

AGUILAR GRACE

THE VALE OF
CEDARS; OR,
THE MARTYR

Grace Aguilar

The Vale of Cedars; Or, The Martyr

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Grace Aguilar

The Vale of Cedars; Or, The Martyr

*"The wild dove hath her nest—the fox her cave—
Mankind their country—Israel but the grave."*

BYRON.

MEMOIR OF GRACE AGUILAR

Grace Aguilar was born at Hackney, June 2nd, 1816. She was the eldest child, and only daughter of Emanuel Aguilar, one of those merchants descended from the Jews of Spain, who, almost within the memory of man, fled from persecution in that country, and sought and found an asylum in England.

The delicate frame and feeble health observable in Grace Aguilar throughout her life, displayed itself from infancy; from the age of three years, she was almost constantly under the care of some physician, and, by their advice, annually spending the summer months by the sea, in the hope of rousing and strengthening a naturally fragile constitution. This want of physical energy was, however, in direct contrast to her mental powers, which developed early, and readily. She learned to read with scarcely any trouble, and when once that knowledge was gained, her answer when asked what she would like for a present, was invariably "A book," which, was read, re-read, and preserved with a care remarkable in so young a child. With the exception of eighteen months passed at school, her mother was her sole instructress, and both parents took equal delight in directing her studies, and facilitating her personal inspection of all that was curious and interesting in the various counties of England to which they resorted for her health.

From the early age of seven she commenced keeping a journal, which was continued with scarce any intermission throughout her life. In 1825 she visited Oxford, Cheltenham, Gloucester, Worcester, Ross, and Bath, and though at that time but nine years old, her father took her to Gloucester and Worcester cathedrals, and also to see a porcelain and pin manufactory, &c., the attention and interest she displayed on these occasions, affording convincing proof that her mind was alive to appreciate and enjoy what was thus presented to her observation. Before she had completed her twelfth year she ventured to try her powers in composition, and wrote a little drama, called *Gustavus Vasa*, never published, and only here recorded as being the first germ of what was afterwards to become the ruling passion.

In September, 1828, the family went to reside in Devonshire for the health of Mr. Aguilar, and there a strong admiration for the beauties and wonders of nature manifested itself: she constantly collected shells, stones, seaweed, mosses, &c., in her daily rambles; and not satisfied with admiring their beauty, sedulously procured whatever little catechisms or other books on those subjects she could purchase, or borrow, eagerly endeavoring by their study, to increase her knowledge of their nature and properties.

When she had attained the age of fourteen, her father commenced a regular course of instruction for his child, by reading aloud, while she was employed in drawing, needlework, &c. History was selected, that being the study which now most interested her, and the first work chosen was Josephus.

It was while spending a short time at Tavistock, in 1830, that the beauty of the surrounding scenery led her to express her thoughts in verse. Several small pieces soon followed her first essay, and she became extremely fond of this new exercise and enjoyment of her opening powers, yet her mind was so well regulated, that she never permitted herself to indulge in original composition until her duties, and her studies, were all performed.

Grace Aguilar was extremely fond of music; she had learned the piano from infancy, and in 1831 commenced the harp. She sang pleasingly, preferring English songs, and invariably selecting them for the beauty or sentiment of the words; she was also passionately fond of dancing, and her cheerful lively manners in the society of her young friends, would scarcely have led any to imagine how deeply she felt and pondered upon the serious and solemn subjects which afterwards formed the labor of her life. She seemed to enjoy all, to enter into all, but a keen observer would detect the hold that sacred and holy principle ever exercised over her lightest act, and gayest hour. A sense of duty was

apparent in the merest trifle, and her following out of the divine command of obedience to parents, was only equalled by the unbounded affection she felt for them. A wish was once expressed by her mother that she should not waltz, and no solicitation could afterwards tempt her. Her mother also required her to read sermons, and study religion and the Bible regularly; this was readily submitted to, first as a task, but afterwards with much delight; for evidence of which we cannot do better than quote her own words in one of her religious works.

"This formed into a habit, and persevered in for a life, would in time, and without labor or weariness, give the comfort and the knowledge that we seek; each year it would become lighter, and more blest, each year we should discover something we knew not before, and in the valley of the shadow of death, feel to our heart's core that the Lord our God is Truth."—*Women of Israel*, Vol. II, page 43.

Nor did Grace Aguilar only study religion for her own personal observance and profit. She embraced its *principles* (the principles of all creeds) in a widely extended and truly liberal sense. She carried her practice of its holy and benevolent precepts into every minutiae of her daily life, doing all the good her limited means would allow, finding time, in the midst of her own studies, and most varied and continual occupations, to work for, and instruct her poor neighbors in the country, and while steadily venerating and adhering to her own faith, neither inquiring nor heeding the religious opinions of the needy whom she succored or consoled. To be permitted to help and comfort, she considered a privilege and a pleasure; she left the rest to God; and thus bestowing and receiving blessings and smiles from all who had the opportunity of knowing her, her young life flowed on, in an almost uninterrupted stream of enjoyment, until she had completed her nineteenth year.

Alas! the scene was soon to change, and trials awaited that spirit which, in the midst of sunshine, had so beautifully striven to prepare itself a shelter from the storm. The two brothers of Miss Aguilar, whom she tenderly loved, left the paternal roof to be placed far from their family at school. Her mother's health necessitated a painful and dangerous operation, and from that time for several years, alternate hopes and fears through long and dreary watchings beside the sick bed of that beloved mother, became the portion of her gifted child. But even this depressing and arduous change in the duties of her existence did not suspend her literary pursuits and labors. She profited by all the intervals she could command, and wrote the tale of the "Martyr," the "Spirit of Judaism," and "Israel Defended;" the latter translated from the French, at the earnest request of a friend, and printed only for private circulation. The "Magic Wreath," a little poetical work, and the first our authoress ever published, dedicated to the Right Honorable the Countess of Munster, also appeared about this time.

