BÉCQUER GUSTAVO ADOLFO

ROMANTIC LEGENDS OF SPAIN

Gustavo Bécquer

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Bécquer G.

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Содержание

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PREFACE

A WORD regarding the circumstances under which this translation was made will be pardoned by all children of dear mothers.

Mrs. Cornelia Frances Bates (1826-1908), a graduate of Mount Holyoke in the days of Mary Lyon and the widow of a Congregational minister, took up the study of Spanish at the age of seventy-one. Until her death ten years later, the proverbial ten years of "labor and sorrow," her Spanish readings and translations were a keen intellectual delight. Her Spanish Bible, from which she had committed many passages to memory, was found at her death no less worn than her English one. Even a few hours before dying, she repeated in Spanish, without the failure of a syllable, the Shepherd's Psalm and the Lord's Prayer.

So youthful was her spirit that, of the various modern Spanish works with which she became acquainted, nothing fascinated her so much as Becquer's strange, romantic tales. The wilder they were, the brighter would be the eager face, under its soft white cap, bent over the familiar little green volumes and the great red dictionary. Seeing the pleasure she took in these legends and learning that no complete English translation existed, I suggested that we unite in a "Becquer Book." Her full share of the work was promptly done; mine was delayed; and the volume – which we had meant to inscribe to my sister – becomes her own memorial.

Gratitude for helpful suggestions is due to the late Mr. Frederick Gulick of Auburndale, Mass., formerly of San Sebastian, and to Señorita Carolina Marcial, formerly of Seville and now of Wellesley College. Especial and most cordial acknowledgment is made of the critical reading given the entire manuscript by Miss Alice H. Bushée of the *Colegio Internacional*, Madrid.

K. L. B.

GUSTAVO ADOLFO BECQUER

THE writer of these tales was a young poet, oppressed by illness, care and poverty. His brief life held many troubles. Born in Seville, February 17, 1836, of a distinguished family that came to Andalusia from Flanders at about the end of the sixteenth century, he was but five years old, the fourth of eight little sons, when he lost his father. The bereavement was greater than anyone knew, for Don José Dominguez Becquer, a genre painter of repute, could have given this imaginative child, a genius in germ, parental sympathy and guidance in an unusual degree. Less than five years later, the mother died, and the disposition of the orphans became a puzzling problem for relatives and friends. Gustavo, who had already attended the day school of San Antonio Abad, was admitted, through the efforts of an uncle, to the *Colegio de San Telmo*, a naval academy, maintained by the government, on the banks of the Guadalquivir. This famous school of Seville was originally founded by the companions of Columbus in gratitude to St. Elmo, patron of mariners. Here Gustavo found a friend of congenial tastes, Narciso Campillo, with whom he composed and presented before their admiring mates what Señor Campillo, who also made a name for himself in Spanish letters, has described as "a fearful and extravagant drama." But Gustavo had enjoyed barely a year of this new life when Isabella II suppressed the academy, bestowing building and grounds on her newly wedded sister, the Duchesse de Montpensier. Visitors to modern Seville know well the *Palacio de Santelmo*, with the fountains playing in its marble courts, with its gardens of orange trees, palms and aloes, of trellised roses and luxuriant tropic shrubs; but who gives a thought there to the exiled boy thrown again, at the age of ten, upon the chances of the world?

His godmother, Doña Manuela Monchay, opened her doors to the waif, and in her comfortable home he dwelt for the next eight years. His schooling was over, but he read his way through Doña Manuela's library and, at fourteen, entered the studio of a Seville painter; here for two years he trained his talent for drawing. Then he changed to the rival studio, that of his father's brother, who was sufficiently impressed by the lad's literary promise to have him taught a little Latin. Meanwhile his godmother, childless and well-to-do, was urging him to adopt a mercantile career. Had he consented, it is supposed that she would have made him her heir, and his manhood, instead of the exhausting struggle it was for bread and shelter, might have been, from the worldly point of view, prosperous enough. But the visionary youth, who, says his friend Correa,[1] "had learned to draw while he was yet learning to write, whose unbounded passion for reading had given him wider horizons than those of book-keeping, and who could never do a sum in mental arithmetic," would not betray his ideal. While his prudent godmother was making her own plans for his future, he was composing with Campillo the opening cantos of an epic on *The Conquest of Seville*, or wandering alone on the banks of the Guadalquivir, his "majestic Bétis, the river of nymphs, naiads and poets, which, crowned with belfries and laurels, flows to the sea from a crystal amphora." In the shade of the white poplars he would lie and dream "of an independent, blissful life, like that of the bird, which is born to sing, while God provides it with food, … that tranquil life of the poet, which glows with a soft lustre from generation to generation." And when that life should be over, he saw his grateful city, the Sultana of Andalusia, laying her poet down "to dream the golden dream of immortality on the banks of the Bétis, whose praise I should have sung in splendid odes, in that very spot where I used to go so often to hear the sweet murmur of its waves." His pensive fancy loved to picture that white cross under the poplars

