ЭДВАРД БУЛЬВЕР-ЛИТТОН

LEILA OR, THE SIEGE OF GRANADA, COMPLETE

Эдвард Бульвер-Литтон

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Содержание

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BOOK I

CHAPTER I. THE ENCHANTER AND THE WARRIOR

It was the summer of the year 1491, and the armies of Ferdinand and Isabel invested the city of Granada.

The night was not far advanced; and the moon, which broke through the transparent air of Andalusia, shone calmly over the immense and murmuring encampment of the Spanish foe, and touched with a hazy light the snow-capped summits of the Sierra Nevada, contrasting the verdure and luxuriance which no devastation of man could utterly sweep from the beautiful vale below.

In the streets of the Moorish city many a group still lingered. Some, as if unconscious of the beleaguering war without, were listening in quiet indolence to the strings of the Moorish lute, or the lively tale of an Arabian improrvisatore; others were conversing with such eager and animated gestures, as no ordinary excitement could wring from the stately calm habitual to every oriental people. But the more public places in which gathered these different groups, only the more impressively heightened the desolate and solemn repose that brooded over the rest of the city.

At this time, a man, with downcast eyes, and arms folded within the sweeping gown which descended to his feet, was seen passing through the streets, alone, and apparently unobservant of all around him. Yet this indifference was by no means shared by the struggling crowds through which, from time to time, he musingly swept.

“God is great!” said one man; “it is the Enchanter Almamen.”

“He hath locked up the manhood of Boabdil el Chico with the key of his spells,” quoth another, stroking his beard; “I would curse him, if I dared.”

“But they say that he hath promised that when man fails, the genii will fight for Granada,” observed a third, doubtingly.

“Allah Akbar! what is, is! what shall be, shall be!” said a fourth, with all the solemn sagacity of a prophet. Whatever their feelings, whether of awe or execration, terror or hope, each group gave way as Almamen passed, and hushed the murmurs not intended for his ear. Passing through the Zacatin (the street which traversed the Great Bazaar), the reputed enchanter ascended a narrow and winding street, and arrived at last before the walls that encircled the palace and fortress of the Alhambra.

The sentry at the gate saluted and admitted him in silence; and in a few moments his form was lost in the solitude of groves, amidst which, at frequent openings, the spray of Arabian fountains glittered in the moonlight; while, above, rose the castled heights of the Alhambra; and on the right those Vermilion Towers, whose origin veils itself in the furthest ages of Phoenician enterprise.

Almamen paused, and surveyed the scene. “Was Aden more lovely?” he muttered; “and shall so fair a spot be trodden by the victor Nazerene? What matters? creed chases creed—race, race—until time comes back to its starting-place, and beholds the reign restored to the eldest faith and the eldest tribe. The horn of our strength shall be exalted.”

At these thoughts the seer relapsed into silence, and gazed long and intently upon the stars, as, more numerous and brilliant with every step of the advancing night, their rays broke on the playful waters, and tinged with silver the various and breathless foliage. So earnest was his gaze, and so absorbed his thoughts, that he did not perceive the approach of a Moor, whose glittering weapons and snow-white turban, rich with emeralds, cast a gleam through the wood.

The new comer was above the common size of his race, generally small and spare—but without attaining the lofty stature and large proportions of the more redoubted of the warriors of Spain. But in his presence and mien there was something, which, in the haughtiest conclave of Christian chivalry, would have seemed to tower and command. He walked with a step at once light and stately, as if it spurned the earth; and in the carriage of the small erect head and stag-like throat, there was that undefinable and imposing dignity, which accords so well with our conception of a heroic lineage, and a noble though imperious spirit. The stranger approached Almamen, and paused abruptly when within a few steps of the enchanter. He gazed upon him in silence for some moments; and when at length he spoke it was with a cold and sarcastic tone.

"Pretender to the dark secrets," said he, "is it in the stars that thou art reading those destinies of men and nations, which the Prophet wrought by the chieftain's brain and the soldier's arm?"

"Prince," replied Almamen, turning slowly, and recognising the intruder on his meditations, "I was but considering how many revolutions, which have shaken earth to its centre, those orbs have witnessed, unsympathising and unchanged."

"Unsympathising!" repeated the Moor—"yet thou believest in their effect upon the earth?"

"You wrong me," answered Almamen, with a slight smile, "you confound your servant with that vain race, the astrologers."

"I deemed astrology a part of the science of the two angels, Harut and Marut."

> [The science of magic. It was taught by the Angels named in the text; for which offence they are still supposed to be confined to the ancient Babel. There they may yet be consulted, though they are rarely seen.—Yallal'odir Yahya.
>
> –SALE'S Koran.]

"Possibly; but I know not that science, though I have wandered at midnight by the ancient Babel."

"Fame lies to us, then," answered the Moor, with some surprise.

"Fame never made pretence to truth," said Almamen, calmly, and proceeding on his way. "Allah be with you, prince! I seek the king."

"Stay! I have just quitted his presence, and left him, I trust, with thoughts worthy of the sovereign of Granada, which I would not have disturbed by a stranger, a man whose arms are not spear nor shield."

"Noble Muza," returned Almamen, "fear not that my voice will weaken the inspirations which thine hath breathed into the breast of Boabdil. Alas! if my counsel were heeded, thou wouldst hear the warriors of Granada talk less of Muza, and more of the king. But Fate, or Allah, hath placed upon the throne of a tottering dynasty, one who, though brave, is weak—though, wise, a dreamer; and you suspect the adviser, when you find the influence of nature on the advised. Is this just?"

Muza gazed long and sternly on the face of Almamen; then, putting his hand gently on the enchanter's shoulder, he said—

"Stranger, if thou playest us false, think that this arm hath cloven the casque of many a foe, and will not spare the turban of a traitor!"

"And think thou, proud prince!" returned Almamen, unquailing, "that I answer alone to Allah for my motives, and that against man my deeds I can defend!"

With these words, the enchanter drew his long robe round him, and disappeared amidst the foliage.

CHAPTER II. THE KING WITHIN HIS PALACE

In one of those apartments, the luxury of which is known only to the inhabitants of a genial climate (half chamber and half grotto), reclined a young Moor, in a thoughtful and musing attitude.

The ceiling of cedar-wood, glowing with gold and azure, was supported by slender shafts, of the whitest alabaster, between which were open arcades, light and graceful as the arched vineyards of Italy, and wrought in that delicate filagree-work common to the Arabian architecture: through these arcades was seen at intervals the lapsing fall of waters, lighted by alabaster lamps; and their tinkling music sounded with a fresh and regular murmur upon the ear. The whole of one side of this apartment was open to a broad and extensive balcony, which overhung the banks of the winding and moonlit Darro; and in the clearness of the soft night might be distinctly seen the undulating hills, the woods, and orange-groves, which still form the unrivalled landscapes of Granada.

The pavement was spread with ottomans and couches of the richest azure, prodigally enriched with quaint designs in broideries of gold and silver; and over that on which the Moor reclined, facing the open balcony, were suspended on a pillar the round shield, the light javelin, and the curving cimiter, of Moorish warfare. So studded were these arms with jewels of rare cost, that they might alone have sufficed to indicate the rank of the evident owner, even if his own gorgeous vestments had not betrayed it. An open manuscript, on a silver table, lay unread before the Moor: as, leaning his face upon his hand, he looked with abstracted eyes along the mountain summits dimly distinguished from the cloudless and far horizon.

No one could have gazed without a vague emotion of interest, mixed with melancholy, upon the countenance of the inmate of that luxurious chamber.

Its beauty was singularly stamped with a grave and stately sadness, which was made still more impressive by its air of youth and the unwonted fairness of the complexion: unlike the attributes of the Moorish race, the hair and curling beard were of a deep golden colour; and on the broad forehead and in the large eyes, was that settled and contemplative mildness which rarely softens the swart lineaments of the fiery children of the sun. Such was the personal appearance of Boabdil el Chico, the last of the Moorish dynasty in Spain.

“These scrolls of Arabian learning,” said Boabdil to himself, “what do they teach? to despise wealth and power, to hold the heart to be the true empire. This, then, is wisdom. Yet, if I follow these maxims, am I wise? alas! the whole world would call me a driveller and a madman. Thus is it ever; the wisdom of the Intellect fills us with precepts which it is the wisdom of Action to despise. O Holy Prophet! what fools men would be, if their knavery did not eclipse their folly!”

The young king listlessly threw himself back on his cushions as he uttered these words, too philosophical for a king whose crown sate so loosely on his brow.

After a few moments of thought that appeared to dissatisfy and disquiet him, Boabdil again turned impatiently round “My soul wants the bath of music,” said he; “these journeys into a pathless realm have wearied it, and the streams of sound supple and relax the travailed pilgrim.”

