

Cooper James Fenimore

Mercedes of Castile: or, The Voyage to Cathay



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PREFACE

So much has been written of late years, touching the discovery of America, that it would not be at all surprising should there exist a disposition in a certain class of readers to deny the accuracy of all the statements in this work. Some may refer to history, with a view to prove that there never were such persons as our hero and heroine, and fancy that by establishing these facts, they completely destroy the authenticity of the whole book. In answer to this anticipated objection, we will state, that after carefully perusing several of the Spanish writers – from Cervantes to the translator of the journal of Columbus, the Alpha and Omega of peninsular literature – and after having read both Irving and Prescott from beginning to end, we do not find a syllable in either of them, that we understand to be conclusive evidence, or indeed to be any evidence at all, on the portions of our subject that are likely to be disputed. Until some solid affirmative proof, therefore, can be produced against us, we shall hold our case to be made out, and rest our claims to be believed on the authority of our own statements. Nor do we think there is any thing either unreasonable or unusual in this course, as perhaps the greater portion of that which is daily and hourly offered to the credence of the American public, rests on the same species of testimony – with the trifling difference that we state truths, with a profession of fiction, while the great moral caterers of the age state fiction with the profession of truth. If any advantage can be fairly obtained over us, in consequence of this trifling discrepancy, we must submit.

There is one point, notwithstanding, concerning which it may be well to be frank at once. The narrative of the "Voyage to Cathay," has been written with the journal of the Admiral before us; or, rather, with all of that journal that has been given to the world through the agency of a very incompetent and meagre editor. Nothing is plainer than the general fact that this person did not always understand his author, and in one particular circumstance he has written so obscurely, as not a little to embarrass even a novelist, whose functions naturally include an entire familiarity with the thoughts, emotions, characters, and, occasionally, with the unknown fates of the subjects of his pen. The nautical day formerly commenced at meridian, and, with all our native ingenuity and high professional prerogatives, we have not been able to discover whether the editor of the journal has adopted that mode of counting time, or whether he has condescended to use the more vulgar and irrational practice of landmen. It is our opinion, however, that in the spirit of impartiality which becomes an historian, he has adopted both. This little peculiarity might possibly embarrass a superficial critic; but accurate critics being so very common, we feel no concern on this head, well knowing that they will be much more apt to wink at these minor inconsistencies, than to pass over an error of the press, or a comma with a broken tail. As we wish to live on good terms with this useful class of our fellow-creatures, we have directed the printers to mis-spell some eight or ten words for their convenience, and to save them from headaches, have honestly stated this principal difficulty ourselves.

Should the publicity which is now given to the consequences of commencing a day in the middle have the effect to induce the government to order that it shall, in future, with all American seamen, commence at one of its ends, something will be gained in the way of simplicity, and the writing of novels will, in-so-much, be rendered easier and more agreeable.

As respects the minor characters of this work, very little need be said. Every one knows that Columbus had seamen in his vessels, and that he brought some of the natives of the islands he had discovered, back with him to Spain. The reader is now made much more intimately acquainted with certain of these individuals, we will venture to say, than he can be possibly by the perusal of any work previously written. As for the subordinate incidents connected with the more familiar events of the

age, it is hoped they will be found so completely to fill up this branch of the subject, as to render future investigations unnecessary.

CHAPTER I

"There was knocking that shook the marble floor,
And a voice at the gate, which said —
'That the Cid Ruy Diez, the Campeador,
Was there in his arms array'd.'" —

Mrs. Hemans.

Whether we take the pictures of the inimitable Cervantes, or of that scarcely less meritorious author from whom Le Sage has borrowed his immortal tale, for our guides; whether we confide in the graver legends of history, or put our trust in the accounts of modern travellers, the time has scarcely ever existed when the inns of Spain were good, or the roads safe. These are two of the blessings of civilization which the people of the peninsula would really seem destined never to attain; for, in all ages, we hear, or have heard, of wrongs done the traveller equally by the robber and the host. If such are the facts to-day, such also were the facts in the middle of the fifteenth century, the period to which we desire to carry back the reader in imagination.

At the commencement of the month of October, in the year of our Lord 1469, John of Trastamara reigned in Aragon, holding his court at a place called Zaragosa, a town lying on the Ebro, the name of which is supposed to be a corruption of Cæsar Augustus, and a city that has become celebrated in our own times, under the more Anglicised term of Saragossa, for its deeds in arms. John of Trastamara, or, as it was more usual to style him, agreeably to the nomenclature of kings, John II., was one of the most sagacious monarchs of his age; but he had become impoverished by many conflicts with the turbulent, or, as it may be more courtly to say, the liberty-loving Catalonians; had frequently enough to do to maintain his seat on the throne; possessed a party-colored empire that included within its sway, besides his native Aragon with its dependencies of Valencia and Catalonia, Sicily and the Balearic Islands, with some very questionable rights in Navarre. By the will of his elder brother and predecessor, the crown of Naples had descended to an illegitimate son of the latter, else would that kingdom have been added to the list. The King of Aragon had seen a long and troubled reign, and, at this very moment, his treasury was nearly exhausted by his efforts to subdue the truculent Catalans, though he was nearer a triumph than he could then foresee, his competitor, the Duke of Lorraine, dying suddenly, only two short months after the precise period chosen for the commencement of our tale. But it is denied to man to look into the future, and on the 9th of the month just mentioned, the ingenuity of the royal treasurer was most sorely taxed, there having arisen an unexpected demand for a considerable sum of money, at the very moment that the army was about to disband itself for the want of pay, and the public coffers contained only the very moderate sum of three hundred *Enriques*, or Henrys — a gold coin named after a previous monarch, and which had a value not far from that of the modern ducat, or our own quarter eagle. The matter, however, was too pressing to be deferred, and even the objects of the war were considered as secondary to those connected with this suddenly-conceived, and more private enterprise. Councils were held, money-dealers were cajoled or frightened, and the confidants of the court were very manifestly in a state of great and earnest excitement. At length, the time of preparation appeared to be passed and the instant of action arrived. Curiosity was relieved, and the citizens of Saragossa were permitted to know that their sovereign was about to send a solemn embassy, on matters of high moment, to his neighbor, kinsman, and ally, the monarch of Castile. In 1469, Henry, also of Trastamara, sat upon the throne of the adjoining kingdom, under the title of Henry IV. He was the grandson, in the male line, of the brother of John II.'s father, and, consequently, a first-cousin once removed, of the monarch of Aragon. Notwithstanding this affinity, and the strong family interests that might be supposed to unite

them, it required many friendly embassies to preserve the peace between the two monarchs; and the announcement of that which was about to depart, produced more satisfaction than wonder in the streets of the town.

Henry of Castile, though he reigned over broader and richer peninsular territories than his relative of Aragon, had his cares and troubles, also. He had been twice married, having repudiated his first consort, Blanche of Aragon, to wed Joanna of Portugal, a princess of a levity of character so marked, as not only to bring great scandal on the court generally, but to throw so much distrust on the birth of her only child, a daughter, as to push discontent to disaffection, and eventually to deprive the infant itself of the rights of royalty. Henry's father, like himself, had been twice married, and the issue of the second union was a son and a daughter, Alfonso and Isabella; the latter becoming subsequently illustrious, under the double titles of the Queen of Castile, and of the Catholic. The luxurious impotency of Henry, as a monarch, had driven a portion of his subjects into open rebellion. Three years preceding that selected for our opening, his brother Alfonso had been proclaimed king in his stead, and a civil war had raged throughout his provinces. This war had been recently terminated by the death of Alfonso, when the peace of the kingdom was temporarily restored by a treaty, in which Henry consented to the setting aside of his own daughter – or rather of the daughter of Joanna of Portugal – and to the recognition of his half-sister Isabella, as the rightful heiress of the throne. The last concession was the result of dire necessity, and, as might have been expected, it led to many secret and violent measures, with a view to defeat its objects. Among the other expedients adopted by the king – or, it might be better to say, by his favorites, the inaction and indolence of the self-indulgent but kind-hearted prince being proverbial – with a view to counteract the probable consequences of the expected accession of Isabella, were various schemes to control her will, and guide her policy, by giving her hand, first to a subject, with a view to reduce her power, and subsequently to various foreign princes, who were thought to be more or less suited to the furtherance of such schemes. Just at this moment, indeed, the marriage of the princess was one of the greatest objects of Spanish prudence. The son of the King of Aragon was one of the suitors for the hand of Isabella, and most of those who heard of the intended departure of the embassy, naturally enough believed that the mission had some connection with that great stroke of Aragonese policy.

Isabella had the reputation of learning, modesty, discretion, piety, and beauty, besides being the acknowledged heiress of so enviable a crown; and there were many competitors for her hand. Among them were to be ranked French, English, and Portuguese princes, besides him of Aragon to whom we have already alluded. Different favorites supported different pretenders, struggling to effect their several purposes by the usual intrigues of courtiers and partisans; while the royal maiden, herself, who was the object of so much competition and rivalry, observed a discreet and womanly decorum, even while firmly bent on indulging her most womanly and dearest sentiments. Her brother, the king, was in the south, pursuing his pleasures, and, long accustomed to dwell in comparative solitude, the princess was earnestly occupied in arranging her own affairs, in a way that she believed would most conduce to her own happiness. After several attempts to entrap her person, from which she had only escaped by the prompt succor of the forces of her friends, she had taken refuge in Leon, in the capital of which province, or kingdom as it was sometimes called, Valladolid, she temporarily took up her abode. As Henry, however, still remained in the vicinity of Granada, it is in that direction we must look for the route taken by the embassy.

The cortège left Saragossa, by one of the southern gates, early in the morning of a glorious autumnal day. There was the usual escort of lances, for this the troubled state of the country demanded; bearded nobles well mailed – for few, who offered an inducement to the plunderer, ventured on the highway without this precaution; a long train of sumpter mules, and a host of those who, by their guise, were half menials and half soldiers. The gallant display drew crowds after the horses' heels, and, together with some prayers for success, a vast deal of crude and shallow conjecture, as is still the practice with the uninstructed and gossiping, was lavished on the probable objects and

results of the journey. But curiosity has its limits, and even the gossip occasionally grows weary; and by the time the sun was setting, most of the multitude had already forgotten to think and speak of the parade of the morning. As the night drew on, however, the late pageant was still the subject of discourse between two soldiers, who belonged to the guard of the western gate, or that which opened on the road to the province of Burgos. These worthies were loitering away the hours, in the listless manner common to men on watch, and the spirit of discussion and of critical censure had survived the thoughts and bustle of the day.

"If Don Alonso de Carbajal thinketh to ride far in that guise," observed the elder of the two idlers, "he would do well to look sharp to his followers, for the army of Aragon never sent forth a more scurvily-appointed guard than that he hath this day led through the southern gate, notwithstanding the glitter of housings, and the clangor of trumpets. We could have furnished lances from Valencia more befitting a king's embassy, I tell thee, Diego; ay, and worthier knights to lead them, than these of Aragon. But if the king is content, it ill becomes soldiers, like thee and me, to be dissatisfied."

"There are many who think, Roderique, that it had been better to spare the money lavished in this courtly letter-writing, to pay the brave men who so freely shed their blood in order to subdue the rebellious Barcelans."

"This is always the way, boy, between debtor and creditor. Don John owes you a few maravedis, and you grudge him every Enrique he spends on his necessities. I am an older soldier, and have learned the art of paying myself, when the treasury is too poor to save me the trouble."

"That might do in a foreign war, when one is battling against the Moor, for instance; but, after all, these Catalans are as good Christians as we are ourselves; some of them are as good subjects; and it is not as easy to plunder a countryman as to plunder an Infidel."

"Easier by twenty fold; for the one expects it, and, like all in that unhappy condition, seldom has any thing worth taking, while the other opens his stores to you as freely as he does his heart – but who are these, setting forth on the highway, at this late hour?"

"Fellows that pretend to wealth, by affecting to conceal it. I'll warrant you, now, Roderique, that there is not money enough among all those varlets to pay the laquais that shall serve them their boiled eggs, to-night."

"By St. Iago, my blessed patron!" whispered one of the leaders of a small cavalcade, who, with a single companion, rode a little in advance of the others, as if not particularly anxious to be too familiar with the rest, and laughing, lightly, as he spoke: "Yonder vagabond is nearer the truth than is comfortable! We may have sufficient among us all to pay for an olla-podrida and its service, but I much doubt whether there will be a dobla left, when the journey shall be once ended."

A low, but grave rebuke, checked this inconsiderate mirth; and the party, which consisted of merchants, or traders, mounted on mules, as was evident by their appearance, for in that age the different classes were easily recognized by their attire, halted at the gate. The permission to quit the town was regular, and the drowsy and consequently surly gate-keeper slowly undid his bars, in order that the travellers might pass.

While these necessary movements were going on, the two soldiers stood a little on one side, coolly scanning the group, though Spanish gravity prevented them from indulging openly in an expression of the scorn that they actually felt for two or three Jews who were among the traders. The merchants, moreover, were of a better class, as was evident by a follower or two, who rode in their train, in the garbs of menials, and who kept at a respectful distance while their masters paid the light fee that it was customary to give on passing the gates after nightfall. One of these menials, capitably mounted on a tall, spirited mule, happened to place himself so near Diego, during this little ceremony, that the latter, who was talkative by nature, could not refrain from having his say.

"Prithee, Pepe," commenced the soldier, "how many hundred doblas a year do they pay, in that service of thine, and how often do they renew that fine leathern doublet?"

The varlet, or follower of the merchant, who was still a youth, though his vigorous frame and embrowned cheek denoted equally severe exercise and rude exposure, started and reddened at this free inquiry, which was enforced by a hand slapped familiarly on his knee, and such a squeeze of the leg as denoted the freedom of the camp. The laugh of Diego probably suppressed a sudden outbreak of anger, for the soldier was one whose manner indicated too much good-humor easily to excite resentment.

"Thy gripe is friendly, but somewhat close, comrade," the young domestic mildly observed; "and if thou wilt take a friend's counsel, it will be, never to indulge in too great familiarity, lest some day it lead to a broken pate."

"By holy San Pedro! – I should relish – "

It was too late, however; for his master having proceeded, the youth pushed a powerful rowel into the flank of his mule, and the vigorous animal dashed ahead, nearly upsetting Diego, who was pressing hard on the pommel of the saddle, by the movement.

"There is mettle in that boy," exclaimed the good-natured soldier, as he recovered his feet. "I thought, for one moment, he was about to favor me with a visitation of his hand."

"Thou art wrong – and too much accustomed to be heedless, Diego," answered his comrade; "and it had been no wonder had that youth struck thee to the earth, for the indignity thou putt'st upon him."

"Ha! a hireling follower of some cringing Hebrew! He dare to strike a blow at a soldier of the king!"

"He may have been a soldier of the king himself, in his day. These are times when most of his frame and muscle are called on to go in harness. I think I have seen that face before; ay, and that, too, where none of craven hearts would be apt to go."

"The fellow is a mere varlet, and a younker that has just escaped from the hands of the women."

"I'll answer for it, that he hath faced both the Catalan and the Moor in his time, young as he may seem. Thou knowest that the nobles are wont to carry their sons, as children, early into the fight, that they may learn the deeds of chivalry betimes."

"The nobles!" repeated Diego, laughing. "In the name of all the devils, Roderique, of what art thou thinking, that thou likenest this knave to a young noble? Dost fancy him a Guzman, or a Mendoza, in disguise, that thou speakest thus of chivalry?"

"True – it doth, indeed, seem silly – and yet have I before met that frown in battle, and heard that sharp, quick voice, in a rally. By St. Iago de Compostello! I have it! Harkee, Diego! – a word in thy ear."

The veteran now led his more youthful comrade aside, although there was no one near to listen to what he said; and looking carefully round, to make certain that his words would not be overheard, he whispered, for a moment, in Diego's ear.

"Holy Mother of God!" exclaimed the latter, recoiling quite three paces, in surprise and awe. "Thou canst not be right, Roderique!"

"I will place my soul's welfare on it," returned the other, positively. "Have I not often seen him with his visor up, and followed him, time and again, to the charge?"

"And he setting forth as a trader's varlet! Nay, I know not, but as the servitor of a Jew!"

"Our business, Diego, is to strike without looking into the quarrel; to look without seeing, and to listen without hearing. Although his coffers are low, Don John is a good master, and our anointed king; and so we will prove ourselves discreet soldiers."

"But he will never forgive me that gripe of the knee, and my foolish tongue. I shall never dare meet him again."

"Humph! – It is not probable thou ever wilt meet him at the table of the king, and, as for the field, as he is wont to go first, there will not be much temptation for him to turn back in order to look at thee."

"Thou thinkest, then, he will not be apt to know me again?"

"If it should prove so, boy, thou need'st not take it in ill part; as such as he have more demands on their memories than they can always meet."

"The Blessed Maria make thee a true prophet! – else would I never dare again to appear in the ranks. Were it a favor I conferred, I might hope it would be forgotten; but an indignity sticks long in the memory."

Here the two soldiers moved away, continuing the discourse from time to time, although the elder frequently admonished his loquacious companion of the virtue of discretion.

In the mean time, the travellers pursued their way, with a diligence that denoted great distrust of the roads, and as great a desire to get on. They journeyed throughout the night, nor did there occur any relaxation in their speed, until the return of the sun exposed them again to the observations of the curious, among whom were thought to be many emissaries of Henry of Castile, whose agents were known to be particularly on the alert, along all the roads that communicated between the capital of Aragon and Valladolid, the city in which his royal sister had then, quite recently, taken refuge. Nothing remarkable occurred, however, to distinguish this journey from any other of the period. There was nothing about the appearance of the travellers – who soon entered the territory of Soria, a province of Old Castile, where armed parties of the monarch were active in watching the passes – to attract the attention of Henry's soldiers; and as for the more vulgar robber, he was temporarily driven from the highways by the presence of those who acted in the name of the prince. As respects the youth who had given rise to the discourse between the two soldiers, he rode diligently in the rear of his master, so long as it pleased the latter to remain in the saddle; and during the few and brief pauses that occurred in the travelling, he busied himself, like the other menials, in the duties of his proper vocation. On the evening of the second day, however, about an hour after the party had left a hostelry, where it had solaced itself with an olla-podrida and some sour wine, the merry young man who has already been mentioned, and who still kept his place by the side of his graver and more aged companion in the van, suddenly burst into a fit of loud laughter, and, reining in his mule he allowed the whole train to pass him, until he found himself by the side of the young menial already so particularly named. The latter cast a severe and rebuking glance at his reputed master, as he dropped in by his side, and said, with a sternness that ill comported with their apparent relations to each other —

"How now, Master Nuñez! what hath called thee from thy position in the van, to this unseemly familiarity with the varlets in the rear?"

"I crave ten thousand pardons, honest Juan," returned the master, still laughing, though he evidently struggled to repress his mirth, out of respect to the other; "but here is a calamity befallen us, that outdoes those of the fables and legends of necromancy and knight-errantry. The worthy Master Ferreras, yonder, who is so skilful in handling gold, having passed his whole life in buying and selling barley and oats, hath actually mislaid the purse, which it would seem he hath forgotten at the inn we have quitted, in payment of some very stale bread and rancid oil. I doubt if there are twenty reals left in the whole party!"

"And is it a matter of jest, Master Nuñez," returned the servant, though a slight smile struggled about his mouth, as if ready to join in his companion's merriment; "that we are penniless? Thank Heaven! the Burgo of Osma cannot be very distant; and we may have less occasion for gold. And now, master of mine, let me command thee to keep thy proper place in this cavalcade, and not to forget thyself by such undue familiarity with thy inferiors. I have no farther need of thee, and therefore hasten back to Master Ferreras and acquaint him with my sympathy and grief."

The young man smiled, though the eye of the pretended servant was averted, as if he cared to respect his own admonitions; while the other evidently sought a look of recognition and favor. In another minute, the usual order of the journey was resumed.

As the night advanced, and the hour arrived when man and beast usually betray fatigue, these travellers pushed their mules the hardest; and about midnight, by dint of hard pricking, they came

under the principal gate of a small walled town, called Osma, that stood not far from the boundary of the province of Burgos, though still in that of Soria. No sooner was his mule near enough to the gate to allow of the freedom, than the young merchant in advance dealt sundry blows on it with his staff, effectually apprising those within of his presence. It required no strong pull of the reins to stop the mules of those behind; but the pretended varlet now pushed ahead, and was about to assume his place among the principal personages near the gate, when a heavy stone, hurled from the battlements, passed so close to his head, as vividly to remind him how near he might be to making a hasty journey to another world. A cry arose in the whole party, at this narrow escape; nor were loud imprecations on the hand that had cast the missile spared. The youth, himself, seemed the least disturbed of them all; and though his voice was sharp and authoritative, as he raised it in remonstrance, it was neither angry nor alarmed.

"How now!" he said; "is this the way you treat peaceful travellers; merchants, who come to ask hospitality and a night's repose at your hands?"

"Merchants and travellers!" growled a voice from above – "say, rather, spies and agents of King Henry. Who are ye? Speak promptly, or ye may expect something sharper than stones, at the next visit."

"Tell me," answered the youth, as if disdainful to be questioned himself – "who holds this borough? Is it not the noble Count of Treviño?"

"The very same, Señor," answered he above, with a mollified tone: "but what can a set of travelling traders know of His Excellency? and who art thou, that speakest up as sharply and as proudly as if thou wert a grandee?"

"I am Ferdinand of Trastamara – the Prince of Aragon – the King of Sicily. Go! bid thy master hasten to the gate."

This sudden announcement, which was made in the lofty manner of one accustomed to implicit obedience, produced a marked change in the state of affairs. The party at the gate so far altered their several positions, that the two superior nobles who had ridden in front, gave place to the youthful king; while the group of knights made such arrangements as showed that disguise was dropped, and each man was now expected to appear in his proper character. It might have amused a close and philosophical observer to note the promptitude with which the young cavaliers, in particular, rose in their saddles, as if casting aside the lounging mien of grovelling traders, in order to appear what they really were, men accustomed to the tourney and the field. On the ramparts the change was equally sudden and great. All appearance of drowsiness vanished; the soldiers spoke to each other in suppressed but hurried voices; and the distant tramp of feet announced that messengers were dispatched in various directions. Some ten minutes elapsed in this manner, during which an inferior officer showed himself on the ramparts, and apologized for a delay that arose altogether from the force of discipline, and on no account from any want of respect. At length a bustle on the wall, with the light of many lanterns, betrayed the approach of the governor of the town; and the impatience of the young men below, that had begun to manifest itself in half-uttered execrations, was put under a more decent restraint for the occasion.

"Are the joyful tidings that my people bring me true?" cried one from the battlements; while a lantern was lowered from the wall, as if to make a closer inspection of the party at the gate: "Am I really so honored, as to receive a summons from Don Ferdinand of Aragon, at this unusual hour?"

"Cause thy fellow to turn his lantern more closely on my countenance," answered the king, "that thou may'st make thyself sure. I will cheerfully overlook the disrespect, Count of Treviño, for the advantage of a more speedy admission."

"'Tis he!" exclaimed the noble: "I know those royal features, which bear the lineaments of a long race of kings, and that voice have I heard, often, rallying the squadrons of Aragon, in their onsets against the Moor. Let the trumpets speak up, and proclaim this happy arrival; and open wide our gates, without delay."

This order was promptly obeyed, and the youthful king entered Osma, by sound of trumpet, encircled by a strong party of men-at-arms, and with half of the awakened and astonished population at his heels.

"It is lucky, my Lord King," said Don Andres de Cabrera, the young noble already mentioned, as he rode familiarly at the side of Don Ferdinand, "that we have found these good lodgings without cost; it being a melancholy truth, that Master Ferreras hath, negligently enough, mislaid the only purse there was among us. In such a strait, it would not have been easy to keep up the character of thrifty traders much longer; for, while the knaves higgel at the price of every thing, they are fond of letting their gold be seen."

"Now that we are in thine own Castile, Don Andres," returned the king, smiling, "we shall throw ourselves gladly on thy hospitality, well knowing that thou hast two most beautiful diamonds always at thy command."

"I, Sir King! Your Highness is pleased to be merry at my expense, although I believe it is, just now, the only gratification I can pay for. My attachment for the Princess Isabella hath driven me from my lands; and even the humblest cavalier in the Aragonese army is not, just now, poorer than I. What diamonds, therefore, can I command?"

"Report speaketh favorably of the two brilliants that are set in the face of the Doña Beatriz de Bobadilla; and I hear they are altogether at thy disposal, or as much so as a noble maiden's inclinations can leave them with a loyal knight."

"Ah! my Lord King! if indeed this adventure end as happily as it commenceth, I may, indeed, look to your royal favor, for some aid in that matter."