[1] To the posthumous edition of Becquer's *Works*, Señor Correa prefixed an account of the poet's life. This, brief and often indefinite as it is, remains the authentic biography. It has been partially reproduced in English by Mrs. Humphry Ward, who published in *Macmillan's Magazine*, February, 1883, pp. 305-320, a valuable article entitled: *A Spanish Romanticist: Gustavo Becquer*. Professor Olmsted of Cornell, in his recent class-room edition of selected *Legends, Tales and Poems* by Becquer (Ginn and Company, Boston, 1907) contributes additional facts gathered from Spanish periodical articles – of which he gives a bibliography – and in conversation with Spaniards who had known the poet.

whose green and silver leaves, as they rustled in the wind, would seem to be praying for his soul, while the birds in their branches would carol at dawn a joyous resurrection hymn. And when the river reeds and the wild morning-glories, his favorite "blue morning-glories with a disk of carmine at the heart," hovered over by "golden insects with wings of light," should have grown up about the marble, hiding his time-blurred name with a leafy curtain, what matter? "Who would not know that I was sleeping there?" And so, to escape commercial drudgery and realize these fair visions, the young Andalusian, at eighteen, the mid-point of his life, with no more than sufficed for the costs of the journey to Madrid, started forth on his quest of glory.

It may truly be said of Becquer that, like Hakluyt's staunch old worthies, he was "content to take his adventure gladly." Nobody ever knew how narrow were the straits of those first years in Madrid. He had to turn his hand to anything, from odds and ends of journalism to a day's job of fresco-painting. Homesick, hungry, ill, he kept through it all a brave buoyancy of spirits and a manly reticence as to his sufferings. "He was never known," testifies Correa, "to complain of his hard life or his physical distresses, nor to curse his fate. Silent as long as he was unhappy, he would find voice only to express a moment's pleasure." He made fun of his troubles, which he, more easily than grosser souls, could indeed forget in the ecstatic contemplation of beauty or in giving form to the crowding fantasies that clamored in his brain. A friend, more concerned over his privations than was Becquer himself, found him a position as copyist in an office of one of the state departments at a salary of one hundred and fifty dollars a year. The poet, more out of gratitude for the intended kindness than from any sense of personal relief, for he would rather starve body than mind, undertook the irksome employment. But the national finances, under the drain of the Carlist wars and the popular uprisings and official corruption of Isabella's disastrous reign, had become so embarrassed that economy in the public service was imperative, and Becquer was pointed out – perhaps, after all, by his good angel – for a victim. In the *Dirección de Bienes Nacionales*, as in other departments, superfluous men were to be weeded out. The Director, as chance would have it, came into the office one day when all the clerks were gathered about Becquer's stool, eagerly looking over his shoulders, lost in admiration of the sketches that his facile pen was turning off. The Director, joining the group and peering with the rest, demanded: "What is this?" Not recognizing the voice, the culprit, absorbed in the joy of art, innocently answered: "This is Ophelia, plucking the leaves from her garland. That old uncle is a grave-digger. Over there" – At this point the awful silence smote his senses and he looked up only to meet the verdict: "Here is one that can be spared."

