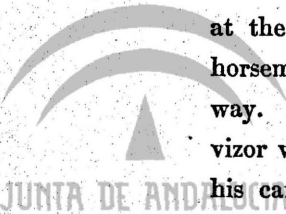


CHAPTER IV.

THE ADVENTURE OF THE SOLITARY HORSEMAN.



It was a burning and sultry noon, when, through a small valley, skirted by rugged and precipitous hills, at the distance of several leagues from Granada, a horseman, in complete armour, wound his solitary way. His mail was black and unadorned; on his vizor waved no plume. But there was something in his carriage and mien, and the singular beauty of his coal-black steed, which appeared to indicate a higher rank than the absence of page and squire, and the plainness of his accoutrements, would have denoted to a careless eye. He rode very slowly; and his steed, with the license of a spoiled favourite, often halted lazily in his sultry path, as a tuft of herbage, or the bough of some overhanging tree, offered its temptation. At length, as he thus paused, a noise was heard in a copse that clothed the descent of a steep mountain; and the horse started suddenly back, forcing the traveller from his reverie. He looked mechanically upward, and beheld

the figure of a man bounding through the trees, with rapid and irregular steps. It was a form that suited well the silence and solitude of the spot; and might have passed for one of those stern recluses—half hermit, half soldier—who, in the earlier crusades, fixed their wild homes amidst the sands and caves of Palestine. The stranger supported his steps by a long staff. His hair and beard hung long and matted over his broad shoulders. A rusted mail, once splendid with arabesque enrichments, protected his breast; but the loose gown—a sort of tartan, which descended below the cuirass—was rent and tattered, and his feet bare; in his girdle was a short curved cimeter, a knife or dagger, and a parchment roll, clasped and bound with iron.

As the horseman gazed at this abrupt intruder on the solitude, his frame quivered with emotion; and, raising himself to his full height, he called aloud, “Fiend or santon—whatsoever thou art—what seekest thou in these lonely places, far from the king thy counsels deluded, and the city betrayed by thy false prophecies and unhallowed charms?”

“Ha!” cried Almamen, for it was indeed the Israelite; “by thy black charger, and the tone of thy haughty voice, I know the hero of Granada. Rather, Muza Ben Abil Gazan, why art thou absent from the last hold of the Moorish empire?”

“Dost thou pretend to read the future, and art thou blind to the present? Granada has capitulated to the Spaniard. Alone I have left a land of slaves, and shall seek, in our ancestral Africa, some spot where the footstep of the misbeliever hath not trodden.”

“The fate of one bigotry is, then, sealed,” said Almamen, gloomily; “but that which succeeds it is yet more dark.”

“Dog!” cried Muza, couching his lance, “what art thou, that thus blasphemest?”

“A Jew!” replied Almamen, in a voice of thunder, and drawing his cimeter: “a despised and despising Jew! Ask you more? I am the son of a race of kings. I was the worst enemy of the Moors, till I found the Nazarene more hateful than the Moslem; and then even Muza himself was not their more renowned champion. Come on, if thou wilt, man to man: I defy thee!”

“No, no,” muttered Muza, sinking his lance; “thy mail is rusted with the blood of the Spaniard, and this arm cannot smite the slayer of the Christian. Part we in peace.”

“Hold, prince!” said Almamen, in an altered voice: “is thy country the sole thing dear to thee? Has the smile of woman never stole beneath thine armour? Has thy heart never beat for softer meetings than the encounter of a foe?”

"Am I human, and a Moor?" returned Muza. "For once you divine aright; and, could thy spells bestow on these eyes but one more sight of the last thing left to me on earth, I should be as credulous of thy sorcery as Boabdil."

"Thou lovest her still, then—this Leila?"

"Dark necromancer, hast thou read my secret? and knowest thou the name of my beloved one? Ah! let me believe thee indeed wise, and reveal to me the spot of earth which holds the treasure of my soul! Yes," continued the Moor, with increased emotion, and throwing up his vizor, as if for air—"yes, Allah forgive me! but, when all was lost at Granada, I had still one consolation in leaving my fated birth-place: I had license to search for Leila; I had the hope to secure to my wanderings in distant lands one to whose glance the eyes of the houris would be dim. But I waste words. Tell me where is Leila, and conduct me to her feet."

"Moslem, I will lead thee to her," answered Almaden, gazing on the prince with an expression of strange and fearful exultation in his dark eyes: "I will lead thee to her—follow me. It is only yesternight that I learned the walls that confined her; and from that hour to this have I journeyed over mountain and desert, without rest or food."

"Yet what is she to thee?" asked Muza, suspiciously.

“Thou shalt learn full soon. Let us on.”

So saying, Almamen sprung forward with a vigour which the excitement of his mind supplied to the exhaustion of his body. Muza wonderingly pushed on his charger, and endeavoured to draw his mysterious guide into conversation : but Almamen scarcely heeded him. His long fast, his solitary travels, his anxieties, his vicissitudes, and—more than all—his own fiery and consuming passions, were fast ripening into confirmed frenzy the half delirious emotions which had for months marred the natural keenness of his intellect ; and, when he broke from his gloomy silence, it was but in incoherent and brief exclamations, often in a tongue foreign to the ear of his companion. The hardy Moor, though steeled against the superstitions of his race, less by the philosophy of the learned than the contempt of the brave, felt an awe gather over him as he glanced, from time to time, from the giant rocks and lonely valleys, to the unearthly aspect and glittering eyes of the reputed sorcerer ; and more than once he muttered such verses of the Koran as he remembered, and were esteemed by his countrymen the counterspell of the machinations of the evil genii.

It might be an hour that they had thus journeyed together, when Almamen paused abruptly. “I am wearied,” said he, faintly ; “and, though time presses, I fear that my strength will fail me.”

“Mount, then, behind me,” returned the Moor,

after some natural hesitation : " Jew though thou art, I will brave the contamination for the sake of Leila."

" Moor!" cried the Hebrew, fiercely, " the contamination would be mine. Things of the yesterday, as thy prophet and thy creed are, thou canst not sound the unfathomable loathing, which each heart, faithful to the Ancient of Days, feels for such as thou and thine."

" Now, by the Kaaba!" said Muza, and his brow became dark, " another such word, and the hoofs of my steed shall trample the breath of blasphemy from thy body."

" I would defy thee to the death," answered Almamen, disdainfully; " but I reserve the bravest of the Moors to witness a deed worthy of the descendant of Jephtha. But, hist! I hear hoofs."

Muza listened; and, at a distance beyond them, his sharp ear caught a distinct ring upon the hard and rocky soil. He turned round, and saw Almamen gliding away through the thick underwood, until the branches concealed his form. Presently, a curve in the path brought in view a Spanish cavalier, mounted on an Andalusian jennet: the horseman was gaily singing one of the popular ballads of the time; and, as it related to the feats of the Spaniards against the Moors, Muza's haughty blood was already stirred, and his moustache quivered on his lip. " I will change the

air," muttered the Moslem, grasping his lance; when, as the thought crossed him, he beheld the Spaniard suddenly reel in his saddle, and fall prostrate on the ground. In the same instant Almamen had darted from his hiding-place, seized the steed of the cavalier, mounted, and, ere Muza recovered from his surprise, was by the side of the Moor.

"By what charm," said Muza, curbing his barb, "didst thou fell the Spaniard—seemingly without a blow?"

"As David felled Goliah—by the pebble and the sling," answered Almamen, carelessly. "Now, then, spur forward, if thou art eager to see thy Leila."

The horsemen dashed over the body of the stunned and insensible Spaniard. Tree and mountain glided by; gradually the valley vanished, and a thick forest gloomed upon their path. Still they made on, though the interlaced boughs, and the ruggedness of the footing, somewhat obstructed their way; until, as the sun began slowly to decline, they entered a broad and circular space, round which trees of the eldest growth spread their motionless and shadowy boughs. In the midmost sward was a rude and antique stone, resembling the altar of some barbarous and departed creed. Here Almamen abruptly halted, and muttered inaudibly to himself.

"What moves thee, dark stranger?" said the

Moor; "and why dost thou mutter, and gaze on space?"

Almamen answered not, but dismounted, hung his bridle to a branch of a scathed and riven elm, and advanced alone into the middle of the space. "Dread and prophetic power that art within me!" said the Hebrew, aloud,— "this, then, is the spot that, by dream and vision, thou hast foretold me wherein to consummate and record the vow that shall sever from the spirit the last weakness of the flesh. Night after night hast thou brought before mine eyes, in darkness and in slumber, the solemn solitude that I now survey. Be it so: I am prepared!"

Thus speaking, he retired for a few moments into the wood; collected in his arms the dry leaves and withered branches which cumbered the desolate clay; and placed the fuel upon the altar. Then, turning to the East, and raising his hands on high, he exclaimed, "Lo! upon this altar, once worshipped, perchance, by the heathen savage, the last bold spirit of thy fallen and scattered race dedicates, O Ineffable One! that precious offering thou didst demand from a sire of old. Accept the sacrifice!"

