, highborn or lowly, I will be thine, thine forever.”

The sun had crossed the crest of the mountain. The shadows were descending its slope with giant strides. The breeze sighed amid the poplars of the fountain. The mist, rising little by little from the surface of the lake, began to envelop the rocks of its margin.

Upon one of these rocks, on one which seemed ready to topple over into the depths of the waters on whose surface was pictured its wavering image, the heir of Almenar, on his knees at the feet of his mysterious beloved, sought in vain to draw from her the secret of her existence.

She was beautiful, beautiful and pallid as an alabaster statue. One of her tresses fell over her shoulders, entangling itself in the folds of her veil like a ray of sunlight passing through clouds; and her eyes, within the circle of her amber-colored lashes, gleamed like emeralds set in fretted gold.

When the youth ceased speaking, her lips moved as for utterance, but only exhaled a sigh, a sigh soft and sorrowful like that of the gentle wave which a dying breeze drives among the rushes.

“Thou answerest not,” exclaimed Fernando, seeing his hope mocked. “Wouldst thou have me credit what they have told me of thee? Oh, no! Speak to me. I long to know if thou lovest me; I long to know if I may love thee, if thou art a woman——”

—“Or a demon. And if I were?”

The youth hesitated a moment; a cold sweat ran through his limbs; the pupils of his eyes dilated, fixing themselves with more intensity upon those of that woman and, fascinated by their phosphoric brilliance, as though demented he exclaimed in a burst of passion:

“If thou wert, I should love thee. I should love thee as I love thee now, as it is my destiny to love thee even beyond this life, if there be any life beyond.”

“Fernando,” said the beautiful being then, in a voice like music: “I love thee even more than thou lovest me; in that I, who am pure spirit, stoop to a mortal. I am not a woman like those that live on earth. I am a woman worthy of thee who art superior to the rest of humankind. I dwell in the depths of these waters, incorporeal like them, fugitive and transparent; I speak with their murmurs and move with their undulations. I do not punish him who dares disturb the fountain where I live; rather I reward him with my love, as a mortal superior to the superstitions of the common herd, as a lover capable of responding to my strange and mysterious embrace.”

While she was speaking, the youth, absorbed in the contemplation of her fantastic beauty, drawn on as by an unknown force, approached nearer and nearer the edge of the rock. The woman of the emerald eyes continued thus:

“Dost thou behold, behold the limpid depths of this lake, behold these plants with large, green leaves which wave in its bosom? They will give us a couch of emeralds and corals and I—I will give thee a bliss unnamable, that bliss which thou hast dreamed of in thine hours of delirium, and which no other can bestow.—Come! the mists of the lake float over our brows like a pavilion of lawn, the waves call us with their incomprehensible voices, the wind sings among the poplars hymns of love; come—come!”

Night began to cast her shadows, the moon shimmered on the surface of the pool, the mist was driven before the rising breeze, the green eyes glittered in the dusk like the will-o'-the-wisps that run over the surface of impure waters. “Come, come!” these words were murmuring in the ears of Fernando like an incantation,—“Come!” and the mysterious woman called him to the brink of the abyss where she was poised, and seemed to offer him a kiss—a kiss——

Fernando took one step toward her—another—and felt arms slender and flexible twining about his neck and a cold sensation on his burning lips, a kiss of snow—wavered, lost his footing and fell, striking the water with a dull and mournful sound.

The waves leaped in sparks of light, and closed over his body, and their silvery circles went widening, widening until they died away on the banks.

THE GOLDEN BRACELET

I.

She was beautiful, beautiful with that beauty which turns a man dizzy; beautiful with that beauty which in no wise resembles our dream of the angels,

and yet is supernatural; a diabolical beauty that the devil perchance gives to certain beings to make them his instruments on earth.

He loved her—he loved her with that love which knows not check nor bounds; he loved her with that love which seeks delight and finds but martyrdom; a love which is akin to bliss, yet which Heaven seems to cast on mortals for the expiation of their sins.

She was wayward, wayward and unreasonable, like all the women of the world.

He, superstitious, superstitious and valiant, like all the men of his time.

Her name was Maria Antúnez.

His, Pedro Alfonso de Orellana.

Both were natives of Toledo, and both had their homes in the city which saw their birth.

The tradition which relates this marvellous event, an event of many years since, tells nothing more of these two central actors.

I, in my character of scrupulous historian, will not add a single word of my own invention to describe them further.

II.

One day he found her in tears and asked her:

“Why dost thou weep?”

She dried her eyes, looked at him searchingly, heaved a sigh and began to weep anew.

Then, drawing close to Maria, he took her hand, leaned his elbow on the fretted edge of the Arabic parapet whence the beautiful maiden was watching the river flow beneath, and again he asked her: “Why dost thou weep?”

The Tajo, moaning at the tower’s foot, twisted in and out amid the rocks on which is seated the imperial city. The sun was sinking behind the neighboring mountains, the afternoon haze was floating, a veil of azure gauze, and only the monotonous sound of the water broke the profound stillness.

Maria exclaimed: “Ask me not why I weep, ask me not; for I would not know how to answer thee, nor thou how to understand. In the souls of us women are stifling desires which reveal themselves only in a sigh, mad ideas that cross the imagination without our daring to form them into speech, strange phenomena of our mysterious nature which man cannot even conceive. I implore thee, ask me not the cause of my grief; if I should reveal it to thee, perchance thou wouldst reply with peals of laughter.”

When these words were faltered out, again she bowed the head and again he urged his questions.

The radiant damsel, breaking at last her stubborn silence, said to her lover in a hoarse, unsteady voice:

“Thou wilt have it. It is a folly that will make thee laugh, but be it so. I will tell thee, since thou dost crave to hear.

“Yesterday I was in the temple. They were celebrating the feast of the Virgin; her image, placed on a golden pedestal above the High Altar, glowed like a burning coal; the notes of the organ trembled, spreading from echo to echo throughout the length and breadth of the church, and in the choir the priests were chanting the *Salve, Regina*.

“I was praying; I was praying, all absorbed in my religious meditations, when involuntarily I lifted my head, and my gaze sought the altar. I know not why my eyes from that instant fixed themselves upon the image, but I speak amiss—it was not on the image; they fixed themselves upon an object which until then I had not seen—an object which, I know not why, thenceforth held all my attention. Do not laugh; that object was the golden bracelet that the Mother of God wears on one of the arms in which rests her divine Son. I turned aside my gaze and strove again to pray. Impossible. Without my will, my eyes moved back to the same point. The altar lights, reflected in the thousand facets of those diamonds, were multiplied prodigiously. Millions of living sparks, rosy, azure, green and golden, were whirling around the jewels like a storm of fiery atoms, like a dizzy round of those spirits of flame which fascinate with their brightness and their marvellous unrest.

“I left the church. I came home, but I came with that idea fixed in imagination. I went to bed; I could not sleep. The night passed, a night eternal with one thought. At dawn my eyelids closed and—believest thou?—even in slumber I saw crossing before me, dimming in the distance and ever returning, a woman, a woman dark and beautiful, who wore the ornament of gold and jewel work; a woman, yes, for it was no longer the Virgin, whom I adore and at whose feet I bow; it was a woman, another woman like myself, who looked upon me and laughed mockingly. ‘Dost see it?’ she appeared to say, showing me the treasure. ‘How it glitters! It seems a circlet of stars snatched from the sky some summer night. Dost see it? But it is not thine, and it will be thine never, never. Thou wilt perchance have others that surpass it, others richer, if it be possible, but this, this which sparkles so piquantly, so bewitchingly, never, never.’ I awoke, but with the same idea fixed here, then as now, like a red-hot nail, diabolical, irresistible, inspired beyond a doubt by Satan himself.—And what then?—Thou art silent, silent, and dost hang thy head.—Does not my folly make thee laugh?”

Pedro, with a convulsive movement, grasped the hilt of his sword, raised his head, which he had, indeed, bent low and said with smothered voice:

“Which Virgin has this jewel?”

“The Virgin of the Sagrario,” murmured Maria.

“The Virgin of the Sagrario!” repeated the youth, with accent of terror. “The Virgin of the Sagrario of the cathedral!”

And in his features was portrayed for an instant the state of his mind, appalled before a thought.

“Ah, why does not some other Virgin own it?” he continued, with a tense, impassioned tone. “Why does not the archbishop bear it in his mitre, the king in his crown, or the devil between his claws? I would tear it away for thee, though its price were death or hell. But from the Virgin of the Sagrario, our own Holy Patroness,—I—I who was born in Toledo! Impossible, impossible!”

“Never!” murmured Maria, in a voice that scarcely reached the ear. “Never!”

And she wept again.

Pedro fixed a stupefied stare on the running waves of the river—on the running waves, which flowed and flowed unceasingly before his absent-thoughted eyes, breaking at the foot of the tower amid the rocks on which is seated the imperial city.

III.

The cathedral of Toledo! Imagine a forest of colossal palm trees of granite, that by the interlacing of their branches form a gigantic, magnificent arch, beneath which take refuge and live, with the life genius has lent them, a whole creation of beings, both fictitious and real.

Imagine an incomprehensible fall of shadow and light wherein the colored rays from the ogive windows meet and are merged with the dusk of the nave; where the gleam of the lamps struggles and is lost in the gloom of the sanctuary.

Imagine a world of stone, immense as the spirit of our religion, sombre as its traditions, enigmatic as its parables, and yet you will not have even a remote idea of this eternal monument of the enthusiasm and faith of our ancestors—a monument upon which the centuries have emulously lavished their treasures of knowledge, inspiration and the arts.

In the cathedral-heart dwells silence, majesty, the poetry of mysticism, and a holy dread which guards those thresholds against worldly thoughts and the paltry passions of earth.

Consumption of the body is stayed by breathing pure mountain air; atheism should be cured by breathing this atmosphere of faith.

But great and impressive as the cathedral presents itself to our eyes at whatsoever hour we enter its mysterious and sacred precinct, never does it produce an impression so profound as in those days when it arrays itself in all the splendors of religious pomp, when its shrines are covered with gold and jewels, its steps with costly carpeting and its pillars with tapestry.

Then, when its thousand silver lamps, aglow, shed forth a flood of light, when a cloud of incense floats in air, and the voices of the choir, the harmonious pealing of the organs, and the bells of the tower make the building tremble from its deepest foundations to its highest crown of spires, then it is we comprehend, because we feel, the ineffable majesty of God who dwells within, gives it life with His breath and fills it with the reflection of His glory.

The same day on which occurred the scene we have just described, the last rites of the magnificent eight-day feast of the Virgin were held in the cathedral.

The holy festival had attracted an immense multitude of the faithful; but already they had dispersed in all directions; already the lights of the chapels and of the High Altar had been extinguished, and the mighty doors of the temple had groaned upon their hinges as they closed behind the last departing worshipper, when forth from the depth of shadow, and pale, pale as the statue of the tomb on which he leant for an instant, while he conquered his emotion, there advanced a man, who came slipping with the utmost stealthiness toward the screen of the central chapel. There the gleam of a lamp made it possible to distinguish his features.

It was Pedro.

What had passed between the two lovers to bring him to the point of putting into execution an idea whose mere conception had lifted his hair with horror? That could never be learned.

But there he was, and he was there to carry out his criminal intent. In his restless glances, in the trembling of his knees, in the sweat which ran in great drops down his face, his thought stood written.

The cathedral was alone, utterly alone, and drowned in deepest hush.

Nevertheless, there were perceptible from time to time suggestions of dim disturbance, creakings of wood maybe or murmurs of the wind, or—who knows?—perchance illusion of the fancy, which in its excited moments hears and sees and feels what is not; but in very truth there sounded, now here, now there, now behind him, now even at his side, something like sobs suppressed,

something like the rustle of trailing robes, and a muffled stir as of steps that go and come unceasingly.

Pedro forced himself to hold his course; he reached the grating and mounted the first step of the chancel. All along the inner wall of this chapel are ranged the tombs of kings, whose images of stone, with hand upon the sword-hilt, seem to keep watch night and day over the sanctuary in whose shade they take their everlasting rest.

“Onward!” he murmured under his breath, and he strove to move and could not. It seemed as if his feet were nailed to the pavement. He lowered his eyes, and his hair stood on end with horror. The floor of the chapel was made of wide, dark burial slabs.

For a moment he believed that a cold and fleshless hand was holding him there with strength invincible. The dying lamps, which sparkled in the hollow aisles and transepts like lost stars in the dark, wavered before his vision, the statues of the sepulchres wavered and the images of the altar, all the cathedral wavered, with its granite arcades and buttresses of solid stone.

“Onward!” Pedro exclaimed again, as if beside himself; he approached the altar and climbing upon it, he reached the pedestal of the image. All the space about clothed itself in weird and frightful shapes, all was shadow and flickering light, more awful even than total darkness. Only the Queen of Heaven, softly illuminated by a golden lamp, seemed to smile, tranquil, gracious and serene, in the midst of all that horror.

Nevertheless, that silent, changeless smile, which calmed him for an instant, in the end filled him with fear, a fear stranger and more profound than what he had suffered hitherto.

Yet he regained his self-control, shut his eyes so as not to see her, extended his hand with a spasmodic movement and snatched off the golden bracelet, pious offering of a sainted archbishop, the golden bracelet whose value equalled a fortune.

Now the jewel was in his possession; his convulsed fingers clutched it with superhuman force; there was nothing left save to flee—to flee with it; but for this it was necessary to open his eyes, and Pedro was afraid to see, to see the image, to see the kings of the sepulchres, the demons of the cornices, the griffins of the capitals, the blotches of shadow and flashes of light which, like ghostly, gigantic phantoms, were moving slowly in the depths of the nave, now filled with confused noises, unearthly and appalling.

At last he opened his eyes, cast one glance about him, and from his lips escaped a piercing cry.

The cathedral was full of statues, statues which, clothed in strange, flowing raiment, had descended from their niches and were thronging all the vast compass of the church, staring at him with their hollow eyes.

Saints, nuns, angels, devils, warriors, great ladies, pages, hermits, peasants surrounded him on every side and were massed confusedly in the open spaces and about the altar. Before it there officiated, in presence of the kings who were kneeling upon their tombs, the marble archbishops whom he had seen heretofore stretched motionless upon their beds of death, while a whole world of granite beasts and creeping things, writhing over the paving-stones, twisting along the buttresses, curled up in the canopies, swinging from the vaulted roof, quivered into life like worms in a giant corpse, fantastic, distorted, hideous.

He could resist no longer. His brows throbbed with terrible violence; a cloud of blood darkened his vision; he uttered a second scream, a scream heart-rending, inhuman, and fell swooning across the altar.

When the sacristans found him crouching on the altar steps the next morning, he still clutched the golden bracelet in both hands and on seeing them draw near, he shrieked with discordant yells of laughter:

“Hers! hers!”

The poor wretch had gone mad.

THE RAY OF MOONSHINE

I do not know whether this is history which seems like a tale, or a tale which seems like history; what I can affirm is that in its core it contains a truth, a truth supremely sad, which in all likelihood I, with my imaginative tendencies, will be one of the last to take to heart.

Another with this idea would perhaps have made a book of melancholy philosophy. I have written this legend that those who see nothing of its deep meaning may at least derive from it a moment of entertainment.

I.

He was noble, he had been born amid the clash of arms, and yet the sudden blare of a war trumpet would not have caused him to lift his head an instant or turn his eyes an inch away from the dim parchment in which he was reading the last song of a troubadour.

Those who desired to see him had no need to look for him in the spacious court of his castle, where the grooms were breaking in the colts, the pages

teaching the falcons to fly, and the soldiers employing their leisure days in sharpening on stones the iron points of their lances.

“Where is Manrico? Where is your lord?” his mother would sometimes ask.

“We do not know,” the servants would reply. “Perchance he is in the cloister of the monastery of the Peña, seated on the edge of a tomb, listening to see if he may surprise some word of the conversation of the dead; or on the bridge watching the river-waves chasing one another under its arches, or curled up in the fissure of some rock counting the stars in the sky, following with his eyes a cloud, or contemplating the will-o’-the-wisps that flit like exhalations over the surface of the marshes. Wherever he is, it is where he has least company.”

In truth, Manrico was a lover of solitude, and so extreme a lover that sometimes he would have wished to be a body without a shadow, because then his shadow would not follow him everywhere he went.

He loved solitude, because in its bosom he would invent, giving free rein to his imagination, a phantasmal world, inhabited by wonderful beings, daughters of his weird fancies and his poetic dreams; for Manrico was a poet,—so true a poet that never had he found adequate forms in which to utter his thoughts nor had he ever imprisoned them in words.

He believed that among the red coals of the hearth there dwelt fire-spirits of a thousand hues which ran like golden insects along the enkindled logs or danced in a luminous whirl of sparks on the pointed flames, and he passed long hours of inaction seated on a low stool by the high Gothic chimney-place, motionless, his eyes fixed on the fire.

He believed that in the depths of the waves of the river, among the mosses of the fountain and above the mists of the lake there lived mysterious women, sibyls, nymphs, undines, who breathed forth laments and sighs, or sang and laughed in the monotonous murmur of the water, a murmur to which he listened in silence, striving to translate it.

In the clouds, in the air, in the depths of the groves, in the clefts of the rocks, he imagined that he perceived forms, or heard mysterious sounds, forms of supernatural beings, indistinct words which he could not comprehend.

Love! He had been born to dream love, not to feel it. He loved all women an instant, this one because she was golden-haired, that one because she had red lips, another because in walking she swayed as a river-reed.

Sometimes his delirium reached the point of his spending an entire night gazing at the moon, which floated in heaven in a silvery mist, or at the stars,

which twinkled afar off like the changing lights of precious stones. In those long nights of poetic wakefulness, he would exclaim: "If it is true, as the Prior of the Peña has told me, that it is possible those points of light may be worlds, if it is true that people live on that pearly orb which rides above the clouds, how beautiful must the women of those luminous regions be! and I shall not be able to see them, and I shall not be able to love them! What must their beauty be! And what their love!"

Manrico was not yet so demented that the boys would run after him, but he was sufficiently so to talk and gesticulate to himself, which is where madness begins.

II.

Over the Douro, which ran lapping the weatherworn and darkened stones of the walls of Soria, there is a bridge leading from the city to the old convent of the Templars, whose estates extended along the opposite bank of the river.

At the time to which we refer, the knights of the Order had already abandoned their historic fortresses, but there still remained standing the ruins of the large round towers of their walls,—there still might be seen, as in part may be seen to-day, covered with ivy and white morning-glories the massive arches of their cloister and the long ogive galleries of their courts of arms through which the wind would breathe soft sighs, stirring the deep foliage.

In the orchards and in the gardens, whose paths the feet of the monks had not trodden for many years, vegetation, left to itself, made holiday, without fear that the hand of man should mutilate it in the effort to embellish. Climbing plants crept upward twining about the aged trunks of the trees; the shady paths through aisles of poplars, whose leafy tops met and mingled, were overgrown with turf; spear-plumed thistles and nettles had shot up in the sandy roads, and in the parts of the building which were bulging out, ready to fall; the yellow crucifera, floating in the wind like the crested feathers of a helmet, and bell-flowers, white and blue, balancing themselves, as in a swing, on their long and flexible stems, proclaimed the conquest of decay and ruin.

It was night, a summer night, mild, full of perfumes and peaceful sounds, and with a moon, white and serene, high in the blue, luminous, transparent heavens.

Manrico, his imagination seized by a poetic frenzy, after crossing the bridge from which he contemplated for a moment the dark silhouette of the city outlined against the background of some pale, soft clouds massed on the horizon, plunged into the deserted ruins of the Templars.

It was midnight. The moon, which had been slowly rising, was now at the zenith, when, on entering a dusky avenue that led from the demolished cloister

to the bank of the Douro, Manrico uttered a low, stifled cry, strangely compounded of surprise, fear and joy.

In the depths of the dusky avenue he had seen moving something white, which shimmered a moment and then vanished in the darkness, the trailing robe of a woman, of a woman who had crossed the path and disappeared amid the foliage at the very instant when the mad dreamer of absurd, impossible dreams penetrated into the gardens.

An unknown woman!—In this place!—At this hour! “This, this is the woman of my quest,” exclaimed Manrico, and he darted forward in pursuit, swift as an arrow.

III.

He reached the spot where he had seen the mysterious woman disappear in the thick tangle of the branches. She had gone. Whither? Afar, very far, he thought he descried, among the crowding trunks of the trees, something like a shining, or a white, moving form. “It is she, it is she, who has wings on her feet and flees like a shadow!” he said, and rushed on in his search, parting with his hands the network of ivy which was spread like a tapestry from poplar to poplar. By breaking through brambles and parasitical growths, he made his way to a sort of platform on which the moonlight dazzled.—Nobody!—“Ah, but by this path, but by this she slips away!” he then exclaimed. “I hear her footsteps on the dry leaves, and the rustle of her dress as it sweeps over the ground and brushes against the shrubs.” And he ran,—ran like a madman, hither and thither, and did not find her. “But still comes the sound of her footfalls,” he murmured again. “I think she spoke; beyond a doubt, she spoke. The wind which sighs among the branches, the leaves which seem to be praying in low voices, prevented my hearing what she said, but beyond a doubt she fleets by yonder path; she spoke, she spoke. In what language? I know not, but it is a foreign speech.” And again he ran onward in pursuit, sometimes thinking he saw her, sometimes that he heard her; now noticing that the branches, among which she had disappeared, were still in motion; now imagining that he distinguished in the sand the prints of her little feet; again firmly persuaded that a special fragrance which crossed the air from time to time was an aroma belonging to that woman who was making sport of him, taking pleasure in eluding him among these intricate growths of briars and brambles. Vain attempt!

He wandered some hours from one spot to another, beside himself, now pausing to listen, now gliding with the utmost precaution over the herbage, now in frantic and desperate race.

Pushing on, pushing on through the immense gardens which bordered the river, he came at last to the foot of the cliff on which rises the hermitage of

San Saturio. "Perhaps from this height I can get my bearings for pursuing my search across this confused labyrinth," he exclaimed, climbing from rock to rock with the aid of his dagger.

He reached the summit whence may be seen the city in the distance and, curving at his feet, a great part of the Douro, compelling its dark, impetuous stream onward through the winding banks that imprison it.

Manrico, once on the top of the cliff, turned his gaze in every direction, till, bending and fixing it at last on a certain point, he could not restrain an oath.

The sparkling moonlight glistened on the wake left behind by a boat, which, rowed at full speed, was making for the opposite shore.

In that boat he thought he had distinguished a white and slender figure, a woman without doubt, the woman whom he had seen in the grounds of the Templars, the woman of his dreams, the realization of his wildest hopes. He sped down the cliff with the agility of a deer, threw his cap, whose tall, full plume might hinder him in running, to the ground, and freeing himself from his heavy velvet cloak, shot like a meteor toward the bridge.

He believed he could cross it and reach the city before the boat would touch the further bank. Folly! When Manrico, panting and covered with sweat, reached the city gate, already they who had crossed the Douro over against San Saturio were entering Soria by one of the posterns in the wall, which, at that time, extended to the bank of the river whose waters mirrored its gray battlements.

IV.

Although his hope of overtaking those who had entered by the postern gate of San Saturio was dissipated, that of tracing out the house which sheltered them in the city was not therefore abandoned by our hero. With his mind fixed upon this idea, he entered the town and, taking his way toward the ward of San Juan, began roaming its streets at hazard.

The streets of Soria were then, and they are to-day, narrow, dark and crooked. A profound silence reigned in them, a silence broken only by the distant barking of a dog, the barring of a gate or the neighing of a charger, whose pawing made the chain which fastened him to the manger rattle in the subterranean stables.

Manrico, with ear attent to these vague noises of the night, which at times seemed to be the footsteps of some person who had just turned the last corner of a deserted street, at others, the confused voices of people who were talking behind him and whom every moment he expected to see at his side, spent

several hours running at random from one place to another.

At last he stopped beneath a great stone mansion, dark and very old, and, standing there, his eyes shone with an indescribable expression of joy. In one of the high ogive windows of what we might call a palace, he saw a ray of soft and mellow light which, passing through some thin draperies of rose-colored silk, was reflected on the time-blackened, weather-cracked wall of the house across the way.

“There is no doubt about it; here dwells my unknown lady,” murmured the youth in a low voice, without removing his eyes for a second from the Gothic window. “Here she dwells! She entered by the postern gate of San Saturio,—by the postern gate of San Saturio is the way to this ward—in this ward there is a house where, after midnight, there is some one awake—awake? Who can it be at this hour if not she, just returned from her nocturnal excursions? There is no more room for doubt; this is her home.”

In this firm persuasion and revolving in his head the maddest and most capricious fantasies, he awaited dawn opposite the Gothic window where there was a light all night and from which he did not withdraw his gaze a moment.

When daybreak came, the massive gates of the arched entrance to the mansion, on whose keystone was sculptured the owner’s coat of arms, turned ponderously on their hinges with a sharp and prolonged creaking. A servitor appeared on the threshold with a bunch of keys in his hand, rubbing his eyes, and showing as he yawned a set of great teeth which might well rouse envy in a crocodile.

For Manrico to see him and to rush to the gate was the work of an instant.

“Who lives in this house? What is her name? Her country? Why has she come to Soria? Has she a husband? Answer, answer, animal!” This was the salutation which, shaking him violently by the shoulder, Manrico hurled at the poor servitor, who, after staring at him a long while with frightened, stupefied eyes, replied in a voice broken with amazement:

“In this house lives the right honorable Señor don Alonso de Valdecuellos, Master of the Horse to our lord, the King. He has been wounded in the war with the Moors and is now in this city recovering from his injuries.”

“Well! well! His daughter?” broke in the impatient youth. “His daughter, or his sister, or his wife, or whoever she may be?”

“He has no woman in his family.”

“No woman! Then who sleeps in that chamber there, where all night long I have seen a light burning?”

“There? There sleeps my lord Don Alonso, who, as he is ill, keeps his lamp

burning till dawn.”

A thunderbolt, suddenly falling at his feet, would not have given Manrico a greater shock than these words.

V.

“I must find her, I must find her; and if I find her, I am almost certain I shall recognize her. How?—I cannot tell—but recognize her I must. The echo of her footstep, or a single word of hers which I may hear again; the hem of her robe, only the hem which I may see again would be enough to make me sure of her. Night and day I see floating before my eyes those folds of a fabric diaphanous and whiter than snow, night and day there is sounding here within, within my head, the soft rustle of her raiment, the vague murmur of her unintelligible words.—What said she?—What said she? Ah, if I might only know what she said, perchance—but yet without knowing it, I shall find her—I shall find her—my heart tells me so, and my heart deceives me never.—It is true that I have unavailingly traversed all the streets of Soria, that I have passed nights upon nights in the open air, a corner-post; that I have spent more than twenty golden coins in persuading duennas and servants to gossip; that I gave holy water in St. Nicholas to an old crone muffled up so artfully in her woollen mantle that she seemed to me a goddess; and on coming out, after matins, from the collegiate church, in the dusk before the dawn, I followed like a fool the litter of the archdeacon, believing that the hem of his vestment was that of the robe of my unknown lady—but it matters not—I must find her, and the rapture of possessing her will assuredly surpass the labors of the quest.

“What will her eyes be? They should be azure, azure and liquid as the sky of night. How I delight in eyes of that color! They are so expressive, so dreamy, so—yes,—no doubt of it; azure her eyes should be, azure they are, assuredly;—and her tresses black, jet black and so long that they wave upon the air—it seems to me I saw them waving that night, like her robe, and they were black—I do not deceive myself, no; they were black.

“And how well azure eyes, very large and slumbrous, and loose tresses, waving and dark, become a tall woman—for—she is tall, tall and slender, like those angels above the portals of our basilicas, angels whose oval faces the shadows of their granite canopies veil in mystic twilight.

“Her voice!—her voice I have heard—her voice is soft as the breathing of the wind in the leaves of the poplars, and her walk measured and stately like the cadences of a musical instrument.

“And this woman, who is lovely as the loveliest of my youthful dreams, who thinks as I think, who enjoys what I enjoy, who hates what I hate, who is a twin spirit of my spirit, who is the complement of my being, must she not

feel moved on meeting me? Must she not love me as I shall love her, as I love her already, with all the strength of my life, with every faculty of my soul?

“Back, back to the place where I saw her for the first and only time that I have seen her. Who knows but that, capricious as myself, a lover of solitude and mystery like all dreamy souls, she may take pleasure in wandering among the ruins in the silence of the night?”

Two months had passed since the servitor of Don Alonso de Valdecuellos had disillusionized the infatuated Manrico, two months in every hour of which he had built a castle in the air only for reality to shatter with a breath; two months during which he had sought in vain that unknown woman for whom an absurd love had been growing in his soul, thanks to his still more absurd imaginations; two months had flown since his first adventure when now, after crossing, absorbed in these ideas, the bridge which leads to the convent of the Templars, the enamored youth plunged again into the intricate pathways of the gardens.

VI.

The night was calm and beautiful, the full moon shone high in the heavens, and the wind sighed with the sweetest of murmurs among the leaves of the trees.

Manrico arrived at the cloister, swept his glance over the enclosed green and peered through the massive arches of the arcades. It was deserted.

He went forth, turned his steps toward the dim avenue that leads to the Douro, and had not yet entered it when there escaped from his lips a cry of joy.

He had seen floating for an instant, and then disappearing, the hem of the white robe, of the white robe of the woman of his dreams, of the woman whom now he loved like a madman.

He runs, he runs in his pursuit, he reaches the spot where he had seen her vanish; but there he stops, fixes his terrified eyes upon the ground, remains a moment motionless, a slight nervous tremor agitates his limbs, a tremor which increases, which increases, and shows symptoms of an actual convulsion—and he breaks out at last into a peal of laughter, laughter loud, strident, horrible.

That white object, light, floating, had again shone before his eyes, it had even glittered at his feet for an instant, only for an instant.

It was a moonbeam, a moonbeam which pierced from time to time the green vaulted roof of trees when the wind moved their boughs.

Several years had passed. Manrico, crouched on a settle by the deep Gothic chimney of his castle, almost motionless and with a vague, uneasy gaze like that of an idiot, would scarcely take notice either of the endearments of his

mother or of the attentions of his servants.

“You are young, you are comely,” she would say to him, “why do you languish in solitude? Why do you not seek a woman whom you may love, and whose love may make you happy?”

“Love! Love is a ray of moonshine,” murmured the youth.

“Why do you not throw off this lethargy?” one of his squires would ask. “Arm yourself in iron from head to foot, bid us unfurl to the winds your illustrious banner, and let us march to the war. In war is glory.”

“Glory!—Glory is a ray of moonshine.”

“Would you like to have me recite you a ballad, the latest that Sir Arnaldo, the Provençal troubadour, has composed?”

“No! no!” exclaimed the youth, straightening himself angrily on his seat, “I want nothing—that is—yes, I want—I want you should leave me alone. Ballads—women—glory—happiness—lies are they all—vain fantasies which we shape in our imagination and clothe according to our whim, and we love them and run after them—for what? for what? To find a ray of moonshine.”

Manrico was mad; at least, all the world thought so. For myself, on the contrary, I think what he had done was to regain his senses.

THE DEVIL'S CROSS

Whether you believe it or not matters little. My grandfather told it to my father; my father related it to me, and I now recount it to you, although it may serve for nothing more than to pass an idle hour.

I.

Twilight was beginning to spread its soft, dim wings over the picturesque banks of the Segre, when after a fatiguing day's travel we reached Bellver, the end of our journey.

Bellver is a small town situated on the slope of a hill, beyond which may be seen, rising like the steps of a colossal granite amphitheatre, the lofty, enclouded crests of the Pyrenees.

The white villages that encircle the town, sprinkled here and there over an undulating plain of verdure, appear from a distance like a flock of doves which have lowered their flight to quench their thirst in the waters of the river.

A naked crag, at whose foot the river makes a bend and on whose summit

may still be seen ancient architectural remains, marks the old boundary line between the earldom of Urgel and the most important of its fiefs.

At the right of the winding path which leads to this point, going up the river and following its curves and luxuriant banks, one comes upon a cross.

The stem and the arms are of iron; the circular base on which it rests is of marble, and the stairway that leads to it of dark and ill-fitted fragments of hewn stone.

The destructive action of time, which has covered the metal with rust, has broken and worn away the stone of this monument in whose crevices grow certain climbing plants, mounting in their interwoven growth until they crown it, while an old, wide-spreading oak serves it as canopy.

I was some moments in advance of my travelling companions, and halting my poor beast, I contemplated in silence that cross, mute and simple expression of the faith and piety of other ages.

At that instant a world of ideas thronged my imagination,—ideas faint and fugitive, without definite form, which were yet bound together, as by an invisible thread of light, by the profound solitude of those places, the deep silence of the gathering night and the vague melancholy of my soul.

Impelled by a religious impulse, spontaneous and indefinable, I dismounted mechanically, uncovered, commenced to search my memory for one of those prayers which I was taught when a child,—one of those prayers that, later in life, involuntarily escaping from our lips, seem to lighten the burdened heart and, like tears, relieve sorrow, which takes these natural outlets.

I had begun to murmur such a prayer, when suddenly I felt myself violently seized by the shoulders.

I turned my head. A man was standing at my side.

He was one of our guides, a native of the region, who, with an indescribable expression of terror depicted on his face, strove to drag me away with him and to cover my head with the hat which I still held in my hands.

My first glance, half astonishment, half anger, was equivalent to a sharp, though silent, interrogation.

The poor fellow, without ceasing his efforts to withdraw me from that place, replied to it with these words which then I could not comprehend but which had in them an accent of sincerity that impressed me:—"By the memory of your mother! by that which you hold most sacred in the world, señorito, cover your head and flee faster than flight itself from that cross. Are you so desperate that, the help of God not being enough, you call on that of the

Devil?”

I stood a moment looking at him in silence. Frankly, I thought he was a madman; but he went on with equal vehemence:

“You seek the frontier; well, then, if before this cross you ask that heaven will give you aid, the tops of the neighboring mountains will rise, in a single night, to the invisible stars, so that we shall not find the boundary in all our life.”

I could not help smiling.

“You take it in jest?—You think perhaps that this is a holy cross like the one in the porch of our church?”

“Who doubts it?”

“Then you are mistaken out and out, for this cross—saving its divine association—is accursed; this cross belongs to a demon and for that reason is called The Devil’s Cross.”

“The Devil’s Cross!” I repeated, yielding to his insistence without accounting to myself for the involuntary fear which began to oppress my spirit, and which repelled me as an unknown force from that place. “The Devil’s Cross! Never has my imagination been wounded with a more inconsistent union of two ideas so absolutely at variance. A cross! and—the Devil’s! Come, come! When we reach the town you must explain to me this monstrous incongruity.”

During this short dialogue our comrades, who had spurred their sorry nags, joined us at the foot of the cross. I told them briefly what had taken place: I remounted my hack, and the bells of the parish were slowly calling to prayer when we alighted at the most out-of-the-way and obscure of the inns of Bellver.

II.

Rosy and azure flames were curling and crackling all along the huge oak log which burned in the wide fire-place; our shadows, thrown in wavering grotesques on the blackened walls, dwindled or grew gigantic according as the blaze emitted more or less brilliancy; the alderwood cup, now empty, now full (and not with water), like the buckets of an irrigating wheel, had been thrice passed round the circle that we formed about the fire, and all were awaiting impatiently the story of The Devil’s Cross, promised us by way of dessert after the frugal supper which we had just eaten, when our guide coughed twice, tossed down a last draught of wine, wiped his mouth on the back of his hand and began thus:

“It was a long, long time ago, how long I cannot say, but the Moors were

occupying yet the greater part of Spain, our kings were called counts, and the towns and villages were held in fief by certain lords, who in turn rendered homage to others more powerful, when that event which I am about to relate took place.”

After this brief historical introduction, the hero of the occasion remained silent some few moments, as if to arrange his thoughts, and proceeded thus:

“Well! the story goes that in that remote time this town and some others formed part of the patrimony of a noble baron whose seigniorial castle stood for many centuries upon the crest of a crag bathed by the Segre, from which it takes its name.

“Some shapeless ruins that, overgrown with wild mustard and moss, may still be seen upon the summit from the road which leads to this town, testify to the truth of my story.

“I do not know whether by chance or through some deed of shame it came to pass that this lord, who was detested by his vassals for his cruelty, and for his evil disposition refused admission to court by the king and to their homes by his neighbors, grew weary of living alone with his bad temper and his cross-bowmen on the top of the rock where his forefathers had hung their nest of stone.

“Night and day he taxed his wits to find some amusement consonant with his character, which was no easy matter, since he had grown tired of making war on his neighbors, beating his servants and hanging his subjects.

“At this time, the chronicles relate, there occurred to him, though without precedent, a happy idea.

“Knowing that the Christians of other nations were preparing to go forth, united in a formidable fleet, to a marvellous country in order to reconquer the sepulchre of our Lord Jesus Christ which was in possession of the Moors, he determined to join their following.

“Whether he entertained this idea with intent of atoning for his sins, which were not few, by shedding blood in so righteous a cause; or whether his object was to remove to a place where his vicious deeds were not known, cannot be said; but it is true that to the great satisfaction of old and young, of vassals and equals, he gathered together what money he could, released his towns, at a heavy price, from their allegiance, and reserving of his estates no more than the crag of the Segre and the four towers of the castle, his ancestral seat, disappeared between the night and the morning.

“The whole district drew a long breath, as if awakened from a nightmare.

“Now no longer clusters of men, instead of fruits, hung from the trees of

their orchards; the young peasant girls no longer feared to go, their jars upon their heads, to draw water from the wells by the wayside; nor did the shepherds lead their flocks to the Segre by the roughest secret paths, fearing at every turn of the steep track to encounter the cross-bowmen of their dearly beloved lord.

“Thus three years elapsed. The story of the Wicked Count, for by that name only was he known, had come to be the exclusive possession of the old women, who in the long, long winter evenings would relate his atrocities with hollow and fearful voice to the terrified children, while mothers would affright their naughty toddlers and crying babies by saying: ‘Here comes the Count of the Segre!’ When behold! I know not whether by day or by night, whether fallen from heaven or cast forth by hell, the dreaded Count appeared indeed, and, as we say, in flesh and bone, in the midst of his former vassals.

“I forbear to describe the effect of this agreeable surprise. You can imagine it better than I can depict it, merely from my telling you that he returned claiming his forfeited rights; that if he went away evil, he came back worse; and that if he was poor and without credit before going to the war, now he could count on no other resources than his desperation, his lance and a half dozen adventurers as profligate and impious as their chieftain.

“As was natural, the towns refused to pay tribute, from which at so great cost they had bought exemption, but the Count fired their orchards, their farm-houses and their crops.

“Then they appealed to the royal justice of the realm, but the Count ridiculed the letters mandatory of his sovereign lords; he nailed them over the sally-port of his castle and hung the bearers from an oak.

“Exasperated, and seeing no other way of salvation, at last they made a league with one another, commended themselves to Providence and took up arms; but the Count gathered his followers, called the Devil to his aid, mounted his rock and made ready for the struggle.

“It began, terrible and bloody. There was fighting with all sorts of weapons, in all places and at all hours, with sword and fire, on the mountain and in the plain, by day and by night.

“This was not fighting to live; it was living to fight.

“In the end the cause of justice triumphed. You shall hear how.

“One dark, intensely dark night, when no sound was heard on earth nor a single star shone in heaven, the lords of the fortress, elated by a recent victory, divided the booty and, drunk with the fume of the liquors, in the midst of their mad and boisterous revel intoned sacrilegious songs in praise of their infernal

patron.

“As I have said, nothing was heard around the castle save the echo of the blasphemies which throbbed out into the black bosom of the night like the throbbing of lost souls wrapped in the hurricane folds of hell.

“Now the careless sentinels had several times fixed their eyes on the hamlet which rested in silence and, without fear of a surprise, had fallen asleep leaning on the thick staves of their lances, when, lo and behold! a few villagers, resolved to die and protected by the darkness, began to scale the crag of the Segre whose crest they reached at the very moment of midnight.

“Once on the summit, that which remained for them to do required little time. The sentinels passed with a single bound the barrier which separates sleep from death. Fire, applied with resinous torches to drawbridge and portcullis, leaped with lightning rapidity to the walls, and the scaling-party, favored by the confusion and making their way through the flames, put an end to the occupants of that fortress in the twinkling of an eye.

“All perished.

“When the next day began to whiten the lofty tops of the junipers, the charred remains of the fallen towers were still smoking, and through their gaping breaches it was easy to discern, glittering as the light struck it, where it hung suspended from one of the blackened pillars of the banquet hall, the armor of the dreaded chieftain whose dead body, covered with blood and dust, lay between the torn tapestries and the hot ashes, confounded with the corpses of his obscure companions.

“Time passed. Briers began to creep through the deserted courts, ivy to climb the dark heaps of masonry, and the blue morning-glory to sway and swing from the very turrets. The changeful sighs of the breeze, the croaking of the birds of night, and the soft stir of reptiles gliding through the tall weeds alone disturbed from time to time the deathly silence of that accursed place. The unburied bones of its former inhabitants lay white in the moonlight and still there could be seen the bundled armor of the Count of the Segre hanging from the blackened pillar of the banquet hall.