He clapped his hands, and from one of the arcades a boy, hitherto invisible, started into sight; at a slight and scarce perceptible sign from the king the boy again vanished, and in a few moments afterwards, glancing through the fairy pillars, and by the glittering waterfalls, came the small and twinkling feet of the maids of Araby. As, with their transparent tunics and white arms, they gleamed, without an echo, through that cool and voluptuous chamber, they might well have seemed the Peris of the eastern magic, summoned to beguile the sated leisure of a youthful Solomon. With them came a maiden of more exquisite beauty, though smaller stature, than the rest, bearing the light Moorish lute; and a faint and languid smile broke over the beautiful face of Boabdil, as his eyes rested upon her graceful form and the dark yet glowing lustre of her oriental countenance. She alone approached the king, timidly kissed his hand, and then, joining her comrades, commenced the following song, to

the air and very words of which the feet of the dancing-girls kept time, while with the chorus rang the silver bells of the musical instrument which each of the dancers carried.

AMINE'S SONG

I

Softly, oh, softly glide,
Gentle Music, thou silver tide,
Bearing, the lulled air along,
This leaf from the Rose of Song!
To its port in his soul let it float,
The frail, but the fragrant boat,
Bear it, soft Air, along!

II

With the burthen of sound we are laden,
Like the bells on the trees of Aden,[1]
When they thrill with a tinkling tone
At the Wind from the Holy Throne,
Hark, as we move around,
We shake off the buds of sound;
Thy presence, Beloved, is Aden.

III

Sweet chime that I hear and wake
I would, for my lov'd one's sake,
That I were a sound like thee,
To the depths of his heart to flee.
If my breath had his senses blest;
If my voice in his heart could rest;
What pleasure to die like thee!

The music ceased; the dancers remained motionless in their graceful postures, as if arrested into statues of alabaster; and the young songstress cast herself on a cushion at the feet of the monarch, and looked up fondly, but silently, into his yet melancholy eyes,—when a man, whose entrance had not been noticed, was seen to stand within the chamber.

[1] The Mohammedans believe that musical bells hang on the trees of Paradise, and are put in motion by a wind from the throne of God.

He was about the middle stature,—lean, muscular, and strongly though sparely built. A plain black robe, something in the fashion of the Armenian gown, hung long and loosely over a tunic of bright scarlet, girdled by a broad belt, from the centre of which was suspended a small golden key, while at the left side appeared the jewelled hilt of a crooked dagger. His features were cast in a larger and grander mould than was common among the Moors of Spain; the forehead was broad, massive, and singularly high, and the dark eyes of unusual size and brilliancy; his beard, short, black, and glossy, curled upward, and concealed all the lower part of the face, save a firm, compressed, and resolute expression in the lips, which were large and full; the nose was high, aquiline, and well-shaped; and the whole character of the head (which was, for symmetry, on too large and gigantic a scale as proportioned to the form) was indicative of extraordinary energy and power. At the first glance, the stranger might have seemed scarce on the borders of middle age; but, on a more careful examination, the deep lines and wrinkles, marked on the forehead and round the eyes, betrayed a more advanced period of life. With arms folded on his breast, he stood by the side of the king, waiting in silence the moment when his presence should be perceived.

He did not wait long; the eyes and gesture of the girl nestled at the feet of Boabdil drew the king's attention to the spot where the stranger stood: his eye brightened when it fell upon him.

"Almamen," cried Boabdil, eagerly, "you are welcome." As he spoke, he motioned to the dancing-girls to withdraw. "May I not rest? O core of my heart, thy bird is in its home," murmured the songstress at the king's feet.

"Sweet Amine," answered Boabdil, tenderly smoothing down her ringlets as he bent to kiss her brow, "you should witness only my hours of delight. Toil and business have nought with thee; I will join thee ere yet the nightingale hymns his last music to the moon." Amine sighed, rose, and vanished with her companions.

"My friend," said the king, when alone with Almamen, "your counsels often soothe me into quiet, yet in such hours quiet is a crime. But what do?—how struggle?—how act? Alas! at the hour of his birth, rightly did they affix to the name of Boabdil, the epithet of *El Zogoybi*. [The Unlucky]. Misfortune set upon my brow her dark and fated stamp ere yet my lips could shape a prayer against her power. My fierce father, whose frown was as the frown of Azrael, hated me in my cradle; in my youth my name was invoked by rebels against my will; imprisoned by my father, with the poison-bowl or the dagger hourly before my eyes, I was saved only by the artifice of my mother. When age and infirmity broke the iron sceptre of the king, my claims to the throne were set aside, and my uncle, El Zagal, usurped my birthright. Amidst open war and secret treason I wrestled for my crown; and now, the sole sovereign of Granada, when, as I fondly imagined, my uncle had lost all claim on the affections of my people by succumbing to the Christian king, and accepting a fief under his dominion, I find that the very crime of El Zagal is fixed upon me by my unhappy subjects—that they deem he would not have yielded but for my supineness. At the moment of my delivery from my rival, I am received with execration by my subjects, and, driven into this my fortress of the Alhambra, dare not venture to head my armies, or to face my people; yet am I called weak and irresolute, when strength and courage are forbid me. And as the water glides from yonder rock, that hath no power to retain it, I see the tide of empire welling from my hands."

The young king spoke warmly and bitterly; and, in the irritation of his thoughts, strode, while he spoke, with rapid and irregular strides along the chamber. Almamen marked his emotion with an eye and lip of rigid composure.

"Light of the faithful," said he, when Boabdil had concluded, "the powers above never doom man to perpetual sorrow, nor perpetual joy: the cloud and the sunshine are alike essential to the heaven of our destinies; and if thou hast suffered in thy youth, thou hast exhausted the calamities of fate, and thy manhood will be glorious, and thine age serene."

"Thou speakest as if the armies of Ferdinand were not already around my walls," said Boabdil, impatiently.

"The armies of Sennacherib were as mighty," answered Almamen.

"Wise seer," returned the king, in a tone half sarcastic and half solemn, "we, the Mussulmans of Spain, are not the blind fanatics of the Eastern world. On us have fallen the lights of philosophy and science; and if the more clear-sighted among us yet outwardly reverence the forms and fables worshipped by the multitude, it is from the wisdom of policy, not the folly of belief. Talk not to me, then, of thine examples of the ancient and elder creeds: the agents of God for this world are now, at least, in men, not angels; and if I wait till Ferdinand share the destiny of Sennacherib, I wait only till the Standard of the Cross wave above the Vermilion Towers."

"Yet," said Almamen, "while my lord the king rejects the fanaticism of belief, doth he reject the fanaticism of persecution? You disbelieve the stories of the Hebrews; yet you suffer the Hebrews themselves, that ancient and kindred Arabian race, to be ground to the dust, condemned and tortured by your judges, your informers, your soldiers, and your subjects."

"The base misers! they deserve their fate," answered Boabdil, loftily. "Gold is their god, and the market-place their country; amidst the tears and groans of nations, they sympathise only with the rise and fall of trade; and, the thieves of the universe! while their hand is against every man's coffer, why wonder that they provoke the hand of every man against their throats? Worse than the tribe of Hanifa, who eat their god only in time of famine;—[The tribe of Hanifa worshipped a lump of dough]—the race of Moisa—[Moses]—would sell the Seven Heavens for the dent on the back of the date-stone."—[A proverb used in the Koran, signifying the smallest possible trifle].

"Your laws leave them no ambition but that of avarice," replied Almamen; "and as the plant will crook and distort its trunk, to raise its head through every obstacle to the sun, so the mind of man twists and perverts itself, if legitimate openings are denied it, to find its natural element in the gale of power, or the sunshine of esteem. These Hebrews were not traffickers and misers in their own sacred land when they routed your ancestors, the Arab armies of old; and gnawed the flesh from their bones in famine, rather than yield a weaker city than Granada to a mightier force than the holiday lords of Spain. Let this pass. My lord rejects the belief in the agencies of the angels; doth he still retain belief in the wisdom of mortal men?"

"Yes!" returned Boabdil, quickly; "for of the one I know nought; of the other, mine own senses can be the judge. Almamen, my fiery kinsman, Muza, hath this evening been with me. He hath urged me to reject the fears of my people, which chain my panting spirit within these walls; he hath urged me to gird on yonder shield and cimiter, and to appear in the Vivarrambla, at the head of the nobles of Granada. My heart leaps high at the thought! and if I cannot live, at least I will die—a king!"

"It is nobly spoken," said Almamen, coldly.

"You approve, then, my design?"

"The friends of the king cannot approve the ambition of the king to die."

"Ha!" said Boabdil, in an altered voice, "thou thinkest, then, that I am doomed to perish in this struggle?"

"As the hour shall be chosen, wilt thou fall or triumph."

"And that hour?"

"Is not yet come."

"Dost thou read the hour in the stars?"

"Let Moorish seers cultivate that frantic credulity: thy servant sees but in the stars worlds mightier than this little earth, whose light would neither wane nor wink, if earth itself were swept from the infinities of space."

"Mysterious man!" said Boabdil; "whence, then, is thy power?—whence thy knowledge of the future?"

Almamen approached the king, as he now stood by the open balcony.