But although Becquer thus failed to serve his country with proper zeal in the only direct opportunity she afforded him, the touch of the capital, with its sense of impending crisis, its call for patriotic leadership, had given a new turn to his dreams. Or perhaps it would be truer to say that the Gothic cathedrals, old castles and ruined abbeys so abundant in Castile, though not in the Crowned City itself, had fastened the hold of the feudal world, with its military ideals, upon his imagination. In these days he longed – or fancied that he longed – to be "a thunderbolt of war," to exert a mighty influence on the destinies of Spain, so that every revolution of the future might be, as it were, a personification of himself, but most of all he indulged his musings in the glorious picture of a warrior's death and burial. He would have chosen, his "thirst for triumphs and acclaim assuaged, to fall in battle, hearing as the last sound of earth the shrill clamor of the trumpets of my valiant hosts, – to be borne upon a shield, wrapped in the folds of my tattered banner, emblem of a hundred victories, finding the peace of the grave in the depths of one of those holy cloisters where dwells eternal silence and to which the centuries lend majesty and a mysterious, indefinable hue." And then the artist in him revelled in all the detailed beauty of that visioned tomb "bathed in dusky shadow," on which his statue, "of richest, transparent alabaster," with sword on breast and couchant lion at the feet, was to sleep an august sleep under the hushed watch of long-robed, praying angels.

Meanwhile, bad lodging and uncertain fare were telling on his delicate constitution. In one respect, Becquer was always fortunate – in friends. Early in his Madrid life he had won the faithful

affection of Correa, another young literary aspirant leading a hand-to-mouth existence, but of vigorous physique and practical capabilities. When in the third year of his struggle Becquer fell seriously ill – "horribly" ill, says Correa – this devoted comrade not only nursed him through, but, finding among the poet's papers a long legend purporting to be an East Indian tradition, managed to get it published in *La Crónica*, – the beginning of success. This legend, *The Chieftain of the Crimson Hands*, has to do with the expiation of a fratricide by a pilgrimage up the Ganges to its far sources in the Himalayas, that in the most secret of those sacred springs the clinging bloodstains might be washed away. But after forty moons of weary travel across the broad plains of India up into the very shadow of the dread Himalayan wall, a law of the pilgrimage was broken, and Vishnu could no longer shield the slayer from the wrath of Siva, who, himself the Destroyer, resents all other destruction as an infringement on his great prerogative.

Another Indian subject, *The Creation*, on which Becquer had tried his hand with a peculiarly light, ironic touch, yielded a more characteristic result. The fable tells how Brahma, utterly bored by the contemplation of his own perfections, took to chemistry. The astonished cherubs fluttered on their thousand-colored wings about the smoking, roaring tower where the Deity had his laboratory and where his eight arms and sixteen hands were all kept busy with managing his test-tubes and retorts, for he was shaping worlds to people space. But one day, tired of his experiments, he went out to take the air and, for all his omniscience, absent-mindedly failed to lock the door. In swarmed the cherubs, ripe for mischief, and lost no time in turning everything topsy-turvy. They flung the parchments into the fire, pulled the stoppers out of the flasks, overturned the great glass vessels, breaking not a few of them and spilling their contents, and wound up their meddling by blowing a ridiculous, soap-bubble planet of their own. This imperfect globe, all awry, with flattened poles and with contradictory elements, heat and cold, joy and grief, good and evil, life and death, at war within itself, went rolling so grotesquely on its axis, that the peals of cherubic laughter brought Brahma hurrying back. In his vexation he was about to crush that preposterous, misformed world, our world, but the appealing cries of the celestial children moved him to let them toss their absurd toy out into the ether among his own beautiful, self-consistent, harmonious spheres. Ever since, the cherubs have been trundling it about the sky, to the amazement of the other planets and the despair of us poor mortals; but it will not last. "There is nothing more tender nor more terrible than the hands of little children; in these the plaything cannot long endure."