“No one dared touch it, but a thousand fables were current concerning it. It was a constant source of foolish reports and terrors among those who saw it flashing in the sunlight by day, or thought they heard in the depths of the night the metallic sound of its pieces as they struck one another when the wind moved them, with a prolonged and doleful groan.

“Notwithstanding all the stories which were set afloat concerning the armor and which the people of the surrounding region repeated in hushed tones one to another, they were no more than stories, and the only positive

result was a constant state of fear that every one tried for his own part to dissimulate, putting, as we say, a brave face on it.

“If the matter had gone no further, no harm would have been done. But the Devil, who apparently was not satisfied with his work, began, no doubt with the permission of God, that so the country might expiate its sins, to take a hand in the game.

“From that moment the tales, which until then had been nothing more than vague rumors without any show of truth, began to assume consistency and to grow from day to day more probable.

“Finally there came nights in which all the village-folk were able to see a strange phenomenon.

“Amid the shadows in the distance, now climbing the steep, twisting paths of the crag of the Segre, now wandering among the ruins of the castle, now seeming to oscillate in the air, mysterious and fantastic lights were seen gliding, crossing, vanishing and reappearing to recede in different directions,—lights whose source no one could explain.

“This was repeated for three or four nights during the space of a month and the perplexed villagers looked in disquietude for the result of those conventicles, for which certainly they were not kept waiting long. Soon three or four homesteads in flames, a number of missing cattle, and the dead bodies of a few travellers, thrown from precipices, alarmed all the region for ten leagues about.

“Now no doubt remained. A band of evildoers were harboring in the dungeons of the castle.

“These desperadoes, who showed themselves at first only very rarely and at definite points of the forest which even to this day extends along the river, finally came to hold almost all the passes of the mountains, to lie in ambush by the roads, to plunder the valleys and to descend like a torrent on the plain where, slaughtering indiscriminately, they did not leave a doll with its head on.

“Assassinations multiplied; young girls disappeared and children were snatched from their cradles despite the lamentations of their mothers to furnish those diabolical feasts at which, it was generally believed, the sacramental vessels stolen from the profaned churches were used as goblets.

“Terror took such possession of men’s souls that, when the bell rang for the Angelus, nobody dared to leave his house, though even there was no certain security against the banditti of the crag.

“But who were they? Whence had they come? What was the name of their mysterious chief? This was the enigma which all sought to explain, but which

thus far no one could solve, although it was noticed that from this time on the armor of the feudal lord had disappeared from the place it had previously occupied, and afterwards various peasants had affirmed that the captain of this inhuman crew marched at its head clad in a suit of mail which, if not the same, was its exact counterpart.

“But in the essential fact, when stripped of that fantastic quality with which fear augments and embellishes its cherished creations, there was nothing necessarily supernatural nor strange.

“What was more common in outlaws than the barbarities for which this band was distinguished or more natural than that their chief should avail himself of the abandoned armor of the Count of the Segre?

“But the dying revelations of one of his followers, taken prisoner in the latest affray, heaped up the measure of evidence, convincing the most incredulous. Less or more in words, the substance of his confession was this:

“‘I belong,’ he said, ‘to a noble family. My youthful irregularities, my mad extravagances, and finally my crimes drew upon my head the wrath of my kindred and the curse of my father, who, at his death, disinherited me. Finding myself alone and without any resources whatever, it was the Devil, without doubt, who must needs suggest to me the idea of gathering together some youths in a situation similar to my own. These, seduced by the promise of a future of dissipation, liberty and abundance, did not hesitate an instant to subscribe to my designs.

“‘These designs consisted in forming a band of young men of gay temper, unscrupulous and reckless, who thenceforward would live joyously on the product of their valor and at the cost of the country, until God should please to dispose of each according to His will, as happens to me this day.

“‘With this object we chose this district as the theatre of our future expeditions, and selected as the point most suitable for our gatherings the abandoned castle of the Segre, a place peculiarly secure, not only because of its strong and advantageous position, but as defended against the peasantry by their superstitions and dread.

“‘Gathered one night under its ruined arcades, around a bonfire that illumined with its ruddy glow the deserted galleries, a heated dispute arose as to which of us should be chosen chief.

“‘Each one alleged his merits; I advanced my claims; already some were muttering together with threatening looks, and others, whose voices were loud in drunken quarrel, had their hands on the hilts of their poniards to settle the question, when we suddenly heard a strange rattling of armor, accompanied by hollow, resounding footsteps which became more and more distinct. We all

cast around uneasy, suspicious glances. We rose and bared our blades, determined to sell our lives dear, but we could only stand motionless on seeing advance, with firm and even tread, a man of lofty stature, completely armed from head to foot, his face covered with the visor of his helmet. Drawing his broad-sword, which two men could scarcely wield, and placing it upon one of the charred fragments of the fallen arcades, he exclaimed in a voice hollow and deep like the murmurous fall of subterranean waters:

“If any one of you dare to be first, while I dwell in the castle of the Segre, let him take up this sword, emblem of power.

“All were silent until, the first moment of astonishment passed, with loud voices we proclaimed him our captain, offering him a glass of our wine. This he declined by signs, perchance that he need not reveal his face, which in vain we strove to distinguish across the iron bars hiding it from our eyes.

“Nevertheless we swore that night the most terrible oaths, and on the following began our nocturnal raids. In these, our mysterious chief went always at our head. Fire does not stop him, nor dangers intimidate him, nor tears move him. He never speaks, but when blood smokes on our hands, when churches fall devoured by the flames, when women flee affrighted amid the ruins, and children utter screams of pain, and the old men perish under our blows, he answers the groans, the imprecations and the lamentations with a loud laugh of savage joy.

“Never does he lay aside his arms nor lift the visor of his helmet after victory nor take part in the feast nor yield himself to slumber. The swords that strike him pierce his armor without causing death or drawing blood; fire reddens his coat of mail and yet he pushes on undaunted amid the flames, seeking new victims; he scorns gold, despises beauty, and is not moved by ambition.

“Among ourselves, some think him a madman, others a ruined noble who from a remnant of shame conceals his face, and there are not wanting those who are persuaded that it is the very Devil in person.’

“The author of these revelations died with a mocking smile on his lips and without repenting of his sins; divers of his comrades followed him at different times to meet their punishment, but the dreaded chief, to whom continually gathered new proselytes, did not cease his ravages.

“The unhappy inhabitants of the region, more and more harassed and desperate, had not yet achieved that pitch of resolution necessary to put an end, once for all, to this order of things, every day more insupportable and grievous.

“Adjoining the hamlet and hidden in the depths of a dense forest, there

dwelt at this time, in a little hermitage dedicated to Saint Bartholomew, a holy man of godly and exemplary life, whom the peasants always held in an odor of sanctity, thanks to his wholesome counsels and sure predictions.

“This venerable hermit, to whose prudence and proverbial wisdom the people of Bellver committed the solution of their difficult problem, after seeking divine aid through his patron saint, who, as you know, is well acquainted with the Devil, and on more than one occasion has put him in a tight place, advised that they should lie in ambush during the night at the foot of the stony road which winds up to the rock on whose summit stands the castle. He charged them at the same time that, once there, they should use no other weapons to apprehend the Enemy than a wonderful prayer which he had them commit to memory, and with which the chronicles assert that Saint Bartholomew had made the Devil his prisoner.

“The plan was put into immediate execution, and its success exceeded all hopes, for the morrow’s sun had not lit the high tower of Bellver when its inhabitants gathered in groups in the central square, telling one another with an air of mystery how, that night, the famous captain of the banditti of the Segre had come into the town bound hand and foot and securely tied to the back of a strong mule.

“By what art the actors in this enterprise had brought it to such fortunate issue no one succeeded in finding out nor were they themselves able to tell; but the fact remained that, thanks to the prayer of the Saint or to the daring of his devotees, the attempt had resulted as narrated.

“As soon as the news began to spread from mouth to mouth and from house to house, throngs rushed into the streets with loud huzzas and were soon massed before the doors of the prison. The parish bell called together the civic body, the most substantial citizens met in council, and all awaited in suspense the hour when the criminal should appear before his improvised judges.

“These judges, who were authorized by the sovereign power of Urgel to administer themselves justice prompt and stern to those malefactors, deliberated but a moment, after which they commanded that the culprit be brought before them to receive his sentence.

“As I have said, as in the central square, so in the streets through which the prisoner must pass to the place where he should meet his judges, the impatient multitude thronged like a clustered swarm of bees. Especially at the gateway of the prison the popular excitement mounted from moment to moment, and already animated dialogues, sullen mutterings and threatening shouts had begun to give the warders anxiety, when fortunately the order came to bring forth the criminal.

“As he appeared below the massive arch of the prison portal, in complete armor, his face covered with the visor, a low, prolonged murmur of admiration and surprise rose from the compact multitude which with difficulty opened to let him pass.

“All had recognized in that coat of mail the well-known armor of the Count of the Segre, that armor which had been the object of the most gloomy traditions while it had been hanging from the ruined walls of the accursed stronghold.

“This was that armor; there was left no room for doubt. All had seen the black plume waving from his helmet’s crest in the battles which formerly they had fought against their lord; all had seen it, blowing in the morning breeze, like the ivy of the flame-gnawed pillar on which the armor had hung since the death of its owner. But who could be the unknown personage who was wearing it now? Soon it would be known; at least, so they thought. Events will show how this expectation, like many another, was frustrated and how out of this solemn act of justice, from which might have been expected a complete revelation of the truth, there resulted new and more inexplicable confusions.

“The mysterious bandit arrived finally at the Council Hall and a profound silence followed the murmurs which had arisen among the bystanders on hearing resound beneath the lofty arches of that chamber the click of his golden spurs. One of the members of the tribunal in a slow and uncertain voice asked his name, and all anxiously listened that they might not lose one word of his response, but the warrior only shrugged his shoulders lightly with an air of contempt and insult, which could but irritate his judges, who exchanged glances of surprise.

“Three times the question was repeated, and as often received the same or a similar reply.

“ ‘Have him lift his visor! Have him show his face! Have him show his face!’ the citizens present at the trial began to shout. ‘Have him show his face! We will see if then he dare insult us with his contempt, as he does now hidden in his mail.’

“‘Show your face,’ demanded the same member of the tribunal who had before addressed him.

“The warrior remained motionless.

“‘I command you by the authority of this council.’

“The same answer.

“‘By the authority of this realm.’

“Nor for that.

“Indignation rose to its height, even to the point where one of the guards, throwing himself upon the criminal, whose pertinacious silence was enough to exhaust the patience of a saint, violently opened his visor. A general cry of surprise escaped from those within the hall, who remained for an instant smitten with an inconceivable amazement.

“The cause was adequate.

“The helmet, whose iron visor, as all could see, was partly lifted toward the forehead, partly fallen over the shining steel gorget, was empty,—entirely empty.

“When, the first moment of terror passed, they would have touched it, the armor shivered slightly and, breaking asunder into its various pieces, fell to the floor with a dull, strange clang.

“The greater part of the spectators, at the sight of the new prodigy, forsook the room tumultuously and rushed in terror to the square.

“The news spread with the speed of thought among the multitude who were awaiting impatiently the result of the trial; and such was the alarm, the excitement and the clamor, that no one longer doubted what the popular voice had asserted from the first—that the Devil, on the death of the Count of the Segre, had inherited the fiefs of Bellver.

“At last the tumult subsided, and it was decided to return the miraculous armor to the dungeon.

“When this was so bestowed, they despatched four envoys, who, as representing the perplexed town, should present the case to the royal Count of Urgel and the archbishop. In a few days these envoys returned with the decision of those dignitaries, a decision brief and comprehensive.

“‘Let the armor be hanged,’ they said, ‘in the central square of the town; if the Devil occupies it, he will find it necessary to abandon it or to be strangled with it.’

“The people of Bellver, enchanted with so ingenious a solution, again assembled in council, ordered a very high gallows to be erected in the square, and when once more the multitude filled the approaches to the prison, went thither for the armor in a body with all the civic dignity which the importance of the case demanded.

“When this honorable delegation arrived at the massive arch giving entrance to the building, a pallid and distracted man threw himself to the ground in the presence of the astonished bystanders, exclaiming with tears in his eyes:

“‘Pardon, señores, pardon!’

“Pardon! For whom?’ said some, ‘for the Devil, who dwells in the armor of the Count of the Segre?’

“For me,’ continued with shaking voice the unhappy man in whom all recognized the chief warden of the prison, ‘for me—because the armor—has disappeared.’

“On hearing these words, amazement was painted on the faces of as many as were in the portico; silent and motionless, so they would have remained God knows how long if the following narrative of the terrified keeper had not caused them to gather in groups around him, greedy for every word.

“Pardon me, señores,’ said the poor warden, ‘and I will conceal nothing from you, however much it may be against me.’

“All maintained silence and he went on as follows:

“I shall never succeed in giving the reason, but the fact is that the story of the empty armor always seemed to me a fable manufactured in favor of some noble personage whom perhaps grave reasons of public policy did not permit the judges to make known or to punish.

“I was ever of this belief—a belief in which I could not but be confirmed by the immobility in which the armor remained from the hour when, by the order of the tribunal, it was brought a second time to the prison. In vain, night after night, desiring to surprise its secret, if secret there were, I crept up little by little and listened at the cracks of the iron door of its dungeon. Not a sound was perceptible.

“In vain I managed to observe it through a small hole made in the wall; thrown upon a little straw in one of the darkest corners, it remained day after day disordered and motionless.

“One night, at last, pricked by curiosity and wishing to convince myself that this object of terror had nothing mysterious about it, I lighted a lantern, went down to the dungeons, drew their double bolts and, not taking the precaution to shut the doors behind me, so firm was my belief that all this was no more than an old wives’ tale, entered the cell. Would I had never done it! Scarcely had I taken a few steps when the light of my lantern went out of itself and my teeth began to chatter and my hair to rise. Breaking the profound silence that encompassed me, I had heard something like a sound of metal pieces which stirred and clanked in fitting themselves together in the gloom.

“My first movement was to throw myself toward the door to bar the passage, but on grasping its panels I felt upon my shoulders a formidable hand, gauntleted, which, after jerking me violently aside, flung me upon the threshold. There I remained until the next morning when my subordinates

found me unconscious and, on reviving, only able to recollect that after my fall I had seemed to hear, confusedly, a sounding tread accompanied by the clatter of spurs, which little by little grew more distant until it died away.’

“When the warden had finished, profound silence reigned, on which there followed an infernal outbreak of lamentations, shouts and threats.

“It was with difficulty that the more temperate could control the populace, who, infuriated at this last turn of affairs, demanded with fierce outcry the death of the inquisitive author of their new disappointment.

“At last the tumult was quieted and the people began to lay plans for a fresh capture. This attempt, too, had a satisfactory outcome.

“At the end of a few days, the armor was again in the power of its foes. Now that the formula was known and the help of Saint Bartholomew secured, the thing was no longer very difficult.

“But yet something remained to be done; in vain, after conquering it, they hanged it from a gallows; in vain they exercised the utmost vigilance for the purpose of giving it no opportunity to escape by way of the upper world. But as soon as two fingers’ breadth of light fell on the scattered pieces of armor, they fitted themselves together and, clinkity clank, made off again to resume their raids over mountain and plain, which was a blessing indeed.

“This was a story without an end.

“In so critical a state of affairs, the people divided among themselves the pieces of the armor that, perchance for the hundredth time, had come into their possession, and prayed the pious hermit, who had once before enlightened them with his counsel, to decide what they should do with it.

“The holy man ordained a general fast. He buried himself for three days in the depths of a cavern that served him as a retreat and at their end bade them melt the diabolical armor and with this and some hewn stones from the castle of the Segre, erect a cross.

“The work was carried through, although not without new and fearful prodigies which filled with terror the souls of the dismayed inhabitants of Bellver.

“As soon as the pieces thrown into the flames began to redden, long and deep groans seemed to come out of the great blaze, within whose circle of fuel the armor leapt as if it were alive and felt the action of the fire. A whirl of sparks red, green and blue danced on the points of the spiring flames and twisted about hissing, as if a legion of devils, mounted on these, would fight to free their lord from that torment.

“Strange, horrible, was the process by which the incandescent armor lost

its form to take that of a cross.

“The hammers fell clanging with a frightful uproar upon the anvil, where twenty sturdy smiths beat into shape the bars of boiling metal that quivered and groaned beneath the blows.

“Already the arms of the sign of our redemption were outspread, already the upper end was beginning to take form, when the fiendish, glowing mass writhed anew, as if in frightful convulsion, and enfolding the unfortunate workmen, who struggled to free themselves from its deadly embrace, glittered in rings like a serpent or contracted itself in zigzag like lightning.

“Incessant labor, faith, prayers and holy water succeeded, at last, in overcoming the infernal spirit, and the armor was converted into a cross.

“This cross it is you have seen to-day, the cross in which the Devil who gives it its name is bound. Before it the young people in the month of May place no clusters of lilies, nor do the shepherds uncover as they pass by, nor the old folk kneel; the strict admonitions of the priest scarcely prevent the boys from stoning it.

“God has closed His ears to all supplications offered Him in its presence. In the winter, packs of wolves gather about the juniper which overshadows it to rush upon the herds; banditti wait in its shade for travellers whose slain bodies they bury at its foot, and when the tempest rages, the lightnings deviate from their course to meet, hissing, at the head of this cross and to rend the stones of its pedestal.”

THREE DATES

In a portfolio which I still treasure, full of idle drawings made during some of my semi-artistic excursions to the city of Toledo, are written three dates.

The events whose memory these figures keep are up to a certain point insignificant.

Nevertheless, by recollecting them I have entertained myself on certain wakeful nights in shaping a novel more or less sentimental or sombre, in proportion as my imagination found itself more or less exalted, and disposed toward the humorous or tragic view of life.

If on the morning following one of these darkling, delirious reveries, I had tried to write out the extraordinary episodes of the impossible fictions which I invented before my eyelids utterly closed, these romances, whose dim dénouement finally floats undetermined on that sea between waking and sleep,

would assuredly form a book of preposterous inconsistencies but original and peradventure interesting.

This is not what I am attempting now. These light—one might almost say impalpable—fantasies are in a sense like butterflies which cannot be caught in the hands without there being left between the fingers the golden dust of their wings.

I am going to confine myself, then, to the brief narration of three events which are wont to serve as headings for the chapters of my dream-novels; the three isolated points which I am accustomed to connect in my mind by a series of ideas like a shining thread; the three themes, in short, upon which I play thousands on thousands of variations, amounting to what might be called absurd symphonies of the imagination.

I.

There is in Toledo a narrow street, crooked and dim, which guards so faithfully the traces of the hundred generations that have dwelt in it, which speaks so eloquently to the eyes of the artist and reveals to him so many secret points of affinity between the ideas and customs of each century, and the form and special character impressed upon even its most insignificant works, that I would close the entrances with a barrier and place above the barrier a shield with this device:

“In the name of poets and artists, in the name of those who dream and of those who study, civilization is forbidden to touch the least of these bricks with its destructive and prosaic hand.”

At one of the ends of this street, entrance is afforded by a massive arch, flat and dark, which provides a covered passage.

In its keystone is an escutcheon, battered now and corroded by the action of the years; in it grows ivy which, blown by the air, floats above the helmet, that crowns it, like a plumy crest.

Below the vaulting and nailed to the wall is seen a shrine with a sacred picture of blackened canvas and undecipherable design, in frame of gilt rococo, with its lantern hanging by a cord and with its waxen votive offerings.

Leading away from this arch, which enfolds the whole place in its shadow, giving to it an undescribable tint of mystery and sadness, extend on the two sides of the street lines of dusky, dissimilar, odd-looking houses, each having its individual form, size and color. Some are built of rough, uneven stones, without other adornment than a few armorial bearings rudely carved above the portal; others are of brick, with an Arab arch for entrance, two or three Moorish windows opening at caprice in a thick, fissured wall, and a glassed

observation turret topped by a lofty weather-vane. Some have a general aspect which does not belong to any order of architecture and yet is a patchwork of all; some are finished models of a distinct and recognized style, some curious examples of the extravagances of an artistic period.

Here are some that boast a wooden balcony with incongruous roof; there are others with a Gothic window freshly whitened and adorned with pots of flowers; and yonder is one with crudely colored tiles set into its door-frame, huge spikes in its panels, and the shafts of two columns, perhaps taken from a Moorish castle, mortised into the wall.

The palace of a grandee converted into a tenement-house; the home of a pundit occupied by a prebendary; a Jewish synagogue transformed into a Christian church; a convent erected on the ruins of an Arab mosque whose minaret is still standing; a thousand strange and picturesque contrasts; thousands on thousands of curious traces left by distinct races, civilizations and epochs epitomized, so to speak, on one hundred yards of ground. All the past is in this one street,—a street built up through many centuries, a narrow, dim, disfigured street with an infinite number of twists where each man in building his house had jugged out or left a corner or made an angle to suit his own taste, regardless of level, height or regularity,—a street rich in uncalculated combinations of lines, with a veritable wealth of whimsical details, with so many, many chance effects that on every visit it offers to the student something new.

When I was first at Toledo, while I was busying myself in making a few sketch-book notes of San Juan de los Reyes, I had to go through this street every afternoon in order to reach the convent from the little inn, with hotel pretensions, where I lodged.

Almost always I would traverse the street from one end to the other without meeting a single person, without any further sound than my own footfalls disturbing the deep silence, without even catching a chance glimpse, behind balcony-blind, door-screen or casement-lattice, of the wrinkled face of a peering old woman, or the great black eyes of a Toledan girl. Sometimes I seemed to myself to be walking through the midst of a deserted city, abandoned by its inhabitants since ages far remote.

Yet one afternoon, on passing in front of a very ancient, gloomy mansion, in whose lofty, massive walls might be seen three or four windows of dissimilar form, placed without order or symmetry, I happened to fix my attention on one of these. It was formed by a great ogee arch surrounded by a wreath of sharply pointed leaves. The arch was closed in by a light wall, recently built and white as snow. In the middle of this, as if contained in the original window, might be seen a little casement with frame and gratings

painted green, with a flower-pot of blue morning-glories whose sprays were clambering up over the granite-work, and with panes of leaded glass curtained by white cloth thin and translucent.

The window of itself, peculiar as it was, would have been enough to arrest the gaze, but the circumstance most effective in fixing my attention upon it was that, just as I turned my head to look at it, the curtain had been lifted for a moment only to fall again, concealing from my eyes the person who undoubtedly was at that same instant looking after me.

I pursued my way preoccupied with the idea of the window, or, rather, the curtain, or, to put it still more clearly, the woman who had raised it, for beyond all doubt only a woman could be peeping out from that window so poetic, so white, so green, so full of flowers, and when I say a woman, be it understood that she is imaged as young and beautiful.

The next afternoon I passed the house,—passed with the same close scrutiny; I rapped down my heels sharply, astonishing the silent street with the clatter of my steps, a clatter that repeated itself in responsive echoes, one after another; I looked at the window and the curtain was raised again.

The plain truth is that behind the curtain I saw nothing at all; but by aid of the imagination I seemed to discern a figure,—the figure, in fact, of a woman.

That day twice or thrice I fell into a muse over my drawing. And on other days I passed the house, and always when I was passing the curtain would be raised again, remaining so till the sound of my steps was lost in the distance and I from afar had looked back at it for the last time.

My sketches were making but little progress. In that cloister of San Juan de los Reyes, in that cloister so mysterious and bathed in so profound a melancholy,—seated on the broken capital of a column, my portfolio on my knees, my elbows on my portfolio, and my head between my hands,—to the music of water which flows there with an incessant murmur, to the rustling of leaves under the evening wind in the wild, forsaken garden, what dreams did I not dream of that window and that woman! I knew her; I knew her name and even the color of her eyes.

I would see her crossing the wide and lonely courts of that most ancient house, rejoicing them with her presence as a sunbeam gilds a pile of ruins. Again I would seem to see her in a garden of very lofty, very shadowy walls, among colossal, venerable trees, such as there ought to be at the back of that sort of Gothic palace where she lived, gathering flowers and seating herself alone on a stone bench and there sighing while she plucked them leaf from leaf thinking on—who knows? Perchance on me. Why say perchance? Assuredly on me. Oh, what dreams, what follies, what poetry did that window

awaken in my soul while I abode at Toledo!

But my allotted time for sojourning in that city went by. One day, heavy of heart and pensive of mood, I shut up all my drawings in the portfolio, bade farewell to the world of fancy, and took a seat in the coach for Madrid.

Before the highest of the Toledo towers had faded on the horizon, I thrust my head from the carriage window to see it once more, and remembered the street.

I still held the portfolio under my arm, and on taking my seat again, while we rounded the hill which suddenly hid the city from my eyes, I drew out my pencil and set down a date. It is the first of the three, and the one which I call the Date of the Window.

II.

At the end of several months, I again had an opportunity to leave the Capital for three or four days. I dusted my portfolio, tucked it under my arm, provided myself with a quire of paper, a half-dozen pencils and a few napoleons and, deploring the fact that the railroad was not yet finished, crowded myself into a public stage that I might journey in reverse order through the scenes of Tirso's famous comedy *From Toledo to Madrid*.

Once installed in the historic city, I devoted myself to visiting again the spots which had most excited my interest on my former trip, and certain others which as yet I knew only by name.

Thus I let slip by, in long, solitary rambles among the most ancient quarters of the town, the greater part of the time which I could spare for my little artistic expedition, finding a veritable pleasure in losing myself in that confused labyrinth of blind lanes, narrow streets, dark passages and steep, impracticable heights.

One afternoon, the last that I might at that time remain in Toledo, after one of these long wanderings in unknown ways, I arrived—by what streets I can scarcely tell—at a great deserted square, apparently forgotten by the very inhabitants of the city and hidden away, as it were, in one of its most remote nooks.

The filth and the rubbish cast out in this square from time immemorial had identified themselves, if I may say so, with the earth in such a manner as to present the broken and mountainous aspect of a miniature Switzerland. On the hillocks and in the valleys formed by these irregularities were growing at their own will wild mallows of colossal proportions, circles of giant nettles, creeping tangles of white morning-glories, stretches of that nameless, common herb, small, fine and of a darkish green, and among these, swaying gently in

the light breath of the air, overtopping like kings all the other parasitic plants, the no less poetic than vulgar yellow mustard, true flower of wastes and ruins.

Scattered along the ground, some half buried, others almost hidden by the tall weeds, might be seen an infinite number of fragments of thousands on thousands of diverse articles, broken and thrown out on that spot in different epochs, where they were in process of forming strata in which it would be easy to follow out a course of genealogical history.

Moorish tiles enamelled in various colors, sections of marble and of jasper columns, fragments of brick of a hundred varying kinds, great blocks covered with verdure and moss, pieces of wood already nearly turned to dust, remains of antique panelling, rags of cloth, strips of leather, and countless other objects, formless, nameless, were what at first sight appeared on the surface, even while the attention was caught and the eyes dazzled by glancing sparks of light sprinkled over the green like a handful of diamonds flung broadcast and which, on closer survey, proved to be nothing else than tiny bits of glass and of glazed earthenware,—pots, plates, pitchers,—that, flashing back the sunlight, counterfeited a very heaven of microscopic, glittering stars.

Such was the flooring of that square, though actually paved in some places with small pebbles of various colors arranged in patterns, and in others covered with great slabs of slate, but in the main, as we have just said, like a garden of parasitic plants or a waste and weedy field.

Nor were the buildings which outlined its irregular form less strange and worthy of study. On one side it was bounded by a line of dingy little houses, the roofs twinkling with chimneys, weathercocks and overhangs, the marble guardposts fastened to the corners with iron rings, the balconies low or narrow, the small windows set with flower-pots, and the hanging lantern surrounded by a wire network to protect its smoky glass from the missiles of the street urchins.

Another boundary was constituted by a great, time-blackened wall full of chinks and crevices, from which, amid patches of moss, peeped out, with little bright eyes, the heads of various reptiles,—a wall exceedingly high, formed of bulky blocks sprinkled over with hollows for doors and balconies that had been closed up with stone and mortar, and on one of whose extremities joined, forming an angle with it, a wall of brick stripped of its plaster and full of rough holes, daubed at intervals with streaks of red, green and yellow and crowned with a thatch of hay, in and out of which ran sprays of climbing plants.

This was no more, so to speak, than the side scenery of the strange stage-setting which, as I made my way into the square, suddenly presented itself to view, captivating my mind and holding it spell-bound for a space, for the true

culminating point of the panorama, the edifice which gave it its general tone, rose at the rear of the square, more whimsical, more original, infinitely more beautiful in its artistic disorder than all the buildings about.

“Here is what I have been wanting to find,” I exclaimed on seeing it, and seating myself on a rough piece of marble, placing my portfolio on my knees and sharpening a pencil, I made ready to sketch, though only in outline, its irregular and eccentric form that I might ever keep it in memory.

If I could fasten on here with wafers the very slight and ill-drawn sketch of this building that I still keep, imperfect and impressionistic though it is, it would save me a mountain of words, giving to my readers a truer idea of it than all the descriptions imaginable.

But since this may not be, I will try to depict it as best I can, so that the readers of these lines may form a remote conception if not of its infinite details, at least of its effect as a whole.

Imagine an Arab palace with horse-shoe portals, its walls adorned by long rows of arches with hundreds of intercrossings, running over a stripe of brilliant tiles; here is seen the recess of an arched window, cut in two by a group of slender colonnettes and enclosed in a frame of exquisite, fanciful ornament; there rises a watch-tower with its light and airy turret, roofed with glazed tiles of green and yellow, its keen golden arrow losing itself in the void; further on is descried the cupola that covers a chamber painted in gold and blue, or lofty galleries closed with green Venetian blinds which on opening reveal gardens with walks of myrtle, groves of laurel, and high-jetting fountains. All is unique, all harmonious, though unsymmetrical; all gives one a glimpse of the luxury and the marvels of its interior; all lets one divine the character and the customs of its inmates.

The wealthy Arab who owned this edifice finally abandons it; the process of the years begins to disintegrate the walls, dim their colors and even corrode their marbles. A king of Castile then chooses for his residence that already crumbling palace, and at this point he breaks the front, opening an ogee and adorning it with a border of escutcheons through whose midst is curled a garland of thistles and clover; yonder he raises a massive fortress-tower of hewn stone with narrow loopholes and pointed battlements; further along he builds on a wing of lofty, gloomy rooms, where may be seen, in curious fellowship, stretches of shining tiles, dusky vaulting, or a solitary Arab window, or a horse-shoe arch, light and elegant, giving entrance to a Gothic hall, austere and grand.

But there comes a day when the king, too, abandons this dwelling, passing it over to a community of nuns, and these in their turn remodel it, adding new features to the already strange physiognomy of the Moorish palace. They

lattice the windows; between two Arab arches they set the symbol of their faith, carved in granite; where tamarinds and laurels used to grow they plant sad and gloomy cypresses; and making use of some remnants of the old edifice, and building on top of others, they form the most picturesque and incongruous combinations conceivable.

Above the main portal of the church, where may be dimly seen, as if enveloped in the mystic twilight made by the shadows of their canopies, a broadside of saints, angels and virgins at whose feet are twisted—among acanthus leaves—stone serpents, monsters and dragons, rises a slender minaret filigreed over with Moorish work; close below the loopholes of the battlemented walls, whose merlons are now broken, they place a shrine with a sacred fresco; and they close up the great slits with thin partitions decorated with little squares like a chess-board; they put crosses on all the pinnacles, and finally they rear a spire full of bells which peal mournfully night and day calling to prayer,—bells which swing at the impulsion of an unseen hand, bells whose far-off sound sometimes draws from the listener tears of involuntary grief.

Still the years are passing and are bathing in a dull, mellow, nondescript hue the whole edifice, harmonizing its colors and sowing ivy in its crevices.

White storks hang their nests on the tower-vane, martins build under the eaves, swallows in the granite canopies, and the owls choose for their haunt lofty holes left by fallen stones, whence on cloudy nights they affright superstitious old women and timid children with the phosphoric gleam of their round eyes and their shrill, uncanny hoots.

Only all these changes of fortune, only all these special circumstances could have resulted in a building so individual, so full of contrasts, of poetry and of memories as the one which on that afternoon presented itself to my view and which to-day I have essayed, albeit in vain, to describe by words.

I had drawn it in part on one of the leaves of my sketch-book. The sun was scarcely gilding the highest spires of the city, the evening breeze was beginning to caress my brow, when rapt in the ideas that suddenly had assailed me on contemplating the silent remains of other eras more poetic than the material age in which we live, suffocating in its utter prose, I let my pencil slip from my fingers and gave over the drawing, leaning against the wall at my back and yielding myself up completely to the visions of imagination. Of what was I thinking? I do not know that I can tell. I clearly saw epoch succeeding epoch, walls falling and other walls rising in their stead. I saw men or, rather, women giving place to other women, and the first and those who came after changing into dust and flying like dust upon the air, a puff of wind bearing away beauty,—beauty which had been wont to call forth secret sighs, to

engender passions, to be the source of ecstasies; then—what know I?—all confused of thought, I saw many things jumbled together,—boudoirs of cunning work, with clouds of perfume and beds of flowers, strait and dreary cells with prayer-stool and crucifix, at the foot of the crucifix an open book, and upon the book a skull; stern and stately halls, hung with tapestries and adorned with trophies of war; and many women passing and still repassing before my gaze, tall nuns pale and thin, brown concubines with reddest lips and blackest eyes; great dames of faultless profile, high bearing and majestic gait.

All these things I saw; and many more of those which, though visioned, cannot be remembered; of those so immaterial that it is impossible to confine them in the narrow compass of a word,—when suddenly I gave a bound upon my seat and, passing my hand over my eyes to convince myself that I was not still dreaming, leaping up as if moved by a nerve-spring, I fastened my gaze on one of the lofty turrets of the convent. I had seen—there is no room for doubt—perfectly had I seen a hand of transcendent whiteness, which, reaching out from one of the apertures of those turrets mortared like chess-boards, had waved several times as if greeting me with a mute and loving sign. And it was I whom it greeted; there was no possibility of a mistake; I was alone, utterly alone in the square.

In vain I waited till night, nailed to that spot and without removing my eyes for an instant from the turret; fruitlessly I often returned to take up my watch again on the dark stone which had served me for seat that afternoon when I saw appear the mysterious hand, already the object of my dreams by night and wildest fantasies by day. I beheld it nevermore.

And finally came the hour when I must depart from Toledo, leaving there, as a useless and ridiculous burden, all the illusions which in its bosom had been raised in my mind. I turned with a sigh to put my papers together in my portfolio; but before securing them there, I wrote another date, the second, the one which I know as the Date of the Hand. As I wrote it, I noticed for a moment the earlier, that of the Window, and could not but smile at my own folly.

III.

From the time of the strange occurrence which I have just related until my return to Toledo, there elapsed about a year, during which the memory of that afternoon was still present to my imagination, at first constantly and in full detail, then less often, and at last so vaguely that I even came to believe sometimes that I had been the sport of an illusive dream.

Nevertheless, scarcely had I arrived at the city which some with good reason call the Spanish Rome than this recollection beset me anew and under

its spell I set forth in absent-minded fashion to roam the streets, without determined direction, with no preconceived purpose of making my way to any special point.

The day was gloomy with that gloom which invades all that one hears and sees and feels. The sky was the color of lead, and under its melancholy shadow the houses seemed older, quainter and duskier than ever. The wind moaned along the tortuous, narrow streets, bearing upon its gusts, like the lost notes of a mysterious symphony, unintelligible words, the peal of bells, and echoes of heavy, far-off blows. The damp, chill air froze the soul with its icy breath.

I wandered for several hours through the most remote and deserted parts of the city, rapt in a thousand confused imaginings; and, contrary to my custom, with a gaze all vague and lost in space, nor could my attention be aroused by any playful detail of architecture, by any monument of an unknown style, by any marvellous and hidden work of sculpture, by any one, in short, of those rare features for whose minute examination I had been wont to pause at every step, at times when only artistic and antiquarian interests held sway in my mind.

The sky was continually growing darker; the wind was blowing more strongly and more boisterously; and a fine sleet had begun to fall, very keen and penetrating, when unwittingly,—for I was still ignorant of the way—and as if borne thither by an impulse which I could not resist, an impulse whose occult force had brought me to the spot whither my thoughts were tending, I found myself in the lonely square which my readers already know.

On finding myself in that place I sprang to clear consciousness from out the depths of that lethargy in which I had been sunken, as if awakened from profound slumber by a violent shock.

I looked about me. All was as I described it—nay, it was more dreary. I know not whether this gloom was due to the darkness of the sky, the lack of verdure, or the state of my own spirit, but the truth is that between the feeling with which I first contemplated that spot and this later impression there was all the distance which lies between poetic melancholy and personal bitterness.

For some moments I stood gazing at the sombre convent, now more sombre than ever to my eyes, and I was already on the point of withdrawing when my ears were wounded by the sound of a bell, a bell of broken, husky voice, which was tolling slowly, while in vivid contrast it was accompanied by something like a little clapper-bell which suddenly began to revolve with the rapidity of a ringing so sharp and so incessant that it seemed to have been seized by an attack of vertigo.

Nothing was ever stranger than that edifice, whose black silhouette was outlined against the sky like that of a cliff bristling with thousands of freakish points, speaking with tongues of bronze through bells that seemed moved by the touch of invisible powers, the one weeping with smothered sobs, the other laughing with shrill, wild outcry, like the laughter of a madwoman.

At intervals and confused with the bewildering clamor of the bells, I seemed to hear, too, something like the indistinct notes of an organ and the words of a sacred, solemn chant.

I changed my intention; and instead of departing I approached the door of the church and asked one of the ragged beggars squatted on the stone steps:

“What is going on here?”

“A taking of the veil,” the mendicant answered, interrupting the prayer which he was muttering between his teeth to resume it later, although not until he had kissed the bit of copper that I dropped into his hand as I put my question.

I had never been present at that ceremony, nor had I ever seen the interior of the convent church. Both considerations impelled me to enter.

The church was high and dark; its aisles were defined by two rows of pillars made up of slender columns gathered into sheaves and resting on broad octagonal bases, while from their rich crowning of capitals sprang the vaulting of the strong ogee arches. The High Altar was placed at the further end under a cupola of Renaissance style decorated with great shield-bearing angels, griffins, a profusion of foliage on the finials, cornices with gilded moldings and rosettes, and odd, elaborate frescoes. Bordering the aisles might be seen a countless number of dusky chapels, in whose recesses were burning a few lamps like stars lost in a cloudy sky. Chapels there were of Arab architecture, Gothic, rococo; some enclosed by magnificent iron gratings; some by humble wooden rails; some submerged in shadow with an ancient marble tomb before the altar; some brightly lighted, with an image clad in tinsel and surrounded by votive offerings of silver and wax, together with little bows of gay-colored ribbon.

The fantastic light which illuminated all the church, whose structural confusion and artistic disorder were entirely in keeping with the rest of the convent, tended to enhance its effect of mystery. From the lamps of silver and copper, suspended from the vaulting, from the altar-candles, from the narrow ogive windows and Moorish casements of the walls, were shed rays of a thousand diverse hues,—white, stealing in from the street by little skylights in the cupola; red, spreading their glow from the great wax-candles before the shrines; green, blue, and a hundred other diverse tints making their way

through the stained glass of the rose-windows. All these lustres, insufficient to flood that sacred place with adequate light, seemed at certain points to blend in strife, while others stood out, clear patches of brightness, over against the veiled, dim depths of the chapels. Despite the solemnity of the rite which was there taking place, but few of the faithful were in attendance. The ceremony had commenced some time ago and was now nearing its close. The priests who officiated at the High Altar were, at that moment, enveloped in a cloud of azure incense which swayed slowly through the air, as they descended the carpeted steps to take their way to the choir where the nuns were heard intoning a psalm.

I, too, moved toward that spot with the intent of peering through the double gratings which isolated the choir from the rest of the church. It seemed borne in upon me that I must know the face of that woman of whom I had seen only—and for one instant—the hand; and opening my eyes to their widest extent and dilating the pupils in the effort to give them greater power and penetration, I strained my gaze on to the deepest recesses of the choir. Fruitless attempt; across the interwoven irons, little or nothing could be seen. Some white and black phantoms moving amidst a gloom against which fought in vain the inadequate radiance of a few tall wax candles; a long line of lofty, crocketed sedilia, crowned with canopies, beneath which might be divined, veiled by the dusk, the indistinct figures of nuns clad in long flowing robes; a crucifix illuminated by four candles and standing out against the dark background of the picture as those points of high light which, on the canvases of Rembrandt, make the shadows more palpable; this was the utmost that could be discerned from the place where I stood.

The priests, covered with their gold-bordered copes, preceded by acolytes who bore a silver cross and two great candles, and followed by others who swung censers that shed perfume all about, advancing through the throng of the faithful who kissed their hands and the hems of their vestments, finally reached the choir-screen.

Up to this moment I had not been able to distinguish, amid the other vague phantoms, that of the maiden who was about to consecrate herself to Christ.

