ELLIOT FRANCES DICKINSON

OLD COURT LIFE IN SPAIN; VOL. 1

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Содержание

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PREFACE

IN no boastful spirit I gratefully acknowledge the flattering success of *Old Court Life in France*, written twenty years ago. It is precisely owing to the favour with which the public in England, America, and on the Continent still honour this work that I have endeavoured to reproduce on the same plan some pictures of early Spanish history comparatively little known to the general public.

Nothing can possibly be more thrilling and more romantic.

It is with the earlier and less known passages of old Court life I have dealt down to the reign of Ferdinand and Isabel, from which period the history of Spain loses its peculiar identity and becomes merged into that of Europe.

If I have loved the courtly history I also love the country. A great part of this work was written in Spain, in the very places where the events occurred. May the reader share the same enthusiasm I felt in describing them!

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CHAPTER I
Introduction

HOW great is Spain! How mighty! From the rugged mountains of the Asturias, their base washed by stormy waves, and the giddy heights of the Pyrenean precipices – an eternal barrier between rival peoples – to the balmy plains of the South, where summer ever reigns! A world within itself, with a world's variety! *Quien dice España dice todo!*

And its history is as varied as the land. First, according to the legend, Hercules set his pillars, or "keys" – the *ne plus ultra* of land and sea – on the rock of Calpe (Gibraltar) in Europe, and on Abyla (Ceuta) in Africa. And, that no one should doubt it, he placed his temple on the water-logged flats, half-sea, half-land, behind Cadiz, long remembered by the Moors as the "district of Idols," near the city of Gades, where Geryon dwelt, from whom Hercules "lifted" that troop of fat oxen which he was destined so long to drive wearily about the earth. In memory of all which Charles the Fifth, the great Emperor, carried Hercules' pillars on his shield, with the proud motto, *Ne plus ultra*, and the city of Cadiz (Gades) still bears them as its arms.

Then, tradition past, came invaders from the earliest times, Celts, Phœnicians, and Greeks, driving the Iberians from their rightful lands. The Carthaginians, too, crossed from Africa along the southern coast, and settled at Cartagena, which still bears their name.

The Romans next appeared, victorious under Pompey and Cæsar, spreading over Spain, but especially powerful at Seville, Cordoba, Toledo, Segovia, and Tarragona, where they have left their mark in mighty monuments.

A race of uncivilised warriors followed from the North, so powerful that two Roman emperors perished in battle with them. Of the precise seat of the Gothic nation it is hard to speak with certainty. It is, however, known that they came from the extreme north, spreading to the borders of the Black Sea, into Asia Minor in the east, and to the south of Spain in the west. They are mentioned by Pliny, about sixty years before Christ, and later by Tacitus, who twice refers to them as "Gothones." There were so many tribes, Visigoths, Astrogoths, Gepidæ, and even Vandals, that their story is as a tangled web, mixed with that of all nations, but it is clear that those who concern our present purpose came down into Spain from Narbonne and Toulouse.

It is strange how soon these savage northmen discarded their wooden idols, Woden, Thor, and Balder, the gods of thunder and of the sun – so that when Constantine the Great christianised the world, the Gothic chief Wulfila was ready to become a convert. Who this Wulfila was, and how he came to be at Constantinople, is not clear. As Bishop of the Goths he returned to missionarise his countrymen, the Dacian tribes, in the mighty plains of Philippopolis (A.D. 310-314), and made a translation of the Bible into Gothic. Even in our own day something of this precious manuscript remains, beautifully written in letters of gold on purple vellum, at the Swedish University of Upsala.

From the earliest times the Goths had a rude alphabet (Runes), which Wulfila increased, with letters closely resembling English, in his translation of the Scriptures.

Rude indeed! The letters were formed by staves on wooden boards, but all the same were destined to become most ornamental. Gothic letters are still in use for decorative purposes. Numerous Gothic manuscripts exist, written in these picturesque characters, and the inscription over the portal of Pedro el Cruel at the Alcazar at Seville is in Gothic. To this day, too, in the Muzaraba Chapel, under the eastern tower of the Cathedral of Toledo, the service is celebrated according to the Christian rite from Gothic missals, dating from the time of King Recaredo.

The line of Gothic rulers in Spain lasted for nearly two centuries and a half. No less than thirty kings succeeded each other in that period, most of whom died either by violence or in battle.

Alaric, “the scourge of God,” never came into Spain, but Eurico, his immediate successor, did. Eurico was the greatest warrior of his time, and so versed in Christian polemics that he insisted on the entire nation becoming Arians like himself. Nothing but the close contact of the Goths with that hotbed of heresy, Constantinople, can account for a semi-barbarian indulging in a choice of divers forms of doctrine, nor for the power the Gothic bishops arrogated to themselves after the precedent of the Eastern prelates up to the time of Witica. Like the Greek patriarchs they were mixed up in every political intrigue, conspiracy, and revolution; made and unmade kings at their pleasure, and greatly influenced the ecclesiastical world by the decrees of their councils at Toledo. The Goths were, indeed, for ages a priest-ridden nation, and the names of their great archbishops have come down to us as landmarks in the land.

So high did party feeling run between Arians and Orthodox that Leovigildô caused his only son to be executed because he had called an Arian bishop “a servant of the devil,” and refused to “communicate” with him. Yet Leovigildô was a great king according to his lights, sat on a raised throne among his long-haired chiefs, and had money coined in his name bearing an effigy of himself. Even now a dim halo of the pomp of the Basileus seems to shine around him, as we picture him wearing the Gothic crown, clothed in an ermine mantle, with the purple sandals of empire on his feet.

How early is the religion of peace turned to strife! We are in the sixth century among a new race, and already the flames of persecution are blazing. Two parties divide the kingdom, “the bigots” and “the Romanisers,” degenerate Goths, who aspire in dress and manners to ape the culture of Byzantium, as opposed to the cloddish habits of the “bigots,” content to know how to master a horse, draw the long bow, launch the javelin, and follow their king to battle. Whether this type of original Goth would have brought back the worship of Thor and Woden does not appear. At least under these idols there was unity; the sacrifice of human victims formed a convenient method of getting rid of prisoners, and the temporary altars among migratory tribes, served by male and female priests, were simple and convenient.

But Recaredo, on his accession, settled the question by becoming (like the mass of his subjects) a Catholic, after a synod of sixty-seven bishops, held at Toledo, had solemnly decided in favour of the orthodoxy of that Church. Perhaps his religious divergences might not have been so unquestioningly accepted, had he not defeated King Gouteran and 60,000 Franks. A Goth must know how to fight, or he was nothing; and thus it came to pass that the theology of a commander, brave enough to hurl destruction on his foes, was thankfully accepted.

Unlike the majority of his predecessors, Recaredo died in his bed (A.D. 601), applauded by all men for his wisdom in completing the union of the conquered Iberians with the Goths, and forming what was destined to become the future kingdom of Spain.

Eleven kings pass, and now (A.D. 680) Recesvinto, whom all men loved, son of Chindavinto, lies dead upon a bed of state, raised on a dais, draped with purple hangings; the four pillars of the canopy are plated with sheets of gold, and a crown formed by strings of jewels, depending from a circlet set with uncut stones, hangs over his head.

So bushy and matted is his hair – worn in the fashion of the Goths, in long loose curls – and so thick his beard, that the sunken features of the good old King are almost hidden. For twenty-three years Recesvinto has reigned in peace, and now he lies in honoured death, while gathered around him is such pomp as the nation possesses of golden crome and kingly insignia; ermine-lined robe, and silken vest, sandals and buskins laced with gold, the baton of command and the Gothic sceptre long borne in battle by their kings.

The vaulted chamber in which he lies in the castle of Gerticos is lined with planks of shining pine, on which some rude embroidery is stretched. The hallowed roof is formed of thick beams and rafters, and huge fireplaces flank either end, filled now with strong-smelling herbs, rosemary and wild myrtle, lavender and thyme, loose sprigs of which, with yew and cypress, are strewn on the rudely worked counterpane which covers the corpse. Broadswords with huge hilts are crossed upon

the walls, along with solidly embossed shields and heavily topped lances, the implements of the chase, and skins of wolves and deer, which have fallen by the prowess of those royal hands, now lying white and cold in death, crossed on his breast, clasping a crucifix! Saddles, too, and the silver trappings of his war-horse, are there, and Runic bracelets, collars, and buckles; all the paraphernalia of a Gothic chief, come down from Dacian ancestors, ranged on tables full in the crimson rays of the setting sun, streaming through the small bars of the uncurtained casements, and illuminating each detail in flickering patches as of flame.

On an oaken bench an altar has been raised to receive his last confession, devoutly made, as he felt death approaching. The Eucharist is still present in a jewelled box, the cup, platter, and crucifix, while priests and acolytes, in stoles and copes, offer up silent prayers for his departed soul. Clouds of incense darken the room and mount into the lofty vaulting of the roof in huge shadowy masses, which to the superstitious mind might shape into the outlines of dead Gothic kings, hovering over the form of the royal brother who has joined them in the world beyond.

Around the chamber are gathered the warriors and chiefs who have followed him in battle, habited in the full loose garments of peace, bound in with girdles and waistbands. Tall, strong men, with blue eyes and fair skins, who, by their dress, might be mistaken for Roman senators, save for the pervading colour of their abundant hair, passing from every tint of pale straw colour to a dull red, their bare arms circled with bracelets and amulets, on which, spite of Christian doctrine, charms and cabalistic signs are engraved.

Chief among them stands Hilderic, Governor of Nîmes (for the south of France up to the centre is Gothic), a massive, large-limbed man of brutal courage, whose life has passed in feuds and battles with Franks and Basques, never hesitating at any act of cruelty that would extend his power. A fierce crimson hue is on his broad face from constant exposure, and there are scars on neck and cheek, calculated to inspire sympathy with his courage, if his ferocious expression did not turn them rather into a cause of dread. Beside him stands Gunhild of Maguelone, a turbulent soldier of inferior position, wanting in the authority assumed by Hilderic.

Both these ambitious chiefs have been intriguing for the crown, as Recesvinto grew old, hating each other bitterly while he lived, and now that he is dead, bearing themselves with an irreverent indifference painful to behold, talking in loud whispers to those about, and laughing at rude jokes, especially Hilderic, who stands apart stroking the head of a favourite wolf-dog of gigantic size.

Beside them is a Greek, Paul by name, who has made his way into favour by extraordinary valour. Of his origin no one is certain; of polished exterior, his superior civilisation is apparent in manners and in dress, much more gaudy and ornate than that of the rest. A mantle of fine blue cloth falls in ample folds about his graceful form, with a certain Oriental amplitude easy to distinguish, and in his hand he carries a scarlet cap.

Paul is to head a revolution by-and-by, under Hilderic; then, unsuccessful, to be dragged by the hair of his head (*more Gotico*), between two horses – friends and allies to-day, mortal enemies to-morrow – such is the custom of these chiefs, often incited by the rancour of the women, who appear in history as more bloodthirsty, if possible, than the men.