It was not literature like this that the Spanish periodicals were seeking in the stormy fifties. It was a time of the keenest political strife, when even poets and novelists were bought by one party or another and made to fight in the midst of the newspaper arena. But no extremity could bring Becquer to be a politician's tool. "Incapable of hatred," says Correa, "he never placed his enviable powers as a writer at the service of animosity … nor was his noble character fitted for adulation or assiduous servility." Yet in his own way he played the patriot by earnest effort, continued unceasingly throughout his life, to assist in recording by pen and pencil the architectural beauties and devout traditions of Spain before these should have utterly perished under the march of progress. Putting politics out of his mind as a matter of little moment, Becquer undertook, with a few kindred spirits, what might have proved, with adequate support, a monumental work on the Spanish churches. As it was, there appeared only one volume, to which he contributed the Introduction, the chapters on the famous Toledo monastery, *San Juan de los Reyes*, and a number of drawings. In his story *Three Dates*, more descriptive than narrative, we catch a few fleeting glimpses of him, always with his sketch-book, pursuing his artistic and archæological researches in Toledo. A similar errand, in all probability, took him to Soria, an ancient city peculiarly rich in mediæval buildings, situated on the Douro, to the north-east of Madrid. In Soria he found several of his legends and, less fortunately, a wife, Carta Estéban y Navarro. The marriage, which took place about 1861, soon resulted in separation. Becquer retained possession of the children, two baby boys, for whom he tenderly cared, as best he could in his Bohemian life, until the last.

It would seem to have been the unwonted sense of an assured income that gave him courage to undertake the support of a wife, for in this year 1861 his constant friend Correa obtained for him a position on the staff of a new Madrid daily, *El Contemporáneo*, a journal into whose labors he threw himself with a zest far beyond his strength and which he came to love with a touching enthusiasm. "*El Contemporáneo* is not for me a newspaper like any other; its columns are yourselves, my friends, my comrades in hope or disappointment, in failure or triumph, in joy or bitterness." It was in *El Contemporáneo* that many of his legends appeared. But even as he thus became more and more closely identified with the life of Madrid, homesickness grew upon him for his own Andalusia "with her golden days and luminous, transparent nights," – for his own Seville, "with her Giralda of lace-work mirrored in the trembling Guadalquivir, … with her barred windows and her serenades, her iron door-screens and her night watchmen that chant the hour, her shrines and her stories, her brawls and her music, her tranquil nights and fiery afternoons, her rosy dawns and azure twilights, – Seville, with all the traditions that twenty centuries have heaped upon her brow, with all the pageantry and festal beauty of her southern nature, with all the poetry that imagination lends to a beloved memory."

He re-visited Seville, if *The Tavern of the Cats* can be taken as testimony, at about this time, and may so have renewed intercourse with his family, for in 1862 his next older brother, Valeriano, who, following in their father's path, had entered on a promising career as a painter of Andalusian types, came to him in Madrid. Valeriano, too, was of frail physique; he, too, had been unhappy in his marriage; yet the brothers affectionately joined such forces as they had and set up, with the little children, a makeshift for a home. But in a year or two some wasting illness, apparently the early stages of consumption, forced the poet to leave "the Court" and seek renewal of health in the mountain valley of Veruela. During this sojourn he gathered several legends of the Moncayo, that precipitous granite wall – known to Martial as the haunt of Æolus – which bars Old Castile from Aragon and divides the basin of the Douro, the river of Soria, from that of the Ebro, the river of Saragossa. To Becquer its snowy crests looked "like the waves of a motionless, gigantic sea." But the main literary result of that retirement is found in the series of eight exquisite letters, *From My Cell*, the high-water mark of Becquer's prose, sent back to *El Contemporáneo*. In these he gives a vivid, humorous account of his journey, by rail to Tudela, by diligence to Tarazona, and by mule up the Moncayo to Veruela, in whose walled and towered old Cistercian abbey he found an austere refuge. He had his Shakespeare with him and his Byron, but the event of the day, in the earlier weeks of his banishment, was the arrival of the mounted postman with *El Contemporáneo*. He could not wait for it in the Gothic cloisters, but would wander halfway down the poplar avenue to the Black Cross of Veruela and, seated at its foot on one of the marble steps, would wait sometimes the afternoon long listening for the far-off beat of the horse's hoofs. The journal came to him like a personal greeting from the life he had left behind. He loved even the odor of the damp paper and the printer's ink, an odor that brought back to him "the incessant pounding and creaking of the presses" and all the eager activity of those hurrying nights in which the words "came palpitating from the pen." But with sunset the feverish memories of Madrid fell from him and his thoughts took on the serenity of faith, "the faith in something grander, in a coming, unknown destiny beyond this life, the faith in eternity." Again he found himself dreaming of death, but not now of a poet's cherished grave beside the Guadalquivir, not now of a great patriot's tomb in some sublime cathedral, but of a mound in a village burial-plot, forgotten under nettles, thistles and grass. Long tormented by insomnia, it seemed sweet to him to slumber in such untroubled peace, "wrapt in a light cloak of earth," without having over him "even the weight of a sepulchral stone." As the mountain air brought strength, he began to ramble over the Moncayo, sketching and gathering up traditions, while through *El Contemporáneo* he passionately urged the claims of the past, and proposed the state organization of archæological expeditions in groups made up of an artist, an architect and a man of letters, to explore the provinces for their hidden, perishing traces of that bygone Spain of Roman, Visigoth, Moor, mailed knight and saintly vision. Bent, as ever, on doing his part in this unprized service, he wrote out, in the quiet and