As the Hebrew ended his adjuration, he drew a vial from his bosom, and sprinked a few drops upon the arid fuel. A pale blue flame suddenly leaped up; and, as it lighted the haggard but earnest countenance

of the Israelite, Muza felt his Moorish blood congeal in his veins, and shuddered, though he scarce knew why. Almamen, then, with his dagger, severed from his head one of his long locks, and cast it upon the flame. He watched it till it was consumed; and then, with a stifled cry, fell upon the earth in a dead swoon. The Moor hastened to raise him; he chafed his hands and temples; he unbuckled the vest upon his bosom: he forgot that his comrade was a sorcerer and a Jew, so much had the agony of that excitement moved his sympathy.

It was not till several minutes had elapsed, that Almamen, with a deep-drawn sigh, recovered from his swoon. "Ah, beloved one! bride of my heart!" he murmured, "was it for this that thou didst commend to me the only pledge of our youthful love? Forgive me! I restore her to the earth, untainted by the Gentile." He closed his eyes again, and a strong convulsion shook his frame. It passed; and he rose as a man from a fearful dream, composed, and almost, as it were, refreshed, by the terrors he had undergone. The last glimmer of the ghastly light was dying away upon that ancient altar, and a low wind crept sighing through the trees.

"Mount, prince," said Almamen, calmly, but averting his eyes from the altar; "we shall have no more delays."

“Wilt thou not explain thy incantation?” asked Muza; “or is it, as my reason tells me, but the mumery of a juggler?”

“Alas! alas!” answered Almamen, in a sad and altered tone, “thou wilt soon know all.”



JUNTA DE ANDALUCÍA

P.C. Monumental de la Alhambra y Generalife
CONSEJERÍA DE CULTURA

CHAPTER V.

THE SACRIFICE.

THE sun was now sinking slowly through those masses of purple cloud which belong to Iberian skies; when, emerging from the forest, the travellers saw before them a small and lovely plain, cultivated like a garden. Rows of orange and citron trees were backed by the dark green foliage of vines; and these, again, found a barrier in girdling copses of chestnut, oak, and the deeper verdure of pines: while, far to the horizon, rose the distant and dim outline of the mountain range, scarcely distinguishable from the mellow colourings of the heaven. Through this charming spot went a slender and sparkling torrent, that collected its waters in a circular basin, over which the rose and orange hung their contrasted blossoms. On a gentle eminence, above this plain or garden, rose the spires of a convent: and, though it was still clear daylight, the long and pointed lattices were illumined within; and, as the horsemen cast their eyes upon the pile, the

sound of the holy chorus—made more sweet and solemn from its own indistinctness, from the quiet of the hour, from the sudden and sequestered loveliness of that spot, suiting so well the ideal calm of the conventual life—rolled its music through the odorous and lucent air.

But that scene and that sound, so calculated to soothe and harmonise the thoughts, seemed to arouse Almamen into agony and passion. He smote his breast with his clenched hand; and, shrieking, rather than exclaiming, "God of my fathers! have I come too late?" buried his spurs to the rowels in the sides of his panting steed. Along the sward, through the fragrant shrubs, athwart the pebbly and shallow torrent, up the ascent to the convent, sped the Israelite. Muza, wondering and half reluctant, followed at a little distance. Clearer and nearer came the voices of the choir; broader and redder glowed the tapers from the Gothic casements: the porch of the convent chapel was reached; the Hebrew sprang from his horse. A small group of the peasants dependent on the convent loitered reverently round the threshold: pushing through them, as one frantic, Almamen entered the chapel, and disappeared.

A minute elapsed. Muza was at the door; but the Moor paused irresolutely ere he dismounted. "What is the ceremony?" he asked of the peasants.

"A nun is about to take the vows," answered one of them.

A cry of alarm, of indignation, of terror, was heard within. Muza no longer delayed: he gave his steed to the bystander, pushed aside the heavy curtain that screened the threshold, and was within the chapel.

By the altar gathered a confused and disordered group — the sisterhood, with their abbess. Round the consecrated rail flocked the spectators, breathless and amazed. Conspicuous above the rest, on the elevation of the holy place, stood Almamen, with his drawn dagger in his right hand, his left arm clasped around the form of a novice, whose dress, not yet replaced by the serge, bespoke her the sister fated to the veil: and, on the opposite side of that sister, one hand on her shoulder, the other rearing on high the sacred crucifix, stood a stern, calm, commanding form, in the white robes of the Dominican order: it was Tomas de Torquemada.

"Avaunt, Abaddon!" were the first words which reached Muza's ear, as he stood, unnoticed, in the middle of the aisle: "here thy sorcery and thine arts cannot avail thee. Release the devoted one of God!"

"She is mine! she is my daughter! I claim her from thee as a father, in the name of the great Sire of Man!"

"Seize the sorcerer! seize him!" exclaimed the

inquisitor, as, with a sudden movement, Almamen cleared his way through the scattered and dismayed group, and stood, with his daughter in his arms, on the first step of the consecrated platform.

But not a foot stirred—not a hand was raised. The epithet bestowed on the intruder had only breathed a supernatural terror into the audience; and they would have sooner rushed upon a tiger in his lair, than on the lifted dagger and savage aspect of that grim stranger.

“Oh, my father!” then said a low and faltering voice, that startled Muza as a voice from the grave—
“wrestle not against the decrees of Heaven. Thy daughter is not compelled to her solemn choice. Humbly, but devotedly, a convert to the Christian creed, her only wish on earth is to take the consecrated and eternal vow.”

“Ha!” groaned the Hebrew, suddenly relaxing his hold, as his daughter fell on her knees before him, “then have I indeed been told, as I have foreseen, the worst. The veil is rent—the spirit hath left the temple. Thy beauty is desecrated; thy form is but unhalloved clay. Dog!” he cried, more fiercely, glaring round upon the unmoved face of the inquisitor, “this is thy work: but thou shalt not triumph. Here, by thine own shrine, I spit at and defy thee, as once before, amidst the tortures of thy inhuman court.

Thus—thus—thus—Almamen the Jew delivers the last of his house from the curse of Galilee!"

"Hold, murderer!" cried a voice of thunder; and an armed man burst through the crowd, and stood upon the platform. It was too late: thrice the blade of the Hebrew had passed through that innocent breast; thrice was it reddened with that virgin blood. Leila fell in the arms of her lover; her dim eyes rested upon his countenance, as it shone upon her, beneath his lifted visor—a faint and tender smile played upon her lips—Leila was no more.

One hasty glance Almamen cast upon his victim, and then, with a wild laugh, that woke every echo in the dreary aisles, he leaped from the place. Brandishing his bloody weapon above his head, he dashed through the coward crowd; and, ere even the startled Dominican had found a voice, the tramp of his headlong steed rang upon the air: an instant—and all was silent.

But over that murdered girl leaned the Moor, as yet incredulous of her death; her head, still unshorn of its purple tresses, pillowed on his lap—her icy hand clasped in his, and her blood weltering fast over his armour. None disturbed him; for, habited as the knights of Christendom, none suspected his faith; and all, even the Dominican, felt a thrill of sympathy at his distress. With the quickness of comprehension



D. Medina A. R. A.

L. Sandoz

The Death of Isabella
Donativo de S. Conde de
Rovinos á la Biblioteca
de la Alhambra. 1909

common to those climes, they understood at once that it was a lover who sustained that beautiful clay. How he came hither, with what object — what hope, their thoughts were too much locked in pity to conjecture. There, voiceless and motionless, bent the Moor; until one of the monks approached and felt the pulse, to ascertain if life was, indeed, utterly gone.

The Moor, at first, waved him haughtily away; but, when he divined the monk's purpose, suffered him in silence to take the beloved hand. He fixed on him his dark and imploring eyes; and, when the father dropped the hand, and, gently shaking his head, turned away, a deep and agonising groan was all that the audience heard from that heart in which the last iron of fate had entered. Passionately he kissed the brow, the cheeks, the lips, of the hushed and angel face — and rose from the spot.

“What dost thou here? and what knowest thou of yon murderous enemy of God and man?” asked the Dominican, approaching.

Muza made no reply, as he stalked slowly through the chapel. The audience was touched to sudden tears. “Forbear!” said they, almost with one accord, to the harsh inquisitor; “he hath no voice to answer thee.”

And thus, amidst the oppressive grief and sympathy of the Christian throng, the unknown Paynim

reached the door; mounted his steed; and, as he turned once more, and cast a hurried glance upon the fatal pile, the bystanders saw the large tears rolling down his swarthy cheeks.