In the Spring of 1835, Grace Aguilar was attacked with measles, and never afterwards recovered her previous state of health, suffering at intervals with such exhausting feelings of weakness, as to become without any visible disease really alarming.

The medical attendants recommended entire rest of mind and body; she visited the sea, and seemed a little revived, but anxieties were gathering around her horizon, to which it became evidently impossible her ardent and active mind could remain passive or indifferent, and which recalled every feeling, every energy of her impressible nature into action. Her elder brother, who had long chosen music as his profession, was sent to Germany to pursue his studies; the younger determined upon entering the sea service. The excitement of these changes, and the parting with both, was highly injurious to their affectionate sister, and her delight a few months after, at welcoming the sailor boy returned from his first voyage, with all his tales of danger and adventure, and his keen enjoyment of the path of life he had chosen, together with her struggles to do her utmost to share his walks and companionship, contributed yet more to impair her inadequate strength.

The second parting was scarcely over ere her father, who had long shown symptoms of failing health, became the victim of consumption. He breathed his last in her arms, and the daughter, while sorrowing over all she had lost, roused herself once more to the utmost, feeling that she was the sole comforter beside her remaining parent. Soon after, when her brother again returned, finding the death

of his father, he resolved not to make his third voyage as a midshipman, but endeavor to procure some employment sufficiently lucrative to prevent his remaining a burthen upon his widowed mother. Long and anxiously did he pursue this object, his sister, whose acquaintance with literary and talented persons had greatly increased, using all her energy and influence in his behalf, and concentrating all the enthusiastic feelings of her nature in inspiring him with patience, comfort, and hope, as often as they failed him under his repeated disappointments. At length his application was taken up by a powerful friend, for her sake, and she had the happiness of succeeding, and saw him depart at the very summit of his wishes. Repose, which had been so long necessary, seemed now at hand; but her nerves had been too long and too repeatedly overstrung, and when this task was done, the worn and weary spirit could sustain no more, and sank under the labor that had been imposed upon it.

Severe illness followed, and though it yielded after a time to skilful remedies and tender care, her excessive languor and severe headaches, continued to give her family and friends great uneasiness.

During all these demands upon her time, her thoughts, and her health, however, the ruling passion neither slumbered nor slept. She completed the Jewish Faith, and also prepared Home Influence for the press, though very unfit to have taxed her powers so far. Her medical attendant became urgent for total change of air and scene, and again strongly interdicted *all* mental exertion—a trip to Frankfort, to visit her elder brother, was therefore decided on. In June, 1847, she set out, and bore the journey without suffering nearly so much as might have been expected. Her hopes were nigh, her spirits raised—the novelty and interest of her first travels on the Continent gave her for a very transient period a gleam, as it were, of strength. For a week or two she appeared to rally, then again every exertion became too much for her, every stimulating remedy to exhaust her. She was ordered from Frankfort to try the baths and mineral waters of Schwalbach, but without success. After a stay of six weeks, and persevering with exemplary patience in the treatment prescribed, she was one night seized with alarming convulsive spasms, so terrible that her family removed her next morning with all speed back to Frankfort, to the house of a family of most kind friends, where every attention and care was lavishly bestowed.

In vain. She took to her bed the very day of her arrival, and never rose from it again; she became daily weaker, and in three weeks from that time her sufferings ceased for ever. She was perfectly conscious to within less than two hours before her death, and took an affectionate leave of her mother and brother. Speech had been a matter of difficulty for some time previous, her throat being greatly affected by her malady; but she had, in consequence, learned to use her fingers in the manner of the deaf and dumb, and almost the last time they moved, it was to spell upon them feebly, "Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him."

She was buried in the cemetery of Frankfort, one side of which is set apart for the people of her faith. The stone which marks the spot bears upon it a butterfly and five stars, emblematic of the soul in heaven, and beneath appears the inscription—

"Give her of the fruit of her hands, and let her own works praise her in the gates."—Prov. ch. xxxi, v. 31.

And thus, 16th September, 1847, at the early age of thirty-one, Grace Aguilar was laid to rest—the bowl was broken, the silver cord was loosed. Her life was short and checkered with pain and anxiety, but she strove hard to make it useful and valuable, by employing diligently and faithfully the talents with which she had been endowed. Nor did the serious view with which she ever regarded earthly existence, induce her to neglect or despise any occasion of enjoyment, advantage, or sociality which presented itself. Her heart was ever open to receive, her hand to give.

Inasmuch as she succeeded to the satisfaction of her fellow beings, let them be grateful; inasmuch as she failed, let those who perceive it deny her not the meed of praise, for her endeavor to open the path she believed would lead mankind to practical virtue and happiness, and strive to carry out the pure philanthropic principles by which she was actuated, and which she so earnestly endeavored to diffuse.

OCTOBER, 1849.

THE VALE OF CEDARS; OR, THE MARTYR

CHAPTER I

*"They had met, and they had parted;
Time had closed o'er each again,
Leaving lone the weary hearted
Mournfully to wear his chain."—MS.*

A deliciously cool, still evening, had succeeded the intense heat of a Spanish summer day, throwing rich shadows and rosy gleams on a wild, rude mountain pass in central Spain. Massive crags and gigantic trees seemed to contest dominion over the path, if path it could be called; where the traveller, if he would persist in going onwards, could only make his way by sometimes scrambling over rocks, whose close approach from opposite sides presented a mere fissure covered with flowers and brushwood, through which the slimmest figure would fail to penetrate; sometimes wading through rushing and brawling streams, whose rapid currents bore many a jagged branch and craggy fragment along with them; sometimes threading the intricacies of a dense forest, recognizing the huge pine, the sweet acorn oak, the cork tree, interspersed with others of lesser growth, but of equally wild perplexing luxuriance. On either side—at times so close that two could not walk abreast, at others so divided that forests and streams intervened—arose mountain walls seeming to reach the very heavens, their base covered with trees and foliage, which gradually thinning, left their dark heads totally barren, coming out in clear relief against the deep blue sky.