The king smiled, in his own sedate manner; but the Count de Treviño pressing nearer to his side at that moment, the discourse was changed. That night Ferdinand of Aragon slept soundly; but with the dawn, he and his followers were again in the saddle. The party quitted Osma, however, in a manner very different from that in which it had approached its gate. Ferdinand now appeared as a knight, mounted on a noble Andalusian charger; and all his followers had still more openly assumed their proper characters. A strong body of lancers, led by the Count of Treviño in person, composed the escort; and on the 9th of the month, the whole cavalcade reached Dueñas, in Leon, a place quite near to Valladolid. The disaffected nobles crowded about the prince to pay their court, and he was received as became his high rank and still higher destinies.

Here the more luxurious Castilians had an opportunity of observing the severe personal discipline by which Don Ferdinand, at the immature years of eighteen, for he was scarcely older, had succeeded in hardening his body and in stringing his nerves, so as to be equal to any deeds in arms. His delight was found in the rudest military exercises; and no knight of Aragon could better direct his steed in the tourney or in the field. Like most of the royal races of that period, and indeed of this, in despite of the burning sun under which he dwelt, his native complexion was brilliant, though it had already become embrowned by exposure in the chase, and in the martial occupations of his boyhood. Temperate as a Mussulman, his active and well-proportioned frame seemed to be early indurating, as if Providence held him in reserve for some of its own dispensations, that called for great bodily vigor as well as for deep forethought and a vigilant sagacity. During the four or five days that followed, the noble Castilians who listened to his discourse, knew not of which most to approve, his fluent eloquence, or a wariness of thought and expression, which, while they might have been deemed prematurely worldly and cold-blooded, were believed to be particular merits in one destined to control the jarring passions, deep deceptions, and selfish devices of men.

CHAPTER II

"Leave to the nightingale her shady wood:
A privacy of glorious light is thine;
Whence thou dost pour upon the world a flood
Of harmony, with rapture more divine;
Type of the wise, who soar, but never roam;
True to the kindred points of Heaven and Home."

Wordsworth.

While John of Aragon had recourse to such means to enable his son to escape the vigilant and vindictive emissaries of the King of Castile, there were anxious hearts in Valladolid, awaiting the result with the impatience and doubt that ever attend the execution of hazardous enterprises. Among others who felt this deep interest in the movements of Ferdinand of Aragon and his companions, were a few whom it has now become necessary to introduce to the reader.

Although Valladolid had not then reached the magnificence it subsequently acquired as the capital of Charles V., it was an ancient, and, for the age, a magnificent and luxurious town, possessing its palaces, as well as its more inferior abodes. To the principal of the former, the residence of John de Vivero – a distinguished noble of the kingdom – we must repair in imagination; where companions more agreeable than those we have just quitted, await us, and who were then themselves awaiting, with deep anxiety, the arrival of a messenger with tidings from Dueñas. The particular apartment that it will be necessary to imagine, had much of the rude splendor of the period, united to that air of comfort and fitness that woman seldom fails to impart to the portion of any edifice that comes directly under her control. In the year 1469, Spain was fast approaching the termination of that great struggle which had already endured seven centuries, and in which the Christian and the Mussulman contended for the mastery of the peninsula. The latter had long held sway in the southern parts of Leon, and had left behind him, in the palaces of this town, some of the traces of his barbaric magnificence. The lofty and fretted ceilings were not as glorious as those to be found further south, it is true; still, the Moor had been here, and the name of *Veled Vlid* – since changed to Valladolid – denotes its Arabic connection. In the room just mentioned, and in the principal palace of this ancient town – that of John de Vivero – were two females, in earnest and engrossing discourse. Both were young, and, though in very different styles, both would have been deemed beautiful in any age or region of the earth. One, indeed, was surpassingly lovely. She had just reached her nineteenth year – an age when the female form has received its full development in that generous climate; and the most imaginative poet of Spain – a country so renowned for beauty of form in the sex – could not have conceived of a person more symmetrical. The hands, feet, bust, and all the outlines, were those of feminine loveliness; while the stature, without rising to a height to suggest the idea of any thing masculine, was sufficient to ennoble an air of quiet dignity. The beholder, at first, was a little at a loss to know whether the influence to which he submitted, proceeded most from the perfection of the body itself, or from the expression that the soul within imparted to the almost faultless exterior. The face was, in all respects, worthy of the form. Although born beneath the sun of Spain, her lineage carried her back, through a long line of kings, to the Gothic sovereigns; and its frequent intermarriages with foreign princesses, had produced in her countenance that intermixture of the brilliancy of the north with the witchery of the south, that probably is nearest to the perfection of feminine loveliness.

Her complexion was fair, and her rich locks had that tint of the auburn which approaches as near as possible to the more marked color that gives it warmth, without attaining any of the latter's distinctive hue. "Her mild blue eyes," says an eminent historian, "beamed with intelligence

and sensibility." In these indexes to the soul, indeed, were to be found her highest claims to loveliness, for they bespoke no less the beauty within, than the beauty without; imparting to features of exquisite delicacy and symmetry, a serene expression of dignity and moral excellence, that was remarkably softened by a modesty that seemed as much allied to the sensibilities of a woman, as to the purity of an angel. To add to all these charms, though of royal blood, and educated in a court, an earnest, but meek sincerity presided over every look and thought – as thought was betrayed in the countenance – adding the illumination of truth to the lustre of youth and beauty.

The attire of this princess was simple, for, happily, the taste of the age enabled those who worked for the toilet to consult the proportions of nature; though the materials were rich, and such as became her high rank. A single cross of diamonds sparkled on a neck of snow, to which it was attached by a short string of pearls; and a few rings, decked with stones of price, rather cumbered than adorned hands that needed no ornaments to rivet the gaze. Such was Isabella of Castile, in her days of maiden retirement and maiden pride – while waiting the issues of those changes that were about to put their seal on her own future fortunes, as well as on those of posterity even to our own times.

Her companion was Beatriz de Bobadilla, the friend of her childhood and infancy, and who continued, to the last, the friend of her prime, and of her death-bed. This lady, a little older than the princess, was of more decided Spanish mien, for, though of an ancient and illustrious house, policy and necessity had not caused so many foreign intermarriages in her race, as had been required in that of her royal mistress. Her eyes were black and sparkling, bespeaking a generous soul, and a resolution so high that some commentators have termed it valor; while her hair was dark as the raven's wing. Like that of her royal mistress, her form exhibited the grace and loveliness of young womanhood, developed by the generous warmth of Spain; though her stature was, in a slight degree, less noble, and the outlines of her figure, in about an equal proportion, less perfect. In short, nature had drawn some such distinction between the exceeding grace and high moral charms that encircled the beauty of the princess, and those which belonged to her noble friend, as the notions of men had established between their respective conditions; though, considered singly, as women, either would have been deemed pre-eminently winning and attractive.

At the moment we have selected for the opening of the scene that is to follow, Isabella, fresh from the morning toilet, was seated in a chair, leaning lightly on one of its arms, in an attitude that interest in the subject she was discussing, and confidence in her companion, had naturally produced; while Beatriz de Bobadilla occupied a low stool at her feet, bending her body in respectful affection so far forward, as to allow the fairer hair of the princess to mingle with her own dark curls, while the face of the latter appeared to repose on the head of her friend. As no one else was present, the reader will at once infer, from the entire absence of Castilian etiquette and Spanish reserve, that the dialogue they held was strictly confidential, and that it was governed more by the feelings of nature, than by the artificial rules that usually regulate the intercourse of courts.

"I have prayed, Beatriz, that God would direct my judgment in this weighty concern," said the princess, in continuation of some previous observation; "and I hope I have as much kept in view the happiness of my future subjects, in the choice I have made, as my own."

"None shall presume to question it," said Beatriz de Bobadilla; "for had it pleased you to wed the Grand Turk, the Castilians would not gainsay your wish, such is their love!"

"Say, rather, such is thy love for me, my good Beatriz, that thou fanciest this," returned Isabella, smiling, and raising her face from the other's head. "Our Castilians might overlook such a sin, but I could not pardon myself for forgetting that I am a Christian. Beatriz, I have been sorely tried, in this matter!"

"But the hour of trial is nearly passed. Holy Maria! what lightness of reflection, and vanity, and misjudging of self, must exist in man, to embolden some who have dared to aspire to become your husband! You were yet a child when they betrothed you to Don Carlos, a prince old enough to be your father; and then, as if that were not sufficient to warm Castilian blood, they chose the King

of Portugal for you, and he might well have passed for a generation still more remote! Much as I love you, Doña Isabella, and my own soul is scarce dearer to me than your person and mind, for nought do I respect you more, than for the noble and princely resolution, child as you then were, with which you denied the king, in his wicked wish to make you Queen of Portugal."

"Don Enriquez is my brother, Beatriz; and thine and my royal master."

"Ah! bravely did you tell them all," continued Beatriz de Bobadilla, with sparkling eyes, and a feeling of exultation that caused her to overlook the quiet rebuke of her mistress; "and worthy was it of a princess of the royal house of Castile! 'The Infantas of Castile,' you said, 'could not be disposed of, in marriage, without the consent of the nobles of the realm;' and with that fit reply they were glad to be content."

"And yet, Beatriz, am I about to dispose of an Infanta of Castile, without even consulting its nobles."

"Say not that, my excellent mistress. There is not a loyal and gallant cavalier between the Pyrenees and the sea, who will not, in his heart, approve of your choice. The character, and age, and other qualities of the suitor, make a sensible difference in these concerns. But unfit as Don Alfonso of Portugal was, and is, to be the wedded husband of Doña Isabella of Castile, what shall we say to the next suitor who appeared as a pretender to your royal hand – Don Pedro Giron, the Master of Calatrava! truly a most worthy lord for a maiden of the royal house! Out upon him! A Pachecho might think himself full honorably mated, could he have found a damsel of Bobadilla to elevate his race!"

"That ill-assorted union was imposed upon my brother by unworthy favorites; and God, in his holy providence, saw fit to defeat their wishes, by hurrying their intended bridegroom to an unexpected grave!"

"Ay! had it not pleased his blessed will so to dispose of Don Pedro, other means would not have been wanting!"

"This little hand of thine, Beatriz," returned the princess, gravely, though she smiled affectionately on her friend as she took the hand in question, "was not made for the deed its owner menaced."

"That which its owner menaced," replied Beatriz, with eyes flashing fire, "this hand would have executed, before Isabella of Castile should be the doomed bride of the Grand Master of Calatrava. What! was the purest, loveliest virgin of Castile, and she of royal birth – nay, the rightful heiress of the crown – to be sacrificed to a lawless libertine, because it had pleased Don Henry to forget his station and duties, and make a favorite of a craven miscreant!"

"Thou always forgettest, Beatriz, that Don Enriquez is our lord the king, and my royal brother."

"I do not forget, Señora, that you are the royal sister of our lord the king, and that Pedro de Giron, or Pachecho, whichever it might suit the ancient Portuguese page to style him, was altogether unworthy to sit in your presence, much less to become your wedded husband. Oh! what days of anguish were those, my gracious lady, when your knees ached with bending in prayer, that this might not be! But God would not permit it – neither would I! That dagger should have pierced his heart, before ear of his should have heard the vows of Isabella of Castile!"

"Speak no more of this, good Beatriz, I pray thee," said the princess, shuddering, and crossing herself; "they were, in sooth, days of anguish; but what were they in comparison with the passion of the Son of God, who gave himself a sacrifice for our sins! Name it not, then; it was good for my soul to be thus tried; and thou knowest that the evil was turned from me – more, I doubt not, by the efficacy of our prayers, than by that of thy dagger. If thou wilt speak of my suitors, surely there are others better worthy of the trouble."

A light gleamed about the dark eye of Beatriz, and a smile struggled toward her pretty mouth; for well did she understand that the royal, but bashful maiden, would gladly hear something of him on whom her choice had finally fallen. Although ever disposed to do that which was grateful to her

mistress, with a woman's coquetry, Beatriz determined to approach the more pleasing part of the subject coyly, and by a regular gradation of events, in the order in which they had actually occurred.

"Then, there was Monsieur de Guienne, the brother of King Louis of France," she resumed, affecting contempt in her manner; "*he* would fain become the husband of the future Queen of Castile! But even our most unworthy Castilians soon saw the unfitness of that union. Their pride was unwilling to run the chance of becoming a fief of France."

"That misfortune could never have befallen our beloved Castile," interrupted Isabella with dignity; "had I espoused the King of France himself, he would have learned to respect me as the Queen Proprietor of this ancient realm, and not have looked upon me as a subject."

"Then, Señora," continued Beatriz, looking up into Isabella's face, and laughing – "was your own royal kinsman, Don Ricardo of Gloucester; he that they say was born with teeth, and who carries already a burthen so heavy on his back, that he may well thank his patron saint that he is not also to be loaded with the affairs of Castile."¹

"Thy tongue runneth riot, Beatriz. They tell me that Don Ricardo is a noble and aspiring prince; that he is, one day, likely to wed some princess, whose merit may well console him for his failure in Castile. But what more hast thou to offer concerning my suitors?"

"Nay, what more can I say, my beloved mistress? We have now reached Don Fernando, literally the first, as he proveth to be the last, and as we know him to be, the best of them all."

"I think I have been guided by the motives that become my birth and future hopes, in choosing Don Ferdinand," said Isabella, meekly, though she was uneasy in spite of her royal views of matrimony; "since nothing can so much tend to the peace of our dear kingdom, and to the success of the great cause of Christianity, as to unite Castile and Aragon under one crown."

"By uniting their sovereigns in holy wedlock," returned Beatriz, with respectful gravity, though a smile again struggled around her pouting lips. "What if Don Fernando is the most youthful, the handsomest, the most valiant, and the most agreeable prince in Christendom, it is no fault of yours, since you did not make him, but have only accepted him for a husband!"

"Nay, this exceedeth discretion and respect, my good Beatriz," returned Isabella, affecting to frown, even while she blushed deeply at her own emotions, and looked gratified at the praises of her betrothed. "Thou knowest that I have never beheld my cousin, the King of Sicily."

"Very true, Señora; but Father Alonso de Coca hath – and a surer eye, or truer tongue than his, do not exist in Castile."

"Beatriz, I pardon thy license, however unjust and unseemly, because I know thou lovest me, and lookest rather at mine own happiness, than at that of my people," said the princess, the effect of whose gravity now was not diminished by any betrayal of natural feminine weakness – for she felt slightly offended. "Thou knowest, or ought'st to know, that a maiden of royal birth is bound principally to consult the interests of the state, in bestowing her hand, and that the idle fancies of village girls have little in common with her duties. Nay, what virgin of noble extraction, like thyself, even, would dream of aught else than of submitting to the counsel of her family, in taking a husband? If I have selected Don Fernando of Aragon, from among many princes, it is, doubtless, because the alliance is more suited to the interests of Castile, than any other that hath offered. Thou seest, Beatriz, that the Castilians and the Aragonese spring from the same source, and have the same habits and prejudices. They speak the same language" —

"Nay, dearest lady, do not confound the pure Castilian with the dialect of the mountains!"

"Well, have thy fling, wayward one, if thou wilt; but we can easier teach the nobles of Aragon our purer Spanish, than we can teach it to the Gaul. Then, Don Fernando is of my own race; the

¹ Note – The authorities differ as to which of the English princes was the suitor of Isabella; Edward IV. himself, Clarence, or Richard. Isabella was the grand-daughter of Catherine of Lancaster, who was a daughter of John of Gaunt.

House of Trastamara cometh of Castile and her monarchs, and we may at least hope that the King of Sicily will be able to make himself understood."

"If he could not, he were no true knight! The man whose tongue should fail him, when the stake was a royal maiden of a beauty surpassing that of the dawn – of an excellence that already touches on heaven – of a crown" —

"Girl, girl, thy tongue is getting the mastery of thee – such discourse ill befitteth thee and me."

"And yet, Doña Ysabel, my tongue is close bound to my heart."

"I do believe thee, my good Beatriz; but we should bethink us both of our last shrivings, and of the ghostly counsel that we then received. Such nattering discourse seemeth light, when we remember our manifold transgressions, and our many occasions for forgiveness. As for this marriage, I would have thee think that it has been contracted on my part, with the considerations and motives of a princess, and not through any light indulgence of my fancies. Thou knowest that I have never beheld Don Fernando, and that he hath never even looked upon me."

"Assuredly, dearest lady and honored mistress, all this I know, and see, and believe; and I also agree that it were unseemly and little befitting her birth, for even a noble maiden to contract the all-important obligations of marriage, with no better motive than the light impulses of a country wench. Nothing is more just than that we are alike bound to consult our own dignity, and the wishes of kinsmen and friends; and that our duty, and the habits of piety and submission in which we have been reared, are better pledges for our connubial affection than any caprices of a girlish imagination. Still, my honored lady, it is most fortunate that your high obligations point to one as youthful, brave, noble, and chivalrous, as is the King of Sicily, as we well know, by Father Alonso's representations, to be the fact; and that all my friends unite in saying that Don Andres de Cabrera, madcap and silly as he is, will make an exceedingly excellent husband for Beatriz de Bobadilla!"

Isabella, habitually dignified and reserved as she was, had her confidants and her moments for unbending; and Beatriz was the principal among the former, while the present instant was one of the latter. She smiled, therefore, at this sally; and parting, with her own fair hand, the dark locks on the brow of her friend, she regarded her much as the mother regards her child, when sudden passages of tenderness come over the heart.

"If madcap should wed madcap, *thy* friends, at least, have judged rightly," answered the princess. Then, pausing an instant, as if in deep thought, she continued in a graver manner, though modesty shone in her tell-tale complexion, and the sensibility that beamed in her eyes betrayed that she now felt more as a woman than as a future queen bent only on the happiness of her people: "As this interview draweth near, I suffer an embarrassment I had not thought it easy to inflict on an Infanta of Castile. To thee, my faithful Beatriz, I will acknowledge, that were the King of Sicily as old as Don Alfonso of Portugal, or were he as effeminate and unmanly as Monsieur of Guienne; were he, in sooth, less engaging and young, I should feel less embarrassment in meeting him, than I now experience."

"This is passing strange, Señora! Now, I will confess that I would not willingly abate in Don Andres, one hour of his life, which has been sufficiently long as it is; one grace of his person, if indeed the honest cavalier hath any to boast of; or one single perfection of either body or mind."

"Thy case is not mine, Beatriz. Thou knowest the Marquis of Moya; hast listened to his discourse, and art accustomed to his praises and his admiration."

"Holy St. Iago of Spain! Do not distrust any thing, Señora, on account of unfamiliarity with such matters – for, of all learning, it is easiest to learn to relish praise and admiration!"

"True, daughter" – (for so Isabella often termed her friend, though her junior: in later life, and after the princess had become a queen, this, indeed, was her usual term of endearment) – "true, daughter, when praise and admiration are freely given and fairly merited. But I distrust, myself, my claims to be thus viewed, and the feelings with which Don Fernando may first behold me. I know – nay, I *feel* him to be graceful, and noble, and valiant, and generous, and good; comely to the eye, and

strict of duty to our holy religion; as illustrious in qualities as in birth; and I tremble to think of my own unsuitableness to be his bride and queen."

"God's Justice! – I should like to meet the impudent Aragonese noble that would dare to hint as much as this! If Don Fernando is noble, are you not nobler, Señora, as coming of the senior branch of the same house; if he is young, are you not equally so; if he is wise, are you not wiser; if he is comely, are you not more of an angel than a woman; if he is valiant, are you not virtuous; if he is graceful, are you not grace itself; if he is generous, are you not good, and what is more, are you not the very soul of generosity; if he is strict of duty in matters of our holy religion, are you not an angel?"

"Good sooth – good sooth – Beatriz, thou art a comforter! I could reprove thee for this idle tongue, but I know thee honest."

"This is no more than that deep modesty, honored mistress, which ever maketh you quicker to see the merits of others, than to perceive your own. Let Don Fernando look to it! Though he come in all the pomp and glory of his many crowns, I warrant you we find him a royal maiden in Castile, who shall abash him and rebuke his vanity, even while she appears before him in the sweet guise of her own meek nature!"

"I have said naught of Don Fernando's vanity, Beatriz – nor do I esteem him in the least inclined to so weak a feeling; and as for pomp, we well know that gold no more abounds at Zaragoza than at Valladolid, albeit he hath many crowns, in possession, and in reserve. Notwithstanding all thy foolish but friendly tongue hath uttered, I distrust myself, and not the King of Sicily. Methinks I could meet any other prince in Christendom with indifference – or, at least, as becometh my rank and sex; but I confess, I tremble at the thought of encountering the eyes and opinions of my noble cousin."

Beatriz listened with interest; and when her royal mistress ceased speaking, she kissed her hand affectionately, and then pressed it to her heart.

"Let Don Fernando tremble, rather, Señora, at encountering yours," she answered.

"Nay, Beatriz, we know that he hath nothing to dread, for report speaketh but too favorably of him. But, why linger here in doubt and apprehension, when the staff on which it is my duty to lean, is ready to receive its burthen: Father Alonso doubtless waiteth for us, and we will now join him."

The princess and her friend now repaired to the chapel of the palace, where her confessor celebrated the daily mass. The self-distrust which disturbed the feelings of the modest Isabella was appeased by the holy rites, or, rather, it took refuge on that rock where she was accustomed to place all her troubles, with her sins. As the little assemblage left the chapel, one, hot with haste, arrived with the expected, but still doubted tidings, that the King of Sicily had reached Dueñas in safety, and that, as he was now in the very centre of his supporters, there could no longer be any reasonable distrust of the speedy celebration of the contemplated marriage.

Isabella was much overcome with this news, and required more than usual of the care of Beatriz de Bobadilla, to restore her to that sweet serenity of mind and air, which ordinarily rendered her presence as attractive as it was commanding. An hour or two spent in meditation and prayer, however, finally produced a gentle calm in her feelings, and these two friends were again alone, in the very apartment where we first introduced them to the reader.

"Hast thou seen Don Andres de Cabrera?" demanded the princess, taking a hand from a brow which had been often pressed in a sort of bewildered recollection.

Beatriz de Bobadilla blushed – and then she laughed outright, with a freedom that the long-established affection of her mistress did not rebuke.

"For a youth of thirty, and a cavalier well hacked in the wars of the Moors, Don Andres hath a nimble foot," she answered. "He brought hither the tidings of the arrival; and with it he brought his own delightful person, to show it was no lie. For one so experienced, he hath a strong propensity to talk; and so, in sooth, while you, my honored mistress, would be in your closet alone, I could but listen to all the marvels of the journey. It seems, Señora, that they did not reach Dueñas any too soon; for the only purse among them was mislaid, or blown away by the wind on account of its lightness."

"I trust this accident hath been repaired. Few of the house of Trastamara have much gold at this trying moment, and yet none are wont to be entirely without it."

"Don Andres is neither beggar nor miser. He is now in our Castile, where I doubt not he is familiar with the Jews and money-lenders; as these last must know the full value of his lands, the King of Sicily will not want. I hear, too, that the Count of Treviño hath conducted nobly with him."

"It shall be well for the Count of Treviño that he hath had this liberality. But, Beatriz, bring forth the writing materials; it is meet that I, at once, acquaint Don Enriquez with this event, and with my purpose of marriage."

"Nay, dearest mistress, this is out of all rule. When a maiden, gentle or simple, intendeth marriage against her kinsmen's wishes, it is the way to wed first, and to write the letter and ask the blessing when the evil is done."

"Go to, light-of-speech! Thou hast spoken; now bring the pens and paper. The king is not only my lord and sovereign, but he is my nearest of kin, and should be my father."

"And Doña Joanna of Portugal, his royal consort, and our illustrious queen, should be your mother; and a fitting guide would she be to any modest virgin! No – no – my beloved mistress; your royal mother was the Doña Isabella of Portugal – and a very different princess was she from this, her wanton niece."

"Thou givest thyself too much license, Doña Beatriz, and forgettest my request. I desire to write to my brother the king."

It was so seldom that Isabella spoke sternly, that her friend started, and the tears rushed to her eyes at this rebuke; but she procured the writing materials, before she presumed to look into Isabella's face, in order to ascertain if she were really angered. There all was beautiful serenity again; and the Lady of Bobadilla, perceiving that her mistress's mind was altogether occupied with the matter before her, and that she had already forgotten her displeasure, chose to make no further allusion to the subject.

Isabella now wrote her celebrated letter, in which she appeared to forget all her natural timidity, and to speak solely as a princess. By the treaty of Toros de Guisando, in which, setting aside the claims of Joanna of Portugal's daughter, she had been recognized as the heiress of the throne, it had been stipulated that she should not marry without the king's consent; and she now apologized for the step she was about to take, on the substantial plea that her enemies had disregarded the solemn compact entered into not to urge her into any union that was unsuitable or disagreeable to herself. She then alluded to the political advantages that would follow the union of the crowns of Castile and Aragon, and solicited the king's approbation of the step she was about to take. This letter, after having been submitted to John de Vivero, and others of her council, was dispatched by a special messenger – after which act the arrangements necessary as preliminaries to a meeting between the betrothed were entered into. Castilian etiquette was proverbial, even in that age; and the discussion led to a proposal that Isabella rejected with her usual modesty and discretion.