Have you never seen, in those last instants of twilight, a shred of mist rise from the waters of a river, the surface of a fen, the waves of the sea, or the deep heart of a mountain tarn,—a shred of mist that floats slowly in the void, and now looks like a woman moving, walking, trailing her gown behind her, now like a white veil fastening the tresses of an invisible sylph, now a ghost which rises in the air hiding its yellow bones beneath a winding-sheet against which is still seen outlined its angular shape? Such was the hallucination I experienced in beholding draw near the screen, as if detaching herself from the sombre depth of the choir, that white, tall, most lightly moving form.

The face I could not see. She had placed herself exactly in front of the candles which lit up the crucifix; and their gleam, making a halo about her head, had left the rest obscure, bathing her in a wavering shadow.

Profound silence reigned; all eyes were fixed on her, and the final act of the ceremony began.

The abbess, murmuring some unintelligible words, words which in their turn the priests repeated with deep and hollow voice, caught from the virgin's brow the enwreathing crown of blossoms and flung it far away.—Poor flowers! They were the last she was to wear, that woman, sister of the flowers even as all women are.

Then the abbess despoiled her of her veil, and her fair tresses poured in a golden cascade down her back and shoulders, which they were suffered to cover but an instant, for at once there began to be heard, in the midst of that profound silence reigning among the faithful, a sharp, metallic clickity-click which set the nerves twitching, and first the magnificent waves of hair fell from the forehead they had shaded, and then those flowing locks that the fragrant air must have kissed so many times slipped over her bosom and dropped upon the floor.

Again the abbess fell to murmuring the unintelligible words; the priest repeated them; and once more all was silence in the church. Only from time to time were heard, afar off, sounds like long-drawn, dreadful moans. It was the wind complaining as it broke upon the edges of the battlements and towers, and shuddering as it passed the colored panes of the ogive windows.

She was motionless, motionless and pallid as a maiden of stone wrenched from the niche of a Gothic cloister.

And they despoiled her of the jewels which covered her arms and throat, and finally they divested her of her wedding robe, that raiment which seemed to have been wrought that a lover might break its clasps with a hand trembling for bliss and passion.

The mystic Bridegroom was awaiting the bride. Where? Beyond the doors of death; lifting, undoubtedly, the stone of the sepulchre and calling her to enter, even as the timid bride crosses the threshold of the sanctuary of nuptial love, for she fell to the floor prostrate as a corpse. As if she were clay, the nuns strewed her body with flowers, intoning a most mournful psalm; a murmur went up from amid the multitude, and the priests with their deep and hollow voices commenced the service for the dead, accompanied by those instruments that seem to weep, augmenting the unfathomable fear which the terrible words they pronounce inspire of themselves.

De profundis clamavi a te! chanted the nuns from the depths of the choir

with plaintive, lamenting voices.

Dies irae, dies illa! responded the priests in thunderous, awful echo, and therewith the bells pealed slowly, tolling for the dead, and between the peals the metal was heard to vibrate with a strange and dolorous drone.

I was touched; no, not touched—terrified. I believed that I was in presence of the supernatural, that I felt the heart of my own life torn from me, and that vacancy was closing in upon me; I felt that I had just lost something precious, as a father, a mother, or a cherished wife, and I suffered that immeasurable desolation which death leaves behind wheresoever it passes, a desolation nameless, indescribable, to be comprehended only by those who have had it to bear.

I was still rooted to that spot with wildly staring eyes, quaking from head to foot and half beside myself, when the new nun rose from the ground. The abbess robed her in the habit of the order, the sisters took lighted candles in their hands and, forming two long lines, led her in procession back to the further side of the choir.

There, amid the shadows, I saw the sudden glint of a ray of light; the door of the cloister was opened. As she stepped beneath the lintel, the nun turned for the last time toward the altar. The brightness of all the lights suddenly shone upon her, and I could see her face. As I saw it, I had to choke back a cry.

I knew that woman; not that I had ever seen her, but I knew her from the visions of my dreams; she was one of those beings whom the soul foretells or perchance remembers from another better world which, in our descent to this, some of us do not altogether forget.

I took two steps forward; I longed to call to her—to cry out—I know not what—giddiness assailed me; but at that instant the cloister door shut—forever. The silver bells rang blithely, the priests raised a Hosanna, clouds of incense swept through the air, the organ poured forth from a hundred metal mouths a torrent of thunderous harmony, and the bells of the tower began to chime, swinging with a frightful ecstasy.

That mad and clamorous glee made my hair rise on my head. I looked about searching for the parents, family, motherless children of that woman. I found none.

“Perhaps she was alone in the world,” I said, and could not repress a tear.

“God grant thee in the cloister the happiness which He denied thee in the world!” simultaneously exclaimed an old woman by my side, and she sobbed and groaned, clutching the grating.

“Do you know her?” I asked.

“The poor dear! Indeed I knew her. I saw her born and I have nursed her in my arms.”

“And why does she take the veil?”

“Because she found herself alone in the world. Her father and mother died of the cholera on one and the same day, a little more than a year ago. Seeing her an orphan and unprotected, the dean gave her a dowry so that she might enter the sisterhood; and now you see—what else was there to do?”

“And who was she?”

“Daughter of the steward of the Count of C——, whom I served until his death.”

“Where did he live?”

When I heard the name of the street, I could not repress an exclamation of surprise.

A line of light, that line of light which is as swift as thought, running brightly through the obscurity and confusion of the mind, uniting experiences far removed from one another and marvellously binding them together, connected my vague memories and I understood—or believed that I understood—all.

This date, which has no name, I have not written anywhere,—nay; I bear it written there where only I may read it and whence it shall never be erased.

Occasionally in recalling these events, even now in relating them here, I have asked myself:—

Some day in the mysterious hour of twilight, when the breath of the spring zephyr, warm and laden with perfumes, penetrates even into the recesses of the most retired dwellings, bearing there an airy touch of memory, of the world, must not a woman, alone, lost in the dim shades of a Gothic cloister, her cheek upon her hand, her elbow resting on the embrasure of an ogive window, have exhaled a sigh as the recollection of these dates crossed her imagination?

Who knows?

Oh! if she sighed, where might that sigh be?

THE CHRIST OF THE SKULL

The King of Castile was going to the Moorish war and, in order to contend

with the enemies of the faith, he had sent a martial summons to all the flower of his nobility. The silent streets of Toledo now resounded night and day with the stirring sound of kettle-drums and trumpets; and in the Moorish gateway of Visagra, or in that of Cambrón, or in the narrow entrance to the ancient bridge of St. Martin, not an hour passed without one's hearing the hoarse cry of the sentinels proclaiming the arrival of some knight who, preceded by his seigniorial banner and followed by horsemen and foot-soldiers, had come to join the main body of the Castilian army.

The time which remained before taking the road to the frontier and completing the order of the royal hosts was spent in public entertainments, lavish feasts and brilliant tournaments, until at last, on the evening before the day appointed by His Highness for the setting out of the army, a grand ball closed the festivities.

On the night of the ball, the royal palace presented a singular appearance. In the spacious courts might be seen, promiscuously mingled around huge bonfires, a motley multitude of pages, soldiers, crossbowmen and hangers-on, who, some grooming their chargers and polishing their arms preparatory to combat, others bewailing with outcries and blasphemies the unforeseen turns of Fortune, personified for them in the cast of the dice, and others chorusing the refrain of a martial ballad which a minstrel was chanting to the accompaniment of a rude violin; others still buying of a palmer cockle-shells, crosses and girdles hallowed by the touch of the sepulchre of Santiago, or greeting with wild outbursts of laughter the jokes of a clown, or practising on the trumpets the battle-airs of the several seigniories, or telling old stories of chivalry and love adventures, or of miracles recently performed,—all contributed their quota to an infernal, undistinguishable uproar impossible to describe in words.

Above that tumultuous ocean of war songs, noise of hammers smiting anvils, creaking of files that bit the steel, stamping of horses, insolent voices, irrepressible laughter, disorderly shouts and intemperate reproaches, oaths and all manner of strange, discordant sounds, there floated at intervals like a breath of harmony the distant music of the ball.

This, which was taking place in the salons of the second story of the palace, offered in its turn a picture, if not so fantastic and capricious, more dazzling and magnificent.

Through galleries of far extent which formed an intricate labyrinth of slender columns and ogees of fretted stone delicate as lace; through great halls hung with tapestries on which silk and gold had pictured with a thousand diverse colors scenes of love, of the chase and of war,—halls adorned with trophies of arms and escutcheons over which was shed a sea of sparkling light

from innumerable lamps, suspended from the loftiest vaults, and from candelabras of bronze, silver and gold, fastened into the massive blocks of the walls; on all sides, wherever the eyes turned, might be seen floating and drifting hither and thither a cloud of beautiful ladies in rich, gold-embroidered garments, nets of pearls imprisoning their tresses, necklaces of rubies blazing upon their breasts, feather fans with ivory handles hanging from their wrists, veils of white laces caressing their cheeks; and joyous throngs of gallants with velvet sword-belts, brocaded jackets and silken trousers, morocco buskins, full-sleeved mantelets with pointed hoods, poniards with ornamental hilts, and rapiers polished, thin and light.

But in that bright and shining assemblage of youthful cavaliers and ladies, whom their elders, seated in the high larch chairs which encircled the royal dais, with smiles of joy saw defiling by, there was one woman who attracted attention for her incomparable loveliness, one who had been hailed Queen of Beauty in all the tournaments and courts of love of the period, one whose colors the most valiant knights had adopted as their emblem, one whose charms were the theme of the songs of the troubadours most proficient in the gay science, one toward whom all eyes turned with wonder, for whom all hearts sighed in secret, around whom might be seen gathering with eagerness, like humble vassals in the train of their mistress, the most illustrious scions of the Toledan nobility assembled at the ball that night.

Those presumptive gallants who were continually in the retinue of the Doña Inés de Tordesillas, for such was the name of this celebrated beauty, were never discouraged in their suit despite her haughty and disdainful character. One was emboldened by a smile which he thought he detected on her lips; another, by a gracious look which he deemed he had surprised in her eyes; another, by a flattering word, the slightest sign of preference, or a vague promise. Each in silence cherished the hope that he would be her choice. Yet among them all there were two particularly prominent for their assiduity and devotion, two who to all appearance, if not the acknowledged favorites of the beauty, might claim to be the farthest advanced upon the path to her heart. These two knights, equals in birth, valor and chivalric accomplishments, subjects of the same king and aspirants for the same lady, were Alonso de Carrillo and Lope de Sandoval.

Both were natives of Toledo; together they had first borne arms; and on one and the same day, their eyes meeting those of Doña Inés, both had conceived a hidden and ardent love for her, a love that for some time grew in secrecy and silence, but at length came to an involuntary betrayal of itself in their actions and conversation.

At the tournaments in the Zocodover, at the floral games of the court, whenever opportunity was presented for rivalry in gallantry or wit, both

knights had availed themselves of it with eagerness, desirous to win distinction under the eyes of their lady; and that night, impelled doubtless by the same passion, changing their helmets for plumes and their mail for brocade and silk, standing together by the seat where she rested a moment after a turn through the salons, they began to engage in a brilliant contest of exquisite and ingenious phrases or keen and covert epigrams.

The lesser stars of that sparkling constellation, forming a gilded semicircle around the two gallants, laughed and cheered on the delicate strife; and the fair lady, the prize of that word-tournament, approved with a scarcely perceptible smile the flashes of wit, elegantly phrased or full of hidden meaning, whether they fell from the lips of her adorers like a light wave of perfume flattering to her vanity, or leapt forth like a sharp arrow seeking to pierce the opponent in his most vulnerable point, his self-love.

Already with each sally the courtly combat of wit and gallantry was growing fiercer; the phrases were still civil in form, but terse and dry, and in the speaking, accompanied though it was by a slight curving of the lips in semblance of a smile, unconcealable lightnings of the eyes betrayed that repressed anger which raged in the breasts of the rivals.

It was a situation that could not be sustained. The lady, so perceiving, had risen to make another tour of the salons, when an incident occurred that broke down the barrier of formal courtesy which had hitherto restrained the two enamoured youths. Perchance intentionally, perchance through carelessness, Doña Inés had let fall upon her lap one of her perfumed gloves whose golden buttons she had amused herself in pulling off one by one during the conversation. As she rose, the glove slipped between the wide silken plaits of her dress and fell upon the carpet. Seeing it drop, all the knights who formed her brilliant retinue bent eagerly to recover it, disputing with one another the honor of a slight inclination of her head as a reward of their gallantry.

Noting the precipitation with which all stooped to pick up her glove, a half smile of satisfied vanity appeared on the lips of the haughty Doña Inés. With a gesture of general acknowledgment to the cavaliers who had shown such eagerness to serve her, the lady, with a lofty, arrogant mien and scarcely glancing in that direction, reached out her hand for the glove toward Lope and Alonso, the first to reach it. In fact, both youths had seen the glove fall close to their feet, both had stooped with equal haste to pick it up and, on rising, each held it seized by one end. On seeing them immovable, looking silent defiance each upon the other, and both determined not to give up the glove which they had just raised from the floor, the lady uttered a light, involuntary cry, stifled by the murmur of the astonished spectators. The whole presented a threatening scene, that there in the royal castle and in the presence of the king might be designated as a serious breach of courtesy.

Lope and Alonso, notwithstanding, remained motionless, mute, scanning each other from head to foot, showing no sign of the tempest in their souls save by a slight nervous tremor which shivered through their limbs as if they had been attacked by a sudden fever.

The murmurs and exclamations were reaching a climax. The people began to group themselves around the principal actors in the scene. Doña Inés, either bewildered or taking delight in prolonging the situation, was moving to and fro as if seeking refuge or escape from the eyes of the throng whose numbers were continually augmented. Catastrophe now seemed inevitable. The two young men had already exchanged a few words in an undertone, and each, while still with one hand holding the glove in a convulsive grip, seemed instinctively to be seeking with the other the golden hilt of his poniard, when the crowd of spectators respectfully opened and there appeared the king.

His brow was tranquil. There was neither indignation in his countenance nor anger in his bearing.

He surveyed the scene; one glance was sufficient to put him in command of the situation. With all the grace of the most accomplished page, he drew the glove from the young knights' hands which, as though moved by a spring, opened without difficulty at the touch of their sovereign, and turning to Doña Inés de Tordesillas, who, leaning on the arm of a duenna, seemed about to faint, said with a firm though controlled voice, as he presented the glove:

“Take it, señora, and be careful not to let it fall again, lest when you recover it, you find it stained with blood.”

By the time the king had finished speaking, Doña Inés, we will not undertake to say whether overcome by emotion, or in order to retreat more gracefully from the situation, had swooned in the arms of those about her.

Alonso and Lope, the former crushing in silence between his hands his velvet cap whose plume trailed along the carpet, and the latter biting his lips till the blood came, fixed each other with a stubborn, intense stare.

A stare at that crisis was equivalent to a blow, a glove thrown in the face, a challenge to mortal combat.

II.

At midnight, the king and queen retired to their chamber. The ball was at an end, and the inquisitive folk outside, who, forming groups and circles in the vicinity of the palace, had been impatiently awaiting this moment, ran to station themselves beside the steep road, up in the balconies along the route, and in the central square of the city, known as the Zocodover.

For an hour or two there reigned, at these points and in the adjacent streets,

clamor, bustle, activity indescribable. Everywhere might be seen squires caracoling on their richly caparisoned steeds, masters-at-arms with showy vestments full of shields and heraldic devices, drummers dressed in gay colors, soldiers in shining armor, pages in velvet cloaks and plumed hats, footmen who preceded luxurious chairs and litters covered with rich cloth. The great, blazing torches borne by the footmen cast a rosy glow upon the multitude, who, with wondering faces, open mouths and frightened eyes, saw with amazement all the chief nobility of Castile passing by, surrounded on that occasion by fabulous splendor and pomp.

Then, by degrees, the noise and excitement subsided, the stained glass in the lofty ogive windows of the palace ceased to shine, the last cavalcade passed through the close-packed throngs, the rabble in their turn began to disperse in all directions, disappearing among the shadows of the puzzling labyrinth formed by those dark, narrow, tortuous streets, and now the deep silence of the night was broken only by the far-off call of some sentinel, the footsteps of some lingerer whose curiosity had left him to the last, the clang of bolts and bars in closing gates, when on the summit of the stone stairway which leads to the platform of the palace, there appeared a knight, who, after looking on all sides as if seeking some one who should have been expecting him, slowly descended to the Cuesta del Alcazar, by which he took his way toward the Zocodover.

On arriving at the square, he halted a moment and cast a searching glance around. The night was dark, not a star glistened in the sky, nor in all the square could a single light be seen; yet afar off, and in the same direction in which he began to perceive a slight sound as of approaching footsteps, he believed he saw the figure of a man, without doubt the same whom he had seemed to await with such impatience.

The knight who had just quitted the castle for the Zocodover was Alonso Carrillo, who, on account of the post of honor which he held near the person of the king, had been kept on attendance in the royal chamber until that hour. The man coming to meet him out of the shadows of the arcades which surround the square was Lope de Sandoval. When the two knights were face to face, they exchanged a few sentences in suppressed voices.

“I thought you would be expecting me,” said the one.

“I hoped that you would surmise as much,” answered the other.

“Where shall we go?”

“Wherever there can be found four handsbreadth of ground to turn around in and a ray to give us light.”

This briefest of dialogues ended, the two young men plunged into one of

the narrow streets leading out from the Zocodover and vanished in the darkness like those phantoms of the night, which, after terrifying for an instant the beholder, dissolve into atoms of mist and are lost in the depth of the shadows.

A long time they went on, traversing the streets of Toledo, seeking a suitable place to end their quarrel, but the darkness of the night was so dense that the duel seemed impossible. Yet both wished to fight and to fight before the whitening of the east; for at dawn the royal hosts were to go forth, and Alonso with them.

So they pressed on, threading at random deserted squares, dusky alleys, long and gloomy passages, till at last they saw shining in the distance a light, a light small and waning, about which the mist formed a circle of ghostly, glimmering lustre.

They had reached the Street of the Christ, and the radiance discernible at one end seemed to come from the small lantern which illuminated then and illuminates still the image that gives the street its name.

On seeing it, both let escape an exclamation of joy and, quickening their steps toward it, were not long in finding themselves near the shrine in which it burned.

An arched recess in the wall, in the depths of which might be seen the image of the Redeemer, nailed to the cross, with a skull at his feet, a rude board covering for protection from the weather, and a small lantern hung by a cord, swaying with the wind and shedding a faint effulgence, constituted the entire shrine. About it clung festoons of ivy which had sprung up among the dark and broken stones forming, as it were, a curtain of verdure.

The cavaliers, after reverently saluting the image of Christ by removing their military caps and murmuring a short prayer, glanced over the ground, threw off their mantles and, each perceiving the other to be ready for the combat and both giving the signal by a slight motion of the head, crossed swords. But scarcely had the blades touched when, before either of the combatants had been able to take a single step or strike a blow, the light suddenly went out, leaving the street plunged in utter darkness. As if moved by the same thought, the two antagonists, on finding themselves surrounded by that instantaneous gloom, took a step backward, lowered the points of their swords to the ground and raised their eyes to the lantern, whose light, a moment before extinguished, began to shine anew at the very instant the duel was suspended.

“It must have been some passing gust that lowered the flame,” exclaimed Carrillo, placing himself again on guard, and giving warning to Lope, who

seemed preoccupied.

Lope took a step forward to recover the lost ground, extended his arm and the blades touched once more, but at their touching the light again went out of itself, remaining thus until the swords separated.

“In truth, but this is strange!” murmured Lope, gazing at the lantern which had begun spontaneously to burn again. The gleam, slowly wavering with the wind, spread a tremulous, wonderful radiance over the yellow skull placed at the feet of Christ.

“Bah!” said Alonso, “it must be because the holy woman who has charge of the lamp cheats the devotees and scants the oil, so that the light, almost out, brightens and then darkens again in its dying agony.”

Thus speaking, the impetuous youth placed himself once more in attitude of defence. His opponent did the same; but this time, not only were they enveloped in a thick and impenetrable gloom, but simultaneously there fell upon their ears the deep echo of a mysterious voice like those long sighs of the south-west wind which seems to complain and articulate words as it wanders imprisoned in the crooked, narrow and dim streets of Toledo.

What was uttered by that fearful and superhuman voice never could be learned; but on hearing it, both youths were seized with such profound terror that their swords dropped from their hands, their hair stood on end, and over their bodies, shaken by an involuntary tremor, and down their pallid and distorted brows a cold sweat like that of death began to flow.

The light, for the third time quenched, for the third time shone again and dispelled the dark.

“Ah!” exclaimed Lope, beholding him who was now his opponent, in other days his best friend, astounded like himself, like himself pale and motionless, “God does not mean to permit this combat, for it is a fratricidal contest; because a duel between us is an offence to heaven in whose sight we have sworn a hundred times eternal friendship.” And saying this he threw himself into the arms of Alonso, who clasped him in his own with unspeakable strength and fervor.

III.

Some moments passed during which both youths indulged in every endearment of friendship and love. Alonso spoke first and, in accents touched by the scene which we have just related, exclaimed, addressing his comrade:

“Lope, I know that you love Doña Inés; perhaps not as much as I, but you love her. Since a duel between us is impossible, let us agree to place our fate in her hands. Let us go and seek her, let her decide with free choice which of us

shall be the happy one, which the wretched. Her decision shall be respected by both, and he who does not gain her favor shall to-morrow go forth with the King of Toledo and shall seek the comfort of forgetfulness in the excitement of war.”

“Since you wish it, so let it be,” replied Lope.

And arm in arm the two friends took their way toward the cathedral beneath whose shadow, in a palace of which there are now no remains, dwelt Doña Inés de Tordesillas.

It was early dawn, and as some of the kindred of Doña Inés, among them her brothers, were to march the coming day with the royal army, it was not impossible that early in the morning they could gain admittance to her palace.

Inspired by this hope they arrived, at last, at the base of the Gothic tower of the church, but on reaching that point a peculiar noise attracted their attention and, stopping in one of the angles, concealed among the shadows of the lofty buttresses that support the walls, they saw, to their amazement, a man emerging from a window upon the balcony of their lady’s apartments in the palace. He lightly descended to the ground by the help of a rope and, finally, a white figure, Doña Inés undoubtedly, appeared upon the balcony and, leaning over the fretted parapet, exchanged tender phrases of farewell with her mysterious lover.

The first motion of the two youths was to place their hands on their sword-hilts, but checking themselves, as though struck by a common thought, they turned to look on one another, each discerning on the other’s face a look of astonishment so ludicrous that both broke forth into loud laughter, laughter which, rolling on from echo to echo in the silence of the night, resounded through the square even to the palace.

Hearing it, the white figure vanished from the balcony, a noise of slamming doors was heard, and then silence resumed her reign.

On the following day, the queen, seated on a most sumptuous dais, saw defile past her the hosts who were marching to the war against the Moors. At her side were the principal ladies of Toledo. Among them was Doña Inés de Tordesillas on whom this day, as ever, all eyes were bent. But it seemed to her that they wore a different expression from that to which she was accustomed. She would have said that in all the curious looks cast upon her lurked a mocking smile.

This discovery could not but disquiet her, remembering, as she did, the noisy laughter which, the night before, she had thought she heard at a distance in one of the angles of the square, while she was closing her balcony and bidding adieu to her lover; but when she saw among the ranks of the army

marching below the dais, sparks of fire glancing from their brilliant armor, and a cloud of dust enveloping them, the two reunited banners of the houses of Carrillo and Sandoval; when she saw the significant smile which the two former rivals, on saluting the queen, directed toward herself, she comprehended all. The blush of shame reddened her face and tears of chagrin glistened in her eyes.

THE WHITE DOE

In a small town of Aragon, about the end of the thirteenth century or a little later, there lived retired in his seigniorial castle a renowned knight named Don Dionís, who, having served his king in the war against the infidels, was then taking his ease, giving himself up to the merry exercise of hunting, after the wearisome hardships of war.

It chanced once to this cavalier, engaged in his favorite diversion, accompanied by his daughter whose singular beauty, of the blond type extraordinary in Spain, had won her the name of White Lily, that as the increasing heat of the day began to tell upon them, absorbed in pursuing a quarry in the mountainous part of his estate, he took for his resting-place during the hours of the siesta a glen through which ran a rivulet leaping from rock to rock with a soft and pleasant sound.

It might have been a matter of some two hours that Don Dionís had lingered in that delectable retreat, reclining on the delicate grass in the shade of a black-poplar grove, talking affably with his huntsmen about the incidents of the day, while they related one to another more or less curious adventures that had befallen them in their hunting experiences, when along the top of the highest ridge and between alternating murmurs of the wind which stirred the leaves on the trees, he began to perceive, each time more near, the sound of a little bell like that of the leader of a flock.

In truth, it was really that, for very soon after the first hearing of the bell, there came leaping over the thick undergrowth of lavender and thyme, descending to the opposite bank of the rivulet, nearly a hundred lambs white as snow, and behind them appeared their shepherd with his pointed hood drawn over his brows to protect him from the vertical rays of the sun and with his shoulder-bag swung from the end of a stick.

“Speaking of remarkable adventures,” exclaimed on seeing him one of the huntsmen of Don Dionís, addressing his lord, “here is Esteban, the shepherd-lad, who has been now for some time more of a fool than God made him,

which was fool enough. He can give us an amusing half-hour by relating the cause of his continual frights.”

“But what is it that happens to this poor devil?” exclaimed Don Dionís with an air of piqued curiosity.

“A mere trifle,” continued the huntsman in a jesting tone. “The case is this—that without having been born on Good Friday, or bearing a birthmark of the cross, or, so far as one can infer from his regular Christian habits, binding himself to the Devil, he finds himself, not knowing why or whence, endowed with the most marvellous faculty that any man ever possessed, unless it be Solomon, who, they say, understood even the language of birds.”

“And with what does this remarkable faculty have to do?”

“It has to do,” pursued the huntsman, “as he affirms, and he swears and forswears it by all that is most sacred, with a conspiracy among the deer which course through these mountains not to leave him in peace, the drollest thing about it being that on more than one occasion he has surprised them in the act of contriving the pranks they were going to play on him and after those tricks had been carried through he has overheard the noisy bursts of laughter with which they applaud them.”

While the huntsman was thus speaking, Constanza, as the beautiful daughter of Don Dionís was named, had drawn near the group of sportsmen and, as she appeared curious to hear the strange experience of Esteban, one of them ran on to the place where the young shepherd was watering his flock and brought him into the presence of his lord, who, to dispel the perturbation and evident embarrassment of the poor peasant, hastened to greet him by name, accompanying the salutation with a benevolent smile.

Esteban was a boy of nineteen or twenty years, robust in build, with a small head sunken between his shoulders, little blue eyes, a wavering, stupid glance like that of albinos, a flat nose, thick, half open lips, low forehead, complexion fair but tanned by the sun, and hair which fell partly over his eyes and partly around his face, in rough red locks like the mane of a sorrel nag.

Such, more or less exactly, was Esteban in point of physique. In respect to his character, it could be asserted without fear of denial on his own part or on that of any one who knew him, that he was an entirely honest, simple-hearted lad, though, like a true peasant, a little suspicious and malicious.

As soon as the shepherd had recovered from his confusion, Don Dionís again addressed him and, in the most serious tone in the world, feigning an extraordinary interest in learning the details of the event to which his huntsman had referred, put to him a multitude of questions to which Esteban began to reply evasively, as if desirous of escaping any discussion of the

subject.

Constrained, nevertheless, by the demands of his lord and the entreaties of Constanza, who seemed most curious and eager that the shepherd should relate his astounding adventures, he decided to talk freely, but not without casting a distrustful glance about him as though fearing to be overheard by others than those present, and scratching his head three or four times in the effort to connect his recollections or find the thread of his narrative, before at last he thus began:

“The fact is, my lord, that as a priest of Tarazona to whom, not long ago, I went for help in my troubles, told me, wits don’t serve against the Devil, but mum! finger on lip, many good prayers to Saint Bartholomew—who, none better, knows his knaveries—and let him have his sport; for God, who is just, and sits up thereon high, will see that all comes right in the end.

“Resolved on this course I had decided never again to say a word to any one about it,—no, not for anything; but I will do it to-day to satisfy your curiosity, and in good sooth, if, after all, the Devil calls me to account and goes to troubling me in punishment for my indiscretion, I carry the Holy Gospels sewed inside my sheepskin coat, and with their help, I think that, as at other times, I may make telling use of a cudgel.”

“But, come!” exclaimed Don Dionís, out of patience with the digressions of the shepherd, which it seemed would never end, “let the whys and wherefores go, and come directly to the subject.”

“I am coming to it,” calmly replied Esteban, and after calling together, by dint of a shout and a whistle, the lambs of which he had not lost sight and which were now beginning to scatter over the mountain-side, he scratched his head again and proceeded thus:

“On the one hand, your own continual hunting trips, and on the other, the persistency of those trespassers who, what with snare and what with crossbow, hardly leave a deer alive in twenty days’ journey round about, had, a little time ago, so thinned out the game in these mountains that you could not find a stag in them, not though you would give one of your eyes.

“I was speaking of this in the town, seated in the porch of the church, where after mass on Sunday I was in the habit of joining some laborers who till the soil in Veratón, when some of them said to me:

“Well, man, I don’t know why it is you fail to run across them, since, as for us, we can give you our word that we don’t once go down to the ploughed land without coming upon their tracks, and it is only three or four days since, without going further back, a herd, which, to judge by their hoof-prints, must have numbered more than twenty, cut down before its time a crop of wheat

belonging to the care-taker of the Virgen del Romeral.’

“‘And in what direction did the track lead?’ I asked the laborers, with a mind to see if I could fall in with the herd.

“‘Toward the Lavender Glen,’ they replied.

“This information did not enter one ear to go out at the other; that very night I posted myself among the poplars. During all its hours I kept hearing here and there, far off as well as near by, the trumpeting of the deer as they called one to another, and from time to time I felt the boughs stirring behind me; but however sharply I looked, the truth is, I could distinguish nothing.

“Nevertheless, at break of day, when I took the lambs to water, at the bank of the stream, about two throws of the sling from the place where we now are, and in so dense a shade of poplars that not even at mid-day is it pierced by a ray of sunshine, I found fresh deer-tracks, broken branches, the stream a little roiled and, what is more peculiar, among the deer-tracks the short prints of tiny feet no larger than the half of the palm of my hand, without any exaggeration.”

On saying this, the boy, instinctively seeming to seek a point of comparison, directed his glance to the foot of Constanza, which peeped from beneath her petticoat shod in a dainty sandal of yellow morocco, but as the eyes of Don Dionís and of some of the huntsmen who were about him followed Esteban’s, the beautiful girl hastened to conceal it, exclaiming in the most natural voice in the world:

“Oh, no! unluckily mine are not so tiny, for feet of this size are found only among the fairies of whom the troubadours sing.”

“But I did not give up with this,” continued the shepherd, when Constanza had finished. “Another time, having concealed myself in another hiding-place by which, undoubtedly, the deer would have to pass in going to the glen, at just about midnight sleep overcame me for a little, although not so much but that I opened my eyes at the very moment when I perceived the branches were stirring around me. I opened my eyes, as I have said; I rose with the utmost caution and, listening intently to the confused murmur, which every moment sounded nearer, I heard in the gusts of wind something like cries and strange songs, bursts of laughter, and three or four distinct voices which talked together with a chatter and gay confusion like that of the young girls at the village when, laughing and jesting on the way, they return in groups from the fountain with their water-jars on their heads.

“As I gathered from the nearness of the voices and close-by crackle of twigs which broke noisily in giving way to that throng of merry maids, they were just about to come out of the thicket on to a little platform formed by a

jut of the mountain there where I was hid when, right at my back, as near or nearer than I am to you, I heard a new voice, fresh, fine and vibrant, which said—believe it, señores, it is as true as that I have to die—it said, clearly and distinctly, these very words:

“Hither, hither, comrades dear!

That dolt of an Esteban is here!’ ”

On reaching this point in the shepherd’s story, the bystanders could no longer repress the merriment which for many minutes had been dancing in their eyes and, giving free rein to their mirth, they broke into clamorous laughter. Among the first to begin to laugh, and the last to leave off, were Don Dionís, who, notwithstanding his air of dignity, could not but take part in the general hilarity, and his daughter Constanza, who, every time she looked at Esteban, all in suspense and embarrassment as he was, fell to laughing again like mad till the tears sprang from her eyes.

The shepherd-lad, for his part, although without heeding the effect his story had produced, seemed disturbed and restless, and while the great folk laughed to their hearts’ content at his simple tale, he turned his face from one side to the other with visible signs of fear and as if trying to descry something beyond the intertwined trunks of the trees.

“What is it, Esteban, what is the matter?” asked one of the huntsmen, noting the growing disquietude of the poor boy, who now was fixing his frightened eyes on the laughing daughter of Don Dionís, and again gazing all around him with an expression of astonishment and dull dismay:

“A very strange thing is happening to me,” exclaimed Esteban. “When, after hearing the words which I have just repeated, I quickly sat upright to surprise the person who had spoken them, a doe white as snow leaped from the very copse in which I was hidden and, taking a few prodigious bounds over the tops of the evergreen oaks and mastic trees, sped away, followed by a herd of deer of the natural color; and these, like the white one who was guiding them, did not utter the cries of deer in flight, but laughed with great peals of laughter, whose echo, I could swear, is sounding in my ears at this moment.”

“Bah, bah, Esteban!” exclaimed Don Dionís, with a jesting air, “follow the counsels of the priest of Tarazona; do not talk of your adventures with the joke-loving deer, lest the Devil bring it to pass that in the end you lose the little sense you have, and since now you are provided with the gospels and know the prayer of Saint Bartholomew, return to your lambs which are beginning to scatter through the glen. If the evil spirits tease you again, you know the remedy—Pater Noster and a big stick.”

The shepherd, after putting away in his pouch a half loaf of white bread and a piece of boar's meat, and in his stomach a mighty draught of wine, which, by order of his lord, one of the grooms gave him, took leave of Don Dionís and his daughter and had scarcely gone four steps when he began whirling his sling, casting stones from it to gather the lambs together.

As, by this time, Don Dionís observed that, what with one diversion and another, the hours of heat were now passed and the light afternoon breeze was beginning to stir the leaves of the poplars and to freshen the fields, he gave orders to his retinue to make ready the horses which were grazing loose in the grove hard by; and when everything was prepared, he signalled to some to slip the leashes, and to others to blow the horns and, sallying forth in a troop from the poplar-grove, took up the interrupted chase.

II.

Among the huntsmen of Don Dionís was one named Garcés, the son of an old servitor of the house and therefore held in high regard by the family.

Garcés was of about the age of Constanza, and from early boyhood had been accustomed to anticipate the least of her wishes and to divine and gratify the lightest of her whims.

He amused himself in his moments of leisure in sharpening with his own hand the pointed arrows of her ivory crossbow; he broke in the colts for her mounts; he trained her favorite hounds in the arts of the chase and tamed her falcons for which he bought at the fairs of Castile red hoods embroidered with gold.

But as for the other huntsmen, the pages and the common folk in the service of Don Dionís, the delicate attentions of Garcés and the marks of esteem with which his superiors distinguished him had caused them to hold him in a sort of general dislike, even to the point of saying, in their envy, that all his assiduous efforts to anticipate the caprices of his mistress revealed the character of a flatterer and a sycophant. Yet there were not wanting those who, more keen-sighted or malicious than the rest, believed that they detected in the young retainer's devotion signs of an ill-dissembled passion.

If this were really so, the secret love of Garcés had more than abundant excuse in the incomparable charms of Constanza. He must needs have had a breast of stone, and a heart of ice, who could remain unmoved day after day at the side of that woman, peerless in her beauty and her bewitching graces.

The Lily of the Moncayo they called her for twenty leagues around, and well she merited this soubriquet, for she was so exquisite, so white and so delicately flushed that it would seem that God had made her, like the lilies, of snow and gold.

Nevertheless, among the neighboring gentry it was whispered that the beautiful Lady of Veratón was not so pure of blood as she was fair, and that despite her bright tresses and her alabaster complexion, she had had a gipsy mother. How much truth there was in these rumors no one could say, for, in fact, Don Dionís had in his youth led an adventurous life, and after fighting long under the banner of the King of Aragon, from whom he received among other rewards the fief of the Moncayo, had gone to Palestine, where he wandered for some years, finally returning to establish himself in his castle of Veratón with a little daughter born, doubtless, on foreign soil. The only person who could have told anything about the mysterious origin of Constanza, having attended Don Dionís in his travels abroad, was the father of Garcés, and he had died some time since without saying a single word on the subject, not even to his own son who, at various times and with manifestations of great interest, had questioned him.

The temperament of Constanza, with its swift alternations from reserve and melancholy to mirth and glee; the singular vividness of her imagination; her wild moods; her extraordinary ways; even the peculiarity of having eyes and eyebrows black as night while her complexion was white and rosy and her hair as bright as gold, had contributed to furnish food for the gossip of the countryside; and even Garcés himself, who knew her so intimately, had come to the conclusion that his liege lady was something apart and did not resemble the rest of womankind.

Present, as the other huntsmen were, at the narration of Esteban, Garcés was perhaps the only one who listened with genuine curiosity to the details of the shepherd's incredible adventure; and though he could not help smiling when the lad repeated the words of the white doe, no sooner had he left the grove in which they had taken their siesta, than he began to revolve in his mind the most ridiculous fancies.

“Without doubt this tale of the talking of the deer is a sheer delusion of Esteban's, who is a perfect simpleton,” the young huntsman said to himself as, mounted on a powerful sorrel, he followed step by step the palfrey of Constanza, who seemed also somewhat preoccupied and was so silent and so withdrawn from the group of hunters as scarcely to take any part in the sport. “Yet who can say that in the story which this poor fool tells there may not be a grain of truth?” thought on the young retainer. “We have seen stranger things in the world, and a white doe may indeed exist, since if we can credit the folk-songs, Saint Hubert, the patron of huntsmen, had one. Oh, if I could take a white doe alive for an offering to my lady!”

Thus thinking and dreaming, Garcés passed the afternoon; and when the sun began to descend behind the neighboring hills, and Don Dionís gave the order to his retinue for the return to the castle, he slipped away from the

company unnoticed and went in search of the shepherd through the densest and most entangled coverts of the mountain.

Night had almost completely closed in when Don Dionís arrived at the gates of his castle. Immediately there was placed before him a frugal collation and he sat down with his daughter at the table.

“And Garcés, where is he?” asked Constanza, noticing that her huntsman was not there to serve her as usual.

“We do not know,” the other attendants hastened to reply. “He disappeared from among us near the glen and we have not seen him since.”

At that instant Garcés arrived, all breathless, his forehead still covered with perspiration, but with the most happy and satisfied expression imaginable.

“Pardon me, my lady,” he exclaimed, addressing Constanza, “pardon me if I have been wanting a moment in my duty, but there whence I came at my horse’s best speed, there, as here, I was busied only in your service.”

“In my service?” repeated Constanza. “I do not understand what you mean.”

“Yes, my lady, in your service,” repeated the youth, “for I have ascertained that the white doe really does exist. Besides Esteban, it is vouched for by various other shepherds, who swear they have seen it more than once; and with their aid I hope in God and in my patron Saint Hubert to bring it, living or dead, within three days to you at the castle.”

“Bah! Bah!” exclaimed Constanza with a jesting air, while the derisive laughter, more or less dissimulated, of the bystanders chorused her words. “Have done with midnight hunts and with white does. Bear in mind that the Devil loves to tempt the simple; and if you persist in following at his heels, he will make you a laughing-stock like poor Esteban.”

“My lady,” interrupted Garcés with a broken voice, concealing as far as possible the anger which the merry scoffs of his companions stirred in him, “I have never yet had to do with the Devil and consequently I am not acquainted with his practices; but, for myself, I swear to you that, do all he can, he will not make me an object of laughter, for that is a privilege I know how to tolerate in yourself alone.”

Constanza saw the effect which her mocking had produced on the enamoured youth, but desiring to test his patience to the uttermost, she continued in the same tone:

“And what if, on aiming at the doe, she salutes you with another laugh like that which Esteban heard, or flings it into your very face, and you, hearing those supernatural peals of merriment, let fall your bow from your hands, and

before you recover from the fright, the white doe has vanished swifter than lightning—what then?”

“Oh, as for that!” exclaimed Garcés, “be sure that if I can speed a shaft before she is out of bowshot, although she play me more tricks than a juggler; although she speak to me, not in the language of the country, but in Latin like the Abbot of Munilla, she will not get off without an arrow-head in her body.”

At this stage in the conversation, Don Dionís joined in with a forced gravity through which might be detected the entire irony of his words, and began to give the now persecuted boy the most original counsels in the world, in case he should suddenly meet with the demon changed into a white doe.

At each new suggestion of her father, Constanza fixed her eyes on the distressed Garcés, and broke into extravagant laughter, while his fellow-servitors encouraged the jesting with glances of intelligence and ill-disguised delight.

Only with the close of the supper ceased this scene, in which the credulity of the young hunter was, so to speak, the theme on which the general mirth played variations, so that when the cloth was removed and Don Dionís and Constanza had withdrawn to their apartments, and all the inmates of the castle had gone to rest, Garcés remained for a long time irresolute, debating whether, notwithstanding the jeers of his liege lord and lady, he would stand firm to his purpose, or absolutely abandon the enterprise.