That this pass led to any inhabited district was little probable, for it grew wilder and wilder, appearing to lead to the very heart of the Sierra Toledo—a huge ridge traversing Spain. By human foot it had evidently been seldom trod; yet on this particular evening a traveller there wended his solitary way. His figure was slight to boyishness, but of fair proportion, and of such graceful agility of movement, that the obstacles in his path, which to others of stouter mould and heavier step might have been of serious inconvenience, appeared by him as unnoticed as unfelt. The deep plume of his broad-rimmed hat could not conceal the deep blue restless eyes, the delicate complexion, and rich brown clustering hair; the varying expression of features, which if not regularly handsome, were bright with intelligence and truth, and betraying like a crystal mirror every impulse of the heart—characteristics both of feature and disposition wholly dissimilar to the sons of Spain.

His physiognomy told truth. Arthur Stanley was, as his name implied, an Englishman of noble family; one of the many whom the disastrous wars of the Roses had rendered voluntary exiles. His father and four brothers had fallen in battle at Margaret's side. Himself and a twin brother, when scarcely fifteen, were taken prisoners at Tewkesbury, and for three years left to languish in prison. Wishing to conciliate the still powerful family of Stanley, Edward offered the youths liberty and honor if they would swear allegiance to himself. They refused peremptorily; and with a refinement of cruelty more like Richard of Gloucester than himself, Edward ordered one to the block, the other to perpetual imprisonment. They drew lots, and Edwin Stanley perished. Arthur, after an interval, succeeded in effecting his escape, and fled from England, lingered in Provence a few months, and then unable to bear an inactive life, hastened to the Court of Arragon; to the heir apparent of which, he bore letters of introduction, from men of rank and influence, and speedily distinguished himself in the wars then agitating Spain. The character of the Spaniards—impenetrable and haughty reserve—occasioned, in general, prejudice and dislike towards all foreigners. But powerful as was their pride,

so was their generosity; and the young and lonely stranger, who had thrown himself so trustingly and frankly on their friendship, was universally received with kindness and regard. In men of lower natures, indeed, prejudice still lingered; but this was of little matter; Arthur speedily took his place among the noblest chivalry of Spain; devoted to the interests of the King of Sicily, but still glorying in the name and feeling of an Englishman, he resolved, in his young enthusiasm, to make his country honored in himself.

He had been five years in Spain, and was now four and twenty; but few would have imagined him that age, so frank and free and full of thoughtless mirth and hasty impulse was his character. These last fifteen months, however, a shadow seemed to have fallen over him, not deep enough to create remark, but *felt* by himself. His feelings, always ardent, had been all excited, and were all concentrated, on a subject so wrapt in mystery, that the wish to solve it engrossed his whole being. Except when engaged in the weary stratagem, the rapid march, and actual conflict, necessary for Ferdinand's interest, but one thought, composed of many, occupied his mind, and in solitude so distractingly, that he could never rest; he would traverse the country for miles, conscious indeed of what he *sought*, but perfectly unconscious where he *went*.

It was in one of these moods he had entered the pass we have described, rejoicing in its difficulties, but not thinking where it led, or what place he sought, when a huge crag suddenly rising almost perpendicularly before him, effectually roused him from his trance. Outlet there was none. All around him towered mountains, reaching to the skies. The path was so winding, that, as he looked round bewildered, he could not even imagine how he came there. To retrace his steps, seemed quite as difficult as to proceed. The sun too had declined, or was effectually concealed by the towering rocks, for sudden darkness seemed around him. There was but one way, and Stanley prepared to scale the precipitous crag before him with more eagerness than he would a beaten path. He threw off his cloak, folded it in the smallest possible compass, and secured it like a knapsack to his shoulders, slung his sword over his neck, and, with a vigorous spring, which conquered several paces of slippery rock at once, commenced the ascent. Some brushwood, and one or two stunted trees, gave him now and then a hold for his hands; and occasional ledges in the rock, a resting for his foot; but still one false step, one failing nerve, and he must have fallen backwards and been dashed to pieces; but to Arthur the danger was his safety. Where he was going, indeed he knew not. He could see no further than the summit of the crag, which appeared like a line against the sky; but any bewilderment were preferable to the strange stagnation towards outward objects, which had enwrapped him ten minutes before.

Panting, breathless, almost exhausted, he reached the summit, and before him yawned a chasm, dark, fathomless, as if nature in some wild convulsion had rent the rock asunder. The level ground on which he stood was barely four feet square; behind him sloped the most precipitous side of the crag, devoid of tree or bush, and slippery from the constant moisture that formed a deep black pool at its base. Stanley hazarded but one glance behind, then looked steadily forward, till his eye seemed accustomed to the width of the chasm, which did not exceed three feet. He fixed his hold firmly on a blasted trunk growing within the chasm; It shook—gave way—another moment and he would have been lost; but in that moment he loosed his hold, clasped both hands above his head, and successfully made the leap—aware only of the immense effort by the exhaustion which followed compelling him to sink down on the grass, deprived even of energy to look around him.

So marvellous was the change of scenery on which his eyes unclosed, that he started to his feet, bewildered. A gradual hill, partly covered with rich meadow grass, and partly with corn, diversified with foliage, sloped downwards, leading by an easy descent to a small valley, where orange and lime trees, the pine and chestnut, palm and cedar, grew in beautiful luxuriance. On the left was a small dwelling, almost hidden in trees. Directly beneath him a natural fountain threw its sparkling showers on beds of sweet-scented and gayly-colored flowers. The hand of man had very evidently aided nature in forming the wild yet chaste beauty of the scene; and Arthur bounded down the slope, disturbing a few tame sheep and goats on his way, determined on discovering the genius of the place.