"It seemeth to me," said John de Vivero, "that this alliance should not take place without some admission, on the part of Don Fernando, of the inferiority of Aragon to our own Castile. The house of the latter kingdom is but a junior branch of the reigning House of Castile, and the former territory of old was admitted to have a dependency on the latter."

This proposition was much applauded, until the beautiful and natural sentiments of the princess, herself, interposed to expose its weakness and its deformities.

"It is doubtless true," she said, "that Don Juan of Aragon is the son of the younger brother of my royal grandfather; but he is none the less a king. Nay, besides his crown of Aragon – a country, if thou wilt, which is inferior to Castile – he hath those of Naples and Sicily; not to speak of Navarre, over which he ruleth, although it may not be with too much right. Don Fernando even weareth the crown of Sicily, by the renunciation of Don Juan; and shall he, a crowned sovereign, make concessions to one who is barely a princess, and whom it may never please God to conduct to a throne? Moreover,

Don John of Vivero, I beseech thee to remember the errand that bringeth the King of Sicily to Valladolid. Both he and I have two parts to perform, and two characters to maintain – those of prince and princess, and those of Christians wedded and bound by holy marriage ties. It would ill become one that is about to take on herself the duties and obligations of a wife, to begin the intercourse with exactions that should be humiliating to the pride and self-respect of her lord. Aragon may truly be an inferior realm to Castile – but Ferdinand of Aragon is even now every way the equal of Isabella of Castile; and when he shall receive my vows, and, with them, my duty and my affections" – Isabella's color deepened, and her mild eye lighted with a sort of holy enthusiasm – "as befitteth a woman, though an infidel, he would become, in some particulars, my superior. Let me, then, hear no more of this; for it could not nearly as much pain Don Fernando to make the concessions ye require, as it paineth me to hear of them."

CHAPTER III

"Nice customs curt'sy to great kings. Dear Kate, you and I cannot be confined within the weak list of a country's fashion. We are the makers of manners; and the liberty that follows our places, stops the mouths of all fault-finders." – Henry V.

Notwithstanding her high resolution, habitual firmness, and a serenity of mind, that seemed to pervade the moral system of Isabella, like a deep, quiet current of enthusiasm, but which it were truer to assign to the high and fixed principles that guided all her actions, her heart beat tumultuously, and her native reserve, which almost amounted to shyness, troubled her sorely, as the hour arrived when she was first to behold the prince she had accepted for a husband. Castilian etiquette, no less than the magnitude of the political interests involved in the intended union, had drawn out the preliminary negotiations several days; the bridegroom being left, all that time, to curb his impatience to behold the princess, as best he might.

On the evening of the 15th of October, 1469, however, every obstacle being at length removed, Don Fernando threw himself into the saddle, and, accompanied by only four attendants, among whom was Andres de Cabrera, he quietly took his way, without any of the usual accompaniments of his high rank, toward the palace of John of Vivero, in the city of Valladolid. The Archbishop of Toledo was of the faction of the princess, and this prelate, a warlike and active partisan, was in readiness to receive the accepted suitor, and to conduct him to the presence of his mistress.

Isabella, attended only by Beatriz de Bobadilla, was in waiting for the interview, in the apartment already mentioned; and by one of those mighty efforts that even the most retiring of the sex can make, on great occasions, she received her future husband with quite as much of the dignity of a princess as of the timidity of a woman. Ferdinand of Aragon had been prepared to meet one of singular grace and beauty; but the mixture of angelic modesty with a loveliness that almost surpassed that of her sex, produced a picture approaching so much nearer to heaven than to earth, that, though one of circumspect behavior, and much accustomed to suppress emotion, he actually started, and his feet were momentarily riveted to the floor, when the glorious vision first met his eye. Then, recovering himself, he advanced eagerly, and taking the little hand which neither met nor repulsed the attempt, he pressed it to his lips with a warmth that seldom accompanies the first interviews of those whose passions are usually so factitious.

"This happy moment hath at length arrived, my illustrious and beautiful cousin!" he said, with a truth of feeling that went directly to the pure and tender heart of Isabella; for no skill in courtly phrases can ever give to the accents of deceit, the point and emphasis that belong to sincerity. "I have thought it would never arrive; but this blessed moment – thanks to our own St. Iago, whom I have not ceased to implore with intercessions – more than rewards me for all anxieties."

"I thank my Lord the Prince, and bid him right welcome," modestly returned Isabella. "The difficulties that have been overcome, in order to effect this meeting, are but types of the difficulties we shall have to conquer as we advance through life."

Then followed a few courteous expressions concerning the hopes of the princess that her cousin had wanted for nothing, since his arrival in Castile, with suitable answers; when Don Ferdinand led her to an armed-chair, assuming himself the stool on which Beatriz de Bobadilla was wont to be seated, in her familiar intercourse with her royal mistress. Isabella, however, sensitively alive to the pretensions of the Castilians, who were fond of asserting the superiority of their own country over that of Aragon, would not quietly submit to this arrangement, but declined to be seated, unless her suitor would take the chair prepared for him also, saying —

"It ill befitteth one who hath little more than some royalty of blood, and her dependence on God, to be thus placed, while the King of Sicily is so unworthily bestowed."

"Let me entreat that it may be so," returned the king. "All considerations of earthly rank vanish in this presence; view me as a knight, ready and desirous of proving his fealty in any court or field of Christendom, and treat me as such."

Isabella, who had that high tact which teaches the precise point where breeding becomes neuter and airs commence, blushed and smiled, but no longer declined to be seated. It was not so much the mere words of her cousin that went to her heart, as the undisguised admiration of his looks, the animation of his eye, and the frank sincerity of his manner. With a woman's instinct she perceived that the impression she had made was favorable, and, with a woman's sensibility, her heart was ready, under the circumstances, to dissolve in tenderness at the discovery. This mutual satisfaction soon opened the way to a freer conversation; and, ere half an hour was passed, the archbishop – who, though officially ignorant of the language and wishes of lovers, was practically sufficiently familiar with both – contrived to draw the two or three courtiers who were present, into an adjoining room, where, though the door continued open, he placed them with so much discretion that neither eye nor ear could be any restraint on what was passing. As for Beatriz de Bobadilla, whom female etiquette required should remain in the same room with her royal mistress, she was so much engaged with Andres de Cabrera, that half a dozen thrones might have been disposed of between the royal pair, and she none the wiser.

Although Isabella did not lose that mild reserve and feminine modesty that threw so winning a grace around her person, even to the day of her death, she gradually grew more calm as the discourse proceeded; and, falling back on her self-respect, womanly dignity, and, not a little, on those stores of knowledge that she had been diligently collecting, while others similarly situated had wasted their time in the vanities of courts, she was quickly at her ease, if not wholly in that tranquil state of mind to which she had been accustomed.

"I trust there can now be no longer any delay to the celebration of our union by holy church," observed the king, in continuation of the subject. "All that can be required of us both, as those entrusted with the cares and interests of realms, hath been observed, and I may have a claim to look to my own happiness. We are not strangers to each other, Doña Isabella; for our grandfathers were brothers, and from infancy up, have I been taught to reverence thy virtues, and to strive to emulate thy holy duty to God."

"I have not betrothed myself lightly, Don Fernando," returned the princess, blushing, even while she assumed the majesty of a queen; "and with the subject so fully discussed, the wisdom of the union so fully established, and the necessity of promptness so apparent, no idle delays shall proceed from me. I had thought that the ceremony might be had on the fourth day from this, which will give us both time to prepare for an occasion so solemn, by suitable attention to the offices of the church."

"It must be as thou wilt," said the king, respectfully bowing; "and now there remaineth but a few preparations, and we shall have no reproaches of forgetfulness. Thou knowest, Doña Isabella, how sorely my father is beset by his enemies, and I need scarce tell thee that his coffers are empty. In good sooth, my fair cousin, nothing but my earnest desire to possess myself, at as early a day as possible, of the precious boon that Providence and thy goodness" —

"Mingle not, Don Fernando, any of the acts of God and his providence, with the wisdom and petty expedients of his creatures," said Isabella, earnestly.

"To seize upon the precious boon, then, that Providence appeared willing to bestow," rejoined the king, crossing himself, while he bowed his head, as much, perhaps, in deference to the pious feelings of his affianced wife, as in deference to a higher Power – "would not admit of delay, and we quitted Zaragoza better provided with hearts loyal toward the treasures we were to find in Valladolid, than with gold. Even that we had, by a mischance, hath gone to enrich some lucky varlet in an inn."

"Doña Beatriz de Bobadilla hath acquainted me with the mishap," said Isabella, smiling; "and truly we shall commence our married lives with but few of the goods of the world in present

possession. I have little more to offer thee, Fernando, than a true heart, and a spirit that I think may be trusted for its fidelity."

"In obtaining thee, my excellent cousin, I obtain sufficient to satisfy the desires of any reasonable man. Still, something is due to our rank and future prospects, and it shall not be said that thy nuptials passed like those of a common subject."

"Under ordinary circumstances it might not appear seemly for one of my sex to furnish the means for her own bridal," answered the princess, the blood stealing to her face until it crimsoned even her brow and temples; maintaining, otherwise, that beautiful tranquillity of mien which marked her ordinary manner – "but the well-being of two states depending on our union, vain emotions must be suppressed. I am not without jewels, and Valladolid hath many Hebrews: thou wilt permit me to part with the baubles for such an object."

"So that thou preservest for me the jewel in which that pure mind is encased," said the King of Sicily, gallantly, "I care not if I never see another. But there will not be this need; for our friends, who have more generous souls than well-filled coffers too, can give such warranty to the lenders as will procure the means. I charge myself with this duty, for henceforth, my cousin – may I not say my betrothed!" —

"The term is even dearer than any that belongeth to blood, Fernando," answered the princess, with a simple sincerity of manner that set at nought the ordinary affectations and artificial feelings of her sex, while it left the deepest reverence for her modesty – "and we might be excused for using it. I trust God will bless our union, not only to our own happiness, but to that of our people."

"Then, my betrothed, henceforth we have but a common fortune, and thou wilt trust in me for the provision for thy wants."

"Nay, Fernando," answered Isabella, smiling, "imagine what we will, we cannot imagine ourselves the children of two hidalgos about to set forth in the world with humble dowries. Thou art a king, even now; and by the treaty of Toros de Guisando, I am solemnly recognized as the heiress of Castile. We must, therefore, have our separate means, as well as our separate duties, though I trust hardly our separate interests."

"Thou wilt never find me failing in that respect which is due to thy rank, or in that duty which it becometh me to render thee, as the head of our ancient House, next to thy royal brother, the king."

"Thou hast well considered, Don Fernando, the treaty of marriage, and accepted cheerfully, I trust, all of its several conditions?"

"As becometh the importance of the measures, and the magnitude of the benefit I was to receive."

"I would have them acceptable to thee, as well as expedient; for, though so soon to become thy wife, I can never cease to remember that I shall be Queen of this country."

"Thou mayest be assured, my beautiful betrothed, that Ferdinand of Aragon will be the last to deem thee aught else."

"I look on my duties as coming from God, and on myself as one rigidly accountable to him for their faithful discharge. Sceptres may not be treated as toys, Fernando, to be trifled with; for man beareth no heavier burden, than when he beareth a crown."

"The maxims of our House have not been forgotten in Aragon, my betrothed – and I rejoice to find that they are the same in both kingdoms."

"We are not to think principally of ourselves in entering upon this engagement," continued Isabella, earnestly – "for that would be supplanting the duties of princes by the feelings of the lover. Thou hast frequently perused, and sufficiently conned the marriage articles, I trust?"

"There hath been sufficient leisure for that, my cousin, as they have now been signed these nine months."

"If I may have seemed to thee exacting in some particulars," continued Isabella, with the same earnest and beautiful simplicity as usually marked her deportment in all the relations of life – "it is

because the duties of a sovereign may not be overlooked. Thou knowest, moreover, Fernando, the influence that the husband is wont to acquire over the wife, and wilt feel the necessity of my protecting my Castilians, in the fullest manner, against my own weaknesses."

"If thy Castilians do not suffer until they suffer from that cause, Doña Isabella, their lot will indeed be blessed."

"These are words of gallantry, and I must reprove their use on an occasion so serious, Fernando. I am a few months thy senior, and shall assume an elder sister's rights, until they are lost in the obligations of a wife. Thou hast seen in those articles, how anxiously I would protect my Castilians against any supremacy of the stranger. Thou knowest that many of the greatest of this realm are opposed to our union, through apprehension of Aragonese sway, and wilt observe how studiously we have striven to appease their jealousies."

"Thy motives, Doña Isabella, have been understood, and thy wishes in this and all other particulars shall be respected."

"I would be thy faithful and submissive wife," returned the princess, with an earnest but gentle look at her betrothed; "but I would also that Castile should preserve her rights and her independence. What will be thy influence, the maiden that freely bestoweth her hand, need hardly say; but we must preserve the appearance of separate states."

"Confide in me, my cousin. They who live fifty years hence will say that Don Fernando knew how to respect his obligations and to discharge his duty."

"There is the stipulation, too, to war upon the Moor. I shall never feel that the Christians of Spain have been true to the faith, while the follower of the arch-imposter of Mecca remaineth in the peninsula."

"Thou and thy archbishop could not have imposed a more agreeable duty, than to place my lance in rest against the infidels. My spurs have been gained in those wars, already; and no sooner shall we be crowned, than thou wilt see my perfect willingness to aid in driving back the miscreants to their original sands."

"There remaineth but one thing more upon my mind, gentle cousin. Thou knowest the evil influence that besets my brother, and that it hath disaffected a large portion of his nobles as well as of his cities. We shall both be sorely tempted to wage war upon him, and to assume the sceptre before it pleaseth God to accord it to us, in the course of nature. I would have thee respect Don Enriquez, not only as the head of our royal house, but as my brother and anointed master. Should evil counsellors press him to attempt aught against our persons or rights, it will be lawful to resist; but I pray thee, Fernando, on no excuse seek to raise thy hand in rebellion against my rightful sovereign."

"Let Don Enriquez, then, be chary of his Beltraneja!" answered the prince with warmth. "By St. Peter! I have rights of mine own that come before those of that ill-gotten mongrel! The whole House of Trastamara hath an interest in stifling that spurious scion which hath been so fraudulently engrafted on its princely stock!"

"Thou art warm, Don Fernando, and even the eye of Beatriz de Bobadilla reproveth thy heat. The unfortunate Joanna never can impair our rights to the throne, for there are few nobles in Castile so unworthy as to wish to see the crown bestowed where it is believed the blood of Pelayo doth not flow."

"Don Enriquez hath not kept faith with thee, Isabella, since the treaty of Toros de Guisando!"

"My brother is surrounded by wicked counsellors – and then, Fernando," – the princess blushed crimson as she spoke – "neither have we been able rigidly to adhere to that convention, since one of its conditions was that my hand should not be bestowed without the consent of the king."

"He hath driven us into this measure, and hath only to reproach himself with our failure on this point."

"I endeavor so to view it, though many have been my prayers for forgiveness of this seeming breach of faith. I am not superstitious, Fernando, else might I think God would frown on a union that is contracted in the face of pledges like these. But, it is well to distinguish between motives, and we

have a right to believe that He who readeth the heart, will not judge the well-intentioned severely. Had not Don Enriquez attempted to seize my person, with the plain purpose of forcing me to a marriage against my will, this decisive step could not have been necessary, and would not have been taken."

"I have reason to thank my patron saint, beautiful cousin, that thy will was less compliant than thy tyrants had believed."

"I could not plight my troth to the King of Portugal, or to Monsieur de Guienne, or to any that they proposed to me, for my future lord," answered Isabella, ingenuously. "It ill befitted royal or noble maidens to set up their own inexperienced caprices in opposition to the wisdom of their friends, and the task is not difficult for a virtuous wife to learn to love her husband, when nature and opinion are not too openly violated in the choice; but I have had too much thought for my soul to wish to expose it to so severe a trial, in contracting the marriage duties."

"I feel that I am only too unworthy of thee, Isabella – but thou must train me to be that thou wouldst wish; I can only promise thee a most willing and attentive scholar."

The discourse now became more general, Isabella indulging her natural curiosity and affectionate nature, by making many inquiries concerning her different relatives in Aragon. After the interview had lasted two hours or more, the King of Sicily returned to Dueñas, with the same privacy as he had observed in entering the town. The royal pair parted with feelings of increased esteem and respect, Isabella indulging in those gentle anticipations of domestic happiness that more properly belong to the tender nature of woman.

The marriage took place, with suitable pomp, on the morning of the 19th October, 1469, in the chapel of John de Vivero's palace; no less than two thousand persons, principally of condition, witnessing the ceremony. Just as the officiating priest was about to commence the offices, the eye of Isabella betrayed uneasiness, and turning to the Archbishop of Toledo, she said —

"Your grace hath promised that there should be nothing wanting to the consent of the church on this solemn occasion. It is known that Don Fernando of Aragon and I stand within the prohibited degrees."

"Most true, my Lady Isabella," returned the prelate, with a composed mien and a paternal smile. "Happily, our Holy Father Pius hath removed this impediment, and the church smileth on this blessed union in every particular."

The archbishop then took out of his pocket a dispensation, which he read, in a clear, sonorous, steady voice; when every shade disappeared from the serene brow of Isabella, and the ceremony proceeded. Years elapsed before this pious and submissive Christian princess discovered that she had been imposed on, the bull that was then read having been an invention of the old King of Aragon and the prelate, not without suspicions of a connivance on the part of the bridegroom. This deception had been practised from a perfect conviction that the sovereign pontiff was too much under the influence of the King of Castile, to consent to bestow the boon in opposition to that monarch's wishes. It was several years before Sixtus IV. repaired this wrong, by granting a more genuine authority.

Nevertheless, Ferdinand and Isabella became man and wife. What followed in the next twenty years must be rather glanced at than related. Henry IV. resented the step, and vain attempts were made to substitute his supposititious child, La Beltraneja, in the place of his sister, as successor to the throne. A civil war ensued, during which Isabella steadily refused to assume the crown, though often entreated; limiting her efforts to the maintenance of her rights as heiress presumptive. In 1474, or five years after her marriage, Don Henry died, and she then became Queen of Castile, though her spurious niece was also proclaimed by a small party among her subjects. The war of the succession, as it was called, lasted five years longer, when Joanna, or La Beltraneja, assumed the veil, and the rights of Isabella were generally acknowledged. About the same time, died Don John II., when Ferdinand mounted the throne of Aragon. These events virtually reduced the sovereignties of the peninsula, which had so long been cut up into petty states, to four, viz., the possessions of Ferdinand and Isabella, which included Castile, Leon, Aragon, Valencia, and many other of the finest provinces of Spain;

Navarre, an insignificant kingdom in the Pyrenees; Portugal, much as it exists to-day; and Granada, the last abiding-place of the Moor, north of the strait of Gibraltar.

Neither Ferdinand, nor his royal consort, was forgetful of that clause in their marriage contract, which bound the former to undertake a war for the destruction of the Moorish power. The course of events, however, caused a delay of many years, in putting this long-projected plan in execution; but when the time finally arrived, that Providence which seemed disposed to conduct the pious Isabella, through a train of important incidents, from the reduced condition in which we have just described her to have been, to the summit of human power, did not desert its favorite. Success succeeded success – and victory, victory; until the Moor had lost fortress after fortress, town after town, and was finally besieged in his very capital – his last hold in the peninsula. As the reduction of Granada was an event that, in Christian eyes, was to be ranked second only to the rescuing of the holy sepulchre from the hands of the Infidels, so was it distinguished by some features of singularity, that have probably never before marked the course of a siege. The place submitted on the 25th November, 1491 – twenty-two years after the date of the marriage just mentioned, and, it may not be amiss to observe, on the very day of the year that has become memorable in the annals of this country, as that on which the English, three centuries later, reluctantly yielded their last foothold on the coast of the republic.

In the course of the preceding summer, while the Spanish forces lay before the town, and Isabella, with her children, were anxious witnesses of the progress of events, an accident occurred that had well nigh proved fatal to the royal family, and brought destruction on the Christian arms. The pavillion of the queen took fire, and was consumed, placing the whole encampment in the utmost jeopardy. Many of the tents of the nobles were also destroyed, and much treasure, in the shape of jewelry and plate, was lost, though the injury went no further. In order to guard against the recurrence of such an accident, and probably viewing the subjection of Granada as the great act of their mutual reign – for, as yet, Time threw his veil around the future, and but one human eye foresaw the greatest of all the events of the period, which was still in reserve – the sovereigns resolved on attempting a work that, of itself, would render this siege memorable. The plan of a regular town was made, and laborers set about the construction of good substantial edifices, in which to lodge the army; thus converting the warfare into that of something like city against city. In three months this stupendous work was completed, with its avenues, streets, and squares, and received the name of Santa Fé, or Holy Faith – an appellation quite as well suited to the zeal which could achieve such a work, in the heat of a campaign, as to that general reliance on the providence of God which animated the Christians in carrying on the war. The construction of this place struck terror into the hearts of the Moors, for they considered it a proof that their enemies intended to give up the conflict only with their lives; and it is highly probable that it had a direct and immediate influence on the submission of Boabdil, the King of Granada, who yielded the Alhambra a few weeks after the Spaniards had taken possession of their new abodes.

Santa Fé still exists, and is visited by the traveller as a place of curious origin; while it is rendered remarkable by the fact – real or assumed – that it is the only town of any size in Spain, that has never been under Moorish sway.

The main incidents of our tale will now transport us to this era, and to this scene; all that has been related as yet, being merely introductory matter, to prepare the reader for the events that are to follow.

CHAPTER IV

"What thing a right line is, – the learned know;
But how avails that him, who in the right
Of life and manners doth desire to grow?
What then are all these humane arts, and lights,
But seas of errors? In whose depths who sound,
Of truth finde only shadowes, and no ground."

Human Learning.

The morning of the 2d of January, 1492, was ushered in with a solemnity and pomp that were unusual even in a court and camp as much addicted to religious observances and royal magnificence, as that of Ferdinand and Isabella. The sun had scarce appeared, when all in the extraordinary little city of Santa Fé were afoot, and elate with triumph. The negotiations for the surrender of Granada, which had been going on secretly for weeks, were terminated; the army and nation had been formally apprised of their results, and this was the day set for the entry of the conquerors.

The court had been in mourning for Don Alonso of Portugal, the husband of the Princess Royal of Castile, who had died a bridegroom; but on this joyous occasion the trappings of woe were cast aside, and all appeared in their gayest and most magnificent apparel. At an hour that was still early, the Grand Cardinal moved forward, ascending what is called the Hill of Martyrs, at the head of a strong body of troops, with a view to take possession. While making the ascent, a party of Moorish cavaliers was met; and at their head rode one in whom, by the dignity of his mien and the anguish of his countenance, it was easy to recognize the mental suffering of Boabdil, or Abdallah, the deposed monarch. The cardinal pointed out the position occupied by Ferdinand, who, with that admixture of piety and worldly policy which were so closely interwoven in his character, had refused to enter within the walls of the conquered city, until the symbol of Christ had superseded the banners of Mahomet; and who had taken his station at some distance from the gates, with a purpose and display of humility that were suited to the particular fanaticism of the period. As the interview that occurred has often been related, and twice quite recently by distinguished writers of our own country, it is unnecessary to dwell on it here. Abdallah next sought the presence of the purer-minded and gentle Isabella, where his reception, with less affection of the character, had more of the real charity and compassion of the Christian; when he went his way toward that pass in the mountains that has ever since been celebrated as the point where he took his last view of the palaces and towers of his fathers, from which it has obtained the poetical and touching name of *El Ultimo Suspiro Del Moro*.

Although the passage of the last King of Granada, from his palace to the hills, was in no manner delayed, as it was grave and conducted with dignity, it consequently occupied some time. These were hours in which the multitude covered the highways, and the adjacent fields were garnished with a living throng, all of whom kept their eyes riveted on the towers of the Alhambra, where the signs of possession were anxiously looked for by every good Catholic who witnessed the triumph of his religion.

Isabella, who had made this conquest a condition in the articles of marriage – whose victory in truth it was – abstained, with her native modesty, from pressing forward on this occasion. She had placed herself at some distance in the rear of the position of Ferdinand. Still – unless, indeed, we except the long-coveted towers of the Alhambra – she was the centre of attraction. She appeared in royal magnificence, as due to the glory of the occasion; her beauty always rendered her an object of admiration; her mildness, inflexible justice, and unyielding truth, had won all hearts; and she was

really the person who was most to profit by the victory, Granada being attached to her own crown of Castile, and not to that of Aragon, a country that possessed little or no contiguous territory.