Slowly that coal-black charger wound down the hillock—crossed the quiet and lovely garden, and vanished amidst the forest. And never was known, to Moor or Christian, the future fate of the hero of Granada. Whether he reached in safety the shores of his ancestral Africa, and carved out new fortunes and a new name; or whether death, by disease or strife, terminated obscurely his glorious and brief career; mystery—deep and unpenetrated, even by the fancies of the thousand bards who have consecrated his deeds—wraps in everlasting shadow the destinies of Muza Ben Abil Gazan, from that hour, when the setting sun threw its parting ray over his stately form and his ebon barb, disappearing amidst the breathless shadows of the forest.

CHAPTER VI.

THE RETURN — THE RIOT — THE TREACHERY — AND
THE DEATH.

It was the eve of the fatal day on which Granada was to be delivered to the Spaniards, and in that subterranean vault beneath the house of Almamen, before described, three elders of the Jewish persuasion were met.

“Trusty and well-beloved Ximen,” cried one — a wealthy and usurious merchant, with a twinkling and humid eye, and a sleek and unctuous aspect, which did not, however, suffice to disguise something fierce and crafty in his low brow and pinched lips: “trusty and well-beloved Ximen,” said this Jew, “truly, thou hast served us well, in yielding to thy persecuted brethren this secret shelter. Here, indeed, may the heathen search for us in vain. Verily, my veins grow warm again; and thy servant hungereth, and hath thirst.”

“Eat, Isaac, eat; yonder are viands prepared for

thee; eat, and spare not. And thou, Elias—wilt thou not draw near the board? The wine is old and precious, and will revive thee.”

“Ashes and hyssop—hyssop and ashes, are food and drink for me!” answered Elias, with passionate bitterness; “they have rased my house—they have burned my granaries—they have molten down my gold. I am a ruined man!”

“Nay,” said Ximen, who gazed at him with a malevolent eye (for so utterly had years and sorrows mixed with gall even the one kindlier sympathy he possessed, that he could not resist an inward chuckle over the very afflictions he relieved, and the very impotence he protected)—“nay, Elias; thou hast wealth yet left in the seaport towns, sufficient to buy up half Granada.”

“The Nazarene will seize it all!” cried Elias; “I see it already in his grasp!”

“Nay, thinkest thou so?—and wherefore?” asked Ximen, startled into sincere, because selfish anxiety.

“Mark me! Under license of the truce, I went, last night, to the Christian camp—I had an interview with the Christian king; and when he heard my name and faith, his very beard curled with ire. ‘Hound of Belial!’ he roared forth, ‘has not thy comrade carrion, the sorcerer Almamen, sufficiently deceived and insulted the majesty of Spain? For his

sake ye shall have no quarter. Tarry here another instant, and thy corpse shall be swinging to the winds! Go, and count over thy misgotten wealth: just census shall be taken of it; and, if thou defraudest our holy impost by one piece of copper, thou shalt sup with Dives! Such was my mission, and mine answer. I return home to see the ashes of mine house! Who is me!"

"And this we owe to Almamen, the pretended Jew!" cried Isaac, from his solitary, but not idle, place at the board.

"I would this knife were at his false throat!" growled Elias, clutching his poniard with his long bony fingers.

"No chance of that," muttered Ximen; "he will return no more to Granada. The vulture and the worm have divided his carcass between them ere this; and (he added inly, with a hideous smile) his house and his gold have fallen into the hands of old, childless Ximen."

"This is a strange and fearful vault," said Isaac, quaffing a large goblet of the hot wine of the Vega; "here might the witch of Endor have raised the dead. Yon door—whither doth it lead?"

"Through passages none, that I know of, save my master, hath trodden," answered Ximen. "I have heard that they reach even to the Alhambra. Come,

worthy Elias! thy form trembles with the cold,— take this wine.”

“Hist!” said Elias, shaking from limb to limb: “Our pursuers are upon us— I hear a step!”

As he spoke, the door to which Isaac had pointed, slowly opened, and Almamen entered the vault.

Had, indeed, a new witch of Endor conjured up the dead, the apparition would not more have startled and appalled that goodly trio. Elias, gripping his knife, retreated to the farthest end of the vault. Isaac dropped the goblet he was about to drain, and fell upon his knees. Ximen, alone—growing, if possible, a shade more ghastly—retained something of self-possession, as he muttered to himself,—“He lives! and his god is not mine! Curse him!”

Seemingly unconscious of the strange guests his sanctuary shrouded, Almamen stalked on, like a man walking in his sleep.

Ximen roused himself—softly unbarred the door which admitted to the upper apartments, and motioned to his comrades to avail themselves of the opening: but, as Isaac,—the first to accept the hint—crept across, Almamen fixed upon him his terrible eye; and, appearing suddenly to awake to consciousness, shouted out, “Thou miscreant, Ximen! whom hast thou admitted to the secrets of thy lord? Close the door—these men must die!”

“Mighty master!” said Ximen, calmly, “is thy servant to blame, that he believed the rumour that declared thy death? These men are of our holy faith, whom I have snatched from the violence of the sacrilegious and maddened mob. No spot but this seemed safe from the popular frenzy.”

“Are ye Jews?” said Almamen. “Ah, yes! I know ye now — things of the market-place and bazaar! Oh, ye are Jews, indeed! Go, go! Leave me!”

Waiting no further license, the three vanished; but, ere he quitted the vault, Elias turned back his scowling countenance on Almamen, who had sunk again into an absorbed meditation, with a glance of vindictive ire — Almamen was alone.

In less than a quarter of an hour Ximen returned, to seek his master; but the place was again deserted.

It was midnight in the streets of Granada — midnight, but not repose. The multitude, roused into one of their paroxysms of wrath and sorrow, by the reflection that the morrow was indeed the day of their subjection to the Christian foe, poured forth through the streets to the number of twenty thousand. It was a wild and stormy night; those formidable gusts of wind, which sometimes sweep in sudden winter from the snows of the Sierra Nevada, howled through the tossing groves, and along the winding streets. But the tempest seemed to heighten, as if by the sympathy of the elements, the

popular storm and whirlwind. Brandishing arms and torches, and gaunt with hunger, the dark forms of the frantic Moors seemed like ghouls, or spectres, rather than mortal men; as, apparently without an object, save that of venting their own disquietude, or exciting the fears of earth, they swept through the desolate city.

In the broad space of the Vivarrambla, the crowd halted; irresolute in all else, but resolved, at least, that something for Granada should yet be done. They were, for the most, armed in their Moorish fashion; but they were wholly without leaders: not a noble, a magistrate, an officer, would have dreamed of the hopeless enterprise of violating the truce with Ferdinand. It was a mere popular tumult—the madness of a mob;—but not the less formidable, for it was an eastern mob, and a mob with swords and shafts, with buckler and mail—the mob by which oriental empires have been built and overthrown! There, in the splendid space that had witnessed the games and tournaments of that Arab and African chivalry—there, where, for many a lustrum, kings had reviewed devoted and conquering armies— assembled these desperate men; the loud winds agitating their tossing torches, that struggled against the moonless night.

“Let us storm the Alhambra!” cried one of the band: “let us seize Boabdil, and place him in the

midst of us, let us rush against the Christians, buried in their proud repose!"

"Lelilies, Lelilies! — the Keys and the Crescent!" shouted the mob.

The shout died: and, at the verge of the space, was suddenly heard a once familiar, and ever thrilling voice.

The Moors, who heard it, turned round in amaze and awe; and beheld, raised upon the stone upon which the criers or heralds had been wont to utter the royal proclamations, the form of Almamen, the santon, whom they had deemed already with the dead.

"Moors, and people of Granada!" he said, in a solemn, but hollow voice, "I am with ye still.

Your monarch and your heroes have deserted ye, but I am with ye to the last! Go not to the Alhambra: the fort is impenetrable — the guard, faithful. Night will be wasted, and day bring upon you the Christian army. March to the gates; pour along the Vega; descend at once upon the foe!"

He spoke, and drew forth his sabre; it gleamed in the torch-light — the Moors bowed their heads in fanatic reverence — the santon sprang from the stone, and passed into the centre of the crowd.

Then, once more arose joyful shouts. The multitude had found a leader worthy of their enthusiasm;

and in regular order, they formed themselves rapidly, and swept down the narrow streets.

Swelled by several scattered groups of desultory marauders (the ruffians and refuse of the city), the infidel numbers were now but a few furlongs from the great gate, whence they had been wont to issue on the foe. And then, perhaps, had the Moors passed these gates, and reached the Christian encampment, lulled, as it was, in security and sleep; that wild army of twenty thousand desperate men might have saved Granada; and Spain might, at this day, possess the only civilised empire which the faith of Mahomet ever founded.