“What the devil,” he exclaimed, rousing himself from the state of uncertainty into which he had fallen. “Greater harm than that which has overtaken me cannot come to pass and if, on the other hand, what Esteban has told us is true, oh, then, how sweet will be the taste of my triumph!”

Thus speaking, he fitted a shaft to his crossbow—not without having made the sign of the cross on the point of the arrow—and swinging it over his shoulder, he directed his steps toward the postern gate of the castle to take the mountain path.

When Garcés reached the glen and the point where, according to the instructions of Esteban, he was to lie in wait for the appearance of the deer, the moon was slowly rising behind the neighboring mountains.

Like a good hunter, well-practised in his craft, he spent a considerable time, before selecting a suitable place for an ambush, in going to and fro, scanning the byways and paths thereabouts, the grouping of the trees, the irregularities of the ground, the curves of the river and the depth of its waters.

At last, after completing this minute examination of the locality, he hid himself upon a sloping bank near some black poplars whose high and

interlacing tops cast a dark shadow, and at whose feet grew a clump of mastic shrubs high enough to conceal a man lying prone on the ground.

The river, which, from the mossy rocks where it rose, came following the windings of the rugged fief of the Moncayo to enter the glen by a cascade, thence went gliding on, bathing the roots of the willows that shaded its bank, or playing with a murmurous ripple among the stones rolled down from the mountain, until it fell into a pool very near the point which served the hunter for a hiding-place.

The poplars, whose silvered leaves the wind stirred with the sweetest rustle, the willows which, leaning over the limpid current, bedewed in it the tips of their pale branches, and the crowded groups of evergreen oaks about whose trunks honeysuckles and blue morning-glories clambered and twined, formed a thick wall of foliage around this quiet river-pool.

The wind, stirring the leafy curtains of living green which spread round about their floating shadow, let penetrate at intervals a stealthy ray of light that gleamed like a flash of silver over the surface of the motionless, deep waters.

Hidden among the bushes, his ear attent to the slightest sound, and his gaze fixed upon the spot where, according to his calculations, the deer should come, Garcés waited a long time in vain.

Everything about him remained buried in a deep calm.

Little by little, and it might well be that the lateness of the hour—for it was past midnight—began to weigh upon his lids—might well be that far-off murmurs of the water, the penetrating scent of the wild flowers and the caresses of the wind affected his senses with the soft drowsiness in which all nature seemed to be steeped—the enamoured boy, who until now had been occupied in revolving in his mind the most alluring fancies, began to find that his ideas took shape more slowly and his thoughts drifted into vague and indecisive forms.

After lingering a little in this dim border-land between waking and sleeping, at last he closed his eyes, let his crossbow slip from his hands, and sank into a profound slumber.

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It must have been for two or three hours now that the young hunter had been snoring at his ease, enjoying to the full one of the serenest dreams of his life, when suddenly he opened his eyes, with a stare, and half raised himself to a sitting posture, full yet of that stupor with which one wakes suddenly from profound sleep.

In the breathings of the wind and blended with the light noises of the night,

he thought he detected a strange hum of delicate voices, sweet and mysterious, which were talking with one another, laughing or singing, each in its own individual strain, making a twitter as clamorous and confused as that of the birds awakening at the first ray of the sun amid the leaves of a poplar grove.

This extraordinary sound was heard for an instant only, and then all was still again.

“Without doubt, I was dreaming of the absurdities of which the shepherd told us,” exclaimed Garcés, rubbing his eyes in all tranquillity, and firmly persuaded that what he had thought he heard was no more than that vague impression of slumber which, on awaking, lingers in the imagination, as the closing cadence of a melody dwells in the ear after the last trembling note has ceased. And overcome by the unconquerable languor weighing down his limbs, he was about to lay his head again upon the turf, when he heard anew the distant echo of those mystic voices, which to the accompaniment of the soft stir of the air, the water and the leaves were singing thus:

CHORUS.

“The archer who watched on the top of the tower has laid his heavy head down on the wall.

The stealthy hunter who was expecting to surprise the deer has been surprised by sleep.

The shepherd who awaited the day, consulting the stars, sleeps now, and will sleep till dawn.

Queen of the water-sprites, follow our steps.

Come to swing in the branches of the willows over the surface of the water.

“Come to intoxicate thyself with the perfume of the violets which open at dusk.

“Come to enjoy the night, which is the day of the spirits.”

While the sweet notes of that delicious music floated on the air, Garcés remained motionless. After it had melted away, with much caution he slightly parted the branches and, not without experiencing a certain shock, saw come into sight the deer, which, moving in a confused group and sometimes bounding over the bushes with incredible lightness, stopping as though listening for others, frolicking together, now hiding in the thicket, now sallying out again into the path, were descending the mountain in the direction of the river-pool.

In advance of her companions, more agile, more graceful, more sportive, more joyous than all of them, leaping, running, pausing and running again so

lightly that she seemed not to touch the ground with her feet, went the white doe, whose wonderful color stood out like a fantastic light against the dark background of the trees.

Although the young man was inclined to see in his surroundings something of the supernatural and miraculous, the fact of the case was that, apart from the momentary hallucination which disturbed his senses for an instant, suggesting to him music, murmurs and words, there was nothing either in the form of the deer, nor in their movements, nor in their short cries with which they seemed to call one to another, that ought not to be entirely familiar to a huntsman experienced in this sort of night expeditions.

In proportion as he put away the first impression, Garcés began to take the practical view of the situation and, smiling inwardly at his credulity and fright, from that instant was intent only on determining, in view of the route they were following, the point where the deer would take the water.

Having made his calculation, he gripped his crossbow between his teeth and, twisting along like a snake behind the mastic shrubs, located himself about forty paces from his former situation. Once ensconced in his new ambush, he waited long enough for the deer to be within the river, that his aim might be the surer. Scarcely had he begun to hear that peculiar sound which is produced by the violent disturbance of water, when Garcés commenced to lift himself little by little, with the greatest precaution, resting first on the tips of his fingers, and afterwards on one knee.

Erect at last, and assuring himself by touch that his weapon was ready, he took a step forward, craned his neck above the shrubs to command a view of the pool and aimed the shaft, but at the very moment when he strained his eyes, together with the cord, in search of the victim whom he must wound, there escaped from his lips a faint, involuntary cry of amazement.

The moon, which had been slowly climbing up the broad horizon, was motionless, and hung as if suspended in the height of heaven. Her clear radiance flooded the forest, shimmered on the unquiet surface of the river, and caused objects to be seen as through an azure gauze.

The deer had disappeared.

In their place, Garcés, filled with consternation and almost with terror, saw a throng of most beautiful women, some of whom were sportively entering the water, while others were just freeing themselves from the light garments which as yet concealed from the covetous view the treasure of their forms.

In those thin, brief dreams of dawn, rich in joyous and luxurious images,—dreams as diaphanous and celestial as the light which then begins to shine through the white bed-curtains, never had the imagination of twenty years

sketched with fanciful coloring a scene equal to that which now presented itself to the eyes of the astonished Garcés.

Having now cast off their robes and their veils of a thousand colors which, suspended from the trees or thrown carelessly down on the carpet of turf, stood out against the dim background, the maidens ran hither and thither through the grove, forming picturesque groups, going in and out of the water and splashing it in glistening sparks over the flowers of the margin, like a little shower of dewdrops.

Here, one of them, white as the fleece of a lamb, lifted her fair head among the green floating leaves of an aquatic plant of which she seemed the half-opened blossom whose flexible stem, one might imagine, could be seen to tremble beneath the endless gleaming circles of the waves.

Another, with her hair loose on her shoulders, swung from the branch of a willow over the river, and her little rose-colored feet made a ray of silvery light as they grazed the smooth surface. While some remained couched on the bank, with their blue eyes drowsy, breathing voluptuously the perfume of the flowers and shivering slightly at the touch of the fresh breeze, others were dancing in a giddy round, interlacing their hands capriciously, letting their heads droop back with delicious abandon, and striking the ground with their feet in harmonious cadence.

It was impossible to follow them in their agile movements, impossible to take in with a glance the infinite details of the picture they formed, some running, some gambolling and chasing one another with merry laughter in and out the labyrinth of trees; others skimming the water swanlike and cutting the current with uplifted breast; others, diving into the depths where they remained long before rising to the surface, bringing one of those wonderful flowers that spring unseen in the bed of the deep waters.

The gaze of the astonished hunter wandered spellbound from one side to another, without knowing where to fix itself, until he believed he saw, seated under swaying boughs which seemed to serve her as a canopy and surrounded by a group of women, each more beautiful than the rest, who were aiding her in freeing herself from her delicate vestments, the object of his secret worship, the daughter of the noble Don Dionís, the incomparable Constanza.

Passing from one surprise to another, the enamoured youth dared not credit the testimony of his senses, and thought he was under the influence of a fascinating, delusive dream.

Still, he struggled in vain to convince himself that all he had seen was the effect of disordered imagination, for the longer and more attentively he looked, the more convinced he became that this woman was Constanza.

He could not doubt; hers were those dusky eyes shaded by the long lashes that scarcely sufficed to soften the brilliancy of their glance; hers that wealth of shining hair, which, after crowning her brow, fell over her white bosom and soft shoulders like a cascade of gold; hers, too, that graceful neck which supported her languid head, lightly drooping like a flower weary with its weight of dewdrops; and that fair figure of which, perchance, he had dreamed, and those hands like clusters of jasmine, and those tiny feet, comparable only to two morsels of snow which the sun has not been able to melt and which in the morning lie white on the greensward.

At the moment when Constanza emerged from the little thicket, all her beauty unveiled to her lover's eyes, her companions, beginning anew to sing, carolled these words to the sweetest of melodies.

CHORUS.

“Genii of the air, dwelling in the luminous ether, enveloped in raiment of silver mist—come!

“Invisible sylphs, leave the cups of the half-opened lilies and come in your mother-of-pearl chariots drawn through the air by harnessed butterflies.

“Nymphs of the fountains, forsake your mossy beds and fall upon us in little, diamond showers.

“Emerald beetles, fiery glow-worms, sable butterflies, come!

“And come, all ye spirits of night, come humming like a swarm of lustrous, golden insects.

“Come, for now the moon, protector of mysteries, sparkles in the fulness of splendor.

“Come, for the moment of marvellous transformation is at hand.

“Come, for those who love you, await you with impatience.”

Garcés, who remained motionless, felt on hearing those mysterious songs the asp of jealousy stinging his heart, and yielding to an impulse stronger than his will, bent on breaking once for all the spell that was fascinating his senses, thrust apart with a tremulous, convulsive hand the boughs which concealed him, and with a single bound gained the river-bank. The charm was broken, everything vanished like a vapor and, looking about him, he neither saw nor heard more than the noisy confusion with which the timid deer, surprised at the height of their nocturnal gambols, were fleeing in fright from his presence, hither and thither, one clearing the thickets with a bound, another gaining at full speed the mountain path.

“Oh, well did I say that all these things were only delusions of the Devil,”

exclaimed the hunter, “but this time, by good luck, he blundered, leaving the chief prize in my hands.”

And so, in fact, it was. The white doe, trying to escape through the grove, had rushed into the labyrinth of its trees and, entangled in a network of honeysuckles, was striving in vain to free herself. Garcés aimed his shaft, but at the very instant in which he was going to wound her, the doe turned toward the hunter and arrested his action with a cry, saying in a voice clear and sharp: “Garcés, what wouldst thou do?” The young man hesitated and, after a moment’s doubt, let his bow fall to the ground, aghast at the mere idea of having been in danger of harming his beloved. A loud, mocking laugh roused him finally from his stupor. The white doe had taken advantage of those brief instants to extricate herself and to flee swift as a flash of lightning, laughing at the trick played on the hunter.

“Ah, damned offspring of Satan!” he shouted in a terrible voice, catching up his bow with unspeakable swiftness, “too soon hast thou sung thy victory; too soon hast thou thought thyself beyond my reach.” And so saying, he sped the arrow, that went hissing on its way and was lost in the darkness of the wood, from whose depths there simultaneously came a shriek followed by choking groans.

“My God!” exclaimed Garcés on hearing those sobs of anguish. “My God! if it should be true!” And beside himself, hardly aware of what he did, he ran like a madman in the direction in which he had shot the arrow, the same direction from which sounded the groans. He reached the place at last, but on arriving there, his hair stood erect with horror, the words throbbed vainly in his throat and he had to clutch the trunk of a tree to save himself from falling to the ground.

Constanza, wounded by his hand, was dying there before his eyes, writhing in her own blood, among the sharp brambles of the mountain.

THE PASSION ROSE

One summer afternoon, in a garden of Toledo, this curious tale was related to me by a young girl as good as she was pretty.

While explaining to me the mystery of its especial structure, she kissed the leaves and pistils which she was plucking one by one from the flower that gives to this legend its name.

If I could tell it with the gentle charm and the appealing simplicity which it had upon her lips, the history of the unhappy Sara would move you as it

moved me.

But since this cannot be, I here set down what of the tradition I can at this instant recall.

I.

In one of the most obscure and crooked lanes of the Imperial City, wedged in and almost hidden between the high Moorish tower of an old Visigothic church and the gloomy walls, sculptured with armorial bearings, of a family mansion, there was many years ago a tumbledown dwelling-house dark and miserable as its owner, a Jew named Daniel Levi.

This Jew, like all his race, was spiteful and vindictive, but for deceit and hypocrisy he had no match.

The possessor, according to popular report, of an immense fortune, he might nevertheless be seen all day long huddled up in the shadowy doorway of his home, making and repairing chains, old belts and broken trappings of all sorts, in which he carried on a thriving business with the riff-raff of the Zocodover, the hucksters of the Postigo and the poor squires.

Though an implacable hater of Christians and of everything pertaining to them, he never passed a cavalier of note or an eminent canon without doffing, not only once, but ten times over, the dingy little cap which covered his bald, yellow head, nor did he receive in his wretched shop one of his regular customers without bending low in the most humble salutations accompanied by flattering smiles.

The smile of Daniel had come to be proverbial in all Toledo, and his meekness, proof against the most vexatious pranks, mocks and cat-calls of his neighbors, knew no limit.

In vain the boys, to tease him, stoned his poor old house; in vain the little pages and even the men-at-arms of the neighboring castle tried to provoke him by insulting nicknames, or the devout old women of the parish crossed themselves when passing his door as if they saw the very Lucifer in person. Daniel smiled eternally with a strange, indescribable smile. His thin, sunken lips twitched under the shadow of his nose, which was enormous and hooked like the beak of an eagle, and although from his eyes, small, green, round and almost hidden by the heavy brows, there gleamed a spark of ill-suppressed anger, he went on imperturbably beating with his little iron hammer upon the anvil where he repaired the thousand rusty and seemingly useless trifles which constituted his stock in trade.

Over the door of the Jew's humble dwelling and within a casing of bright-colored tiles there opened an Arabic window left over from the original

building of the Toledan Moors. Around the fretted frame of the window and climbing over the slender marble colonettes that divided it into two equal apertures there arose from the interior of the house one of those climbing plants which, green and full of sap and of exuberant growth, spread themselves over the blackened walls of ruins.

In the part of the house that received an uncertain light through the narrow spaces of the casement, the only opening in the time-stained, weather-worn wall, lived Sara, the beloved daughter of Daniel.

When the neighbors, passing the shop of the Hebrew, chanced to see Sara through the lattice of her Moorish window and Daniel crouched over his anvil, they would exclaim aloud in admiration of the charms of the beautiful Jewess: "It seems impossible that such an ugly old trunk should have put forth so beautiful a branch!"

For, in truth, Sara was a miracle of beauty. In the pupils of her great eyes, shadowed by the cloudy arch of their black lashes, gleamed a point of light like a star in a darkened sky. Her glowing lips seemed to have been cut from a carmine weft by the invisible hands of a fairy. Her complexion was pale and transparent as the alabaster of a sepulchral statue. She was scarcely sixteen years of age and yet there seemed engraven on her countenance the sweet seriousness of precocious intelligence, and there arose from her bosom and escaped from her mouth those sighs which reveal the vague awakening of passion.

The most prominent Jews of the city, captivated by her marvellous beauty, had sought her in marriage, but the Hebrew maiden, untouched by the homage of her admirers and the counsels of her father, who urged her to choose a companion before she should be left alone in the world, held herself aloof in a deep reserve, giving no other reason for her strange conduct than the caprice of wishing to retain her freedom. At last, one of her adorers, tired of suffering Sara's repulses and suspecting that her perpetual sadness was a certain sign that her heart hid some important secret, approached Daniel and said to him:

"Do you know, Daniel, that among our brothers there is complaint of your daughter?"

The Jew raised his eyes for an instant from his anvil, stopped his eternal hammering and, without showing the least emotion, asked his questioner:

"And what do they say of her?"

"They say," continued his interlocutor, "they say—what do I know?—many things; among them, that your daughter is in love with a Christian." At this, the despised suitor waited to see what effect his words had had upon Daniel.

Daniel raised his eyes once more, looked at him fixedly a moment without speaking and, lowering his gaze again to resume his interrupted work, exclaimed:

“And who says this is not slander?”

“One who has seen them more than once in this very street talking together while you were absent at our Rabbinical service,” insisted the young Hebrew, wondering that his mere suspicions, much more his positive statements, should have made so little impression on the mind of Daniel.

The Jew, without giving up his work, his gaze fixed upon the anvil where he was now busying himself, his little hammer laid aside, in brightening the metal clasp of a sword guard with a small file, began to speak in a low, broken voice as if his lips were repeating mechanically the thoughts that struggled through his mind:

“He! He! He!” he chuckled, laughing in a strange, diabolical way. “So a Christian dog thinks he can snatch from me my Sara, the pride of our people, the staff on which my old age leans! And do you believe he will do it? He! He!” he continued, always talking to himself and always laughing, while his file, biting the metal with its teeth of steel, grated with an ever-increasing force. “He! He! ‘Poor Daniel,’ my friends will say, ‘is in his dotage. What right has this decrepit old fellow, already at death’s door, to a daughter so young and so beautiful, if he doesn’t know how to guard her from the covetous eyes of our enemies?’ He! He! He! Do you think perchance that Daniel sleeps? Do you think, peradventure, that if my daughter has a lover—and that might well be—and this lover is a Christian and tries to win her heart and wins it—all which is possible—and plans to flee with her—which also is easy—and flees, for instance, to-morrow morning,—which falls within human probability,—do you think that Daniel will suffer his treasure to be thus snatched away? Do you think he will not know how to avenge himself?”

“But,” exclaimed the youth, interrupting him, “did you then know it before?”

“I know,” said Daniel, rising and giving him a slap on the shoulder, “I know more than you, who know nothing, and would know nothing had not the hour come for telling all. Adieu! Bid our brethren assemble as soon as possible. To-night, in an hour or two, I will be with them. Adieu!”

And saying this, Daniel gently pushed his interlocutor out into the street, gathered up his tools very slowly, and began to fasten with double bolts and bars the door of his little shop.

The noise made by the door as it closed on its creaking hinges prevented the departing youth from hearing the sound of the window lattice, which at the

same time fell suddenly as if the Jewess were just withdrawing from the embrace.

II.

It was the night of Good Friday, and the people of Toledo, after having attended the service of the Tenebrae in their magnificent cathedral, had just retired to rest, or, gathered at their firesides, were relating legends like that of the Christ of the Light, a statue which, stolen by Jews, left a trail of blood causing the discovery of the criminals, or the story of the Child Martyr, upon whom the implacable enemies of our faith repeated the cruel Passion of Jesus. In the city there reigned a profound silence, broken at intervals, now by the distant cries of the night-watchman, at that epoch accustomed to keep guard about the Alcázar, and again by the sighing of the wind which was whirling the weather-cocks of the towers or sighing through the tortuous windings of the streets. At this dead hour the master of a little boat that, moored to a post, lay swaying near the mills which seem like natural incrustations at the foot of the rocks bathed by the Tagus and above which the city is seated, saw approaching the shore, descending with difficulty one of the narrow paths which lead down from the height of the walls to the river, a person whom he seemed to await with impatience.

“It is she,” the boatman muttered between his teeth. “It would seem that this night all that accursed race of Jews is bent on mischief. Where the devil will they hold their tryst with Satan that they all come to my boat when the bridge is so near? No, they are bound on no honest errand when they take such pains to avoid a sudden meeting with the soldiers of San Servando,—but, after all, they give me the chance to earn good money and—every man for himself—it is no business of mine.”

Saying this, the worthy ferryman, seating himself in his boat, adjusted the oars, and when Sara, for it was no other than she for whom he had been waiting, had leaped into the little craft, he cast off the rope that held it and began to row toward the opposite shore.

“How many have crossed to-night?” asked Sara of the boatman, when they had scarcely pulled away from the mills, as though referring to something of which they had just been speaking.

“I could not count them,” he replied, “a swarm. It looks as though to-night will be the last of their gatherings.”

“And do you know what they have in mind and for what purpose they leave the city at this hour?”

“I don’t know, but it is likely that they are expecting some one who ought to arrive to-night. I cannot tell why they are lying in wait for him, but I suspect

for no good end.”

After this brief dialogue Sara remained for some moments plunged in deep silence as if trying to collect her thoughts. “Beyond a doubt,” she reflected, “my father has discovered our love and is preparing some terrible vengeance. I must know where they go, what they do, and what they are plotting. A moment of hesitation might be death to him.”

While Sara sprang to her feet and, as if to thrust away the horrible doubts that distracted her, passed her hand over her forehead which anguish had covered with an icy sweat, the boat touched the opposite shore.

“Friend,” exclaimed the beautiful Jewess, tossing some coins to the ferryman and pointing to a narrow, crooked road that wound up among the rocks, “is that the way they take?”

“It is, and when they come to the Moor’s Head they turn to the left. Then the Devil and they know where they go next,” replied the boatman.

Sara set out in the direction he had indicated. For some moments he saw her appear and disappear alternately in that dusky labyrinth of dim, steep rocks. When she had reached the summit called the Moor’s Head, her dark silhouette was outlined for an instant against the azure background of the sky and then was lost amid the shades of night.

III.

On the path where to-day stands the picturesque hermitage of the Virgin of the Valley, and about two arrow flights from the summit known by the Toledan populace as the Moor’s Head, there existed at that period the ruins of a Byzantine church of date anterior to the Arab conquest.

In the porch, outlined by rough blocks of marble scattered over the ground, were growing brambles and other parasitical plants, among which lay, half concealed—here, the shattered capital of a column, there, a square-hewn stone rudely sculptured with interlacing leaves, horrible or grotesque monsters and formless human figures. Of the temple there remained standing only the side walls and some broken ivy-grown arches.

Sara, who seemed to be guided by a supernatural instinct, on arriving at the point the boatman had indicated, hesitated a little, uncertain which way to take; but, finally, with a firm and resolute step, directed her course toward the abandoned ruins of the church.

In truth, her instinct had not been at fault; Daniel, who was no longer smiling, no longer the feeble and humble old man, but rather, fury flashing from his little round eyes, seemed inspired by the spirit of Vengeance, was in the midst of a throng of Jews eager, like himself, to wreak their thirsty hate on

one of the enemies of their religion. He seemed to multiply himself, giving orders to some, urging others forward in the work, making, with a hideous solicitude, all the necessary preparations for the accomplishment of the frightful deed which he had been meditating, day in, day out, while, impassive, he hammered the anvil in his den at Toledo.

Sara, who, favored by the darkness, had succeeded in reaching the porch of the church, had to make a supreme effort to suppress a cry of horror as her glance penetrated its interior. In the ruddy glow of a blaze which threw the shadow of that infernal group on the walls of the church, she thought she saw that some were making efforts to raise a heavy cross, while others wove a crown of briars, or sharpened on a stone the points of enormous nails. A fearful thought crossed her mind. She remembered that her race had been accused more than once of mysterious crimes. She recalled vaguely the terrifying story of the Crucified Child which she had hitherto believed a gross calumny invented by the populace for the taunting and reproaching of the Hebrews.

But now there was no longer room for doubt. There, before her eyes, were those awful instruments of martyrdom, and the ferocious executioners only awaited their victim.

Sara, filled with holy indignation, overflowing with noble wrath and inspired by that unquenchable faith in the true God whom her lover had revealed to her, could not control herself at sight of that spectacle, and, breaking through the tangled undergrowth that concealed her, suddenly appeared on the threshold of the temple.

On beholding her the Jews raised a cry of amazement, and Daniel, taking a step toward his daughter with threatening aspect, hoarsely asked her: "What seekest thou here, unhappy one?"

"I come to cast in your faces," said Sara, in a clear, unfaltering voice, "all the shame of your infamous work and I come to tell you that in vain you await the victim for the sacrifice, unless you mean to quench in me your thirst for blood, for the Christian you are expecting will not come, because I have warned him of your plot."

"Sara!" exclaimed the Jew, roaring with anger, "Sara, this is not true; thou canst not have been so treacherous to us as to reveal our mysterious rites. If it is true that thou hast revealed them, thou art no longer my daughter."

"No, I am not thy daughter. I have found another Father, a father all love for his children, a Father whom you Jews nailed to an ignominious cross and who died upon it to redeem us, opening to us for an eternity the doors of heaven. No, I am no longer thy daughter, for I am a Christian, and I am

ashamed of my origin.”

On hearing these words, pronounced with that strong fortitude which heaven puts only into the mouth of martyrs, Daniel, blind with rage, rushed upon the beautiful Hebrew girl and, throwing her to the ground, dragged her by the hair, as though he were possessed by an infernal spirit, to the foot of the cross which seemed to open its bare arms to receive her.

“Here I deliver her up to you,” he exclaimed to those who stood around. “Deal justice to this shameless one, who has sold her honor, her religion and her brethren.”

IV.

On the day following, when the cathedral bells were pealing the Gloria and the worthy citizens of Toledo were amusing themselves by shooting from crossbows at Judases of straw, just as is done to-day in some of our villages, Daniel opened the door of his shop, according to his custom and, with that everlasting smile on his lips, commenced to salute the passers-by, beating ceaselessly on his anvil with his little iron hammer; but the lattices of Sara’s Moorish window were unopened, nor was the beautiful Jewess ever seen again reclining at her casement of colored tiles.

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They say that some years afterward a shepherd brought to the archbishop a flower till then unknown, in which were represented all the instruments of the Saviour’s martyrdom—a flower strange and mysterious, which had grown, a climbing vine, over the crumbling walls of the ruined church.

Penetrating into that precinct and seeking to discover the origin of this marvel, there was found, they add, the skeleton of a woman and, buried with her, those instruments of the Passion which characterize the flower.

The skeleton, although no one could ascertain whose it might be, was preserved many years with special veneration in the hermitage of San Pedro el Verde, and the flower, now common, is called the Passion Rose.

BELIEVE IN GOD

A Provençal Ballad.

“I was the true Teobaldo de Montagut, Baron of Fortcastell. Lord or serf, noble or commoner, thou, whosoever thou mayst be, who pausest an instant beside my sepulchre, believe in God, as I have believed, and pray for me.”

Ye gallant Knights Errant, who, lance in rest, vizor closed, mounted on powerful charger, ride the world over with no more patrimony than your illustrious name and your good sword, seeking honor and glory in the profession of arms,—if on crossing the rugged valley of Montagut you have been overtaken by night and storm and have found a refuge in the ruins of the monastery still to be seen in its bosom, hearken to me!

Ye Shepherds, who follow with slow step your herds that go grazing far and wide over the hills and plains, if on leading them to the border of the transparent rivulet which runs, struggling and leaping, amid the great rocks of the valley of Montagut in the drought of summer, ye have found, on a fiery afternoon, shade and slumber beneath the broken monastery arches, whose mossy pillars kiss the waves, hearken to me!

Little Daughters of the hamlets roundabout, ye wild lilies who bloom happy in the shelter of your humbleness, if on the morning of the Patron Saint of this locality, coming down into the valley of Montagut to gather clovers and daisies to deck his shrine, conquering the fear which the sombre monastery, rising on its rocks, strikes to your childish hearts, ye have ventured into its silent and deserted cloister to wander amid its forsaken tombs, on whose edges grow the fullest-petaled daisies and the bluest harebells, hearken to me!

Thou, Noble Knight, perchance by the gleam of a lightning flash; thou, Wandering Shepherd, bronzed by the fierce heat of the sun; thou, Lovely Child, still besprent with drops of dew like tears, all ye would have seen in that holy place a tomb, a lowly tomb. Formerly it consisted of an unhewn stone and a wooden cross; the cross has disappeared and only the stone remains. In this tomb, whose inscription is the motto of my song, rests in peace the last baron of Fortcastell, Teobaldo de Montagut, whose strange history I am about to tell.

I.

While the noble Countess of Montagut was pregnant with her firstborn son, Teobaldo, she had a strange and terrible dream. Perchance a divine warning; mayhap a vain fantasy which time made real in later years. She dreamed that in her womb she had borne a serpent, a monstrous serpent that, darting out shrill hisses, now gliding through the short grass, now coiling upon itself for a spring, fled from her sight, hiding at last in a clump of briers.

“There it is! there it is!” shrieked the Countess in her horrible nightmare, pointing out to her servitors the brambles among which the nauseous reptile had sought concealment.

When the servitors had swiftly reached the spot which the noble lady, motionless and overwhelmed by a profound terror, was still pointing out to

them with her finger, a white dove rose from out the prickly thicket and soared to the clouds.

The serpent had disappeared.

II.

Teobaldo was born. His mother died in giving him birth; his father perished a few years later in an ambushade, warring like a good Christian against the Moors, the enemies of God.

From this time on the youth of the heir of Fortcastell can be likened only to a hurricane. Wherever he went, his way was marked by a trail of tears and blood. He hanged his vassals, he fought his equals, he pursued maidens, he beat the monks, and never ceased from oaths and blasphemies. There was no saint in peace, no hallowed thing, he did not curse.

III.

One day when he was out hunting and when, as was his custom, he had had all his devilish retinue of profligate pages, inhuman archers and debased servants, with the dogs, horses and gerfalcons, take shelter from the rain in a village church of his demesne, a venerable priest, daring the young lord's wrath, not quailing at thought of the fury-fits of that wild nature, raised the consecrated Host in his hands and conjured the invader in the name of Heaven to depart from that place and go on foot, with pilgrim staff, to entreat of the Pope absolution for his crimes.

“Leave me alone, old fool!” exclaimed Teobaldo on hearing this,—“leave me alone! Or, since I have not come on a single quarry all day long, I will let loose my hounds and chase thee like a wild boar for my sport.”

IV.

With Teobaldo a word was a deed. Yet the priest made no answer save this:

“Do what thou wilt, but remember that there is a God who chastises and who pardons. If I die at thy hands, He will blot out my sins from the book of His displeasure, to write thy name in their place and to make thee expiate thy crime.”

“A God who chastises and pardons!” interrupted the blasphemous baron with a burst of laughter. “I do not believe in God and, by way of proof, I am going to carry out my threat; for though not much given to prayer, I am a man of my word. Raimundo! Gerardo! Pedro! Set on the pack! give me a javelin! blow the alali on your horns, since we will hunt down this idiot, though he climb to the tops of his altars.”

V.

After an instant's hesitation and a fresh command from their lord, the pages began to unleash the greyhounds that filled the church with the din of their eager barking; the baron had strung his crossbow, laughing a Satanic laugh; and the venerable priest, murmuring a prayer, was, with his eyes raised to heaven, tranquilly awaiting death, when there rose outside the sacred enclosure a wild halloo, the braying of horns proclaiming that the game had been sighted, and shouts of After the boar! Across the brushwood! To the mountain! Teobaldo, at this announcement of the longed-for quarry, dashed open the doors of the church, transported by delight; behind him went his retainers, and with his retainers the horses and hounds.

VI.

“Which way went the boar?” asked the baron as he sprang upon his steed without touching the stirrups or unstringing his bow. “By the glen which runs to the foot of those hills,” they answered him. Without hearing the last word, the impetuous hunter buried his golden spur in the flank of the horse, who bounded away at full gallop. Behind him departed all the rest.

The dwellers in the hamlet, who had been the first to give the alarm and who, at the approach of the terrible beast, had taken refuge in their huts, timidly thrust out their heads from behind their window-shutters, and when they saw that the infernal troop had disappeared among the foliage of the woods, they crossed themselves in silence.

VII.

Teobaldo rode in advance of all. His steed, swifter by nature or more severely goaded than those of the retainers, followed so close to the quarry that twice or thrice the baron, dropping his bridle upon the neck of the fiery courser, had stood up in his stirrups and drawn the bow to his shoulder to wound his prey. But the boar, whom he saw only at intervals among the tangled thickets, would again vanish from view to reappear just out of reach of the arrow.

So he pursued the chase hour after hour, traversing the ravines of the valley and the stony bed of the stream, until, plunging into a deep forest, he lost his way in its shadowy defiles, his eyes ever fixed on the coveted game he constantly expected to overtake, only to find himself constantly mocked by its marvellous agility.

VIII.

At last, he had his chance; he extended his arm and let fly the shaft, which plunged, quivering, into the loin of the terrible beast that gave a leap and a frightful snort.—“Dead!” exclaims the hunter with a shout of glee, driving his spur for the hundredth time into the bloody flank of his horse. “Dead! in vain

he flees. The trail of his flowing blood marks his way." And so speaking, Teobaldo commenced to sound upon his bugle the signal of triumph that his retinue might hear.

At that instant his steed stopped short, its legs gave way, a slight tremor shook its strained muscles, it fell flat to the ground, shooting out from its swollen nostrils, bathed in foam, a rill of blood.

It had died of exhaustion, died when the pace of the wounded boar was beginning to slacken, when but one more effort was needed to run the quarry down.

IX.

To paint the wrath of the fierce-tempered Teobaldo would be impossible. To repeat his oaths and his curses, merely to repeat them, would be scandalous and impious. He shouted at the top of his voice to his retainers, but only echo answered him in those vast solitudes, and he tore his hair and plucked at his beard, a prey to the most furious despair.—"I will run it down, even though I break every blood-vessel in my body," he exclaimed at last, stringing his bow anew and making ready to pursue the game on foot; but at that very instant he heard a sound behind him; the thick branches of the wood opened, and before his eyes appeared a page leading by the halter a charger black as night.

"Heaven hath sent it to me," exclaimed the hunter, leaping upon its loins lightly as a deer. The page, who was thin, very thin, and yellow as death, smiled a strange smile as he handed him the bridle.

X.

The horse whinnied with a force which made the forest tremble, gave an incredible bound, a bound that raised him more than thirty feet above the earth, and the air began to hum about the ears of the rider, as a stone hums, hurled from a sling. He had started off at full gallop; but at a gallop so headlong that, afraid of losing the stirrups and in his dizziness falling to the ground, he had to shut his eyes and with both hands clutch the streaming mane.

And still without a shake of the reins, without touch of spur or call of voice, the steed ran, ran without ceasing. How long did Teobaldo gallop thus, unwitting where, feeling the branches buffet his face as he rushed by, and the brambles tear at his clothing, and the wind whistle about his head? No human being knows.

XI.

When, recovering courage, he opened his eyes an instant to throw a troubled glance about him, he found himself far, very far from Montagut, and

in a district that was to him entirely unknown. The steed ran, ran without ceasing, and trees, rocks, castles and villages passed by him like a breath. New and still new horizons opened to his view,—horizons that melted away only to give place to others stranger and yet more strange. Narrow valleys, bristling with colossal fragments of granite which the tempests had torn down from mountain-summits; smiling plains, covered with a carpet of verdure and sprinkled over with white villages; limitless deserts, where the sands seethed beneath the searching rays of a sun of fire; immeasurable wildernesses, boundless steppes, regions of eternal snow, where the gigantic icebergs, standing out against a dim grey sky, were like white phantoms reaching out their arms to seize him by the hair as he fled past; all this, and thousands of other sights that I cannot depict, he saw in his wild race, until, enveloped in an obscure cloud, he ceased to hear the tramp of his horse's hoofs beating the ground.

I.

Noble Knights, Shepherds, Lovely Little Maids who hearken to my lay, if what I tell be a marvel in your ears, deem it not a fable woven at my whim to steal a march on your credulity; from mouth to mouth this tradition has been passed down to me, and the inscription upon the tomb which still abides in the monastery of Montagut is an unimpeachable proof of the veracity of my words.

Believe, then, what I have told, and believe what I have yet to tell, for it is as certain as the foregoing, although more wonderful. Perchance I shall be able to adorn with a few graces of poetry the bare skeleton of this simple and terrible history, but never will I consciously depart one iota from the truth.

II.

When Teobaldo ceased to perceive the hoof-beats of his courser and felt himself hurled forth upon the void, he could not repress an involuntary shudder of terror. Up to this point he had believed that the objects which flashed before his eyes were the wild visions of his imagination, perturbed as it was by giddiness, and that his steed ran uncontrolled, to be sure, but still ran within the boundaries of his own seigniory. Now there remained no doubt that he was the sport of a supernatural power, which was hurrying him he knew not whither, through those masses of dark clouds, clouds of freakish and fantastic forms, in whose depths, lit up from time to time by flashes of lightning, he thought he could distinguish the burning thunderbolts about to break upon him.

The steed still ran, or, be it better said, swam now in that ocean of vague

and fiery vapors, and the wonders of the sky began to display themselves one after another before the astounded eyes of his rider.

III.

He saw the angels, ministers of the wrath of God, clad in long tunics with fringes of fire, their burning hair loose on the hurricane, their brandished swords, which flashed the lightning, throwing out sparks of crimson light,—he saw this heavenly cavalry wheeling upon the clouds, sweeping like a mighty army over the wings of the tempest.

And he mounted higher, and he deemed he descried, from far above, the stormy clouds like a sea of lava, and heard the thunder moan below him as moans the ocean breaking on the cliff from whose summit the pilgrim views it all amazed.

IV.

And he saw the archangel, white as snow, who, throned on a great crystal globe, steers it through space in the cloudless nights like a silver boat over the surface of an azure lake.

And he saw the sun revolving in splendor on golden axles through an atmosphere of color and of flame, and at its centre the fiery spirits who dwell unharmed in that intensest glow and from its blazing heart entone to their Creator hymns of praise.

He saw the threads of imperceptible light which bind men to the stars, and he saw the rainbow arch, thrown like a colossal bridge across the abyss which divides the first from the second heaven.

V.

By a mystic stair he saw souls descend to earth; he saw many come down, and few go up. Each one of these innocent spirits went accompanied by a most radiant archangel who covered it with the shadow of his wings. The archangels who returned alone came in silence, weeping; but the others mounted singing like the larks on April mornings.

Then the rosy and azure mists which floated in the ether, like curtains of transparent gauze, were rent, as Holy Saturday, the Day of Glory, rends in our churches the veiling of the altars, and the Paradise of the Righteous opened, dazzling in its beauty, to his gaze.

VI.

There were the holy prophets whom you have seen rudely sculptured on the stone portals of our cathedrals, there the shining virgins whom the painter vainly strives, in the stained glass of the ogive windows, to copy from his

dreams; there the cherubim with their long and floating robes and haloes of gold; as in the altar pictures; there, at last, crowned with stars, clad in light, surrounded by all the celestial hierarchy, and beautiful beyond all thought, Our Lady of Montserrat, Mother of God, Queen of Archangels, the shelter of sinners and the consolation of the afflicted.

VII.

Beyond the Paradise of the Righteous; beyond the throne where sits the Virgin Mary. The mind of Teobaldo was stricken by terror; a fathomless fear possessed his soul. Eternal solitude, eternal silence live in those spaces that lead to the mysterious sanctuary of the Most High. From time to time a rush of wind, cold as the blade of a poniard, smote his forehead,—a wind that shriveled his hair with horror and penetrated to the marrow of his bones,—a wind like to those which announced to the prophets the approach of the Divine Spirit. At last he reached a point where he thought he perceived a dull murmur that might be likened to the far-off hum of a swarm of bees, when, in autumn evenings, they hover around the last of the flowers.

VIII.

He crossed that fantastic region whither go all the accents of the earth, the sounds which we say have ceased, the words which we deem are lost in the air, the laments which we believe are heard of none.

There, in a harmonious circle, float the prayers of little children, the orisons of virgins, the psalms of holy hermits, the petitions of the humble, the chaste words of the pure in heart, the resigned moans of those in pain, the sobs of souls that suffer and the hymns of souls that hope. Teobaldo heard among those voices, that throbbed still in the luminous ether, the voice of his sainted mother who prayed to God for him; but he heard no prayer of his own.

IX.

Further on, thousands on thousands of harsh, rough accents wounded his ears with a discordant roar,—blasphemies, cries for vengeance, drinking songs, indecencies, curses of despair, threats of the helpless, and sacrilegious oaths of the impious.

Teobaldo traversed the second circle with the rapidity of a meteor crossing the sky in a summer evening, that he might not hear his own voice which vibrated there thunderously loud, exceeding all other voices in the stress of that infernal concert.

“I do not believe in God! I do not believe in God!” still spake his tone beating through that ocean of blasphemies; and Teobaldo began to believe.

X.

He left those regions behind him and crossed other illimitable spaces full of terrible visions, which neither could he comprehend nor am I able to conceive, and finally he came to the uppermost circle of the spiral heavens, where the seraphim adore Jehovah, covering their faces with their triple wings and prostrate at His feet.

He would see God.