Previously to the appearance of Abdallah, the crowd moved freely, in all directions; multitudes of civilians having flocked to the camp to witness the entry. Among others were many friars, priests, and monks – the war, indeed, having the character of a crusade. The throng of the curious was densest near the person of the queen, where, in truth, the magnificence of the court was the most imposing. Around this spot, in particular, congregated most of the religious, for they felt that the pious mind of Isabella created a sort of moral atmosphere in and near her presence, that was peculiarly suited to their habits, and favorable to their consideration. Among others, was a friar of prepossessing mien, and, in fact, of noble birth, who had been respectfully addressed as Father Pedro, by several grandees, as he made his way from the immediate presence of the queen, to a spot where the circulation was easier. He was accompanied by a youth of an air so much superior to that of most of those who did not appear that day in the saddle, that he attracted general attention. Although not more than twenty, it was evident, from his muscular frame, and embrowned but florid cheeks, that he was acquainted with exposure; and by his bearing, many thought, notwithstanding he did not appear in armor on an occasion so peculiarly military, that both his mien and his frame had been improved by familiarity with war. His attire was simple, as if he rather avoided than sought observation, but it was, nevertheless, such as was worn by none but the noble. Several of those who watched this youth, as he reached the less confined portions of the crowd, had seen him received graciously by Isabella, whose hand he had even been permitted to kiss, a favor that the formal and fastidious court of Castile seldom bestowed except on the worthy, or on those, at least, who were unusually illustrious from their birth. Some whispered that he was a Guzman, a family that was almost royal; while others thought that he might be a Ponce, a name that had got to be one of the first in Spain, through the deeds of the renowned Marquis-Duke of Cadiz, in this very war; while others, again, affected to discern in his lofty brow, firm step, and animated eye, the port and countenance of a Mendoza.

It was evident that the subject of all these commentaries was unconscious of the notice that was attracted by his vigorous form, handsome face, and elastic, lofty tread; for, like one accustomed to be observed by inferiors, his attention was confined to such objects as amused his eye, or pleased his fancy, while he lent a willing ear to the remarks that, from time to time, fell from the lips of his reverend companion.

"This is a most blessed and glorious day for Christianity!" observed the friar, after a pause a little longer than common. "An impious reign of seven hundred years hath expired, and the Moor is at length lowered from his pride; while the cross is elevated above the banners of the false prophet. Thou hast had ancestors, my son, who might almost arise from their tombs, and walk the earth in exultation, if the tidings of these changes were permitted to reach the souls of Christians long since departed."

"The Blessed Maria intercede for them, father, that they may not be disturbed, even to see the Moor unhoused; for I doubt much, agreeable as the Infidel hath made it, if they find Granada as pleasant as Paradise."

"Son Don Luis, thou hast got much levity of speech, in thy late journeyings; and I doubt if thou art as mindful of thy paters and confessions, as when under the care of thy excellent mother, of sainted memory!"

This was not only said reprovingly, but with a warmth that amounted nearly to anger.

"Chide me not so warmly, father, for a lightness of speech that cometh of youthful levity, rather than of disrespect for holy church. Nay, thou rebukest warmly, and then, as I come like a penitent to lay my transgressions before thee, and to seek absolution, thou fastenest thine eye on vacancy, and gazest as if one of the spirits of which thou so lately spokest actually had arisen and come to see the Moor crack his heart strings at quitting his beloved Alhambra!"

"Dost see that man, Luis!" demanded the friar, still gazing in a fixed direction, though he made no gesture to indicate to which particular individual of the many who were passing in all directions, he especially alluded.

"By my veracity, I see a thousand, father, though not one to fasten the eye as if he were fresh from Paradise. Would it be exceeding discretion to ask who or what hath thus riveted thy gaze?"

"Dost see yonder person of high and commanding stature, and in whom gravity and dignity are so singularly mingled with an air of poverty; or, if not absolutely of poverty – for he is better clad, and, seemingly, in more prosperity now, than I remember ever to have seen him – still, evidently not of the rich and noble; while his bearing and carriage would seem to bespeak him at least a monarch?"

"I think I now perceive him thou meanest, father; a man of very grave and reverend appearance, though of simple deportment. I see nothing extravagant, or ill-placed, either in his attire, or in his bearing."

"I mean not that; but there is a loftiness in his dignified countenance that one is not accustomed to meet in those who are unused to power."

"To me, he hath the air and dress of a superior navigator, or pilot – of a man accustomed to the seas – ay, he hath sundry symbols about him that bespeak such a pursuit."

"Thou art right, Don Luis, for such is his calling. He cometh of Genoa, and his name is Christoval Colon; or, as they term it in Italy, Christoforo Colombo."

"I remember to have heard of an admiral of that name, who did good service in the wars of the south, and who formerly led a fleet into the far east."

"This is not he, but one of humbler habits, though possibly of the same blood, seeing that both are derived from the identical place. This is no admiral, though he would fain become one – ay, even a king!"

"The man is, then, either of a weak mind, or of a light ambition."

"He is neither. In mind, he hath outdone many of our most learned churchmen; and it is due to his piety to say that a more devout Christian doth not exist in Spain. It is plain, son, that thou hast been much abroad, and little at court, or thou wouldst have known the history of this extraordinary being, at the mention of his name, which has been the source of merriment for the frivolous and gay this many a year, and which has thrown the thoughtful and prudent into more doubts than many a fierce and baneful heresy."

"Thou stirrest my curiosity, father, by such language. Who and what is the man?"

"An enigma, that neither prayers to the Virgin, the learning of the cloisters, nor a zealous wish to reach the truth, hath enabled me to read. Come hither, Luis, to this bit of rock, where we can be seated, and I will relate to thee the opinions that render this being so extraordinary. Thou must know, son, it is now seven years since this man first appeared among us. He sought employment as a discoverer, pretending that, by steering out into the ocean, on a western course, for a great and unheard-of distance, he could reach the farther Indies, with the rich island of Cipango, and the kingdom of Cathay, of which one Marco Polo hath left us some most extraordinary legends!"

"By St. James of blessed memory! the man must be short of his wits!" interrupted Don Luis, laughing. "In what way could this thing be, unless the earth were round – the Indies lying east, and not west of us?"

"That hath been often objected to his notions; but the man hath ready answers to much weightier arguments."

"What weightier than this can be found? Our own eyes tell us that the earth is flat."

"Therein he differeth from most men – and to own the truth, son Luis, not without some show of reason. He is a navigator, as thou wilt understand, and he replies that, on the ocean, when a ship is seen from afar, her upper sails are first perceived, and that as she draweth nearer, her lower sails, and finally her hull cometh into view. But thou hast been over sea, and may have observed something of this?"

"Truly have I, father. While mounting the English sea, we met a gallant cruiser of the king's, and, as thou said'st, we first perceived her upper sail, a white speck upon the water; then followed sail after sail, until we came nigh and saw her gigantic hull, with a very goodly show of bombards and cannon – some twenty at least, in all."

"Then thou agreest with this Colon, and thinkest the earth round?"

"By St. George of England! not I. I have seen too much of the world, to traduce its fair surface in so heedless a manner. England, France, Burgundy, Germany, and all those distant countries of the north, are just as level and flat as our own Castile."

"Why, then, didst thou see the upper sails of the Englishman first?"

"Why, father – why – because they were first visible. Yes, because they came first into view."

"Do the English put the largest of their sails uppermost on the masts?"

"They would be fools if they did. Though no great navigators – our neighbors the Portuguese, and the people of Genoa, exceeding all others in that craft – though no great navigators, the English are not so surpassingly stupid. Thou wilt remember the force of the winds, and understand that the larger the sail the lower should be its position."

"Then how happened it that thou sawest the smaller object before the larger?"

"Truly, excellent Fray Pedro, thou hast not conversed with this Christoforo for nothing! A question is not a reason."

"Socrates was fond of questions, son; but *he* expected answers."

"*Peste!* as they say at the court of King Louis. I am not Socrates, my good father, but thy old pupil and kinsman, Luis de Bobadilla, the truant nephew of the queen's favorite, the Marchioness of Moya, and as well-born a cavalier as there is in Spain – though somewhat given to roving, if my enemies are to be believed."

"Neither thy pedigree, thy character, nor thy vagaries, need be given to me, Don Luis de Bobadilla, since I have known thee and thy career from childhood. Thou hast one merit that none will deny thee, and that is, a respect for truth; and never hast thou more completely vindicated thy character, in this particular, than when thou saidst thou were not Socrates."

The worthy friar's good-natured smile, as he made this sally, took off some of its edge; and the young man laughed, as if too conscious of his own youthful follies to resent what he heard.

"But, dear Fray Pedro, lay aside thy government, for once, and stoop to a rational discourse with me on this extraordinary subject. *Thou*, surely, wilt not pretend that the earth is round?"

"I do not go as far as some, on this point, Luis, for I see difficulties with Holy Writ, by the admission. Still, this matter of the sails much puzzleth me, and I have often felt a desire to go from one port to another, by sea, in order to witness it. Were it not for the exceeding nausea that I ever feel in a boat, I might attempt the experiment."

"That would be a worthy consummation of all thy wisdom!" exclaimed the young man, laughing. "Fray Pedro de Carrascal turned rover, like his old pupil, and that, too, astride a vagary! But set thy heart at rest, my honored kinsman and excellent instructor, for I can save thee the trouble. In all my journeyings, by sea and by land – and thou knowest that, for my years, they have been many – I have ever found the earth flat, and the ocean the flattest portion of it, always excepting a few turbulent and uneasy waves."

"No doubt it so seemeth to the eye; but this Colon, who hath voyaged far more than thou, thinketh otherwise. He contendeth that the earth is a sphere, and that, by sailing west, he can reach points that have been already attained by journeying east."

"By San Lorenzo! but the idea is a bold one! Doth the man really propose to venture out into the broad Atlantic, and even to cross it to some distant and unknown land?"

"That is his very idea; and for seven weary years hath he solicited the court to furnish him with the means. Nay, as I hear, he hath passed much more time – other seven years, perhaps – in urging his suit in different lands."

"If the earth be round," continued Don Luis, with a musing air, "what preventeth all the water from flowing to the lower parts of it? How is it, that we have any seas at all? and if, as thou hast hinted, he deemeth the Indies on the other side, how is it that their people stand erect? – it cannot be done without placing the feet uppermost."

"That difficulty hath been presented to Colon, but he treateth it lightly. Indeed, most of our churchmen are getting to believe that there is no up, or down, except as it relateth to the surface of the earth; so that no great obstacle existeth in that point."

"Thou would'st not have me understand, father, that a man can walk on his head – and that, too, with the noble member in the air? By San Francisco! thy men of Cathay must have talons like a cat, or they would be falling, quickly!"

"Whither, Luis?"

"Whither, Fray Pedro? – to Tophet, or the bottomless pit. It can never be that men walk on their heads, heels uppermost, with no better foundation than the atmosphere. The caravels, too, must sail on their masts – and that would be rare navigation! What would prevent the sea from tumbling out of its bed, and falling on the Devil's fires and extinguishing them?"

"Son Luis," interrupted the monk, gravely, "thy lightness of speech is carried too far. But, if thou so much deridest the opinion of this Colon, what are thine own notions of the formation of this earth, that God hath so honored with his spirit and his presence?"

"That it is as flat as the buckler of the Moor I slew in the last sortie, which is as flat as steel can hammer iron."

"Dost thou think it hath limits?"

"That do I – and please heaven, and Doña Mercedes de Valverde, I will see them before I die!"

"Then thou fanciest there is an edge, or precipice, at the four sides of the world, which men may reach, and where they can stand and look off, as from an exceeding high platform?"

"The picture doth not lose, father, for the touch of thy pencil! I have never bethought me of this before; and yet some such spot there must be, one would think. By San Fernando, himself! that would be a place to try the metal of even Don Alonso de Ojeda, who might stand on the margin of the earth, put his foot on a cloud, and cast an orange to the moon!"

"Thou hast bethought thee little of any thing serious, I fear, Luis; but to me, this opinion and this project of Colon are not without merit. I see but two serious objections to them, one of which is, the difficulty connected with Holy Writ; and the other, the vast and incomprehensible, nay, useless, extent of the ocean that must necessarily separate us from Cathay; else should we long since have heard from that quarter of the world."

"Do the learned favor the man's notions?"

"The matter hath been seriously argued before a council held at Salamanca, where men were much divided upon it. One serious obstacle is the apprehension that should the world prove to be round, and could a ship even succeed in getting to Cathay by the west, there would be great difficulty in her ever returning, since there must be, in some manner, an ascent and a descent. I must say that most men deride this Colon; and I fear he will never reach his island of Cipango, as he doth not seem in the way even to set forth on the journey. I marvel that he should now be here, it having been said he had taken his final departure for Portugal."

"Dost thou say, father, that the man hath long been in Spain?" demanded Don Luis, gravely, with his eye riveted on the dignified form of Columbus, who stood calmly regarding the gorgeous spectacle of the triumph, at no great distance from the rock where the two had taken their seats.

"Seven weary years hath he been soliciting the rich and the great to furnish him with the means of undertaking his favorite voyage."

"Hath he the gold to prefer so long a suit?"

"By his appearance, I should think him poor – nay, I know that he hath toiled for bread, at the occupation of a map-maker. One hour he hath passed in arguing with philosophers and in soliciting princes, while the next hath been occupied in laboring for the food that he hath taken for sustenance."

"Thy description, father, hath whetted curiosity to so keen an edge, that I would fain speak with this Colon. I see he remaineth yonder, in the crowd, and will go and tell him that I, too, am somewhat of a navigator, and will extract from him a few of his peculiar ideas."

"And in what manner wilt thou open the acquaintance, son?"

"By telling him that I am Don Luis de Bobadilla, the nephew of the Doña Beatriz of Moya, and a noble of one of the best houses of Castile."

"And this, thou thinkest, will suffice for thy purpose, Luis!" returned the friar, smiling. "No – no – my son; this may do with most map-sellers, but it will not effect thy wishes with yonder Christoval Colon. That man is so filled with the vastness of his purposes; is so much raised up with the magnitude of the results that his mind intently contemplateth, day and night; seemeth so conscious of his own powers, that even kings and princes can, in no manner, lessen his dignity. That which thou proposest, Don Fernando, our honored master, might scarcely attempt, and hope to escape without some rebuke of manner, if not of tongue."

"By all the blessed saints! Fray Pedro, thou givest an extraordinary account of this man, and only increasest the desire to know him. Wilt thou charge thyself with the introduction?"

"Most willingly, for I wish to inquire what hath brought him back to court, whence, I had understood, he lately went, with the intent to go elsewhere with his projects. Leave the mode in my hands, son Luis, and we will see what can be accomplished."

The friar and his mercurial young companion now arose from their seats on the rock, and threaded the throng, taking the direction necessary to approach the man who had been the subject of their discourse, and still remained that of their thoughts. When near enough to speak, Fray Pedro stopped, and stood patiently waiting for a moment when he might catch the navigator's eye. This did not occur for several minutes, the looks of Colon being riveted on the towers of the Alhambra, where, at each instant, the signal of possession was expected to appear; and Luis de Bobadilla, who, truant, and errant, and volatile, and difficult to curb, as he had proved himself to be, never forgot his illustrious birth and the conventional distinctions attached to personal rank, began to manifest his impatience at being kept so long dancing attendance on a mere map-seller and a pilot. He in vain urged his companion to advance, however; but one of his own hurried movements at length drew aside the look of Columbus, when the eyes of the latter and of the friar met, and being old acquaintances, they saluted in the courteous manner of the age.

"I felicitate you, Señor Colon, on the glorious termination of this siege, and rejoice that you are here to witness it, as I had heard affairs of magnitude had called you to another country."

"The hand of God, father, is to be traced in all things. You perceive in this success the victory of the cross; but to me it conveyeth a lesson of perseverance, and sayeth as plainly as events can speak, that what God hath decreed, must come to pass."

"I like your application, Señor; as, indeed, I do most of your thoughts on our holy religion. Perseverance is truly necessary to salvation; and I doubt not that a fitting symbol to the same may be found in the manner in which our pious sovereigns have conducted this war, as well as in its glorious termination."

"True, father; and also doth it furnish a symbol to the fortunes of all enterprises that have the glory of God and the welfare of the church in view," answered Colon, or Columbus, as the name has been Latinized; his eye kindling with that latent fire which seems so deeply seated in the visionary and the enthusiast. "It may seem out of reason to you, to make such applications of these great events; but the triumph of their Highnesses this day, marvellously encourageth me to persevere, and not to faint, in my own weary pilgrimage, both leading to triumphs of the cross."

"Since you are pleased to speak of your own schemes, Señor Colon," returned the friar, ingenuously, "I am not sorry that the matter hath come up between us; for here is a youthful kinsman of mine, who hath been somewhat of a rover, himself, in the indulgence of a youthful fancy, that neither friends nor yet love could restrain; and having heard of your noble projects, he is burning with a desire to learn more of them from your own mouth, should it suit your condescension so to indulge him."

"I am always happy to yield to the praiseworthy wishes of the young and adventurous, and shall cheerfully communicate to your young friend all he may desire to know," answered Columbus, with a simplicity and dignity that at once put to flight all the notions of superiority and affability with which Don Luis had intended to carry on the conversation, and which had the immediate effect to satisfy the young man that he was to be the obliged and honored party, in the intercourse that was to follow. "But, Señor, you have forgotten to give me the name of the cavalier."

"It is Don Luis de Bobadilla, a youth whose best claims to your notice, perhaps, are, a most adventurous and roving spirit, and the fact that he may call your honored friend, the Marchioness of Moya, his aunt."

"Either would be sufficient, father. I love the spirit of adventure in the youthful; for it is implanted, no doubt, by God, in order that they may serve his all-wise and beneficent designs; and it is of such as these that my own chief worldly stay and support must be found. Then, next to Father Juan Perez de Marchena and Señor Alonzo de Quintanilla, do I esteem Doña Beatriz, among my fastest friends; her kinsman, therefore, will be certain of my esteem and respect."

All this sounded extraordinary to Don Luis; for, though the dress and appearance of this unknown stranger, who even spoke the Castilian with a foreign accent, were respectable, he had been told he was merely a pilot, or navigator, who earned his bread by toil; and it was not usual for the noblest of Castile to be thus regarded, as it might be, with a condescending favor, by any inferior to those who could claim the blood and lineage of princes. At first he was disposed to resent the words of the stranger; then to laugh in his face; but, observing that the friar treated him with great deference, and secretly awed by the air of the reputed projector, he was not only successful in maintaining a suitable deportment, but he made a proper and courteous reply, such as became his name and breeding. The three then retired together, a little aloof from the thickest of the throng, and found seats, also, on one of the rocks, of which so many were scattered about the place.

"Don Luis hath visited foreign lands, you say, father," said Columbus, who did not fail to lead the discourse, like one entitled to it by rank, or personal claims, "and hath a craving for the wonders and dangers of the ocean?"

"Such hath been either his merit or his fault, Señor; had he listened to the wishes of Doña Beatriz, or to my advice, he would not have thrown aside his knightly career for one so little in unison with his training and birth."

"Nay, father, you treat the youth with unmerited severity; he who passeth a life on the ocean, cannot be said to pass it in either an ignoble or a useless manner. God separated different countries by vast bodies of water, not with any intent to render their people strangers to each other, but, doubtless, that they might meet amid the wonders with which he hath adorned the ocean, and glorify his name and power so much the more. We all have our moments of thoughtlessness in youth – a period when we yield to our impulses rather than to our reason; and as I confess to mine, I am little disposed to bear too hard on Señor Don Luis, that he hath had his."

"You have probably battled with the Infidel, by sea, Señor Colon," observed the young man, not a little embarrassed as to the manner in which he should introduce the subject he most desired.

"Ay, and by land, too, son" – the familiarity startled the young noble, though he could not take offence at it – "and by land, too. The time hath been, when I had a pleasure in relating my perils and escapes, which have been numerous, both from war and tempests; but, since the power of God hath awakened my spirit to mightier things, that his will may be done, and his word spread throughout

the whole earth, my memory ceaseth to dwell on them." Fray Pedro crossed himself, and Don Luis smiled and shrugged his shoulders, as one is apt to do when he listens to any thing extravagant; but the navigator proceeded in the earnest, grave manner that appeared to belong to his character. "It is now very many years since I was engaged in that remarkable combat between the forces of my kinsman and namesake, the younger Colombo, as he was called, to distinguish him from his uncle, the ancient admiral of the same name, which took place not far north from Cape St. Vincent. On that bloody day, we contended with the foe – Venetians, richly laden – from morn till even, and yet the Lord carried me through the hot contest unharmed. On another occasion, the galley in which I fought was consumed by fire, and I had to find my way to land – no trifling distance – by the aid of an oar. To me, it seemeth that the hand of God was in this, and that he would not have taken so signal and tender a care of one of his insignificant creatures, unless to use him largely for his own honor and glory."

Although the eye of the navigator grew brighter as he uttered this, and his cheek flushed with a species of holy enthusiasm, it was impossible to confound one so grave, so dignified, so measured even in his exaggerations (if such they were), with the idle and light-minded, who mistake momentary impulses for indelible impressions, and passing vanities for the convictions that temper character. Fray Pedro, instead of smiling, or in any manner betraying that he regarded the other's opinions lightly, devoutly crossed himself again, and showed by the sympathy expressed in his countenance, how much he entered into the profound religious faith of the speaker.

"The ways of God are often mysterious to his creatures," said the friar; "but we are taught that they all lead to the exaltation of his name and to the glory of his attributes."

"It is so that I consider it, father; and with such views have I always regarded my own humble efforts to honor him. We are but instruments, and useless instruments, too, when we look at how little proceedeth from our own spirits and power."

"There cometh the blessed symbol that is our salvation and guide!" exclaimed the friar, holding out both arms eagerly, as if to embrace some distant object in the heavens, immediately falling to his knees, and bowing his shaven and naked head, in deep humility, to the earth.

Columbus turned his eyes in the direction indicated by his companion's gestures, and he beheld the large silver cross that the sovereigns had carried with them throughout the late war, as a pledge of its objects, glittering on the principal tower of the Alhambra. At the next instant, the banners of Castile and of St. James were unfolded from other elevated places. Then came the song of triumph, mingled with the chants of the church. Te Deum was sung, and the choirs of the royal chapel chanted in the open fields the praises of the Lord of Hosts. A scene of magnificent religious pomp, mingled with martial array, followed, that belongs rather to general history than to the particular and private incidents of our tale.

CHAPTER V

"Who hath not proved how feebly words essay
To fix one spark of beauty's heavenly ray?
Who doth not feel, until his failing sight
Faints into dimness with its own delight,
His changing cheek, his sinking heart confess
The might – the majesty of loveliness!"

Byron.

That night the court of Castile and Aragon slept in the palace of the Alhambra. As soon as the religious ceremony alluded to in the last chapter had terminated, the crowd rushed into the place, and the princes followed, with a dignity and state better suited to their high character. The young Christian nobles, accompanied by their wives and sisters – for the presence of Isabella, and the delay that attended the surrender, had drawn together a vast many of the gentler sex, in addition to those whose duty it was to accompany their royal mistress – hurried eagerly through the celebrated courts and fretted apartments of this remarkable residence; nor was curiosity appeased even when night came to place a temporary stay to its indulgence. The Court of the Lions in particular, a place still renowned throughout Christendom for its remains of oriental beauty, had been left by Boabdil in the best condition; and, although it was midwinter, by the aid of human art it was even then gay with flowers; while the adjacent halls, those of the Two Sisters and of Abencerrages, were brilliant with light, and alive with warriors and courtiers, dignified priests and luxuriant beauty.

Although no Spanish eye could be otherwise than familiar with the light peculiar graces of Moorish architecture, these of the Alhambra so much surpassed those of any other palace which had been erected by the Mussulman dynasties of that part of the world, that their glories struck the beholders with the freshness of novelty, as well as with the magnificence of royalty. The rich conceits in stucco, an art of eastern origin then little understood in Christendom; the graceful and fanciful arabesques – which, improved on by the fancies of some of the greatest geniuses the world ever saw, have descended to our own times, and got to be so familiar in Europe, though little known on this side of the Atlantic – decorated the walls, while brilliant fountains cast their waters into the air, and fell in glittering spray, resembling diamonds.