Aëtius is there also, and Turismundo and Sisenanth, all mighty nobles, and placed modestly behind a noble Goth, verging into years, noticeable for the merciful disposition expressed in his wrinkled face; Wamba is his name, the friend of the oppressed and of the tillers of the soil, poor slaves whom no man heeds – even of the Jews, whom he insists upon treating as members of the great human family; a brave, determined man of the old Dacian type, notable among the fiery spirits around. As he has great possessions, to which he attends himself, he is known as “the farmer,” in derision of his simple tastes. Wamba is no kinsman to Recesvinto, but a whisper has gone forth that he is destined to succeed him. The Church, at this time most powerful, favours him, and he is the only chief present whose record is free from crime. Many and many a time he has fought shoulder to shoulder with the

king who now lies dead. To him the funeral chamber brings a genuine sorrow – not even pretended by the rest – and as he gazes on the features of his friend, tears rise and moisten his eyes.

Behind Wamba stands his beloved follower, Ervig, a youth whose olive-complexioned face and clear brown eyes show alien blood. His mother, a Gothic princess, was kinswoman to King Chindavinto, but his father was a Greek. As yet no one reads the unscrupulous ambition of his soul. Indeed, he hardly realises it himself. Crime often lies dormant in seemingly innocent natures, until occasion discovers it. The evil spirit within him is to be developed by the indulgence of his patron Wamba, who, unknowingly, is warming a serpent in his breast.

All present fall back as Julianus, the Archbishop of Toledo, enters. He has hurried from Toledo to be present ere the old king breathes his last. But death waits for no man. As he enters the homely chamber of death with an overwhelming majesty of look and manner, his cold, impassive glance dominates them all. Nor is the dignity of costume wanting. His monastic mantle is secured at the neck by a golden clasp, and drapes heavily about him; the sleeves of his tunic are lined with precious fur; on his finger is the pastoral ring, and from his neck is suspended a jewelled cross; a dress at once simple and costly, answering to the imperious expression of his face, looking out from the folds of a dark silken cowl, which falls back from his head, his deeply-sunk eyes taking in at a glance all the details around him.

Julianus is the foremost prelate in learning and power the Goths ever had. Next, indeed, in historical importance to Isidor of Seville, though much earlier in point of date; his influence and preponderance are at this time supreme. Possibly he was by birth a Jew, though early attached to the Chapter of Toledo. A churchman of great literary gifts, restless, unscrupulous, ambitious; the very Hildebrand of those early times, who raised the see of Toledo to a position of unparallelled supremacy, presiding during his life at various councils most important in the history of the mediæval church.

The archbishop is attended by his secretary, a lay brother, habited in black, carrying papers, who (as reflecting the tyranny of his master) stands, without daring to raise his eyes, more like an automaton than a living man.

The only one whom the archbishop condescends to notice among the assembly is Wamba, who holds himself somewhat apart from the rest. He at once singles him out and salutes him with a profound obeisance which Wamba, without evincing any surprise, returns in silence.

To look on the face of the dead is a duty among these savage races, who believe that the soul of the departed lingers for awhile about its tenement of clay. But there is another and more powerful incentive which has assembled these chiefs from the far-off provinces of the kingdom.

Round the bed of the dead king they stand to choose his successor. Absolute silence reigns. Each man is jealous of his neighbour, and convinced that his own claims will prevail. Especially is this the case with Hilderic, who has a secret compact with the Jews who fled from oppression in the south of Spain to his government of Narbonne, and he knows that they will gladly furnish him with funds to harass the Christian nobles.

At last the voice of the archbishop is raised to break the strange hush around.

“Chiefs and nobles of the Gothic nation,” he says, in a tone of authority, while all eyes are fixed on him, “the king who lies here reigned in peace according to the Gospel. I am not come to make his funeral oration. All present know his good deeds and the moderation of his rule. For twenty-three years the sword of the Goth has rested in the scabbard. But this calm cannot continue. An able man must succeed him. One” – and as he spoke the silken cowl fell altogether back, displaying the powerful lines of his tonsured head, the broad intellectual brow, and the erectness of command – “one, I say, alone is worthy, and that is Wamba. He has no enemies.”

As a long-drawn breath of eager expectation looses itself with a distinct note of relief, so did a low sound pass through the dead chamber as Julianus spoke. On every countenance came an expression of astonishment, but it was astonishment unmixed with opposition or anger. A relief

indeed to pent-up feelings, which finally found vent in a burst of loud applause, each man falling back instinctively to where Wamba had placed himself at the foot of the bed. Then, as with one voice, came the response:

"Yes, Wamba! He shall be our king!"

"But," cried Wamba, his wrinkled face working with emotion, as he advanced quickly to where Julianus stood, "my consent is needful to this proposal. Now I refuse it. I am not of an age to rule over my valorous countrymen. I am old, I am unworthy. The strength of my arm is gone. I am unfit to lead the dauntless Goths to battle."

"Then rule over them at home," is the short rejoinder of the archbishop. "In a nation of soldiers a peaceful sovereign is best. You are great in wisdom, O Wamba! Recesvinto was no warrior, and we are here to mourn his loss."

"Yes," replies Hilderic, secretly rejoiced at the choice of Julianus, as from the age of Wamba he will have time and occasion to complete his treacherous plans before the new king's probable death, for to Hilderic Wamba appears an aged visionary, easy to be put aside when opportunity is ripe, a convenient stop-gap for a time – "yes, Wamba, you are the only man we will accept without bloodshed."

"Impossible!" cries Wamba, his cheeks reddening with anger. "I will accept nothing which I cannot righteously fulfil. I am unfit to reign."

"No, no!" exclaims Ervig, casting his arms about his patron's neck and affectionately saluting him. "Goodness and wisdom are the best, and those are yours, dear master."

"We *will* have you! Speak! Consent!" come as one word from the circle of nobles. "You dare not refuse the will of the chiefs," cry all, gathering round him, each more or less approving the choice on the same grounds as did Hilderic, or as considering Wamba an easy ruler, under whom every man would be his own master. Already the brows of some begin to darken at his continued refusal.

"Choose some younger man," he persists, struggling from the hands which are now laid on him; "one better fitted for the arduous duties of your king. Look at me," and he raises his grey locks and bares his furrowed forehead, "I am long past my prime." As he speaks he is retreating as best he can towards the door, when the fiery Hilderic, seizing him with one hand, with the other brandishes a naked spear.

"Look you, Wamba," says he, a dangerous fire kindling his eye, "you shall never leave this chamber, save as a dead man, or as our king."

"Dead, or as our king," came as a war-cry from all the fierce Goths, closing round him with such unseeming shouts and din, that it seemed as if their rude clamour must disturb the last sleep of the dead whose presence all had forgotten.

"You accept the crown in the sight of God?" demands the archbishop in a solemn voice, stretching forth his hands towards Wamba, who, perceiving that further opposition is useless, bows his head. "Then at this altar let us offer up our thanksgivings. The Church is with you, Wamba." And Julianus turns to the oaken table on which stands the Host, and falls upon his knees, with the priests and acolytes around, followed by all those fierce spirits quelled for an instant by the might of his power.

"And," says Wamba, as last of all that assembly he slowly bends his knee in the place of honour reserved for him next to the archbishop, "countrymen! let your prayers be for me also, that I may not be deemed unworthy!"

Again the incense rises in shadowy clouds, filling the chamber with strange outlines. Again the voices of the priests rise and fall, and human interests are lulled for awhile in the presence of the dead king. Again the chiefs remember for a brief moment his just and tranquil reign, and many prayers are recited with apparent fervour for the repose of his soul.

Within nineteen days after the election of his successor, Recesvinto was buried and Wamba crowned by Julianus in the Cathedral of Toledo. All Spain was jubilant, for he was a blameless man;

indeed, a fond remembrance yet clings to his name at Toledo. The words *Tiempo del Rey Wamba* still point to some lingering impression of national prosperity and of a time of plenty, answering to the days of the "Saxon kings" in England. And Wamba was indeed no imbecile, or weak-handed in war, as Hilderic and his friend the Greek Paul pretended, when, helped by the Jews, they broke into rebellion. He was a warrior indeed, who, though old, could lead the Goths to victory and punish his enemies by slaughter and torture as was the habit of his nation. After which the "Farmer King," as he was affectionately called, to indicate his simple tastes and care for the neglected serfs, returned to Toledo to enjoy his triumph, descending the hill to the cathedral, through the narrow streets, much as we see them now, followed by a long procession of captive Basques with shaven heads, a signal mark of humiliation to the abundant-haired Goths (the rebel Paul, in impious mockery, decorated with a leather crown, stuck on his head with melted pitch, and a sceptre of reeds in his hand), to be received by the Archbishop Julianus under the sculptures of the Gate, at the head of his clergy.

But the decline of native valour had gone too far for any single man to stem the downward tide. The free constitution of the Nomad tribes had given place to a military despotism, alternating with, and controlled by, a bigoted priesthood. The tremendous superiority of Julianus delayed for a time this downward course, but could not arrest it. Even his iron will could not stop the decadence of a nation. Each chief – or duke (*dux*) – was king in his own district, and free to lead a life of idleness and crime. If the Goths still fought well, it was only against each other, or when pressed by necessity to arrest the inroads of the Franks, a much more masculine nation than themselves.

In the south, the Moors were eagerly watching for some chance of crushing out the Northmen. At home, the Jews, persecuted, ill-treated, and numerous, were ready to join with every rebel, and to welcome any invader, while, in spite of the efforts of the king, the freedmen, sunk in hopeless slavery, tilled the land for their masters and lived like the beasts of the field. All who possessed more than themselves or who amassed riches were exposed to the envious rapacity of the nobles.

Thus the nation was threatened with destruction on all sides, yet so short-sighted and effete had the Goths become, that, deluded with the semblance of a false peace, they lived as they listed, unconscious of the ruin gathering around.

For a time all went well with Wamba. The vigour of his government had been a surprise to those who had elected him, to none more than the archbishop himself, who little expected to find a ruler of such determination in the modest-minded chief. No woman swayed his councils, neither wife, daughter, nor leman. All his love was centred in Ervig, whom he constantly advanced step by step to fresh honours and commands. So much was Wamba beloved by the people and nation, that the erudite but ambitious Julianus, still hoping to govern him with courtly flattery, wrote his panegyric in the *Storia Wamba*, extolling him as the pattern of a Christian hero; and Ervig, who had developed into a subtle statesman, greatly favoured by the archbishop, helped him to turn the elegant sentences.

When Julianus had declared on Wamba's election that "the Church was with him," it was in the belief that he was dealing with a weak old man whom he could blindly lead. He never dreamed that he would dare to touch the privileges of his order. Perhaps Wamba thought so himself before power imposed duties on his conscience. But when he insisted on keeping the clergy in check, and exercised his prerogative in enacting new laws of reform, Julianus secretly resolved on his destruction. Imbued with the spirit of the Roman pontiffs he would permit no meddling of the secular arm with his authority. Even the king, according to Julianus, must submit to the decrees of the great councils which he, as archbishop, was so fond of calling together, and which were destined to make his name famous throughout the world.

To effect the downfall of Wamba a tool was needed, and that tool was Ervig. Striking with a master hand on the baser chords of his nature, vanity and ambition, the relentless archbishop crushed out of him every spark of gratitude and love and moulded him to his hand as the potter moulds the clay.

"It is for the salvation of the Church of God," whispered Julianus, "a holy deed. It is Wamba who is the Judas, not you, my son," in answer to Ervig's feeble arguments. "Wamba has basely betrayed his master, and must be cast out as a brand to the burning! You are of royal blood, Wamba is but a hireling. Instead of standing as second to the throne, it is your right to mount it, and prove to this backslider that the same hand which crowned him can cast him down."