"Behold!" said he, pointing to the waters of the Darro—"yonder stream is of an element in which man cannot live nor breathe: above, in the thin and impalpable air, our steps cannot find a

footing, the armies of all earth cannot build an empire. And yet, by the exercise of a little art, the fishes and the birds, the inhabitants of the air and the water, minister to our most humble wants, the most common of our enjoyments; so it is with the true science of enchantment. Thinkest thou that, while the petty surface of the world is crowded with living things, there is no life in the vast centre within the earth, and the immense ether that surrounds it? As the fisherman snares his prey, as the fowler entraps the bird, so, by the art and genius of our human mind, we may thrall and command the subtler beings of realms and elements which our material bodies cannot enter—our gross senses cannot survey. This, then, is my lore. Of other worlds know I nought; but of the things of this world, whether men, or, as your legends term them, ghouls and genii, I have learned something. To the future, I myself am blind; but I can invoke and conjure up those whose eyes are more piercing, whose natures are more gifted."

"Prove to me thy power," said Boabdil, awed less by the words than by the thrilling voice and the impressive aspect of the enchanter.

"Is not the king's will my law?" answered Almamen; "be his will obeyed. To-morrow night I await thee."

"Where?"

Almamen paused a moment, and then whispered a sentence in the king's ear: Boabdil started, and turned pale.

"A fearful spot!"

"So is the Alhambra itself, great Boabdil; while Ferdinand is without the walls and Muza within the city."

"Muza! Darest thou mistrust my bravest warrior?"

"What wise king will trust the idol of the king's army? Did Boabdil fall to-morrow by a chance javelin, in the field, whom would the nobles and the warriors place upon his throne? Doth it require an enchanter's lore to whisper to thy heart the answer in the name of 'Muza'?"

"Oh, wretched state! oh, miserable king!" exclaimed Boabdil, in a tone of great anguish. "I never had a father. I have now no people; a little while, and I shall have no country. Am I never to have a friend?"

"A friend! what king ever had?" returned Almamen, drily.

"Away, man—away!" cried Boabdil, as the impatient spirit of his rank and race shot dangerous fire from his eyes; "your cold and bloodless wisdom freezes up all the veins of my manhood! Glory, confidence, human sympathy, and feeling—your counsels annihilate them all. Leave me! I would be alone."

"We meet to-morrow, at midnight, mighty Boabdil," said Almamen, with his usual unmoved and passionless tones. "May the king live for ever."

The king turned; but his monitor had already disappeared. He went as he came—noiseless and sudden as a ghost.

CHAPTER III. THE LOVERS

When Muza parted from Almamen, he bent his steps towards the hill that rises opposite the ascent crowned with the towers of the Alhambra; the sides and summit of which eminence were tenanted by the luxurious population of the city. He selected the more private and secluded paths; and, half way up the hill, arrived, at last, before a low wall of considerable extent, which girded the gardens of some wealthier inhabitant of the city. He looked long and anxiously round; all was solitary; nor was the stillness broken, save as an occasional breeze, from the snowy heights of the Sierra Nevada, rustled the fragrant leaves of the citron and pomegranate; or as the silver tinkling of waterfalls chimed melodiously within the gardens. The Moor's heart beat high: a moment more, and he had scaled the wall; and found himself upon a green sward, variegated by the rich colours of many a sleeping flower, and shaded by groves and alleys of luxuriant foliage and golden fruits.

It was not long before he stood beside a house that seemed of a construction anterior to the Moorish dynasty. It was built over low cloisters formed by heavy and timeworn pillars, concealed, for the most part by a profusion of roses and creeping shrubs: the lattices above the cloisters opened upon large gilded balconies, the super-addition of Moriscan taste. In one only of the casements a lamp was visible; the rest of the mansion was dark, as if, save in that chamber, sleep kept watch over the inmates. It was to this window that the Moor stole; and, after a moment's pause, he murmured rather than sang, so low and whispered was his voice, the following simple verses, slightly varied from an old Arabian poet:—

Light of my soul, arise, arise!
Thy sister lights are in the skies;
    We want thine eyes,
    Thy joyous eyes;
The Night is mourning for thine eyes!
The sacred verse is on my sword,
But on my heart thy name
The words on each alike adored;
The truth of each the same,
The same!—alas! too well I feel
The heart is truer than the steel!
Light of my soul! upon me shine;
Night wakes her stars to envy mine.
    Those eyes of thine,
    Wild eyes of thine,
What stars are like those eyes of thine?

As he concluded, the lattice softly opened; and a female form appeared on the balcony.

"Ah, Leila!" said the Moor, "I see thee, and I am blessed!"

"Hush!" answered Leila; "speak low, nor tarry long I fear that our interviews are suspected; and this," she added in a trembling voice, "may perhaps be the last time we shall meet."

"Holy Prophet!" exclaimed Muza, passionately, "what do I hear? Why this mystery? why cannot I learn thine origin, thy rank, thy parents? Think you, beautiful Leila, that Granada holds a rouse lofty enough to disdain the alliance with Muza Ben Abil Gazan? and oh!" he added (sinking the haughty tones of his voice into accents of the softest tenderness), "if not too high to scorn me, what should war against our loves and our bridals? For worn equally on my heart were the flower of thy sweet self, whether the mountain top or the valley gave birth to the odour and the bloom."

"Alas!" answered Leila, weeping, "the mystery thou complainest of is as dark to myself as thee. How often have I told thee that I know nothing of my birth or childish fortunes, save a dim memory of a more distant and burning clime; where, amidst sands and wastes, springs the everlasting cedar, and the camel grazes on stunted herbage withering in the fiery air? Then, it seemed to me that I had a mother: fond eyes looked on me, and soft songs hushed me into sleep."

"Thy mother's soul has passed into mine," said the Moor, tenderly.

Leila continued:—"Borne hither, I passed from childhood into youth within these walls. Slaves ministered to my slightest wish; and those who have seen both state and poverty, which I have not, tell me that treasures and splendour, that might glad a monarch, are prodigalised around me: but of ties and kindred know I little: my father, a stern and silent man, visits me but rarely—sometimes months pass, and I see him not; but I feel he loves me; and, till I knew thee, Muza, my brightest hours were in listening to the footsteps and flying to the arms of that solitary friend."

"Know you not his name?"

"Nor, I nor any one of the household; save perhaps Ximen, the chief of the slaves, an old and withered man, whose very eye chills me into fear and silence."

"Strange!" said the Moor, musingly; "yet why think you our love is discovered, or can be thwarted?"

"Hush! Ximen sought me this day: 'Maiden,' said he, 'men's footsteps have been tracked within the gardens; if your sire know this, you will have looked your last on Granada. Learn,' he added, in a softer voice, as he saw me tremble, 'that permission were easier given to thee to wed the wild tiger than to mate with the loftiest noble of Morisca! Beware!' He spoke, and left me. O Muza!" she continued, passionately wringing her hands, "my heart sinks within me, and omen and doom rise dark before my sight!"

"By my father's head, these obstacles but fire my love, and I would scale to thy possession, though every step in the ladder were the corpses of a hundred foes!"

Scarcely had the fiery and high-souled Moor uttered his boast, than, from some unseen hand amidst the groves, a javelin whirred past him, and as the air it raised came sharp upon his cheek, half buried its quivering shaft in the trunk of a tree behind him.

"Fly, fly, and save thyself! O God, protect him!" cried Leila; and she vanished within the chamber.

The Moor did not wait the result of a deadlier aim; he turned; yet, in the instinct of his fierce nature, not from, but against, the foe; his drawn scimitar in his hand, the half-suppressed cry of wrath trembling on his lips, he sprang forward in the direction the javelin had sped. With eyes accustomed to the ambuscades of Moorish warfare, he searched eagerly, yet warily through the dark and sighing foliage. No sign of life met his gaze; and at length, grimly and reluctantly, he retraced his steps, and quitted the demesnes; but just as he had cleared the wall, a voice—low, but sharp and shrill—came from the gardens.

"Thou art spared," it said, "but, haply, for a more miserable doom!"

CHAPTER IV. THE FATHER AND DAUGHTER

The chamber into which Leila retreated bore out the character she had given of the interior of her home. The fashion of its ornament and decoration was foreign to that adopted by the Moors of Granada. It had a more massive and, if we may use the term, Egyptian gorgeousness. The walls were covered with the stuffs of the East, stiff with gold, embroidered upon ground of the deepest purple; strange characters, apparently in some foreign tongue, were wrought in the tesselated cornices and on the heavy ceiling, which was supported by square pillars, round which were twisted serpents of gold and enamel, with eyes to which enormous emeralds gave a green and lifelike glare: various scrolls and musical instruments lay scattered upon marble tables: and a solitary lamp of burnished silver cast a dim and subdued light around the chamber. The effect of the whole, though splendid, was gloomy, strange, and oppressive, and rather suited to the thick and cave-like architecture which of old protected the inhabitants of Thebes and Memphis from the rays of the African sun, than to the transparent heaven and light pavilions of the graceful orientals of Granada.