Among the throng that moved through this scene of almost magical beauty, was Beatriz de Bobadilla, who had long been the wife of Don Andres de Cabrera, and was now generally known as the Marchioness of Moya; the constant, near, and confidential friend of the queen, a character she retained until her royal mistress was numbered with the dead. On her arm leaned lightly a youthful female, of an appearance so remarkable, that few strangers would have passed her without turning to take a second look at features and a countenance that were seldom seen and forgotten. This was Doña Mercedes de Valverde, one of the noblest and richest heiresses of Castile; the relative, ward, and adopted daughter of the queen's friend – favorite being hardly the term one would apply to the relation in which Doña Beatriz stood toward Isabella. It was not the particular beauty of Doña Mercedes, however, that rendered her appearance so remarkable and attractive; for, though feminine, graceful, of exquisite form, and even of pleasing features, there were many in that brilliant court who would generally be deemed fairer. But no other maiden of Castile had a countenance so illuminated by the soul within, or no other female face habitually wore so deep an impression of sentiment and sensibility; and the professed physiognomist would have delighted to trace the evidences of a deeply-seated, earnest, but unobtrusive enthusiasm, which even cast a shade of melancholy over a face that fortune and the heart had equally intended should be sunny and serene. Serene it was, notwithstanding;

the shadow that rested on it seeming to soften and render interesting its expression, rather than to disturb its tranquillity or to cloud its loveliness.

On the other side of the noble matron walked Luis de Bobadilla, keeping a little in advance of his aunt, in a way to permit his own dark, flashing looks to meet, whenever feeling and modesty would allow it, the fine, expressive blue eyes of Mercedes. The three conversed freely, for the royal personages had retired to their private apartments, and each group of passengers was so much entranced with the novelty of its situation and its own conversation, as to disregard the remarks of others.

"This is a marvel, Luis," observed Doña Beatriz, in continuation of a subject that evidently much interested them all, "that thou, a truant and a rover thyself, should now have heard for the first time of this Colon! It is many years since he has been soliciting their Highnesses for their royal aid in effecting his purposes. The matter of his schemes was solemnly debated before a council at Salamanca; and he hath not been without believers at the Court itself."

"Among whom is to be classed Doña Beatriz de Cabrera," said Mercedes, with that melancholy smile that had the effect to bring out glimpses of all the deep but latent feeling that lay concealed beneath the surface: "I have often heard Her Highness declare that Colon hath no truer friend in Castile."

"Her Highness is seldom mistaken, child – and never in my heart. I do uphold the man; for to me he seemeth one fitted for some great and honorable undertaking; and surely none greater hath ever been proposed or imagined by human mind, than this he urgeth. Think of our becoming acquainted with the nations of the other side of the earth, and of finding easy and direct means of communicating with them, and of imparting to them the consolations of Holy Church!"

"Ay, Señora my aunt," cried Luis, laughing, "and of walking in their delightful company with all our heels in the air, and our heads downward! I hope this Colon hath not neglected to practice a little in the art, for it will need some time to gain a sure foot, in such circumstances. He might commence on the sides of these mountains, by way of a horn-book, throwing the head boldly off at a right-angle; after which, the walls and towers of this Alhambra would make a very pretty grammar, or stepping-stone to new progress."

Mercedes had unconsciously but fervently pressed the arm of her guardian, as Doña Beatriz admitted her interest in the success of the great project; but at this sally of Don Luis, she looked serious, and threw a glance at him, that he himself felt to be reproachful. To win the love of his aunt's ward was the young man's most ardent wish; and a look of dissatisfaction could at any moment repress that exuberance of spirits which often led him into an appearance of levity that did injustice to the really sterling qualities of both his heart and mind. Under the influence of that look, then, he was not slow to repair the wrong he had done himself, by adding almost as soon as he had ceased to speak —

"The Doña Mercedes is of the discovering party, too, I see; this Colon appeareth to have had more success with the dames of Castile than with her nobles" —

"Is it extraordinary, Don Luis," interrupted the pensive-looking girl, "that women should have more confidence in merit, more generous impulses, more zeal for God, than men?"

"It must be even so, since you and my aunt, Doña Beatriz, side with the navigator. But I am not always to be understood in the light I express myself;" Mercedes now smiled, but this time it was archly — "I have never studied with the minstrels, nor, sooth to say, deeply with the churchmen. To be honest with you, I have been much struck with this noble idea; and if Señor Colon doth, in reality, sail in quest of Cathay and the Indies, I shall pray their Highnesses to let me be one of the party, for, now that the Moor is subdued, there remaineth little for a noble to do in Spain."

"If thou should'st really go on this expedition," said Doña Beatriz, with grave irony, "there will, at least, be one human being topsy-turvy, in the event of thy reaching Cathay. But yonder is an attendant of the court; I doubt if Her Highness doth not desire my presence."

The Lady of Moya was right – the messenger coming to announce to her that the queen required her attendance. The manners of the day and country rendered it unseemly that Doña Mercedes should continue her promenade accompanied only by Don Luis, and the marchioness led the way to her own apartments, where a saloon suitable to her rank and to her favor with the queen, had been selected for her from among the numberless gorgeous rooms of the Moorish kings. Even here, the marchioness paused a moment, in thought, before she would leave her errant nephew alone with her ward.

"Though a rover, he is no troubadour, and cannot charm thy ear with false rhymes. It were better, perhaps, that I sent him beneath thy balcony, with his guitar; but knowing so well his dulness, I will confide in it, and leave him with thee, for the few minutes that I shall be absent. A cavalier who hath so strong a dislike to reversing the order of nature, will not surely condescend to go on his knees, even though it be to win a smile from the sweetest maiden in all Castile."

Don Luis laughed; Doña Beatriz smiled, as she kissed her ward, and left the room; while Doña Mercedes blushed, and riveted her gaze on the floor. Luis de Bobadilla was the declared suitor and sworn knight of Mercedes de Valverde; but, though so much favored by birth, fortune, affinity, and figure, there existed some serious impediments to his success. In all that was connected with the considerations that usually decide such things, the union was desirable; but there existed, nevertheless, a strong influence to overcome, in the scruples of Doña Beatriz, herself. High-principled, accustomed to the just-minded views of her royal mistress, and too proud to do an unworthy act, the very advantages that a marriage with her ward offered to her nephew, had caused the marchioness to hesitate. Don Luis had little of the Castilian gravity of character – and, by many, his animal spirits were mistaken for lightness of disposition and levity of thought. His mother was a woman of a very illustrious French family; and national pride had induced most observers to fancy that the son inherited a constitutional disposition to frivolity, that was to be traced to the besetting weakness of a whole people. A consciousness of his being so viewed at home, had, indeed, driven the youth abroad; and as, like all observant travellers, he was made doubly sensible of the defects of his own state of society on his return, a species of estrangement had grown up between him and his natural associates that had urged the young man, again and again, to wander into foreign lands. Nothing, indeed, but his early and constantly increasing passion for Mercedes had induced him to return; a step that, fortunately for himself, he had last taken in time to assist in the reduction of Granada. Notwithstanding these traits, which, in a country like Castile, might be properly enough termed peculiarities, Don Luis de Bobadilla was a knight worthy of his lineage and name. His prowess in the field and in the tourney, indeed, was so very marked as to give him a high military character, in despite of what were deemed his failings; and he passed rather as an inconsiderate and unsafe young man, than as one who was either debased or wicked. Martial qualities, in that age in particular, redeemed a thousand faults; and Don Luis had even been known to unhorse, in the tourney, Alonzo de Ojeda, then the most expert lance in Spain. Such a man could not be despised, though he might be distrusted. But the feeling which governed his aunt, referred quite as much to her own character as to his. Deeply conscientious, while she understood her nephew's real qualities much better than mere superficial observers, she had her doubts about the propriety of giving the rich heiress who was entrusted to her care, to so near a relative, when all could not applaud the act. She feared, too, that her own partiality might deceive her, and that Luis might in truth be the light and frivolous being he sometimes appeared to be in Castilian eyes, and that the happiness of her ward would prove the sacrifice of the indiscretion. With these doubts, then, while she secretly desired the union, she had in public looked coldly on her nephew's suit; and, though unable, without a harshness that circumstances would not warrant, to prevent all intercourse, she had not only taken frequent occasions to let Mercedes understand her distrust, but she had observed the precaution not to leave so handsome a suitor, notwithstanding he was often domiciliated in her own house, much alone with her ward.

The state of Mercedes' feelings was known only to herself. She was beautiful, of an honorable family, and an heiress; and as human infirmities were as besetting beneath the stately mien of the

fifteenth century as they are to-day, she had often heard the supposed faults of Don Luis' character sneered at, by those who felt distrustful of his good looks and his opportunities. Few young females would have had the courage to betray any marked preference under such circumstances, until prepared to avow their choice, and to take sides with its subject against the world; and the quiet but deep enthusiasm that prevailed in the moral system of the fair young Castilian, was tempered by a prudence that prevented her from running into most of its lighter excesses. The forms and observances that usually surround young women of rank, came in aid of this native prudence; and even Don Luis himself, though he had watched the countenance and emotions of her to whom he had so long urged his suit, with a lover's jealousy and a lover's instincts, was greatly in doubt whether he had succeeded in the least in touching her heart. By one of those unlooked-for concurrences of circumstances that so often decide the fortunes of men, whether as lovers or in more worldly-minded pursuits, these doubts were now about to be unexpectedly and suddenly removed.

The triumph of the Christian arms, the novelty of her situation, and the excitement of the whole scene, had aroused the feelings of Mercedes from that coy concealment in which they usually lay smothered beneath the covering of maiden diffidence; and throughout the evening her smile had been more open, her eye brighter, and her cheeks more deeply flushed, than was usual even with one whose smiles were always sweet, whose eyes were never dull, and whose cheeks answered so sensitively to the varying impulses within.

As his aunt quitted the room, leaving him alone with Mercedes for the first time since his return from his last ramble, Don Luis eagerly threw himself on a stool that stood near the feet of his adored, who placed herself on a sumptuous couch, that, twenty-four hours before, had held the person of a princess of Abdallah's family.

"Much as I honor and reverence Her Highness," the young man hurriedly commenced, "my respect and veneration are now increased ten-fold! Would that she might send for my beloved aunt thrice where she now wants her services only once! and may her presence become so necessary to her sovereign that the affairs of Castile cannot go on without her counsel, if so blessed an opportunity as this, to tell you all I feel, Doña Mercedes, is to follow her obedience!"

"It is not they who are most fluent of speech, or the most vehement, who always feel the deepest, Don Luis de Bobadilla."

"Nor do they feel the least. Mercedes, thou canst not doubt my love! It hath grown with my growth – increased with each increase of my ideas – until it hath got to be so interwoven with my mind itself, that I can scarce use a faculty that thy dear image doth not mingle with it. In all that is beautiful, I behold thee; if I listen to the song of a bird, it is thy carol to the lute; or if I feel the gentle south wind from the fragrant isles fanning my cheek, I would fain think it thy sigh."

"You have dwelt so much among the light conceits of the French court, Don Luis, you appear to have forgotten that the heart of a Castilian girl is too true, and too sincere, to meet such rhapsodies with favor."

Had Don Luis been older, or more experienced in the sex, he would have been flattered by this rebuke – for he would have detected in the speaker's manner, both feeling of a gentler nature than her words expressed, and a tender regret.

"If thou ascribest to me rhapsodies, thou dost me great injustice. I may not do credit to my own thoughts and feelings; but never hath my tongue uttered aught to thee, Mercedes, that the heart hath not honestly urged. Have I not loved thee since thou and I were children? Did I ever fail to show my preference for thee when we were boy and girl, in all the sports and light-hearted enjoyments of that guileless period?"

"Guileless, truly," answered Mercedes, her look brightening as it might be with agreeable fancies and a flood of pleasant recollections – doing more, in a single instant, to break down the barriers of her reserve, than years of schooling had effected toward building them up. "Thou wert then, at least, sincere, Luis, and I placed full faith in thy friendship, and in thy desire to please."

"Bless thee, bless thee, for these precious words, Mercedes! for the first time in two years, hast thou spoken to me as thou wert wont to do, and called me Luis without that courtly, accursed, Don."

"A noble Castilian should never regard his honors lightly, and he oweth it to his rank to see that others respect them, too;" answered our heroine, looking down, as if she already half repented of the familiarity. "You are quick to remind me of my forgetfulness, Don Luis de Bobadilla."

"This unlucky tongue of mine can never follow the path that its owner wisheth! Hast thou not seen in all my looks – all my acts – all my motives – a desire to please thee, and thee alone, lovely Mercedes? When Her Highness gave her royal approbation of my success, in the last tourney, did I not seek thine eye, in order to ask if thou notedst it? Hast thou ever expressed a wish, that I have not proved an eager desire to see it accomplished?"

"Nay, now, Luis, thou emboldenest me to remind thee that I expressed a wish that thou wouldst not go on thy last voyage to the north, and yet thou didst depart! I felt that it would displease Doña Beatriz; thy truant disposition having made her uneasy lest thou shouldst get altogether into the habits of a rover, and into disfavor with the queen."

"It was for this that thou madst the request, and it wounded my pride to think that Mercedes de Valverde should so little understand my character, as to believe it possible a noble of my name and lineage could so far forget his duties as to sink into the mere associate of pilots and adventurers."

"Thou didst not know that I believed this of thee."

"Hadst thou asked of me, Mercedes, to remain for thy sake – nay, hadst thou imposed the heaviest services on me, as thy knight, or as one who enjoyed the smallest degree of thy favor – I would have parted with life sooner than I would have parted from Castile. But not even a look of kindness could I obtain, in reward for all the pain I had felt on thy account" —

"Pain, Luis!"

"Is it not pain to love to the degree that one might kiss the earth that received the foot-print of its object – and yet to meet with no encouragement from fair words, no friendly glance of the eye, nor any sign or symbol to betoken that the being one hath enshrined in his heart's core, ever thinketh of her suitor except as a reckless rover and a hair-brained adventurer?"

"Luis de Bobadilla, no one that really knoweth thy character, can ever truly think thus of thee."

"A million of thanks for these few words, beloved girl, and ten millions for the gentle smile that hath accompanied them! Thou mightst mould me to all thy wishes" —

"My wishes, Don Luis?"

"To all thy severe opinions of sobriety and dignity of conduct, wouldst thou but feel sufficient interest in me to let me know that my acts can give thee either pain or pleasure."

"Can it be otherwise? Could'st thou, Luis, see with indifference the proceedings of one thou hast known from childhood, and esteemed as a friend?"

"Esteem! Blessed Mercedes! dost thou own even that little in my favor?"

"It is not little, Luis, to esteem – but much. They who prize virtue never esteem the unworthy; and it is not possible to know thy excellent heart and manly nature, without esteeming thee. Surely I have never *concealed* my *esteem* from thee or from any one else."

"Hast thou *concealed* aught? Ah! Mercedes, complete this heavenly condescension, and admit that one – as lightly as thou wilt – but that one soft sentiment hath, at times, mingled with this esteem."

Mercedes blushed brightly, but she would not make the often-solicited acknowledgment. It was some little time before she answered at all. When she did speak, it was hesitatingly, and with frequent pauses, as if she distrusted the propriety or the discretion of that which she was about to utter.

"Thou hast travelled much and far, Luis," she said; "and hast lost some favor on account of thy roving propensities; why not regain the confidence of thy aunt by the very means through which it has been lost?"

"I do not comprehend thee. This is singular counsel to come from one like thee, who art prudence itself!"

"The prudent and discreet think well of their acts and words, and are the more to be confided in. Thou seemest to have been struck with these bold opinions of the Señor Colon; and while thou hast derided them, I can see that they have great weight on thy mind."

"I shall, henceforth, regard thee with ten-fold respect, Mercedes; for thou hast penetrated deeper than my foolish affectation of contempt, and all my light language, and discovered the real feeling that lieth underneath. Ever since I have heard of this vast project, it hath, indeed, haunted my imagination; and the image of the Genoese hath constantly stood beside thine, dearest girl, before my eyes, if not in my heart. I doubt if there be not some truth in his opinions; so noble an idea cannot be wholly false!"

The fine, full eye of Mercedes was fastened intently on the countenance of Don Luis; and its brilliancy increased as some of that latent enthusiasm which dwelt within, kindled and began to glow at this outlet of the feelings of the soul.

"There *is*," she answered, solemnly – "there *must* be truth in it! The Genoese hath been inspired of Heaven, with his sublime thoughts, and he will live, sooner or later, to prove their truth. Imagine this earth fairly encircled by a ship; the farthest east, the land of the heathen, brought in close communion with ourselves, and the cross casting its shadows under the burning sun of Cathay! These are glorious, heavenly anticipations, Luis, and would it not be an imperishable renown, to share in the honor of having aided in bringing about so great a discovery?"

"By Heaven! I will see the Genoese as soon as the morrow's sun shall appear, and offer to make one in his enterprise. He shall not need for gold, if that be his only want."

"Thou speakest like a generous, noble-minded, fearless young Castilian, as thou art!" said Mercedes, with an enthusiasm that set at naught the usual guards of her discretion and her habits, "and as becometh Luis de Bobadilla. But gold is not plenty with any of us at this moment, and it will surpass the power of an ordinary subject to furnish that which will be necessary. Nor is it meet than any but sovereigns should send forth such an expedition, as there may be vast territories to govern and dispose of, should Colon succeed. My powerful kinsman – the Duke of Medina Celi – hath had this matter in close deliberation, and he viewed it favorably, as is shown by his letters to Her Highness; but even he conceived it a matter too weighty to be attempted by aught but a crowned head, and he hath used much influence with our mistress, to gain her over to the opinion of the Genoese's sagacity. It is idle to think, therefore, of aiding effectually in this noble enterprise, unless it be through their Highnesses."

"Thou knowest, Mercedes, that I can do naught for Colon, with the court. The king is the enemy of all who are not as wary, cold, and as much given to artifice as himself" —

"Luis! thou art in his palace – beneath his roof, enjoying his hospitality and protection, at this very moment!"

"Not I," answered the young man, with warmth – "this is the abode of my royal mistress, Doña Isabella; Granada being a conquest of Castile, and not of Aragon. Touching the queen, Mercedes, thou shalt never hear disrespectful word from me, for, like thyself, she is all that is virtuous, gentle, and kind in woman; but the king hath many of the faults of us corrupt and mercenary men. Thou canst not tell me of a young, generous, warm-blooded cavalier, even among his own Aragonese, who truly and confidingly loveth Don Fernando; whilst all of Castile adore the Doña Isabella."

"This may be true in part, Luis, but it is altogether imprudent. Don Fernando is a king, and I fear me, from the little I have seen while dwelling in a court, that they who manage the affairs of mortals must make large concessions to their failings, or human depravity will thwart the wisest measures that can be devised. Moreover, can one truly love the wife and not esteem the husband? To me it seemeth that the tie is so near and dear as to leave the virtues and the characters of a common identity."

"Surely, thou dost not mean to compare the modest piety, the holy truth, the sincere virtue, of our royal mistress, with the cautious, wily policy of our scheming master!"

"I desire not to make comparisons between them, Luis. We are bound to honor and obey both; and if Doña Isabella hath more of the confiding truth and pure-heartedness of her sex, than His Highness, is it not ever so as between man and woman?"

"If I could really think that thou likenest me, in any way, with that managing and false-faced King of Aragon, much as I love thee, Mercedes, I would withdraw, forever, in pure shame."

"No one will liken thee, Luis, to the false-tongued or the double-faced; for it is thy failing to speak truth when it might be better to say nothing, as witness the present discourse, and to look at those who displease thee, as if ever ready to point thy lance and spur thy charger in their very teeth."

"My looks have been most unfortunate, fair Mercedes, if they have left such memories in thee!" answered the youth, reproachfully.

"I speak not in any manner touching myself, for to me, Luis, thou hast ever been gentle and kind," interrupted the young Castilian girl, with a haste and earnestness that hurried the blood to her cheeks a moment afterward; "but solely that thou mayst be more guarded in thy remarks on the king."

"Thou beganst by saying that I was a rover" —

"Nay, I have used no such term of reproach, Don Luis; thy aunt may have said this, but it could have been with no intent to wound. I said that thou hadst travelled *far* and *much*."

"Well – well – I merit the title, and shall not complain of my honors. Thou saidst that I had travelled *far* and *much*, and thou spokest approvingly of the project of this Genoese. Am I to understand, Mercedes, it is thy wish that I should make one of the adventurers?"

"Such was my meaning, Luis, for I have thought it an emprise fitting thy daring mind and willing sword; and the glory of success would atone for a thousand trifling errors, committed under the heat and inconsideration of youth."

Don Luis regarded the flushed cheek and brightened eyes of the beautiful enthusiast nearly a minute, in silent but intense observation; for the tooth of doubt and jealousy had fastened on him, and, with the self-distrust of true affection, he questioned how far he was worthy to interest so fair a being, and had misgivings concerning the motive that induced her to wish him to depart.

"I wish I could read thy heart, Doña Mercedes," he at length resumed; "for, while the witching modesty and coy reserve of thy sex, serve but to bind us so much the closer in thy chains, they puzzle the understanding of men more accustomed to rude encounters in the field than to the mazes of their ingenuity. Dost thou desire me to embark in an adventure that most men, the wise and prudent Don Fernando at their head – he whom thou so much esteemest, too – look upon as the project of a visionary, and as leading to certain destruction? Did I think this, I would depart to-morrow, if it were only that my hated presence should never more disturb thy happiness."

"Don Luis, you have no justification for this cruel suspicion," said Mercedes, endeavoring to punish her lover's distrust by an affectation of resentment, though the tears struggled through her pride, and fell from her reproachful eyes. "You know that no one, here or elsewhere, hateth you; you know that you are a general favorite, though Castilian prudence and Castilian reserve may not always view your wandering life with the same applause as they give to the more attentive courtier and rigidly observant knight."

"Pardon me, dearest, most beloved Mercedes; thy coldness and aversion sometime madden me."

"Coldness! aversion! Luis de Bobadilla! When hath Mercedes de Valverde ever shown either, to *thee*?"

"I fear that Doña Mercedes de Valverde is, even now, putting me to some such proof."

"Then thou little knowest her motives, and ill appreciatest her heart. No, Luis, I am not averse, and would not appear cold, to *thee*. If thy wayward feelings get so much the mastery, and pain thee thus, I will strive to be more plain. Yes! rather than thou shouldst carry away with thee the false notion, and perhaps plunge, again, into some unthinking sea-adventure, I will subdue my maiden pride, and forget the reserve and caution that best become my sex and rank, to relieve thy mind. In advising thee

to attach thyself to this Colon, and to enter freely into his noble schemes, I had thine own happiness in view, as thou hast, time and again, sworn to me, thy happiness *could* only be secured" —

"Mercedes! what meanest thou? My happiness can only be secured by a union with thee!"

"And thy union with me can only be secured by thy ennobling that besetting propensity to roving, by some act of worthy renown, that shall justify Doña Beatriz in bestowing her ward on a truant nephew, and gain the favor of Doña Isabella."

"And thou! — would this adventure win thee, too, to view me with kindness?"

"Luis, if thou *wilt* know all, I am won already — nay — restrain this impetuosity, and hear all I have to say. Even while I confess so much more than is seemly in a maiden, thou art not to suppose I can further forget myself. Without the cheerful consent of my guardian, and the gracious approbation of Her Highness, I will wed no man — no, not even *thee*, Luis de Bobadilla, dear as I acknowledge thee to be to my heart" — the ungovernable emotions of female tenderness caused the words to be nearly smothered in tears — "would I wed, without the smiles and congratulations of all who have a right to smile, or weep, for any of the house of Valverde. Thou and I cannot marry like a village hind and village girl; it is suitable that we stand before a prelate, with a large circle of approving friends to grace our union. Ah! Luis, thou hast reproached me with coldness and indifference to thee" — sobs nearly stifled the generous girl — "but others have not been so blind — nay, speak not, but suffer me, now that my heart is overflowing, to unburden myself to thee, entirely, for I fear that shame and regret will come soon enough to cause repentance for what I now confess — but all have not been blind as thou. Our gracious queen well understandeth the female heart, and that thou hast been so slow to discover, she hath long seen; and her quickness of eye and thought hath alone prevented me from saying to thee, earlier, a part at least of that which I now reluctantly confess" —

"How! Is Doña Isabella, too, my enemy? Have I Her Highness' scruples to overcome, as well as those of my cold-hearted and prudish aunt?"

"Luis, thy intemperance causeth thee to be unjust. Doña Beatriz of Moya is neither cold-hearted nor prudish, but all that is the reverse. A more generous or truer spirit never sacrificed self to friendship, and her very nature is frankness and simplicity. Much of that I so love in thee, cometh of her family, and *thou* shouldst not reproach her for it. As for Her Highness, certes, it is not needed that I should proclaim her qualities. Thou knowest that she is deemed the mother of her people; that she regardeth the interests of all equally, or so far as her knowledge will allow; and that what she doth for any, is ever done with true affection, and a prudence that I have heard the cardinal say, seemeth to be inspired by infinite wisdom."

"Ay, it is not difficult, Mercedes, to seem prudent, and benevolent, and inspired, with Castile for a throne, and Leon, with other rich provinces, for a footstool!"

"Don Luis, if you would retain my esteem," answered the single-minded girl, with a gravity that had none of her sex's weakness in it, though much of her sex's truth — "speak not lightly of my royal mistress. Whatever she may have done in this matter, hath been done with a mother's feelings and a mother's kindness — thy injustice maketh me almost to apprehend, with a mother's wisdom."