"But you will spare his life," pleaded Ervig, pricked sorely in his conscience in spite of the casuistry of the archbishop.

"That will be in the hands of the Lord," answered the arrogant priest. "I am but the instrument of the Most High."

Wamba did not live in the fortress over the city of Toledo, the present Alcazar, but in a palace near the church now called Juan de los Reyes, situated on a plateau overlooking the Tagus, and lower down in the town among the citizens. Instinctively he was conscious of a change in Ervig. He shunned him, he was short and reticent in his replies, assumed a haughty indifference to his commands, and so openly opposed the new clerical laws that Wamba severely reproved him. After which a strange thing happened. Wamba fell into a deep sleep, sitting in the hall of his palace, lulled by the ripple of the river far below; a stupor, rather than a sleep, for he could not be aroused.

"The hand of God is upon him," cried the false Ervig, whom the attendants had summoned. "Call the archbishop. He must not die unshriven."

When consciousness returned, Wamba found himself habited as a monk, with a dark cowl over his eyes, lying on a wooden trestle, more like a bier than a resting-place for a living man. The walls around were bare and discoloured with mildew, a dim uncertain light fell on his face from a narrow window too high in the wall to reveal anything without. A terrible oppression overwhelmed him; he could scarcely open his eyes, and every limb seemed paralysed.

Whether the sleeping potion administered by Ervig had not been potent enough to end life, or whether the strength of his constitution had resisted its full action, no man will ever know. Gradually, as his senses returned, he understood the treason of which he was the victim. He was in a monk's dress, and, according to the Gothic law, whoever once assumes the ecclesiastical habit is dead to actual life. As far as his kingly office was concerned they might as well have sealed him in a tomb, and read the prayers for the dead over him!

"And Ervig had done this! Ervig!" For he dimly remembered a drink which Ervig had at his request offered him before he fell asleep. In that moment more than the bitterness of death passed over him. Death brings forgetfulness. Wamba's returning senses came with an agonised recalling of all his former life, out of which rose the image of that one false friend whom he had so loved and trusted. Moment by moment all became clear; Ervig had, during his swoon, clothed him as a monk. He was dethroned!

Suddenly the door of the cell opens, and the stately figure of the archbishop appears. With straight swift strides he advances to where Wamba lies; his priestly robe drooping around him with a heavy patrician grace, his ebon hair falling over his ample brow, a veil to the glittering eyes beneath, which burn with an evil fire. Like a phantom he stands over the prostrate king – his form in shadow, sombrely defined against the window, and in an instant all the cell seems to palpitate with life; the walls animate with the expectant eyes of monks placed there to watch the swoon of the king – a dark and sinister background revealed by the scanty light, in which Julianus dominates like some wicked giant about to pounce upon his prey.

Ervig was beside him, standing with averted looks that he might not meet the gaze of Wamba, who still lay with half closed eyes, passively watching the movements of his enemies.

Was it to be life or death? He cared not! A chill as of death curdled his blood. The cell whirled and a mighty darkness reeled down upon him. Wounded to the quick, he would not even condescend to expostulate. Before such base treachery his righteous soul revolted. They had him in their power, let them wreak their will. His life was done, his reign ended. Against the law under which he lay there

was no appeal. Shut up in a subterranean prison how could he communicate with any who might dare to restore him to his throne? It was subtly planned, and by a master mind!

Wamba is, however, the first to break silence. He heaves a deep sigh and opens his eyes, passing his hands slowly over his face, ghastly under the effects of the poison. “You have been a false friend to me,” he says, addressing himself, not to the archbishop, but to the muffled figure which stands behind him. “You have returned evil for good. In what have I injured you?” His voice is low, but he speaks with the calmness of one who has already passed the gates of death.

“Accuse not Ervig,” answers the archbishop, in a tone of lofty command, placing himself before Wamba, so as to fill with his ample draperies the narrow space of light. “It is the Holy Church in my person you have offended. As an unfaithful son you are cast out. Ervig has but done his duty, for you, Wamba, are a recreant unfit to reign.”

“And does the duty of Ervig lead him to succeed me?” asks Wamba, raising himself painfully from the pallet and leaning forward, so that the outlines of his sunken features appear under the cowl.

“It does,” answers Julianus, still shielding Ervig from the glance of contempt which shoots from the eyes of Wamba.

“It is well,” is the answer. “You made me king, Julianus, against my will. Now, against my will, you unmake me. Poor and wretched instrument,” he adds, raising his hand towards Ervig, who was crouching in the shadow near the wall, “beware how you cross Julianus. Take example by me, and let no love for the Gothic tempt you to do justice to the people.”

“Dare not to question the judgment of God,” exclaims the archbishop, an expression of lofty scorn lighting up the evil brilliancy of his deeply sunken eyes. “To Ervig you owe your life. I would have flung you into the fires of purgatory to purify your sinful soul, but his counsels were of mercy.”

“I thank him not,” replies Wamba. “I am old, and my time in this world is short. I would far rather have sunk into eternal sleep, than lead the life to which you have condemned me.”

So deeply moved was Ervig, despite the dignity which awaited him, that he did not reply. He was a weak, unworthy nature, bad, but not wholly depraved. He had been worked upon and warped by the sophistries of the unscrupulous archbishop, which now, in the presence of his benefactor, seemed to lose all their weight. Even his ambition to reign wavered for the moment before his remorse, as one who having braced himself to commit a crime, yet lacks the courage to carry out the measure of his iniquity.

So evident was this, that, full of the fear of what his affection for Wamba might prompt him to do, Julianus brought the interview to an abrupt end. Without another word he passed out of the cell followed by Ervig, and the army of tonsured monks, who had borne Wamba in, now returned to watch his gradual return to active life.

The “Farmer King” had, however, many friends. The Goths loved him, and the Jews (a powerful contingent, richer than all the rest) respected him. So humble was he in peace, so brilliant in war, and under that calm exterior gifted with such energy that he had inspired the State with a new life, as the last great spirit of the old Dacian stock, that Julianus became seriously alarmed, and hastened to call a Council of Bishops to ratify the accession of Ervig to the throne.

The sentence which was passed upon Wamba was thus worded: “As there are some who, being clothed in the garments of penitence when in peril of death, after having recovered, claim that the vow is not binding – let all such remember that they are baptised without will or knowledge, and yet no man can remove baptism without damnation; as it is with baptism, so with monastic vows, and we [the Council] declare that all who violate this law are worthy of the severest punishment, and are incapable of holding any office or civil dignity during their natural lives.”

By this it would seem that, however the nation clung to the memory of the good old king, yet these once brave and manly warriors had sunk into an incredibly superstitious and priest-ridden nation, fit only to be crushed in the hands of the first bold invader, and that all this internal strife was

but as an invitation to the Moors across the Straits, and the Basques in the mountains of the north, to take advantage of their weakness.

Of Ervig it is said that, after a few years passed in vassalage to Julianus, remorse overcame him, and he took to his bed and died.

Under Witica the Court of Toledo was stained with blood. He was an ignorant, arrogant tyrant, who only understood present advantage to himself. To prevent possible rebellion – and hostile parties were many and ran high, as in preceding reigns – he dismantled the city walls and fortresses, and in his mad eagerness for the security of the throne murdered every kinsman whose life lay within his hand. Particularly was his insane jealousy directed against his cousin Favila, Dux of Cantabria, who was executed, and Witica had prepared the same fate for his son Pelayo, but he escaped to become later on the saviour of his country in driving out the Moors from the north of Spain.

Then his suspicions spent themselves on another kinsman, the Gothic chief Theodofredo. His eyes were put out, and he was imprisoned in the damp vault under the castle of Cordoba.

Half Mussulman, and wholly brutal, Witica ingeniously united the vices of both nations – the Iberians and the Goths – and indulged in such a numerous harem as put even the Moors to shame. In vain did the Church thunder against this very peccant son. Julianus was long dead. He laughed at the threats of the Pope, and, like his Gothic ancestor, Alaric, threatened to lay siege to Rome.

"Why," cried he, when presiding in the Chapter at Toledo, clothed in his royal robes, the crown and sceptre beside him, in the midst of the trembling canons, who knew it was at their life's peril to venture to contradict him – "why shall not our Gothic damsels adorn themselves with the jewels of the Vatican, and our coffers be replenished with the treasury of St. Peter's?"

Incensed at the opposition of the Archbishop Sindaredo, who dared to expostulate with him, he appointed his own brother Opas, at heart as profligate as himself, Archbishop of Seville, to take his seat along with Sindaredo in the episcopal chair of Toledo. (Opas was the most unscrupulous prelate that ever wore the mitre. Even Julianus was his inferior in secular power, for Opas was a prince, born of the old Gothic stock.)

"Since the Church of Toledo will not yield to me, her lawful spouse," said Witica, with savage sarcasm, "she shall, like a harlot, have two husbands – Sindaredo and Opas. No foreign potentate with a triple crown shall preach to *me*."

Witica, bad as he was, is yet entitled to be considered as the first reformer. He promulgated a law freeing the clergy from the vow of celibacy. No threats or anathemas of any mitred Julianus stopped him. No obedience to monkish precepts governed his mind. He revelled in lawless licentiousness, and in outraging the pietism of the time. Of Witica it was said that "he taught all Spain to sin." Naturally the monkish chronicles have unmercifully vilified him. Yet there is much of the humoristic coarseness of the Middle Ages in his character; a grotesque setting at naught of all law and *convenance*, which the fashion of politer times – not a whit less vile – softened and refined into a quasi-elegance perhaps more repulsive.

While the churches are closed under an interdict, the altars bare, the people disarmed, the castles and fortresses dismantled lest they might harbour enemies, and disorder and sensuality reign unchecked throughout the land, a youthful avenger is growing up in the person of Roderich, son of Theodofredo, now dead, some say *murdered*, in the gloomy dungeons of Cordoba.

Of royal birth, reared and educated among the cultivated Romans, Roderich is not only a brilliant knight, but a master of all the civilisation of the age, prompt at all martial exercise, of graceful and polished manners, and eager to avenge the wrongs of his father and of the Goths. Like a meteor, this young hero flashes upon Spain, defeats Witica "the Wicked," in a pitched battle, and imprisons him in the same castle of Cordoba, where his father has lately died. Not a dissentient voice is heard on the battle-field when Roderich, raised on a shield by the soldiers, as was the custom of his ancestors, and standing erect to face the four quarters of the world, is proclaimed King of the Western Goths, in place of the sons of Witica.

And now we come to the history of the beautiful Moor, Egilona, daughter of the King of Algiers, who was at this time shipwrecked on the coast of Spain at Denia. As the royal vessel grounded on the sand (says the chronicle), the rabble of Denia – and what a rabble, in all ages, is that of Spain, how greedy, how rapacious – rushed into the surf, to capture and make spoil. But the grandeur of the illustrious company assembled on the deck somewhat awed them as they paused with greedy eyes, – men and women, sumptuously attired, facing them with all the haughtiness of Oriental dignity. In the stern, closely pressed within a circle of her Moslem guards, stood a lovely princess, lightly veiled, her turban ablaze with jewels, and as the vessel heaved in upon the swell, and the mob found themselves close upon the strangers, scimitars flashed and jewelled daggers gleamed. Then some of the older Moors, understanding the helplessness of their position, leaped on shore, and falling on their knees before the alcaide, who stood by, unable to understand the meaning of what he saw, implored his mercy towards a royal princess.