But the evil star of Boabdil prevailed. The news of the insurrection in the city reached him. Two aged men, from the lower city, arrived at the Alhambra—demanded and obtained an audience; and the effect of that interview was instantaneous upon Boabdil. In the popular frenzy he saw only a justifiable excuse for the Christian king to break the conditions of the treaty, rase the city, and exterminate the inhabitants. Touched by a generous compassion for his subjects, and actuated no less by a high sense of kingly honour, which led him to preserve a truce solemnly sworn to, he once more mounted his cream-coloured charger, with the two elders who had sought him by his side; and, at the head of his guard, rode from the Alhambra. The sound of his trumpets, the tramp of his steeds,

the voice of his heralds, simultaneously reached the multitude; and, ere they had leisure to decide their course, the king was in the midst of them.

“What madness is this, O my people?” cried Boabdil, spurring into the midst of the throng,—
“whither would ye go?”

“Against the Christian!—against the Goth!” shouted a thousand voices. “Lead us on! The santon is risen from the dead, and will ride by thy right hand!”

“Alas!” resumed the king, “ye would march against the Christian king! Remember that our hostages are in his power; remember that he will desire no better excuse to level Granada with the dust, and put you and your children to the sword. We have made such treaty as never yet was made between foe and foe. Your lives, laws, wealth—all are saved. Nothing is lost, save the crown of Boabdil. I am the only sufferer. So be it. My evil star brought on you these evil destinies: without me, you may revive, and be once more a nation. Yield to fate to-day, and you may grasp her proudest awards to-morrow. To succumb is not to be subdued. But, go forth against the Christians, and if ye win one battle, it is but to incur a more terrible war; if you lose, it is not honourable capitulation, but certain extermination to which you rush! Be persuaded, and listen once again to your king.”

The crowd were moved, were softened, were half

convinced. They turned, in silence, towards their santón; and Almamen did not shrink the appeal. Little as he cared for the Moors, his hatred for the Christians spurred him on to any measure that might redden the earth with their abhorred blood. He stood forth, confronting the king.

“King of Granada!” he cried aloud, “behold thy friend—thy prophet! Lo! I assure you victory!”

“Hold!” interrupted Boabdil, “thou hast deceived and betrayed me too long! Moors! knowest thou this pretended santón? He is of no Moslem creed. He is a hound of Israel, who would sell you to the best bidder. Slay him!”

“Ha!” cried Almamen, “and who is my accuser?”

“Thy servant—behold him!” At these words, the royal guards lifted their torches, and the glare fell, redly, on the death-like features of Ximen.

“Light of the world! there be other Jews that know him,” said the traitor.

“Will ye suffer a Jew to lead ye, O race of the Prophet?” cried the king.

The crowd stood confused and bewildered: Almamen felt his hour was come; he remained silent, his arms folded, his brow erect.

“Be there any of the tribe of Moisa amongst the crowd?” cried Boabdil, pursuing his advantage; “if so, let them approach and testify what they know.”

Forth came—not from the crowd, but from amongst Boabdil's train, a well-known Israelite :

“ We disown this man of blood and fraud,” said Elias, bowing to the earth ; “ but he was of our creed.”

“ Speak, false santon ! art thou dumb ? ” cried the king.

“ A curse light on thee, dull fool ! ” cried Almamen, fiercely. “ What matters who the instrument that would have restored to thee thy throne ? Yes ! I, who have ruled thy councils, who have led thine armies, I am of the race of Joshua and of Samuel—and the Lord of Hosts is the God of Almamen ! ”

A shudder ran through that mighty multitude : but the looks, the mien, and the voice of the man, awed them ; and not a weapon was raised against him. He might, even then, have passed scathless through the crowd ; he might have borne to other climes his burning passions and his torturing woes : but his care for life was past ; he desired but to curse his dupes, and to die. He paused, looked round, and burst into a laugh of such bitter and haughty scorn, as the tempted of earth may hear, in the halls below, from the lips of Eblis.

“ Yes,” he exclaimed, “ such I am ! I have been your idol and your lord ; I may be your victim, but, in death, I am your vanquisher. Christian and Moslem alike my foe, I would have trampled upon

both. But the Christian, wiser than you, gave me smooth words; and I would have sold ye to his power: wickeder than you, he deceived me; and I would have crushed him, that I might have continued to deceive and rule the puppets that ye call your chiefs. But they for whom I toiled, and laboured, and sinned—for whom I surrendered peace and ease, yea, and a daughter's person and a daughter's blood—they have betrayed me to your hands, and the Curse of Old rests with them evermore—Amen! The disguise is rent: Almamen, the santon, is the son of Issachar the Jew!”

More might he have said, but the spell was broken. With a ferocious yell those living waves of the multitude rushed over the stern fanatic; six cimeters passed through him, and he fell not: at the seventh he was a corpse. Trodden in the clay—then whirled aloft—limb torn from limb,—ere a man could have drawn breath nine times, scarce a vestige of the human form was left to the mangled and bloody clay.

One victim sufficed to slake the wrath of the crowd. They gathered like wild beasts, whose hunger is appeased, around their monarch, who in vain had endeavoured to stay their summary revenge, and who now, pale and breathless, shrunk from the passions he had excited. He faltered forth a few words of remonstrance and exhortation, turned the head of his steed, and took his way to his palace.

The crowd dispersed, but not yet to their homes. The crime of Almamen worked against his whole race. Some rushed to the Jews' quarter, which they set on fire; others to the lonely mansion of Almamen.

Ximen, on quitting the king, had been before the mob. Not anticipating such an effect of the popular rage, he had hastened to the house, which he now deemed at length his own. He had just reached the treasury of his dead lord—he had just feasted his eyes on the massive ingots and glittering gems: in the lust of his heart he had just cried aloud, "And these are mine!" when he heard the roar of the mob below the wall,—when he saw the glare of their torches against the casement. It was in vain that he shrieked aloud, "I am the man that exposed the Jew!" the wild winds scattered his words over a deafened audience. Driven from his chamber by the smoke and flame, afraid to venture forth amongst the crowd, the miser loaded himself with the most precious of the store: he descended the steps, he bent his way to the secret vault, when suddenly the floor, pierced by the flames, crashed under him, and the fire rushed up in a fiercer and more rapid volume, as his death-shriek broke through that lurid shroud.

Such were the principal events of the last night of the Moorish dynasty in Granada.

CHAPTER VII.

THE END.

DAY dawned upon Granada: the populace had sought their homes, and a profound quiet wrapped the streets, save where, from the fires committed in the late tumult, was yet heard the crash of roofs, or the crackle of the light and fragrant timber employed in those pavilions of the summer. The manner in which the mansions of Granada were built, each separated from the other by extensive gardens, fortunately prevented the flames from extending. But the inhabitants cared so little for the hazard, that not a single guard remained to watch the result. Now and then, some miserable forms in the Jewish gown might be seen cowering by the ruins of their house, like the souls that, according to Plato, watch in charnels over their own mouldering bodies. Day dawned, and the beams of the winter sun, smiling away the clouds of the past night, played cheerily on the murmuring waves of the Xenil and the Darro.

Alone, upon a balcony commanding that stately landscape, stood the last of the Moorish kings. He had sought to bring to his aid all the lessons of the philosophy he had cultivated.

“What are we,” thought the musing prince, “that we should fill the world with ourselves—we kings! Earth resounds with the crash of my falling throne: on the ear of races unborn the echo will live prolonged. But what have I lost? nothing that was necessary to my happiness, my repose; nothing save the source of all my wretchedness, the Marah of my life! Shall I less enjoy heaven and earth, or thought or action, or man’s more material luxuries of food or sleep—the common and the cheap desires of all? At the worst, I sink but to a level with chiefs and princes: I am but levelled with those whom the multitude admire and envy. Arouse thee, then, O heart within me! many and deep emotions of sorrow or of joy are yet left to break the monotony of existence.”

He paused; and, at the distance, his eye fell upon the lonely minarets of the distant and deserted palace of Muza Ben Abil Gazan.

“Thou wert right, then,” resumed the king; “thou wert right, brave spirit, not to pity Boabdil: but not because death was in his power; man’s soul is greater than his fortunes, and there is majesty in a life that towers above the ruins that fall around its path.” He

turned away, and his cheek suddenly grew pale ; for he heard, in the courts below, the tread of hoofs, the bustle of preparation : it was the hour for his departure. His philosophy vanished : he groaned aloud, and re-entered the chamber, just as his vizier and the chief of his guard broke upon his solitude.

The old vizier attempted to speak, but his voice failed him.

“ It is time, then, to depart,” said Boabdil, with calmness ; “ let it be so : render up the palace and the fortress, and join thy friend, no more thy monarch, in his new home.”

He stayed not for reply : he hurried on, descended to the court, flung himself on his barb, and, with a small and saddened train, passed through the gate which we yet survey, by a blackened and crumbling tower, overgrown with vines and ivy ; thence, amidst gardens, now appertaining to the convent of the victor faith, he took his mournful and unwitnessed way. When he came to the middle of the hill that rises above those gardens, the steel of the Spanish armour gleamed upon him, as the detachment sent to occupy the palace marched over the summit in steady order and profound silence.