A waft of fire scorched his face, a sea of light darkened his eyes, unbearable thunder resounded in his ears and, caught from his charger and hurled into the void, like an incandescent stone shot out from a volcano, he felt himself falling, and falling without ever alighting, blind, burned and deafened, as the rebellious angel fell when God overthrew with a breath the pedestal of his pride.

I.

Night had shut in, and the wind moaned as it stirred the leaves of the trees, through whose luxuriant foliage was slipping a soft ray of moonlight, when Teobaldo, rising upon his elbow and rubbing his eyes as if awakening from profound slumber, looked about him and found himself in the same wood where he had wounded the boar, where his steed fell dead, where was given him that phantasmal courser which had rushed him away to unknown, mysterious realms.

A deathlike silence reigned about him, a silence broken only by the distant calling of the deer, the timid murmur of the leaves, and the echo of a far-off bell borne to his ears from time to time upon the gentle gusts.

“I must have dreamed,” said the baron, and set forth on his way across the wood, coming out at last into the open.

II.

At a great distance, and above the rocks of Montagut, he saw the black silhouette of his castle standing out against the blue, transparent background of the night sky—“My castle is far away and I am weary,” he muttered. “I will await the day in this village-hut near by,” and he bent his steps to the hut. He knocked at the door. “Who are you?” they demanded from within. “The Baron of Fortcastell,” he replied, and they laughed in his face. He knocked at another door. “Who are you and what do you want?” these, too, asked him. “Your liege lord,” urged the knight, surprised that they did not recognize him. “Teobaldo de Montagut.” “Teobaldo de Montagut!” angrily repeated the person within, a woman not yet old. “Teobaldo de Montagut, the count of the story! Bah! Go your way and don’t come back to rouse honest folk from their

sleep to hear your stupid jests.”

III.

Teobaldo, full of astonishment, left the village and pursued his way to the castle, at whose gates he arrived when it was scarcely dawn. The moat was filled up with great blocks of stone from the ruined battlements; the raised drawbridge, now useless, was rotting as it still hung from its strong iron chains, covered with rust though they were by the wasting of the years; in the homage-tower slowly tolled a bell; in front of the principal arch of the fortress and upon a granite pedestal was raised a cross; upon the walls not a single soldier was to be discerned; and, indistinct and muffled, there seemed to come from its heart like a distant murmur a sacred hymn, grave, solemn and majestic.

“But this is my castle, beyond a doubt,” said Teobaldo, shifting his troubled gaze from one point to another, unable to comprehend the situation. “That is my escutcheon, still engraved above the keystone of the arch. This is the valley of Montagut. These are the lands it governs, the seigniory of Fortcastell”—

At this instant the heavy doors swung upon their hinges and a monk appeared beneath the lintel.

IV.

“Who are you and what are you doing here?” demanded Teobaldo of the monk.

“I am,” he answered, “a humble servant of God, a monk of the monastery of Montagut.”

“But”—interrupted the baron. “Montagut? Is it not a seigniory?”

“It was,” replied the monk, “a long time ago. Its last lord, the story goes, was carried off by the Devil, and as he left no heir to succeed him in the fief, the Sovereign Counts granted his estate to the monks of our order, who have been here for a matter of from one hundred to one hundred and twenty years. And you—who are you?”

“I”—stammered the Baron of Fortcastell, after a long moment of silence, “I am—a miserable sinner, who, repenting of his misdeeds, comes to make confession to your abbot and beg him for admittance into the bosom of his faith.”

THE PROMISE

I.

Margarita, her face hidden in her hands, was weeping; she did not sob, but the tears ran silently down her cheeks, slipping between her fingers to fall to the earth toward which her brow was bent.

Near Margarita was Pedro, who from time to time lifted his eyes to steal a glance at her and, seeing that she still wept, dropped them again, maintaining for his part utter silence.

All was hushed about them, as if respecting her grief. The murmurs of the field were stilled, the breeze of evening slept, and darkness was beginning to envelop the dense growth of the wood.

Thus some moments passed, during which the trace of light that the dying sun had left on the horizon faded quite away; the moon began to be faintly sketched against the violet background of the twilight sky, and one after another shone out the brighter stars.

Pedro broke at last that distressful silence, exclaiming in a hoarse and gasping voice and as if he were communing with himself:

“‘Tis impossible—impossible!”

Then, coming close to the inconsolable maiden and taking one of her hands, he continued in a softer, more caressing tone:

“Margarita, for thee love is all, and thou seest naught beyond love. Yet there is one thing as binding as our love, and that is my duty. Our lord the Count of Gômara goes forth to-morrow from his castle to join his force to the army of King Fernando, who is on his way to deliver Seville out of the power of the Infidels, and it is my duty to depart with the Count.

“An obscure orphan, without name or family, I owe to him all that I am. I have served him in the idle days of peace, I have slept beneath his roof, I have been warmed at his hearth and eaten at his board. If I forsake him now, to-morrow his men-at-arms, as they sally forth in marching array from his castle gates, will ask, wondering at my absence: ‘Where is the favorite squire of the Count of Gômara?’ And my lord will be silent for shame, and his pages and his fools will say in mocking tone: ‘The Count’s squire is only a gallant of the jousts, a warrior in the game of courtesy.’”

When he had spoken thus far, Margarita lifted her eyes full of tears to meet those of her lover and moved her lips as if to answer him; but her voice was choked in a sob.

Pedro, with still tenderer and more persuasive tone, went on:

“Weep not, for God’s sake, Margarita; weep not, for thy tears hurt me. I must go from thee, but I will return as soon as I shall have gained a little glory for my obscure name.

“Heaven will aid us in our holy enterprise; we shall conquer Seville, and to us conquerors the King will give fiefs along the banks of the Guadalquivir. Then I will come back for thee, and we will go together to dwell in that paradise of the Arabs, where they say the sky is clearer and more blue than the sky above Castile.

“I will come back, I swear to thee I will; I will return to keep the troth solemnly pledged thee that day when I placed on thy finger this ring, symbol of a promise.”

“Pedro!” here exclaimed Margarita, controlling her emotion and speaking in a firm, determined tone:

“Go, go to uphold thine honor,” and on pronouncing these words, she threw herself for the last time into the embrace of her lover. Then she added in a tone lower and more shaken: “Go to uphold thine honor, but come back—come back—to save mine.”

Pedro kissed the brow of Margarita, loosed his horse, that was tied to one of the trees of the grove, and rode off at a gallop through the depths of the poplar-wood.

Margarita followed Pedro with her eyes until his dim form was swallowed up in the shades of night. When he could no longer be discerned, she went back slowly to the village where her brothers were awaiting her.

“Put on thy gala dress,” one of them said to her as she entered, “for in the morning we go to Gômara with all the neighborhood to see the Count marching to Andalusia.”

“For my part, it saddens rather than gladdens me to see those go forth who perchance shall not return,” replied Margarita with a sigh.

“Yet come with us thou must,” insisted the other brother, “and thou must come with mien composed and glad; so that the gossiping folk shall have no cause to say thou hast a lover in the castle, and thy lover goeth to the war.”

II.

Hardly was the first light of dawn streaming up the sky when there began to sound throughout all the camp of Gômara the shrill trumpeting of the Count’s soldiers; and the peasants who were arriving in numerous groups from the villages round about saw the seigniorial banner flung to the winds from the highest tower of the fortress.

The peasants were everywhere,—seated on the edge of the moat, ensconced in the tops of trees, strolling over the plain, crowning the crests of the hills, forming a line far along the highway, and it must have been already for nearly an hour that their curiosity had awaited the show, not without some signs of impatience, when the ringing bugle-call sounded again, the chains of the drawbridge creaked as it fell slowly across the moat, and the portcullis was raised, while little by little, groaning upon their hinges, the massive doors of the arched passage which led to the Court of Arms swung wide.

The multitude ran to press for places on the sloping banks beside the road in order to see their fill of the brilliant armor and sumptuous trappings of the following of the Count of Gômara, famed through all the countryside for his splendor and his lavish pomp.

The march was opened by the heralds who, halting at fixed intervals, proclaimed in loud voice, to the beat of the drum, the commands of the King, summoning his feudatories to the Moorish war and requiring the villages and free towns to give passage and aid to his armies.

After the heralds followed the kings-at-arms, proud of their silken vestments, their shields bordered with gold and bright colors, and their caps decked with graceful plumes.

Then came the chief retainer of the castle armed cap-à-pie, a knight mounted on a young black horse, bearing in his hands the pennon of a grandee with his motto and device; at his left hand rode the executioner of the seigniory, clad in black and red.

The seneschal was preceded by fully a score of those famous trumpeters of Castile celebrated in the chronicles of our kings for the incredible power of their lungs.

When the shrill clamor of their mighty trumpeting ceased to wound the wind, a dull sound, steady and monotonous, began to reach the ear,—the tramp of the foot-soldiers, armed with long pikes and provided with a leather shield apiece. Behind these soon came in view the soldiers who managed the engines of war, with their crude machines and their wooden towers, the bands of wall-scalers and the rabble of stable-boys in charge of the mules.

Then, enveloped in the cloud of dust raised by the hoofs of their horses, flashing sparks from their iron breastplates, passed the men-at-arms of the castle, formed in thick platoons, looking from a distance like a forest of spears.

Last of all, preceded by the drummers who were mounted on strong mules tricked out in housings and plumes, surrounded by pages in rich raiment of silk and gold and followed by the squires of the castle, appeared the Count.

As the multitude caught sight of him, a great shout of greeting went up and in the tumult of acclamation was stifled the cry of a woman, who at that moment, as if struck by a thunderbolt, fell fainting into the arms of those who sprang to her aid. It was Margarita, Margarita who had recognized her mysterious lover in that great and dreadful lord, the Count of Gômara, one of the most exalted and powerful feudatories of the Crown of Castile.

III.

The host of Don Fernando, after going forth from Cordova, had marched to Seville, not without having to fight its way at Écija, Carmona, and Alcalá del Rio del Guadaira, whose famous castle, once taken by storm, put the army in sight of the stronghold of the Infidels.

The Count of Gômara was in his tent seated on a bench of larchwood, motionless, pale, terrible, his hands crossed upon the hilt of his broadsword, his eyes fixed on space with that vague regard which appears to behold a definite object and yet takes cognizance of naught in the encompassing scene.

Standing by his side, the squire who had been longest in the castle, the only one who in those moods of black despondency could have ventured to intrude without drawing down upon his head an explosion of wrath, was speaking to him. "What is your ail, my lord?" he was saying. "What trouble wears and wastes you? Sad you go to battle, and sad return, even though returning victorious. When all the warriors sleep, surrendered to the weariness of the day, I hear your anguished sighs; and if I run to your bed, I see you struggling there against some invisible torment. You open your eyes, but your terror does not vanish. What is it, my lord? Tell me. If it be a secret, I will guard it in the depths of my memory as in a grave."

The Count seemed not to hear his squire, but after a long pause, as if the words had taken all that time to make slow way from his ears to his understanding, he emerged little by little from his trance and, drawing the squire affectionately toward him, said to him with grave and quiet tone:

"I have suffered much in silence. Believing myself the sport of a vain fantasy, I have until now held my peace for shame,—but nay, what is happening to me is no illusion.

"It must be that I am under the power of some awful curse. Heaven or hell must wish something of me, and tell me so by supernatural events. Recallest thou the day of our encounter with the Moors of Nebriza in the Aljarafe de Triana? We were few, the combat was stern, and I was face to face with death. Thou sawest, in the most critical moment of the fight, my horse, wounded and blind with rage, dash toward the main body of the Moorish host. I strove in vain to check him; the reins had escaped from my hands, and the fiery animal

galloped on, bearing me to certain death.

“Already the Moors, closing up their ranks, were grounding their long pikes to receive me on the points; a cloud of arrows hissed about my ears; the horse was but a few bounds from the serried spears on which we were about to fling ourselves, when—believe me, it was not an illusion—I saw a hand that, grasping the bridle, stopped him with an unearthly force and, turning him in the direction of my own troops, saved me by a miracle.

“In vain I asked of one and another who my deliverer was; no one knew him, no one had seen him.

“ ‘When you were rushing to throw yourself upon the wall of pikes,’ they said, ‘you went alone, absolutely alone; this is why we marvelled to see you turn, knowing that the steed no longer obeyed his rider.’

“That night I entered my tent distraught; I strove in vain to extirpate from my imagination the memory of the strange adventure; but on advancing toward my bed, again I saw the same hand, a beautiful hand, white to the point of pallor, which drew the curtains, vanishing after it had drawn them. Ever since, at all hours, in all places, I see that mysterious hand which anticipates my desires and forestalls my actions. I saw it, when we were storming the castle of Triana, catch between its fingers and break in the air an arrow which was about to strike me; I have seen it at banquets where I was trying to drown my trouble in the tumultuous revelry, pour the wine into my cup; and always it flickers before my eyes, and wherever I go it follows me; in the tent, in the battle, by day, by night,—even now, see it, see it here, resting gently on my shoulder!”

On speaking these last words, the Count sprang to his feet, striding back and forth as if beside himself, overwhelmed by utter terror.

The squire dashed away a tear. Believing his lord mad, he did not try to combat his ideas, but confined himself to saying in a voice of deep emotion:

“Come; let us go out from the tent a moment; perhaps the evening air will cool your temples, calming this incomprehensible grief, for which I find no words of consolation.”

IV.

The camp of the Christians extended over all the plain of Guadaira, even to the left bank of the Guadalquivir. In front of the camp and clearly defined against the bright horizon, rose the walls of Seville flanked by massive, menacing towers. Above the crown of battlements showed in its rich profusion the green leafage of the thousand gardens enclosed in the Moorish stronghold, and amid the dim clusters of foliage gleamed the observation turrets, white as

snow, the minarets of the mosques, and the gigantic watch-tower, over whose aerial parapet the four great balls of gold, which from the Christian camp looked like four flames, threw out, when smitten by the sun, sparks of living light.

The enterprise of Don Fernando, one of the most heroic and intrepid of that epoch, had drawn to his banners the greatest warriors of the various kingdoms in the Peninsula, with others who, called by fame, had come from foreign, far-off lands to add their forces to those of the Royal Saint. Stretching along the plain might be seen, therefore, army-tents of all forms and colors, above whose peaks waved in the wind the various ensigns with their quartered escutcheons,—stars, griffins, lions, chains, bars and caldrons, with hundreds of other heraldic figures or symbols which proclaimed the name and quality of their owners. Through the streets of that improvised city were circulating in all directions a multitude of soldiers who, speaking diverse dialects, dressed each in the fashion of his own locality and armed according to his fancy, formed a scene of strange and picturesque contrasts.

Here a group of nobles were resting from the fatigues of combat, seated on benches of larchwood at the door of their tents and playing at chess, while their pages poured them wine in metal cups; there some foot-soldiers were taking advantage of a moment of leisure to clean and mend their armor, the worse for their last skirmish; further on, the most expert archers of the army were covering the mark with arrows, amidst the applause of the crowd marvelling at their dexterity; and the beating of the drums, the shrilling of the trumpets, the cries of pedlars hawking their wares, the clang of iron striking on iron, the ballad-singing of the minstrels who entertained their hearers with the relation of prodigious exploits, and the shouts of the heralds who published the orders of the camp-masters, all these, filling the air with thousands of discordant noises, contributed to that picture of soldier life a vivacity and animation impossible to portray in words.

The Count of Gômara, attended by his faithful squire, passed among the lively groups without raising his eyes from the ground, silent, sad, as if not a sight disturbed his gaze nor the least sound reached his hearing. He moved mechanically, as a sleepwalker, whose spirit is busy in the world of dreams, steps and takes his course without consciousness of his actions, as if impelled by a will not his own.

Close by the royal tent and in the middle of a ring of soldiers, little pages and camp-servants, who were listening to him open-mouthed, making haste to buy some of the tawdry knickknacks which he was enumerating in a loud voice, with extravagant praises, was an odd personage, half pilgrim, half minstrel, who, at one moment reciting a kind of litany in barbarous Latin, and the next giving vent to some buffoonery or scurrility, was mingling in his

interminable tale devout prayers with jests broad enough to make a common soldier blush, romances of illicit love with legends of saints. In the huge pack that hung from his shoulders were a thousand different objects all tossed and tumbled together,—ribbons touched to the sepulchre of Santiago, scrolls with words which he averred were Hebrew, the very same that King Solomon spoke when he founded the temple, and the only words able to keep you free of every contagious disease; marvellous balsams capable of sticking together men who were cut in two; secret charms to make all women in love with you; Gospels sewed into little silk bags; relics of the patron saints of all the towns in Spain; tinsel jewels, chains, sword-belts, medals and many other gewgaws of brass, glass and lead.

When the Count approached the group formed by the pilgrim and his admirers, the fellow began to tune a kind of mandolin or Arab guitar with which he accompanied himself in the singsong recital of his romances. When he had thoroughly tested the strings, one after another, very coolly, while his companion made the round of the circle coaxing out the last coppers from the flaccid pouches of the audience, the pilgrim began to sing in nasal voice, to a monotonous and plaintive air, a ballad whose stanzas always ended in the same refrain.

The Count drew near the group and gave attention. By an apparently strange coincidence, the title of this tale was entirely at one with the melancholy thoughts that burdened his mind. As the singer had announced before beginning, the lay was called the Ballad of the Dead Hand.

The squire, on hearing so strange an announcement, had striven to draw his lord away; but the Count, with his eyes fixed on the minstrel, remained motionless, listening to this song.

I.

A maiden had a lover gay
Who said he was a squire;
The war-drums called him far away;
Not tears could quench his fire.
“Thou goest to return no more.”
“Nay, by all oaths that bind”—
But even while the lover swore,
A voice was on the wind:
Ill fares the soul that sets its trust

On faith of dust.

II.

Forth from his castle rode the lord

With all his glittering train,

But never will his battle-sword

Inflict so keen a pain.

“His soldier-honor well he keeps;

Mine honor—blind! oh, blind!”

While the forsaken woman weeps,

A voice is on the wind:

Ill fares the soul that sets its trust

On faith of dust.

III.

Her brother’s eye her secret reads;

His fatal angers burn.

“Thou hast us shamed.” Her terror pleads,—

“He swore he would return.”

“But not to find thee, if he tries,

Where he was wont to find.”

Beneath her brother’s blow she dies;

A voice is on the wind:

Ill fares the soul that sets its trust

On faith of dust.

IV.

In the trysting-wood, where love made mirth,

They have buried her deep,—but lo!

However high they heap the earth,

A hand as white as snow

Comes stealing up, a hand whose ring

A noble’s troth doth bind.

Above her grave no maidens sing,
But a voice is on the wind:
Ill fares the soul that sets its trust
On faith of dust.

Hardly had the singer finished the last stanza, when, breaking through the wall of eager listeners who respectfully gave way on recognizing him, the Count fronted the pilgrim and, clutching his arm, demanded in a low, convulsive voice:

“From what part of Spain art thou?”

“From Soria,” was the unmoved response.

“And where hast thou learned this ballad? Who is that maiden of whom the story tells?” again exclaimed the Count, with ever more profound emotion.

“My lord,” said the pilgrim, fixing his eyes upon the Count with imperturbable steadiness, “this ballad is passed from mouth to mouth among the peasants in the fief of Gômara, and it refers to an unhappy village-girl cruelly wronged by a great lord. The high justice of God has permitted that, in her burial, there shall still remain above the earth the hand on which her lover placed a ring in plighting her his troth. Perchance you know whom it behooves to keep that pledge.”

V.

In a wretched village which may be found at one side of the highway leading to Gômara, I saw not long since the spot where the strange ceremony of the Count’s marriage is said to have taken place.

After he, kneeling upon the humble grave, had pressed the hand of Margarita in his own, and a priest, authorized by the Pope, had blessed the mournful union, the story goes that the miracle ceased, and the dead hand buried itself forever.

At the foot of some great old trees there is a bit of meadow which, every spring, covers itself spontaneously with flowers.

The country-folk say that this is the burial place of Margarita.

THE KISS

I.

When a division of the French army, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, took possession of historic Toledo, the officers in command, not unaware of the danger to which French soldiers were exposed in Spanish towns by being quartered in separate lodgings, commenced to fit up as barracks the largest and best edifices of the city.

After occupying the magnificent palace of Carlos V. they appropriated the City Hall, and when this could hold no more, they began to invade the pious shade of monasteries, at last making over into stables even the churches sacred to worship. Such was the state of affairs in the famous old town, scene of the event which I am about to recount, when one night, already late, there entered the city, muffled in their dark army-cloaks and deafening the narrow, lonely streets, from the Gate of the Sun to the Zocodover, with the clang of weapons and the resounding beat of the hoofs that struck sparks from the flinty way, one hundred or so of these tall dragoons, dashing, mettlesome fellows, whom our grandmothers still tell about with admiration.

The force was commanded by a youthful officer, riding about thirty paces in advance of his troop and talking in low tones with a man on foot, who, so far as might be inferred from his dress, was also a soldier. Walking in front of his interlocutor, with a small lantern in hand, he seemed to be serving as guide through that labyrinth of obscure, twisted and intertwined streets.

“In sooth,” said the trooper to his companion, “if the lodging prepared for us is even such as you picture it, perhaps it would be better to camp out in the country or in one of the public squares.”

“But what would you, my captain?” answered the guide, who was, in fact, a sergeant sent on before to make ready for their reception. “In the palace there is not room for another grain of wheat, much less for a man; of San Juan de los Reyes there is no use in talking, for there it has reached such a point that in one of the friars’ cells are sleeping fifteen hussars. The monastery to which I am taking you was not so bad, but some three or four days ago there fell upon us, as if out of the clouds, one of the flying columns that scour the province, and we are lucky to have prevailed on them to heap themselves up along the cloisters and leave the church free for us.”

“Ah, well!” exclaimed the officer, after a brief silence, with an air of resigning himself to the strange quarters which chance had apportioned him, “an ill lodging is better than none. At all events, in case of rain,—not unlikely, judging from the massing of the clouds,—we shall be under cover, and that is something.”

With this the conversation was broken off, and the troopers, preceded by the guide, took the onward way in silence until they came to one of the smaller squares, on the further side of which stood out the black silhouette of the

monastery with its Moorish minaret, spired bell-tower, ogive cupola and dark, uneven roof.

“Here is your lodging!” exclaimed the sergeant at sight of it, addressing the captain, who, after commanding his troop to halt, dismounted, caught the lantern from the hands of the guide, and took his way toward the building designated.

Since the church of the monastery was thoroughly dismantled, the soldiers who occupied the other parts of the building had thought that the doors were now a trifle less than useless and, piece by piece, had wrenched off one to-day, another to-morrow, to make bonfires for warming themselves by night.

Our young officer, therefore, did not have to delay for turning of keys or drawing of bolts before penetrating into the heart of the sanctuary.

By the light of the lantern, whose doubtful ray, lost in the heavy glooms of nave and aisles, threw in giant proportions upon the wall the fantastic shadow of the sergeant going on before, he traversed the length and breadth of the church and peered into the deserted chapels, one by one, until he had made himself thoroughly acquainted with the place, when he ordered his troop to dismount, and set about the bestowing of that confused crowd of men and horses as best he could.

As we have said, the church was completely dismantled; before the High Altar were still hanging from the lofty cornices torn shreds of the veil with which the monks had covered it on abandoning that holy place; at intervals along the aisles might be seen shrines fastened against the wall, their niches bereft of images; in the choir a line of light traced the strange contour of the shadowy larchwood stalls; upon the pavement, destroyed at various points, might still be distinguished broad burial slabs filled with heraldic devices, shields and long Gothic inscriptions; and far away, in the depths of the silent chapels and along the transepts, were vaguely visible in the dimness, like motionless white spectres, marble statues which, some extended at full length and others kneeling on their stony tombs, appeared to be the only tenants of that ruined structure.

For anyone less spent than the captain of dragoons, who carried in his body the fatigues of a ride of fourteen leagues, or less accustomed to seeing these sacrileges as the most natural thing in the world, two drams of imagination would have sufficed to keep eyes from closing the whole night long in that dusky, awesome haunt, where the oaths of the soldiers, who were loudly complaining of their improvised barracks, the metallic clink of their spurs striking rudely against the once sepulchral slabs of the pavement, the clatter of the horses as they pawed impatiently, tossing their heads and rattling the chains which bound them to the pillars, formed a strange and fearful confusion

of sounds that reverberated through the reaches of the church and was repeated, ever more weirdly, from echo to echo among the lofty vaults.

But our hero, young though he was, had already become so familiar with those shiftings of the scene in a soldier's life, that scarcely had he assigned places to his men than he ordered a sack of fodder flung down at the foot of the chancel steps, and rolling himself as snugly as possible into his cloak, resting his head upon the lowest stair, in five minutes was snoring with more tranquillity than King Joseph himself in his palace at Madrid.

The soldiers, making pillows of the saddles, followed his example, and little by little the murmur of their voices died away.

Half an hour later, nothing was to be heard save the stifled groans of the wind which entered by the broken ogive windows of the church, the skurrying flights of night-birds whose nests were built in the stone canopies above the sculptured figures of the walls, and the tramp, now near, now far, of the sentry who was pacing up and down the portico, wound in the wide folds of his military cloak.

II.

In the epoch to which the account of this incident, no less true than strange, reverts, the city of Toledo, for those who knew not how to value the treasures of art which its walls enclose, was, even as now, no more than a great huddle of houses, old-fashioned, ruinous, insufferable.

The officers of the French army who, to judge from the acts of vandalism by which they left in Toledo a sad and enduring memory of their occupation, counted few artists and archaeologists in their number, found themselves, as goes without the saying, supremely bored in the ancient city of the Cæsars.

In this frame of mind, the most trifling event which came to break the monotonous calm of those eternal, unvarying days was eagerly caught up among the idlers, so that the promotion of one of their comrades to the next grade, a report of the strategic movement of a flying column, the departure of an official post or the arrival at the city of any military force whatsoever, became a fertile theme of conversation and object of every sort of comment, until something else occurred to take its place and serve as foundation for new grumblings, criticisms and conjectures.

As was to be expected, among those officers who, according to their custom, gathered on the following day to take the air and chat a little in the Zocodover, the dish of gossip was supplied by nothing else than the arrival of the dragoons, whose leader was left in the former chapter stretched out at his ease, sleeping off the fatigues of the march. For upwards of an hour the conversation had been beating about this event, and already various

explanations had been put forward to account for the non-appearance of the new-comer, whom an officer present, a former schoolmate, had invited to the Zocodover, when at last, in one of the side-streets that radiate from the square, appeared our gallant captain, no longer obscured by his voluminous army-cloak, but sporting a great shining helmet with a plume of white feathers, a turquoise-blue coat with scarlet facings, and a magnificent two-handed sword in a steel scabbard which clanked as it struck the ground in time to his martial stride and to the keener, sharper clink of his golden spurs.

As soon as his former chum caught sight of him, off he went to meet him and bid him welcome, followed by almost all the officers who chanced to be in the group that morning and who had been stirred to curiosity and a desire to know him by what they had already heard of his original, extraordinary traits of character.

After the customary close embraces, and the exclamations, compliments and questions enjoined by etiquette in meetings like this; after discussing at length and in detail the latest news from Madrid, the changing fortune of the war, and old friends dead or far away, the conversation, flitting from one subject to another, came to roost at last on the inevitable theme, to wit, the hardships of the service, the dearth of amusements in the city, and the inconveniences of their lodgings.

Now at this juncture one of the company, who, it would seem, had heard of the ill grace with which the young officer had resigned himself to quartering his troop in the abandoned church, said to him with an air of raillery:

“And speaking of lodgings, what sort of a night did you have in yours?”

“We lacked for nothing,” answered the captain, “and if it is the truth that I slept but little, the cause of my insomnia is well worth the pains of wakefulness. A vigil in the society of a charming woman is surely not the worst of evils.”

“A woman!” repeated his interlocutor, as if wondering at the good fortune of the new arrival. “This is what they call ending the pilgrimage and kissing the saint.”

“Perhaps it is some old flame of the Capital who follows him to Madrid to make his exile more endurable,” added another of the circle.

“Oh, no!” exclaimed the captain, “nothing of the sort. I swear to you, on the word of a gentleman, I had never seen her before, nor had I dreamed of finding so gracious a hostess in so bad a hostelry. It is altogether what one might call a genuine adventure.”

“Tell it! tell it!” chorused the officers who surrounded the captain, and as

he proceeded so to do, all lent the most eager attention, while he began his story thus:

“I was sleeping last night the sleep of a man who carries in his body the effects of a thirteen-league ride, when, look you, in the best of my slumber I was startled wide-awake,—springing up and leaning on my elbows,—by a horrible uproar, such an uproar that it deafened me for an instant and left my ears, a full minute after, humming as if a horse-fly were singing on my cheek.

“As you will have guessed, the cause of my alarm was the first stroke which I heard of that diabolical *campana gorda*, a sort of bronze chorister, which the canons of Toledo have placed in their cathedral for the praiseworthy object of killing the weary with wrath.

“Cursing between my teeth both bell and bell-ringer, I disposed myself, as soon as that strange and frightful noise had ceased, to take up anew the thread of my broken dream, when there befell, to pique my imagination and challenge my senses, a thing of wonder. By the uncertain moonlight which entered the church through the narrow Moorish window of the chancel wall, I saw a woman kneeling at the altar.”

The officers exchanged glances of mingled astonishment and incredulity; the captain, without heeding the impression his narrative was making, continued as follows:

“It could not enter into man’s heart to conceive that nocturnal, phantasmal vision, vaguely outlined in the twilight of the chapel, like those virgins painted in colored glass that you have sometimes seen, from afar off, stand out, white and luminous, across the shadowy stretch of the cathedrals.

“Her oval face, on which one saw stamped the seal, delicate and spiritual, of emaciation, her harmonious features full of a gentle, melancholy sweetness, her intense pallor, the perfect lines of her slender figure, her reposeful, noble posture, her robe of flowing white, brought to my memory the women of whom I used to dream when I was still little more than a child. Chaste, celestial images, illusive objects of the wandering love of youth!

“I believed myself the sport of an hallucination and not withdrawing my eyes from her for an instant, I scarcely dared breathe, fearing that a breath might dissolve the enchantment.

“She remained motionless.

“The fancy crossed my mind, on seeing her so shining, so transparent, that this was no creature of the earth, but a spirit, that, once more assuming for an instant the veil of human form, had descended in the moonbeam, leaving in the air behind it the azure track which slanted from the high window to the

foot of the opposite wall, breaking the deep gloom of that dusky, mysterious recess.”

“But—” interrupted his former schoolmate, who, inclined at the outset to make fun of the story, had at last grown closely attentive—“how came that woman there? Did you not speak to her? Did she not explain to you her presence in that place?”

“I decided not to address her, because I was sure that she would not answer me, nor see me, nor hear me.”

“Was she deaf?”

“Was she blind?”

“Was she dumb?” exclaimed simultaneously three or four of those who were listening to the story.

“She was all at once,” finally declared the captain after a moment’s pause, “for she was—— marble.”

On hearing this remarkable dénouement of so strange an adventure, the bystanders burst into a noisy peal of laughter, while one of them said to the narrator of this curious experience, who alone remained quiet and of grave deportment:

“We will make a complete thing of it. As for this sort of ladies, I have more than a thousand, a regular seraglio, in San Juan de los Reyes, a seraglio which from this time on I put quite at your service, since, it would seem, a woman of stone is the same to you as a woman of flesh.”

“Oh, no!” responded the captain, not nettled in the slightest by the laughter of his companions. “I am sure that they cannot be like mine. Mine is a true Castilian dame of high degree, who by a miracle of sculpture appears not to have been buried in a sepulchre, but still, body and soul, to kneel upon the lid of her own tomb, motionless, with hands joined in attitude of prayer, drowned in an ecstasy of mystic love.”

“You are so plausible that you will end by making us believe in the fable of Galatea.”

“For my part, I admit that I had always supposed it nonsense, but since last night I begin to comprehend the passion of the Greek sculptor.”

“Considering the peculiar circumstances of your new lady, I presume you would have no objection to presenting us. As for me, I vow that already I am dead with longing to behold this paragon. But—what the devil!—one would say that you do not wish to introduce us. Ha, ha, ha! It would be a joke indeed if we should find you jealous.”

“Jealous!” the captain hastened to reply. “Jealous—of men, no; but yet see to what lengths my madness reaches. Close beside the image of this woman is a warrior, also of marble, an august figure, as lifelike as herself,—her husband, without doubt. Well, then! I am going to make a clean breast of it, jeer at my folly as you may,—if I had not feared being taken for a lunatic, I believe I should have broken him to pieces a hundred times over.”

A fresh and yet more riotous outburst of laughter from the officers greeted this original revelation on the part of the eccentric lover of the marble lady.

“We will take no refusal. We must see her,” cried some.

“Yes, yes, we must know if the object of such devotion is as unique as the passion itself,” added others.

“When shall we come together to take a drink in the church where you lodge?” demanded the rest.

“Whenever you please; this very evening, if you like,” replied the young captain, regaining his usual debonair expression, dispelled for an instant by that flash of jealousy. “By the way, along with the baggage I have brought as many as two dozen bottles of champagne, genuine champagne, what was left over from a present given to our brigadier-general, who, as you know, is a distant relative of mine.”

“Bravo! Bravo!” shouted the officers with one voice, breaking into gleeful exclamations.

“We will drink the wine of our native land!”

“And we will sing one of Ronsard’s songs!”

“And we will talk of women, apropos of the lady of our host.”

“And so—good-bye till evening!”

“Till evening!”

III.

It was now a good hour since the peaceful inhabitants of Toledo had secured with key and bolt the massive doors of their ancient mansions; the campana gorda of the cathedral was ringing curfew, and from the summit of the palace, now converted into barracks, was sounding the last bugle-call for silence, when ten or twelve officers, who had been gradually assembling in the Zocodover, took the road leading thence to the monastery where the captain was lodged, impelled more by hope of draining the promised bottles than by eagerness to make acquaintance with the marvellous piece of sculpture.

The night had shut down dark and threatening; the sky was covered with

leaden clouds; the wind, whistling along the imprisoning channels of the narrow, tortuous streets, was shaking the dying flames of the shielded lamps before the shrines, or making the iron weather-vanes of the towers whirl about with a shrill creaking.

Scarcely had the officers caught sight of the square where stood the monastery which served as quarters for their new friend, than he, who was impatiently looking out for their arrival, sallied forth to meet them, and after the exchange of a few low-toned sentences, all together entered the church, within whose dim enclosure the faint gleam of a lantern was struggling at hopeless odds with the black and heavy shadows.

“ ‘Pon my honor!” exclaimed one of the guests, peering about him. “If this isn’t the last place in the world for a revel!”

“True enough!” said another. “You bring us here to meet a lady, and scarcely can a man see his hand before his face.”

“And worst of all, it’s so icy cold that we might as well be in Siberia,” added a third, hugging the folds of his cloak about him.

“Patience, gentlemen, patience!” interposed the host. “A little patience will set all to rights. Here, my lad!” he continued, addressing one of his men. “Hunt us up a bit of fuel and kindle a rousing bonfire in the chancel.”

The orderly, obeying his captain’s directions, commenced to rain swinging blows on the carven stalls of the choir, and after he had thus collected a goodly supply of wood, which was heaped up at the foot of the chancel steps, he took the lantern and proceeded to make an auto de fe of those fragments carved in richest designs. Among them might be seen here a portion of a spiral column, there the effigy of a holy abbot, the torso of a woman, or the misshapen head of a griffin peeping through foliage.

In a few minutes, a great light which suddenly streamed out through all the compass of the church announced to the officers that the hour for the carousal had arrived.

The captain, who did the honors of his lodging with the same punctiliousness which he would have observed in his own house, turned to his guests and said:

“We will, if you please, pass to the refreshment room.”

His comrades, affecting the utmost gravity, responded to the invitation with absurdly profound bows and took their way to the chancel preceded by the lord of the revel, who, on reaching the stone steps, paused an instant, and extending his hand in the direction of the tomb, said to them with the most exquisite courtesy:

“I have the pleasure of presenting you to the lady of my dreams. I am sure you will grant that I have not exaggerated her beauty.”

The officers turned their eyes toward the point which their friend designated, and exclamations of astonishment broke involuntarily from the lips of all.

In the depths of a sepulchral arch lined with black marbles, they saw, in fact, kneeling before a prayer-stool, with folded palms and face turned toward the altar, the image of a woman so beautiful that never did her equal come from sculptor’s hands, nor could desire paint her in imagination more supremely lovely.

“In truth, an angel!” murmured one.

“A pity that she is marble!” added another.

“Well might—illusion though it be—the neighborhood of such a woman suffice to keep one from closing eye the whole night through.”

“And you do not know who she is?” others of the group, contemplating the statue, asked of the captain, who stood smiling, satisfied with his triumph.

“Recalling a little of the Latin which I learned in my boyhood, I have been able, at no small pains, to decipher the inscription on the stone,” he answered, “and by what I have managed to make out, it is the tomb of a Castilian noble, a famous warrior who fought under the Great Captain. His name I have forgotten, but his wife, on whom you look, is called Doña Elvira de Castañeda, and by my hopes of salvation, if the copy resembles the original, this should be the most notable woman of her time.”

After these brief explanations, the guests, who did not lose sight of the principal object of the gathering, proceeded to uncork some of the bottles and, seating themselves around the bonfire, began to pass the wine from hand to hand.

In proportion as their libations became more copious and frequent, and the fumes of the foaming champagne commenced to cloud their brains, the animation, the uproar and the merriment of the young Frenchmen rose to such a pitch that some of them threw the broken necks of the empty bottles at the granite monks carved against the pillars, and others trolled at the tops of their voices scandalous drinking-songs, while the rest burst into roars of laughter, clapped their hands in applause or quarrelled among themselves with angry words and oaths.

The captain sat drinking in silence, like a man distraught, without moving his eyes from the statue of Doña Elvira.

Illumed by the ruddy splendor of the bonfire, and seen across the misty

veil which wine had drawn before his vision, the marble image sometimes seemed to him to be changing into an actual woman; it seemed to him that her lips parted, as if murmuring a prayer, that her breast heaved as if with stifled sobs, that her palms were pressed together with more energy, and finally, that rosy color crept into her cheeks, as if she were blushing before that sacrilegious and repugnant scene.

The officers, noting the gloomy silence of their comrade, roused him from the trance into which he had fallen, and thrusting a cup into his hands, exclaimed in noisy chorus:

“Come, give us a toast, you, the only man that has failed of it to-night!”

The young host took the cup, rose and, lifting it on high, turned to face the statue of the warrior kneeling beside Doña Elvira and said:

“I drink to the Emperor, and I drink to the success of his arms, thanks to which we have been able to penetrate even to the heart of Castile and to court, at his own tomb, the wife of a conqueror of Cerñiola.”

The officers drank the toast with a storm of applause, and the captain, keeping his balance with some difficulty, took a few steps toward the sepulchre.

“No,” he continued, always addressing, with the stupid smile of intoxication, the statue of the warrior. “Don’t suppose that I have a grudge against you for being my rival. On the contrary, old lad, I admire you for a patient husband, an example of meekness and long suffering, and, for my part, I wish to be generous, too. You should be a tippler, since you are a soldier, and it shall not be said that I left you to die of thirst in the sight of twenty empty bottles. Drink!”

And with these words he raised the cup to his lips and, after wetting them with the liquor which it contained, flung the rest into the marble face, bursting into a boisterous peal of laughter to see how the wine splashed down over the tomb from the carven beard of the motionless warrior.

“Captain,” exclaimed at that point one of his comrades in a tone of raillery, “take heed what you do. Bear in mind that these jests with the stone people are apt to cost dear. Remember what happened to the Fifth Hussars in the monastery of Poblet. The story goes that the warriors of the cloister laid hand to their granite swords one night and gave plenty of occupation to those merry fellows who had amused themselves by adorning them with charcoal mustaches.”

The young revellers received this report with roars of laughter, but the captain, heedless of their mirth, continued, his mind fixed ever on the same

idea.

“Do you think that I would have given him the wine, had I not known that he would swallow at least as much as fell upon his mouth? Oh, no! I do not believe like you that these statues are mere blocks of marble as inert to-day as when hewed from the quarry. Undoubtedly the artist, who is always a god, gives to his work a breath of life which is not powerful enough to make the figure move and walk, but which inspires it with a strange, incomprehensible life, a life which I do not fully explain to myself, but which I feel, especially when I am a little drunk.”

“Magnificent!” exclaimed his comrades. “Drink and continue!”

The officer drank and, fixing his eyes upon the image of Doña Elvira, went on with mounting excitement:

“Look at her! Look at her! Do you not note those changing flushes of her soft, transparent flesh? Does it not seem that beneath this delicate alabaster skin, azure-veined and tender, circulates a fluid of rose-colored light? Would you wish more life, more reality?”

“Oh, but yes, by all means,” said one of those who was listening. “We would have her of flesh and bone.”