"She whom you behold," said one sumptuously robed African, who seemed to lead the expedition, his brow covered by a green turban, on which glittered an aigrette of inestimable worth, "is the only daughter of the King of Algiers, whom we are conducting to her affianced husband, the King of Tunis. Foul winds, as you see, have driven us on your coast. We were compelled to make for land, or imperil the life of our inimitable mistress. Allah has preserved her. Do you, Señor Alcaide, not prove more cruel than the waves."

The alcaide, a worthy man, much overcome by the magnificence of these sea-borne guests, bowed his head in acquiescence, and called on his alguazils to keep off the crowd. "I will myself conduct your princess to the castle," he replied to the noble Moor who had addressed him. "Let her freely tread the Spanish soil. It shall be to her as safe as the African land of her fathers."

"The castle!" cried the same dazzling Moor who had already spoken, stopping the alcaide short. "The castle! You would then treat this regal bride as a captive? By the tomb of the Prophet, Señor Alcaide, you do ill! Know that her ransom will be to you, and to your race for ever, riches incalculable, such as the genii in dreams bear to the faithful – if you deal well with her and let her go."

Another and another of the circle of superbly robed strangers also spoke.

"All we have is yours, Sir Alcaide."

The fair captive herself held out her hands in supplication towards the excellent magistrate, who stood perplexed, as divided between duty and inclination.

"Will you," she asked, in a soft voice, "imprison one whom the sea has set free?"

In vain! The honesty of this Spanish official is a record to all time. He was a Goth of the old school, and cared neither for jewels nor gold. Much as it moved him to withstand the entreaties of so beautiful a creature, his sense of duty conquered.

"Sir Moslem," he answered, afraid at first to address himself directly to the lady with a churlish refusal, but singling out the illustrious Moor, whose words and presence showed him to be of exalted rank, "and you, fair and virtuous lady, whom the storm has drifted on our shores, greatly does it grieve me to say you nay, but my loyalty to my sovereign, Don Roderich, leaves me no choice. This princess," – pointing to the lady, who had sunk back fainting in the arms of her attendants, as soon as she was convinced of her failure to move the alcaide – "is a royal captive, whom chance has landed within the Gothic realm. Don Roderich can alone decide her fate. Within the castle I command let her seek shelter and repose, more I cannot promise."

To the court at Toledo the beautiful African journeyed, shedding many tears. To the Eastern mind she was a slave, awaiting the will of her new master. Yet it was refreshing to her feelings to be received in every town and castle with royal honours, to be still surrounded by her Moorish court, and to travel mounted on a snow-white palfrey, the wonder and astonishment of all who beheld her. Slave though she was, her head was carried high as one accustomed to receive homage. Her clear, dark eyes, sparkling and mild, shone out under the strongly marked eyebrows of the East, profuse braids of black hair hung loosely about her neck, tinkling with golden coins; a veil of silver tissue was twined

about her head, to be drawn over the face and bosom at pleasure, under a turban, to which a diadem was attached, decked with bright feathers; a long tunic, woven in the looms of her country, heavy with pearls, and trousers of a transparent fabric descended to her feet, incased in delicate slippers, a loose mantle of changing silk covering all. Nor was her horse unadorned; an embroidered saddle-cloth swept the ground, the bridle and stirrup were inlaid with gems, and even the shoes were wrought in gold.

At length, high over the wide plains which encircle Toledo, the bulk of a lofty castle rises to her eyes; the rock on which it stands so hard and defined in outline, it seems as if nature had planted it there as a pedestal to receive the burden, and to guide the majestic current of the Tagus through solemn defiles round the walls.

There, as now, the Alcazar stands, the servile city grouping at its base in long, flat lines, granite rocks breaking out between, and giant buttresses bordering the deep flood – a sadly tinted scene, terrible and weird, just touched with burning flecks when the sun sets.

In a deep valley beside the Tagus Egilona rested under a silken pavilion prepared for her, to await the coming of the king. Gloomy were her thoughts on the banks of that rock-bound river, black with granite boulders and rash and hasty in its course. What a country was this, after the exotic landscapes of Algiers, the palmy groves and plantains, the orange and lemon orchards, the ruddy pomegranates and olive grounds, and the deep valleys of the hills! What pale, dismal tints! What stern, sunless skies! Terror struck to Egilona's heart as she asked herself what kind of man this Northern king would be who dwelt in that frowning castle. Would those walls enclose her in a life-long prison? or would the dark flood beside her be her grave? Poor Egilona! a captive and a slave! How could she guess the brilliant future before her, when the aspect of nature itself heightened her fears?

Meanwhile, descending by the winding path which proudly zigzags down the hill, a glittering cavalcade reaches the archway of the Golden Gate (a monument formed in all ages for triumphant conquerors to pass through) to defile upon the bridge upheld by many piers. Gothic chiefs, magnificent in glittering armour, lances, heavy embossed casques, and gold-inlaid corselets, riding deeply-flanked horses, champing bits of gold – the great princes of the Northern court, the magnificent successors of those iron-hearted warriors who well-nigh conquered the world; mules with embroidered saddle-cloths, and gay litters and arabas furnished with striped curtains for such attendant *demoiselles* as cannot ride; gorgeous chariots, too, horsed with battle-steeds and surrounded by archers and spearmen, flags and banners waving in the sun, pages and attendants bright as exotic birds; and last of all, more dazzling than the rest, Roderich himself, clad in crimson robes, active, vigorous, and graceful, his face aglow with an excitement which heightened the wondrous beauty of his features.

For such a reputation of comeliness to have come down to us from the eighth century argues Roderich a royal Apollo indeed; but whether he favoured the raven, or if his curling locks recalled the glow of the dawn, can only be conjectured.

As he draws rein and dismounts before the silken draperies of the pavilion, within which the peerless Egilona rests, his soul is moved with tender expectation. He enters; their eyes meet, and he is struck dumb! That mischievous boy, Cupid, has pierced him with his dart, and then and there he swears a silent oath that Egilona shall be his queen.

"Come to me," he says, in a soft voice, as he bends on her his glowing eyes. "Come without fear. Let no sorrow cloud that royal brow. Beside me, your path shall ever be made smooth, and a shelter found, where you shall rest alone. As in the court of your father, so shall you be in mine. All I crave is leave to kiss your feet, most incomparable stranger. This favour you will not refuse."

At which Egilona, blushing to the painted henna circles which increased the splendour of her eyes under his ardent gaze, bows her dark head.

Then taking her hand, Roderich, kissing the delicate finger-tips tenderly, forbade her to kneel before him as she desired. With his own hands he mounted her on a palfrey, and accompanied her

up the ascent to the castle, where he installed her in the richest chambers facing the sun. And, ever more and more enslaved, the handsome young Goth, amorous by temperament and habit, became dearer and dearer to her, and fainter and fainter grew the remembrance of her African home, and that Tunisian bridegroom she had never seen; until, at last, her dainty lips opened with a "Yes," to his entreaties, and Egilona consented to become a Christian and his queen.

Wonderful are the ways of love! All this took place in a brief space. Not only Egilona, but many of her Moorish damsels, wooed by Gothic knights, eloquent with the words of passion, found their arguments so convincing, that they also not only shared in her conversion, but followed her example in marriage.

Happy Egilona! The shops in the Yacatin, the Jews' quarter, and the bales of the African merchants travelling from city to city, were ransacked for her use. The most precious merchandise, silks, gems, perfumes, and sweetmeats – all that Europe and the East possessed richest and rarest to please a lady's eye – were showered upon her, when Don Roderich led her by the broad marble stairs of the Alcazar into the pillared *patio*, followed by her African retinue, down the steep streets to the Cathedral – very different to what we see it now, though standing on the same spot, and in all ages a fair and stately edifice, said to have been founded by the Virgin herself. Children, according to ancient custom, ran before to throw flowers in her path; and bowls filled with uncut jewels and gold coins were presented to her by noble youths in silken robes. The wedding chorus was sung as she passed by, a poet reciting "How the god of love had wounded the heart of the king," the Archbishop Opas himself meeting them at the great Puerta, and blessing them as they knelt.

Jousts, tournaments and banquets, followed; the great chiefs appearing resplendent in burnished armour, embossed and enamelled in the ancient style; nothing was too costly for these delicate descendants of the rudely armed Alaric; carpet knights, all plumes and banners and worked scarfs, glittering in and out of silken tents; and revelry and dances presided over by the king and queen.

For twenty days princes and knights, assembled from all parts of Spain, kept holiday at Toledo. Every tongue declared the dark-skinned Egilona peerless among queens, and Don Roderich the comeliest of the Gothic race. Egilona was adored by her Christian consort. He turned no more longing eyes upon the venal fair who hitherto had contended for his favour, and the vessel of state glided over a crystal sea to the soft winds of prosperity under a cloudless sky.

The old lays and ballads make Roderich, in the magnificence of his youth, a rival of the Cid Campeador himself. Even his mortal enemies, the Moors, glorify him in their songs sung to the cither under the orange groves of Granada.

But already the "cloud no bigger than a man's hand" is rising on the horizon, by-and-by to obscure and darken the sun of his success.

A crown acquired by violence sits uneasily on the usurper's head. Like Witica, Don Roderich was tormented with suspicions of conspiracies and treachery among his powerful nobles. So little did the fate of his ill-starred predecessor teach him wisdom, that he permitted the same fears to haunt him, of all who were allied to him by blood. Witica's two sons were banished from Spain, and, to avoid the chance of rebellion, such defences in walls and castles as yet remained were thrown down, and the carefully constructed fortifications of the Romans levelled to the earth. Nor could a rude and warlike race be expected to maintain their early valour in the midst of such luxury and licentiousness as prevailed. For two hundred years the Gothic kings had held Spain by the prowess of their arms, and the simple habits of their forefathers – Ataulfo, Sigeric, Theodoric, Alaric, Amalaric, and his successors up to the frugal-minded Wamba, the "Farmer King."

Now, under Witica and Roderich, effeminacy and sloth led on to cowardice. The Gothic soldiers who had been galvanised into a temporary show of valour by the recent strife between Witica and Roderich, soon sank back into the inactivity of a wanton court, feasting, dancing, and wassailing in a style more becoming the satraps of an Eastern potentate than the chiefs of a free and generous people. Who could have recognised in these voluptuous youths, who hung about the person of Don

Roderich, the descendants of those stern and frugal Teutonic heroes of the North, marching down like thunder-gods to conquer the nations?

Pomp there was, it is true, and splendour, and civilisation, and an elegance of manners and of thought unknown before; but the heart of the Gothic nation was cankered at the core, and the warlike Moors, ever on the lookout to snatch from their grasp the fertile Peninsula showing out so fair across the Straits, noted it with joy.

CHAPTER II
Don Roderich – Gathering of the Chiefs – Trial of Witica

HOW strange to think of Cordoba before the Moors, who so imbued it with the spirit of Moslem life! Those famous Caliphs of the rival houses of Mirvan and Ummaija, and the great Abdurraman, whose wealth and luxury read like a dream; Eastern luxury in banquets under painted domes; odalisques and white-robed eunuchs gliding beneath fretted arches, vaults of alabaster and porphyry; harems with walls shedding showers of jasmine and rose-leaves, the soft breathings of *guzla* and cither, dark heads crowned with orient pearls, and tissue-robed Sultanas reclining on golden thrones.