No living object was visible, however; and with his usual reckless spirit, he resolved on exploring further, ere he demanded the hospitality of the dwelling. A narrow path led into a thicker wood, and in the very heart of its shade stood a small edifice, the nature of which Arthur vainly endeavored to understand. It was square, and formed of solid blocks of cedar; neither carving nor imagery of any kind adorned it; yet it had evidently been built with skill and care. There was neither tower nor bell, the usual accompaniments of a chapel, which Stanley had at first imagined it; and he stood gazing on it more and more bewildered. At that moment, a female voice of singular and thrilling beauty sounded from within. It was evidently a hymn she chanted, for the strain was slow and solemn, but though *words* were distinctly intelligible, their language was entirely unknown. The young man listened at first, conscious only of increasing wonderment, which was quickly succeeded by a thrill of hope, so strange, so engrossing, that he stood, outwardly indeed as if turned to stone; inwardly, with every pulse so throbbing that to move or speak was impossible. The voice ceased; and in another minute a door, so skilfully constructed as when closed to be invisible in the solid wall, opened noiselessly; and a female figure stood before him.

CHAPTER II

*"Farewell! though in that sound be years
Of blighted hopes and fruitless tears—
Though the soul vibrate to its knell
Of joys departed—yet farewell."*

MRS. HEMANS.

To attempt description of either face or form would be useless. The exquisite proportions of the rounded figure, the very perfection of each feature, the delicate clearness of the complexion—brunette when brought in close contact with the Saxon, blonde when compared with the Spaniard—all attractions in themselves, were literally forgotten, or at least unheeded, beneath the spell which dwelt in the *expression* of her countenance. Truth, purity, holiness, something scarcely of this nether world, yet blended indescribably with all a woman's nature, had rested there, attracting the most unobservant, and riveting all whose own hearts contained a spark of the same lofty attributes. Her dress, too, was peculiar—a full loose petticoat of dark blue silk, reaching only to the ankle, and so displaying the beautifully-shaped foot; a jacket of pale yellow, the texture seeming of the finest woven wool, reaching to the throat; with sleeves tight on the shoulders, but falling in wide folds as low as the wrist, and so with every movement displaying the round soft arm beneath. An antique brooch of curiously wrought silver confined the jacket at the throat. The collar, made either to stand up or fall, was this evening unclosed and thrown back, its silver fringe gleaming through the clustering tresses that fell in all their native richness and raven blackness over her shoulders, parted and braided on her brow, so as to heighten the chaste and classic expression of her features.

On a stranger that beautiful vision must have burst with bewildering power: to Arthur Stanley she united *memory* with *being*, the *past* with the *present*, with such an intensity of emotion, that for a few minutes his very breath was impeded. She turned, without seeing him, in a contrary direction; and the movement roused him.

"Marie!" he passionately exclaimed, flinging himself directly in her path, and startling her so painfully, that though there was a strong and visible effort at self-control, she must have fallen had he not caught her in his arms. There was an effort to break from his hold, a murmured exclamation, in which terror, astonishment, and yet joy, were painfully mingled, and then the heroine gave place to the woman, for her head sunk on his shoulder and she burst into tears.

Time passed. Nearly an hour from that strange meeting, and still they were together; but no joy, nor even hope was on the countenance of either. At first, Arthur had alluded to their hours of happy yet unconfessed affection, when both had felt, intuitively, that they were all in all to each other, though not a syllable of love had passed their lips; on the sweet memories of those blissful hours, so brief, so fleeting, but still Marie wept: the memory seemed anguish more than joy. And then he spoke of returned affection, as avowed by her, when his fond words had called it forth; and shuddered at the recollection that that hour of acknowledged and mutual love, had proved the signal of their separation. He referred again to her agonized words, that a union was impossible, that she dared not wed him; it was sin even to love him; that in the tumultuary, yet delicious emotions she had experienced, she had forgotten, utterly forgotten in what it must end—the agony of desolation for herself, and, if he so loved her, for Stanley also—and again he conjured her to explain their meaning. They had been separated, after that fearful interview, by a hasty summons for him to rejoin his camp; and when he returned, she had vanished. He could not trace either her or the friend with whom she had been staying. Don Albert had indeed said, his wife had gone to one of the southern cities, and his young guest returned to her father's home; but where that home was, Don Albert had so effectually

evaded, that neither direct questionings nor wary caution could obtain reply. But he had found her now; they had met once more, and oh, why need they part again? Why might he not seek her father, and beseech his blessing and consent?

His words were eloquent, his tone impassioned, and hard indeed the struggle they occasioned. But Marie wavered not in the repetition of the same miserable truth, under the impression of which they had separated before. She conjured him to leave her, to forget the existence of this hidden valley, for danger threatened her father and herself if it was discovered. So painful was her evident terror, that Arthur pledged his honor never to reveal it, declaring that to retrace the path by which he had discovered it, was even to himself impossible. But still he urged her, what was this fatal secret? Why was it sin to love him? Was she the betrothed of another? and the large drops starting to the young man's brow denoted the agony of the question.

"No, Arthur, no," was the instant rejoinder: "I never could love, never could be another's, this trial is hard enough, but it is all I have to bear. I am not called upon to give my hand to another, while my heart is solely thine."

"Then wherefore join that harsh word 'sin,' with such pure love, my Marie? Why send me from you wretched and most lonely, when no human power divides us?"

"No human power!—alas! alas!—a father's curse—an offended God—these are too awful to encounter, Arthur. Oh do not try me more; leave me to my fate, called down by my own weakness, dearest Arthur. If you indeed love me, tempt me not by such fond words; they do but render duty harder. Oh, wherefore have you loved me!"