“Flesh and bone! Misery and corruption!” exclaimed the captain. “I have felt in the course of an orgy my lips burn, and my head. I have felt that fire which runs boiling through the veins like the lava of a volcano, that fire whose dim vapors trouble and confuse the brain and conjure up strange visions. Then the kiss of these material women burned me like a red-hot iron, and I thrust them from me with displeasure, with horror and with loathing; for then, as now, I needed for my fevered forehead a breath of the sea-breeze, to drink ice and to kiss snow, snow tinted by mellow light, snow illumined by a golden ray of sunshine,—a woman white, beautiful and cold, like this woman of stone who seems to allure me with her ethereal grace, to sway like a flame—who challenges me with parted lips, offering me a wealth of love. Oh, yes, a kiss! Only a kiss of thine can calm the fire which is consuming me.”

“Captain!” exclaimed some of the officers, on seeing him start toward the statue as if beside himself, his gaze wild and his steps reeling. “What mad foolery would you commit? Enough of jesting! Leave the dead in peace.”

The young host did not even hear the warnings of his friends; staggering, groping his way, he reached the tomb and approached the statue of Doña Elvira, but as he stretched out his arms to clasp it, a cry of horror resounded through the temple. With blood gushing from eyes, mouth and nostrils, he had fallen prone, his face crushed in, at the foot of the sepulchre.

The officers, hushed and terrified, dared not take one step forward to his aid.

At the moment when their comrade strove to touch his burning lips to those of Doña Elvira, they had seen the marble warrior lift its hand and, with a frightful blow of the stone gauntlet, strike him down.

THE SPIRITS' MOUNTAIN

On All Souls' Night I was awakened, I knew not at what hour, by the tolling of bells; their monotonous, unceasing sound brought to mind this tradition which I heard a short time ago in Soria.

I tried to sleep again. Impossible! The imagination, once roused, is a horse that runs wild and cannot be reined in. To pass the time, I decided to write the story out, and so in fact I did.

I had heard it in the very place where it originated and, as I wrote, I sometimes glanced behind me with sudden fear, when, smitten by the cold night air, the glass of my balcony crackled.

Make of it what you will,—here it goes loose, like the mounted horseman in a Spanish pack of cards.

I.

“Leash the dogs! Blow the horns to call the hunters together, and let us return to the city. Night is at hand,—the Night of All Souls, and we are on the Spirits' Mountain.”

“So soon!”

“Were it any day but this, I would not give up till I had made an end of that pack of wolves which the snows of the Moncayo have driven from their dens; but to-day it is impossible. Very soon the Angelus will sound in the monastery of the Knights Templars, and the souls of the dead will commence to toll their bell in the chapel on the mountain.”

“In that ruined chapel! Bah! Would you frighten me?”

“No, fair cousin; but you are not aware of all that happens hereabout, for it is not yet a year since you came hither from a distant part of Spain. Rein in your mare; I will keep mine at the same pace and tell you this story on the way.”

The pages gathered together in merry, boisterous groups; the Counts of

Bórges and Alcudiel mounted their noble steeds, and the whole company followed after the son and daughter of those great houses, Alonso and Beatriz, who rode at some little distance in advance of the company.

As they went, Alonso related in these words the promised tradition:

“This mountain, which is now called the Spirits’ Mountain, belonged to the Knights Templars, whose monastery you see yonder on the river bank. The Templars were both monks and warriors. After Soria had been wrested from the Moors, the King summoned the Templars here from foreign lands to defend the city on the side next to the bridge, thus giving deep offense to his Castilian nobles, who, as they had won Soria alone, would alone have been able to defend it.

“Between the knights of the new and powerful Order and the nobles of the city there fermented for some years an animosity which finally developed into a deadly hatred. The Templars claimed for their own this mountain, where they reserved an abundance of game to satisfy their needs and contribute to their pleasures; the nobles determined to organize a great hunt within the bounds notwithstanding the rigorous prohibitions of the clergy with spurs, as their enemies called them.

“The news of the projected invasion spread fast, and nothing availed to check the rage for the hunt on the one side, and the determination to break it up on the other. The proposed expedition came off. The wild beasts did not remember it; but it was never to be forgotten by the many mothers mourning for their sons. That was not a hunting-trip, but a frightful battle; the mountain was strewn with corpses, and the wolves, whose extermination was the end in view, had a bloody feast. Finally the authority of the King was brought to bear; the mountain, the accursed cause of so many bereavements, was declared abandoned, and the chapel of the Templars, situated on this same wild steep, friends and enemies buried together in its cloister, began to fall into ruins.

“They say that ever since, on All Souls’ Night, the chapel bell is heard tolling all alone, and the spirits of the dead, wrapt in the tatters of their shrouds, run as in a fantastic chase through the bushes and brambles. The deer trumpet in terror, wolves howl, snakes hiss horribly, and on the following morning there have been seen clearly marked in the snow the prints of the fleshless feet of the skeletons. This is why we call it in Soria the Spirits’ Mountain, and this is why I wished to leave it before nightfall.”

Alonso’s story was finished just as the two young people arrived at the end of the bridge which admits to the city from that side. There they waited for the rest of the company to join them, and then the whole cavalcade was lost to sight in the dim and narrow streets of Soria.

II.

The servants had just cleared the tables; the high Gothic fireplace of the palace of the Counts of Alcuéjar was shedding a vivid glow over the groups of lords and ladies who were chatting in friendly fashion, gathered about the blaze; and the wind shook the leaded glass of the ogive windows.

Two persons only seemed to hold aloof from the general conversation,—Beatriz and Alonso. Beatriz, absorbed in a vague reverie, followed with her eyes the capricious dance of the flames. Alonso watched the reflection of the fire sparkling in the blue eyes of Beatriz.

Both maintained for some time an unbroken silence.

The duennas were telling gruesome stories, appropriate to the Night of All Souls,—stories in which ghosts and spectres played the principal rôles, and the church bells of Soria were tolling in the distance with a monotonous and mournful sound.

“Fair cousin,” finally exclaimed Alonso, breaking the long silence between them. “Soon we are to separate, perhaps forever. I know you do not like the arid plains of Castile, its rough, soldier customs, its simple, patriarchal ways. At various times I have heard you sigh, perhaps for some lover in your far-away demesne.”

Beatriz made a gesture of cold indifference; the whole character of the woman was revealed in that disdainful contraction of her delicate lips.

“Or perhaps for the grandeur and gaiety of the French capital, where you have lived hitherto,” the young man hastened to add. “In one way or another, I foresee that I shall lose you before long. When we part, I would like to have you carry hence a remembrance of me. Do you recollect the time when we went to church to give thanks to God for having granted you that restoration to health which was your object in coming to this region? The jewel that fastened the plume of my cap attracted your attention. How well it would look clasping a veil over your dark hair! It has already been the adornment of a bride. My father gave it to my mother, and she wore it to the altar. Would you like it?”

“I do not know how it may be in your part of the country,” replied the beauty, “but in mine to accept a gift is to incur an obligation. Only on a holy day may one receive a present from a kinsman,—though he may go to Rome without returning empty-handed.”

The frigid tone in which Beatriz spoke these words troubled the youth for a moment, but, clearing his brow, he replied sadly:

“I know it, cousin, but to-day is the festival of All Saints, and yours among them,—a holiday on which gifts are fitting. Will you accept mine?”

Beatriz slightly bit her lip and put out her hand for the jewel, without a word.

The two again fell silent and again heard the quavering voices of the old women telling of witches and hobgoblins, the whistling wind which shook the ogive windows, and the mournful, monotonous tolling of the bells.

After the lapse of some little time, the interrupted dialogue was thus renewed:

“And before All Saints’ Day ends, which is holy to my saint as well as to yours, so that you can, without compromising yourself, give me a keepsake, will you not do so?” pleaded Alonso, fixing his eyes on his cousin’s, which flashed like lightning, gleaming with a diabolical thought.

“Why not?” she exclaimed, raising her hand to her right shoulder as though seeking for something amid the folds of her wide velvet sleeve embroidered with gold. Then, with an innocent air of disappointment, she added:

“Do you recollect the blue scarf I wore to-day to the hunt,—the scarf which you said, because of something about the meaning of its color, was the emblem of your soul?”

“Yes.”

“Well! it is lost! it is lost, and I was thinking of letting you have it for a souvenir.”

“Lost! where?” asked Alonso, rising from his seat with an indescribable expression of mingled fear and hope.

“I do not know,—perhaps on the mountain.”

“On the Spirits’ Mountain!” he murmured, paling and sinking back into his seat. “On the Spirits’ Mountain!”

Then he went on in a voice choked and broken:

“You know, for you have heard it a thousand times, that I am called in the city, in all Castile, the king of the hunters. Not having yet had a chance to try, like my ancestors, my strength in battle, I have brought to bear on this pastime, the image of war, all the energy of my youth, all the hereditary ardor of my race. The rugs your feet tread on are the spoils of the chase, the hides of the wild beasts I have killed with my own hand. I know their haunts and their habits; I have fought them by day and by night, on foot and on horseback, alone and with hunting-parties, and there is not a man will say that he has ever seen me shrink from danger. On any other night I would fly for that scarf,—fly as joyously as to a festival; but to-night, this one night—why disguise it?—I am afraid. Do you hear? The bells are tolling, the Angelus has sounded in San

Juan del Duero, the ghosts of the mountain are now beginning to lift their yellowing skulls from amid the brambles that cover their graves—the ghosts! the mere sight of them is enough to curdle with horror the blood of the bravest, turn his hair white, or sweep him away in the stormy whirl of their fantastic chase as a leaf, unwitting whither, is carried by the wind.”

While the young man was speaking, an almost imperceptible smile curled the lips of Beatriz, who, when he had ceased, exclaimed in an indifferent tone, while she was stirring the fire on the hearth, where the wood blazed and snapped, throwing off sparks of a thousand colors:

“Oh, by no means! What folly! To go to the mountain at this hour for such a trifle! On so dark a night, too, with ghosts abroad, and the road beset by wolves!”

As she spoke this closing phrase, she emphasized it with so peculiar an intonation that Alonso could not fail to understand all her bitter irony. As moved by a spring, he leapt to his feet, passed his hand over his brow as if to dispel the fear which was in his brain, not in his breast, and with firm voice he said, addressing his beautiful cousin, who was still leaning over the hearth, amusing herself by stirring the fire:

“Farewell, Beatriz, farewell. If I return, it will be soon.”

“Alonso, Alonso!” she called, turning quickly, but now that she wished—or made show of wishing—to detain him, the youth had gone.

In a few moments she heard the beat of a horse’s hoofs departing at a gallop. The beauty, with a radiant expression of satisfied pride flushing her cheeks, listened attentively to the sound which grew fainter and fainter until it died away.

The old dames, meanwhile, were continuing their tales of ghostly apparitions; the wind was shrilling against the balcony glass, and far away the bells of the city tolled on.

III

An hour had passed, two, three; midnight would soon be striking, and Beatriz withdrew to her chamber. Alonso had not returned; he had not returned, though less than an hour would have sufficed for his errand.

“He must have been afraid!” exclaimed the girl, closing her prayer-book and turning toward her bed after a vain attempt to murmur some of the prayers that the church offers for the dead on the Day of All Souls.

After putting out her light and drawing the double silken curtains, she fell asleep; but her sleep was restless, light, uneasy.

The Postigo clock struck midnight. Beatriz heard through her dreams the slow, dull, melancholy strokes, and half opened her eyes. She thought she had heard, at the same time, her name spoken, but far, far away, and in a faint, suffering voice. The wind groaned outside her window.

“It must have been the wind,” she said, and pressing her hand above her heart, she strove to calm herself. But her heart beat ever more wildly. The larchwood doors of the chamber grated on their hinges with a sharp creak, prolonged and strident.

First these doors, then the more distant ones,—all the doors which led to her room opened, one after another, some with a heavy, groaning sound, some with a long wail that set the nerves on edge. Then silence, a silence full of strange noises, the silence of midnight, with a monotonous murmur of far-off water, the distant barking of dogs, confused voices, unintelligible words, echoes of footsteps going and coming, the rustle of trailing garments, half-suppressed sighs, labored breathing almost felt upon the face, involuntary shudders that announce the presence of something not seen, though its approach is felt in the darkness.

Beatriz, stiffening with fear, yet trembling, thrust her head out from the bed-curtains and listened a moment. She heard a thousand diverse noises; she passed her hand across her brow and listened again; nothing, silence.

She saw, with that dilation of the pupils common in nervous crises, dim shapes moving hither and thither all about the room, but when she fixed her gaze on any one point, there was nothing but darkness and impenetrable shadows.

“Bah!” she exclaimed, again resting her beautiful head upon her blue satin pillow, “am I as timid as these poor kinsfolk of mine, whose hearts thump with terror under their armor when they hear a ghost-story?”

And closing her eyes she tried to sleep,—but her effort to compose herself was in vain. Soon she started up again, paler, more uneasy, more terrified. This time it was no illusion; the brocade hangings of the door had rustled as they were pushed to either side, and slow footsteps were heard upon the carpet; the sound of those footsteps was muffled, almost imperceptible, but continuous, and she heard, keeping measure with them, a creaking as of dry wood or bones. And the footfalls came nearer, nearer; the prayer-stool by the side of her bed moved. Beatriz uttered a sharp cry, and burying herself under the bedclothes, hid her head and held her breath.

The wind beat against the balcony glass; the water of the far-off fountain was falling, falling, with a monotonous, unceasing sound; the barking of the dogs was borne upon the gusts, and the church bells in the city of Soria, some

near, some remote, tolled sadly for the souls of the dead.

So passed an hour, two, the night, a century, for that night seemed to Beatrix eternal. At last the day began to break; putting fear from her, she half opened her eyes to the first silver rays. How beautiful, after a night of wakefulness and terrors, is the clear white light of dawn! She parted the silken curtains of her bed and was ready to laugh at her past alarms, when suddenly a cold sweat covered her body, her eyes seemed starting from their sockets, and a deadly pallor overspread her cheeks; for on her prayer-stool she had seen, torn and blood-stained, the blue scarf she lost on the mountain, the blue scarf Alonso went to seek.

When her attendants rushed in, aghast, to tell her of the death of the heir of Alcudiel, whose body, partly devoured by wolves, had been found that morning among the brambles on the Spirits' Mountain, they discovered her motionless, convulsed, clinging with both hands to one of the ebony bedposts, her eyes staring, her mouth open, the lips white, her limbs rigid,—dead, dead of fright!

IV.

They say that, some time after this event, a hunter who, having lost his way, had been obliged to pass the Night of the Dead on the Spirits' Mountain, and who in the morning, before he died, was able to relate what he had seen, told a tale of horror. Among other awful sights, he avowed he beheld the skeletons of the ancient Knights Templars and of the nobles of Soria, buried in the cloister of the chapel, rise at the hour of the Angelus with a horrible rattle and, mounted on their bony steeds, chase, as a wild beast, a beautiful woman, pallid, with streaming hair, who, uttering cries of terror and anguish, had been wandering, with bare and bloody feet, about the tomb of Alonso.

THE CAVE OF THE MOOR'S DAUGHTER

I.

Opposite the Baths of Fitero, on a rocky, precipitous eminence, at whose base flows the river Alhama, there may be seen to this day the abandoned ruins of a Moorish castle celebrated in the glorious memories of the Reconquest as having been the theatre of great and famous exploits, as well on the part of the defenders as of those who valiantly nailed to its parapets the standard of the Cross.

Of the walls there remain only some scattered ruins; the stones of the watch-tower have fallen one above another into the moat, filling it to the top;

in the court-of-arms grow briars and patches of yellow mustard; in whatever direction you look, you see only broken arches, blackened and crumbling blocks of stone; here a section of the barbican in whose fissures springs the ivy, there a round tower, standing yet, as by a miracle; further on, pillars of cement with the iron rings which supported the drawbridge.

During my stay at the Baths, partly for exercise, which I was assured would be conducive to my health, and partly from curiosity, I strolled every afternoon along the rough path that leads to the ruins of the Arab fortress. There I passed hours and hours, closely scanning the ground in the hope of discovering some fragments of armor, beating the walls to find out whether they were hollow and might be the hiding place of treasure, and investigating all the nooks and crannies with the idea of hitting upon the entrance to some of those underground cells which are believed to exist in all Moorish castles.

My diligent search was, after all, a fruitless one.

But yet, one afternoon, when I had quite despaired of discovering anything new and curious on the rocky height crowned by the castle and had given up the climb, limiting my walk to the banks of the river which flows by its foot, I saw, as I walked along by the stream, a sort of gaping hole in the living rock, half hidden by thickly-leaved bushes. Not without a little tremor, I parted the branches covering the entrance to what seemed a natural cave, but what I perceived, after advancing a few steps, was a subterranean vault narrowing to the mouth. Not being able to penetrate to the end, which was lost in darkness, I confined myself to observing attentively the peculiarities of the arch and of the pavement that appeared to me to rise in great stairs toward the height on which stood the castle I have mentioned, and in whose ruins I then remembered having seen a closed-up trap door. Doubtless I had discovered one of those secret passages so common in the fortifications of that epoch, serving for covert sallies, or for bringing, in state of siege, water from the river which flows hard by.

That I might be more sure of the truth of my inferences, after I had come out from the cave by the same way in which I had entered, I fell into conversation with a workman who was pruning some vines in that rough region and whom I accosted under pretence of asking a light for my cigarette.

We talked of various matters: the medicinal properties of the waters of Fitero; the last harvest and the next; the women of Navarre and the cultivation of vines; indeed, we talked of everything which occurred to the sociable body before we spoke of the cave, the object of my curiosity.

When, at last, the conversation had reached this point, I asked him if he knew of any one who had gone through it, and seen the other end.

“Gone through the cave of the Moor’s Daughter!” he repeated, astonished at hearing such a question. “Who would dare? Do you not know that from this cave there comes out, every night, a ghost?”

“A ghost!” I exclaimed, smiling. “Whose ghost?”

“The ghost of the daughter of a Moorish chief, she who yet wanders mourning about these places and is seen every night coming out of this cave, robed in white, and filling at the river a water-jar.”

Through this good fellow I learned that there was a tradition clinging to this Arab castle and the vault which I believed to communicate with it. And as I am a most willing hearer of all these legends, especially from the lips of the neighbor-folk, I begged him to relate it to me, and so he did, almost in the very words in which I in turn am going to relate it to my readers.

II.

When the castle, of which there remain to-day only a few shapeless ruins, was still held by the Moorish kings, and its towers, not one stone now left upon another, commanded from their lofty site all that most fertile valley watered by the river Alhama, there was fought near the town of Fitero a hotly contested battle in which a famous Christian knight, as worthy of renown for his piety as for his valor, fell, wounded, into the hands of the Arabs.

Taken to the fortress and loaded with irons by his enemies, he was for some days in the depths of a dungeon struggling between life and death, until, healed as if miraculously of his wounds, he was redeemed by his kindred with a ransom of gold.

The captive returned to his home,—returned to clasp to his breast those who had given him being. His brothers-in-arms and his men-of-war were overjoyed to see him, supposing that he would sound the call to new combat, but the soul of the knight had become possessed by a deep melancholy, and neither the endearments of parental love nor the assiduities of friendship could dissipate his strange gloom.

During his imprisonment he had managed to see the daughter of the Moorish chief, rumors of whose beauty had already reached his ears. But when he beheld her, he found her so superior to the idea he had formed of her that he could not resist the fascination of her charms and fell desperately in love with one who could never be his bride.

Months and months were spent by the knight in devising the most daring, most absurd plans; now he would imagine some way of breaking the barriers that separated him from that woman; again, he would make the utmost efforts to forget her; to-day he would decide on one course of action and to-morrow

he would resolve on another absolutely different. At last, one morning, he called together his brothers and companions-in-arms, summoned his men-of-war, and after having made, with the greatest secrecy, all necessary preparations, fell suddenly upon the fortress which sheltered the beautiful being who was the object of his insensate love.

On setting out on this expedition, all believed that their commander was moved only by eagerness to avenge himself for the sufferings he had endured loaded with irons in the dungeon depth, but after the fortress was taken, the true cause of that reckless enterprise, in which so many good Christians had perished to contribute to the satisfaction of an unworthy passion, was hid from none.

The knight, intoxicated with the love which he had at last succeeded in kindling in the breast of the beautiful Moorish girl, gave no heed to the counsels of his friends, and was deaf to the murmurs and complaints of his soldiers. One and all were clamoring to go out as soon as possible from those walls, upon which it was natural that the Arabs, recovered from the panic of the surprise, would fall anew.

And this, in fact, was what took place. The Moorish chief called together the Arabs from all about; and, one morning, the look-out who was stationed in the watch-tower of the keep went down to announce to the infatuated lovers that over all the mountain range which was discernible from that summit, such a cloud of warriors was descending that he was convinced all Mohammedanism was going to fall upon the castle.

The Moor's daughter, hearing this, stood still, pale as death; the knight shouted for his arms, and everything was put in motion in the fortress. The soldiers rushed out tumultuously from their quarters; the captains began to give orders; the portcullis was lowered; the drawbridge was raised, and the battlements were manned with archers.

After some hours, the assault began.

The castle might well be called impregnable. Only by surprise, as the Christians had taken it, could it be overcome. So its defenders resisted one, two, and even ten onsets.

The Moors, seeing the uselessness of their efforts, contented themselves with closely surrounding the castle, that they might bring its defenders to capitulation through famine.

Hunger began, indeed, to make frightful ravages among the Christians, but, knowing that once the castle was surrendered, the price of the life of its defenders would be the head of their leader, no one would betray him, and the very soldiers who had reprobated his conduct swore to perish in his defence.

The Moors, waxing impatient, resolved to make a fresh assault in the middle of the night. The attack was furious; the defence, desperate; the encounter, horrible. During the combat, the Moorish chief, his forehead cleft by an axe, fell into the moat from the top of the wall to which he had succeeded in climbing by the aid of a scaling ladder. Simultaneously the knight received a mortal stroke in the breach of the barbican where men were fighting hand to hand in the darkness.

The Christians began to give way and fell back. At this point, the Moorish girl bent over her lover, who lay in deathlike swoon on the ground and, taking him in her arms, with a strength born of desperation and the sense of peril, she dragged him to the castle court. There she touched a spring and through a passage disclosed by a stone, which rose as if supernaturally moved, she disappeared with her precious burden and began to descend until she reached the bottom of the vault.

III.

When the knight recovered consciousness, he cast a wandering glance about him, crying: "I thirst! I die! I burn!" And in his delirium, precursor of death, from his dry lips, through which whistled the difficult breath, came only these words of agony: "I thirst! I burn! Water! Water!"

The Moorish girl knew that there was an opening from that vault to the valley through which the river flows. The valley and all the heights which overlook it were full of Moslem soldiers, who, the fortress now surrendered, were vainly seeking everywhere the knight and his beloved to satiate on them their thirst for destruction; yet she did not hesitate an instant, but taking the helmet of the dying man, she slipped like a shadow through the thicket which covered the mouth of the cave and went down to the river bank.

Already she had dipped up the water and was rising to return to the side of her lover, when an arrow hissed and a cry resounded.

Two Arab archers who were on watch near the fortress had drawn their bows in the direction in which they heard the foliage rustle.

The Moor's daughter, mortally wounded, yet succeeded in dragging herself to the entrance of the vault and down into its depths where she joined the knight. He, on seeing her bathed with blood and at the point of death, recovered his reason and, realizing the enormity of the sin which demanded so fearful an expiation, raised his eyes to heaven, took the water which his beloved offered him and, without lifting it to his lips, asked the Moorish girl: "Would you be a Christian? Would you die in my faith and, if I am saved, be saved with me?" The Moor's daughter, who had fallen to the ground, faint with loss of blood, made a slight movement of her head, and upon it the knight

poured the baptismal water, invoking the name of the Almighty.

The next day the soldier who had shot the arrow saw a trace of blood on the river bank and, following it, went into the cave where he found the dead bodies of the cavalier and his beloved, who, ever since, come out at night to wander through these parts.

THE GNOME

The young girls of the village were returning from the fountain with their water-jars on their heads; they were returning with song and laughter, a merry confusion of sound comparable only to the gleeful twitter of a flock of swallows when, thick as hail, they circle around the weather-vane of a belfry.

Just in front of the church porch, seated at the foot of a juniper tree, was Uncle Gregorio. Uncle Gregorio was the patriarch of the village; he was nearly ninety years old, with white hair, smiling lips, roguish eyes and trembling hands. In childhood he had been a shepherd; in his young manhood, a soldier; then he tilled a little piece of fruitful land inherited from his parents, until at last his strength was spent and he sat tranquilly awaiting death which he neither dreaded nor longed for. Nobody retailed a bit of gossip more spicily than he, nor knew more marvellous tales, nor could bring so neatly to bear an old refrain, proverb or adage.

The girls, on seeing him, quickened their steps, eager for his talk, and when they were in the porch they all began to tease him for a story to pass away the time still left them before nightfall—not much, for the setting sun was slanting his rays across the earth, and the shadows of the mountains grew larger moment by moment all along the plain.

Uncle Gregorio smiled as he listened to the pleading of the lasses, who, having once coaxed from him a promise to tell them something, let down their water-jars upon the ground, and sitting all about him, made a circle with the patriarch in the centre; then he began to talk to them after this fashion:

“I will not tell you a story, for though several come into my mind this minute, they have to do with such weighty matters that the attention of a group of giddypates, like you, would never hold out to the end; besides, with the afternoon so nearly gone, I would not have time to tell them through. So I will give you instead a piece of good counsel.”

“Good counsel!” exclaimed the girls with undisguised vexation. “Bah! it isn’t to hear good counsel that we are stopping here; when we have need of that, his Reverence the priest will give it to us.”

“But perhaps,” went on the old man with his habitual smile, speaking in his broken, tremulous voice, “his Reverence the priest will not know how to give you, this once, such timely advice as Uncle Gregorio; for the priest, busy with his liturgies and litanies, will not have noticed, as I have noticed, that every day you go earlier to the fountain and come back later.”

The girls looked at one another with hardly perceptible smiles of derision, while some of those who were placed behind Uncle Gregorio touched finger to forehead, accompanying the action with a significant gesture.

“And what harm do you find in our lingering at the fountain to chat a minute with our friends and neighbors?” asked one of them. “Do slanders, perhaps, go about the village because the lads step out on to the road for a pleasant word or two, or come offering to carry our water-jars till we are in sight of the houses?”

“Ay, people talk,” replied the old man to the girl who had asked him the question for them all. “The old dames of the village murmur that to-day the girls resort for fun and frolic to a spot whither they used to go swiftly and in fear to draw the water, since only there can water be had; and I find it much amiss that you are losing little by little the dread which the vicinity of the fountain inspires in all your elders,—for so it might come to pass that some time the night should overtake you there.”

Uncle Gregorio spoke these last words in a tone so full of mystery that the lasses opened wide their frightened eyes to look at him, and with blended curiosity and mischief, again pressed their questions:

“The night! But what goes on in that place by night that you should scare us so and throw out such dark and dreadful hints of what might befall? Do you think the wolves will eat us?”

“When the Moncayo is covered with snow, the wolves, driven from their dens, come down in packs and range over its slope; more than once we have heard them howling in horrible concert, not only in the neighborhood of the fountain, but in the very streets of the village; yet the wolves are not the most terrible tenants of the Moncayo; in its deep and dark caverns, on its wild and lonely summits, in its hollow heart there live certain diabolical spirits that, during the night, pour down its cascades in swarms and people the empty spaces, thronging like ants upon the plain, leaping from rock to rock, sporting in the waters and swinging on the bare boughs of the trees. It is these spirits that cry from the clefts of the crags, that roll up and push along those immense snowballs which come rolling down from the lofty peaks and sweep away and crush whatever they find in their path,—theirs are the voices calling in the hail at our windows on stormy nights,—theirs the forms that flit like thin, blue flames over the marshes. Among these spirits—who, driven from the lowlands

by the sacred services and exorcisms of the Church, have taken refuge on the inaccessible crests of the mountains,—are those of diverse natures, that on appearing to our eyes clothe themselves in varied forms. Yet the most dangerous, those who with sweet words win their way into the hearts of maidens and dazzle them with magnificent promises, are the gnomes. The gnomes live in the inner recesses of the mountains; they know their subterranean roads and, eternal guardians of the treasures hidden in the heart of the hills, they keep watch day and night over the veins of metal and the precious stones. Do you see—” continued the old man, pointing with the stick which served him for a prop to the summit of the Moncayo, that rose at his right, looming dark and gigantic against the misted, violet sky of twilight —“do you see that mighty mass still crowned with snow? In its deep cavities these diabolical spirits have their dwellings. The palace they inhabit is terrible and glorious to see. Many years ago a shepherd, following some stray of his flock, penetrated into the mouth of one of those caves whose entrances are covered by thick growths of bushes and whose outlets no man has ever seen. When he came back to the village, he was pale as death; he had surprised the secret of the gnomes; he had breathed their poisonous atmosphere, and he paid for his rashness with his life; but before he died he related marvellous things. Going on along that cavern, he had come at last to vast subterranean galleries lighted by a fitful, fantastic splendor shed from the phosphorescence in the rocks, which there were like great boulders of quartz crystallized into a thousand strange, fantastic forms. The floor, the vaulted ceiling and the walls of those immense halls, the work of nature, seemed variegated like the richest marbles; but the veins which crossed them were of gold and silver, and among those shining veins, as if incrustated in the rock, were seen jewels, a multitude of precious stones of all colors and sizes. There were jacinths and emeralds in heaps, and diamonds and rubies, and sapphires and—how should I know?—many other gems unrecognized—more than he could name but all so great and beautiful that his eyes dazzled at the sight. No noise of the outer world reached the depths of that weird cavern; the only perceptible sounds were, at intervals, the prolonged and pitiful groans of the air which blew through that enchanted labyrinth, a vague roar of subterranean fire furious in its prison, and murmurs of running water which flowed on not knowing whither they went. The shepherd, alone and lost in that immensity, wandered I know not how many hours without finding any outlet, until at last he chanced upon the source of a spring whose murmur he had heard. This broke from the ground like a miraculous fountain, a leap of foam-crowned water that fell in an exquisite cascade, singing a silver song as it slipped away through the crannies of the rocks. About him grew plants that he had never seen, some with wide, thick leaves, and others delicate and long like floating ribbons. Half hidden in that humid foliage were running about a number of extraordinary creatures, some

of them manlike, some reptilian, or both at once, changing shape continually, at one moment appearing like human beings, deformed and tiny, the next like gleaming salamanders or fugitive flames that danced in circles above the tip of the fountain-jet. There, darting in all directions, running across the floor in form of repugnant, hunchbacked dwarfs, scrambling up the walls, wriggling along, reptile-shaped, in their slime, dancing like Will-o-the-wisps on the pool of water, went the gnomes, the lords of those recesses, counting over and shifting from place to place their fabulous riches. They know where misers store those treasures which, afterwards, the heirs seek in vain; they know the spot where the Moors, before their flight, hid their jewels; and the ornaments which are lost, the money that is missing, everything that has value and disappears, they search for, find and steal, to hide in their caves, for they know how to go to and fro through all the world by secret, unimagined paths beneath the earth. So there they were keeping stored up in heaps all manner of rare and precious things. There were jewels of inestimable worth; chains and necklaces of pearls and exquisite gems; golden jars of classic form, full of rubies; chiseled cups, armor richly wrought, coins with images and superscriptions that it is no longer possible to recognize or decipher; treasures, in short, so fabulous and limitless that scarcely may imagination picture them. And all glittered together, flashing out such vivid sparks of light and color that it seemed as if the whole hoard were on fire, quivering and wavering. At least, the shepherd said that so it had seemed to him.” At this point the old patriarch paused a moment. The girls, who in the beginning had hearkened to Uncle Gregorio’s story with a mocking smile, now maintained unbroken silence, hoping that he would go on,—waiting with frightened eyes, with lips slightly parted, and with curiosity and interest depicted on their faces. One of them finally broke the hush, and unable to control herself, exclaimed, fascinated with the account of the fabulous riches which had met the shepherd’s view:

“And what then? Did he take away nothing out of all that?”

“Nothing,” replied Uncle Gregorio.

“What a silly!” the girls exclaimed in concert.

“Heaven helped him in that moment of peril,” continued the old man, “for at the very instant when avarice, the ruling passion, began to dispel his fear and, bewitched by the sight of those jewels, one alone of which would have made him wealthy, the shepherd was about to possess himself of some small share of that treasure, he says he heard—listen and marvel—clear and distinct in those profound abodes,—despite the shouts of laughter and harsh voices of the gnomes, the roar of the subterranean fire, the murmur of running water and the laments of the imprisoned air, he heard, I say, as if he had been at the foot of the hill where it stands, the pealing of the bell in the hermitage of Our Lady of the Moncayo.

“On hearing the bell, which was ringing the Ave Maria, the shepherd fell to his knees, calling on the Mother of Our Lord Jesus Christ; and instantly, without knowing the means nor the way, he found himself on the outside of the mountain, near the road which leads to the village, thrown out on a footpath and overwhelmed by a great bewilderment as if he had just been startled out of a dream.

“Since then everybody has understood why our village fountain sometimes has in its waters a glint as of very fine gold-dust; and when night falls, vague words are heard in its murmur, flattering words with which the gnomes, that defile it from its source, try to entice the foolhardy who lend them ear, promising them riches and treasures that are bound to be the destruction of their souls.”

When Uncle Gregorio had reached this point in his relation, night had fallen and the church bell commenced to call to prayer. The girls crossed themselves devoutly, repeating in low voices an Ave Maria, and after bidding good-night to Uncle Gregorio, who again counselled them not to tarry at the fountain, each picked up her water-jar and all went forth, silent and musing, from the churchyard. They were already far from the spot where they had found the old man, and had, indeed, reached the central square of the village whence they were to go their several ways, before the more resolute and decided of them all broke out with the question:

“Do you girls believe any of that nonsense Uncle Gregorio has been telling us?”

“Not I,” said one.

“Nor I,” exclaimed another.

“Nor I! nor I!” chimed in the rest, laughing at their momentary credulity.

The group of lasses melted away, each taking her course toward one or another side of the square. Last of all, when the others had disappeared down the better streets that led out from this market-place, two girls, the only ones who had not opened their lips to make fun of Uncle Gregorio’s veracity, but who, still musing on the marvellous tale, seemed absorbed in their own meditations, went away together, with the slow step natural to people deep in thought, by a dismal, narrow, crooked alley.

Of those two girls, the elder, who seemed to be some twenty years old, was called Marta; and the younger, who had not yet finished her sixteenth year, Magdalena.

As long as the walk lasted, both kept complete silence; but when they reached the threshold of their home and had set down their water-jars on the

stone bench by the door, Marta said to Magdalena: "And do you believe in the marvels of the Moncayo and the spirits of the fountain?" "Yes," answered Magdalena simply, "I believe it all. But you, perhaps, have doubts?" "Oh, no!" Marta hastily interrupted. "I, too, believe everything, everything—that I wish to believe."

II.

Marta and Magdalena were sisters. Orphans from early childhood, they were living wretchedly under the protection of a kinswoman of their mother,—a kinswoman who had taken them in for charity and who at every step made them feel, by her taunting and humiliating words, the weight of their obligation. Everything would seem to tend toward tightening the knot of love between those two sister souls,—not merely the bond of blood, but those of poverty and suffering, and yet there existed between Marta and Magdalena a mute rivalry, a secret antipathy explicable only by a study of their characters, as utterly contrasted as were their physical types.

Marta was overbearing, strong in her passions and of a rough directness in the expression of her feelings; she did not understand either laughter or tears, and so had never wept nor laughed. Magdalena, on the other hand, was gentle, affectionate, kind, and more than once had been seen to laugh and weep together, as children do.

Marta's eyes were blacker than night and from under her dark lashes there sometimes seemed to leap fiery sparks as from a burning coal.

The blue eyes of Magdalena appeared to swim in liquid light behind the golden curve of her blond lashes. And everything in them was in keeping with the different expression of their eyes. Marta, thin, pale, tall, stiff of movement, her dark, crisp hair shading her brow and falling upon her shoulders like a velvet mantle, formed a singular contrast to Magdalena, white and pink, petite, with the rounded face and figure of babyhood, and with golden tresses encircling her temples like the gilded halo about the head of an angel.

Despite the inexplicable repulsion which each felt for the other, the two sisters had lived up to this time on terms of indifference that might have been mistaken for peace and affection; there had been no caresses to quarrel over, nor partialities to envy; equal in misfortune and affliction, Marta, withdrawn into herself, had borne her troubles in a proud, self-centered silence; and Magdalena, finding no response in her sister's heart, would weep alone when the tears involuntarily rushed into her eyes.

They had not a sentiment in common; they never confided to one another their joys and griefs, and yet the only secret which each had striven to hide in the depths of her soul had been divined by the other with the marvelous

instinct of love and jealousy. Marta and Magdalena had in fact set their hearts on one and the same man.

The passion of the one was a stubborn desire, born of a wilful and indomitable character; in the other, love was manifest in that vague, spontaneous tenderness of youth, which, needing an object on which to spend itself, takes the first that comes. Both guarded the secret of their love, for the man who had inspired it would perchance have made mock of a devotion which could be interpreted as an absurd ambition in penniless girls of lowly birth. Both, despite the distance which separated them from their idol, cherished a faint hope of winning him.

Hard by the village, and above a height which dominated the country round about, there was an ancient castle abandoned by its owners. The old women, in their evening gossips, would relate a marvellous story about its founders. They told how the King of Aragon, finding himself at war with his enemies, his resources exhausted, forsaken by his allies and on the point of losing the throne, was sought out one day by a shepherdess of those parts, who, after revealing to him the existence of certain subterranean passages by means of which he could go through the Moncayo without being perceived by his enemies, gave him a treasure in fine pearls, precious stones of the richest, and bars of gold and silver; with these the king paid his troops, raised a mighty army and, marching beneath the earth one whole night long, fell the next day upon his adversaries and routed them, establishing the crown securely on his head.

After he had won so distinguished a victory, the story goes that the king said to the shepherdess: "Ask of me what thou wilt, and even though it be the half of my kingdom, I swear I will give it thee on the instant."

"I wish no more than to go back to the keeping of my flock," replied the shepherdess. "Thou shalt keep only my frontiers," rejoined the king, and he gave her lordship over all the boundary, and bade her build a stronghold in the town nearest the borders of Castile; here dwelt the shepherdess, married to one of the king's favorites, a husband noble, gallant, valiant and, as well, lord over many fortresses and many fiefs.

The astonishing account given by Uncle Gregorio of the Moncayo gnomes, whose secret haunt was in the village fountain, set soaring anew the wild dreams of the two enamored sisters, for it formed a sequel, so to speak, to the hitherto unexplained tradition of the treasure found by the fabled shepherdess—treasure whose remembered gleam had troubled more than once their wakeful, embittered nights, flashing before their imaginations like a fragile ray of hope.

The evening following their afternoon meeting with Uncle Gregorio, all

the other girls of the village chatted in their homes about the wonderful story he had told them. Marta and Magdalena preserved an unbroken silence, and neither that evening, nor throughout the following day, did they exchange a single word on this matter, the theme of all the talk throughout the hamlet and text of all the neighbors' commentaries.

At the usual hour, Magdalena took her water-jar and said to her sister: "Shall we go to the fountain?" Marta did not answer, and Magdalena said again: "Shall we go to the fountain? If we do not hurry, the sun will have set before we are back." Marta finally replied shortly and roughly: "I don't care about going to-day." "Neither do I," rejoined Magdalena after an instant of silence during which she kept her eyes fastened on those of her sister, as if she would read in them the cause of her resolution.

III.

For nearly an hour the village girls had been back in their homes. The last glow of sunset had faded on the horizon, and the night was beginning to close in more and more darkly, when Marta and Magdalena, each avoiding the other, left the hamlet by different paths in the direction of the mysterious fountain. The fountain welled up in a hidden nook among some steep, mossy rocks at the further end of a deep grove. Now that the sounds of the day had ceased little by little, and no longer was heard the distant echo of voices from the laborers who return home in knightly fashion, mounted on their yoked oxen and trolling out songs to the accompaniment of the beam of the plough they go dragging over the ground,—now that the monotonous clang of the sheep-bells had gone beyond hearing, together with the shouts of the shepherds and the barking of their dogs gathering the flocks together,—now that there had sounded in the village-tower the last peal of the call to prayers, there reigned august that double silence of night and solitude, a silence full of strange, soft murmurs making it yet more perceptible.

Marta and Magdalena slipped through the labyrinth of the trees and, sheltered by the darkness, arrived without seeing each other at the far end of the grove. Marta knew no fear; her steps were firm and unfaltering. Magdalena trembled at the mere rustle made by her feet as they trod upon the dry leaves carpeting the ground. When the two sisters were close to the fountain, the night wind began to stir the branches of the poplars, and to their uneven, sighing whispers the springing water seemed to make answer with a steady, regular murmur.

Marta and Magdalena lent attention to those soft noises of the night,—those that flowed beneath their feet like a continuous ripple of laughter, and those that floated above their heads like a lament rising and falling only to rise again and spread through the foliage of the grove. As the hours went on, that

unceasing sound of the air and of the water began to produce in them a strange exaltation, a kind of dizziness that, clouding the eyes and humming in the ears, seemed to confuse them utterly. Then as one hears in dreams the far, vague echo of speech, they seemed to perceive, amid those nameless noises, inarticulate sounds as of a child who would call his mother and cannot; then words repeated over and over, always the same; then disconnected, inconsequent phrases, without order or meaning, and at last—at last the wind wandering among the trees, and the water leaping from rock to rock, commenced to speak.