"Forgive me, adored, beloved Mercedes! a thousand times more adored and loved than ever, now that thou hast been so generous and confiding. But I cannot rest in peace until I know what the queen hath said and done, in any thing that toucheth thee and me."

"Thou knowest how kind and gracious the queen hath ever been to me, Luis, and how much I have reason to be grateful for her many condescensions and favors. I know not how it is, but, while thy aunt hath never seemed to detect my feelings, and all those related to me by blood have appeared to be in the same darkness, the royal eye hath penetrated a mystery that, at the moment, I do think, was even concealed from myself. Thou rememberest the tourney that took place just before thou left us on thy last mad expedition?"

"Do I not? Was it not thy coldness after my success in that tourney, and when I even wore thy favors, that not only drove me out of Spain, but almost drove me out of the world?"

"If the world could impute thy acts to such a cause, all obstacles would at once be removed, and we might be happy without further efforts. But," and Mercedes smiled, archly, though with great tenderness in her voice and looks, as she added, "I fear thou art much addicted to these fits of madness, and that thou wilt never cease to wish to be driven to the uttermost limits of the world, if not fairly out of it."

"It is in thy power to make me as stationary as the towers of this Alhambra. One such smile, daily, would chain me like a captive Moor at thy feet, and take away all desire to look at other objects than thy beauty. But Her Highness – thou hast forgotten to add what Her Highness hath said and done."

"In that tourney thou wert conqueror, Luis! The whole chivalry of Castile was in the saddle, that glorious day, and yet none could cope with thee! Even Alonzo de Ojeda was unhorsed by thy lance, and all mouths were filled with thy praises; all memories – perhaps, it would be better to say that all memories but one – forgot thy failings."

"And that one was thine, cruel Mercedes."

"Thou knowest better, unkind Luis! That day I remembered nothing but thy noble, generous heart, manly bearing in the tilt-yard, and excellent qualities. The more mindful memory was the queen's, who sent for me, to her closet, when the festivities were over, and caused me to pass an hour with her, in gentle, affectionate discourse, before she touched at all on the real object of her command. She spoke to me, Luis, of our duties as Christians, of our duties as females, and, most of all, of the solemn obligations that we contract in wedlock, and of the many pains that, at best, attend that honored condition. When she had melted me to tears, by an affection that equalled a mother's love, she made me promise – and I confirmed it with a respectful vow – that I would never appear at the altar, while she lived, without her being present to approve of my nuptials; or, if prevented by disease or duty, at least not without a consent given under her royal signature."

"By St. Denis of Paris! Her Highness endeavored to influence thy generous and pure mind against me!"

"Thy name was not even mentioned, Luis, nor would it have been in any way concerned in the discourse, had not my unbidden thoughts turned anxiously toward thee. What Her Highness meditated, I do not even now know, but it was the manner in which my own sensitive feelings brought up thy image, that hath made me, perhaps idly, fancy the effect might be to prevent me from wedding thee, without Doña Isabella's consent. But, knowing, as I well do, her maternal heart and gentle affections, how can I doubt that she will yield to my wishes, when she knoweth that my choice is not really unworthy, though it may seem to the severely prudent in some measure indiscreet."

"But thou thinkest – thou feelest, Mercedes, that it was in fear of me that Her Highness extorted the vow?"

"I apprehended it, as I have confessed, with more readiness than became a maiden's pride, because thou wert uppermost in my mind. Then thy triumphs throughout the day, and the manner in which thy name was in all men's mouths, might well tempt the thoughts to dwell on thy person."

"Mercedes, thou canst not deny that thou believest Her Highness extorted that vow in dread of me?"

"I wish to deny nothing that is true, Don Luis; and you are early teaching me to repent of the indiscreet avowal I have made. That it was in *dread* of you that Her Highness spoke, I do deny; for I cannot think she has any such feelings toward *you*. She was full of maternal affection for *me*, and I think, for I will conceal naught that I truly believe, that apprehension of thy powers to please, Luis, may have induced her to apprehend that an orphan girl, like myself, might possibly consult her fancy more than her prudence, and wed one who seemed to love the uttermost limits of the earth so much better than his own noble castles and his proper home."

"And thou meanest to respect this vow!"

"Luis! thou scarce reflectest on thy words, or a question so sinful would not be put to me! What Christian maiden ever forgets her vows, whether of pilgrimage, penitence, or performance – and why should I be the first to incur this disgraceful guilt? Besides, had I not vowed, the simple wish of the queen, expressed in her own royal person, would have been enough to deter me from wedding any. She is my sovereign, mistress, and, I might almost say, mother; Doña Beatriz herself scarce manifesting greater interest in my welfare. Now, Luis, thou must listen to my suit, although I see thou art ready to exclaim, and protest, and invoke; but I have heard thee patiently some years, and it is now my turn to speak and thine to listen. I do not think the queen had thee in her mind on the occasion of that vow, which was *offered* freely by me, rather than *extorted*, as thou seemest to think, by Her Highness. I *do*, then, believe that Doña Isabella supposed there might be a danger of my yielding to thy suit, and that she had apprehensions that one so much given to roving, might not bring, or keep, happiness in the bosom of a family. But, Luis, if Her Highness hath not done thy noble, generous heart, justice; if she hath been deceived by appearances, like most of those around her; if she hath not known thee, in short, is it not thine own fault? Hast thou not been a frequent truant from Castile; and, even when present, hast thou been as attentive and assiduous in thy duties at court, as becometh thy high birth and admitted claims? It is true, Her Highness, and all others who were present, witnessed thy skill in the tourney, and in these wars thy name hath had frequent and honorable mention for prowess against the Moor; but while the female imagination yields ready homage to this manliness, the female heart yearneth for other, and gentler, and steadier virtues, at the fireside and in the circle within. This, Doña Isabella hath seen, and felt, and knoweth, happy as hath been her own marriage with the King of Aragon; and is it surprising that she hath felt this concern for me? No, Luis; feeling hath made thee unjust to our royal mistress, whom it is now manifestly thy interest to propitiate, if thou art sincere in thy avowed desire to obtain my hand."

"And how is this to be done, Mercedes? The Moor is conquered, and I know not that any knight would meet me to do battle for thy favor."

"The queen wisheth nothing of this sort – neither do I. We both know thee as an accomplished Christian knight already, and, as thou hast just said, there is no one to meet thy lance, for no one hath met with the encouragement to justify the folly. It is through this Colon that thou art to win the royal consent."

"I believe I have, in part, conceived thy meaning; but would fain hear thee speak more plainly."

"Then I will tell thee in words as distinct as my tongue can utter them," rejoined the ardent girl, the tint of tenderness gradually deepening on her cheek to the flush of a holy enthusiasm, as she proceeded: "Thou knowest already the general opinions of the Señor Colon, and the mode in which he proposeth to effect his ends. I was still a child when he first appeared in Castile, to urge the court to embark in this great enterprise, and I can see that Her Highness hath often been disposed to yield her aid, when the coldness of Don Fernando, or the narrowness of her ministers, hath diverted her mind from the object. I think she yet regardeth the scheme with favor; for it is quite lately that Colon, who had taken leave of us all, with the intent to quit Spain and seek elsewhere for means, was summoned to return, through the influence of Fray Juan Perez, the ancient confessor of Her Highness. He is now here, as thou hast seen, waiting impatiently for an audience, and it needeth only to quicken the queen's memory, to obtain for him that favor. Should he get the caravels he asketh, no doubt many of the nobles will feel a desire to share in an enterprise that will confer lasting honor on all concerned, if successful; and thou mightst make one."

"I know not how to regard this solicitude, Mercedes, for it seemeth strange to wish to urge those we affect to value, to enter on an expedition whence they may never return."

"God will protect thee!" answered the girl, her face glowing with pious ardour: "the enterprise will be undertaken for his glory, and his powerful hand will guide and shield the caravels."

Don Luis de Bobadilla smiled, having far less religious faith and more knowledge of physical obstacles than his mistress. He did full justice to her motives, notwithstanding his hastily expressed

doubts; and the adventure was of a nature to arouse his constitutional love of roving, and his desire for encountering dangers. Both he and Mercedes well knew that he had fairly earned no small part of that distrust of his character, which alone thwarted their wishes; and, quick of intellect, he well understood the means and manner by which he was to gain Doña Isabella's consent. The few doubts that he really entertained were revealed by the question that succeeded.

"If Her Highness is disposed to favor this Colon," he asked, "why hath the measure been so long delayed?"

"This Moorish war, an empty treasury, and the wary coldness of the king, have prevented it."

"Might not Her Highness look upon all the followers of the man, as so many vain schemers, should we return without success, as will most likely be the case – if, indeed, we ever return?"

"Such is not Doña Isabella's character. She will enter into this project, in honor of God, if she entereth into it at all; and she will regard all who accompany Colon voluntarily, as so many crusaders, well entitled to her esteem. Thou wilt not return unsuccessful, Luis; but with such credit as will cause thy wife to glory in her choice, and to be proud of thy name."

"Thou art a most dear enthusiast, beloved girl! If I could take thee with me, I would embark in the adventure, with no other companion."

A fitting reply was made to this gallant, and, at the moment, certainly sincere speech, after which the matter was discussed between the two, with greater calmness and far more intelligibly. Don Luis succeeded in restraining his impatience; and the generous confidence with which Mercedes gradually got to betray her interest in him, and the sweet, holy earnestness with which she urged the probability of success, brought him at length to view the enterprise as one of lofty objects, rather than as a scheme which flattered his love of adventure.

Doña Beatriz left the lovers alone for quite two hours, the queen requiring her presence all that time; and soon after she returned, her reckless, roving, indiscreet, but noble-hearted and manly nephew, took his leave. Mercedes and her guardian, however, did not retire until midnight; the former laying open her whole heart to the marchioness, and explaining all her hopes as they were connected with the enterprise of Colon. Doña Beatriz was both gratified and pained by this confession, while she smiled at the ingenuity of love, in coupling the great designs of the Genoese with the gratification of its own wishes. Still she was not displeased. Luis de Bobadilla was the son of an only and much-beloved brother, and she had transferred to her nephew most of the affection she had felt for the father. All who knew him, indeed, were fond of the handsome and gallant young cavalier, though the prudent felt compelled to frown on his indiscretions; and he might have chosen a wife, at will, from among the fair and high-born of Castile, with the few occasional exceptions that denote the circumspection and reserve of higher principles than common, and a forethought that extends beyond the usual considerations of marriage. The marchioness, therefore, was not an unwilling listener to her ward; and ere they separated for the night, the ingenuous but modest confessions, the earnest eloquence, and the tender ingenuity, of Mercedes, had almost made a convert of Doña Beatriz.

CHAPTER VI

"Looke back, who list, unto the former ages,
And call to count, what is of them become,
Where be those learned wits and antique sages,
Which of all wisdom knew the perfect somme?
Where those great warriors which did overcome
The world with conquest of their might and maine,
And made one meare of th'earth and of their raigne."

Ruins of Time.

Two or three days had passed before the Christians began to feel at home in the ancient seat of Mahommedan power. By that time, however, the Alhambra and the town got to be more regulated than they were during the hurry, delight, and grief, of taking possession and departing; and as the politic and far from ill-disposed Ferdinand had issued strict orders that the Moors should not only be treated with kindness, but with delicacy, the place gradually settled down into tranquillity, and men began to fall into their ancient habits and to interest themselves in their customary pursuits.

Don Fernando was much occupied with new cares, as a matter of course; but his illustrious consort, who reserved herself for great occasions, exercising her ordinary powers in the quiet, gentle manner that became her sex and native disposition, her truth and piety, had already withdrawn, as far as her high rank and substantial authority would allow, from the pageantry and martial scenes of a warlike court, and was seeking, with her wonted readiness, the haunts of private affection, and that intercourse which is most congenial to the softer affections of a woman. Her surviving children were with her, and they occupied much of her maternal care; but she had also many hours for friendship, and for the indulgence of an affection that appeared to include all her subjects within the ties of family.

On the morning of the third day that succeeded the evening of the interview related in the preceding chapter, Doña Isabella had collected about her person a few of those privileged individuals who might be said to have the entrée to her more private hours; for while that of Castile was renowned among Christian courts for etiquette, habits that it had probably derived from the stately oriental usages of its Mahommedan neighbors, the affectionate nature of the queen had cast a halo around her own private circle, that at once rendered it graceful as well as delightful to all who enjoyed the high honor of entering it. At that day, churchmen enjoyed a species of exclusive favor, mingling with all the concerns of life, and not unfrequently controlling them. While we are quick to detect blemishes of this sort among foreign nations, and are particularly prone to point out the evils that have flowed from the meddling of the Romish divines, we verify the truth of the venerable axiom that teaches us how much easier it is to see the faults of others than to discover our own; for no people afford stronger evidences of the existence of this control, than the people of the United States, more especially that portion of them who dwell in places that were originally settled by religionists, and which still continue under the influence of the particular sects that first prevailed; and perhaps the strongest national trait that exists among us at this moment – that of a disposition to extend the control of society beyond the limits set by the institutions and the laws, under the taking and plausible appellation of Public Opinion – has its origin in the polity of churches of a democratic character, that have aspired to be an *imperium in imperio*, confirmed and strengthened by their modes of government and by provincial habits. Be the fact as it may among ourselves, there is no question of the ascendancy of the Catholic priesthood throughout Christendom, previously to the reformation; and Isabella was too sincerely devout, too unostentatiously pious, not to allow them every indulgence that comported with her own sense of right, and among others, that of a free access to her presence, and an influence on all her measures.

On the occasion just named, among others who were present was Fernando de Talavera, a prelate of high station, who had just been named to the new dignity of Archbishop of Granada, and the Fray Pedro de Carrascal, the former teacher of Luis de Bobadilla, an unbeneficed divine, who owed his favor to great simplicity of character, aided by his high birth. Isabella, herself, was seated at a little table, where she was employed with her needle, the subject of her toil being a task as homely as a shirt for the king, it being a part of her womanly propensities to acquit herself of this humble duty, as scrupulously as if she had been the wife of a common tradesman of her own capital. This was one of the habits of the age, however, if not a part of the policy of princes; for most travellers have seen the celebrated saddle of the Queen of Burgundy, with a place arranged for the distaff, that, when its owner rode forth, she might set an example of thrift to her admiring subjects; and with our own eyes, in these luxurious times, when few private ladies even condescend to touch any thing as useful as the garment that occupied the needle of Isabella of Castile, we have seen a queen, seated amid her royal daughters, as diligently employed with the needle as if her livelihood depended on her industry. But Doña Isabella had no affectations. In feelings, speech, nature, and acts, she was truth itself; and matrimonial tenderness gave her a deeply felt pleasure in thus being occupied for a husband whom she tenderly loved as a man, while it was impossible she could entirely conceal from herself all his faults as a monarch. Near her sat the companion of her girlish days, the long-trying and devoted Beatriz de Cabrera. Mercedes occupied a stool, at the feet of the Infanta Isabella, while one or two other ladies of the household were placed at hand, with such slight distinctions of rank as denoted the presence of royalty, but with a domestic freedom that made these observances graceful without rendering them fatiguing. The king himself was writing at a table, in a distant corner of the vast apartment; and no one, the newly-created archbishop not excepted, presumed to approach that side of the room. The discourse was conducted in a tone a little lower than common; even the queen, whose voice was always melody, modulating its tones in a way not to interfere with the train of thought into which her illustrious consort appeared to be profoundly plunged. But, at the precise moment that we now desire to present to the reader, Isabella had been deeply lost in reflection for some time, and a general silence prevailed in the female circle around the little work-tables.

"Daughter-Marchioness" – for so the queen usually addressed her friend – "Daughter-Marchioness," said Isabella, arousing herself from the long silence, "hath aught been seen or heard of late of the Señor Colon, the pilot who hath so long urged us on the subject of this western voyage?"

The quick, hurried glance of intelligence and gratification, that passed between Mercedes and her guardian, betrayed the interest they felt in this question, while the latter answered, as became her duty and her respect for her mistress —

"You remember, Señora, that he was written for, by Fray Juan Perez, Your Highness' ancient confessor, who journeyed all the way from his convent of Santa Maria de Rabida, in Andalusia, to intercede in his behalf, that his great designs might not be lost to Castile."

"Thou thinkest his designs, then, great, Daughter-Marchioness?"

"Can any think them otherwise, Señora? They seem reasonable and natural, and if just, is it not a great and laudable undertaking to extend the bounds of the church, and to confer honor and wealth on one's own country? My enthusiastic ward, Mercedes de Valverde, is so zealous in behalf of this navigator's great project, that, next to her duty to her God, and her duty to her sovereigns, it seemeth to make the great concern of her life."

The queen turned a smiling face toward the blushing girl who was the subject of this remark, and she gazed at her, for an instant, with the expression of affection that was so wont to illuminate her lovely countenance when dwelling on the features of her own daughters.

"Dost thou acknowledge this, Doña Mercedes?" she said; "hath Colon so convinced thee, that thou art thus zealous in his behalf?"

Mercedes arose, respectfully, when addressed by the queen, and she advanced a step or two nearer to the royal person before she made any reply.

"It becometh me to speak modestly, in this presence," said the beautiful girl; "but I shall not deny that I feel deep concern for the success of the Señor Colon. The thought is so noble, Señora, that it were a pity it should not be just."

"This is the reasoning of the young and generous-minded; and I confess myself, Beatrice, almost as childish as any, on this matter, at times – Colon, out of question, is still here?"

"Indeed he is, Señora," answered Mercedes, eagerly, and with a haste she immediately repented, for the inquiry was not made directly to herself; "I know of one who hath seen him as lately as the day the troops took possession of the town."

"Who is that person?" asked the queen, steadily, but not severely, her eye having turned again to the face of the girl, with an interest that continued to increase as she gazed.

Mercedes now bitterly regretted her indiscretion, and, in spite of a mighty effort to repress her feelings, the tell-tale blood mounted to her temples, ere she could find resolution to reply.

"Don Luis de Bobadilla, Señora, the nephew of my guardian, Doña Beatriz," she at length answered; for the love of truth was stronger in this pure-hearted young creature, even, than the dread of shame.

"Thou art particular, Señorita," Isabella observed calmly, severity seldom entering into her communication with the just-minded and good; "Don Luis cometh of too illustrious a house to need a herald to proclaim his alliances. It is only the obscure that the world doth not trouble itself about. Daughter-Marchioness," relieving Mercedes from a state scarcely less painful than the rack, by turning her eyes toward her friend, "this nephew of thine is a confirmed rover – but I doubt if he could be prevailed on to undertake an expedition like this of Colon's, that hath in view the glory of God and the benefit of the realm."

"Indeed, Señora" – Mercedes repressed her zeal by a sudden and triumphant effort.

"Thou wert about to speak, Doña Mercedes," gravely observed the queen.

"I crave Your Highness' forgiveness. It was improperly, as your own words were not addressed to me."

"This is not the court of the Queen of Castile, daughter, but the private room of Isabella de Trastamara," said the queen, willing to lessen the effect of what had already passed. "Thou hast the blood of the Admiral of Castile in thy veins, and art even akin to our Lord the King. Speak freely, then."

"I know your gracious goodness to me, Señora, and had nearly forgotten myself, under its influence. All I had to say was, that Don Luis de Bobadilla desireth exceedingly that the Señor Colon might get the caravels he seeketh, and that he himself might obtain the royal permission to make one among the adventurers."

"Can this be so, Beatriz?"

"Luis is a truant, Señora, beyond a question, but it is not with ignoble motives. I have heard him ardently express his desire to be one of Colon's followers, should that person be sent by Your Highness in search of the land of Cathay."

Isabella made no reply, but she laid her homely work in her lap, and sat musing, in pensive silence, for several minutes. During this interval, none near her presumed to speak, and Mercedes retired, stealthily, to her stool, at the feet of the Infanta. At length the queen arose, and, crossing the room, she approached the table where Don Fernando was still busily engaged with the pen. Here she paused a moment, as if unwilling to disturb him; but soon, laying a hand kindly on his shoulder, she drew his attention to herself. The king, as if conscious whence such familiarity could alone proceed, looked around immediately, and, rising from his chair, he was the first to speak.

"These Moriscoes need looking to," he said, betraying the direction that his thoughts had so early taken toward the increase of his power – "I find we have left Abdallah many strongholds in the Apulxarras, that may make him a troublesome neighbor, unless we can push him across the Mediterranean" —

"Of this, Fernando, we will converse on some other opportunity," interrupted the queen, whose pure mind disliked every thing that even had an approach to a breach of faith. "It is hard enough for those who control the affairs of men, always to obey God and their own consciences, without seeking occasions to violate their faith. I have come to thee, on another matter. The hurry of the times, and the magnitude of our affairs, have caused us to overlook the promise given to Colon, the navigator" —

"Still busied with thy needle, Isabella, and for my comfort," observed the king, playing with the shirt that his royal consort had unconsciously brought in her hand; "few subjects have wives as considerate and kind as thou!"

"Thy comfort and happiness stand next to my duty to God and the care of my people," returned Isabella, gratified at the notice the King of Aragon had taken of this little homage of her sex, even while she suspected that it came from a wish to parry the subject that was then uppermost in her thoughts. "I would do naught in this important concern, without thy fullest approbation, if that may be had; and I think it toucheth our royal words to delay no longer. Seven years are a most cruel probation, and, unless we are active, we shall have some of the hot-blooded young nobles of the kingdom undertaking the matter, as their holiday sports."

"Thou say'st true, Señora, and we will refer the subject, at once, to Fernando de Talavera, yonder, who is of approved discretion, and one to be relied on." As the king spoke, he beckoned to the individual named, who immediately approached the royal pair. "Archbishop of Granada," continued the wily king, who had as many politic arts as a modern patriot intently bent on his own advancement — "Archbishop of Granada, our royal consort hath a desire that this affair of Colon should be immediately inquired into, and reported on to ourselves. It is our joint command that you, and others, take the matter, before the next twenty-four hours shall pass, into mature consideration and inquiry, and that you lay the result before ourselves. The names of your associates shall be given to you in the course of the day."

While the tongue of Ferdinand was thus instructing the prelate, the latter read in the expression of the monarch's eye, and in the coldness of his countenance, a meaning that his quick and practiced wits were not slow in interpreting. He signified his dutiful assent, however; received the names of his associates in the commission, of whom Isabella pointed out one or two, and then waited to join in the discourse.

"This project of Colon's is worthy of being more seriously inquired into," resumed the king, when these preliminaries were settled, "and it shall be our care to see that he hath all consideration. They tell me the honest navigator is a good Christian."

"I think him devotedly so, Don Fernando. He hath a purpose, should God prosper his present undertaking, to join in a new effort to regain the holy sepulchre."

"Umph! Such designs may be meritorious, but ours is the true way to advance the faith — this conquest of our own. We have raised the cross, my wife, where the ensigns of infidelity were lately seen, and Granada is so near Castile that it will not be difficult to maintain our altars. Such, at least, are the opinions of a layman — holy prelate — on these matters."

"And most just and wise opinions are they, Señor," returned the archbishop. "That which can be retained, it is wisest to seek, for we lose our labors in gaining things that Providence hath placed so far beyond our control, that they do not seem designed for our purposes."

"There are those, my Lord Archbishop," observed the queen, "who might argue against all attempts to recover the holy sepulchre, hearing opinions like these, from so high authority!"

"Then, Señora, they would misconceive that authority," the politic prelate hurriedly replied. "It is well for all Christendom, to drive the Infidels from the Holy Land; but for Castile it is better to dispossess them of Granada. The distinction is a very plain one, as every sound casuist must admit."

"This truth is as evident to our reason," added Ferdinand, casting a look of calm exultation out at a window, "as that yonder towers were once Abdallah's, and that they are now our own!"

"Better for Castile!" repeated Isabella, in the tones of one who mused. "For her worldly power better, perhaps, but not better for the souls of those who achieve the deed – surely, not better for the glory of God!"

"My much-honored wife, and beloved consort" – said the king.

"Señora" – added the prelate.

But Isabella walked slowly away, pondering on principles, while the eyes of the two worldings she left behind her, met, with the sort of free-masonry that is in much request among those who are too apt to substitute the expedient for the right. The queen did not return to her seat, but she walked up and down that part of the room which the archbishop had left vacant when he approached herself and her husband. Here she remained alone for several minutes, even Ferdinand holding her in too much reverence to presume to disturb her meditations, uninvited. The queen several times cast glances at Mercedes, and, at length, she commanded her to draw near.

"Daughter," said Isabella, who frequently addressed those she loved by this endearing term, "thou hast not forgotten thy freely-offered vow?"

"Next to my duty to God, Señora, I most consider my duty to my sovereign."

Mercedes spoke firmly, and in those tones that seldom deceive. Isabella riveted her eyes on the pale features of the beautiful girl, and when the words just quoted were uttered, a tender mother could not have regarded a beloved child with stronger proofs of affection.