"Kartuba the important," the gem of the Carthaginians, – ancient when the Gentiles reigned in the time of Moses; possessed in turn by Greeks and Romans, the birthplace of Seneca, Lucan, Averroës, and El Gran Capitan Gonsalvo Aguilar de Cordoba; for ages the capital of Southern Spain, – is to be considered exclusively, before the advent of the Moors, as a Roman settlement, the grandly regular aspect of these masters of the world impressed upon its buildings. Siding with Pompey in the time of the Republic, it was destroyed by the vengeance of Cæsar. Rebuilt by Marcellus and repeopled by penniless patricians from Rome, it was for a time called "Patricia"; under all names a sober and dignified capital gathered round its ancient castle on the banks of the Guadalquivir.

At all times Cordoba is beautiful; the verdant slopes of the Sierra Morena, rising precipitously from the very gates, look down serenely on the strife of rival peoples; lovely retreats, dotted with white *quintas*, farms, mills, vineyards, and olive-grounds; the rugged summits rising westwards to the limits of Lusitania; the lazy Guadalquivir flowing at their base, through grassy plains dark with orange and myrtle.

Now what a desolation! A solitary shepherd pipes to his flock, as he passes at the *Ave Maria*, on the lonely road; a file of mules carrying bricks or corn succeed him; a ragged goatherd watches his kids grazing beside the river, and droves of swine burrow in the mould once trodden by the steps of heroes! Two boldly crenelated towers and a portion of the outer walls, rising from an ancient garden of exceeding sweetness, are all that remains of the palace and fortress of the Gothic kings. Thickets of roses and lilacs engulf you as you enter, broad palm leaves shroud decay, and quivering cane-brakes whisper softly of the past. A little to the left rises a lower tower, grey against the sky, another and another, the stones scarcely held together by entwining ropes of ivy – all that remains of the royal castle.

In the prison beneath, on a level with the Guadalquivir, the noble Theodofredo, father of Roderich, languishes, deprived of sight by red-hot irons held before the eyes, a favourite mode of torture, borrowed, like all that is degraded, from the Byzantines. Now Witica, who commanded this savage act, has taken his place in the same prison, and is to be judged by Theodofredo's son. Wiser would it be, and more merciful, if Roderich should forego this vengeance. But with power have come the savage instincts of his race. The indulgence of his life has already begun to tell on his once generous nature. Little by little, he has fallen from the high position of regenerator of Spain, and, led on by evil counsel and a natural weakness inherent in his nature, has adopted the same false and cruel principles of government which he was called to the throne to reform.

Within a broad vaulted hall, the high roof supported by carved rafters, the walls hung with tapestry woven with silver thread – in which the stories of Gothic victories are rudely depicted – Roderich sits on a low silver throne. It is shaped like a shield, in remembrance of the early custom of the nomad chiefs, his ancestors, who, when invested with military command, were three times, standing upon a shield, carried round the camp, on the shoulders of stalwart Goths. A rich mantle of purple brocade covers a lightly wrought cuirass inlaid with gold. The Gothic crown, which has,

in the altered manners of the time, come to be not of iron but of gold, set with resplendent jewels, rests upon his head, almost concealed by luxuriant masses of hair, falling on neck and shoulders, in beard and love-locks. His buskins are red, like the Eastern emperors', and his feet, shod with pearled sandals, rest on an inlaid footstool. The sceptre lies beside him with his sword, and over his head is a raised canopy of cloth of gold, decorated with inscriptions in Runic characters and quaint devices, come down from early times.

Around are the chiefs and nobles of the nation, gathered from all quarters of Spain – to judge him who lately was their king. All are men of war, habited in the superb but cumbrous armour of the time, before the delicate handling of the Moor turned metal into thin plates of steel, made swords as fine and piercing as needles, and armory a science.

Nearest to Roderich stands Ataulfo, next in succession to the throne, a generous-hearted youth, full of the old virtues of his nation. With much of the ruddy countenance of the king, he shows his Northern origin in the chestnut locks which escape from his burnished cap, and a certain blond fairness in spite of exposure to a southern sun.

Teodomir, a veteran general, comes next; as too rigid a disciplinarian for the degenerate times, he has somewhat fallen into neglect among the younger chiefs who have risen to power with the accession of the king. Teodomir is well past the prime of life, but retains the keen eye and stalwart limbs of youth, as at the head of an army he will show before many years are past. The historic warrior, Pelistes, is here too, already sunk into the vale of years, but, like Teodomir, strong and ready of hand and purpose, his grizzled hair shading a noble countenance. These two trusty chiefs, who present themselves in the antiquated armour of the Goths, were close friends of Roderich's father, and were specially active in raising the hasty levies for the battle which placed his son on the throne; spite of which services, as time goes by, they find themselves somewhat disregarded by the young king, who listens to more flattering counsels and secretly laughs at the rustic virtues applauded in the days of Recaredo and Wamba.

The royal lad Pelayo is also bidden, the son of that Favila, Dux of Cantabria, put to death by Witica, when he purposed to slaughter all of his blood. Pelayo stands somewhat back as becomes his youth, for who can guess that this beardless boy, with a smiling, artless face, and full blue Northern eyes will, by his fortitude, become the founder of a new race of Gothic kings, and by his endurance and valour raise up a native dynasty in Spain?

A crowd of young courtiers, most careful of the adornment of their persons, fill up the space behind, apparelled in long embroidered mantles of many brilliant shades, held in by jewelled cinctures and buckles, elaborately worked caps upon their heads (the first idea of the later *toque* of the Renaissance) – fashions which have taken the place of the short tunic, leather girdle, and heavy head-piece of former times.

Beside these stands one on whom all eyes are turned. Stern and composed of aspect, as if conscious of the possession of such power that he is cautious of displaying it. His name is Julian, and it is he who chiefly seconded the rising in favour of Roderich. Yet this man, Espatorios of Spain, Lord of Consuegra and Algeciras, commander of the Goths on the African seaboard, and governor of Ceuta, half royal himself, is a dangerous subject and a doubtful friend. Why he supported Roderich is the enigma of the day; he had but to stretch out his hand to seize the crown himself, and with a much more legitimate claim. The ambition of his wife Frandina is well known, and that she chafes at her inferior position, and shuns the Court of Toledo and the royal house since Egilona is the queen; yet, strange to say, Julian as yet, has never swerved in his allegiance to Roderich. If any dark purpose of treason is brooding in his soul, as yet it appears not. To this time he is faithful, and is now present at Cordoba to judge his own near kinsman Witica for divers misdeeds, but principally for his share in the death of Roderich's father, Theodofredo.

What that judgment will be is very plain to see. Rather to behold the wretched tyrant die than to judge him are they all assembled there, for the settled purpose in the mind of Roderich is revenge.

If Julian is an enigma, much more so is his smooth-faced brother-in-law, Opas, Archbishop of Seville, brother of the fallen king, and his aider and abettor in all his vice and cruelty. A very Judas in cunning is Opas, who, with the fall of the supremacy of the Church has, for the sake of power, accommodated himself to the new ideas, and looks out now upon the course of events with a cold eye. What are his present motives? None can guess. Yet in the fiendish treachery and bitter hatred he came later to display towards Roderich some explanation may be found in the cruel punishment he inflicted on his unfortunate brother. But the present unnatural compliance of Opas, even in these rough days, is looked on with disgust. There he stands, however, scornfully indifferent to what men think, clothed in a rich cope and jewel-adorned dalmatica, a double tiara on his head, resplendent with gems, for as he is in the presence of one king, to judge another who has worn the crown, Opas has arrayed himself in the splendid paraphernalia of his double office of Archbishop of Seville and of Toledo. Attended by two deacons he presents the very picture of the prelate of the day, ready to lead in war, or govern in peace; a cross upon his neck, his waist girded with a sword, and his feet cased in steel.

More than any one else present, however, the royal lad Pelayo, for whom so romantic a future is in store, is personally interested in the punishment of Witica, the murderer of his father; yet the composure of his face and the carelessness of his attitude, as he leans against one of the columns that uphold the raftered roof, are as if he were but one among the many. Outwardly he betrays no consciousness of his great wrong. Death and torture are familiar to the Gothic mind, and, like the rest, he appears prepared to abide by the judgment of the king.

The heavy hangings shrouding the southern entrance to the hall are drawn aside, and, with a rush of sunshine and scent of aromatic herbs and odorous flowers, Witica appears, led in by slaves, heavy chains clanking at his feet, and manacles binding his arms. Common woollen garments of a dark colour cling to his emaciated frame, and his long, unkempt hair streams down to his waist. So greatly is he changed that it is almost impossible to recognise the lineaments of the jubilant and gross-featured voluptuary in this thin, care-ravaged face. As he slowly approaches the throne upon which Roderich is seated, he stops abruptly. The rude guards on either side push him on, and weighted by the grasp of the fetters he falls helplessly forward on his knees. Thus he remains motionless. No friendly hand is outstretched to help him – the miserable king. Not a single eye in that assembly softens with a pitying glance.

A wan, craven look comes over his face as he raises his eyes beseechingly to the superb young monarch who has taken his place – so miserable an object, that whatever have been his crimes it seems impossible he can now inspire anything but pity. But Don Roderich thinks otherwise; he contemplates the wretched figure before him with a stern glance. Then, turning to the assembled chiefs and addressing himself more especially to Julian, standing as sword-bearer at the right of the throne, he speaks in a hard, resonant voice:

“In this man you behold the butcher of my father. To amuse his caprice, he put out his eyes and imprisoned him in the dungeon of this castle until, worn out by suffering, he died. My father,” he repeats, in a ringing voice, which sounds hollow in the vast bare hall, “the noble Theodofredo, whose only crime was being born near the throne.”

As he speaks there is so cruel an echo in his voice, the miserable Witica shivers and cowers still lower on the floor. Never possessed of much intelligence it would seem as if the long imprisonment and certainty of death have deadened within him the little sense he has. Dragged from the darkness of a dungeon into the full light of day, before the varied pageant of a court once his own, his brain has become confused. A dreadful horror is all he feels.

“What punishment,” continues Don Roderich, “think you, noble Goths, most revered archbishop, and brother chiefs, should be inflicted on him for this death, and all the evil he has wrought in Spain?”

"My lord," replies Julian, bowing low, apparently unmoved by the miserable object grovelling before him, "that is a personal matter, which you alone can decide. The wrongs of a father are the wrongs of his child."

"That is my mind also," briefly spoke the veteran Teodomir. "And mine – and mine," ran round the warlike circle, to whom the soft attribute of mercy was unknown – "blood calls for blood. Such is the law of our ancestors."

Loud, too, in assent was heard the voice of Pelistes, moved to something like feeling, as the image of his friend, the noble Theodofredo, rose to his mind, condemned to a slow death within the very castle in which they stand. For the shifting of the Gothic Court to Cordoba, for the trial of Witica on the very spot where Theodofredo suffered was indeed a master-stroke on the part of Roderich to heighten to the utmost pitch of intensity not only the acuteness of his own vengeance, but the sanguinary passions of the Goths.

While each noble gives assent, the young Pelayo grows very pale. Was not Favila, his father, lord of the wide district of Cantabria, on the iron-bound coast, besides the range of the Asturian mountains, a Northern king in all but the name? Was not Favila also cruelly put to death. And had not Witica sought to lay his murderous hands on him also? Yet no man heeded. The death of Favila passed unnoticed, and Roderich, at best but a usurper, and Roderich's wrongs are alone in every mouth! Too young to remonstrate with these elder chiefs, the heart of Pelayo chafes in silent indignation, and he swears to himself that if he lives, the day shall come when ancient Iberia shall ring with the forgotten name of his sire!