Leila stood within this chamber, pale and breathless, with her lips apart, her hands clasped, her very soul in her ears; nor was it possible to conceive a more perfect ideal of some delicate and brilliant Peri, captured in the palace of a hostile and gloomy Genius. Her form was of the lightest shape consistent with the roundness of womanly beauty; and there was something in it of that elastic and fawnlike grace which a sculptor seeks to embody in his dreams of a being more aerial than those of earth. Her luxuriant hair was dark indeed, but a purple and glossy hue redeemed it from that heaviness of shade too common in the tresses of the Asiatics; and her complexion, naturally pale but clear and lustrous, would have been deemed fair even in the north. Her features, slightly aquiline, were formed in the rarest mould of symmetry, and her full rich lips disclosed teeth that might have shamed the pearl. But the chief charm of that exquisite countenance was in an expression of softness and purity, and intellectual sentiment, that seldom accompanies that cast of loveliness, and was wholly foreign to the voluptuous and dreamy languor of Moorish maidens; Leila had been educated, and the statue had received a soul.

After a few minutes of intense suspense, she again stole to the lattice, gently unclosed it, and looked forth. Far, through an opening amidst the trees, she descried for a single moment the erect and stately figure of her lover, darkening the moonshine on the sward, as now, quitting his fruitless search, he turned his lingering gaze towards the lattice of his beloved: the thick and interlacing foliage quickly hid him from her eyes; but Leila had seen enough—she turned within, and said, as grateful tears trickled clown her cheeks, and she sank on her knees upon the piled cushions of the chamber: “God of my fathers! I bless Thee—he is safe!”

“And yet (she added, as a painful thought crossed her), how may I pray for him? we kneel not to the same Divinity; and I have been taught to loathe and shudder at his creed! Alas! how will this end? Fatal was the hour when he first beheld me in yonder gardens; more fatal still the hour in which he crossed the barrier, and told Leila that she was beloved by the hero whose arm was the shelter, whose name is the blessing, of Granada. Ah, me! Ah, me!”

The young maiden covered her face with her hands, and sank into a passionate reverie, broken only by her sobs. Some time had passed in this undisturbed indulgence of her grief, when the arras was gently put aside, and a man, of remarkable garb and mien, advanced into the chamber, pausing as he beheld her dejected attitude, and gazing on her with a look on which pity and tenderness seemed to struggle against habitual severity and sternness.

“Leila!” said the intruder.

Leila started, and and a deep blush suffused her countenance; she dashed the tears from her eyes, and came forward with a vain attempt to smile.

“My father, welcome!”

The stranger seated himself on the cushions, and motioned Leila to his side.

"These tears are fresh upon thy cheek," said he, gravely; "they are the witness of thy race! our daughters are born to weep, and our sons to groan! ashes are on the head of the mighty, and the Fountains of the Beautiful run with gall! Oh that we could but struggle—that we could but dare—that we could raise up, our heads, and unite against the bondage of the evil doer! It may not be—but one man shall avenge a nation!"

The dark face of Leila's father, well fitted to express powerful emotion, became terrible in its wrath and passion; his brow and lip worked convulsively; but the paroxysm was brief; and scarce could she shudder at its intensity ere it had subsided into calm.

"Enough of these thoughts, which thou, a woman and a child, art not formed to witness. Leila, thou hast been nurtured with tenderness, and schooled with care. Harsh and unloving may I have seemed to thee, but I would have shed the best drops of my heart to have saved thy young years from a single pang. Nay, listen to me silently. That thou mightest one day be worthy of thy race, and that thine hours might not pass in indolent and weary lassitude, thou hast been taught lessons of a knowledge rarely to thy sex. Not thine the lascivious arts of the Moorish maidens; not thine their harlot songs, and their dances of lewd delight; thy delicate limbs were but taught the attitude that Nature dedicates to the worship of a God, and the music of thy voice was tuned to the songs of thy fallen country, sad with the memory of her wrongs, animated with the names of her heroes, with the solemnity of her prayers. These scrolls, and the lessons of our seers, have imparted to thee such of our science and our history as may fit thy mind to aspire, and thy heart to feel for a sacred cause. Thou listenest to me, Leila?"

Perplexed and wondering, for never before had her father addressed her in such a strain, the maiden answered with an earnestness of manner that seemed to content the questioner; and he resumed, with an altered, hollow, solemn voice:

"Then curse the persecutors. Daughter of the great Hebrew race, arise and curse the Moorish taskmaster and spoiler!"

As he spoke, the adjuror himself rose, lifting his right hand on high; while his left touched the shoulder of the maiden. But she, after gazing a moment in wild and terrified amazement upon his face, fell cowering at his knees; and, clasping them imploringly, exclaimed in scarce articulate murmurs:

"Oh, spare me! spare me!"

The Hebrew, for such he was, surveyed her, as she thus quailed at his feet, with a look of rage and scorn: his hand wandered to his poniard, he half unsheathed it, thrust it back with a muttered curse, and then, deliberately drawing it forth, cast it on the ground beside her.

"Degenerate girl!" he said, in accents that vainly struggled for calm, "if thou hast admitted to thy heart one unworthy thought towards a Moorish infidel, dig deep and root it out, even with the knife, and to the death—so wilt thou save this hand from that degrading task."

He drew himself hastily from her grasp, and left the unfortunate girl alone and senseless.

CHAPTER V. AMBITION DISTORTED INTO VICE BY LAW

On descending a broad flight of stairs from the apartment, the Hebrew encountered an old man, habited in loose garments of silk and fur, upon whose withered and wrinkled face life seemed scarcely to struggle against the advance of death—so haggard, wan, and corpse-like was its aspect.

"Ximen," said the Israelite, "trusty and beloved servant, follow me to the cavern." He did not tarry for an answer, but continued his way with rapid strides through various courts and alleys, till he came at length into a narrow, dark, and damp gallery, that seemed cut from the living rock. At its entrance was a strong grate, which gave way to the Hebrew's touch upon the spring, though the united strength of a hundred men could not have moved it from its hinge. Taking up a brazen lamp that burnt in a niche within it, the Hebrew paused impatiently till the feeble steps of the old man reached the spot; and then, reclosing the grate, pursued his winding way for a considerable distance, till he stopped suddenly by a part of the rock which seemed in no respect different from the rest: and so artfully contrived and concealed was the door which he now opened, and so suddenly did it yield to his hand, that it appeared literally the effect of enchantment, when the rock yawned, and discovered a circular cavern, lighted with brazen lamps, and spread with hangings and cushions of thick furs. Upon rude and seemingly natural pillars of rock, various antique and rusty arms were suspended; in large niches were deposited scrolls, clasped and bound with iron; and a profusion of strange and uncouth instruments and machines (in which modern science might, perhaps, discover the tools of chemical invention) gave a magical and ominous aspect to the wild abode.

The Hebrew cast himself on a couch of furs; and, as the old man entered and closed the door, "Ximen," said he, "fill out wine—it is a soothing counsellor, and I need it."

Extracting from one of the recesses of the cavern a flask and goblet, Ximen offered to his lord a copious draught of the sparkling vintage of the Vega, which seemed to invigorate and restore him.

"Old man," said he, concluding the potation with a deep-drawn sigh, "fill to thyself-drink till thy veins feel young."

Ximen obeyed the mandate but imperfectly; the wine just touched his lips, and the goblet was put aside.

"Ximen," resumed the Israelite, "how many of our race have been butchered by the avarice of the Moorish kings since first thou didst set foot within the city?"

"Three thousand—the number was completed last winter, by the order of Jusef the vizier; and their goods and coffers are transformed into shafts and cimiters against the dogs of Galilee."

"Three thousand—no more! three thousand only! I would the number had been tripled, for the interest is becoming due!"

"My brother, and my son, and my grandson, are among the number," said the old man, and his face grew yet more deathlike.

"Their monuments shall be in hecatombs of their tyrants. They shall not, at least, call the Jews niggards in revenge."

"But pardon me, noble chief of a fallen people; thinkest thou we shall be less despoiled and trodden under foot by yon haughty and stiff-necked Nazarenes, than by the Arabian misbelievers?"

"Accursed, in truth, are both," returned the Hebrew; "but the one promise more fairly than the other. I have seen this Ferdinand, and his proud queen; they are pledged to accord us rights and immunities we have never known before in Europe."

"And they will not touch our traffic, our gains, our gold?"

"Out on thee!" cried the fiery Israelite, stamping on the ground. "I would all the gold of earth were sunk into the everlasting pit! It is this mean, and miserable, and loathsome leprosy of avarice, that gnaws away from our whole race the heart, the soul, nay—the very form, of man! Many a time, when I have seen the lordly features of the descendants of Solomon and Joshua (features that stamp

the nobility of the eastern world born to mastery and command) sharpened and furrowed by petty cares,—when I have looked upon the frame of the strong man bowed, like a crawling reptile, to some huckstering bargainer of silks and unguents,—and heard the voice, that should be raising the battle-cry, smoothed into fawning accents of base fear, or yet baser hope,—I have asked myself, if I am indeed of the blood of Israel! and thanked the great Jehovah that he hath spared me at least the curse that hath blasted my brotherhood into usurers and slaves"

Ximen prudently forbore an answer to enthusiasm which he neither shared nor understood; but, after a brief silence, turned back the stream of the conversation.

"You resolve, then, upon prosecuting vengeance on the Moors, at whatsoever hazard of the broken faith of these Nazarenes?"