At the head of this vanguard rode, upon a snow-white palfrey, the Bishop of Avila, followed by a long train of barefooted monks. They halted as Boabdil approached, and the grave bishop saluted him with the

air of one who addresses an infidel and an inferior. With the quick sense of dignity common to the great, and yet more to the fallen, Boabdil felt, but resented not, the pride of the ecclesiastic. "Go, Christian," said he, mildly, "the gates of the Alhambra are open, and Allah has bestowed the palace and the city upon your king: may his virtues atone the faults of Boabdil!" So saying, and waiting no answer, he rode on, without looking to the right or left. The Spaniards also pursued their way. The sun had fairly risen above the mountains, when Boabdil and his train beheld, from the eminence on which they were, the whole armament of Spain: and at the same moment, louder than the tramp of horse, or the flash of arms, was heard distinctly the solemn chaunt of *Te Deum*, which preceded the blaze of the unfurled and lofty standards. Boabdil, himself still silent, heard the groans and exclamations of his train; he turned to cheer or chide them, and then saw, from his own watch-tower, with the sun shining full upon its pure and dazzling surface, the silver cross of Spain. His Alhambra was already in the hands of the foe; while, beside that badge of the holy war, waved the gay and flaunting flag of St. Iago, the canonised Mars of the chivalry of Spain.

At that sight the king's voice died within him: he gave the rein to his barb, impatient to close the fatal ceremonial, and did not slacken his speed till almost

within bowshot of the first ranks of the army. Never had Christian war assumed a more splendid and imposing aspect. Far as the eye could reach, extended the glittering and gorgeous lines of that goodly power, bristling with sunlit spears and blazoned banners; while beside, murmured and glowed and danced the silver and laughing Xenil, careless what lord should possess, for his little day, the banks that bloomed by its everlasting course. By a small mosque halted the flower of the army. Surrounded by the archpriests of that mighty hierarchy, the peers and princes of a court that rivalled the Rolands of Charlemagne, was seen the kingly form of Ferdinand himself, with Isabel at his right hand, and the high-born dames of Spain; relieving, with their gay colours and sparkling gems, the sterner splendour of the crested helmet and polished mail.

Within sight of the royal group Boabdil halted,—composed his aspect so as best to conceal his soul,—and, a little in advance of his scanty train, but never, in mien and majesty, more a king, the son of Abdallah met his haughty conqueror.

At the sight of his princely countenance and golden hair, his comely and commanding beauty, made more touching by youth, a thrill of passionate admiration ran through that assembly of the brave and fair. Ferdinand and Isabel slowly advanced to meet their late rival—their new subject; and, as Boabdil would have

dismounted, the Spanish king placed his hand upon his shoulder. "Brother and prince," said he, "forget thy sorrows; and may our friendship hereafter console thee for reverses, against which thou hast contended as a hero and a king—resisting man, but resigned at length to God!"

Boabdil did not affect to return this bitter, but unintentional, mockery of compliment. He bowed his head, and remained a moment silent; then motioning to his train, four of his officers approached, and, kneeling beside Ferdinand, proffered to him, upon a silver buckler, the keys of the city.

"O king!" then said Boabdil, "accept the keys of the last hold which has resisted the arms of Spain! The empire of the Moslem is no more. Thine are the city and the people of Granada: yielding to thy prowess, they yet confide in thy mercy."

"They do well," said the king; "our promises shall not be broken. But, since we know the gallantry of Moorish cavaliers, not to us, but to gentler hands, shall the keys of Granada be surrendered."

Thus saying, Ferdinand gave the keys to Isabel, who would have addressed some soothing flatteries to Boabdil: but the emotion and excitement were too much for her compassionate heart, heroine and queen though she was; and, when she lifted her eyes upon the calm and pale features of the fallen monarch, the

tears gushed from them irresistibly, and her voice died in murmurs. A faint flush overspread the features of Boabdil, and there was a momentary pause of embarrassment, which the Moor was the first to break.

“Fair queen,” said he, with mournful and pathetic dignity, “thou canst read the heart that thy generous sympathy touches and subdues: this is thy last, nor least, glorious conquest. But I detain ye: let not my aspect cloud your triumph. Suffer me to say farewell.”

“May we not hint at the blessed possibility of conversion?” whispered the pious queen, through her tears, to her royal consort.

“Not now—not now, by Saint Iago!” returned Ferdinand, quickly, and in the same tone, willing himself to conclude a painful conference. He then added, aloud, “Go, my brother, and fair fortune with you! Forget the past.”

Boabdil smiled bitterly, saluted the royal pair with profound and silent reverence, and rode slowly on, leaving the army below, as he ascended the path that led to his new principality beyond the Alpuxarras. As the trees snatched the Moorish cavalcade from the view of the king, Ferdinand ordered the army to recommence its march; and trumpet and cymbal presently sent their music to the ear of the Moslems.

Boabdil spurred on at full speed, till his panting charger halted at the little village where his mother,

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The last sight of the Moor

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his slaves, and his faithful Amine (sent on before), awaited him. Joining these, he proceeded without delay upon his melancholy path.

They ascended that eminence which is the pass into the Alpuxarras. From its height, the vale, the rivers, the spires, the towers of Granada, broke gloriously upon the view of the little band. They halted, mechanically and abruptly: every eye was turned to the beloved scene. The proud shame of baffled warriors, the tender memories of home—of childhood—of fatherland, swelled every heart, and gushed from every eye. Suddenly, the distant boom of artillery broke from the citadel, and rolled along the sunlit valley and crystal river. An universal wail burst from the exiles; it smote—it overpowered the heart of the ill-starred king, in vain seeking to wrap himself in Eastern pride or stoical philosophy. The tears gushed from his eyes, and he covered his face with his hands.

Then said his haughty mother, gazing at him with hard and disdainful eyes, in that unjust and memorable reproach which history has preserved—
“Ay, weep, like a woman, over what thou couldst not defend like a man!”

Boabdil raised his countenance, with indignant majesty, when he felt his hand tenderly clasped, and, turning round, saw Amine by his side.

“Heed her not! heed her not, Boabdil!” said the slave; “never didst thou seem to me more noble than in that sorrow. Thou wert a hero for thy throne; but feel still, O light of mine eyes, a woman for thy people!”

“God is great!” said Boabdil, “and God comforts me still! Thy lips, which never flattered me in my power, have no reproach for me in my affliction!”

He said, and smiled upon Amine—it was *her* hour of triumph.

The band wound slowly on through the solitary defiles: and that place where the king wept, and the woman soothed, is still called “El ultimo suspiro del Moro,”—THE LAST SIGH OF THE MOOR.

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CALDERON, THE COURTIER.



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CALDERON, THE COURTIER:

A TALE.

CHAPTER I.

THE ANTECHAMBER.

THE Tragi-Comedy of Court Intrigue, which had ever found its principal theatre in Spain since the accession of the House of Austria to the throne, was represented with singular complication of incident, and brilliancy of performance, during the reign of Philip the Third. That monarch, weak, indolent, and superstitious, left the reins of government in the hands of the Duke of Lerma. The Duke of Lerma, in his turn, mild, easy, ostentatious, and shamefully corrupt, resigned the authority he had thus received to Roderigo Calderon, an able and resolute upstart, whom nature and fortune seemed equally to favour and endow. But, not more to his talents, which were great, than to the policy of religious persecution which

he had supported and enforced, Roderigo Calderon owed his promotion. The King and the Inquisition had, some years before our story opens, resolved upon the general expulsion of the Moriscos—the wealthiest, the most active, the most industrious portion of the population.

“I would sooner,” said the bigoted king—and his words were hallowed by the enthusiasm of the church—“depopulate my kingdom than suffer it to harbour a single infidel.”

The Duke de Lerma entered into the scheme that lost to Spain many of her most valuable subjects, with the zeal of a pious Catholic, expectant of the cardinal's hat which he afterwards obtained. But to this scheme Calderon brought an energy, a decision,—a vehemence, and sagacity of hatred, that savoured more of personal vengeance than religious persecution. His perseverance in this good work established him firmly in the king's favour; and in this he was supported by the friendship not only of Lerma, but of Fray Louis de Aliaga, a renowned Jesuit, and confessor to the king. The disasters and distresses occasioned by this barbarous crusade, which crippled the royal revenues, and seriously injured the estates of the principal barons, from whose lands the industrious and intelligent Moriscos were expelled, ultimately concentrated a deep and general hatred upon Calderon. But his extraordinary address and vigorous energies, his perfect mastery of

the science of intrigue, not only sustained, but continued to augment, his power. Though the king was yet in the prime of middle age, his health was infirm and his life precarious. Calderon had contrived, while preserving the favour of the reigning monarch, to establish himself as the friend and companion of the heir apparent. In this, indeed, he had affected to yield to the policy of the king himself; for Philip the Third had a wholesome terror of the possible ambition of his son, who early evinced talents which might have been formidable, but for passions which urged him into the most vicious pleasures, and the most extravagant excesses. The craft of the king was satisfied by the device of placing about the person of the Infant one devoted to himself; nor did his conscience, pious as he was, revolt at the profligacy which his favourite was said to participate and, perhaps, to encourage; since, the less popular the prince, the more powerful the king.