leisure that had been so seldom his, masterly descriptions of the market-place of Tarazona, and of the peasant-women of the Amazonian hamlet of Añón. In the sixth letter he narrates, with a pen almost unendurably graphic, the recent doing to death of a reputed hereditary witch, a wretched old woman whom the superstitious Aragonese peasants had, in very truth, hunted to a peak of the Moncayo off which, bleeding from stones and knives, she had been thrust down the precipice. In the seventh and eighth letters he goes on to relate, in his most attractive manner, two local legends of witchcraft, – one of the necromancer who built in a night the castle of Trasmoz, and one of the pious priest who exorcised the witches that had come, in course of time, to make its ruined tower their tryst, only to have his work undone by the girlish vanity of his niece. She tampered with the holy water and restored to the witches the freedom of the castle in return for their kind offices in scrambling down her chimney, gray cats, black cats, all manner of cats, the night before a festival, and stitching up for her such fascinating finery that she forthwith won a husband.

His brother followed Becquer to Veruela and together they made trial of the neighboring Baths of Fitero in Navarre, but they were in Madrid again by 1865, often sorely put to it in the effort to carry the costs of their little household. If one of the children fell ill and a doctor must be called in, a friend might be entreated for an emergency loan of three or four dollars; but as a rule these invalid brothers bore their burden unassisted. Valeriano drew woodcuts for such market as he could find, talking, says Correa, of "the great pictures he would paint as soon as he could get the canvases," and Gustavo translated the trashy French novels that were in demand, writing, in the intervals of such hack work, an occasional fantasy of delicate beauty, as *Withered Leaves*, and ever looking forward to the time when he should have golden hours of calm in which he might give his higher and more mystical conceptions fitting utterance. Twice it seemed as if the way were opening. Isabella's last prime minister, Luis González Bravo, became interested in the poet and made him censor of novels. Becquer immediately availed himself of the comparative leisure thus afforded to gather together a volume of his poems, which González Bravo was proposing to print at his own expense. Then burst the long-gathering storm of 1868, the genial, unprincipled queen was dethroned, and her prime minister of literary tastes fled to the frontier with such precipitation that the precious manuscript entrusted to his keeping was lost. Becquer, with that scrupulous honor well known to his friends, promptly resigned his censorship; Valeriano's pension for the study of national types was withdrawn; and the year 1869 saw them again in straits. Yet they took daily comfort in their close brotherly love and their artistic sympathies, even though, in those troublous times, their joint enthusiasm for the beauties of Toledo once landed them in jail. They were then temporarily residing, with their little family, in their favorite city, "the city sombre and melancholy *par excellence*," and had sallied out, one evening, to contemplate its ghostly charms by moonlight. Their disordered dress, long beards, excited gestures and eager talk roused the suspicion of a brace of Civil Guards, who, drawing near and overhearing such dangerous terms as "apses, squinches, ogives," seized the conspirators without more ado and lodged them, for their further artistic illumination, in one of the historic dungeons of Toledo. The next morning the editorial room of *El Contemporáneo* resounded with merriment as a letter from Becquer went the rounds, – a letter "all full," says Correa, "of sketches representing in detail the probable passion and death of both innocents." The entire staff united in a written protest and explanation to the jailer, and it was long remembered in that office with what shining eyes and peals of laughter the delivered prisoners, on their return, set out their adventure in exuberant wit of words and pencil.