And they spoke thus:

The Water.

Woman!—woman!—hear me!—hear me and draw near that thou mayst hear me, and I will kiss thy feet while I tremble to copy thine image in the shadowy depth of my waves. Woman!—hear how my murmurs are words.

The Wind.

Maiden!—Gentle maiden, lift thine head, let me give thy brow the kiss of peace, while I stir thy tresses. Gentle maiden, listen to me, for I, too, know how to speak and I will murmur in thine ear phrases of tenderness.

Marta.

Oh, speak! Speak, and I will understand, for my mind floats in a dizzy maze, as float those dim words of thine.

Speak, mysterious stream.

Magdalena.

I am afraid. Air of night, air of perfumes, refresh my burning brow! Tell me what may inspire me with courage, for my spirit wavers.

The Water.

I have crossed the dark hollow of the earth, I have surprised the secret of its marvellous fecundity, and I know the phenomena of its inner parts, whence springs the life to be.

My murmur lulls to sleep and awakens. Awaken thou that thou mayst comprehend it.

The Wind.

I am the air which the angels, as they traverse space, set in motion with their mighty wings. I mass up in the west the clouds that offer to the sun a bed of purple, and I shed at dawn, from the mists that vanish into drops, a pearly dew over the flowers. My sighs are a balm: open thine heart and I will flood it

with bliss.

Marta.

When for the first time I heard the murmur of a subterranean stream, not in vain did I bow myself to the earth, lending it ear. With it there went a mystery which at last it should be mine to understand.

Magdalena.

Sighs of the wind, I know you well: you used to caress me, a dreaming child, when, spent with weeping, I gave myself up to slumber, and your soft breathings would seem to me the words of a mother who sings her child to sleep.

The water ceased from speech for a few moments and made no other noise than that of water breaking on rocks. The wind was voiceless, too, and its sound was no other than the sound of blowing leaves. So passed some time, and then they spoke again, and thus they spoke:

The Water.

Since I came filtering, drop by drop, through the vein of gold in an inexhaustible mine; since I came running along a bed of silver and leaping, as over pebbles, amid innumerable sapphires and amethysts, bearing on with me, in lieu of sands, diamonds and rubies, I have joined myself in mystic union to a spirit of the earth. Enriched by his power and by the occult virtues of the precious stones and metals, saturated with whose atoms I come, I can offer thee the utmost reach of thine ambitions. I have the force of an incantation, the power of a talisman, and the virtue of the seven stones and the seven colors.

The Wind.

I come from wandering over the plain, and as the bee that returns to the hive with its booty of sweet honey, I bring with me woman's sighs, children's prayers, words of chaste love, and aromas of nard and wild lilies. I have gathered in my journey no more than fragrances and echoes of harmonies; my treasures are not material, but they give peace of soul and the vague happiness of pleasant dreams.

While her sister, drawn on and on as by a spell, was leaning over the margin of the fountain to hear better, Magdalena was instinctively moving away, withdrawing from the steep rocks in whose midst bubbled the spring.

Both had their eyes fixed, the one on the depth of the waters, the other on the depth of the sky.

And Magdalena exclaimed, seeing the astral splendors overhead: "These are the halos of the invisible angels who have us in their keeping."

At the same instant Marta was saying, seeing the reflection of the stars tremble in the clear waters of the fountain: "These are the particles of gold which the stream gathers in its mysterious course."

The fountain and the wind, after a second brief period of silence, spoke again and said:

The Water.

Trust thyself to my current, cast from thee fear as a coarse garment, and dare to cross the threshold of the unknown. I have divined that thy soul is of the essence of the higher spirits.

Envy perchance hath thrust thee out of heaven to plunge thee into the mire of mortal misery. Yet I see in thy darkened brow a seal of pride that renders thee worthy of us, spirits strong and free.—Come; I am going to teach thee magic words of such virtue that as thou speakest them the rocks will open and allure thee with the diamonds that are in their hearts, as pearls are in the shells which fishermen bring up from the bottom of the sea. Come! I will give thee treasures that thou mayst live in joy, and later, when the cell that imprisons thee is shattered, thy spirit shall be made like unto our own, which are human spirits, and all in one we shall be the motive force, the vital ray of the universe, circulating like a fluid through its subterranean arteries.

The Wind.

Water licks the earth and lives in the mud; I roam the ether and fly in limitless space. Follow the impulses of thy heart; let thy soul rise like flame and the azure spirals of smoke. Wretched is he who, having wings, descends to the depths to seek for gold, while he might mount to the heights for love and sympathy.

Live hidden as the violet, and I will give thee in a fruitful kiss the living seed of another, sister flower, and I will rend the clouds that there may not be lacking a sunbeam to illumine thy joy. Live obscure, live unheeded, and when thy spirit is set free, I will lift it on a rosy cloud up to the world of light.

Wind and wave were hushed, and there appeared the gnome.

The gnome was like a transparent pigmy, a sort of dwarf all made of light, as a Will-o-the-wisp; it laughed hugely, but without noise, and leapt from rock to rock, making one dizzy with its giddy antics. Sometimes it plunged into the water and kept on shining in the depths like a precious stone of myriad colors; again it leapt to the surface, and tossed its feet and its hands, and swung its head from one side to the other with a rapidity that was little short of prodigious.

Marta had seen the gnome and was following him with a bewildered gaze

in all his extravagant evolutions; and when the diabolical spirit darted away at last into the craggy wilds of the Moncayo, like a running flame, shaking out sparks from its hair, she felt an irresistible attraction and rushed after it in frantic chase.

Magdalena! at the same instant called the breeze, slowly withdrawing; and Magdalena, moving step by step like a sleep-walker guided in slumber by a friendly voice, followed the zephyr, which was softly blowing over the plain.

When all was done, again there was silence in the dusky grove, and the wind and the water kept on, as ever, with sounds as of murmuring and sighing.

IV.

Magdalena returned to the hamlet pale and full of amazement. They waited in vain for Marta all that night.

On the afternoon of the following day, the village girls found a broken water-jar at the margin of the fountain in the grove. It was Marta's water-jar; nothing more was ever known of her. Since then the girls go for water so early that they rise with the sun. A few have assured me that by night there has been heard, more than once, the weeping of Marta, whose spirit lives imprisoned in the fountain. I do not know what credit to give to this last part of the story, for the truth is that since that night nobody has dared penetrate into the grove to hear it after the ringing of the Ave Maria.

THE MISERERE

Some months since, while visiting the celebrated abbey of Fitero and entertaining myself by turning over a few volumes in its neglected library, I discovered, stowed away in a dark corner, two or three old books of manuscript music, covered with dust and gnawed at the edges by rats.

It was a Miserere.

I do not read music, but it attracts me so that, even though I do not understand it, I sometimes take up the score of an opera and pore over its pages for hours, looking at the groups of notes more or less crowded together, the dashes, the semi-circles, the triangles and that sort of et cetera called keys, and all this without comprehending an iota or deriving the slightest profit.

After this foolish habit of mine, I turned over the leaves of the music-books, and the first thing which attracted my attention was the fact that, although on the last page stood that Latin word so common in all compositions, *finis*, the Miserere was not concluded, for the music did not go

beyond the tenth verse of the psalm.

This it was, undoubtedly, that arrested my attention first; but as soon as I scanned the pages closely, I was still more surprised to observe that instead of the Italian words commonly used, such as *maestoso*, *allegro*, *ritardando*, *piu vivo*, *à piacere*, there were lines of very small German script written in, some of which called for things as difficult to do as this: “They crack—crack the bones, and from their marrow must the cries seem to come forth;” or this other: “The chord shrieketh, yet in unison; the tone thundereth, yet without deafening; for all that hath sound soundeth, and there is no confusion, and all is humanity that sobbeth and groaneth;” or what was certainly the most original of all, enjoined just under the last verse: “The notes are bones covered with flesh; light inextinguishable, the heavens and their harmony—force!—force and sweetness.”

“Do you know what this is?” I asked of the old friar who accompanied me, after I had half translated these lines, which seemed like phrases scribbled by a lunatic.

My aged guide then told me the legend which I now pass on to you.

I.

Many years ago, on a dark and rainy night, a pilgrim arrived at the cloister door of this abbey and begged for a little fire to dry his clothes, a morsel of bread to appease his hunger, and a shelter, however humble, till the morning, when he would resume his journey at dawn.

The lay-brother of whom this request was made placed his own meagre repast, his own poor bed and his glowing hearth at the service of the traveller, to whom, after he had recovered from his exhaustion, were put the usual questions as to the purpose of his pilgrimage and the goal to which his steps were bent.

“I am a musician,” replied the stranger. “I was born far from here, and in my own country I enjoyed a day of great renown. In my youth I made of my art a powerful weapon of seduction and I enkindled with it passions which drew me on to crime. In my old age I would use for good the talents which I have employed for evil, redeeming my soul by the very means that have brought it into danger of the judgment.”

As the enigmatic words of the unknown guest did not seem at all clear to the lay-brother, whose curiosity was now becoming aroused, he was moved to press his questions further, obtaining the following response:

“I was ever weeping in the depths of my soul for the sin that I had committed; but when I tried to pray to God for mercy, I could find no adequate

words to utter my repentance, until one day my eyes chanced to fall upon a holy book. I opened that book and on one of its pages I met with a giant cry of true contrition, a psalm of David, commencing: Miserere mei, Domine! From the instant in which I read those verses my one thought has been to find a musical expression so magnificent, so sublime, that it would suffice as a setting for the Royal Psalmist's mighty hymn of anguish. As yet I have not found it; but if I ever attain to the point of expressing what I feel in my heart, what I hear confusedly in my brain, I am sure of writing a Miserere so marvellous in beauty that the sons of men will have heard no other like unto it, so desperate in grief that, as its first strains rise to heaven, the archangels, their eyes flooded with tears, will with me cry out unto the Lord, beseeching Mercy; and the Lord will be merciful to his unhappy creature."

The pilgrim, on reaching this point in his narrative, paused for an instant, and then, heaving a sigh, took up again the thread of his story. The lay-brother, a few dependents of the abbey, and two or three shepherds from the friars' farm—these who formed the circle about the hearth—listened to him in the deepest silence.

"After travelling over all Germany," he continued, "all Italy and the greater part of this country whose sacred music is classic, I have not yet heard a Miserere that can give me my inspiration, not one,—not one, and I have heard so many that I may say I have heard them all."

"All?" broke in one of the upper shepherds. "But you have not heard, have you, the Miserere of the Mountain?"

"The Miserere of the Mountain!" exclaimed the musician with an air of amazement. "What Miserere is that?"

"Didn't I say so?" muttered the peasant under his breath, and then went on in a mysterious tone: "This Miserere, which is only heard, as chance may fall, by those who, like myself, wander day and night following the sheep through the thickets and over the rocky hills, is, in fact, a tradition, a very old tradition; yet incredible as it seems, it is no less true.

"The case is that, in the most rugged part of yonder mountain chains which bound the horizon of this valley in whose bosom the abbey stands, there used to be, many years ago—why do I say many years!—many centuries, rather, a famous monastery. This monastery, it seems, was built at his own cost by a lord with the wealth that he would naturally have left to his son, whom on his death-bed he disinherited, as a punishment for the young profligate's evil deeds.

"So far, all had gone well; but the trouble is that this son, who, from what will be seen further on, must have been the skin of the Devil, if not the Devil

himself, learning that his goods were in the possession of the monks, and that his castle had been transformed into a church, gathered together a crew of banditti, comrades of his in the ruffian life he had taken up on forsaking his father's house, and one Holy Thursday night, when the monks would be in the choir, and at the very hour and minute when they would be just beginning or would have just begun the Miserere, these outlaws set fire to the monastery, sacked the church, and willy-nilly, left not a single monk alive.

“After this atrocity, the banditti and their leader went away, whither no one knows, perhaps to hell.

“The flames reduced the monastery to ashes; of the church there still remain standing the ruins upon the hollow crag whence springs the cascade that after leaping down from rock to rock, forms the rill which comes to bathe the walls of this abbey.”

“But,”—interrupted the musician impatiently, “the Miserere?”

“Wait a while,” said the shepherd with great deliberation, “and all will be told in proper order.” Vouchsafing no further reply, he continued his story:

“The people of all the country round about were shocked at the crime; it was related with horror in the long winter evenings, handed down from father to son, and from son to grandson; but what tends most of all to keep it fresh in memory is that every year, on the anniversary of that night when the church was burned, lights are seen shining out through its shattered windows, and there is heard a sort of strange music, with mournful, terrible chants that are borne at intervals upon the gusts of wind.

“The singers are the monks, who, slain perchance before they were ready to present themselves pure of all sin at the Judgment Seat of God, still come from Purgatory to implore His mercy, chanting the Miserere.”

The group about the fire exchanged glances of incredulity; but the pilgrim, who had seemed to be vitally interested in the recital of the tradition, inquired eagerly of the narrator:

“And do you say that this marvel still takes place?”

“It will begin without fail in less than three hours, for the precise reason that this is Holy Thursday night, and the abbey clock has just struck eight.”

“How far is the monastery from here?”

“Barely a league and a half,—but what are you doing?” “Whither would you go on a night like this?” “Have you fallen from the shelter of God's hand?” exclaimed one and another as they saw the pilgrim, rising from his bench and taking his staff, leave the fireplace and move toward the door.

“Whither am I going? To hear this miraculous music, to hear the great, the true Miserere, the Miserere of those who return to the world after death, those who know what it is to die in sin.”

And so saying, he disappeared from the sight of the amazed lay-brother and the no less astonished shepherds.

The wind shrilled without and shook the doors as if a powerful hand were striving to tear them from their hinges; the rain fell in torrents, beating against the window-panes, and from time to time a lightning-flash lit up for an instant all the horizon that could be seen from there.

After the first moment of bewilderment had passed the lay-brother exclaimed:

“He is mad.”

“He is mad,” repeated the shepherds and, replenishing the fire, they gathered closely around the hearth.

II.

After walking for an hour or two, the mysterious personage, to whom they had given the degree of madman in the abbey, by following upstream the course of the rill which the story-telling shepherd had pointed out to him, reached the spot where rose the blackened, impressive ruins of the monastery.

The rain had ceased; the clouds were drifting in long, dark masses, from between whose shifting shapes there glided from time to time a furtive ray of doubtful, pallid light; and one would say that the wind, as it lashed the strong buttresses and swept with widening wings through the deserted cloisters, was groaning in its flight. Yet nothing supernatural, nothing extraordinary occurred to strike the imagination. To him who had slept more nights than one without other shelter than the ruins of an abandoned tower or a lonely castle,—to him who in his far pilgrimage had encountered hundreds on hundreds of storms, all those noises were familiar.

The drops of water which filtered through the cracks of the broken arches and fell upon the stones below with a measured sound like the ticking of a great clock; the hoots of the owl, screeching from his refuge beneath the stone nimbus of an image still standing in a niche of the wall; the stir of the reptiles that, wakened from their lethargy by the tempest, thrust out their misshapen heads from the holes where they sleep, or crawled among the wild mustard and the briars that grow at the foot of the altar, rooted in the crevices between the sepulchral slabs that form the pavement of the church,—all those strange and mysterious murmurs of the open country, of solitude and of night, came perceptibly to the ear of the pilgrim who, seated on the mutilated statue of a

tomb, was anxiously awaiting the hour when the marvellous event should take place.

But still the time went by and nothing more was heard; those myriad confused noises kept on sounding and combining with one another in a thousand different ways, but themselves always the same.

“Ah, they have played a joke on me!” thought the musician; but at that moment he heard a new sound, a sound inexplicable in such a place, like that made by a clock a few seconds before striking the hour, a sound of whirring wheels, of stretching cords, of machinery secretly setting to work and making ready to use its mysterious mechanic vitality, and a bell rang out the hour— one, two, three, up to eleven.

In the ruined church there was no bell nor clock, not even a bell-tower.

The last peal, lessening from echo to echo, had not yet died away; the vibration was still perceptible, trembling in the air, when the granite canopies which overhung the sculptures, the marble steps of the altars, the hewn stones of the ogee arches, the fretted screens of the choir, the festoons of trefoil on the cornices, the black buttresses of the walls, the pavements, the vaulted ceiling, the entire church, began to be lighted by no visible agency, nor was there in sight torch or lamp or candle to shed abroad that unwonted radiance.

It suggested a skeleton over whose yellow bones spreads that phosphoric gas which burns and puts forth fumes in the darkness like a blue light, restless and terrible.

Everything seemed to be in motion, but with that galvanic movement which lends to death contractions that parody life, instantaneous movement more horrible even than the inertia of the corpse which stirs with that unknown force. Stones reunited themselves to stones; the altar, whose broken fragments had before been scattered about in disorder, rose intact, as if the artificer had just given it the last blow of the chisel, and simultaneously with the altar rose the ruined chapels, the shattered capitals and the great, crumbled series of arches which, crossing and interlacing at caprice, formed with their columns a labyrinth of porphyry.

As soon as the church was rebuilt there grew upon the hearing a distant harmony which might have been taken for the wailing of the wind, but which was a chorus of far-off, solemn voices, that seemed to come from the depths of the earth and rise to the surface little by little, continually growing more distinct.

The daring pilgrim began to fear, but with his fear still battled his passion for the bygone and the marvellous, and made valiant by the strength of his desire, he left the tomb on which he was resting, leaned over the brink of the

abyss, amid whose rocks leapt the torrent, rushing over the precipice with an incessant and terrifying thunder, and his hair rose with horror.

Ill wrapped in the tatters of their habits, their cowls, beneath whose folds the dark eye-cavities of the skulls contrasted with the fleshless jaws and the white teeth, drawn forward over their heads, he saw the skeletons of the monks who had been thrown from the battlements of the church down that headlong steep, emerging from the depth of the waters and, clutching with the long fingers of their bony hands at the fissures in the rocks, clamber over them up to the brink, chanting in low, sepulchral voice, but with a heartrending intonation of anguish, the first verse of David's Psalm:

Miserere mei, Domine, secundum magnam misericordiam tuam!

When the monks reached the peristyle of the church they arranged themselves in two rows and, entering, went in procession to the choir where they knelt in their places, while with voices louder and yet more solemn they continued to intone the verses of the psalm. The music sounded in accompaniment to their voices; that music was the distant roll of the thunder which sank into murmurs as the tempest subsided; it was the blowing of the wind which groaned in the hollow of the mountain; it was the monotonous splash of the cascade falling down the crag; and the drip of the filtered waterdrops, and the hoot of the hidden owl, and the gliding sound of the uneasy reptiles. All this was in the music, and something more that cannot be expressed nor scarcely conceived,—something more that seemed like the echo of an organ accompanying the verses of the Royal Psalmist's giant hymn of contrition, with notes and chords as tremendous as the awful words.

The service proceeded; the musician who witnessed it, absorbed and terrified as he was, believed himself to be outside the actual world, living in that fantastic region of dreams where all things re clothe themselves in phenomenal and alien forms.

A terrible shock came to rouse him from that stupor which was clogging all the faculties of his mind. His nerves sprang to the thrill of a mighty emotion, his teeth chattered, shaking with a tremor he could in no wise repress, and the chill penetrated to the marrow of his bones.

At that instant the monks were intoning those dread words of the Miserere:

In iniquitatibus conceptus sum; et in peccatis concepit me mater mea.

As the thunder of this verse went rolling in sonorous echo from vault to vault, there arose a terrible outcry which seemed a wail of agony breaking from all humanity for its sense of sin, a horrible wail made up of all the laments of the unfortunate, all the shrieks of despair, all the blasphemies of the impious, a monstrous consonance, fit interpreter of those who live in sin and

were conceived in iniquity.

The chant went on, now sad and deep, now like a sunbeam which breaks through the dark storm cloud, succeeding the lightning-flash of terror by another flash of joy, until by grace of a sudden transformation the church stood resplendent, bathed in celestial light; the skeletons of the monks were again clothed in their flesh, about their brows shone lustrous aureoles, the roof vanished and above was seen heaven like a sea of light open to the gaze of the righteous.

Seraphim, archangels, angels and all the heavenly hierarchy accompanied with a hymn of glory this verse, which then rose sublime to the throne of the Lord like the rhythmical notes of a trumpet, like a colossal spiral of sonorous incense:

Auditui meo dabis gaudium et laetitiam, et exultabunt ossa humiliata.

At this point the dazzling brightness blinded the pilgrim's eyes, his temples throbbed violently, there was a roaring in his ears, he fell senseless to the ground and heard no more.

III.

On the following day, the peaceful monks of the Abbey of Fitero, to whom the lay-brother had given an account of the strange visit of the night before, saw the unknown pilgrim, pallid and like a man beside himself, entering their doors.

“Did you hear the Miserere at last?” the lay-brother asked him with a certain tinge of irony, slyly casting a glance of intelligence at his superiors.

“Yes,” replied the musician.

“And how did you like it?”

“I am going to write it. Give me a refuge in your house,” he continued, addressing the abbot, “a refuge and bread for a few months, and I will leave you an immortal work of art, a Miserere which shall blot out my sins from the sight of God, eternize my memory, and with it the memory of this abbey.”

The monks, out of curiosity, counselled the abbot to grant his request; the abbot, for charity, though he believed the man a lunatic, finally consented; and the musician, thus installed in the monastery, began his work.

Night and day he labored with unremitting zeal. In the midst of his task he would pause and appear to be listening to something which sounded in his imagination; his pupils would dilate and he would spring from his seat exclaiming: “That is it; so; so; no doubt about it—so!” And he would go on writing notes with a feverish haste which more than once made those who kept

him under secret observation wonder.

He wrote the first verses, and those following to about the middle of the Psalm; but when he had written the last verse that he had heard upon the mountain, it was impossible for him to proceed.

He made one, two, one hundred, two hundred rough drafts; all in vain. His music was not like the music already written. Sleep fled from his eyelids, he lost his appetite, fever seized upon his brain, he went mad, and died, at last, without being able to finish the Miserere, which, as a curiosity, the monks treasured till his death, and even yet preserve in the archives of the abbey.

When the old man had made an end of telling me this story, I could not refrain from turning my eyes again to the dusty, ancient manuscript of the Miserere, which still lay upon one of the tables.

In peccatis concepit me mater mea.

These were the words on the page before me, seeming to mock me with their notes, their keys and their scrawls unintelligible to lay-brothers in music.

I would have given a world to be able to read them.

Who knows if they may not be mere nonsense?

STRANGE

I.

We were taking tea in the house of a lady who is a friend of mine, and the talk turned upon the social dramas which develop from act to act, unheeded of the world,—dramas with whose leading characters we have been acquainted, if indeed we have not ourselves played a part in one or another of their scenes.

Among numerous other persons whom I do not remember, there was a girl of the blonde type, fair and slender, who, if she had had a lapful of flowers in place of the blear-eyed little dog that growled half hidden in the wide folds of her skirt, might have been compared without exaggeration to Shakespeare's Ophelia.

So pure was the white of her forehead, the azure of her eyes.

Conversing with the fair girl was a young man, who stood with one hand resting on the causeuse of blue velvet where she sat and the other caressing the precious trinkets of his gold chain. In his affected pronunciation a slight foreign accent was noticeable, despite the fact that his look and bearing were

as Spanish as those of the Cid or Bernardo del Carpio.

A gentleman of mature years, tall, thin, of distinguished and courteous manners, who seemed seriously preoccupied with the operation of sweetening to the exact point his cup of tea, completed the group nearest the fireplace, in whose warmth I sat down to tell this human history. It seems like a fable, but it is not; one could make a book of it; I have done so several times in imagination. Nevertheless, I will tell it in few words, since for him to whom it is given to comprehend it, these few will be more than enough.

Andrés, for so the hero of my tale was called, was one of those men whose hearts abound with feeling for which they have found no outlet, and with love that has no object on which to spend itself.

An orphan almost from his birth, he was left in the care of relatives. I do not know the details of his childhood; I can only say that whenever it was mentioned, his face would cloud and he would exclaim, with a sigh: "That is over now."

We all say the same, sadly recalling bygone joys. But was this the explanation of his words? I repeat that I do not know; but I suspect not.

As soon as he was grown, he launched out into the world. Though I would not calumniate it, the fact remains that the world for the poor, and especially for a certain class of the poor, is not a Paradise nor anything like it. Andrés was, as the saying goes, one of those people who rise, most days, with nothing to look forward to but twenty-four hours more. Judge then, my readers, what would be the state of a spirit all idealism, all love, put to the no less difficult than prosaic task of seeking our daily bread.

Yet sometimes, sitting on the edge of his lonely bed, his elbows on his knees and his head between his hands, he would exclaim:

"If I only had something to love with all my heart! A wife, a horse, even a dog!"

As he had not a copper to spare, it was not possible for him to get anything,—not any object on which to satisfy his hunger to love. This waxed to such a point that in its acute attacks he came to feel an affection for the wretched closet where he slept, the scanty furniture that met his needs, his very landlady, that patron saint who was his evil genius.

This is not at all surprising; Josephus relates that during the siege of Jerusalem hunger reached such a point that mothers devoured their children.

There came a day when he was able to secure a very small living wage. The evening of that day, when he was returning to his boarding-house, on crossing a narrow street he heard a sort of wail, like the crying of a new-born

child. He had taken but a few steps further after hearing those doleful sounds, when he exclaimed, stopping short:

“What the deuce is that?”

And he touched with the toe of his shoe a soft object that moved, and fell again to mewling and whining. It was one of those new-born puppies that people cast out to the mercy of the rubbish heap.

“Providence has placed it in my path,” said Andrés to himself, picking it up and wrapping it in the skirt of his coat; and he carried it to his miserable lodging.

“What now!” grumbled the landlady on seeing him enter with the puppy; “all we needed was this fresh nuisance in the house. Take it back this minute to where you found it, or else look up new quarters for the two of you to-morrow.”

The next day Andrés was turned out of the house, and in the course of two or three months he left some two hundred more, for the same reason. But for all these inconveniences, and a thousand others which it is impossible to detail, he was richly compensated by the intelligence and affection of the dog, with whom he diverted himself as with a person in his long hours of solitude and ennui. They ate together, they enjoyed their siestas together, and together they would take a turn in the Ronda, or go to walk along the Carabanchel road.

Evening gatherings, fashionable promenades, theatres, cafés, places where dogs are not allowed or would be in the way, were forbidden to our hero, who sometimes exclaimed from the fulness of his heart, as he responded to the caresses of his very own:

“Doggy mine! you can do everything but talk.”

II.

It would be wearisome to explain how, but it came to pass that Andrés somewhat bettered his position, and seeing that he had money in hand, he said:

“If I only had a wife! But having a wife is very expensive. Men like me, before choosing a bride, should have a paradise to offer her, and a paradise in Madrid is worth as much as a man’s eye.—If I could buy a horse! A horse! There is no animal more noble or more beautiful. How he would love my dog! what merry times they would have with each other, and I with both!”

One afternoon he went to the bullfight, and before the entertainment began, he unpremeditatedly strolled out into the court-yard, where the horses who had to take part in the contest were waiting, already saddled.

I do not know whether my readers have ever had the curiosity to go and

see them. For myself, without claiming to be as tender-hearted as the protagonist of this tale, I can assure you that I have often had a mind to buy them all. So great was the pity that I felt for them.

Andrés could not fail to experience a most grievous sensation on finding himself in this place. Some of the horses, with drooping heads, creatures all skin and bone, their manes rough and dirty, were standing motionless, awaiting their turn, as if they had a foreboding of the dreadful death which would put an end, within a few hours, to that miserable life of theirs; others, half blind, were sniffing about for the rack and eating, or, tearing the ground with the hoof and snorting wildly, were struggling to pull themselves loose and flee from the peril which they scented with horror. And all those animals had been young and beautiful. What aristocratic hands had patted their necks! What affectionate voices had urged on their speed! And now all was blows from one side, oaths from the other, and death at last, death in terrible agony accompanied by jests and hisses!

“If they think at all,” said Andrés, “what will these animals think at the core of their dim intelligence, when in the middle of the ring they bite their tongues and expire with a frightful spasm? Truly the ingratitude of man is sometimes inconceivable.”

He was startled out of those reflections by the rough voice of one of the picadores, who was swearing and cursing while he tested the legs of one of the horses, striking the butt-end of his lance against the wall. The horse did not seem entirely contemptible; apparently it was crazy or had some mortal disease.

Andrés thought of buying it. As for the cost, it ought not to cost much; but how about its keep? The picador plunged the spur into its flank and started to ride toward the gate of the ring; our youth wavered for an instant and then stopped him. How he did it, I do not know; but in less than a quarter of an hour he had induced the horseman to leave the beast behind, had hunted up the contractor, made his bargain for the horse and taken it away.

I suppose it is superfluous to say that on that afternoon he did not see the bullfight.

He led off the horse in triumph; but the horse, in fact, was or appeared to be crazy.

“Use plenty of stick on him,” said one authority.

“Don’t give him much to eat,” advised a blacksmith.

The horse was still unruly. “Bah!” at last exclaimed his owner. “Let him eat what he likes and do as he chooses.” The horse was not old, and now

began to fatten and grow more docile. It is true that he still had his whims, and that nobody but Andrés could mount him; but his master said: "So I shall not be teased to lend him; and as for his oddities, each of us will get accustomed to those of the other." And they came to such a good understanding that Andrés knew when the horse felt like doing a thing and when not, and as for the horse, the voice of his master was enough to make him take a leap, stand still, or set off at a gallop, swift as a hurricane.

Of the dog we need say nothing; he came to be so friendly with his new comrade that neither could go out, even to drink, without the other. From this time on, when Andrés set off at a gallop in a cloud of dust on the Carabanchel road, with his dog frisking along beside him, dashing ahead to turn back and hunt for him, or letting him pass to scamper up and overtake him, he believed himself the happiest of men.

Time went by; our young man was rich, or almost rich.

One day, after a long gallop, he alighted, tired out, near a tree and stretched himself in its shade.

It was a spring day, bright and blue,—one of those days in which men breathe voluptuously the warm air impregnated with passion, in which the blowing of the wind comes to the ear like distant harmonies, in which the clear horizons are outlined in gold, and there float before our eyes shining motes of I know not what, motes like transparent forms that follow us, encompass us and intoxicate us with sadness and with happiness at once.

"I dearly love these two beings," exclaimed Andrés as he reclined there stroking his dog with one hand and with the other giving to his horse a handful of grass, "dearly; but yet there is a vacancy in my heart which has never been filled; I still have it in me to lavish a love greater, holier, purer. Decidedly I need a wife."

At that moment there passed along the road a young girl with a water-jar upon her head.

Andrés was not thirsty, but yet he begged a drink of water. The girl stopped to offer it to him, and did so with such gentle grace that our youth comprehended perfectly one of the most patriarchal episodes of the Bible.

"What is your name?" he asked when he had drunk.

"Placida."

"And what do you do with yourself?"

"I am the daughter of a merchant who died ruined and persecuted for his political opinions. After his death, my mother and I retired to a hamlet, where we get on very badly with a pension of three reales [fifteen cents a day] for all

our living. My mother is ill, and everything comes on me.”

“And why haven’t you married?”

“I don’t know; in the village they say that I am good for nothing about work, that I am very delicate, very much the señorita.”

The girl, with a courteous good-bye, moved away.

While she was still in sight, Andrés watched her retreating form in silence; when she was lost to view, he said with the satisfaction of one who solves a problem:

“This is the woman for me.”

He mounted his horse and, followed by his dog, took his way to the village. He promptly made the acquaintance of the mother and, almost as soon, utterly lost his heart to the daughter. When at the end of a few months she was left an orphan, he married her, a man in love with his wife, which is one of the greatest blessings life affords.

To marry, and to set up housekeeping in a country mansion situated in one of the most picturesque spots of his native land, was the work of a few days.

When he saw himself in this residence, rich, with his wife, his dog and his horse, he had to rub his eyes; he thought he must be dreaming. So happy, so perfectly happy was poor Andrés.

III.

So he lived for a period of several years, in divine bliss, when one afternoon he thought he noticed that some one was prowling about his house, and later he surprised a man fitting his eye to the key-hole of one of the garden-doors.

“There are robbers about,” he said. And he determined to inform the nearest town, where there was a brace of civil guards.

“Where are you going?” asked his wife.

“To the town.”

“What for?”

“To inform the civil guards that I suspect some one is prowling about our house.”

When his wife heard that, she paled slightly. He, giving her a kiss, continued:

“I am going on foot, for it is not far. Good-bye till I come again.”

On passing through the court-yard to reach the gate, he stepped into the stable a moment, looked his horse over and, patting him, said:

“Good-bye, old fellow, good-bye; to-day you shall rest, for yesterday I put you to your paces.”

The horse, who was accustomed to go out every day with his master, whinnied sadly on hearing him depart.

When Andrés was about to leave the premises, the dog began to frolic for joy.

“No, you are not coming with me,” he exclaimed, speaking as if the dog would understand. “When you go to the town, you bark at the boys and chase the hens, and some fine day somebody will give you such a blow that you will have no spirit left to go back for another. Don’t let him out until I am gone,” he continued, addressing a servant, and he shut the gate that the dog might not follow him.

He had taken the turn in the road before he ceased hearing the prolonged howls.

He went to the town, despatched his business, had a pleasant half-hour with the alcalde, chatting of this and that, and returned home. On reaching the neighborhood of his estate, he was greatly surprised that the dog did not come out to welcome him, the dog that on other occasions, as if aware of his movements, would meet him half way down the road.—He whistles—no response! He enters the outer gates. Not a servant! “What the deuce is the meaning of this?” he exclaims disquieted, and proceeds to the house.

Arrived, he enters the court. The first sight that meets his eyes is the dog stretched in a pool of blood at the stable door. A few pieces of cloth scattered over the ground, some threads still hanging from his jaws, covered with crimson foam, witness that he made a good defence and that in the defence he had received the wounds so thick upon him.

Andrés calls him by his name; the dying dog half opens his eyes, tries in vain to get upon his feet, feebly wags his tail, licks the hand that caresses him, and dies.

“My horse! where is my horse?” then exclaimed Andrés with a voice hoarse and stifled by emotion, as he saw the stall empty and the halter broken.

He dashes thence like a madman; he calls his wife,—no answer; his servants,—nothing. Beside himself, he rushes over the whole house,—vacant, abandoned. Again he goes out to the street, sees the hoof-marks of his horse, his own,—no doubt of it,—for he knows, or thinks he knows, even the tracks of his cherished animal.

“I understand it all,” he says, as if illumined by a sudden idea. “The robbers have taken advantage of my absence to accomplish their design, and they are carrying off my wife to exact of me for her ransom a great sum of money. Money! my blood, my soul’s salvation, would I give for her.—My poor dog!” he exclaims, returning to look at him, and then he starts forth running like a man out of his wits, following the direction of the hoof-prints.

And he ran, he ran without resting for an instant after those tracks; one hour, two, three.

“Have you seen,” he asked of everybody, “a man on horseback with a woman on the crupper?”

“Yes,” they answered.

“Which way did they go?”

“That way.”

And Andrés would gather fresh force and keep on running.

The night commenced to fall. To the same question he had ever the same reply; and he ran, and he ran, until at last he discerned a village, and near the entrance, at the foot of a cross which marked the point where the road divided into two, he saw a group of people, laborers, old men, boys, who were regarding with curiosity something that he could not distinguish.

He arrives, puts the same question as ever, and one of the group says:

“Yes, we have had sight of that pair; look! for a clearer trace see the horse that carried them, who fell here ruptured with running.”

Andrés turns his eyes in the direction they indicated, and indeed sees his horse, his beloved horse, which some men of the place were preparing to flay for the sake of its hide. He could scarcely resist his grief, but recovering himself, he turned again to the thought of his wife.

“And tell me,” he exclaimed impetuously; “how you failed to render aid to that woman in distress.”

“And didn’t we aid her!” said another of the circle. “Didn’t I sell them another saddle-horse so that they might press on their way with all the speed that seemed so important to them!”

“But,” interrupted Andrés, “that woman was stolen away by force; that man is a bandit, who, regardless of her tears and her laments, drags her I know not whither.”

The sly rustics exchanged glances and compassionate smiles.

“Not so, señorito! what tales are you telling us?” slowly continued the man

with whom he was talking. “Stolen away by force! But how if it were she herself who said with the greatest earnestness: ‘Quick, quick, let us flee from this district! I shall not be at rest until it is out of my sight forever.’ ”

Andrés comprehended all; a cloud of blood passed before his eyes—eyes which shed no tear, and he fell to the earth prone as the dead.

He went mad; in a few days, he died.

There was an autopsy; no organic trouble was found. Ah! if it were possible to dissect the soul, how many deaths similar to this would be explained!

“And did he actually die of that?” exclaimed the youth, who was still playing with the charms that hung from his watch chain, as I finished my story.

I glanced at him as if to say: “Does it seem to you so little?” He continued with a certain air of profundity: “Strange! I know what it is to suffer; when in the last races my Herminia stumbled, killed the jockey and broke a leg, the misfortune of that animal vexed me horribly; but, frankly, not so much as that—not so much as that.”

I was still regarding him with astonishment, when I heard a melodious and slightly veiled voice, the voice of the girl with the azure eyes.

“Strange, indeed! I love my Medoro dearly,” she said, dropping a kiss on the snout of the sluggish and blear-eyed lap-dog, who gave a little grunt, “but if he should die, or somebody should kill him, I do not believe that I would go mad nor anything like it.”

My astonishment was passing into stupefaction; these people had not understood me, nor wished to understand me.

Finally I turned to the gentleman who was taking tea, for at his years he might be expected to be somewhat more reasonable.

“And you? how does it seem to you?” I asked.

“I will tell you,” he replied. “I am married; I loved my wife; I have, it seems to me, a regard for her still; there came up between us a domestic unpleasantness, that by its publicity forced me to demand satisfaction; a duel followed; I had the good luck to wound my adversary, an excellent fellow, as full of jest and wit as any man alive, with whom I am still in the habit of taking coffee occasionally in the Iberia. Since then I have ceased to live with my wife, and have devoted myself to travel.—When I am in Madrid, I stay with her as a friend visiting a friend; and all this has taken place without any violent passions, without any great emotions, without any extraordinary sufferings. After this slight sketch of my character and of my life, what shall I

say to you about these phenomenal explosions of feeling except that all this seems to me strange, very strange?”

When he had finished speaking, the blonde girl and the young man who was making love to her looked over together at an album of Gabarni's caricatures. In those few moments the elder gentleman treated himself with exquisite enjoyment to his third cup of tea.

When I called to mind that on hearing the outcome of my story they all had said—Strange!—I for my part exclaimed to myself—Natural!

WITHERED LEAVES

The sun had set. The wheeling masses of cloud were hastening to heap themselves one above another in the distant horizon. The cold wind of autumn evenings was whirling the withered leaves about my feet.

I was sitting by the side of a road [the road to the cemetery] where ever there return fewer than those who go.

I do not know of what I was thinking, if, indeed, I was just then thinking of anything at all. My soul was trembling on the point of soaring into space, as the bird trembles and flutters its wings before taking flight.

There are moments in which, thanks to a series of abstractions, the spirit withdraws from its environment and, self-absorbed, analyzes and comprehends the mysterious phenomena of the inner life of man.

There are other moments in which the soul slips free from the flesh, loses its personality, mingles with the elements of nature, relates itself to their mode of being and translates their incomprehensible language.

In one of these latter moments was I, when, alone and in the midst of a clear tract of level ground, I heard talking near me.

The speakers were two withered leaves, and this, a little more or less exact, was their strange dialogue:

“Whence comest thou, sister?”

“I come from riding on the whirlwind, enveloped in the cloud of dust and of withered leaves, our companions, all the length of the interminable plain. And thou?”

“I drifted for a time with the current of the river, until the strong south wind snatched me up from the mud and reeds of the bank.”

“And whither bound?”

“I know not. Doth perchance the wind that driveth me know?”

“Woe is me! Who would have said that we should end like this, faded and withered, dragging ourselves along the ground—we who lived clothed in color and light, dancing in the air?”

“Rememberest thou the beautiful days of our budding—that peaceful morning when, at the breaking of the swollen sheath which had served us for a cradle, we unfolded to the gentle kiss of the sun, like a fan of emeralds?”

“Oh, how sweet it was to be swayed at that height by the breeze, drinking in through every pore the air and the light!”

“Oh, how beautiful it was to watch the flowing water of the river that lapped the twisted roots of the ancient tree which sustained us, that limpid, transparent water, reflecting like a mirror the azure of the sky, so that we seemed to live suspended between two blue abysses!”

“With what delight we used to peep over the green foliage to see ourselves pictured in the tremulous stream!”

“How we would sing together, imitating the murmur of the breeze and following the rhythm of the waves!”

“Brilliant insects would flit about us, spreading their gauzy wings.”

“And the white butterflies and blue dragon-flies, gyrating in strange circles through the air, would alight for a moment on our dentate edges to tell each other the secrets of that mysterious love lasting but an instant and burning up their lives.”

“Each of us was a note in the concert of the groves.”

“Each of us was a tone in their harmony of color.”

“In the silver nights when the moonbeams glided over the mountain tops, dost remember how we would chat in low voices amid the translucent shadows?”