But, all this while, there was formed a powerful cabal against both the Duke of Lerma and Don Rodrigo Calderon, in a quarter where it might least have been anticipated. The cardinal duke, naturally anxious to cement and perpetuate his authority, had placed his son, the Duke d'Uzeda, in a post that gave him constant access to the monarch. The prospect of power made Uzeda eager to seize at once upon all its advantages; and it became the object of his life to

supplant his father. This would have been easy enough but for the genius and vigilance of Calderon, whom he hated as a rival, disdained as an upstart, and dreaded as a foe. Philip was soon aware of the contest between the two factions, but, in the true spirit of Spanish kingcraft, he took care to play one against the other. Nor could Calderon, powerful as he was, dare openly to seek the ruin of Uzeda; while Uzeda, more rash and, perhaps, more ingenuous, entered into a thousand plots for the downfall of the prime favourite.

The frequent missions, principally into Portugal, in which of late Calderon had been employed, had allowed Uzeda to encroach more and more upon the royal confidence; while the very means which Don Roderigo had adopted to perpetuate his influence, by attaching himself to the prince, necessarily distracted his attention from the intrigues of his rival. Perhaps, indeed, the greatness of Calderon's abilities made him too arrogantly despise the machinations of the duke, who, though not without some capacities as a courtier, was wholly incompetent to those duties of a minister on which he had set his ambition and his grasp.

Such was the state of parties in the Court of Philip the Third, at the time in which we commence our narrative in the antechamber of Don Roderigo Calderon.

“It is not to be endured,” said Don Felix de Castro, an old noble, whose sharp features and diminutive stature proclaimed the purity of his blood and the antiquity of his descent.

“Just three-quarters of an hour and five minutes have I waited for audience to a fellow who would once have thought himself honoured if I had ordered him to call my coach,” said Don Diego Sarmiento de Mendoza.

“Then, if it chafe you so much, gentlemen, why come you here at all? I dare say, Don Roderigo can dispense with your attendance.”

This was said bluntly by a young noble of good mien, whose impetuous and irritable temperament betrayed itself by an impatience of gesture and motion unusual amongst his countrymen. Sometimes he walked, with uneven strides, to and fro the apartments, unheeding the stately groups whom he jostled, or the reproving looks that he attracted; sometimes he paused abruptly, raised his eyes, muttered, twitched his cloak, or played with his sword-knot; or, turning abruptly round upon his solemn neighbours, as some remark on his strange bearing struck his ear, brought the blood to many a haughty cheek by his stern gaze of defiance and disdain. It was easy to perceive that this personage belonged to the tribe—rash, vain, and young—who are eager to take offence, and to provoke quarrel. Nevertheless, the cavalier had noble and

great qualities. A stranger to courts, in the camp he was renowned for a chivalrous generosity and an extravagant valour, that emulated the ancient heroes of Spanish romaunt and song. His was a dawn that promised a hot noon and a glorious eve. The name of this brave soldier was Martin Fonseca. He was of an ancient but impoverished house, and related, in a remote degree, to the Duke de Lerma. In his earliest youth he had had cause to consider himself the heir to a wealthy uncle on his mother's side; and with those expectations, while still but a boy, he had been invited to court by the cardinal duke. Here, however, the rude and blunt sincerity of his bearing had so greatly shocked the formal hypocrisies of the court, and had more than once so seriously offended the minister, that his powerful kinsman gave up all thought of pushing Fonseca's fortunes at Madrid, and meditated some plausible excuse for banishing him from court. At this time, the rich uncle, hitherto childless, married a second time, and was blessed with an heir. It was no longer necessary to keep terms with Don Martin; and he suddenly received an order to join the army on the frontiers. Here his courage soon distinguished him; but his honest nature still stood in the way of his promotion. Several years elapsed, and his rise had been infinitely slower than that of men not less inferior to him in birth than merit.

Some months since, he had repaired to Madrid, to enforce his claims upon the government; but, instead of advancing his suit, he had contrived to effect a serious breach with the cardinal, and been abruptly ordered back to the camp. Once more he appeared at Madrid; but this time it was not to plead desert, and demand honours.

In any country but Spain under the reign of Philip the Third, Martin Fonseca would have risen early to high fortunes. But, as we have said, his talents were not those of the flatterer or the hypocrite; and it was a matter of astonishment to the calculators round him to see Don Martin Fonseca in the anteroom of Roderigo Calderon, Count Oliva, Marquis de Siete Iglesias, secretary to the King, and parasite and favourite of the Infant of Spain.

"Why come you here at all?" repeated the young soldier.

"Señor," answered Don Felix de Castro, with great gravity, "we have business with Don Roderigo. Men of our station must attend to the affairs of the state, no matter by whom transacted."

"That is, you must crawl on your knees to ask for pensions and governorships, and transact the affairs of the state by putting your hands into its coffers."

"Señor!" growled Don Felix, angrily, as his hand played with his sword-belt.

“Tush!” said the young man, scornfully, turning on his heel.

The folding-doors were thrown open, and all conversation ceased at the entrance of Don Roderigo Calderon.

This remarkable personage had risen from the situation of a confidential scribe to the Duke of Lerma, to the nominal rank of secretary to the King—to the real station of autocrat of Spain. The birth of the favourite of fortune was exceedingly obscure. He had long affected to conceal it; but, when he found curiosity had proceeded into serious investigation of his origin, he had suddenly appeared to make a virtue of necessity; proclaimed, of his own accord, that his father was a common soldier of Valladolid; and even invited to Madrid, and lodged in his own palace, his low-born progenitor. This prudent frankness disarmed malevolence on the score of birth. But, when the old soldier died, rumours went abroad that he had confessed, on his death-bed, that he was not in any way related to Calderon; that he had submitted to an imposture which secured to his old age so respectable and luxurious an asylum; and that he knew not for what end Calderon had forced upon him the honours of spurious parentship. This tale, which, ridiculed by most, was yet believed by some, gave rise to darker reports concerning one on whom the eyes of all Spain were fixed.

It was supposed that he had some motive, beyond that of shame at their meanness, to conceal his real origin and name. What could be that motive, if not the dread of discovery for some black and criminal offence, connected with his earlier youth, and for which he feared the prosecution of the law? They who affected most to watch his exterior, averred that often, in his gayest revels and proudest triumphs, his brow would lower—his countenance change—and it was only by a visible and painful effort that he could restore his mind to its self-possession. His career, which evinced an utter contempt for the ordinary rules and scruples that curb even adventurers into a seeming of honesty and virtue, appeared in some way to justify these reports. But, at times, flashes of sudden and brilliant magnanimity broke forth to bewilder the curious, to puzzle the examiners of human character, and to contrast the general tenor of his ambitious and remorseless ascent to power. His genius was confessed by all, but it was a genius that in no way promoted the interests of his country. It served only to prop, defend, and advance himself—to baffle difficulties—to defeat foes—to convert every accident, every chance, into new steppingstones in his course. Whatever his birth, it was evident that he had received every advantage of education; and scholars extolled his learning and boasted of his patronage. While, more recently, if the daring and wild excesses of the profligate prince

were, on the one hand, popularly imputed to the guidance of Calderon, and increased the hatred generally conceived against him ; so, on the other hand, his influence over the future monarch seemed to promise a new lease to his authority, and struck fear into the councils of his foes. In fact, the power of the upstart marquis appeared so firmly rooted, the career before him so splendid, that there were not wanted whisperers, who, in addition to his other crimes, ascribed to Roderigo Calderon the assistance of the black art. But the black art in which that subtle courtier was a proficient, is one that dispenses with necromancy. It was the art of devoting the highest intellect to the most selfish purposes — an art that thrives tolerably well, for a time, in the great world !

He had been for several weeks absent from Madrid on a secret mission ; and to this, his first public levee, on his return, thronged all the rank and chivalry of Spain.

The crowd gave way, as, with haughty air, in the maturity of manhood, the Marquis de Siete Iglesias moved along. He disdained all accessories of dress, to enhance the effect of his singularly striking exterior. His mantle and vest of black cloth, made in the simplest fashion, were unadorned with the jewels that then constituted the ordinary insignia of rank. His hair, bright and glossy as the raven's plume, curled back from the

lofty and commanding brow, which, save by one deep wrinkle between the eyes, was not only as white, but as smooth, as marble. His features were aquiline and regular; and the deep olive of his complexion seemed pale and clear, when contrasted by the rich jet of the moustache and pointed beard. The lightness of his tall and slender, but muscular form, made him appear younger than he was; and, had it not been for the supercilious and scornful arrogance of air which so seldom characterises gentle birth, Calderon might have mingled with the loftiest magnates of Europe, and seemed to the observer the stateliest of the group. It was one of those rare forms that are made to command the one sex and fascinate the other. But, on a deeper scrutiny, the restlessness of the brilliant eye—the quiver of the upper lip—a certain abruptness of manner and speech, might have shewn that greatness had brought suspicion as well as pride. The spectators beheld the huntsman on the height;—the huntsman saw the abyss below, and respired with difficulty the air above.