The second opportunity came with the founding of that now famous periodical, *La Ilustración de Madrid*; but it came too late. Becquer was appointed director and looked to for regular contributions, while Valeriano furnished many of the illustrations. The management had large schemes in hand, including a *Library of Great Authors*, for which Becquer began a translation of Dante. But now, when a certain degree of freedom, relief and recognition had been at last attained, the strained and fretted cord of life gave way. The first number of *La Ilustración* appeared January 12, 1870. On September 23, Valeriano died in his brother's arms. On December 22, the poet, surrounded

by devoted friends to whom, with his failing breath, he commended his children, sank exhausted into that mysterious repose on which, from boyhood, his musings had so often dwelt. But his mocking destiny was not yet content. His body was buried in one of those crowded city cemeteries always so repugnant to him, San Nicolás in Madrid. His younger son did not live to manhood; the elder, his namesake, went wrong.

His loyal friends, after raising what money they could for the children, gathered together and published in three small volumes the most characteristic of Becquer's writings, – a series of lyrical poems,[2] the letters *From My Cell*,[3] some legends and tales of unequal merit;[4] and a few miscellaneous articles on architecture, literature and the like.

The *Rimas* almost immediately established Becquer's fame. He is counted to-day among the chief lyrists of the nineteenth century. These poignant snatches of song pass, in theme, from life to love and from love to death. So far as they give, or purport to give, a history of the poet's heart, they tell of passion at first requited, then of estrangement and despair. It is supposed that a certain Julia Espín y Guillén, later the wife of Don Benigno Quiroga Ballesteros, a living Spaniard of distinction, figures to some extent in the *Rimas*. The house of her father, director of the orchestra in the *Teatro Reál*, was a resort of young musicians, artists and men of letters, and here Becquer, during his earlier years in Madrid, was a frequent guest. There seems little doubt that his youthful devotion was given, though in silence, to this disdainful brunette, but the poems likewise tell of a love "of gold and snow." There is a green-eyed maiden, too, whom he essays to comfort for this peculiarity, – though, indeed, eyes of jewel green, strangely fascinating, are not rare in Spain. He may have had her in mind in writing his legend of *The Emerald Eyes*. And one of the most beautiful lyrics follows out the slight thread of story in *Three Dates*, representing the poet as gazing night after night up from that ancient Toledo square, with its glorified rubbish-heap, to the ogive windows of the convent where the nun who had so thrilled his imagination was immured. Over the spirit of Becquer, to whom the immaterial was ever more real than the material, no one actual woman held lasting sway. He tells the truth of the matter in his eleventh lyric:

I am black and comely; my lips are glowing;
I am passion; my heart is hot;
The rapture of life in my veins is flowing.
For me thou callest? – I call thee not.

Pale is my forehead and gold my tresses;
Endless comforts are locked in me,
Treasure of hearthside tendernesses.
'Tis I whom thou seekest? – Nay, not thee.

I am a dream, afar, forbidden.
Vague as the mist on the mountain-brow,

[2] Of the seventy-six poems that make up the *Rimas*, thirty-two are given in literal English rendering by Lucy White Jennison ("Owen Innsley") as the third section of her *Love Songs and Other Poems* (The Grafton Press, New York, 1883), and a few are similarly rendered by Mrs. Humphry Ward in the article already mentioned. A complete translation in English verse, by Jules Renard of Seattle, has just come (1908) from The Gorham Press, Richard G. Badger, Boston.

[3] Not, to my knowledge, translated into English.

[4] Except for a few magazine waifs and strays, usually in abridged form, and for seven out of the twelve stories in W. W. Gibbings' *Terrible Tales*, where the translation, according to Professor Olmsted, is "often inaccurate," these legends have not before been translated into English. The twenty-one here given include everything even remotely in the nature of a tale contained in the three volumes, with the exception of the two East Indian legends already mentioned, and the two witchcraft tales in *From My Cell*. Good as these witch stories are, it seemed a pity to take them out of their context. What might be considered further omission is noted later. Of the translations in this volume, several have appeared in *Short Stories*, two in *The Churchman*, and one in the *Boston Evening Transcript*.

A bodiless glory, haunting, hidden;
I cannot love thee. – Oh, come! come thou!