“And we would relate in soft whispers stories of the sylphs who swing in the golden threads that the spiders hang from tree to tree.”

“Until we hushed our murmurous speech to listen enraptured to the plaints of the nightingale, who had chosen our tree for her throne of song.”

“And so sad and so tender were her lamenting strains that, though filled with joy to hear her, the dawn found us weeping.”

“Oh, how sweet were those tears which the dew of night would shed upon

us, and which would sparkle with all the colors of the rainbow in the first gleam of dawn!”

“Then came the jocund flock of linnets to pour into the grove life and sound with the gleeful, gay confusion of their songs.”

“And one enamoured pair hung close to us their round nest of straws and feathers.”

“We served to shelter the little ones from the troublesome rain-drops in the summer tempests.”

“We served as a canopy to shield them from the fierce rays of the sun.”

“Our life passed like a golden dream from which we had no thought there could be an awakening.”

“One beautiful afternoon, when everything around us seemed to smile, when the setting sun was kindling the west and crimsoning the clouds, and from the earth, touched by the evening damp, were rising exhalations of life and the perfumes of flowers, two lovers stayed their steps on the river bank at the foot of our parent tree.”

“Never will that memory fade! She was young, scarcely more than a child, beautiful and pallid. He asked her tenderly, ‘Why weepest thou?’ ‘Forgive this involuntary selfishness,’ she replied, brushing away a tear; ‘I weep for myself; I weep for the life which is slipping from me. When the sky is crowned with sunshine and the earth is clothed with verdure and flowers, and the wind is laden with perfumes, with the songs of birds and with far-off harmonies, and when one loves and feels herself beloved, life is good.’ ‘And why wilt thou not live?’ he insisted, deeply moved, clasping her hands close in his. ‘Because I cannot. When these leaves, which whisper in unison above our heads, fall withered, I, too, shall die, and the wind will some day bear away their dust, and mine—whither, who knoweth?’ ”

“I heard, and thou did’st hear, and we shuddered and were silent. We must wither! We must die, and be whirled about by the rushing wind! Mute and full of terror we remained even till nightfall. O, how terrible was that night!”

“For the first time the love-lorn nightingale failed at the tryst which she had enchanted with her mournful lays.”

“Soon the birds flew away, and with them their little ones now clothed with plumage, and only the nest remained, rocking slowly and sadly, like the empty cradle of a dead child.”

“And the white butterflies and the blue dragonflies fled, leaving their place to obscure insects which came to eat away our fibre and to deposit in our bosoms their nauseous larvae.”

“Oh, and how we shivered, shrinking from the icy touch of the night frosts!”

“We lost our color and freshness.”

“We lost our pliancy and grace, and what before had been to us like the soft sound of kisses, like the murmur of love words, now became a harsh, dry call, unwelcome, dismal.”

“And at last, dislodged, we flew away.”

“Trodden under foot by the careless passers-by, whirled incessantly from one point to another in the dust and the mire, I accounted myself happy when I could rest for an instant in the deep rut of a road.”

“I have revolved unceasingly in the grip of the turbid stream; and in the course of my long travels I saw, alone, in mourning garb and with clouded brow, gazing absently upon the running waters and the withered leaves which shared and marked their movement, one of those two lovers whose words gave us our first presentment of death.”

“She, too, has lost her hold on life, and perchance will sleep in an open, new-made grave over which I paused a moment.”

“Ah, she sleeps and rests at last; but we, when shall we come to the end of our long journey?”

“Never!—Even now the wind, which has given us a brief repose, blows once more, and I feel myself constrained to rise from the ground and follow. Adieu, sister!”

“Adieu!”

**

The wind, quiet for a moment, whistled again, and the leaves rose in a whirling confusion, to be lost afar in the darkness of the night.

And then there came to me a thought that I cannot remember and that, even though I were to remember it, I could find no words to utter.

THE SET OF EMERALDS

We were pausing on the Street of San Jerónimo, in front of Durán’s and were reading the title of a book by Mery.

As my attention was called to that extraordinary title, and as I spoke of it to

the friend who accompanied me, he, leaning lightly on my arm, exclaimed: "The day could not be more beautiful. Let us take a turn by the Fuente Castellana. While we are walking, I will tell you a story in which I am the principal hero. You will see how, after hearing it, you will not only understand this title, but will find its explanation the easiest thing in the world."

I had plenty to do; but as I am always glad of an excuse for doing nothing, I accepted the proposition, and my friend began his story as follows:

"Some time ago, one night when I had set out to stroll the streets, without any more definite object,—after having examined all the collections of prints and photographs in the shop-windows, after having chosen in imagination in front of the Savoyard store the bronzes with which I would adorn my house, if I had one, after having made a minute survey, in fine, of all the objects of art and luxury exposed to public view upon the shelves behind the lighted plate-glass, I stopped a moment before Samper's.

"I do not know how long it was that I remained there, adorning, in fancy, all the pretty women I know, one with a collar of pearls, another with a cross of diamonds, another with ear-rings of amethyst and gold. I was deliberating at that point to whom to offer—who would be worthy of it—a magnificent set of emeralds as rich as it was elegant, which among all the other jewelled ornaments claimed attention for the beauty and clearness of its stones, when I heard at my side the softest, sweetest voice exclaim with an accent which could not fail to put my fancies to flight: 'What beautiful emeralds!'

"I turned my head in the direction of that voice, a woman's voice, for only so could it have left such an echo, and I confronted, in fact, a woman supremely beautiful. I could look at her only a moment, and yet her loveliness made on me a profound impression.

"At the door of the jeweller's shop from which she had come out, there was a carriage. She was accompanied by a lady of mature age, too young to be her mother, too old to be her friend. When both had entered the coupé, the horses started, and I stood like a fool staring after her until she was lost to sight.

" 'What beautiful emeralds!' she had said. The emeralds were indeed superb. That collar, around her snowy neck, would look like a garland of young almond leaves besprent with dew; that brooch upon her bosom, a lotus-flower when it sways on its pulsing wave, crowned with foam. 'What beautiful emeralds!' Would she like them, perhaps? And if she would like them, why not have them? She must be rich, a lady of high rank. She has an elegant carriage, and on the door of that carriage I thought I saw a crest. Doubtless in the life of this woman there is some mystery.

“These were the thoughts that agitated my mind after I lost sight of her,—when not even the sound of her carriage wheels came to my ears. And truly there was in her life, apparently so peaceful and enviable, a horrible mystery. I found it out—I will not tell you how.

“Married when a mere child to a profligate who, after squandering his own fortune, had sought a profitable alliance, as the best means of squandering another’s, that woman, a model of wives and mothers, had refused to gratify the least of her caprices that she might save some part of her inheritance for her daughter and that she might maintain in outer appearance the dignity of her house at the height which it had always held in Spanish society.

“People tell of some women’s great sacrifices. I believe that, considering their peculiar organization, there is none comparable with the sacrifice of an ardent desire in which vanity and coquetry are concerned.

“From the time when I penetrated the mystery of her life, all my aspirations, through one of these freakish enthusiasms of my character, were reduced to this only,—to get possession of that marvellous set of jewels and to give it to her in such a way that she could not refuse it, nor even know from whose hand it might have come.

“Among other difficulties which I at once encountered in the realization of my idea, assuredly not the least was that I had not money, neither much nor little, to buy the gems.

“Yet I did not despair.

“ ‘Where shall I look for money?’ I said to myself, and I remembered the marvels of *The Thousand and One Nights*; those cabalistic words at whose echo the earth opened and revealed hidden treasures; those rods of such rare virtue that, when rocks were smitten by them, there bubbled from the clefts not a spring of water, which was a small miracle, but rubies, topazes, pearls and diamonds.

“Being ignorant of the words and not knowing where to find a rod, I decided at last to write a book and sell it. To get money out of the rock of a publisher is nothing short of miraculous; but I did it.

“I wrote a book of original quality, which few people liked, as only one person could understand it; for the rest it was merely a collection of phrases.

“The book was entitled *The Set of Emeralds*, and I signed it with my initials only.

“Since I am not Victor Hugo, nor anybody of the sort, I need not tell you that I did not get for my novel what the author of *Notre Dame de Paris* had for his latest; but what with one thing and another I gathered together a sufficient

sum to begin my plan of campaign.

“The emeralds in question would be worth from fourteen to fifteen thousand dollars, and toward the purchase I now counted up the respectable sum of one hundred and fifty. It was necessary, then, to game.

“I gamed; and I gamed with such good sense and good fortune that in a single night I won what I needed.

“Apropos of gambling, I have made an observation in which every day has confirmed me more and more. If one puts down his money with the full expectation of winning, he wins. One must not approach the green table with the hesitancy of a man who is going to try his luck, but with the coolness of him who comes to take his own. For myself, I can assure you that I should have been as much surprised to lose that night as if a substantial bank had refused me money on a check with Rothschild’s signature.

“The next day I went to Samper’s. Will you believe that in throwing down upon the jeweller’s counter that handful of many-colored notes, those notes which represented for me at least a year of pleasure, many beautiful women, a journey to Italy, and champagne and cigars at discretion, that I wavered a moment? Then don’t believe it. I threw them down with the same nonchalance—do I say nonchalance?—with the same satisfaction with which Buckingham, breaking the thread on which they were strung, strewed with pearls the carpet of his beloved’s palace.

“I bought the jewels and carried them to my lodgings. You can picture nothing more glorious than that set of emeralds. No wonder the women sigh now and then as they pass in front of those shops which present to their eyes such glittering temptations; no wonder that Mephistopheles selected a collar of precious stones as the object most likely to seduce Marguerite. I, man that I am, could have wished for an instant to live in the Orient and be one of those fabulous monarchs who wreath their brows with a coil of gold and gems, that I might adorn myself with those magnificent emerald leaves and diamond flowers.

“A gnome, to buy a kiss from a sylph, would not have been able to find among the immense treasures hoarded in the avaricious heart of the earth and known to those elves alone, an emerald larger, clearer, more beautiful than that which sparkled, fastening a knot of rubies, in the centre of the diadem.

“Now that I had the gems, I began to think out a way of placing them in possession of the woman for whom they were intended.

“At the end of several days, I prevailed upon one of her maids—thanks to the money that I still had left—to promise me that she, when unobserved, would place the set in the jewel-box; and to assure myself that she should not,

by her conduct, betray the source of the gift, I gave her what money was left over, several hundred dollars, on condition that she, as soon as she had put the emeralds in the place agreed upon, should leave the capital and remove to Barcelona. This, in fact, she did.

“Judge for yourself what must have been the surprise of her mistress when, after noticing her sudden disappearance and suspecting that perhaps she had fled from the house with something stolen, she found in the jewel-box the magnificent set of emeralds. Who had divined her thought? Who had been able to surmise that she still, from time to time, remembered those gems with a sigh?

“The weeks and the months passed on. I knew that she kept my gift; I knew that great efforts had been made to discover whence it came; and yet I had never seen her adorned with it.—Did she scorn the offering? ‘Ah!’ I said, ‘if she knew all the merit of that gift! if she knew that its desert is scarcely surpassed by the gift of that lover who pawned his cloak in winter to buy a nosegay! Does she perhaps think that it comes from the hands of some great personage who will one day present himself, if admitted, to claim its price? What a mistake she makes!’

“One night when there was to be a royal ball I stationed myself at the door of the palace and, lost in the crowd, waited for her carriage that I might see her. When it arrived and, the footman opening the door, she appeared in radiant beauty, a murmur of admiration went up from among the pressing multitude. The women beheld her with envy; the men with longing; from me there broke a low, involuntary cry. She was wearing the set of emeralds.

“That night I went to bed without my supper; I do not remember whether it was because emotion had taken away my appetite or because I had no money. In either case, I was happy. In my dreams I thought I heard the music of the ball and saw her crossing before my eyes, flashing sparks of a thousand colors, until I dreamed even that I was dancing with her.

“The romance of the emeralds had been conjectured, since they had been talked about when they first appeared in the cabinet, by some ladies of rank.

“Now that the set had been seen, there was no longer room for doubt, and idle tongues began to comment on the affair. She enjoyed a spotless reputation. Notwithstanding the dissipation of her husband and his neglect of her, calumny could never reach to the height on which her virtue had placed her; but yet, on this occasion, there began to stir that little breath of gossip from which, according to Don Basilio, scandal begins.

“On a day when I chanced to be in a circle of young men, the conversation fell on the famous emeralds, and finally a coxcomb said, as if settling the

matter:

“There is no need of discussion. These jewels have as vulgar an origin as all such presents in this world of ours. The time has gone by when invisible spirits placed marvellous gifts under the pillows of lovely ladies, and the man who makes a present of this value makes it with the hope of a recompense—and this recompense, who knows that it was not given in advance?”

“The words of that idiot roused my wrath, and all the more because they found response in those who heard them. Yet I controlled myself. What right had I to go to the defence of that woman?”

“Not a quarter of an hour had passed when I had opportunity to contradict this man who had insulted her. I do not know exactly what the point was on which I contradicted him; what I can assure you of is that I did it with so much sharpness, not to say rudeness, that out of our dispute grew a quarrel. That is what I was seeking.

“My friends, knowing my disposition, wondered, not only that I should have sought a duel for so trifling a cause, but at my firm refusal to give or receive explanations of any kind.

“I fought, I do not know whether to say with good fortune or not, for although on firing I saw my adversary sway an instant and fall to the ground, a second after I felt my ears buzzing and my eyes clouding over. I was wounded, too, and seriously, in the breast.

“They carried me, already in a burning fever, to my mean lodging. There I know not how many days went by, while I called aloud I know not on whom; undoubtedly on her. I would have had courage to suffer in silence all my life for one look of gratitude on the brink of the grave; but to die without leaving her even a memory of me!

“These ideas were tormenting my imagination one wakeful, fevered night, when I saw the curtains of my alcove part and in the opening appeared a woman. I thought that I was dreaming; but no. That woman approached my bed, that poor, hot bed on which I was tossing in pain, and lifting the veil which covered her face, disclosed a tear trembling on her long, dark lashes. It was she!

“I started up with frightened eyes, I started up and—at that moment I arrived in front of Durán’s bookstore—”

“What!” I exclaimed, interrupting my friend on hearing that change of tone. “Then you were not wounded and in bed?”

“In bed!—ah! what the deuce! I had forgotten to tell you that all this is what I was thinking as I came from the jewelry shop of Samper,—where in

sober truth I saw the set of emeralds and heard, on the lips of a beautiful woman, the exclamation which I have mentioned to you,—to the Carrera de San Jerónimo, where a thrust from the elbow of a porter roused me from my revery in front of Durán's, in whose window I observed a book by Mery with this title, *Histoire de ce qui n'est pas arrivé*, 'The Story of that which did not happen.' Do you understand it now?"

On hearing this dénouement, I could not repress a shout of laughter. Really I do not know of what Mery's book may treat, but I now see how, with that title, a million incomparable stories might be written.

THE TAVERN OF THE CATS

In Seville, at the half-way point of the road that runs from the Macarena gate to the convent of San Jerónimo, there is, among other famous taverns, one which, because of its location and the special features that attach to it, may be said to have been, if it is not now, the real thing, the most characteristic of all the Andalusian roadside inns.

Picture to yourself a little house, white as the driven snow, under its roof of tiles, some reddish, some deep green, with an endless growth of yellow mustard and sprigs of mignonette springing up among them. A wooden overhang shadows the door, which has on either side a bench of cemented brick. Mortised into the wall, which is broken by various little casements, opened at caprice to give light to the interior, some lower, some higher, one square, another imitating a Moorish arched window with its dividing colonnettes, or a dormer, are seen at regular distances iron spikes and rings for hitching the horses. A vine, full of years, which twists its blackening stems in and out of the sustaining wooden lattice, clothing it with clusters of grapes and broad green leaves, covers like a canopy the guest-hall, that consists of three pine benches, half a dozen rickety rush chairs, and as many as six or seven crippled tables made of ill-joined boards. On one side of the house climbs a honeysuckle, clinging to the cracks in the wall, up to the roof, from whose eaves droop sprays that sway with the wind, like floating curtains of verdure. On the other side runs a fence of wattled twigs, defining the bounds of a little garden that looks like a basket of rushes overflowing with flowers. The tops of two great trees, towering up behind the tavern, form the dark background against which stand out its white chimneys; the decoration is completed by the orchard-plots full of century-plants and blackberries, the broom that grows on the borders of the river, and the Guadalquivir, which flows into the distance, slowly winding its tortuous way between those rural banks to the foot of the

ancient convent of San Jerónimo, that peers above the thick olive groves surrounding it and traces the black silhouette of its towers against a transparent, azure sky.

Imagine this landscape animated by a multitude of figures—men, women, children and animals, forming groups that vie with one another in the characteristic and the picturesque; here the innkeeper, round and ruddy, seated in the sun on a low chair, rolling between his hands the tobacco to make a cigarette, with the paper in his mouth; there a huckster of Macarena who sings, rolling up his eyes, to the accompaniment of his guitar, while others beat time by clapping their hands or striking their glasses on the tables; over yonder a group of peasant girls with their gauzy kerchiefs of a million colors, and a whole flower-pot of pinks in their hair, who play the tambourine, and scream, and laugh, and talk at the top of their voices as they push like mad the swing hung between two trees; and the serving-boys of the tavern who come and go with trays of wine-glasses full of manzanilla and with plates of olives; and the group of village people who swarm in the road; two drunken fellows quarrelling with a dandy who is making love, in passing, to a pretty girl; a cock that, proudly spreading out its wings, crows from the thatch of the poultry-yard; a dog that barks at the boys who tease him with sticks and stones; olive-oil boiling and bubbling in the pan where fish is frying; the cracking of the whips of the cab-drivers who arrive in a cloud of dust; a din of songs, castanets, peals of laughter, voices, whistles and guitars, and blows on the tables, and clappings, and crash of breaking pitchers, and thousands of strange, discordant sounds forming a jocund hullabaloo impossible to describe. Fancy all this on a pleasant calm afternoon, the afternoon of one of the most beautiful days in Andalusia where all the days are so beautiful, and you will have an idea of the spectacle that presented itself for the first time to my eyes, when, led by its fame, I came to visit that celebrated tavern.

This was many years ago; ten or twelve, at least. I was there as a stranger, away from my natural environment, and everything about me, from the cut of my clothes to the astonished expression of my face, was out of keeping with that picture of frank and boisterous jollity. It seemed to me that the passers-by turned their heads to stare at me with the dislike with which one regards an intruder.

Not wishing to attract attention nor choosing that my appearance should be made the butt of mockeries more or less dissembled, I took a seat at one side of the tavern door, called for something to drink, which I did not drink, and when all had forgotten my alien presence, I drew out a sheet of sketching paper from the portfolio which I carried with me, sharpened a pencil, and began to look about for a characteristic figure to copy and preserve as a souvenir of that day.

Soon my eyes fastened on one of the girls forming the merry group around the swing. She was tall, slender, brunette, with sleepy eyes, big and black, and hair blacker than her eyes. While I was making the sketch a group of men, among them one who played lively flourishes on the guitar with much skill, chorused songs that alluded to personal qualities, the secrets of love, the likings of the girls who were sporting about the swing or stories of their jealousy and their disdain,—songs to which these in their turn responded with others no less saucy, piquant and gay.

The slender brunette, quick of wit, whom I had chosen for model, led the singing of the women, composing the quatrains and reciting them to her companions who greeted them with clapping and laughter, while the guitar-player seemed to be the leader of the lads and the one eminent among them all for his cleverness and ready retorts.

For my part, it did not take me long to understand that between these two there was a feeling of affection which betrayed itself in their songs, full of transparent allusions and enamoured phrases.

When I finished my drawing, night was beginning to fall. Already there had been lighted in the tower of the cathedral the two lanterns of the shrine of the bells, and their lustres seemed like fiery eyes from that giant of brick and mortar which dominates all the city. The groups were going, melting away little by little and disappearing up the road in the dim twilight silvered by the moon, that now began to show against the violet dusk of the sky. The girls went singing away together, and their clear, bright voices gradually lessened until they became but a part of the other indistinct and distant sounds that trembled in the air. All was over at once,—the day, the jollity, the animation and the impromptu festival; and of all there remained only an echo in the ear and in the soul, like the softest of vibrations, like a sweet drowsiness such as one experiences on waking from a pleasant dream.

When the last loiterers were gone, I folded my drawing, placed it safely in the portfolio, called the waiter with a hand-clap, paid my trifling account, and was just on the point of departing when I felt myself caught gently by the arm. It was the young guitar-player whom I had noticed before and who while I was drawing had often stared at me with unusual curiosity. I had not observed that, after the fun was over, he approached under some pretext the place where I was sitting in order to see what I was doing that I should be looking so steadily at the woman in whom he seemed to have a special interest.

“Señorito,” he said to me in a tone which he strove to soften as much as possible, “I am going to ask you to do me a favor.”

“A favor!” I exclaimed, without comprehending what he could want of me. “Name it, and if it is in my power, count on it as done.”

“Would you give me the picture you have made?” On hearing this, I could not help pausing a moment in perplexity, surprised both by the request, rare enough in itself, and by the tone, which baffled me to determine whether it was one of threat or of entreaty. He must have understood my hesitation, and he immediately hastened to add:

“I beg it of you for the sake of your mother, for the sake of the woman whom you hold dearest in the world, if you hold any dear; ask of me in return all that my poverty affords.”

I did not know how to make my way out of this difficulty, I would almost have preferred that it had come in guise of a quarrel, if so I might have kept the sketch of that woman who had so deeply impressed me; but whether it was the surprise of the moment, or my inability to say no to anything, the fact is that I opened my portfolio, took out the drawing and handed it to him without a word.

To repeat the lad’s expressions of gratitude, his exclamations as he gazed at it anew by the light of the tavern’s metal lamp, the care with which he folded it to put it away securely in his sash, the offers of devotion he made me, and the extravagant praises with which he cried up his good fortune in that he had met one whom he called, in his clipped Andalusian speech, a “reg’lar señorito,” would be a task most difficult, not to say impossible. I will only say that, as the night, what with one delay and another, was now fully upon us, he insisted, willy-nilly, on going with me to the Macarena gate; and he laid so much stress on it, that finally I decided that it would be better to take the road together. The way is very short, but while it lasted he managed to tell me from beginning to end all the story of his love.

The tavern where the merry-making had taken place belonged to his father, who had promised him, when he should marry, an orchard which adjoined the house and was part of its holding. As to the girl, the object of his love, whom he described to me with the most vivid colors and most picturesque phrases, he told me that her name was Amparo, that she had been brought up in his father’s house from her babyhood, and that it was not known who her parents were. All this and a hundred other details of less interest he related to me on the way. When he had come to the gates of the city he gave me a strong pressure of the hands, again put himself at my service, and made off trolling a song whose echoes spread far and wide through the silence of the night. I stood a moment watching him depart. His happiness seemed contagious, and I felt joyous with a strange and nameless joy—a reflected joy, if I may say so.

He sang till he could sing no longer. One of his refrains ran thus:

“Too long our separation;

Soul of my soul thou art,
The Virgin of Consolation
On the altar of my heart.”

When his voice began to die away, I heard borne on the evening wind another voice, delicate and vibrating, that sounded at a further distance yet. It was she, she who impatiently awaited his coming.

A few days later I left Seville, and many years went by before my return. I forgot many things which happened to me there, but the memory of such happiness, so humble and so content, was never erased from my memory.

II.

As I have said, many years passed after my leaving Seville without my forgetting in the least that afternoon whose recollection sometimes passed over my imagination like a reviving breeze that cools the heated brow.

When chance brought me again to the great city which is called with so much reason the Queen of Andalusia, one of the things that most attracted my attention was the remarkable change effected during my absence. Great buildings, blocks of houses and entire suburbs had risen at the magic touch of industry and capital; on every side were factories, public gardens, parks, shady walks, but unhappily many venerable monuments of antiquity had disappeared.

I visited again many proud edifices full of historical and artistic memories; again I wandered and lost my way amid the million turns of the curious suburb of Santa Cruz; I surprised in the course of my strolls many new buildings which had been erected I know not how; I missed many old ones which had vanished I know not why; and finally I took my way to the bank of the river. The river-bank has ever been in Seville the chosen field for my excursions.

After I had admired the magnificent panorama which offers itself to the view at the point where the iron bridge connects the opposite shores; after I had noticed, with absorbed gaze, the myriad details,—palaces and rows of small white houses; after I had passed in review the innumerable ships at anchor in the stream, unfurling to the wind their airy pennants of a thousand colors, and when I heard the confused hum of the wharves, where everything breathes activity and movement, I transported myself, following in imagination the river, against its current, to San Jerónimo.

I remembered that tranquil landscape, reposeful, luminous, where the rich vegetation of Andalusia displays without cultivation her natural charms. As if I had been in a boat rowed upstream, again, with memory's aid, I saw file by, on one side, the Cartuja [Carthusian convent] with its groves and its lofty,

slender towers; on the other, the Barrio de los Humeros [the old gypsy quarter], the ancient city walls, half Arab, half Roman, the orchards with their fences covered with brambles, and the water-wheels shaded by great, isolated trees, and finally, San Jerónimo.—On reaching this point in my imagination, those memories that I still cherished of the famous inn rose before me more vividly than ever, and I fancied myself present once again at those peasant merry-makings; I heard the girls singing, as they flew through the air in the swing; and I saw the groups of village folk wandering over the meadows, some picnicking, some quarrelling, some laughing, some dancing, and all in motion, overflowing with youth, vivacity and glee. There was she, surrounded by her children, now holding herself aloof from the group of merry girls who were still laughing and singing, and there was he, tranquil and content with his felicity, looking with tenderness at the persons whom he loved best in the world, all together about him and all happy,—his wife, his children, his father, who was there as ten years ago, seated at the door of his inn, impassively twisting the paper about his cigarette, without more change than that his head, which then was gray, would now be white as snow.

A friend who accompanied me in the walk, noting the sort of blissful revery in which for several moments I had been rapt with these imaginings, shook me at last by the arm, asking:

“What are you thinking about?”

“I was thinking,” I replied, “of the Tavern of the Cats, and revolving in my mind all the pleasant recollections I cherish of an afternoon when I was at San Jerónimo.—This very instant I was ending a love story which I left there well begun, and I ended it so much to my liking that I believe there cannot be any other conclusion than that which I have made for it. And speaking of the Tavern of the Cats,” I continued, turning to my friend, “when shall we take a day and go there for luncheon or to enjoy an hour of revel?”

“An hour of revel!” exclaimed my friend, with an expression of astonishment which I did not at that time succeed in explaining to myself, “an hour of revel! A very appropriate place it is for that!”

“And why not?” I rejoined, wondering in my turn at his surprise.

“The reason is very simple,” he told me at last, “for at one hundred paces from the tavern they have laid out the new cemetery” [of San Fernando].

Then it was I who gazed at him with astonished eyes and remained some minutes silent before speaking a single word.

We returned to the city, and that day went by, and still more days, without my being able entirely to throw off the impression which news so unexpected had made upon me. The more variations I played upon it, still the love story of

the brunette had no conclusion, for what I had invented before was not conceivable, since I could not make natural a picture of happiness and mirth with a cemetery for a background.

One afternoon, determined to resolve my doubts, I pleaded a slight indisposition as an excuse for not accompanying my friend in our accustomed rambles, and I started out alone for the inn. When I had left behind me the Macarena gate and its picturesque suburb and had begun to cross by a narrow footpath that labyrinth of orchards, already I seemed to perceive something strange in my surroundings.

Whether it was because the afternoon had become a little clouded, or that the tendency of my mind inclined me to melancholy ideas, the fact is that I felt cold and sad, and noticed a silence about me which reminded me of utter solitude, as sleep reminds us of death.

I walked a little without stopping, crossed the orchards to shorten the distance and came out into the street of San Lázaro, whence already may be seen in the distance the convent of San Jerónimo.

Perhaps it is an illusion, but it seems to me that along the road where pass the dead even the trees and the vegetation come to take on a different color. I fancied there, at least, that warm and harmonious tones were lacking,—no freshness in the groves, no atmosphere in space, no light upon the earth. The landscape was monotonous; its figures black and isolated.

Here was a hearse moving slowly, covered with mourning draperies, raising no dust, cracking no whip, without shout to the horses, almost without movement; further on a man of ill countenance with a spade on his shoulder, or a priest in long, dark robe, or a group of old men poorly clad and of repugnant aspect, with extinguished candles in their hands, who were returning in silence, with lowered heads, and eyes fixed on the ground. I believed myself transported I know not whither; for all that I saw reminded me of a landscape whose contours were the same as ever, but whose colors had been, as it were, blotted out, there being left of them merely a vague half-tone. The impression that I experienced can be compared only to that which we feel in those dreams where, by an inexplicable phenomenon, things are and are not at one and the same time, and the places in which we believe ourselves to be, partially transform themselves in an eccentric and impossible fashion.

At last I reached the roadside inn; I recognized it more by the name, which it still keeps printed in large letters on one of its walls, than by anything else; for as to the little house itself, it seemed to me that it had changed even its outlines and its proportions. At once I saw that it was much more ruinous, that it was forsaken and sad. The shadow of the cemetery, which rose just beyond it, appeared to fall over it, enveloping it in a dark covering, like the cloth laid

on the face of the dead. The innkeeper was there, utterly alone. I recognized him as the same of ten years back; I recognized him I know not why, for in this time he had aged even to the point of appearing a decrepit old man on the edge of the grave, whereas when I first saw him he seemed fifty, abounding in health, satisfaction and vitality.

I sat down at one of the deserted tables; I asked for something to drink, which the innkeeper brought me, and from one detached remark after another we fell finally into continuous conversation relating to that love story of whose last chapter I was still in ignorance, although I had several times attempted to divine it.

“Everything,” said the poor old man to me, “everything seems to have conspired against us since the period in which you remember me. You know how it was with us. Amparo was the delight of our eyes; she had been reared here from her birth; she was the joy of the house; never could she miss her own parents, for I loved her like a father; my son had loved her, too, from his boyhood, first as a brother, afterwards with a devotion greater yet. They were on the eve of marriage; I was ready to make over to them the better part of my modest property, for with the profits of my business it seemed to me that I should have more than enough to live at ease, when some evil spirit—I know not what—envied our happiness and destroyed it in a moment. In the first place the whisper went about that they were going to locate a cemetery on this side of San Jerónimo; some said close by, others further off, and while we were all uneasy and anxious, fearing that they might carry out this project, a greater and more certain trouble fell upon us.

“One day two gentlemen arrived here in a carriage; they put to me thousands of questions about Amparo whom I had taken in her babyhood from the foundling hospital; they asked to see the swaddling-clothes which she wore when she was abandoned and which I had kept, with the final result that Amparo proved to be the daughter of a very rich gentleman, who went to law to recover her from us and persisted until he gained his end. I do not wish even to call to memory the day when they took her away. She wept like a Magdalen, my son would have made a mad resistance, I was like one dumfounded, not understanding what was happening to me. She went. Rather, she did not go, for she loved us too much to go of her own accord, but they carried her off, and a curse fell upon the house. My son, after an attack of terrible despair, fell into a sort of lethargy. I do not know how to express my own state of mind. I believed that for me the world had ended.

“While these things were going on, they began to lay out the cemetery. The village-folk fled from this neighborhood. There were no more festivals, songs and music; all the merriment of this countryside was over, even as the joy of our souls.

“And Amparo was no happier than we; bred here in the open air, in the bustle and animation of the inn, brought up to be joyous in poverty, they plucked her from this life, and she withered, as wither the flowers gathered in a garden to adorn a drawing-room. My son made incredible efforts to see her again, to have a moment’s speech with her. All was in vain; her family did not wish it. At last he saw her, but he saw her dead. The funeral train passed by here. I knew nothing about it and I cannot tell why I fell to weeping when I saw her hearse. The heart, loyal to love, clamored to me:

“ ‘She is young like Amparo; she, too, must be beautiful; who knows if it may not be herself?’ And it was. My son followed the train, entered the enclosure and, when the coffin was opened, uttered a cry and fell senseless to the ground; and so they brought him back to me. Afterwards he went mad, and is now a lunatic.”

When the poor old man had reached this point in his narrative, there entered the inn two gravediggers of sinister bearing and repellent look. Having finished their task, they had come to take a drink “to the health of the dead,” as one of them said, accompanying the jest with a silly leer. The innkeeper brushed off a tear with the back of his hand and went to serve them.

Night was beginning to fall, a dark night and most gloomy. The sky was black and so was the landscape. From the boughs of the trees still hung, half rotted, the ropes of the swing swaying in the wind; it reminded me of a gallows-rope quivering yet after the body of the felon had been taken down. Only confused noises reached my ears,—the distant barking of dogs on guard in the orchards; the creaking of a water-wheel, prolonged, melancholy and shrill like a lament; disconnected, horrible words of the gravediggers who were plotting in low tones a sacrilegious robbery—I know not what; my memory has kept of this fantastic scene of desolation as of that other scene of merriment only a confused recollection that I cannot reproduce. What I still seem to hear as I heard it then is this refrain intoned in a plaintive voice, suddenly disturbing the silence that reigned about:

“The coach of the dead was grand
As it passed our humble door,
But from it beckoned a pallid hand,
And I saw my love once more.”

It was the poor boy, who was locked up in one of the rooms of the inn, where he passed his days in motionless contemplation of the picture of his beloved, without speaking a word, scarcely eating, never weeping, hardly opening his lips save to sing this simple, tender verse enclosing a poem of sorrow that I then learned to decipher.

ALL SOULS' NIGHT

The gloaming of a misty, melancholy autumn day is succeeded by a cold, dark night. For several hours now, the continuous stir of the town seems to have ceased.

Some near, others far, some with grave and measured beat and others with a quick and tremulous vibration, the bells are swinging in their towers, flinging out upon the air their metallic notes which float and mingle, lessen and die away to yield place to a new rain of sounds pouring continually from the deep brazen throats as from a spring of inexhaustible harmonies.

It is said that joy is contagious, but I believe that sadness is much more so. There are melancholy spirits who succeed in eluding the intoxication of delight that our great popular festivals carry in their atmosphere. It is hard to find one who is able to bear unaffected the icy touch of the atmosphere of sorrow, if this comes to seek us in the privacy of our own fireside,—comes in the wearisome, slow vibration of the bell that is like a grieving voice, uttering its tale of troubles at one's very ear.

I cannot hear the bells, even when they ring out merry peals as for a festival, without having my soul possessed by a sentiment of inexplicable and involuntary sadness. In the great capitals, by good or evil hap, the confused murmur of the multitude which beats on every sense, full of the noisy giddiness of action, ordinarily drowns the clamor of the bells to such a degree as to make one believe it does not exist. To me at least it seems that on All Souls' Night, the only night of the year when I hear them, the towers of the Madrid churches, thanks to a miracle, regain their voices, breaking for a few hours only their long silence. Whether it be that my imagination, predisposed to melancholy thoughts, aids in producing this effect, or that the novelty of the sound strikes me the more profoundly; always when I perceive, borne on the wind, the separate notes of this harmony, a strange phenomenon takes place in my senses. I think that I distinguish the different voices of the bells one from another; I think that each of them has its own tone and expresses a special feeling; I think, in fine, that after lending for some time profound attention to the discordant combination of sounds, deep or shrill, dull or silvery, which they breathe forth, I succeed in surprising mysterious words that palpitate upon the air enveloped in its prolonged vibrations.

These words without connection, without meaning, that float in space accompanied by sighs scarcely perceptible and by long sobs, commence to reunite one with another as the vague ideas of a dream combine on waking,

and reunited, they form an immense, dolorous poem, in which each bell chants its strophe, and all together interpret by means of symbolic sounds the dumb thought that seethes in the brain of those who harken, plunged in profound meditation.

A bell of hollow, deafening tone, swinging heavily in its lofty tower with ceremonial slowness, that seems to have a mathematical rhythm and moves by some perfect mechanism, says in peals punctiliously adjusted to the ritual:

“I am the empty sound that melts away without having made vibrate a single one of the infinite chords of feeling in the heart of man. I bear in my echoes neither sobs nor sighs. I perform correctly my part in the lugubrious, aerial symphony of grief, my sonorous strokes never falling behind nor going in advance by a single second. I am the bell of the parish church, the official bell of funeral honors. My voice proclaims the mourning of etiquette; my voice laments from the heights of the belfry announcing to the neighborhood the fatality, groan by groan; my voice, which sorrows at so much a sob, releases the rich heir and the young widow from other cares than those of the formalities attending the reading of the will, and the orders for elegant mourning.

“At my peal the artisans of death come out of their atrophy: the carpenter hastens to adorn with gold braid the most comfortable of his coffins; the marble worker strikes in his chisel seeking a new allegory for the ostentatious sepulchre; even the horses of the grotesque hearse, theatre of the last triumph of vanity, proudly shake their antique tufts of flywing-colored plumes, while the pillars of the church are wound about with black baize, the traditional catafalque is set up under the dome, and the choir-master rehearses on the violin a new Dies Irae for the last mass of the Requiem.

“I am the grief of tinsel tears, of paper flowers and of distichs in letters of gold.

“To-day it is my duty to commemorate my fellow-countrymen, the illustrious dead for whom I mourn officially, and on doing this with all the pomp and all the noise befitting their social position, my only regret is that I cannot utter one by one their names, titles and decorations; perchance this new formula would be a comfort to their families.”

“When the measured hammering of the heavy bell ceases an instant and its distant echo, blent with the cloud of tones that the wind carries away, is lost, there begins to be heard the sad, uneven, piercing melody of a little clapper-bell.”

“I am,” it says, “the voice that sings the joys and bewails the sorrows of the village which I dominate from my spire; I am the humble bell of the hamlet,

that calls down with ardent petitions water from heaven upon the parched fields, the bell that with its pious conjurations puts the storms to flight, the bell that whirls, quivering with emotion, and in wild outcries pleads for succour when fire is devouring the crops.

“I am the friendly voice that bids the poor his last farewell; I am the groan that grief chokes in the throat of the orphan and that mounts on the winged notes of the bell to the throne of the Father of Mercies.

“On hearing my melody, a prayer breaks involuntarily from the lip, and my last echo goes to breathe itself away on the brink of hidden graves—an echo borne by the wind that seems to pray in a low voice as it waves the tall grass that covers them.

“I am the weeping that scalds the cheeks; I am the woe that dries the fount of tears; I am the anguish that presses on the heart with an iron hand; I am the supreme sorrow, the sorrow of the forsaken and forlorn.

“To-day I toll for that nameless multitude which passes through life unheeded, leaving no more trace behind than the broad stream of sweat and tears that marks its course; to-day I toll for those who sleep in earth forgotten, without other monument than a rude cross of wood which, perchance, is hidden by the nettles and the spear-plume thistles, but amid their leaves arise these humble, yellow-petaled flowers that the angels sow over the graves of the just.”

The echo of the clapper-bell grows fainter little by little till it is lost amid the whirlwind of tones, above which are distinguished the crashing, broken strokes of one of those gigantic bells which set shuddering, as they sound, even the deep foundations of the ancient Gothic cathedrals in whose towers we see them suspended.

“I am,” says the bell with its terrible, stentorian peal, “the voice of the stupendous mass of stone which your forefathers raised for the amazement of the ages. I am the mysterious voice familiar to the long-robed virgins, the angels, the kings and the marble prophets who keep watch by night and by day at the church doors, enveloped in the shadows of their arches. I am the voice of the misshapen monsters, of the griffins and prodigious reptiles that crawl among the intertwined stone leaves along the spires of the towers. I am the phantasmal bell of tradition and of legend that swings alone on All Souls’ Night, rung by an invisible hand.

“I am the bell of fearsome folk-tales, stories of ghosts and souls in pain,—the bell whose strange and indescribable vibration finds an echo only in ardent imaginations.

“At my voice, knights armed with all manner of arms rise from their

Gothic sepulchres; monks come forth from the dim vaults in which they are sleeping their last sleep to the foot of their abbey altars; and the cemeteries open their gates little by little to let pass the troops of yellow skeletons that run nimbly to dance in giddy round about the pointed spire which shelters me.

“When my tremendous clamor surprises the credulous old woman before the antique shrine whose lights she tends, she believes that she sees for a moment the spirits of the picture dance amid the vermilion and ochre flames by the glimmer of the dying lantern.

“When my mighty vibrations accompany the monotonous recital of an old-time fable to which the children, grouped about the hearth, listen all absorbed, the tongues of red and blue fire that glide along the glowing logs, and the fiery sparks that leap up against the obscure background of the kitchen, are taken for spirits circling in the air, and the noise of the wind shaking the doors, for the work of souls knocking at the leaded panes of the windows with the fleshless knuckles of their bony hands.

“I am the bell that prays to God for the souls condemned to hell; I am the voice of superstitious terror; I cause not weeping, but rising of the hair, and I carry the chill of fright to the marrow of his bones who harkens to me.”

So one after another, or all at once, the bells go pealing on, now as the musical theme that rises clearly above the full orchestra in a grand symphony, now as a fantasia that lingers and recedes, dilating on the wind.

Only the daylight and the noises that come up from the heart of the town at the first dawn can put to flight the strange abortions of the mind and the doleful, persistent tolling of the bells, which even in sleep is felt as an exhausting nightmare through the eternal Noche de Difuntos.

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