But such suffering tone, such broken words, were not likely to check young Stanley's solicitations. Again and again he urged her, at least to say what fatal secret so divided them; did he but know it, it might be all removed. Marie listened to him for several minutes, with averted head and in unbroken silence; and when she did look on him again, he started at her marble paleness and the convulsive quivering of her lips, which for above a minute prevented the utterance of a word.

"Be it so," she said at length; "you shall know this impassable barrier. You are too honorable to reveal it. Alas! it is not that fear which restrained me; my own weakness which shrinks from being to thee as to other men, were the truth once known, an object of aversion and of scorn."

"Aversion! scorn! Marie, thou ravest," impetuously exclaimed Stanley; "torture me not by these dark words: the worst cannot be more suffering."

But when the words were said, when with blanched lips and cheeks, and yet unfaltering tone, Marie revealed the secret which was to separate them for ever, Arthur staggered back, relinquishing the hands he had so fondly clasped, casting on her one look in which love and aversion were strangely and fearfully blended, and then burying his face in his hands, his whole frame shook as with some sudden and irrepressible anguish.

"Thou knowest all, now," continued Marie, after a pause, and she stood before him with arms folded on her bosom, and an expression of meek humility struggling with misery on her beautiful features. "Señor Stanley, I need not now implore you to leave me; that look was sufficient, say but you forgive the deception I have been compelled to practise—and—and forget me. Remember what I am, and you will soon cease to love."

"Never, never!" replied Stanley, as with passionate agony he flung himself before her. "Come with me to my own bright land; who shall know what thou art there? Marie, my own beloved, be mine. What to me is race or blood? I see but the Marie I have loved, I shall ever love. Come with me. Edward has made overtures of peace if I would return to England. For thy sake I will live beneath his sway; be but mine, and oh, we shall be happy yet."

"And my father," gasped the unhappy girl, for the generous nature of Arthur's love rendered her trial almost too severe. "Wilt thou protect him too? wilt thou for my sake forget what he is, and be to him a son?" He turned from her with a stifled groan. "Thou canst not—I knew it—oh bless thee for thy generous love; but tempt me no more, Arthur; it cannot be; I dare not be thy bride."

"And yet thou speakest of love. 'Tis false, thou canst not love me," and Stanley sprung to his feet disappointed, wounded, till he scarce knew what he said. "I would give up Spain and her monarch's love for thee. I would live in slavery beneath a tyrant's rule to give thee a home of love. I would forget, trample on, annihilate the prejudices of a life, unite the pure blood of Stanley with the darkened torrent running through thy veins, forget thy race, descent, all but thine own sweet self. I would do this, all this for love of thee. And for me, what wilt thou do?—reject me, bid me leave thee—and yet thou speakest of love: 'tis false, thou lovest another better!"

"Ay!" replied Marie, in a tone which startled him, "ay, thou hast rightly spoken; thy words have recalled what in this deep agony I had well nigh forgotten. There is a love, a duty stronger than that I bear to thee. I would resign all else, but not my father's God."

The words were few and simple; but the tone in which they were spoken recalled Arthur's better nature, and banished hope at once. A pause ensued, broken only by the young man's hurried tread, as he traversed the little platform in the vain struggle for calmness. On him this blow had fallen wholly unprepared; Marie had faced it from the moment they had parted fifteen months before, and her only prayer had been (a fearful one for a young and loving heart), that Stanley would forget her, and they might never meet again. But this was not to be; and though she had believed herself prepared, one look on his face, one sound of his voice had proved how vain had been her dream.

"I will obey thee, Marie," Stanley said, at length, pausing before her. "I will leave thee now, but not—not for ever. No, no; if indeed thou lovest me time will not change thee, if thou hast one sacred tie, when nature severs that, and thou art alone on earth, thou shalt be mine, whatever be thy race."

"Hope it not, ask it not! Oh, Arthur, better thou shouldst hate me, as thy people do my race: I cannot bear such gentle words," faltered poor Marie, as her head sunk for a minute on his bosom, and the pent-up tears burst forth. "But this is folly," she continued, forcing back the choking sob, and breaking from his passionate embrace. "There is danger alike for my father and thee, if thou tarriest longer. Not that way," she added, as his eye glanced inquiringly towards the hill by which he had descended; "there is another and an easier path; follow me—thou wilt not betray it?"

"Never!" was the solemn rejoinder, and not a word more passed between them. He followed her through what seemed to be an endless maze, and paused before a towering rock, which, smooth and perpendicular as a wall built by man, ran round the vale and seemed to reach to heaven. Pushing aside the thick brushwood, Marie stood beside the rock, and by some invisible movement, a low door flew open and disclosed a winding staircase.

"Thou wilt trust me, Arthur?"

"Ay, unto death," he answered, springing after her up the rugged stair. Narrow loopholes, almost concealed without by trees and brushwood, dimly lighted the staircase, as also a low, narrow passage, which branched off in zig-zag windings at the top, and terminated, as their woody path had done, in a solid wall. But again an invisible door flew open, closing behind them; and after walking about a hundred yards through prickly shrubs and entangled brushwood that obscured his sight, Marie paused, and Arthur gazed round bewildered. A seemingly boundless plain stretched for miles around him, its green level only diversified by rocks scattered about in huge masses and wild confusion, as if hurled in fury from some giant's hand. The rock whence he had issued was completely invisible. He looked around again and again, but only to bewilder himself yet more.

"The way looks more dreary than it is. Keep to the left: though it seems the less trodden path thou wilt find there a shelter for the night, and to-morrow's sun will soon guide thee to a frontier town; thy road will be easy then. Night is falling so fast now, thou hadst best not linger, Arthur."

But he did linger, till once more he had drawn from her a confession of her love, that none other could take his place, even while she conjured him never to seek her again—and so they parted. Five minutes more, and there was not a vestige of a human form on the wide-extended plain.