"Ay, the vapour of human blood hath risen unto heaven, and, collected into thunder-clouds, hangs over the doomed and guilty city. And now, Ximen, I have a new cause for hatred to the Moors: the flower that I have reared and watched, the spoiler hath sought to pluck it from my hearth. Leila —thou hast guarded her ill, Ximen; and, wert thou not endeared to me by thy very malice and vices, the rising sun should have seen thy trunk on the waters of the Darro."

"My lord," replied Ximen, "if thou, the wisest of our people, canst not guard a maiden from love, how canst thou see crime in the dull eyes and numbed senses of a miserable old man?"

The Israelite did not answer, nor seem to hear this deprecatory remonstrance. He appeared rather occupied with his own thoughts; and, speaking to himself, he muttered, "It must be so: the sacrifice is hard—the danger great; but here, at least, it is more immediate. It shall be done. Ximen," he continued, speaking aloud; "dost thou feel assured that even mine own countrymen, mine own tribe, know me not as one of them? Were my despised birth and religion published, my limbs would be torn asunder as an impostor; and all the arts of the Cabala could not save me."

"Doubt not, great master; none in Granada, save thy faithful Ximen, know thy secret."

"So let me dream and hope. And now to my work; for this night must be spent in toil."

The Hebrew drew before him some of the strange instruments we have described; and took from the recesses in the rock several scrolls. The old man lay at his feet, ready to obey his behests; but, to all appearance, rigid and motionless as the dead, whom his blanched hues and shrivelled form resembled. It was, indeed, as the picture of the enchanter at his work, and the corpse of some man of old, revived from the grave to minister to his spells, and execute his commands.

Enough in the preceding conversation has transpired to convince the reader, that the Hebrew, in whom he has already detected the Almamen of the Alhambra, was of no character common to his tribe. Of a lineage that shrouded itself in the darkness of his mysterious people, in their day of power, and possessed of immense wealth, which threw into poverty the resources of Gothic princes,—the youth of that remarkable man had been spent, not in traffic and merchandise but travel and study.

As a child, his home had been in Granada. He had seen his father butchered by the late king, Muley Abul Hassan, without other crime than his reputed riches; and his body literally cut open, to search for the jewels it was supposed he had swallowed. He saw, and, boy as he was he vowed revenge. A distant kinsman bore the orphan to lands more secure from persecution; and the art with which the Jews concealed their wealth, scattering it over various cities, had secured to Almamen the treasures the tyrant of Granada had failed to grasp.

He had visited the greater part of the world then known; and resided for many years at the court of the sultan of that hoary Egypt, which still retained its fame for abstruse science and magic lore. He had not in vain applied himself to such tempting and wild researches; and had acquired many of those secrets now perhaps lost for ever to the world. We do not mean to intimate that he attained to what legend and superstition impose upon our faith as the art of sorcery. He could neither command the elements nor pierce the veil of the future-scatter armies with a word, nor pass from spot to spot by the utterance of a charmed formula. But men who, for ages, had passed their lives in attempting all the effects that can astonish and awe the vulgar, could not but learn some secrets which

all the more sober wisdom of modern times would search ineffectually to solve or to revive. And many of such arts, acquired mechanically (their invention often the work of a chemical accident), those who attained to them could not always explain, not account for the phenomena they created, so that the mightiness of their own deceptions deceived themselves; and they often believed they were the masters of the Nature to which they were, in reality, but erratic and wild disciples. Of such was the student in that grim cavern. He was, in some measure, the dupe, partly of his own bewildered wisdom, partly of the fervour of an imagination exceedingly high-wrought and enthusiastic. His own gorgeous vanity intoxicated him: and, if it be an historical truth that the kings of the ancient world, blinded by their own power, had moments in which they believed themselves more than men, it is not incredible that sages, elevated even above kings, should conceive a frenzy as weak, or, it may be, as sublime: and imagine that they did not claim in vain the awful dignity with which the faith of the multitude invested their faculties and gifts.

But, though the accident of birth, which excluded him from all field for energy and ambition, had thus directed the powerful mind of Almamen to contemplation and study, nature had never intended passions so fierce for the calm, though visionary, pursuits to which he was addicted. Amidst scrolls and seers, he had pined for action and glory; and, baffled in all wholesome egress, by the universal exclusion which, in every land, and from every faith, met the religion he belonged to, the faculties within him ran riot, producing gigantic but baseless schemes, which, as one after the other crumbled away, left behind feelings of dark misanthropy and intense revenge.

Perhaps, had his religion been prosperous and powerful, he might have been a sceptic; persecution and affliction made him a fanatic. Yet, true to that prominent characteristic of the old Hebrew race, which made them look to a Messiah only as a warrior and a prince, and which taught them to associate all their hopes and schemes with worldly victories and power, Almamen desired rather to advance, than to obey, his religion. He cared little for its precepts, he thought little of its doctrines; but, night and day, he revolved his schemes for its earthly restoration and triumph.

At that time, the Moors in Spain were far more deadly persecutors of the Jews than the Christians were. Amidst the Spanish cities on the coast, that merchant tribe had formed commercial connections with the Christians, sufficiently beneficial, both to individuals and to communities, to obtain for them, not only toleration, but something of personal friendship, wherever men bought and sold in the market-place. And the gloomy fanaticism which afterwards stained the fame of the great Ferdinand, and introduced the horrors of the Inquisition, had not yet made it self more than fitfully visible. But the Moors had treated this unhappy people with a wholesale and relentless barbarity. At Granada, under the reign of the fierce father of Boabdil,—"that king with the tiger heart,"—the Jews had been literally placed without the pale of humanity; and even under the mild and contemplative Boabdil himself, they had been plundered without mercy, and, if suspected of secreting their treasures, massacred without scruple; the wants of the state continued their unrelenting accusers,—their wealth, their inexpiable crime.

It was in the midst of these barbarities that Almamen, for the first time since the day when the death-shriek of his agonised father rang in his ears, suddenly returned to Granada. He saw the unmitigated miseries of his brethern, and he remembered and repeated his vow. His name changed, his kindred dead, none remembered, in the mature Almamen, the beardless child of Issachar, the Jew. He had long, indeed, deemed it advisable to disguise his faith; and was known, throughout the African kingdoms, but as the potent santon, or the wise magician.

This fame soon lifted him, in Granada, high in the councils of the court. Admitted to the intimacy of Muley Hassan, with Boabdil, and the queen mother, he had conspired against that monarch; and had lived, at least, to avenge his father upon the royal murderer. He was no less intimate with Boabdil; but steeled against fellowship or affection for all men out of the pale of his faith, he saw in the confidence of the king only the blindness of a victim.

Serpent as he was, he cared not through what mire of treachery and fraud he trailed his baleful folds, so that, at last, he could spring upon his prey. Nature had given him sagacity and strength. The curse of circumstance had humbled, but reconciled him to the dust. He had the crawl of the reptile, —he had, also, its poison and its fangs.

CHAPTER VI. THE LION IN THE NET

IT was the next night, not long before daybreak, that the King of Granada abruptly summoned to his council Jusef, his vizier. The old man found Boabdil in great disorder and excitement; but he almost deemed his sovereign mad, when he received from him the order to seize upon the person of Muza Ben Abil Gazan, and to lodge him in the strongest dungeon of the Vermilion Tower. Presuming upon Boabdil's natural mildness, the vizier ventured to remonstrate,—to suggest the danger of laying violent hands upon a chief so beloved,—and to inquire what cause should be assigned for the outrage.

The veins swelled like cords upon Boabdil's brow, as he listened to the vizier; and his answer was short and peremptory.

"Am I yet a king, that I should fear a subject, or excuse my will? Thou hast my orders; there are my signet and the firman: obedience or the bow-string!"

Never before had Boabdil so resembled his dread father in speech and air; the vizier trembled to the soles of his feet, and withdrew in silence. Boabdil watched him depart; and then, clasping his hands in great emotion, exclaimed, "O lips of the dead! ye have warned me; and to you I sacrifice the friend of my youth."

On quitting Boabdil the vizier, taking with him some of those foreign slaves of a seraglio, who know no sympathy with human passion outside its walls, bent his way to the palace of Muza, sorely puzzled and perplexed. He did not, however, like to venture upon the hazard of the alarm it might occasion throughout the neighbourhood, if he endeavoured, at so unseasonable an hour, to force an entrance. He resolved, rather, with his train to wait at a little distance, till, with the growing dawn, the gates should be unclosed, and the inmates of the palace astir.

Accordingly, cursing his stars, and wondering at his mission, Jusef, and his silent and ominous attendants, concealed themselves in a small copse adjoining the palace, until the daylight fairly broke over the awakened city. He then passed into the palace; and was conducted to a hall, where he found the renowned Moslem already astir, and conferring with some Zegri captains upon the tactics of a sortie designed for that day.

It was with so evident a reluctance and apprehension that Jusef approached the prince, that the fierce and quick-sighted Zegris instantly suspected some evil intention in his visit; and when Muza, in surprise, yielded to the prayer of the vizier for a private audience, it was with scowling brows and sparkling eyes that the Moorish warriors left the darling of the nobles alone with the messenger of their king.