"And you, most venerable archbishop," continues Roderich, turning to address himself to Opas, who, as if some claim of kindred had sounded at his heart, had further withdrawn himself when Witica appeared, and stood so placed as to conceal the view of the pathetic spectacle before him – "you who, by your presence here this day, give us so signal a proof of your loyalty, what seems to you just in this matter, so closely touching yourself? We would willingly carry the Church with us. Speak your mind freely, nor let our royal presence in aught prejudice the prisoner."

"My lord," answers Opas, in a voice which, spite of his efforts to steady it, still sounds scarcely in its natural tone, "my vote lies with my kinsman, Julian. In a matter so nearly concerning myself as a brother's life and death, it fitteth best for me to be silent."

Something in the familiar tones of his voice, some subtle affinity of blood betwixt brother and brother, struck the dull sense of Witica. As Opas spoke he raised his head, and, as he seemed to listen, a sickly smile played for a moment about his sunken lips, and a more human expression passed into his eyes. Listening, listening eagerly, as if expecting some help, a wistful gleam of hope striking across the depths of blank despair, his glance swept upwards with a pleading impotency terrible to behold, the vibration as it were of some subtle instrument set mysteriously in motion. Watching for what was to come, with open mouth and anxious eyes, thus he remained some time, then gradually the tension ceased, the heavy eye clouded, the jaw dropped, and the head, with its shaggy, unkempt locks, freely mixed with grey, once more sank hopelessly on his breast. All this occupied but the space of a few minutes.

Don Roderich spoke once more. "Witica," says he, lowering his eyes to the level of the prostrate king, "you have heard the judgment of your kinsmen and those who were your former subjects. What have you to answer?"

An inarticulate sound breaks the silence. Witica makes a feeble effort to raise himself in the arms of the slaves, who have never withdrawn their hold, opens his mouth to answer, and then falls back speechless.

The Goths were ever a people cruel and savage in their laws, but so terrible a spectacle as that one, lately monarch in the land, should have fallen into such a strait might have touched even the heart of an enemy, how much more kinsmen so nearly allied to him? But it was not so, neither did any generous impulse move the king from his cruel purpose. With the kindling eye of vengeance

Roderich contemplates what was left of that Witica whose kingdom he had seized, and proceeds to give sentence in clear, ringing tones, audible in every corner of the hall.

"Let the evil Witica has wrought on others be visited on himself. The eyes of my father Theodofredo were put out by his order, even so be it done with him. In the same dungeon here at Cordoba, where my father died, shall his life end. Away with the prisoner."

The sounds of approval which follow these words, especially from the group of young courtiers, serve in some sort to drown the piercing shrieks which break from Witica when his dulled senses grasp the full meaning of the sentence. Quick as thought he is borne away, and the spot where he has lain is rapidly covered by the feet of the crowd of chiefs and princes who gather in groups in front of the throne.

With a careless laugh Roderich descends the marble steps on which the throne is placed, and placing his crown in the hands of a daintily apparelled page, moves freely about among his nobles. The friends of his father, Pelistes and Teofredo, coming from Murcia, are specially greeted. To the Archbishop Opas he again addresses himself with the studied courtesy he learned in civilised Italy. But again Pelayo is passed over in silence, an affront which calls up a flush of anger on his face, as he silently turns and leaves the hall. At last, singling out Julian, Roderich moves aside under the range of the low pillars which divide the hall.

"This judgment," says he, speaking with caution, "relieves my mind of much care. Witica has been condemned by those of his own blood. Brother, brother-in-law, and kinsmen have joined together to make secure my position on the throne. The dam indeed is scotched, but what of the lambkins? Witica will be executed forthwith, but his sons remain. Where are they? While they live the kingdom will never be safe from traitors."

"Have no fear, my lord," answered Julian, who, through all this painful scene seemed to be lost in the contemplation of the expression of the king, as a student pores over the page of a precious manuscript, the sense of which may escape him by its obscurity. What manner of man is this they have chosen, he was asking himself? Was Roderich as ferocious as he seemed? Or was his conduct but the effort of a vacillating mind to play the tyrant to excess, conscious of an inherent weakness? And as he watched him, a feeling of deadly hatred came over him for the commission of the very act of cruelty he had just sanctioned. But his answer to Roderich's question was as unmoved as though no hostile sentiments were warring within him.

"The youths are already fled to Africa, my lord, where the Spanish Governor of Tangiers harbours them out of gratitude to their father. Let them rest, they will not trouble you."

"You say well, count," answers Roderich in a light tone; "vengeance for my father is a duty. For awhile we will grant them life, but later they must pay the forfeit of Witica's crimes. But now to other matters. How fares the Lady Frandina, your virtuous consort, and the young Florinda, whom report extols as beautiful beyond measure?"

The manners of the king were frank and soldierly, and history records that he possessed to a great degree that winning demeanour which charms in the high ones of the earth. To Julian, whose powerful aid had mainly helped him to the possession of the crown, he had hitherto shown a deference that flattered while it controlled. To Don Roderich's question Julian answered with a smile: "It is well with my consort, who is at our castle of Algeciras; she bade me greet your grace. As to my daughter, it was of her I was about to speak. Florinda is with me in Cordoba. I have brought her as a fair present and hostage to your bride, Queen Egilona, to attend on her, along with the other noble damsels of the court, and to learn those lessons of virtue and excellence in which she is paramount. Will you, my lord, be my surety with the queen?"

"That will I, gladly," answers Don Roderich, his countenance lighting up with a gracious smile. "The confidence which you repose in me is of all else the crown and proof of your loyalty. As such I accept it. To me Florinda shall be as a daughter. I will watch over her as yourself, and see that she is trained in the same rigid principles of piety which honour her mother's name."

Julian, his pale, olive-skinned face flushed with the gratification these words afford, bows low. “Florinda,” he replies, “is but a timid girl brought up by her mother’s side, as yet unacquainted with the state which fittingly surrounds Queen Egilona. You will pardon her inexperience; she is quick and sensitive of nature, and keen to appreciate kindness. It is by her wish that she will attend the queen; I have but followed her own desire. Her mother indeed consented, but unwillingly, to part with her.”

“This is welcome news. It is as a shaft which tells both ways, in the sentiment of attachment in which she has been reared, and of the mind of the fair maid herself. No parents shall be tenderer or more careful than we to her. Would that I had a son to match with her in marriage.”

“And now,” says Julian, making a low obeisance, “I will crave to be permitted to withdraw; my presence is demanded in my government. The Moors have received considerable reinforcements, and advance upon Ceuta from the neighbouring hills. By way of Damascus they come, despatched by Almanzor from Bagdad, called by those unbelievers ‘The sword of God.’ Our Gothic province on the margin of the Straits needs vigorous and constant watching.”

“And it is for that reason,” is Roderich’s reply, “that I have placed the government in your hands, valiant Espatorios, first and most trusted of all my Gothic chiefs.”

“I will do my duty, my lord,” is the rejoinder. “You need, I trust, no assurance of this; but, spite of precautions, I fear greatly that a battle or a siege is imminent. The Moslems are gathered in such numbers, savage tribes of Arabs and Berbers, under the Moorish general, Mousa ben Nozier of Damascus, and his son Abd-el-asis, that it will need all our resources to baffle. Mousa swears that he will drive the Cross from the confines of Africa, and raise the Crescent on every Christian fortress we hold in Tingitana.”

“This is a confirmation of evil news,” replies Don Roderich, whose beaming countenance had darkened as Julian gave these details. “I am well advised of the concentration of the Arabs in the north of Africa. I but awaited your coming to confirm it. But had you not been present with the archbishop it would have been argued in the nation that as his relative you disapproved my sentence. Now we are hand in hand. Command all the resources of the mainland to drive the invaders back. Light sloops can be run from Algeciras to Ceuta with soldiers and arms.”

“My lord, I have enough; should a siege be threatened every mouth has to be fed. But it is to me, the leader, that the Christians look. It is I who am needed on the coast of Barbary. I have personally, too, great credit with the Moors; they are noble enemies.”

“I doubt it not,” is Roderich’s answer. “Wherever my trusty Espatorios draws the sword, victory follows.”

“My lord, it was but to excuse my hasty parting, not to ask for more supplies, that I spoke. To know that my daughter is well disposed of in a safe asylum is a balm to me greater than any boon you could bestow. My wife, Frandina, fights by my side. I have no fear for her, and our son is consigned to the care of the Archbishop Opas. Now, thanks to you, my lord, I am free-handed to face the Moors. I have but to settle more matters connected with Florinda, and to depart. The queen is at Toledo; I must accompany her thither.”

“By no means,” cries Don Roderich, “unless such is your wish. She shall go with me, accompanied by suitable attendants. I myself will present her to Egilona as our child.”

Meanwhile, the assemblage had gradually diminished. Each chief was in haste to depart, for the country was full of enemies, more especially in the south and east, where the vessels of the Moors continually landed Berbers and Arabs to plunder and carry off the inhabitants as slaves. That serious invasion was near at hand all understood, except perhaps Roderich and the idle young Goths who formed his court. As yet, it is true, Don Julian held the enemy at bay in Africa, but, his presence or his support withdrawn, the Moors would pour like a torrent on the land, and, save for a few of the old leaders who had survived the disastrous reign of Witica, and the enervating atmosphere spreading everywhere from the court into all ranks, *who* was there to oppose them?

CHAPTER III
Don Roderich's Perfidy

THE court life shifts from the green Sierras of Cordoba to the old city of Toledo. Again we are in the corn-bearing plains, the outlines of the domes, pinnacles, and turrets of the Alcazar before us gay and jocund with the security of two hundred years of Gothic rule. What footsteps have echoed through those courts! What regal presences haunt them! Iberian, Roman, and Gothic; Recaredo, Wamba, Witica, and comely Roderich; to be followed by Moors, and Castilian kings; El Caballero, El Emplazado, El Valente, El Impotente; a red haired bastard of Trastamare succeeding his brother Don Pedro el Cruel, a swaggering Alfonso, Velasque's, Philip, the staid dowager-queen Berenguela, fair Isabel the Catholic, the widow of Philip the Fourth, the mother of Charles el Soco, Johana el Loca, not to forget the Cid, first Christian alcaide and governor; a palace in old times marking the utmost limits of the known world, beyond which the East looked into the hyperborean darkness of the West; the geographical centre of all Spain – supremely regal, its foundations laid in legend, and its ramparts raised in the glamour of Oriental song; a refuge from Moorish invasion for the defenceless Goth, and the superb residence of later kings. In a hollow beneath rise the towers of the cathedral, and the outline of many ancient synagogues, for the Jews were always powerful in Toledo – El Transito and El Blanco are the principal ones, and hospitals for the chosen race. If Toledo was the Gothic capital, it was also long before known under the name of "Toledoth," where the Jews came in great numbers after the sack of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar. "The Jews fled to Tarshish," says the Bible, and Tarshish is the scriptural name for Southern Spain.