CHAPTER III

*"Now History unfolds her ample page,
Rich with the spoils of Time."*

Clearly to comprehend the internal condition of Spain at the period of our narrative (1479)—a condition which, though apparently purely national, had influence over every domestic hearth—it is necessary to glance back a few years. The various petty Sovereignities into which Spain had been divided never permitted any lengthened period of peace; but these had at length merged into two great kingdoms, under the names of Arragon and Castile. The *form* of both governments was monarchical; but the *genius* of the former was purely republican, and the power of the sovereign so circumscribed by the Junta, the Justicia, and the Holy Brotherhood, that the vices or follies of the monarch were of less consequence, in a national point of view, in Arragon, than in any other kingdom. It was not so with Castile. From the death of Henry the Third, in 1404, a series of foreign and civil disasters had plunged the kingdom in a state of anarchy and misery. John the Second had some virtues as an individual, but none as a king; and his son Henry, who succeeded him in 1450, had neither the one nor the other. Governed as his father had been, entirely by favorites, the discontent of all classes of his subjects rapidly increased; the people were disgusted and furious at the extravagance of the monarch's minion; the nobles, fired at his insolence; and an utter contempt of the king, increased the virulence of the popular ferment. Unmindful of the disgrace attendant on his divorce from Blanche of Navarre, Henry sought and obtained the hand of Joanna, Princess of Portugal, whose ambition and unprincipled intrigues heightened the ill-favor with which he was already regarded. The court of Castile, once so famous for chastity and honor, sank to the lowest ebb of infamy, the shadow of which, seeming to extend over the whole land, affected nobles and people with its baleful influence. All law was at an end: the people, even while they murmured against the King, followed his evil example; and history shrinks from the scenes of debauchery and licentiousness, robbery and murder, which desecrated the land. But this state of things could not last long, while there still remained some noble hearts amongst the Castilians. Five years after their marriage, the Queen was said to have given birth to a daughter, whom Henry declared should be his successor, in lieu of his young brother Alfonso (John's son, by a second wife, Isabella of Portugal). This child the nobles refused to receive, believing and declaring that she was not Henry's daughter, and arrogated to themselves the right of trying and passing sentence on their Sovereign, who, by his weak, flagitious conduct had, they unanimously declared, forfeited all right even to the present possession of the crown.

The confederates, who were the very highest and noblest officers of the realm, assembled at Avita, and with a solemnity and pomp which gave the whole ceremony an imposing character of reality, dethroned King Henry in effigy, and proclaimed the youthful Alfonso sovereign in his stead. All present swore fealty, but no actual good followed: the flame of civil discord was re-lighted, and raged with yet greater fury; continuing even after the sudden and mysterious death of the young prince, whose extraordinary talent, amiability, and firmness, though only fourteen, gave rise to the rumor that he had actually been put to death by his own party, who beheld in his rising genius the utter destruction of their own turbulence and pride. Be this as it may, his death occasioned no cessation of hostilities, the confederates carrying on the war in the name of his sister, the Infanta Isabella. Her youth and sex had pointed her out as one not likely to interfere or check the projects of popular ambition, and therefore the very fittest to bring forward as an excuse for their revolt. With every appearance of humility and deference, they offered her the crown; but the proudest and boldest shrank back abashed, before the flashing eye and proud majesty of demeanor with which she answered, "The

crown is not yours to bestow; it is held by Henry, according to the laws alike of God and man; and till his death, you have no right to bestow, nor I to receive it."

But though firm in this resolution, Isabella did not refuse to coincide in their plans for securing her succession. To this measure Henry himself consented, thus appearing tacitly to acknowledge the truth of the reports that Joanna was a surreptitious child, and for a brief period Castile was delivered from the horrors of war. Once declared heiress of Castile and Leon, Isabella's hand was sought by many noble suitors, and her choice fell on Ferdinand, the young King of Sicily, and heir-apparent to the crown of Arragon. Love was Isabella's incentive. Prudence, and a true patriotic ambition, urged the Archbishop of Toledo not only to ratify the choice, but to smooth every difficulty in their way; he saw at once the glory which might accrue to Spain by this peaceful union of two rival thrones. Every possible and impossible obstacle was privately thrown by Henry to prevent this union, even while he gave publicly his consent; his prejudice against Ferdinand being immovable and deadly. But the manoeuvres of the Archbishop were more skilful than those of the King. The royal lovers—for such they really were—were secretly united at Valladolid, to reach which place in safety Ferdinand had been compelled to travel in disguise, and attended only by four cavaliers; and at that period so straitened were the circumstances of the Prince and Princess, who afterwards possessed the boundless treasures of the new world, that they were actually compelled to borrow money to defray the expenses of their wedding!

The moment Henry became aware of this marriage, the civil struggle recommenced. In vain the firm, yet pacific Archbishop of Toledo recalled the consent he had given, and proved that the union not only secured the after-glory of Spain, but Henry's present undisturbed possession of his throne. Urged on by his wife, and his intriguing favorite, the Marquis of Villena, who was for ever changing sides, he published a manifesto, in which he declared on oath that he believed Joanna to be his daughter, and proclaimed her heiress of Castile. Ferdinand and Isabella instantly raised an array, regardless of the forces of Portugal (to whose monarch Joanna had been betrothed), who were rapidly advancing to the assistance of Henry. Ere, however, war had regularly commenced, a brief respite was obtained by the death of Henry, and instantly and unanimously Isabella was proclaimed Queen of Leon and Castile. Peace, however, was not instantly regained; the King of Portugal married Joanna, and resolved on defending her rights. Some skirmishing took place, and at length a long-sustained conflict near Fero decided the point—Ferdinand and the Castilians were victorious; the King of Portugal made an honorable retreat to his own frontiers, and the Marquis of Villena, the head of the malcontents, and by many supposed to be the real father of Joanna, submitted to Isabella. Peace thus dawned for Castile; but it was not till three years afterwards, when Ferdinand had triumphed over the enemies of Arragon, and succeeded his father as Sovereign of that kingdom, that any vigorous measures could be taken for the restoration of internal order.