"By the tomb of the prophet!" said one of the Zegris, as he quitted the hall, "the timid Boabdil suspects our Ben Abil Gazan. I learned of this before."

"Hush!" said another of the band; "let us watch. If the king touch a hair of Muza's head, Allah have mercy on his sins!"

Meanwhile, the vizier, in silence, showed to Muza the firman and the signet; and then, without venturing to announce the place to which he was commissioned to conduct the prince, besought him to follow at once. Muza changed colour, but not with fear.

"Alas!" said he, in a tone of deep sorrow, "can it be that I have fallen under my royal kinsman's suspicion or displeasure? But no matter; proud to set to Granada an example of valour in her defence, be it mine to set, also, an example of obedience to her king. Go on—I will follow thee. Yet stay, you will have no need of guards; let us depart by a private egress: the Zegris might misgive, did they see me leave the palace with you at the very time the army are assembling in the Vivarrambla, and awaiting my presence. This way."

Thus saying, Muza, who, fierce as he was, obeyed every impulse that the oriental loyalty dictated from a subject to a king, passed from the hall to a small door that admitted into the garden, and in thoughtful silence accompanied the vizier towards the Alhambra. As they passed the copse in

which Muza, two nights before, had met with Almamen, the Moor, lifting his head suddenly, beheld fixed upon him the dark eyes of the magician, as he emerged from the trees. Muza thought there was in those eyes a malign and hostile exultation; but Almamen, gravely saluting him, passed on through the grove: the prince did not deign to look back, or he might once more have encountered that withering gaze.

"Proud heathen!" muttered Almamen to himself, "thy father filled his treasuries from the gold of many a tortured Hebrew; and even thou, too haughty to be the miser, hast been savage enough to play the bigot. Thy name is a curse in Israel; yet dost thou lust after the daughter of our despised race, and, could defeated passion sting thee, I were avenged. Ay, sweep on, with thy stately step and lofty crest-thou goest to chains, perhaps to death."

As Almamen thus vented his bitter spirit, the last gleam of the white robes of Muza vanished from his gaze. He paused a moment, turned away abruptly, and said, half aloud, "Vengeance, not on one man only, but a whole race! Now for the Nazarene."

BOOK. II

CHAPTER I. THE ROYAL TENT OF SPAIN. —THE KING AND THE DOMINICAN —THE VISITOR AND THE HOSTAGE

Our narrative now summons us to the Christian army, and to the tent in which the Spanish king held nocturnal counsel with some of his more confidential warriors and advisers. Ferdinand had taken the field with all the pomp and circumstance of a tournament rather than of a campaign; and his pavilion literally blazed with purple and cloth of gold.

The king sat at the head of a table on which were scattered maps and papers; nor in countenance and mien did that great and politic monarch seem unworthy of the brilliant chivalry by which he was surrounded. His black hair, richly perfumed and anointed, fell in long locks on either side of a high imperial brow, upon whose calm, though not unfurrowed surface, the physiognomist would in vain have sought to read the inscrutable heart of kings. His features were regular and majestic: and his mantle, clasped with a single jewel of rare price and lustre, and wrought at the breast with a silver cross, waved over a vigorous and manly frame, which derived from the composed and tranquil dignity of habitual command that imposing effect which many of the renowned knights and heroes in his presence took from loftier stature and ampler proportions. At his right hand sat Prince Juan, his son, in the first bloom of youth; at his left, the celebrated Rodrigo Ponce de Leon, Marquess of Cadiz; along the table, in the order of their military rank, were seen the splendid Duke of Medina Sidonia, equally noble in aspect and in name; the worn and thoughtful countenance of the Marquess de Villena (the Bayard of Spain); the melancholy brow of the heroic Alonzo de Aguilar; and the gigantic frame, the animated features, and sparkling eyes, of that fiery Hernando del Pulgar, surnamed “the knight of the exploits.”

“You see, senores,” said the king, continuing an address, to which his chiefs seemed to listen with reverential attention, “our best hope of speedily gaining the city is rather in the dissensions of the Moors than our own sacred arms. The walls are strong, the population still numerous; and under Muza Ben Abil Gazan, the tactics of the hostile army are, it must be owned, administered with such skill as to threaten very formidable delays to the period of our conquest. Avoiding the hazard of a fixed battle, the infidel cavalry harass our camp by perpetual skirmishes; and in the mountain defiles our detachments cannot cope with their light horse and treacherous ambuscades. It is true, that by dint of time, by the complete devastation of the Vega, and by vigilant prevention of convoys from the seatowns, we might starve the city into yielding. But, alas! my lords, our enemies are scattered and numerous, and Granada is not the only place before which the standard of Spain should be unfurled. Thus situated, the lion does not disdain to serve himself of the fox; and, fortunately, we have now in Granada an ally that fights for us. I have actual knowledge of all that passes within the Alhambra: the king yet remains in his palace, irresolute and dreaming; and I trust that an intrigue by which his jealousies are aroused against his general, Muza, may end either in the loss of that able leader, or in the commotion of open rebellion or civil war. Treason within Granada will open its gates to us.”

“Sire,” said Ponce de Leon, after a pause, “under your counsels, I no more doubt of seeing our banner float above the Vermilion Towers, than I doubt the rising of the sun over yonder hills; it matters little whether we win by stratagem or force. But I need not say to your highness, that we should carefully beware lest we be amused by inventions of the enemy, and trust to conspiracies which may be but lying tales to blunt our sabres, and paralyse our action.”

"Bravely spoken, wise de Leon!" exclaimed Hernando del Pulgar, hotly: "and against these infidels, aided by the cunning of the Evil One, methinks our best wisdom lies in the sword-arm. Well says our old Castilian proverb:

'Curse them devoutly,
Hammer them stoutly.'"

The king smiled slightly at the ardour of the favourite of his army, but looked round for more deliberate counsel. "Sire," said Villena, "far be it from us to inquire the grounds upon which your majesty builds your hope of dissension among the foe; but, placing the most sanguine confidence in a wisdom never to be deceived, it is clear that we should relax no energy within our means, but fight while we plot, and seek to conquer, while we do not neglect to undermine."

"You speak well, my Lord," said Ferdinand, thoughtfully; "and you yourself shall head a strong detachment to-morrow, to lay waste the Vega. Seek me two hours hence; the council for the present is dissolved."

The knights rose, and withdrew with the usual grave and stately ceremonies of respect, which Ferdinand observed to, and exacted from, his court: the young prince remained.

"Son," said Ferdinand, when they were alone, "early and betimes should the Infants of Spain be lessoned in the science of kingcraft. These nobles are among the brightest jewels of the crown; but still it is in the crown, and for the crown, that their light should sparkle. Thou seest how hot, and fierce, and warlike, are the chiefs of Spain—excellent virtues when manifested against our foes: but had we no foes, Juan, such virtues might cause us exceeding trouble. By St. Jago, I have founded a mighty monarchy! observe how it should be maintained—by science, Juan, by science! and science is as far removed from brute force as this sword from a crowbar. Thou seemest bewildered and amazed, my son: thou hast heard that I seek to conquer Granada by dissensions among the Moors; when Granada is conquered, remember that the nobles themselves are at Granada. Ave Maria! blessed be the Holy Mother, under whose eyes are the hearts of kings!" Ferdinand crossed himself devoutly; and then, rising, drew aside a part of the drapery of the pavilion, and called; in a low voice, the name of Perez. A grave Spaniard, somewhat past the verge of middle age, appeared.

"Perez," said the king, reseating himself, "has the person we expected from Granada yet arrived?"

"Sire, yes; accompanied by a maiden."

"He hath kept his word; admit them. Ha! holy father, thy visits are always as balsam to the heart."

"Save you, my son!" returned a man in the robes of a Dominican friar, who had entered suddenly and without ceremony by another part of the tent, and who now seated himself with smileless composure at a little distance from the king.

There was a dead silence for some moments; and Perez still lingered within the tent, as if in doubt whether the entrance of the friar would not prevent or delay obedience to the king's command. On the calm face of Ferdinand himself appeared a slight shade of discomposure and irresolution, when the monk thus resumed:

"My presence, my son, will not, I trust, disturb your conference with the infidel—since you deem that worldly policy demands your parley with the men of Belial."

"Doubtless not—doubtless not," returned the king, quickly: then, muttering to himself, "how wondrously doth this holy man penetrate into all our movements and designs!" he added, aloud, "Let the messenger enter."

Perez bowed, and withdrew.

During this time, the young prince reclined in listless silence on his seat; and on his delicate features was an expression of weariness which augured but ill of his fitness for the stern business to

which the lessons of his wise father were intended to educate his mind. His, indeed, was the age, and his the soul, for pleasure; the tumult of the camp was to him but a holiday exhibition—the march of an army, the exhilaration of a spectacle; the court as a banquet—the throne, the best seat at the entertainment. The life of the heir-apparent, to the life of the king possessive, is as the distinction between enchanting hope and tiresome satiety.