Other churches and oratories there were, for the Goths were a pious people, also the house of Wamba over the Tagus, and the mystic tower of Hercules, rising on a rock, the entrance guarded by an inscription setting forth "that whenever a king passes the threshold, the empire of Spain shall fall"; a warning much respected by the Gothic kings – Wamba, Ervig, Eric, and Witica, who each in turn ordered fresh locks and chains to be added to make it fast. Baths there were also, and on the hills summer houses and *huertas* moistened by fountains and streams, the dark Tagus making, as it were, a defence and barrier about the walls.

One plaisance there was, particularly noted, on a terrace overhanging the river, where the spires and domes of many-painted pavilions uprose, with tile-paved *patios*, and arcades and *miradores* open to the sky, which Roderich had formed for Egilona, from the pattern of a Moorish retreat she loved at Algiers. Here soft fluffy plane-trees whispered to the breeze, violets blossomed in low damp trenches, and the blue-green fronds of the palms cut against the sky. A garden, indeed, most cunningly adapted to intoxicate the senses, where every tree and branch was vocal with nightingale and thrush, the soft rhythm of *zambras* and flutes thrilling through the boughs from invisible orchestras; a place in itself so lovely and so lonely that life passed by in an atmosphere of delight, akin to the houri-haunted paradise prepared for the brave Moslems who fall in battle. Hither came Egilona, as into the solitude of an Eastern harem, shut out from the foot of man. Even Roderich rarely entered to disturb her hours of innocent delight, surrounded by a band of fair damsels, who, like Florinda, had been committed to her care.

It was a delicious evening after a day of fiery heat. So oppressive had been the sun, that even the orange leaves flagged on their stems and the song-birds were mute. In the broad plains without, the rarefied air trembled; nothing but the sharp note of the cicala broke the silence of mid-day.

Now the air was cool in these leafy gardens, over-hanging the river, from which delicate rippling gusts rose up to fan the atmosphere. The dazzling pavilions with open galleries lay in shadow, and only a transient ray from the setting sun lit up some detail of lace-worked panel or gilded pinnacle into a transient flame.

On a broad terrace, from which the roofs of the city are dimmed into vague outlines, a merry party of the queen's maidens emerge from one of the galleries, amid peals of that shrill and joyous laughter heard only among the young, and running swiftly along scare the peacocks, who drop their tails and fly into the covered avenues beyond. Some of the maidens ensconce themselves in verdant kiosks, others wander into the bamboo-thickets to lie on flowery banks, or wade in the shallow streams which flow around. One delicately limbed girl, oppressed by the heat, divests herself of the light draperies she wears, and like a playful Nereid plunges into a pool, scattering water on her laughing companions.

One of these maidens, Zora, by name, who came from Barbary with Egilona, is of a darker colouring than the rest. Zora can sing to the cither and relate stories like a true Arab as she is. Now a circle of her companions gather about her, and beg her to tell them a tale.

"But you have heard all my stories so often," pleads poor Zora, whose little feet are tingling with the desire of movement after the confinement of the long hot day.

"Never mind, you must invent a new one, Zora." A cloud passes over her merry face. "*Invent* a story! Well, I will try," and after a few minutes she seats herself on a porcelain bench under a clump of cedars, and begins.

Zora's Story

"There were once three sisters, I don't know where, but they were princesses. They had an ugly old father with one eye, who shut them up in a tower high in a wall. They were never to go out, and had an old slave to watch them; her name was Wenza, and there was a eunuch too, who carried a scimitar; but he does not matter, for he stayed out of doors.

"Now the tower was very beautiful, only the sisters did not like it, because they called it a prison. There was a *patio* with an alabaster fountain, which kept up a running murmur day and night; the walls were wrought in a coloured net-work of flowers, and arches and angles were worked beautifully to look like crystal caves. All around were the sweetest little rooms for the sisters to sleep in, not forgetting Wenza, who, they said, snored, so she was put in the farthest one. The walls were hung with golden tapestry, and the divans worked with shells and stones. So beautiful! Like a casket! There were curtains with monsters and beasts embroidered in fine silk, hung at the doors to keep out draughts, and so many singing-birds in golden cages, that there were times when they could not hear themselves speak. A little kitchen, too, lay in a corner, where Wenza cooked the food, but the sisters lived on cakes and fruit quite in a fairy-like way, which often made Wenza say she knew she would be starved, only the eunuch was kind and sometimes handed in on his scimitar a piece of meat. High up in the walls were barred casemates, but oh! so small, mere slits and the princesses often tore their robes clambering up to look out. They could see the sky – a passing cloud was a variety, but what delighted them most, and, indeed, occupied the day, when they were not playing on lutes and cithers, or teaching tricks to the birds, was a rocky valley, oh! so deep down! They could just see it. The sun never shone there, and the rocks looked always damp. A valley, and a stream with a strange echo like voices, only what it said was past their power to know; and Wenza could not help them, she only pulled them down from the windows and scolded them, and threatened she would call in the eunuch with his drawn sword. But Wenza liked to hear about it all the same, and asked often if the voices of the stream had spoken more plainly.

"The only one who minded what Wenza said was the youngest princess, Zeda. She was much more timid than her sisters, with cheeks as white as a lily. She could touch the stops of a silver lute and sing Moorish ballads. She was so gentle; she would nurse a sick bird in her warm hand for hours and hours, and feed the little starlings that settled on the window edge. All day she was in and out about the flowers, which stood in pots round the fountain and lived on the spray.

"Zoda, the second, was very vain, and looked at herself in a steel mirror twenty times a day, painting her eyes and trimming her hair, and Lindaxara, the eldest, was proud, and would sometimes beat poor gentle Zeda when she offended her."

"And their clothes?" asked a little Gothic maiden interrupting her, "you have told us nothing of their clothes."

"Ah! that is true," and Zora paused and thought a little. "Well! they were all in tunics of white satin with gemmed waistbands and borders, and trousers of Broussa gauze, lined with rose colour, little caps upon their heads twinkling with coins, and necklaces of pearl. Very lovely clothes, I assure you, and they looked lovely, too, standing with the spray of the fountain behind them.

"Well," continued Zora, growing eager herself as her tale went on, and the eyes of all her companions riveted on her, "you may fancy what it was, when Lindaxara, who was tall and slim, clamoured up one day to the latticed window and saw *three Christian knights* working among the stones in the valley below. She was so astonished that she gave a loud scream, which brought her sisters and Wenza, to the window. So there was no secret about it, and they all strained their necks as far as the bars would let them.

"Just to think of it! Three adorable knights in the flower of youth. Eyes full of love, and the sweetest heads of hair, not cut and trimmed like the Arabs' under big turbans, but hanging loose in curls upon their shoulders. Captives, alas! loaded with chains! The tears came into the sisters' eyes as they gazed. 'The one in green,' cried Lindaxara, thrilling all over as she leaned out of the bars, 'he is my knight. What grace! What beauty!'

" 'No, the crimson one for me,' said Zoda, arranging her hair. 'I love him already. He shall never be a slave.'

"Gentle little Zeda said nothing, but heaved a great sigh. 'No one will ever care for me,' she whispered, 'but it is that other one I like best. He has such a heavenly smile.'

"After which, Wenza, suddenly remembering her duty, drove them all down, and shut up the window. But too late, the harm was done; Wenza protested, but she was the worst of all. The eunuch was bribed by her with so much gold, he put up his scimitar, and did all that he was bid.

"The Christian knights were told that three beautiful princesses, daughters of the one-eyed king, loved them. It made them very happy in spite of their chains. They managed to talk together by signs and to arrange their plans.

"One night, when the moon was sinking, and all was still, a whistle, heard from below, struck on impatient ears. The bars had been sawn from the window by the eunuch, who was strong, and Wenza had cut the sheets into strips and tied them all together into a long rope; then one by one they went down, at first trembling, but quite brave and glad at last, as they fell into the arms of the Christian knights, Wenza into the arms of the eunuch, who took care of her – all save poor little Zeda.

"When it came to her turn to descend, she had no courage to move, but stood at the window clasping her hands, and casting down wistful glances on her sisters. Now her fingers were on the cord, then she withdrew them; she saw her Christian knight beckoning to her; listened, listened as the stream called Zeda. Again she grasped the cord. In vain, her heart failed her.

" 'Too late, too late, dear sisters,' she cried. 'Go forth and be happy. Think sometimes of the poor little prisoner left behind.' And so," concluded Zora, evidently at a loss how to finish her tale, "Ansa, the one-eyed king, her father, coming to visit his daughters, found her alone, and condemned her to die of hunger in the tower.

"Poor little Zeda! But she still lives in the spirit of the fountain, when it boils and bubbles at night in the form of a Moslem princess, flower-crowned, singing to a silver lute, 'Ay de mi Zeda!' "

A great clapping of hands, and many thanks to Zora for the story, greeted its conclusion. The little Gothic maiden, who was very fond of Zora, cried at the fate of the poor princess starved to death. She is sure none of them were comelier than Zora; and in this she speaks truly. An African sun had dyed her skin to a ruddier colour, given symmetry to her limbs, and a dark fire to her eyes.

As a stranger Zora is by turns laughed at and petted. And as the setting sun now catches the swarthy ebony of her long hair, and blazes on the rich brown of her cheek, the difference between her and the rest suddenly strikes a lively little playmate, who is forming a pattern on the ground from the coloured petals of roses.

"I should like to know," says she, contemplating Zora, "which is prettier, dark Zora with the flashing eyes, or pale Florinda with the chestnut curls. In my opinion Zora is worth a whole bevy of us white-faced Goths."

"No, no, no," echoes from all sides, while poor Zora, put to shame, blushes under tawny skin and retreats to the farthest corner of the garden.

"I will not give the palm of beauty to Zora," cries another voice, "but to Florinda. Where is she?" A general search is made for a long time in vain, but at last she is discovered fast asleep under a palm. Slumber has lent a lustre to her cheek, and her white bosom rises and falls under the transparent tissue of her bodice.

"Look!" cry the maidens exultingly, "can you compare Zora with Florinda?" And in their eagerness the giddy group tear asunder the sheltering draperies which cling about her.

Alas! little did they know, these joyous maidens, that the fate of the Gothic kingdom turned on the balance of their childish games, and that, mere puppets in the hands of fate, they were destined to be the instruments of destruction to their country!

In the gloom that precedes the setting of the sun, amid the dusky shadows of huge-leaved plants and myrtle hedges which broke the space into squares in every direction, Don Roderich had stolen from the Alcazar to enjoy the evening freshness and to visit the queen. Hearing from afar the bursts of girlish laughter, at the contest of beauty between dark and fair, he looked out from the latticed *mirador* of the pavilion, and beheld the undraped form of Florinda before she could escape from the hands of her companions.

That glance is fatal. Forgetful of the sacred pledges given to her father, forgetful of his honour as a knight and his gratitude as a king, a mighty passion rises within his breast. But Florinda gives no response; his fervid glances are met with downcast eyes, and a blush rises on her cheek as she involuntarily approaches him. This does but serve to fan his lawless love; and so great is his infatuation he cannot persuade himself that she does not return it. His whole soul is as a furnace, which consumes his life. Speak to her he must, and a wicked hope whispers it will not be in vain!

Meeting her one day, a little later, by chance in the queen's antechamber, he called her to him, and presented to her his hand.

"Sweet one," says he, in a voice he can scarcely command, every pulse within him beating tumultuously, "a thorn has sorely pricked me, can you draw it out?"

Florinda, who unconsciously has come rather to fear him, kneels at his feet and takes his hand in hers. At the touch of her light fingers a tremor runs through his frame. Is this slight girl to resist the transports that shake his being to the core, as the fury of the tempest shakes the light leaves?