The petty Sovereignities of the Peninsular, with the sole exception of the mountainous district of Navarre, and the Moorish territories in the south, were now all united; and it was the sagacious ambition of Ferdinand and Isabella to render Spain as important in the scale of kingdoms as any other European territory; and to do this, they knew, demanded as firm a control over their own subjects, as the subjection of still harassing foes.

Above a century had elapsed since Spain had been exposed to the sway of weak or evil kings, and all the consequent miseries of misrule and war. Rapine, outrage, and murder had become so frequent and unchecked, as frequently to interrupt commerce, by preventing all communication between one place and another. The people acknowledged no law but their own passions. The nobles were so engrossed with hatred of each other, and universal contempt of their late sovereign, with personal ambition and general discontent, that they had little time or leisure to attend to any but their own interest. But a very brief interval convinced both nobles and people that a new era was dawning for them. In the short period of eighteen months, the wise administration of Isabella and Ferdinand, had effected a sufficient change to startle all ranks into the conviction that their best interests lay in

prompt obedience, and in exerting themselves in their several spheres, to second the sovereign's will. The chivalric qualities of Ferdinand, his undoubted wisdom and unwavering firmness, excited both love and fear; while devotion itself is not too strong a term to express the national feeling entertained toward Isabella. Her sweet, womanly gentleness, blended as it was with the dignity of the sovereign; her ready sympathy in all that concerned her people—for the lowest of her subjects; doing justice, even if it were the proud noble who injured, and the serf that suffered—all was so strange, yet fraught with such national repose, that her influence every year increased; while every emotion of chivalry found exercise, and yet rest in the heart of the aristocracy for their Queen; her simple word would be obeyed, on the instant, by men who would have paused, and weighed, and reasoned, if any other—even Ferdinand himself—had spoken. Isabella knew her power; and if ever sovereign used it for the good, the happiness of her people, that proud glory was her own.

In spite of the miserable condition of the people during the civil struggles, the wealth of Spain had not decreased. It was protected and increased by a class of people whose low and despised estate was, probably, their safeguard—these were the Jews, who for many centuries had, both publicly and secretly, resided in Spain. There were many classes of this people in the land, scattered alike over Castile, Leon, Arragon, Navarre, and also in the Moorish territories; some there were confined to the mystic learning and profound studies of the schools, whence they sent many deeply learned men to other countries, where their worth and wisdom gained them yet greater regard than they received in Spain: others were low and degraded in outward seeming, yet literally holding and guiding the financial and commercial interests of the kingdom;—whose position was of the lowest—scorned and hated by the very people who yet employed them, and exposed to insult from every class; the third, and by far the largest body of Spanish Jews, were those who, Israelites in secret, were so completely Catholic in seeming, that the court, the camp, the council, even the monasteries themselves, counted them amongst them. And this had been the case for years—we should say for centuries—and yet so inviolable was the faith pledged to each other, so awful the dangers around them, were even suspicion excited, that the fatal secret never transpired; offices of state, as well as distinctions of honor, were frequently conferred on men who, had their faith or race been suspected, would have been regarded as the scum of the earth, and sentenced to torture and death, for daring to pass for what they were not. At the period of which we write, the fatal enemy to the secret Jews of more modern times, known as the Holy Office, did not exist; but a secret and terrible tribunal there was, whose power and extent were unknown to the Sovereigns of the land.

The Inquisition is generally supposed to have been founded by Ferdinand and Isabella, about the year 1480 or '82; but a deeper research informs us that it had been introduced into Spain several centuries earlier, and obtained great influence in Arragon. Confiding in the protection of the papal see, the Inquisitors set no bounds to their ferocity: secret informations, imprisonments, tortures, midnight assassinations, marked their proceedings; but they overreached themselves. All Spain, setting aside petty rivalships, rose up against them. All who should give them encouragement or assistance were declared traitors to their country; the very lives of the Inquisitors and their families were, in the first burst of fury, endangered; but after a time, imagining they had sunk into harmless insignificance, their oppressors desisted in their efforts against them, and were guilty of the unpardonable error of not exterminating them entirely.¹

According to the popular belief, the dreaded tribunal slept, and so soundly, they feared not, imagined not its awakening. They little knew that its subterranean halls were established near almost all the principal cities, and that its engines were often at work, even in the palaces of kings. Many a family wept the loss of a beloved member, they knew not, guessed not how—for those who once entered those fatal walls were never permitted to depart; so secret were their measures, that even the existence of this fearful mockery of justice and Religion was not known, or at that time it would

¹ Stockdale's History of the Inquisition.

have been wholly eradicated. Superstition had not then gained the ascendancy which in after years so tarnished the glory of Spain, and opened the wide gates to the ruin and debasement under which she labors now. The fierce wars and revolutions ravaging the land had given too many, and too favorable opportunities for the exercise of this secret power; but still, regard for their own safety prevented the more public display of their office, as ambition prompted. The vigorous proceedings of Ferdinand and Isabella rendered them yet more wary; and little did the Sovereigns suspect that in their very courts this fatal power held sway. The existence of this tribunal naturally increased the dangers environing the Israelites who were daring enough to live amongst the Catholics as one of them; but of this particular danger they themselves were not generally aware, and their extraordinary skill in the concealment of their faith (to every item of which they yet adhered) baffled, except in a very few instances, even these ministers of darkness.

CHAPTER IV

*"In war did never lion rage more fierce—
In peace was never gentle lamb more mild,
Than was that young and princely gentleman."*

SHAKSPEARE.