The small grey eyes of the friar wandered over each of his royal companions with a keen and penetrating glance, and then settled in the aspect of humility on the rich carpets that bespread the floor; nor did he again lift them till Perez, reappearing, admitted to the tent the Israelite, Almamen, accompanied by a female figure, whose long veil, extending from head to foot, could conceal neither the beautiful proportions nor the trembling agitation, of her frame.

"When last, great king, I was admitted to thy presence," said Almamen, "thou didst make question of the sincerity and faith of thy servant; thou didst ask me for a surety of my faith; thou didst demand a hostage; and didst refuse further parley without such pledge were yielded to thee. Lo! I place under thy kingly care this maiden—the sole child of my house—as surety of my truth; I intrust to thee a life dearer than my own."

"You have kept faith with us, stranger," said the king, in that soft and musical voice which well disguised his deep craft and his unrelenting will; "and the maiden whom you intrust to our charge shall be ranked with the ladies of our royal consort."

"Sire," replied Almamen, with touching earnestness, "you now hold the power of life and death over all for whom this heart can breathe a prayer or cherish a hope, save for my countrymen and my religion. This solemn pledge between thee and me I render up without scruple, without fear. To thee I give a hostage, from thee I have but a promise."

"But it is the promise of a king, a Christian, and a knight," said the king, with dignity rather mild than arrogant; "among monarchs, what hostage can be more sacred? Let this pass: how proceed affairs in the rebel city?"

"May this maiden withdraw, ere I answer my lord the king?" said Almamen.

The young prince started to his feet. "Shall I conduct this new charge to my mother?" he asked, in a low voice, addressing Ferdinand.

The king half smiled: "The holy father were a better guide," he returned, in the same tone. But, though the Dominican heard the hint, he retained his motionless posture; and Ferdinand, after a momentary gaze on the friar, turned away. "Be it so, Juan," said he, with a look meant to convey caution to the prince; "Perez shall accompany you to the queen: return the moment your mission is fulfilled—we want your presence."

While this conversation was carried on between the father and son, the Hebrew was whispering, in his sacred tongue, words of comfort and remonstrance to the maiden; but they appeared to have but little of the desired effect; and, suddenly falling on his breast, she wound her arms around the Hebrew, whose breast shook with strong emotions, and exclaimed passionately, in the same language, "Oh, my father! what have I done?—why send me from thee?—why intrust thy child to the stranger? Spare me, spare me!"

"Child of my heart!" returned the Hebrew, with solemn but tender accents, "even as Abraham offered up his son, must I offer thee, upon the altars of our faith; but, O Leila! even as the angel of the Lord forbade the offering, so shall thy youth be spared, and thy years reserved for the glory of generations yet unborn. King of Spain!" he continued in the Spanish tongue, suddenly and eagerly, "you are a father, forgive my weakness, and speed this parting."

Juan approached; and with respectful courtesy attempted to take the hand of the maiden.

"You?" said the Israelite, with a dark frown. "O king! the prince is young."

"Honour knoweth no distinction of age," answered the king. "What ho, Perez! accompany this maiden and the prince to the queen's pavilion."

The sight of the sober years and grave countenance of the attendant seemed to re-assure the Hebrew. He strained Leila in his arms; printed a kiss upon her forehead without removing her veil; and then, placing her almost in the arms of Perez, turned away to the further end of the tent, and concealed his face with his hands. The king appeared touched; but the Dominican gazed upon the whole scene with a sour scowl.

Leila still paused for a moment; and then, as if recovering her self-possession, said, aloud and distinctly,—"Man deserts me; but I will not forget that God is over all." Shaking off the hand of the Spaniard, she continued, "Lead on; I follow thee!" and left the tent with a steady and even majestic step.

"And now," said the king, when alone with the Dominican and Almamen, "how proceed our hopes?"

"Boabdil," replied the Israelite, "is aroused against both his army and their leader, Muza; the king will not quit the Alhambra; and this morning, ere I left the city, Muza himself was in the prisons of the palace."

"How!" cried the king, starting from his seat.

"This is my work," pursued the Hebrew coldly. "It is these hands that are shaping for Ferdinand of Spain the keys of Granada."

"And right kingly shall be your guerdon," said the Spanish monarch: "meanwhile, accept this earnest of our favour." So saying, he took from his breast a chain of massive gold, the links of which were curiously inwrought with gems, and extended it to the Israelite. Almamen moved not. A dark flush upon his countenance bespoke the feelings he with difficulty restrained.

"I sell not my foes for gold, great king," said he, with a stern smile: "I sell my foes to buy the ransom of my friends."

"Churlish!" said Ferdinand, offended: "but speak on, man, speak on!"

"If I place Granada, ere two weeks are past, within thy power, what shall be my reward?"

"Thou didst talk to me, when last we met, of immunities to the Jews."

The calm Dominican looked up as the king spoke, crossed himself, and resumed his attitude of humility.

"I demand for the people of Israel," returned Almamen, "free leave to trade and abide within the city, and follow their callings, subjected only to the same laws and the same imposts as the Christian population."

"The same laws, and the same imposts! Humph! there are difficulties in the concession. If we refuse?"

"Our treaty is ended. Give me back the maiden—you will have no further need of the hostage you demanded: I return to the city, and renew our interviews no more."

Politic and cold-blooded as was the temperament of the great Ferdinand, he had yet the imperious and haughty nature of a prosperous and long-descended king; and he bit his lip in deep displeasure at the tone of the dictatorial and stately stranger.

"Thou usest plain language, my friend," said he; "my words can be as rudely spoken. Thou art in my power, and canst return not, save at my permission."

"I have your royal word, sire, for free entrance and safe egress," answered Almamen. "Break it, and Granada is with the Moors till the Darro runs red with the blood of her heroes, and her people strew the vales as the leaves in autumn."

"Art thou then thyself of the Jewish faith?" asked the king. "If thou art not, wherefore are the outcasts of the world so dear to thee?"

"My fathers were of that creed, royal Ferdinand; and if I myself desert their creed, I do not desert their cause. O king! are my terms scorned or accepted?"

"I accept them: provided, first, that thou obtainest the exile or death of Muza; secondly, that within two weeks of this date thou bringest me, along with the chief councillors of Granada, the

written treaty of the capitulation, and the keys of the city. Do this: and though the sole king in Christendom who dares the hazard, I offer to the Israelites throughout Andalusia the common laws and rights of citizens of Spain; and to thee I will accord such dignity as may content thy ambition."

The Hebrew bowed reverently, and drew from his breast a scroll, which he placed on the table before the king. "This writing, mighty Ferdinand, contains the articles of our compact."

"How, knave! wouldst thou have us commit our royal signature to conditions with such as thou art, to the chance of the public eye? The king's word is the king's bond!"

The Hebrew took up the scroll with imperturbable composure, "My child!" said he; "will your majesty summon back my child? we would depart."

"A sturdy mendicant this, by the Virgin!" muttered the king; and then, speaking aloud, "Give me the paper, I will scan it."

Running his eyes hastily over the words, Ferdinand paused a moment, and then drew towards him the implements of writing, signed the scroll, and returned it to Almamen.

The Israelite kissed it thrice with oriental veneration, and replaced it in his breast.

Ferdinand looked at him hard and curiously. He was a profound reader of men's characters; but that of his guest baffled and perplexed him.

"And how, stranger," said he, gravely,—"how can I trust that man who thus distrusts one king and sells another?"

"O king!" replied Almamen (accustomed from his youth to commune with and command the possessors of thrones yet more absolute),—"O king! if thou believest me actuated by personal and selfish interests in this our compact, thou has but to make, my service minister to my interest, and the lore of human nature will tell thee that thou hast won a ready and submissive slave. But if thou thinkest I have avowed sentiments less abject, and developed qualities higher than those of the mere bargainer for sordid power, oughtest thou not to rejoice that chance has thrown into thy way one whose intellect and faculties may be made thy tool? If I betray another, that other is my deadly foe. Dost not thou, the lord of armies, betray thine enemy? The Moor is an enemy bitterer to myself than to thee. Because I betray an enemy, am I unworthy to serve a friend? If I, a single man, and a stranger to the Moor, can yet command the secrets of palaces, and render vain the counsels of armed men, have I not in that attested that I am one of whom a wise king can make an able servant?"

"Thou art a subtle reasoner, my friend," said Ferdinand, smiling gently. "Peace go with thee! our conference for the time is ended. What ho, Perez!" The attendant appeared.

"Thou hast left the maiden with the queen?"

"Sire, you have been obeyed."

"Conduct this stranger to the guard who led him through the camp. He quits us under the same protection. Farewell! yet stay—thou art assured that Muza Ben Abil Gazan is in the prisons of the Moor?"

"Yes."

"Blessed be the Virgin!"

"Thou hast heard our conference, Father Tomas?" said the king, anxiously, when the Hebrew had withdrawn.

"I have, son."

"Did thy veins freeze with horror?"

"Only when my son signed the scroll. It seemed to me then that I saw the cloven foot of the tempter."

"Tush, father, the tempter would have been more wise than to reckon upon a faith which no ink and no parchment can render valid, if the Church absolve the compact. Thou understandest me, father?"

"I do. I know your pious heart and well-judging mind."