The courtiers one by one approached the marquis, who received them with very unequal courtesy. To the common herd he was sharp, dry, and bitter; to the great he was obsequious, yet with a certain grace and manliness of bearing that elevated even the character of servility; and all the while, as he bowed low to a Medina, or a Guzman, there was a half impercep-

tible mockery lurking in the corners of his mouth, which seemed to imply that, while his policy cringed, his heart despired. To two or three, whom he either personally liked, or honestly esteemed, he was familiar, but brief, in his address; to those whom he had cause to detest or to dread—his foes, his underminers—he assumed a yet greater frankness, mingled with the most caressing insinuation of voice and manner.

Apart from the herd, with folded arms, and an expression of countenance in which much admiration was blent with some curiosity and a little contempt, Don Martin Fonseca gazed upon the favourite.

“ I have done this man a favour,” thought he: “ I have contributed towards his first rise—I am now his suppliant. Faith! I, who have never found sincerity or gratitude in the camp, come to seek those hidden treasures at a court! Well, we are strange puppets, we mortals!”

Don Diego Sarmiento de Mendoza had just received the smiling salutation of Calderon, when the eye of the latter fell upon the handsome features of Fonseca. The blood mounted to his brow; he hastily promised Don Diego all that he desired; and, hurrying back through the crowd, retired to his private cabinet. The levee was broken up.

As Fonseca, who had caught the glance of the secretary, and who drew no favourable omen from his sudden evanishment, slowly turned to depart with

the rest, a young man, plainly dressed, touched him on the shoulder.

“ You are Señor Don Martin Fonseca ?”

“ The same.”

“ Follow me, if it please you, señor, to my master, Don Roderigo Calderon.”

Fonseca's face brightened; he obeyed the summons; and in another moment he was in the cabinet of the Sejanus of Spain.



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CHAPTER II.

THE LOVER AND THE CONFIDANT.

CALDERON received the young soldier at the door of his chamber with marked and almost affectionate respect.

“Don Martin,” said he, and there seemed a touch of true feeling in the tremor of his rich sweet voice, “I owe you the greatest debt one man can incur to another—it was your hand that set before my feet their first stepping-stone to power. I date my fortunes from the hour in which I was placed in your father’s house as your preceptor. When the cardinal duke invited you to Madrid, I was your companion; and when, afterwards, you joined the army, and required no longer the services of the peaceful scholar, you demanded of your illustrious kinsman the single favour—to provide for Calderon. I had already been fortunate enough to win the countenance of the duke, and from that day my rise was rapid. Since then we have never met. Dare I hope that it is now in the power of Calderon to prove himself not ungrateful?”

“ Yes,” said Fonseca, eagerly, “ it is in your power to save me from the most absolute wretchedness that can befall me. It is in your power, at least I think so, to render me the happiest of men !”

“ Be seated, I pray you, señor. And how? I am your servant.”

“ Thou knowest,” said Fonseca, “ that, though the kinsman, I am not the favourite, of the Duke of Lerma.”

“ Nay, nay,” interrupted Calderon, softly, and with a bland smile, “ you misunderstand my illustrious patron: he loves you, but not your indiscretions.”

“ Yes, honesty is very indiscreet! I cannot stoop to the life of the antechamber; I cannot, like the Duke of Lerma, detest my nearest relative, if his shadow cross the line of my interests. I am of the race of Pelayo, not Oppas; and my profession, rather that of an ancient Persian than a modern Spaniard, is to manage the steed, to wield the sword, and to speak the truth.”

There was an earnestness and gallantry in the young man's aspect, manner, and voice, as he thus spoke, which afforded the strongest contrast to the inscrutable brow and artificial softness of Calderon; and which, indeed, for the moment, occasioned that crafty and profound adventurer an involuntary feeling of self-humiliation.

“ But,” continued Fonseca, “ let this pass: I come

to my story and my request. Do you, or do you not know, that I have been for some time attached to Beatriz Coello?"

"Beatriz," repeated Calderon, abstractedly, with an altered countenance, "it is a sweet name—it was my mother's!"

"Your mother's! I thought to have heard her name was Mary Sandalen?"

"True—Mary Beatriz Sandalen," replied Calderon, indifferently. "But, proceed. I heard, after your last visit to Madrid, when, owing to my own absence in Portugal, I was not fortunate enough to see you, that you had offended the duke by desiring an alliance unsuitable to your birth. Who, then, is this Beatriz Coello?"

"An orphan of humble origin and calling. In infancy she was left to the care of a woman who, I believe, had been her nurse; they were settled in Seville, and the old gouvernante's labours in embroidery maintained them both till Beatriz was fourteen. At that time the poor woman was disabled, by a stroke of palsy, from continuing her labours; and Beatriz, good child, yearning to repay the obligations she had received, in her turn sought to maintain her protectress. She possessed the gift of a voice wonderful for its sweetness. This gift came to the knowledge of the superintendent of the theatre at Seville: he made her the most advantageous proposals to enter upon the stage.

Beatriz, innocent child, was unaware of the perils of that profession: she accepted, eagerly, the means that would give comfort to the declining life of her only friend—she became an actress. At that time we were quartered in Seville, to keep guard on the suspected Moriscos.”

“Ah, the hated infidels!” muttered Calderon, fiercely, through his teeth.

“I saw Beatriz, and loved her at first sight. I do not say,” added Fonseca, with a blush, “that my suit, at the outset, was that which alone was worthy of her; but her virtue soon won my esteem, as well as love. I left Seville to seek my father, and obtain his consent to a marriage with Beatriz. You know a hidalgo’s prejudices—they are insuperable. Meanwhile the fame of the beauty and voice of the young actress reached Madrid, and hither she was removed from Seville, by royal command. To Madrid, then, I hastened, on the pretence of demanding promotion. You, as you have stated, were absent in Portugal, on some state mission. I sought the Duke de Lerma. I implored him to give me some post, anywhere—I recked not beneath what sky, in the vast empire of Spain—in which, removed from the prejudices of birth and of class, and provided with other means, less precarious than those that depend on the sword, I might make Beatriz my wife. The polished duke was more inexorable than the stern hidalgo. I flew to Beatriz; I told her I had nothing

but my heart and right hand to offer. She wept, and she refused me."

"Because you were not rich?"

"Shame on you, no! but because she would not consent to mar my fortunes, and banish me from my native land. The next day I received a peremptory order to rejoin the army, and with that order came a brevet of promotion. Lover though I be, I am a Spaniard: to have disobeyed the order would have been dishonour. Hope dawned upon me—I might rise, I might become rich. We exchanged our vows of fidelity. I returned to the camp. We corresponded. At last her letters alarmed me. Through all her reserve, I saw that she was revolted by her profession, and terrified at the persecutions to which it exposed her: the old woman, her sole guide and companion, was dying: she was dejected and unhappy: she despaired of our union; she expressed a desire for the refuge of the cloister. At last came this letter, bidding me farewell for ever. Her relation was dead; and, with the little money she had amassed, she had bought her entrance into the convent of St. Mary of the White Sword. Imagine my despair! I obtained leave of absence—I flew to Madrid. Beatriz is already immured in that dreary asylum; she has entered on her noviciate."

"Is that the letter you refer to?" said Calderon, extending his hand.

Fonseca gave him the letter.

Hard and cold as Calderon's character had grown, there was something in the tone of this letter—its pure and noble sentiments, its innocence, its affection—that touched some mystic chord in his heart. He sighed as he laid it down.

“You are, like all of us, Don Martin,” said he, with a bitter smile, “the dupe of a woman's faith. But you must purchase experience for yourself; and if, indeed, you ask my services to procure you present bliss and future disappointment, those services are yours. It will not, I think, be difficult to interest the queen in your favour: leave me this letter, it is one to touch the heart of a woman. If we succeed with the queen, who is the patroness of the convent, we may be sure to obtain an order from court for the liberation of the novice: the next step is one more arduous. It is not enough to restore Beatriz to freedom—we must reconcile your family to the marriage. This cannot be done while she is not noble; but letters patent (here Calderon smiled) could ennoble a mushroom itself—your humble servant is an example. Such letters may be bought or begged; I will undertake to procure them. Your father, too, may find a dowry accompanying the title, in the shape of a high and honourable post for yourself. You deserve much; you are beloved in the army; you have won a high name in the world. I take shame on myself that your fortunes have been overlooked. ‘Out of sight

out of mind;’ alas! it is a true proverb. I confess that, when I beheld you in the ante-room, I blushed for my past forgetfulness. No matter—I will repair my fault. Men say that my patronage is misapplied—I will prove the contrary by your promotion.”