As she kneels the tresses of her auburn hair fall as a veil around her, and blush after blush flushes her cheeks. Vainly she seeks for the thorn in Don Roderich's hand. In her surprise she lifts her eyes to his, which are bent on her with ill-controlled passion; then, starting to her feet in confusion, "My lord," she says, retreating from where he stands leaning against a painted pillar, his jewelled cap pressed down upon his brows, "there is no thorn."

She turns to go, filled with an apprehension she cannot explain, but he catches her hand, and presses it to his heart.

"Here, here is the thorn, Florinda; will you pluck *that* out?"

"My lord, my lord," cries the alarmed girl, "I do not catch your meaning."

"Then I will teach you," he answers, fast losing command over himself. "Do you love me?" and he draws her to him so near that his quick-coming breath plays upon her cheek.

Ever farther and farther she strives to retreat; ever nearer and nearer Don Roderich presses her, his glowing eyes resting on her like flames.

"My lord," she says at last, trembling from head to foot, "my father told me to revere you as himself. I was to be to you and to the queen as a daughter. To your protection I look, may it never fail."

A terrible fear possessed her of coming danger, as she shaped her words to this appeal, and had a spark of loyalty remained in the heart of Don Roderich, her reproof would have brought him to a better mind, but an evil destiny had doomed him to work out his own ruin.

"Florinda," he cries, seizing her by both hands so as to draw her to him by force, "innocent as you are, you must understand me. It is not the love for a father nor the submission to a king I ask of you. It is *love*. Ah! tremble not, fair one, there is nothing to scare you. None shall know it. Deep in our hearts it shall lie. Nor does the love of your king degrade you like that of a common man. All the power of the Gothic throne shall compass you with delights, and I will make your father Julian greater than myself."

At these base words the rising terror of Florinda gave place to indignation. Her soft eyes kindled with a fire far different from that which Don Roderich would have desired.

"I understand, my lord," she answers, in a firm voice; "but none of my race hold power by evil means. My father would rather die than accept such dishonour. But," and an ill-assured smile plays about her mouth, "I believe you mean but to try me; you think me too stupid and childish to serve the queen. I pray your pardon for taking a jest in such foolish earnest."

The blanched face of Florinda ill-corresponded with the words which her quivering lips could scarcely articulate.

"May I die," cries Don Roderich, "if I speak aught but truth. My heart, my kingdom, are at your command. Be mine, fair angel, and the Goths shall know no rule but yours."

But now, the courage of Florinda, timid and girlish as she was, rises up within her. "My lord, I am in your power," are her words. "You may kill me, but there you stop. My will you can never force." Then, casting up her arms with a gesture of despair, she flees, vanishing among the long lines of pillars in the hall; and such was the power of her anger that the king dares not follow her. And here we must leave her with a wonder whether the assiduous worship paid her by Roderich was *always* repulsed with a like vigour, or if the opprobrious name of *La Cava* with which she came to be branded in the legends of the time was not undeserved.

That the king was so depraved by the indulgence of his life as not to be haunted by the shame of what he had done is difficult to believe. That he counted, however, on the secrecy of Florinda would seem certain from the indifference he displayed to the consequences of his action as affecting his relations with Julian, at that very time leading his army against the Moorish hosts, commanded by the veteran general, Mousa, in the neighbourhood of Ceuta.

"Those whom the gods forsake, they blind," says the Pagan proverb. It is certainly impossible to explain the inactivity of the once valiant Roderich by any rational course of reasoning. Not only had the rumour of approaching battle come from the African shores, but swift messengers had brought to Toledo the news that the rock of Calpe (Gibraltar) in Spain bristled with scimitars, led by the ferocious old Berber, Tháryk, with his single eye.

"Tell Roderich the Goth," ran the message, "that Tháryk has crossed the Straits to conquer his kingdom, and that he will not return until he has made the Goth lick the dust before him."

Whatever blindness had fallen on Roderich, the consciousness of her disgrace soon forced itself on the mind of Florinda. Guilty or not, despair at last took possession of her. For a time she was silent, but unable to endure her shame, and horrified at her treason towards the queen, who ever tenderly cherished her, in a paroxysm of remorseful grief she caught up a pen and wrote to Julian:

"Would to God, my father, that the earth had swallowed me ere I came to Toledo! What am I to tell you of that which it is meet to conceal? Alas! my father, your lamb has been entrusted to the wolf. She were better dead than dishonoured. Hasten to rescue your unhappy Florinda. Come quickly."

Tying this brief missive in a square of silk, and fastening it with a ribbon, she called to her a young page, bred at her father's court, who had been especially appointed to her service.

"Adolfo," said she, and sobs were in her voice, "saddle the swiftest steed you can lay hands on, and if ever, dear *niño*, you aspire to the honours of a belted knight in the service of my father, or hope for lady's grace in the tourney; if ever – " here she burst into a flood of tears, moved by her own vehemence. "Oh, sweet Adolfo, dear little page, reared up in my home, for the love of Christ, ride day and night until you reach the sea. Then, at the price of gold, which I give you," and she placed in his hands a heavy purse, "take the best boat and the swiftest rowers, and with flowing sail speed to my father at Ceuta, nor eat nor drink until you have placed this writing in his hand."

Before the eager Florinda, whose every feature spoke the deadly anxiety she felt, the page, cap in hand, bowed low.

"Trust me, noble daughter of my honoured lord. I will truly execute your trust. Swiftly will I ride, nor turn aside for aught but death, either by land or sea."

Placing the letter in the bosom of his gaudy vest, he kissed her hand and sped his way, mounted a fast horse he found in the *patio* of the Palace, galloped down the declivity, through the Golden Gate, and so on into the eternal plains which gird about Toledo, until clouds of dust concealed him from Florinda's anxious gaze.

Meanwhile, Julian, fighting valiantly in Africa, had just repulsed an attack of Mousa on the castle of Ceuta, standing on a cape which juts out into the Straits, the nearest point to the Spanish mainland. It was a desperate struggle; the Moors, under the command of the famous Arabs, rallying again and again.

The news of such a success spread round not only in Africa but over all the breadth of Spain. The landing of the Moors in Andalusia was a constant subject of terror on the mainland. Men knew that the Gothic nation no longer held together as under the early kings, and that each chief looked to himself alone, caring but little what became of his neighbours. The castles were dismantled by the selfish policy of Witica and Roderich, and the army was sunk into the same luxurious ease as the rest of the nation.

The name of Julian was soon on every lip. He was hailed as a saviour, and blessings invoked on him as the bulwark of the Cross.

With the sound of this homage ringing in his ears, the page arrives at Ceuta, bearing the letter from Florinda. Julian at once summons him to his tent, as perchance the bearer of some signal honour bestowed upon him by the king, or of some royal recompense for his services.

"What tidings from Don Roderich?" he asks.

"None, my lord," is the answer. "I rode in haste away, without seeing the king. What I bear is a letter from the Lady Florinda."

"Florinda – how fares she?"

"Well, my lord," answers the page, as he takes the silken packet from his bosom.

Cutting the ribbon that binds it with his dagger, Julian reads the miserable lines; word after word brings a terrible certainty to his mind; he stands in speechless anguish, then, flinging the parchment from him, he folds his arms, while one by one the burning remembrance of each act of devotion to Roderich stings him to the soul. It is a terrible reckoning; a dark and malignant fury enters into his soul, not only against Roderich, but against all Spain, the scene of his dishonour, the home of his disgrace.

"And this," cries he, when words come to his lips, "is my reward for serving a villain! This is the return he makes me for the hostage of my child! May I die a slave if I rest until I have given him full measure in return!"

CHAPTER IV
Don Julian Goes over to the Moors

JULIAN'S first object is, without exciting suspicion, to remove his daughter from Toledo. Full of the project of revenge, he crosses the Straits and repairs to the Court. Wherever he appears is hailed as the leader to whose prowess the nation owes its safety. Roderich, counting on the silence of Florinda, receives him with a frank and generous welcome, and loads him with new honours. Julian, meanwhile, artfully magnifies the present danger which threatens the frontier, and prepares all things for his return to Africa. For Florinda he obtains leave of absence from the queen "to attend upon her mother Frandina, dangerously ill at Algeciras." Together they cross the bridge of the Tagus, followed by the shouting populace, but as his horse's hoofs strike on the opposite bank he raises his mailed hand, and shakes it in the air as he turns his eyes towards the Alcazar.

"My curse rest on thee, Don Roderich!" are his words. "May desolation fall on thy dwelling and thy realm!"

Journeying on with Florinda, he came to a wild range of mountains near Consucara – still called the Mountain of Treason – where he meets his kinsman, Archbishop Opas, and his wife Frandina, a formidable amazon, who not only followed her lord in battle, but concentrated in herself all the duplicity of her brother.

She had long hated Roderich for his marriage with Egilona, now she could revenge herself.

"I would rather die," she exclaims, as she gazed at Florinda, prostrate at her feet, "than submit to this outrage!"

"Be satisfied," replies Don Julian; "she shall be avenged. Opas will bind our friends by dreadful oaths. I myself will go to Africa to seek great Mousa, and negotiate his aid."

From Malaga Julian embarked for Africa with Frandina and Florinda, his treasure and his household, and ever since the gate in the city wall through which they passed has been called *Puerta de la Cava* (Gate of the Harlot), by which name the unhappy Florinda was known among the Moors.

The dark tents of the Moslems were spread in a pastoral valley at the foot of the billowy chain of hills which follow along the north of Barbary (as it was called of old), outshoots from the great Atlas range which towers in the far distance. A motley host from Egypt and Mauretania – Saracens, Tartars, Syrians, Copts, and Berbers, – all, Christian or Moslem, fair-skinned or negro, united under the banner of Mousa, Governor of North Africa for the Caliph of Damascus, a man long past middle life, but who concealed his years cunningly.

As Mousa sits to administer justice among the mixed tribes of his host, raised on a divan covered with sheep-skins, under a wide-spreading oak, near which a rapid streamlet runs down into the sea, the flag of Islam floating beside him, Tháryk, his lieutenant, on his right hand, a bugle sounds from above among the hills, and the gay apparel of a herald appears in the distance, attended by a single trumpeter. Cautiously descending the steep path among a forest-like grove, the herald, bearing on his tabard the Gothic arms, pauses at the base; the trumpeter sounds another loud blast, then both ride boldly into the circle gathered round Mousa. After an obeisance, responded to in silence by the astonished Moors, he speaks, lowering his cognisance before the chief: "I demand," says he, "a safe passage for my master, Don Julian Espatorios of Spain, under King Roderich the Goth. Can he come without danger to life and limb and depart when he lists?"

To which Mousa, touching with the tips of his fingers the folds of the green turban which he wears, then carrying them down and crossing them on his chest, in an Eastern salute of ceremony replies:

"The demand of Don Julian is granted. Let my noble adversary advance without fear. So brave a leader shall eat of our salt were he ten times our foe."

Clad in a complete suit of armour, and mounted on a powerful charger, Julian appears. A surcoat of black is over his armour, his legs are encased in fluted steel, and on his helmet rests a sable plume. Behind him rides his esquire, bearing his lance and shield. With grave courtesy he salutes the Moslem chiefs whom he has so lately defeated, then, upon the motion of Mousa, who rises at his approach, he dismounts, and, flinging the bridle to his esquire, takes the place assigned to him.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.