"Thou wert right," resumed the king, musingly, "when thou didst tell us that these caitiff Jews were waxing strong in the fatness of their substance. They would have equal laws—the insolent blasphemers!"

"Son!" said the Dominican, with earnest adjuration, "God, who has prospered your arms and councils, will require at your hands an account of the power intrusted to you. Shall there be no difference between His friends and His foes—His disciples and His crucifiers?"

"Priest," said the king, laying his hand on the monk's shoulder, and with a saturnine smile upon his countenance, "were religion silent in this matter, policy has a voice loud enough to make itself heard. The Jews demand equal rights; when men demand equality with their masters, treason is at work, and justice sharpens her sword. Equality! these wealthy usurers! Sacred Virgin! they would be soon buying up our kingdoms."

The Dominican gazed hard on the king. "Son, I trust thee," he said, in a low voice, and glided from the tent.

CHAPTER II. THE AMBUSH, THE STRIFE, AND THE CAPTURE

The dawn was slowly breaking over the wide valley of Granada, as Almamen pursued his circuitous and solitary path back to the city. He was now in a dark and entangled hollow, covered with brakes and bushes, from amidst which tall forest trees rose in frequent intervals, gloomy and breathless in the still morning air. As, emerging from this jungle, if so it may be called, the towers of Granada gleamed upon him, a human countenance peered from the shade; and Almamen started to see two dark eyes fixed upon his own.

He halted abruptly, and put his hand on his dagger, when a low sharp whistle from the apparition before him was answered around—behind; and, ere he could draw breath, the Israelite was begirt by a group of Moors, in the garb of peasants.

"Well, my masters," said Almamen, calmly, as he encountered the wild savage countenances that glared upon him, "think you there is aught to fear from the solitary santon?"

"It is the magician," whispered one man to his neighbour—"let him pass."

"Nay," was the answer, "take him before the captain; we have orders to seize upon all we meet."

This counsel prevailed; and gnashing his teeth with secret rage, Almamen found himself hurried along by the peasants through the thickest part of the copse. At length, the procession stopped in a semicircular patch of rank sward, in which several head of cattle were quietly grazing, and a yet more numerous troop of peasants reclined around upon the grass.

"Whom have we here?" asked a voice which startled back the dark blood from Almamen's cheek; and a Moor of commanding presence rose from the midst of his brethren. "By the beard of the prophet, it is the false santon! What dost thou from Granada at this hour?"

"Noble Muza," returned Almamen—who, though indeed amazed that one whom he had imagined his victim was thus unaccountably become his judge, retained, at least, the semblance of composure—"my answer is to be given only to my lord the king; it is his commands that I obey."

"Thou art aware," said Muza, frowning, "that thy life is forfeited without appeal? Whatsoever inmate of Granada is found without the walls between sunrise and sunset, dies the death of a traitor and deserter."

"The servants of the Alhambra are excepted," answered the Israelite, without changing countenance.

"Ah!" muttered Muza, as a painful and sudden thought seemed to cross him, "can it be possible that the rumour of the city has truth, and that the monarch of Granada is in treaty with the foe?" He mused a little; and then, motioning the Moors to withdraw, he continued aloud, "Almamen, answer me truly: hast thou sought the Christian camp with any message from the king?"

"I have not."

"Art thou without the walls on the mission of the king?"

"If I be so, I am a traitor to the king should I reveal his secret."

"I doubt thee much, santon," said Muza, after a pause; "I know thee for my enemy, and I do believe thy counsels have poisoned the king's ear against me, his people and his duties. But no matter, thy life is spared a while; thou remainest with us, and with us shalt thou return to the king."

"But, noble Muza–"

"I have said! Guard the santon; mount him upon one of our chargers; he shall abide with us in our ambush." While Almamen chafed in vain at his arrest, all in the Christian camp was yet still. At length, as the sun began to lift himself above the mountains, first a murmur, and then a din, betokened warlike preparations. Several parties of horse, under gallant and experienced leaders, formed themselves in different quarters, and departed in different ways, on expeditions of forage, or in the hope of skirmish with the straggling detachments of the enemy. Of these, the best equipped,

was conducted by the Marquess de Villena, and his gallant brother Don Alonzo de Pacheco. In this troop, too, rode many of the best blood of Spain; for in that chivalric army, the officers vied with each other who should most eclipse the meaner soldiery in feats of personal valour; and the name of Villena drew around him the eager and ardent spirits that pined at the general inactivity of Ferdinand's politic campaign.

The sun, now high in heaven, glittered on the splendid arms and gorgeous pennons of Villena's company, as, leaving the camp behind, it entered a rich and wooded district that skirts the mountain barrier of the Vega. The brilliancy of the day, the beauty of the scene, the hope and excitement of enterprise, animated the spirits of the whole party. In these expeditions strict discipline was often abandoned, from the certainty that it could be resumed at need. Conversation, gay and loud, interspersed at times with snatches of song, was heard amongst the soldiery; and in the nobler group that rode with Villena, there was even less of the proverbial gravity of Spaniards.

"Now, marquess," said Don Estevon de Suzon, "what wager shall be between us as to which lance this day robs Moorish beauty of the greatest number of its worshippers?"

"My falchion against your jennet," said Don Alonzo de Pacheco, taking up the challenge.

"Agreed. But, talking of beauty, were you in the queen's pavilion last night, noble marquess? it was enriched by a new maiden, whose strange and sudden apparition none can account for. Her eyes would have eclipsed the fatal glance of Cava; and had I been Rodrigo, I might have lost a crown for her smile."

"Ay," said Villena, "I heard of her beauty; some hostage from one of the traitor Moors, with whom the king (the saints bless him!) bargains for the city. They tell me the prince incurred the queen's grave rebuke for his attentions to the maiden."

"And this morning I saw that fearful Father Tomas steal into the prince's tent. I wish Don Juan well through the lecture. The monk's advice is like the algarroba;—[The algarroba is a sort of leguminous plant common in Spain]—when it is laid up to dry it may be reasonably wholesome, but it is harsh and bitter enough when taken fresh."

At this moment one of the subaltern officers rode up to the marquess, and whispered in his ear.

"Ha!" said Villena, "the Virgin be praised! Sir knights, booty is at hand. Silence! close the ranks." With that, mounting a little eminence, and shading his eyes with his hand, the marquess surveyed the plain below; and, at some distance, he beheld a horde of Moorish peasants driving some cattle into a thick copse. The word was hastily given, the troop dashed on, every voice was hushed, and the clatter of mail, and the sound of hoofs, alone broke the delicious silence of the noon-day landscape.

Ere they reached the copse, the peasants had disappeared within it. The marquess marshalled his men in a semicircle round the trees, and sent on a detachment to the rear, to cut off every egress from the wood. This done the troop dashed within. For the first few yards the space was more open than they had anticipated: but the ground soon grew uneven, rugged, and almost precipitous, and the soil, and the interlaced trees, alike forbade any rapid motion to the horse. Don Alonzo de Pacheco, mounted on a charger whose agile and docile limbs had been tutored to every description of warfare, and himself of light weight and incomparable horsemanship—dashed on before the rest. The trees hid him for a moment; when suddenly, a wild yell was heard, and as it ceased uprose the solitary voice of the Spaniard, shouting, "*Santiago, y cierra*, Espana; St. Jago, and charge, Spain!"

Each cavalier spurred forward; when suddenly, a shower of darts and arrows rattled on their armour; and upsprung from bush and reeds, and rocky clift, a number of Moors, and with wild shouts swarmed around the Spaniards.

"Back for your lives!" cried Villena; "we are beset—make for the level ground!"

He turned-spurred from the thicket, and saw the Paynim foe emerging through the glen, line after line of man and horse; each Moor leading his slight and fiery steed by the bridle, and leaping on it as he issued from the wood into the plain. Cased in complete mail, his visor down, his lance in its

rest, Villena (accompanied by such of his knights as could disentangle themselves from the Moorish foot) charged upon the foe. A moment of fierce shock passed: on the ground lay many a Moor, pierced through by the Christian lance; and on the other side of the foe was heard the voice of Villena —"St. Jago to the rescue!" But the brave marquess stood almost alone, save his faithful chamberlain, Solier. Several of his knights were dismounted, and swarms of Moors, with lifted knives, gathered round them as they lay, searching for the joints of the armour, which might admit a mortal wound. Gradually, one by one, many of Villena's comrades joined their leader, and now the green mantle of Don Alonzo de Pacheco was seen waving without the copse, and Villena congratulated himself on the safety of his brother. Just at that moment, a Moorish cavalier spurred from his troop, and met Pacheco in full career. The Moor was not clad, as was the common custom of the Paynim nobles, in the heavy Christian armour. He wore the light flexile mail of the ancient heroes of Araby or Fez. His turban, which was protected by chains of the finest steel interwoven with the folds, was of the most dazzling white—white, also, were his tunic and short mantle; on his left arm hung a short circular shield, in his right hand was poised a long and slender lance. As this Moor, mounted on a charger in whose raven hue not a white hair could be detected, dashed forward against Pacheco, both Christian and Moor breathed hard, and remained passive. Either nation felt it as a sacrilege to thwart the encounter of champions so renowned.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.