"Thy duty to God overshadoweth all other feelings, daughter, as is just," answered the queen; "thy duty to me is secondary and inferior. Still, thou and all others, owe a solemn duty to your sovereign, and I should be unfit for the high trust that I have received from Providence, did I permit any of these obligations to lessen. It is not I that reign in Castile, but Providence, through its humble and unworthy instrument. My people are my children, and I often pray that I may have heart enough to hold them all. If princes are sometimes obliged to frown on the unworthy, it is but in humble and distant imitation of that Power which cannot smile on evil."

"I hope, Señora," said the girl, timidly, observing that the queen paused, "I have not been so unfortunate as to displease you; a frown from Your Highness would indeed be a calamity!"

"Thou? No, daughter; I would that all the maidens of Castile, noble and simple, were of thy truth, and modesty, and obedience. But we cannot permit thee to become the victim of the senses. Thou art too well taught, Doña Mercedes, not to distinguish between that which is brilliant and that which is truly virtuous" —

"Señora!" cried Mercedes, eagerly – then checking herself, immediately, for she felt it was a disrespect to interrupt her sovereign.

"I listen to what thou wouldst say, daughter," Isabella answered, after pausing for the frightened girl to continue. "Speak freely; thou addressest a parent."

"I was about to say, Señora, that if all that is brilliant is not virtuous, neither is all that is unpleasant to the sight, or what prudence might condemn, actually vicious."

"I understand thee, Señorita, and the remark hath truth in it. Now, let us speak of other things. Thou appearest to be friendly to the designs of this navigator, Colon?"

"The opinion of one untaught and youthful as I, can have little weight with the Queen of Castile, who can ask counsel of prelates and learned churchmen, besides consulting her own wisdom;" Mercedes modestly answered.

"But thou thinkest well of his project; or have I mistaken thy meaning?"

"No, Señora, I *do* think well of Colon's scheme; for to me it seemeth of that nobleness and grandeur that Providence would favor, for the good of man and the advancement of the church."

"And thou believest that nobles and cavaliers can be found willing to embark with this obscure Genoese, in his bold undertaking?"

The queen felt the hand that she affectionately held in both her own, tremble, and when she looked at her companion she perceived that her face was crimsoned and her eyes lowered. But the

generous girl thought the moment critical for the fortunes of her lover, and she rallied all her energies in order to serve his interests.

"Señora, I do," she answered, with a steadiness that both surprised and pleased the queen, who entered into and appreciated all her feelings; "I think Don Luis de Bobadilla will embark with him; since his aunt hath conversed freely with him on the nature and magnitude of the enterprise, his mind dwelleth on little else. He would be willing to furnish gold for the occasion, could his guardians be made to consent."

"Which any guardian would be very wrong to do. We may deal freely with our own, but it is forbidden to jeopard the goods of another. If Don Luis de Bobadilla persevere in this intention, and act up to his professions, I shall think more favorably of his character than circumstances have hitherto led me to do."

"Señora!"

"Hear me, daughter; we cannot now converse longer on this point, the council waiting my presence, and the king having already left us. Thy guardian and I will confer together, and thou shalt not be kept in undue suspense; but Mercedes de Valverde" —

"My Lady the Queen" —

"Remember thy vow, daughter. It was freely given, and must not be hastily forgotten."

Isabella now kissed the pale cheek of the girl and withdrew, followed by all the ladies; leaving the half-pleased and yet half-terrified Mercedes standing in the centre of the vast apartment, resembling a beautiful statue of Doubt.

CHAPTER VII

"He that of such a height hath built his mind,
And reared the dwelling of his thoughts so strong
As neither fear nor hope can shake the frame
Of his resolved powers."

Daniel.

The following day the Alhambra was crowded with courtiers as usual; applicants for favors, those who sought their own, and those who solicited the redress of imaginary wrongs. The ante-chambers were thronged, and the different individuals in waiting jealously eyed each other, as if to inquire how far their neighbors would be likely to thwart their several views or to advance their wishes. Men bowed, in general, coldly and with distrust; and the few that did directly pass their greetings, met with the elaborated civility that commonly characterizes the intercourse of palaces.

While curiosity was active in guessing at the business of the different individuals present, and whispers, nods, shrugs of the shoulders, and meaning glances, passed among the old stagers, as they communicated to each other the little they knew, or thought they knew, on different subjects, there stood in the corner of the principal apartment, one in particular, who might be distinguished from all around him, by his stature, the gravity and dignity of his air, and the peculiar sort of notice that he attracted. Few approached him, and they that did, as they turned their backs, cast those glances of self-sufficiency and ridicule about them, that characterize the vulgar-minded when they fancy that they are deriding or sneering in consonance with popular opinion. This was Columbus, who was very generally regarded by the multitude as a visionary schemer, and who necessarily shared in that sort of contemptuous obloquy that attaches itself to the character. But even the wit and jokes of the crowd had been expended upon this subject, and the patience of those who danced attendance was getting to be exhausted, when a little stir at the door announced the approach of some new courtier. The manner in which the throng quickly gave way, denoted the presence of some one of high rank, and presently Don Luis de Bobadilla stood in the centre of the room.

"It is the nephew of Her Highness' favorite," whispered one.

"A noble of one of the most illustrious families of Castile," said another; "but a fitting associate of this Colon, as neither the authority of his guardians, the wishes of the queen, nor his high station, can keep him from the life of a vagabond."

"One of the best lances in Spain, if he had the prudence and wisdom to turn his skill to profit," observed a third.

"That is the youthful knight who hath so well deported himself in this last campaign," growled an inferior officer of the infantry, "and who unhorsed Don Alonso de Ojeda in the tourney; but his lance is as unsteady in its aim, as it is good in the rest. They tell me he is a rover."

As if purposely to justify this character, Luis looked about him anxiously a moment, and then made his way directly to the side of Colon. The smiles, nods, shrugs, and half-suppressed whispers that followed, betrayed the common feeling; but a door on the side of the closet opening, all eyes were immediately bent in that direction, and the little interruption just mentioned was as soon forgotten.

"I greet you, Señor," said Luis, bowing respectfully to Columbus. "Since our discourse of last evening I have thought of little besides its subject, and have come hither to renew it."

That Columbus was pleased by this homage, appeared in his eye, his smile, and the manner in which he raised his body, as if full of the grandeur of his own designs; but he was compelled to defer the pleasure that it always gave him to dilate on his enterprise.

"I am commanded hither, noble Señor," he answered, cordially, "by the holy Archbishop of Granada, who, it seemeth, hath it in charge from their Highnesses, to bring my affair to a speedy issue, and who hath named this very morning for that purpose. We touch upon the verge of great events: the day is not distant, when this conquest of Granada will be forgotten, in the greater importance of the mighty things that God hath held in reserve!"

"By San Pedro, my new patron! I do believe you, Señor. Cathay must lie at or near the spot you have named, and your own eyes shall not see it, and its gorgeous stories of wealth, sooner than mine. Remember Pedro de Muños, I pray you, Señor Colon."

"He shall not be forgotten, I promise you, young lord; and all the great deeds of your ancestors will be eclipsed by the glory achieved by their son. But I hear my name called; we will talk of this anon."

"El Señor Christoval Colon!" was called by one of the pages, in a loud authoritative voice, and the navigator hurried forward, buoyed up with hope and joy.

The manner in which one so generally regarded with indifference, if not with contempt, had been selected from all that crowd of courtiers, excited some surprise; but as the ordinary business of the antechamber went on, and the subordinates of office soon appeared in the rooms, to hear solicitations and answer questions, the affair was quickly forgotten. Luis withdrew disappointed, for he had hoped to enjoy another long discourse with Columbus, on a subject which, as it was connected with his dearest hopes, now occupied most of his thoughts. We shall leave him, however, and all in the ante-chambers, to follow the great navigator further into the depths of the palace.

Fernando de Talavera had not been unmindful of his orders. Instead, however, of associating with this prelate, men known to be well disposed to listen to the propositions of Columbus, the king and queen had made the mistake of choosing some six or eight of their courtiers, persons of probity and of good general characters, but who were too little accustomed to learned research, properly to appreciate the magnitude of the proposed discoveries. Into the presence of these distinguished nobles and churchmen was Columbus now ushered, and among them is the reader to suppose him seated. We pass over the customary ceremonies of the introduction, and proceed at once to the material part of the narrative. The Archbishop of Granada was the principal speaker on the part of the commissioners.

"We understand, Señor Colon," continued the prelate, "should you be favored by their Highnesses' power and authority, that you propose to undertake a voyage into the unknown Atlantic, in quest of the land of Cathay and the celebrated island of Cipango?"

"That is my design, holy and illustrious prelate. The matter hath been so often up between the agents of the two sovereigns and myself, that there is little occasion to enlarge on my views."

"These were fully discussed at Salamanca, of a verity, where many learned churchmen were of your way of thinking, Señor, though more were against it. Our Lord the King, and our Lady the Queen, however, are disposed to view the matter favorably, and this commission hath been commanded that we might arrange all previous principles, and determine the rights of the respective parties. What force in vessels and equipments do you demand, in order to achieve the great objects you expect, under the blessing of God, to accomplish?"

"You have well spoken, Lord Archbishop; it will be by the blessing of God, and under his especial care, that all will be done, for his glory and worship are involved in the success. With so good an ally on my side, little worldly means will be necessary. Two caravels of light burden are all I ask, with the flag of the sovereigns, and a sufficiency of mariners."

The commissioners turned toward each other in surprise, and while some saw in the moderate request the enthusiastic heedlessness of a visionary, others detected the steady reliance of faith.

"That is not asking much, truly," observed the prelate, who was among the first; "and, though these wars have left us of Castile with an exhausted treasury, we could compass that little without the aid of a miracle. The caravels might be found, and the mariners levied, but there are weighty points

to determine before we reach that concession. You expect, Señor, to be intrusted with the command of the expedition, in your own person?"

"Without that confidence I could not be answerable for success. I ask the full and complete authority of an admiral, or a sea-commander, of their Highnesses. The force employed will be trifling in appearance, but the risks will be great, and the power of the two crowns must completely sustain that of him on whose shoulders will rest the entire weight of the responsibility."

"This is but just, and none will gainsay it. But, Señor, have you thought maturely on the advantages that are to accrue to the sovereigns, should they sustain you in this undertaking?"

"Lord Archbishop, for eighteen years hath this subject occupied my thoughts, and employed my studies, both by day and by night. In the whole of that long period have I done little that hath not had a direct bearing on the success of this mighty enterprise. The advantages to all concerned, that will flow from it, have, therefore, scarce been forgotten."

"Name them, Señor."

"First, then, as is due to his all-seeing and omnipotent protection, glory will be given to the Almighty, by the spreading of his church and the increase of his worshippers." Fernando de Talavera and all the churchmen present piously crossed themselves, an act in which Columbus himself joined. "Their Highnesses, as is meet, will reap the next advantages, in the extension of their empire and in the increase of their subjects. Wealth will flow in upon Castile and Aragon, in a rapid stream, His Holiness freely granting to Christian monarchs the thrones and territories of all infidel princes whose possessions may be discovered, or people converted to the faith, through their means."

"This is plausible, Señor," returned the prelate, "and founded on just principles. His Holiness certainly is entrusted with that power, and hath been known to use it, for the glory of God. You doubtless know, Señor Colon, that Don John of Portugal hath paid great attention to these matters already, and that he and his predecessors have probably pushed discovery to the verge of its final limits. His enterprise hath also obtained from Rome certain privileges that may not be meddled with."

"I am not ignorant of the Portuguese enterprise, holy prelate, nor of the spirit with which Don John hath exercised his power. His vessels voyage along the western shore of Africa, and in a direction altogether different from that I propose to take. My purpose is to launch forth, at once, into the broad Atlantic, and by following the sun toward his place of evening retirement, reach the eastern bounds of the Indies, by a road that will lessen the journey many months."

Although the archbishop and most of his coadjutors belonged to the numerous class of those who regarded Columbus as a brain-heated visionary, the earnest, but lofty dignity, with which he thus simply touched upon his projects; the manner in which he quietly smoothed down his white locks, when he had spoken; and the enthusiasm that never failed to kindle in his eye, as he dwelt on his noble designs, produced a deep impression on all present, and there was a moment when the general feeling was to aid him to the extent of the common means. It was a singular and peculiar proof of the existence of this transient feeling that one of the commissioners immediately inquired —

"Do you propose, Señor Colon, to seek the court of Prestor John?"

"I know not, noble Señor, that such a potentate hath even an existence," answered Columbus, whose notions had got the fixed and philosophical bias that is derived from science, and who entered little into the popular fallacies of the day, though necessarily subject to much of the ignorance of the age; "I find nothing to establish the truth of there being such a monarch at all, or such territories."

This admission did not help the navigator's cause; for to affirm that the earth was a sphere, and that Prestor John was a creature of the imagination, was abandoning the marvellous to fall back on demonstration and probabilities — a course that the human mind, in its uncultivated condition, is not fond of taking.

"There are men who will be willing to put faith in the truth of Prestor John's power and territories," interrupted one of the commissioners, who was indebted to his present situation purely

to King Ferdinand's policy, "who will flatly deny that the earth is round; since we all know that there are kings, and territories, and Christians, while we see that the earth and the ocean are plains."

This opinion was received with an assenting smile by most present, though Fernando de Talavera had doubts of its justice.

"Señor," answered Columbus, mildly, "if all in this world was in truth what it seemeth, confessions would be little needed, and penance would be much lighter."

"I esteem you a good Christian, Señor Colon," observed the archbishop, sharply.

"I am such as the grace of God and a weak nature have made me, Lord Archbishop; though I humbly trust that when I shall have achieved this great end, that I may be deemed more worthy of the divine protection, as well as of the divine favor."

"It hath been said that thou deemest thyself especially set apart by Providence for this work."

"I feel that within me, holy prelate, that encourageth such a hope; but I build naught on mysteries that exceed my comprehension."

It would be difficult to say whether Columbus lost or gained in the opinions of his auditors, by this answer. The religious feeling of the age was in perfect consonance with the sentiment; but, to the churchmen present, it seemed arrogant in a humble and unknown layman, even to believe it possible that he could be the chosen vessel, when so many who appeared to have higher claims were rejected. Still no expression of this feeling was permitted, for it was then, as it is now – he who seemed to rely on the power of God, carrying with him a weight and an influence that ordinarily checked rebukes.

"You propose to endeavor to reach Cathay by means of sailing forth into the broad Atlantic," resumed the archbishop, "and yet you deny the existence of Prestor John."

"Your pardon, holy prelate – I do propose to reach Cathay and Cipango in the mode you mention, but I do not absolutely deny the existence of the monarch you have named. For the probability of the success of my enterprise, I have already produced my proofs and reasons, which have satisfied many learned churchmen; but evidence is wanting to establish the last."

"And yet Giovanni di Montecorvino, a pious bishop of our holy church, is said to have converted such a prince to the true faith, nearly two centuries since."

"The power of God can do any thing, Lord Archbishop, and I am not one to question the merits of his chosen ministers. All I can answer on this point is, to say that I find no scientific or plausible reasons to justify me in pursuing what may prove to be as deceptive as the light which recedes before the hand that would touch it. As for Cathay and its position and its wonders, we have the better established evidence of the renowned Venetians, Marco and Nicolo Polo, who not only travelled in those territories, but sojourned years at the court of their monarch. But, noble gentlemen, whether there is a Prestor John, or a Cathay, there is certainly a limit to the western side of the Atlantic, and that limit I am ready to seek."

The archbishop betrayed his incredulity in the upward turn of his eyes; but having his commands from those who were accustomed to be obeyed, and knowing that the theory of Columbus had been gravely heard and reported on, years before, at Salamanca, he determined prudently to keep within his proper sphere, and to proceed at once to that into which it was his duty to inquire.

"You have set forth the advantages that you think may be derived to the sovereigns, should your project succeed, Señor," he said, "and truly they are not light, if all your brilliant hopes may be realized; but it now remaineth to know what conditions you reserve for yourself, as the reward of all your risks and many years of anxious labor."

"All that hath been duly considered, illustrious archbishop, and you will find the substance of my wishes set forth in this paper, though many of the smaller provisions will remain to be enumerated."

As Columbus spoke he handed the paper in question to Ferdinand of Talavera. The prelate ran his eyes over it hastily at first, but a second time with more deliberation, and it would be difficult to say whether ridicule or indignation was most strongly expressed in his countenance, as he deridingly threw

the document on a table. When this act of contempt was performed, he turned toward Columbus, as if to satisfy himself that the navigator was not mad.

"Art thou serious in demanding these terms, Señor?" he asked sternly, and with a look that would have caused most men, in the humble station of the applicant, to swerve from their purpose.

"Lord Archbishop," answered Columbus, with a dignity that was not easily disturbed, "this matter hath now occupied my mind quite eighteen years. During the whole of this long period I have thought seriously of little else, and it may be said to have engaged my mind sleeping and waking. I saw the truth early and intensely, but every day seems to bring it brighter and brighter before my eyes. I feel a reliance on success, that cometh from dependence on God. I think myself an agent, chosen for the accomplishment of great ends, and ends that will not be decided by the success of this one enterprise. There is more beyond, and I must retain the dignity and the means necessary to accomplish it. I cannot abate, in the smallest degree, the nature or the amount of these conditions."

Although the manner in which these words were uttered lent them weight, the prelate fancied that the mind of the navigator had got to be unsettled by his long contemplation of a single subject. The only things that left any doubt concerning the accuracy of this opinion, were the method and science with which he had often maintained, even in his own presence, the reasonableness of his geographical suppositions; arguments which, though they had failed to convince one bent on believing the projector a visionary, had, nevertheless, greatly puzzled the listener. Still, the demands he had just read seemed so extravagant, that, for a single instant, a sentiment of pity repressed the burst of indignation to which he felt disposed to give vent.

"How like ye, noble lords," he cried, sarcastically, turning to two or three of his fellow-commissioners, who had eagerly seized the paper and were endeavoring to read it, and all at the same moment, "the moderate and modest demands of the Señor Christoval Colon, the celebrated navigator who confounded the Council of Salamanca! Are they not such as becometh their Highnesses to accept on bended knees, and with many thanks?"

"Read them, Lord Archbishop," exclaimed several in a breath. "Let us first know their nature."

"There are many minor conditions that might be granted, as unworthy of discussion," resumed the prelate, taking the paper; "but here are two that must give the sovereigns infinite satisfaction. The Señor Colon actually satisfieth himself with the rank of Admiral and Viceroy over all the countries he may discover; and as for gains, one-tenth – the church's share, my brethren – yea, even one-tenth, one *humble* tenth of the proceeds and customs, will content him!"

The general murmur that passed among the commissioners, denoted a common dissatisfaction, and at that instant Columbus had not a true supporter in the room.

"Nor is this all, illustrious nobles, and holy priests," continued the archbishop, following up his advantage as soon as he believed his auditors ready to hear him – "nor is this all; lest these high dignities should weary their Highnesses' shoulders, and those of their royal progeny, the liberal Genoese actually consenteth to transmit them to his own posterity, in all time to come; converting the kingdom of Cathay into a realm for the uses of the house of Colon, to maintain the dignity of which, the tenth of all the benefits are to be consigned to its especial care!"

There would have been an open laugh at this sally, had not the noble bearing of Columbus checked its indulgence; and even Ferdinand of Talavera, under the stern rebuke of an eye and mien that carried with them a grave authority, began to think he had gone too far.

"Your pardon, Señor Colon," he immediately and more courteously added; "but your conditions sounded so lofty that they have quite taken me by surprise. You cannot seriously mean to maintain them?"

"Not one jot will I abate, Lord Priest: that much will be my due; and he that consenteth to less than he deserveth, becometh an instrument of his own humiliation. I shall give to the sovereigns an empire that will far exceed in value all their other possessions, and I claim my reward. I tell you,

moreover, reverend prelate, that there is much in reserve, and that these conditions will be needed to fulfil the future."

"These are truly modest proposals for a nameless Genoese!" exclaimed one of the courtiers, who had been gradually swelling with disgust and contempt. "The Señor Colon will be certain of commanding in the service of their Highnesses, and if nothing is done he will have that high honor without cost; whereas, should this most improbable scheme lead to any benefits, he will become a vice-king, humbly contenting himself with the church's revenue!"

This remark appeared to determine the wavering, and the commissioners rose, in a body, as if the matter were thought to be unworthy of further discussion. With the view to preserve at least the appearance of impartiality and discretion, however, the archbishop turned once more toward Columbus, and now, certain of obtaining his ends, he spoke to him in milder tones.

"For the last time, Señor," he said, "I ask if you still insist on these unheard-of terms?"

"On them, and on no other," said Columbus, firmly. "I know the magnitude of the services I shall perform, and will not degrade them – will in no manner lessen their dignity, by accepting aught else. But, Lord Archbishop, and you, too, noble Señor, that treateth my claims so lightly, I am ready to add to the risk of person, life, and name, that of gold. I will furnish one-eighth of the needful sums, if ye will increase my benefits in that proportion."

"Enough, enough," returned the prelate, preparing to quit the room; "we will make our report to the sovereigns, this instant, and thou shalt speedily know their pleasure."

Thus terminated the conference. The courtiers left the room, conversing earnestly among themselves, like men who did not care to repress their indignation; while Columbus, filled with the noble character of his own designs, disappeared in another direction, with the bearing of one whose self-respect was not to be lessened by clamor, and who appreciated ignorance and narrowness of views too justly to suffer them to change his own high purposes.

Ferdinand of Talavera was as good as his word. He was the queen's confessor, and, in virtue of that holy office, had at all times access to her presence. Full of the subject of the late interview, he took his way directly to the private apartments of the queen, and, as a matter of course, was at once admitted. Isabella heard his representations with mortification and regret, for she had begun to set her heart on the sailing of this extraordinary expedition. But the influence of the archbishop was very great, for his royal penitent knew the sincerity and devotedness of his heart.

"This carrieth presumption to insolence, Señora," continued the irritated churchman; "have we not here a mendicant adventurer demanding honors and authority that belong only to God and his anointed, the princes of the earth? Who is this Colon? – a nameless Genoese, without rank, services, or modesty, and yet doth he carry his pretensions to a height that might cause even a Guzman to hesitate."

"He is a good Christian, holy prelate," Isabella meekly answered, "and seemeth to delight in the service and glory of God, and to wish to favor the extension of his visible and Catholic church."

"True, Señora, and yet may there be deceit in this" —

"Nay, Lord Archbishop, I do not think that deceit is the man's failing, for franker speech and more manly bearing it is not usual to see, even in the most powerful. He hath solicited us for years, and yet no act of meanness may be fairly laid to his charge."

"I shall not judge the heart of this man harshly, Doña Isabella, but we may judge of his actions and his pretensions, and how far they may be suitable to the dignity of the two crowns, freely and without censure. I confess him grave, and plausible, and light of neither discourse nor manner, virtues certainly, as the world moveth in courts" – Isabella smiled, but she said nothing, for her ghostly counsellor was wont to rebuke with freedom, and she to listen with humility – "where the age is not exhibiting its purest models of sobriety of thought and devotion, but even these may exist without the spirit that shall be fitted for heaven. But what are gravity and decorum, if sustained by an inflated pride and inordinate rapacity? ambition being a term too lofty for such a craving. Reflect, Señora,

on the full nature of these demands. This Colon requireth to be established, forever, in the high state of a substitute for a king, not only for his own person, but for those of his descendants throughout all time, with the title and authority of Admiral over all adjacent seas, should he discover any of the lands he so much exalts, before he will consent to enter into the command of certain of Your Highnesses' vessels, a station of itself only too honorable for one of so little note! Should his most extravagant pretensions be realized – and the probabilities are that they will entirely fail – his demands would exceed his services; whereas, in the case of failure, the Castilian and Aragonese names would be covered with ridicule, and a sore disrespect would befall the royal dignity for having been thus duped by an adventurer. Much of the glory of this late conquest would be tarnished, by a mistake so unfortunate."

"Daughter-Marchioness," observed the queen, turning toward the faithful, and long-tried friend who was occupied with her needle near her own side – "these conditions of Colon do, truly, seem to exceed the bounds of reason."

"The enterprise also exceedeth all the usual bounds of risks and adventures, Señora," was the steady reply of Doña Beatriz, as she glanced toward the countenance of Mercedes. "Noble efforts deserve noble rewards."

The eye of Isabella followed the glance of her friend, and it remained fixed for some time on the pale, anxious features of her favorite's ward. The beautiful girl herself was unconscious of the attention she excited; but one who knew her secret might easily detect the intense feeling with which she awaited the issue. The opinions of her confessor had seemed so reasonable, that Isabella was on the point of assenting to the report of the commissioners, and of abandoning altogether the secret hopes and expectations she had begun to couple with the success of the navigator's schemes, when a gentler feeling, one that belonged peculiarly to her own feminine heart, interposed to give the mariner another chance. It is seldom that woman is dead to the sympathies connected with the affections, and the wishes that sprang from the love of Mercedes de Valverde were the active cause of the decision that the Queen of Castile came to at that critical moment.