Becquer himself was wont to ascribe the premature death of poets, that breaking of the harp while yet the golden chords have yielded but their least of melodies, to a restless fulness of life, the imprisoned vapor that bursts the vessel. This appears with pathetic emphasis in the *Introduction* that he wrote, not long before his death, for a projected volume of tales and fantasies. He felt that he must rid his fevered brain of their importunity, but he had begun to give expression to only one, *The Woman of Stone*, when death broke the magic pen. The story remains a fragment,[5] not passing beyond its opening pages of rich artistic description, nor can its course be clearly conjectured even though in *The Kiss*, and in the closing passages of his *Literary Letters to a Woman*, his imagination hovers about the theme. He left, like Hawthorne, many tantalizing titles that suggest the greatness of our loss. That drama on "The Brothers of Sorrow," that poem on the discovery of America, those Andalusian novels on "The Last Minstrel," "To Live or Not to Live," those Toledo legends on "The Foundress of Convents," "*El Cristo de la Vega*," "The Angel Musicians," those fantasies on "Light and Snow," "The Diana of the Indies," "The Life of the Dead," – these are but a few of the conceptions that teemed in his mind but found no outlet to the world. It seemed to his friends, who knew the man and had listened to his marvellous talk, that the scanty handful of tales they could collect from newspapers here and there made so inadequate a showing as almost to misrepresent his powers. Yet however thwarted and wronged by circumstance this harvest of his imagination may be, it deserves attention if only for its finer and less obvious qualities. Becquer charges himself with a melancholy temperament, and seldom, in fact, do we find in these pages the blither humor playing in *The Set of Emeralds*; but the occasional morbidness of his tone is due rather, it would seem, to illness and its consequent despondency than to any native quality of his thought. He deals too much in the horrible for modern taste, but he cannot claim, like Baudelaire, to have "invented a new shudder." Tales grounded in folk-lore are bound to contain elements of superstitious terror, and the affinity of these legends in that respect is rather with German balladry and the earlier romanticism in general than with the genius of Poe. Becquer's truer kinship is with Hawthorne, whose outer faculty of close and minute observation is his as well as the inner preoccupation with mystery and symbol. All the senses of this young Spaniard seem to have been of the finest, his exquisite hearing entering into these tales as effectively as his keen sight; but he is most himself in presence of the dim, the fugitive, the impalpable. His mind was essentially mystical. His religion was not without its human side. In brooding on the inequalities of the mortal lot, he finds comfort in the reflection: "God, though invisible, yet holds a hand outreached to lift a little the burden that presses on the poor." But faith in him was of the very fibre of imagination. He even lent a certain sympathetic credence to the mediæval legends of the Church, at least when the spell of Toledo was upon him. "Outside the place that guards their memory," he says, "far from the precincts which still preserve their traces, and where we seem yet to breathe the atmosphere of the ages that gave them being, traditions lose their poetic mystery, their inexplicable hold upon the soul. At a distance we question, we analyze, we doubt; but there faith, like a secret revelation, illuminates the spirit, and we believe." In a letter from Veruela to a lady of his acquaintance, a letter relating a brief but lovely legend[6] of an appearance of the Virgin, he asserts: "Only the hand of faith can touch the delicate flowers of tradition." "God," he elsewhere says, "is the glowing, eternal centre of all beauty."

The writer of these tales described himself thus: "I have a special predilection for all that which cannot be vulgarized by the touch and the judgment of the indifferent multitude. If I were to paint landscapes, I would paint them without figures. I like the fleeting ideas that slip away without leaving

[5] And therefore has not been included in this volume.

[6] Not included in this volume because it should not be taken from its context.

a trace on the understandings of practical folk, like a drop of water over a marble shelf. In the cities I visit, I seek the narrow, lonely streets; in the edifices I examine, the dusky nooks and corners of the inner courts, where grass springs up, and moisture enriches with its patches of greenish color the parched tint of the wall; in the women who impress me, the hint of mystery that I think I see shining with wavering light in the depths of their eyes, like the glimmer of a lamp that burns unknown and unsuspected in the sanctuary of their hearts; even in the blossoms of a shrub, I believe there is for me something more potent and exciting in the one that hides beneath the leaves and there, concealed, fills the air with fragrance, unprofaned by human gaze. In all this I find a certain unsullied purity of feelings and of things."

Becquer goes on to admit that this "pronounced inclination sometimes degenerates into extravagances."