“Generous Calderon!” said Fonseca, falteringly, “I ever hated the judgments of the vulgar. They calumniate you; it is from envy.”

“No,” said Calderon, coldly, “I am bad enough, but I am still human. Besides, gratitude is my policy; I have always found that it is a good way to get on in the world, to serve those who serve us.”

“But the duke?”

“Fear not; I have an oil that will smooth all the billows on that surface. As for the letter, I say, leave it with me; I will shew it to the queen. Let me see you again to-morrow.”

CHAPTER · III.

A RIVAL.

CALDERON'S eyes were fixed musingly on the door which closed on Fonseca's martial and noble form.

"Great contrasts among men!" said he, half aloud. "All the classes into which naturalists ever divided the animal world contain not the variety that exists between man and man. And, yet, we all agree in one object of our being — all prey on each other! Glory, which is but the thirst of blood, makes you soldier the tiger of his kind; other passions have made me the serpent: both fierce, relentless, unscrupulous — both! hero and courtier, valour and craft! Hem! I will serve this young man — he has served me. When all other affection was torn from me, he, then a boy, smiled on me, and bade me love him. Why has he been so long forgotten? He is not of the race that I abhor; no Moorish blood flows in his veins; neither is he of the great and powerful, whom I dread; nor of the crouching and the servile, whom I despise: he is one whom I can aid without a blush."

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While Calderon thus soliloquised, the arras was lifted aside, and a cavalier, on whose cheek was the first down of manhood, entered the apartment.

“So, Roderigo, alone! welcome back to Madrid. Nay, seat thyself, man—seat thyself.”

Calderon bowed with the deepest reverence; and, placing a large *fauteuil* before the stranger, seated himself on a stool at a little distance.

The new-comer was of dark and saturnine complexion; but his features, on the whole, were comely, and his gorgeous dress sparkled with prodigal jewels. Boy as he was, there was yet a careless loftiness, a haughty ease, in the gesture—the bend of the neck, the wave of the hand, which, coupled with the almost servile homage of the arrogant favourite, would have convinced the most superficial observer that he was born of the highest rank. A second glance would have betrayed, in the full Austrian lip—the high, but narrow forehead—the dark, voluptuous, but crafty and sinister eye, the features of the descendant of Charles V. It was the Infant of Spain that stood in the chamber of his ambitious minion.

“This is convenient, this private entrance into thy penetralia, Roderigo. It shelters me from the prying eyes of Uzeda, who ever seeks to cozen the sire by spying on the son. We will pay him off one of these days. He loves you less than he does his prince.”

“ I bear no malice to him for that, your highness. He covets the smiles of the rising sun, and rails at the humble object which, he thinks, obstructs the beam.”

“ He might be easy on that score: I hate the man, and his cold formalities. He is ever fancying that we princes are intent on the affairs of state, and forgets that we are mortal, and that youth is the age for the bower, not the council. My precious Calderon, life would be dull without thee: how I rejoice at thy return, thou best inventor of pleasure that satiety ever prayed for! Nay, blush not: some men despise thee for thy talents; I do thee homage. By my great grand-sire's beard, it will be a merry time at court when I am monarch, and thou minister!”

Calderon looked earnestly at the prince, but his scrutiny did not serve to dispel a certain suspicion of the royal sincerity that ever and anon came across the favourite's most sanguine dreams. With all Philip's gaiety, there was something restrained and latent in his ambiguous smile, and his calm, deep, brilliant eye. Calderon, immeasurably above his lord in genius, was scarcely, perhaps, the equal of that beardless boy in hypocrisy and craft, in selfish coldness, in matured depravity.

“ Well,” resumed the prince, “ I pay you not these compliments without an object. I have need of you — great need; never did I so require your services

as at this moment ; never was there so great demand on your invention, your courage, your skill. Know, Calderon, I love !”

“ My prince,” said the marquis, smiling, “ it is certainly not first love. How often has your highness ——”

“ No,” interrupted the prince, hastily — “ no, I never loved till now. We never can love what we can easily win ; but this, Calderon, *this* heart would be a conquest. Listen. I was at the convent chapel of St. Mary of the White Sword yesterday with the queen. Thou knowest that the abbess once was a lady of the chamber, and the queen loves her. Both of us were moved and astonished by the voice of one of the choir—it was that of a novice. After the ceremony, the queen made inquiries touching this new Santa Cecilia ; and who dost thou think she is ? No ; thou wilt never guess !—the once celebrated singer—the beautiful, the inimitable Beatriz Coello ! Ah ! you may well look surprised ; when actresses turn nuns, it is wellnigh time for Calderon and Philip to turn monks. Now, you must know, Roderigo, that I, unworthy though I be, am the cause of this conversion. There is a certain Martin Fonseca, a kinsman of Lerma’s—thou knowest him well. I learned, some time since, from the duke, that this young Orlando was most madly enamoured of a low-born girl—nay, desired to wed her. The duke’s story

moved my curiosity. I found that it was the young Beatriz Coello, whom I had already admired on the stage. Ah, Calderon, she blazed and set during thy dull mission to Lisbon! I sought an opportunity to visit her. I was astonished at her beauty, that seemed more dazzling in the chamber than on the stage. I pressed my suit—in vain. Calderon, hear you that?—in vain! Why wert thou not by? Thy arts never fail, my friend! She was living with an old relation, or *gouvernante*. The old relation died suddenly—I took advantage of her loneliness—I entered her house at night. By St. Jago, her virtue baffled and defeated me. The next morning she was gone; nor could my researches discover her, until at the convent of St Mary I recognised the lost actress in the young novice. She has fled to the convent to be true to Fonseca; she must fly from the convent to bless the prince! This is my tale: I want thy aid."

"Prince," said Calderon, gravely, "thou knowest the laws of Spain—the rigour of the church. I dare not"—

"Pshaw! No scruples—my rank will bear thee harmless. Nay, look not so demure; why, even thou, I see, hast thy Armida. This billet in a female hand—Heaven and earth! Calderon! What name is this? Beatriz Coello! Darest thou have crossed my path? Speak, sir!—speak!"

“Your highness,” said Calderon, with a mixture of respect and dignity in his manner, — “your highness, hear me. My first benefactor, my beloved pupil, my earliest patron, was the same Don Martin Fonseca who seeks this girl with an honest love. This morning he has visited me, to implore my intercession on his behalf. Oh, prince! turn not away: thou knowest not half his merit. Thou knowest not the value of such subjects—men of the old iron race of Spain. Thou hast a noble and royal heart; be not the rival to the defender of thy crown. Bless this brave soldier—spare this poor orphan—and one generous act of self-denial shall give thee absolution for a thousand pleasures.”

“This from Roderigo Calderon!” said the prince, with a bitter sneer. “Man, know thy station, and thy profession. When I want homilies, I seek my confessor; when I have resolved on a vice, I come to thee. A truce with this bombast. For Fonseca, he shall be consoled; and when he shall learn who is his rival, he is a traitor if he remain discontented with his lot. Thou shalt aid me, Calderon!”

“Your highness will pardon me—no!”

“Do I hear right? No!—Art thou not my minion—my instrument? Can I not destroy as I have helped to raise thee? Thy fortunes have turned thy brain. The king already suspects and dislikes

thee; thy foe, Uzeda, has his ear. The people execrate thee. If I abandon thee, thou art lost. Look to it!"

Calderon remained mute and erect, with his arms folded on his breast, and his cheek flushed with suppressed passions. Philip gazed at him earnestly, and then, muttering to himself, approached the favourite with an altered air.

"Come, Calderon—I have been hasty—you maddened me; I meant not to wound you. Thou art honest, and I think thou lovest me; and I will own, that in ordinary circumstances thy advice would be good, and thy scruples laudable. But I tell thee, that I adore this girl; that I have set all my hopes upon her; that at whatever cost, whatever risk, she must be mine. Wilt *thou* desert me? Wilt thou, on whose faith I have ever leaned so trustingly, forsake thy friend and thy prince for this brawling soldier! No; I wrong thee."

"Oh!" said Calderon, with much semblance of emotion,—“I would lay down my life in your service, and I have often surrendered my conscience to your lightest will. But this would be so base a perfidy in me! He has confided his life of life to my hands. How canst even thou count on my faith, if thou knowest me false to another?"

"False! art thou not false to me? Have I not

confided to thee, and dost thou not desert me—nay, perhaps, betray? How wouldst thou serve this Fonseca? How liberate the novice?”

“By an order of the court. Your royal mother——”

“Enough!” said the prince, fiercely; “do so. Thou shalt have leisure for repentance.”

As he spoke, Philip strode to the door. Calderon, alarmed and anxious, sought to detain him; but the prince broke disdainfully away, and Calderon was again alone.



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