"We must be neither harsh nor hasty with this Genoese, Lord Archbishop," she said, turning again to the prelate. "He hath the virtues of devoutness and fair-dealing, and these are qualities that sovereigns learn to prize. His demands no doubt have become somewhat exaggerated by long brooding, in his thoughts, on a favorite and great scheme; but kind words and reason may yet lead him to more moderation. Let him, then, be tried with propositions of our own, and doubtless, his necessities, if not a sense of justice, will cause him to accept them. The viceroyalty doth, indeed, exceed the usual policy of princes, and, as you say, holy prelate, the tenth is the church's share; but the admiral's rank may be fairly claimed. Meet him, then, with these moderated proposals, and substitute a fifteenth for a tenth; let him be a viceroy in his own person, during the pleasure of Don Fernando and myself, but let him relinquish the claim for his posterity."

Fernando de Talavera thought even these concessions too considerable, but, while he exercised his sacred office with a high authority, he too well knew the character of Isabella to presume to dispute an order she had once issued, although it was in her own mild and feminine manner. After receiving a few more instructions, therefore, and obtaining the counsel of the king, who was at work in an adjoining cabinet, the prelate went to execute this new commission.

Two or three days now passed before the subject was finally disposed of, and Isabella was again seated in the domestic circle, when admission was once more demanded in behalf of her confessor. The archbishop entered with a flushed face, and his whole appearance was so disturbed that it must have been observed by the most indifferent person.

"How now, holy archbishop," – demanded Isabella – "doth thy new flock vex thy spirit, and is it so very hard to deal with an infidel?"

"'Tis naught of that, Señora – 'tis naught relating to my new people. I find even the followers of the false prophet more reasonable than some who exult in Christ's name and favor. This Colon

is a madman, and better fitted to become a saint in Mussulmans' eyes, than even a pilot in Your Highness' service."

At this burst of indignation, the queen, the Marchioness of Moya, and Doña Mercedes de Valverde, simultaneously dropped their needle-work, and sat looking at the prelate, with a common concern. They had all hoped that the difficulties which stood in the way of a favorable termination to the negotiation would be removed, and that the time was at hand, when the being who, in spite of the boldness and unusual character of his projects, had succeeded in so signally commanding their respect, and in interesting their feelings, was about to depart, and to furnish a practical solution to problems that had as much puzzled their reasons as they had excited their curiosity. But here was something like a sudden and unlooked-for termination to all their expectations; and while Mercedes felt something like despair chilling her heart, the queen and Doña Beatriz were both displeased.

"Didst thou duly explain to Señor Colon, the nature of our proposals, Lord Archbishop?" the former asked, with more severity of manner than she was accustomed to betray; "and doth he still insist on the pretensions to a vice-regal power, and on the offensive condition in behalf of his posterity?"

"Even so, Your Highness; were it Isabella of Castile treating with Henry of England or Louis of France, the starving Genoese could not hold higher terms or more inflexible conditions. He abateth nothing. The man deemeth himself chosen of God, to answer certain ends, and his language and conditions are such as one who felt a holy impulse to his course, could scarcely feel warranted in assuming."

"This constancy hath its merit," observed the queen; "but there is a limit to concession. I shall urge no more in the navigator's favor, but leave him to the fortune that naturally followeth self-exaltation and all extravagance of demand."

This speech apparently sealed the fate of Columbus in Castile. The archbishop was appeased, and, first holding a short private conference with his royal penitent, he left the room. Shortly after, Christoval Colon, as he was called by the Spaniards – Columbus, as he styled himself in later life – received, for a definite answer, the information that his conditions were rejected, and that the negotiation for the projected voyage to the Indies was finally at an end.

CHAPTER VIII

"Oh! ever thus, from childhood's hour,
I've seen my fondest hopes decay;
I never loved a tree or flower,
But 'twas the first to fade away."

Lalla Rookh.

The season had now advanced to the first days of February, and, in that low latitude, the weather was becoming genial and spring-like. On the morning succeeding that of the interview just related, some six or eight individuals, attracted by the loveliness of the day, and induced morally by a higher motive, were assembled before the door of one of those low dwellings of Santa Fé that had been erected for the accommodation of the conquering army. Most of these persons were grave Spaniards of a certain age, though young Luis de Bobadilla was also there, and the tall, dignified form of Columbus was in the group. The latter was equipped for the road, and a stout, serviceable Andalusian mule stood ready to receive its burden, near at hand. A charger was by the side of the mule, showing that the rider of the last was about to have company. Among the Spaniards were Alonzo de Quintanilla, the accountant-general of Castile, a firm friend of the navigator, and Luis de St. Angel, the receiver of the ecclesiastical revenues of Aragon, who was one of the firmest converts that Columbus had made to the philosophical accuracy of his opinions and to the truth of his vast conceptions.

The two last had been in earnest discourse with the navigator, but the discussion had closed, and Señor de St. Angel, a man of generous feelings and ardent imagination, was just expressing himself warmly, in the following words —

"By the lustre of the two crowns!" he cried, "this ought not to come to pass. But, adieu, Señor Colon — God have you in his holy keeping, and send you wiser and less prejudiced judges, hereafter. The past can only cause us shame and grief, while the future is in the womb of time."

The whole party, with the exception of Luis de Bobadilla, then took their leave. As soon as the place was clear, Columbus mounted, and passed through the thronged streets, attended by the young noble on his charger. Not a syllable was uttered by either, until they were fairly on the plain, though Columbus often sighed like a man oppressed with grief. Still, his mien was calm, his bearing dignified, and his eye lighted with that unquenchable fire which finds its fuel in the soul within.

When fairly without the gates, Columbus turned courteously to his young companion and thanked him for his escort; but, with a consideration for the other that was creditable to his heart, he added —

"While I am so grateful for this honor, coming from one so noble and full of hopes, I must not forget your own character. Didst thou not remark, friend Luis, as we passed through the streets, that divers Spaniards pointed at me, as the object of scorn?"

"I did, Señor," answered Luis, his cheek glowing with indignation, "and had it not been that I dreaded your displeasure, I would have trodden the vagabonds beneath my horse's feet, failing of a lance to spit them on!"

"Thou hast acted most wisely in showing forbearance. But these are men, and their common judgment maketh public opinion; nor do I perceive that the birth, or the opportunities, causeth material distinctions between them, though the manner of expression vary. There are vulgar among the noble, and noble among the lowly. This very act of kindness of thine, will find its deriders and contemners in the court of the two sovereigns."

"Let him look to it, who presumeth to speak lightly of you, Señor, to Luis de Bobadilla! We are not a patient race, and Castilian blood is apt to be hot blood."

"I should be sorry that any man but myself should draw in my quarrel. But, if we take offence at all who think and speak folly, we may pass our days in harness. Let the young nobles have their jest, if it give them pleasure – but do not let me regret my friendship for thee."

Luis promised fairly, and then, as if his truant thoughts would revert to the subject unbidden, he hastily resumed —

"You speak of the noble as of a class different from your own – surely, Señor Colon, thou art noble?"

"Would it make aught different in thy opinions and feelings, young man, were I to answer no?"

The cheek of Don Luis flushed, and, for an instant, he repented of his remark; but falling back on his own frank and generous nature, he answered immediately, without reservation or duplicity —

"By San Pedro, my new patron! I could wish you were noble, Señor, if it were merely for the honor of the class. There are so many among us who do no credit to their spurs, that we might gladly receive such an acquisition."

"This world is made up of changes, young Señor," returned Columbus, smiling. "The seasons undergo their changes; night follows day; comets come and go; monarchs become subjects, and subjects monarchs; nobles lose the knowledge of their descent, and plebeians rise to the rank of nobles. There is a tradition among us, that we were formerly of the privileged class; but time and our unlucky fortune have brought us down to humble employments. Am I to lose the honor of Don Luis de Bobadilla's company in the great voyage, should I be more fortunate in France than I have been in Castile, because his commander happeneth to have lost the evidences of his nobility?"

"That would be a most unworthy motive, Señor, and I hasten to correct your mistake. As we are now about to part for some time, I ask permission to lay bare my whole soul to you. I confess that when first I heard of this voyage, it struck me as a madman's scheme" —

"Ah! friend Luis," interrupted Columbus, with a melancholy shake of the head, "this is the opinion of but too many! I fear Don Ferdinand of Aragon, as well as that stern prelate, his namesake, who hath lately disposed of the question, thinketh in the same manner."

"I crave your pardon, Señor Colon, if I have uttered aught to give you pain; but if I have once done you injustice, I am ready enough to expiate the wrong, as you will quickly see. Thinking thus, I entered into discourse with you, with a view to amuse myself with fancied ravings; but, though no immediate change of opinion followed as to the truth of the theory, I soon perceived that a great philosopher and profound reasoner had the matter in hand. Here my judgment might have rested, and my opinion been satisfied, but for a circumstance of deep moment to myself. You must know, Señor, though come of the oldest blood of Spain, and not without fair possessions, that I may not always have answered the hopes of those who have been charged with the care of my youth" —

"This is unnecessary, noble sir" —

"Nay, by St. Luke! it shall be said. Now, I have two great and engrossing passions, that sometimes interfere with each other. The one is a love for rambling – a burning desire to see foreign lands, and this, too, in a free and roving fashion – with a disposition for the sea and the doings of havens; and the other is a love for Mercedes de Valverde, the fairest, gentlest, most affectionate, warmest-hearted, and truest maiden of Castile!"

"Noble, withal," put in Columbus, smiling.

"Señor," answered Luis, gravely, "I jest not concerning my guardian angel. She is not only noble, and every way fitted to honor my name, but she hath the blood of the Guzmans, themselves, in her veins. But I have lost favor with others, if not with my lovely mistress, in yielding to this rambling inclination; and even my own aunt, who is her guardian, hath not looked smilingly on my suit. Doña Isabella, whose word is law among all the noble virgins of the court, hath also her prejudices, and it hath become necessary to regain her good opinion, to win the Doña Mercedes. It struck me" —

Luis was too manly to betray his mistress by confessing that the thought was hers – "it struck me, that if my rambling tastes took the direction of some noble enterprise, like this you urge, that what hath been a demerit might be deemed a merit in the royal eyes, which would be certain soon to draw all other eyes after them. With this hope, then, I first entered into the present intercourse, until the force of your arguments hath completed my conversion, and now no churchman hath more faith in the head of his religion, than I have that the shortest road to Cathay is athwart the broad Atlantic; or no Lombard is more persuaded that his Lombardy is flat, than I feel convinced that this good earth of ours is a sphere."

"Speak reverently of the ministers of the altar, young Señor," said Columbus, crossing himself, "for no levity should be used in connection with their holy office. It seemeth, then," he added, smiling, "I owe my disciple to the two potent agents of love and reason; the former, as most potent, overcoming the first obstacles, and the latter getting uppermost at the close of the affair, as is wont to happen – love, generally, triumphing in the onset, and reason, last."

"I'll not deny the potency of the power, Señor, for I feel it too deeply to rebel against it. You now know my secret, and when I have made you acquainted with my intentions, all will be laid bare. I here solemnly vow" – Don Luis lifted his cap and looked to heaven, as he spoke – "to join you in this voyage, on due notice, sail from whence you may, in whatever bark you shall choose, and whenever you please. In doing this, I trust, first to serve God and his church; secondly, to visit Cathay and those distant and wonderful lands; and lastly, to win Doña Mercedes de Valverde."

"I accept the pledge, young sir," rejoined Columbus, struck by his earnestness, and pleased with his sincerity – "though it might have been a more faithful representation of your thoughts had the order of the motives been reversed."

"In a few months I shall be master of my own means," continued the youth, too intent on his own purposes to heed what the navigator had said – "and then, nothing but the solemn command of Doña Isabella, herself, shall prevent our having one caravel, at least; and the coffers of Bobadilla must have been foully dealt by, during their master's childhood, if they do not afford two. I am no subject of Don Fernando's, but a servant of the elder branch of the House of Trastamara; and the cold judgment of the king, even, shall not prevent it."

"This soundeth generously, and thy sentiments are such as become a youthful and enterprising noble; but the offer cannot be accepted. It would not become Columbus to use gold that came from so confiding a spirit and so inexperienced a head; and there are still greater obstacles than this. My enterprise must rest on the support of some powerful prince. Even the Guzman hath not deemed himself of sufficient authority to uphold a scheme so large. Did we make the discoveries without that sanction, we should be toiling for others, without security for ourselves, since the Portuguese or some other monarch would wrong us of our reward. That I am destined to effect this great work, I feel, and it must be done in a manner suited to the majesty of the thought and to the magnitude of the subject. And, here, Don Luis, we must part. Should my suit be successful at the court of France, thou shalt hear from me, for I ask no better than to be sustained by hearts and hands like thine. Still, thou must not mar thy fortunes unheedingly, and I am now a fallen man in Castile. It may not serve thee a good turn, to be known to frequent my company any longer – and I again say, here we must part."

Luis de Bobadilla protested his indifference to what others might think; but the more experienced Columbus, who rose so high above popular clamor in matters that affected himself, felt a generous reluctance to permit this confiding youth to sacrifice his hopes, to any friendly impressions in his own favor. The leave-taking was warm, and the navigator felt a glow at his heart, as he witnessed the sincere and honest emotions that the young man could not repress at parting. They separated, however, about half a league from the town, and each bent his way in his own direction; Don Luis de Bobadilla's heart swelling with indignation at the unworthy treatment that there was, in sooth, so much reason for thinking his new friend had received.

Columbus journeyed on, with very different emotions. Seven weary years had he been soliciting the monarchs and nobles of Spain to aid him in his enterprise. In that long period, how much of poverty, contempt, ridicule, and even odium, had he not patiently encountered, rather than abandon the slight hold that he had obtained on a few of the more liberal and enlightened minds of the nation! He had toiled for bread while soliciting the great to aid themselves in becoming still more powerful; and each ray of hope, however feeble, had been eagerly caught at with joy, each disappointment borne with a constancy that none but the most exalted spirit could sustain. But he was now required to endure the most grievous of all his pains. The recall of Isabella had awakened within him a confidence to which he had long been a stranger; and he awaited the termination of the siege with the calm dignity that became his purpose, no less than his lofty philosophy. The hour of leisure had come, and it produced a fatal destruction to all his buoyant hopes. He had thought his motives understood, his character appreciated, and his high objects felt; but he now found himself still regarded as a visionary projector, his intentions distrusted, and his promised services despised. In a word, the bright expectations that had cheered his toil for years, had vanished in a day, and the disappointment was all the greater for the brief, but delusive hopes produced by his recent favor.

It is not surprising, therefore, that, when left alone on the highway, even the spirit of this extraordinary man grew faint within him, and he had to look to the highest power for succor. His head dropped upon his breast, and one of those bitter moments occurred, in which the past and the future, crowd the mind, painfully as to sufferings endured, cheerlessly as to hope. The time wasted in Spain seemed a blot in his existence, and then came the probability of another long and exhausting probation, that, like this, might lead to nothing. He had already reached the lustrum that would fill his threescore years, and life seemed slipping from beneath him, while its great object remained unachieved. Still the high resolution of the man sustained him. Not once did he think of a compromise of what he felt to be his rights – not once did he doubt of the practicability of accomplishing the great enterprise that others derided. His heart was full of courage, even while his bosom was full of grief. "There is a wise, a merciful, and omnipotent God!" he exclaimed, raising his eyes to heaven. "He knoweth what is meet for his own glory, and in him do I put my trust." There was a pause, and the eyes kindled, while a scarcely perceptible smile lighted the grave face, and then were murmured the words – "Yea, he taketh his time, but the Infidel shall be enlightened, and the blessed sepulchre redeemed!"

After this burst of feeling, the grave-looking man, whose hairs had already become whitened to the color of snow, by cares, and toils, and exposures, pursued his way, with the quiet dignity of one who believed that he was not created for naught, and who trusted in God for the fulfilment of his destiny. If quivering sighs occasionally broke out of his breast, they did not disturb the placidity of his venerable countenance; if grief and disappointment still lay heavy on his heart, they rested on a base that was able to support them. Leaving Columbus to follow the common mule-track across the Vega, we will now return to Santa Fé, where Ferdinand and Isabella had re-established their court, after the few first days that succeeded the possession of their new conquest.

Luis de St. Angel was a man of ardent feelings and generous impulses. He was one of those few spirits who live in advance of their age, and who permitted his reason to be enlightened and cheered by his imagination, though it was never dazzled by it. As he and his friend Alonzo de Quintanilla, after quitting Columbus as already related, walked toward the royal pavillion, they conversed freely together concerning the man, his vast conceptions, the treatment he had received, and the shame that would alight on Spain in consequence, were he suffered thus to depart forever. Blunt of speech, the receiver of the ecclesiastical revenues did not measure his terms, every syllable of which found an echo in the heart of the accountant-general, who was an old and fast friend of the navigator. In short, by the time they reached the pavilion, they had come to the resolution to make one manly effort to induce the queen to yield to Columbus' terms and to recall him to her presence.

Isabella was always easy of access to such of her servants as she knew to be honest and zealous. The age was one of formality, and, in many respects, of exaggeration, while the court was renowned

for ceremony; but the pure spirit of the queen threw a truth and a natural grace around all that depended on her, which rendered mere forms, except as they were connected with delicacy and propriety, useless, and indeed impracticable. Both the applicants for the interview enjoyed her favor, and the request was granted with that simple directness that this estimable woman loved to manifest, whenever she thought she was about to oblige any whom she esteemed.

The queen was surrounded by the few ladies among whom she lived in private, as Luis de St. Angel and Alonzo de Quintanilla entered. Among them, of course, were the Marchioness of Moya and Doña Mercedes de Valverde. The king, on this occasion, was in an adjoining closet, at work, as usual, with his calculations and orders. Official labor was Ferdinand's relaxation, and he seldom manifested more happiness than when clearing off a press of affairs that most men would have found to the last degree burdensome. He was a hero in the saddle, a warrior at the head of armies, a sage in council, and respectable, if not great, in all things but motives.

"What has brought the Señor St. Angel and the Señor Quintanilla, as suitors, so early to my presence?" asked Isabella, smiling in a way to assure both that the boon would be asked of a partial mistress. "Ye are not wont to be beggars, and the hour is somewhat unusual."

"All hours are suitable, gracious lady, when one cometh to *confer* and not to *seek* favor," returned Luis de St. Angel, bluntly. "We are not here to solicit for ourselves, but to show Your Highness the manner in which the crown of Castile may be garnished with brighter jewels than any it now possesseth."

Isabella looked surprised, both at the words of the speaker, and at his hurried earnestness, as well as his freedom of speech. Accustomed, however, to something of the last, her own calm manner was not disturbed, nor did she even seem displeased.

"Hath the Moor another kingdom of which to be despoiled," she asked; "or would the receiver of the church's revenues have us war upon the Holy See?"

"I would have Your Highness accept the boons that come from God, with alacrity and gratitude, and not reject them unthankfully," returned de St. Angel, kissing the queen's offered hand with a respect and affection that neutralized the freedom of his words. "Do you know, my gracious mistress, that the Señor Christoval Colon, he from whose high projects we Spaniards have hoped so much, hath actually taken mule and quitted Santa Fé?"

"I expected as much, Señor, though I was not apprized that it had actually come to pass. The king and I put the matter into the hands of the Archbishop of Granada, with other trusty counsellors, and they have found the terms of the Genoese arrogant; so full of exceeding and unreasonable extravagance, that it ill befitted our dignity, and our duty to ourselves, to grant them. One who hath a scheme of such doubtful results, ought to manifest moderation in his preliminaries. Many even believe the man a visionary."

"It is unlike an unworthy pretender, Señora, to abandon his hopes before he will yield his dignity. This Colon feeleth that he is treating for empires, and he negotiates like one full of the importance of his subject."

"He that lightly valueth himself, in matters of gravity, hath need to expect that he will not stand high in the estimation of others," put in Alonzo de Quintanilla.

"And, moreover, my gracious and beloved mistress," added de St. Angel, without permitting Isabella even to answer, "the character of the man, and the value of his intentions, may be appreciated by the price he setteth on his own services. If he succeed, will not the discovery eclipse all others that have been made since the creation of the world? Is it nothing to circle the earth, to prove the wisdom of God by actual experiment, to follow the sun in its daily track, and imitate the motions of that glorious moving mass? And then the benefits that will flow on Castile and Aragon – are they not incalculable? I marvel that a princess who hath shown so high and rare a spirit on all other occasions, should shrink from so grand an enterprise as this!"

"Thou art earnest, my good de St. Angel," returned Isabella, with a smile that betrayed no anger; "and when there is much earnestness there is sometimes much forgetfulness. If there were honor and profit in success, what would there be in failure? Should the king and myself send out this Colon, with a commission to be our viceroy, forever, over undiscovered lands, and no lands be discovered, the wisdom of our councils might be called in question, and the dignity of the two crowns would be fruitlessly and yet deeply committed."

"The hand of the Lord Archbishop is in this! This prelate hath never been a believer in the justice of the navigator's theories, and it is easy to raise objections when the feelings lean against an enterprise. No glory is obtained without risk. Look, Your Highness, at our neighbors, the Portuguese – how much have discoveries done for that kingdom, and how much more may it do for us! We know, my honored mistress, that the earth is round" —

"Are we quite certain of that important fact, Señor," asked the king, who, attracted by the animated and unusual tones of the speaker, had left his closet, and approached unseen. "Is that truth established? Our doctors at Salamanca were divided on that great question, and, by St. James! I do not see that it is so very clear."

"If not round, my Lord the King," answered de St. Angel, turning quickly to face this new opponent, like a well-drilled corps wheeling into a new front, "of what form *can* it be? Will any doctor, come he of Salamanca, or come he from elsewhere, pretend that the earth is a plain, and that it hath limits, and that one may stand on these limits and jump down upon the sun as he passeth beneath at night – is this reasonable, honored Señor, or is it in conformity with scripture?"

"Will any one, doctor of Salamanca, or elsewhere," rejoined the king, gravely, though it was evident his feelings were little interested in the discussion, "allege that there are nations who forever walk with their heads downward, where the rain falleth upward, and where the sea remaineth in its bed, though its support cometh from above, and is not placed beneath?"

"It is to explain these great mysteries, Señor Don Fernando, my gracious master, that I would have this Colon at once go forth. We may see, nay, we have demonstration, that the earth is a sphere, and yet we do not see that the waters fall from its surface any where. The hull of a ship is larger than her top-masts, and yet the last are first visible on the ocean, which proveth that the body of the vessel is concealed by the form of the water. This being so, and all who have voyaged on the ocean know it to be thus, why doth not the water flow into a level, here, on our own shores? If the earth be round, there must be means to encircle it by water, as well as by land – to complete the entire journey, as well as to perform a part. Colon proposeth to open the way to this exploit, and the monarch that shall furnish the means will live in the memories of our descendants, as one far greater than a conqueror. Remember, illustrious Señor, that all the east is peopled with Infidels, and that the head of the church freely bestoweth their lands on any Christian monarch that may drag them from their benighted condition, into the light of God's favor. Believe me, Doña Isabella, should another sovereign grant the terms Colon requireth, and reap the advantages that are likely to flow from such discoveries, the enemies of Spain would make the world ring with their songs of triumph, while the whole peninsula would mourn over this unhappy decision."

"Whither hath the Señor Colon sped?" demanded the king, quickly; all his political jealousies being momentarily aroused by the remarks of his receiver-general: "He hath not gone again to Don John of Portugal?"

"No, Señor, my master, but to King Louis of France, a sovereign whose love for Aragon amounteth to a proverb."

The king muttered a few words between his teeth, and he paced the apartment, to and fro, with a disturbed manner; for, while no man living cared less to hazard his means, without the prospect of a certain return, the idea of another's reaping an advantage that had been neglected by himself, brought him at once under the control of those feelings that always influenced his cold and calculating policy. With Isabella the case was different. Her pious wishes had ever leaned toward the accomplishment of

Columbus' great project, and her generous nature had sympathized deeply with the noble conception, vast moral results, and the glory of the enterprise. Nothing but the manner in which her mind, as well as her religious aspirations, had been occupied by the war in Granada, had prevented her from entering earlier into a full examination of the navigator's views; and she had yielded to the counsel of her confessor, in denying the terms demanded by Columbus, with a reluctance it had not been easy to overcome. Then the gentler feelings of her sex had their influence, for, while she too reflected on what had just been urged, her eye glanced around the room and rested on the beautiful face of Mercedes, who sat silent from diffidence, but whose pale, eloquent countenance betrayed all the pleadings of the pure, enthusiastic love of woman.

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