FOREWORD

IN dim corners of my mind there sleep, hidden away and naked, the freakish children of my imagination, waiting in silence for art to clothe them with language that it may present them in decency upon the stage of the world.

My Muse, as fruitful as the marriage-bed of poverty, and like those parents who bring to birth more children than they have means to rear, is ever conceiving and bearing in the mystic sanctuary of the intelligence, peopling it with innumerable creations, to which not my utmost effort nor all the years that are left to me of life, will be sufficient to give form.

And here within me I sometimes feel them, all unclad and shapeless as they are, huddled and twisted together in confusion indescribable, stirring and living with a dim, strange life, similar to that of those myriad germs which seethe and quiver in eternal generation within the secret places of the earth, without winning strength enough to reach the surface and transform themselves, at the kiss of the sun, into flowers and fruits.

They go with me, destined to die with me, leaving no more trace than is left by a midnight dream which the morning cannot recall. On certain occasions and in face of this terrible idea, there rises in them the instinct of life, and trooping in formidable though silent multitudes they seek tumultuously a way of escape from amid the shadows of their dwelling-place forth to the light. But alas! between the world of idea and the world of form yawns an abyss which only the word can bridge, and the word, timid and slothful, refuses to aid their efforts. Mute, dim and powerless, after the unavailing struggle they fall back into their old passivity. So fall, inert, into the hollows by the wayside, when the wind ceases, the yellow leaves which the autumn storm blew up.

These seditions on the part of the rebel sons of my imagination explain some of my attacks of fever; they are the cause, unrecognized by science, of my excitements and depressions. And thus, although in ill estate, have I lived till now, walking among the indifferent throngs of men with this silent tempest in my head. Thus have I lived till now, but all things reach an end, and to these must be put their period.

Sleeplessness and fantasy go on begetting and producing with monstrous fecundity. Their creations, crowded already like the feeble plants of a conservatory, strive one with another for the expanding of their unreal existences, fighting for the drops of memory as for the scanty moisture of a sterile land. It is needful to open a channel for the deep waters, which, daily fed from a living spring, will at last break down the dike.

Go forth, then! Go forth and live with the only life I can give you. My intellect shall supply you with nutriment enough to make you palpable; I will clothe you, though in rags, so that you need not blush for nakedness. I would like to fashion for each one of you a marvellous stuff woven of exquisite phrases, in which you could fold yourselves with pride, as in mantles of purple. I would like to engrave the form that must contain you as the golden vase which holds a precious ointment is engraved. But this may not be.

And yet, I need to rest. I need, just as the body through whose swollen veins the life-blood surges with phlethoric force, is bled, to clear my brain, inadequate to the lodging of so many grotesqueries.

Then gather here, like the misty trail that marks the passing of an unknown comet, like atoms dispersed in an embryonic world which Death fans through the air, until the Creator shall have spoken the *fiat lux* that divides light from darkness.

I would not that in my sleepless nights you still should pass before my eyes in weird procession, begging me with gestures and contortions to draw you out from the limbo in which you lead these phantom, thin existences into the life of reality. I would not that at the breaking of this harp already old and cracked the unknown notes which it contained should perish with the instrument. I would interest myself a little in the world which lies without me, free at last to withdraw my eyes from

this other world that I carry within my head. Common sense, which is the barrier of dreamland, is beginning to give way, and the people of the different camps mingle and grow confused. It costs me an effort to know which things I have dreamed and which have actually happened. My affections are divided between real persons and phantasms of the imagination. My memory shifts from one category to the other the names of women who have died and the dates of days that have passed, with days and women that have existed only in my mind. I must put an end to this by flinging you all forth from my brain once and forever.

If to die is to sleep, I would sleep in peace in the night of death, without your coming to be my nightmare, cursing me for having doomed you to nothingness before you had been born. Go, then, to the world at whose touch you came into being, and linger there, as the echo which life's joys and griefs, hopes and struggles, found in one soul that passed across the earth.

Perchance very soon must I pack my portmanteau for the great journey. At any moment the spirit may free herself from the material that she may rise to purer air. I would not, when this moment comes, take with me, as the trivial baggage of a mountebank, the treasure of tinsel and tatters that my Fancy has been heaping up in the rubbish chambers of the brain.

ROMANTIC LEGENDS OF SPAIN

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 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 briers 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.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.