The wars ravaging Spain had nursed many a gallant warrior, and given ample opportunities for the possession and display of those chivalric qualities without which, in that age, no manly character was considered perfect. The armies of Ferdinand and Isabella counted some of the noblest names and most valiant knights of Christendom. The Spanish chivalry had always been famous, and when once organized under a leader of such capacity and firmness as Ferdinand; when the notice and regard of the Queen they idolized could only be obtained by manly virtue as well as the warrior's ardor, a new spirit seemed to wake within them; petty rivalships and jealousies were laid aside, all they sought was to become distinguished; and never had chivalry shone with so pure and glorious a lustre in the court of Spain as then, when, invisibly and unconsciously, it verged on its decline.

It was amongst all this blaze of chivalry that Arthur Stanley had had ample opportunity to raise, in his own person, the martial glory of his own still much loved and deeply regretted land. Ferdinand had honored him with so large a portion of his coveted regard, that no petty feelings on the part of the Spaniards, because he was a stranger, could interfere with his advancement; his friends, however, were mostly among the Arragonese; to Isabella, and the Castilians, he was only known as a valiant young warrior, and a marked favorite of the king. There was one person, however, whom the civil contentions of Spain had so brought forward, that his name was never spoken, either in council, court, or camp, palace or hut—by monarch or captive, soldier or citizen—without a burst of such warm and passionate attachment that it was almost strange how any single individual, and comparatively speaking, in a private station, could so have won the hearts of thousands. Yet it had been gradually that this pre-eminence had been attained—gradually, and entirely by the worth of its object. At the early age of sixteen, and as page to Gonzalos de Lara, Ferdinand Morales had witnessed with all the enthusiasm of a peculiarly ardent, though outwardly quiet nature, the exciting proceedings at Avila. His youth, his dignified mien, his earnestness, perhaps even his striking beauty, attracted the immediate attention of the young Alfonso, and a bond of union of reciprocal affection from that hour linked the youths together. It is useless arguing on the folly and frivolity of such rapid attachments; there are those with whom one day will be sufficient, not only to awaken, but to rivet, those mysterious sympathies which are the undying links of friendship; and others again, with whom we may associate intimately for months—nay, years—and yet feel we have not one thought in common, nor formed one link to sever which is pain.

During Alfonso's brief career, Ferdinand Morales displayed personal qualities, and a wisdom and faithfulness in his cause, well deserving not only the prince's love, but the confidence of all those who were really Alfonso's friends. His deep grief and ill-concealed indignation at the prince's mysteriously sudden death might, for the time, have obtained him enemies, and endangered his own life; but the favor of Isabella, whom it was then the policy of the confederates to conciliate in all things possible, protected and advanced him. The love borne by the Infanta for her young brother surpassed even the tenderest affection of such relatives; all who had loved and served him were dear to her; and at a time when so much of treachery and insidious policy lurked around her, even in the garb of seeming devotion to her cause, the unwavering fidelity and straightforward conduct of Morales, combined as it was with his deep affection for Alfonso, permitted her whole mind to rest on him, secure not only of his faithfulness, but of vigilance which would discover and counteract

every evil scheming of seeming friends. Her constantly chosen messenger to Ferdinand, he became known and trusted by both that prince and his native subjects. His wealth, which, seemed exhaustless, independent of his preferments, was ever at the service of either Isabella or her betrothed; he it was from whom the necessary means for her private nuptials were borrowed. At that scene he was, of course, present, and, at his own desire, escorted Ferdinand back to his own domains—an honorable but most dangerous office, performed with his usual unwavering fidelity and skill. That one so faithful in adversity should advance from post to post as soon as dawning prosperity permitted Isabella and Ferdinand to reward merit as well as to evince gratitude, was not surprising; but no royal favor, no coveted honors, no extended power, could alter one tittle of his single-hearted truth—his unrestrained intercourse with and interest in his equals, were they of the church, court, or camp—his gentle and unassuming manner to his inferiors. It was these things that made him so universally beloved. The coldest natures, if thrown in contact with him, unconsciously to themselves kindled into warmth; vice itself could not meet the glance of that piercing eye without shrinking, for the moment, in loathing from itself.

Until Isabella and Ferdinand were firmly established on the throne, and Arragon and Castile united, there had been little leisure amongst their warriors to think of domestic ties, otherwise it might perhaps have been noticed as somewhat remarkable that Ferdinand Morales appeared to stand alone; kindred, indeed, he claimed with four or five of the noblest amongst the Castilians, but he seemed to have no near relative; and though he mingled courteously, and to some young hearts far too pleasingly, amongst Isabella's court, it seemed as if he would never stoop to love. The Queen often jested him on his apparent insensibility, and entreating him to wed. At first he had smiled away such words; but two or three months after the commencement of our tale, he acknowledged that his affections had been for some years engaged to one living so completely in retirement as to be unknown to all; he had but waited till peace had dawned for Spain, and he might offer her not only his love, but a secure and quiet home. He spoke in confidence, and Isabella, woman-like, had listened with no little interest, giving her royal approval of his choice, without knowing more than his own words revealed; but feeling convinced, she said, that Ferdinand Morales would never wed one whose birth or lineage would tarnish his pure Castilian blood, or endanger the holy faith of which he was so true a member. A red flush might have stained the cheek of the warrior at these words, but the deep obeisance with which he had departed from the royal presence concealed the unwonted emotion. Ere a year from that time elapsed, not only the ancient city of Segovia, where his large estates lay, but all Castile were thrown into a most unusual state of excitement by the marriage of the popular idol, Don Ferdinand Morales, with a young and marvellously lovely girl, whom few, if any, had ever seen before, and whose very name, Donna Marie Henriquez, though acknowledged as essentially Castilian, was yet unfamiliar. The mystery, however, as to who she was, and where he could have found her, was speedily lost in the universal admiration of her exceeding and remarkable loveliness, and of the new yet equally attractive character which, as a devoted husband, Morales thenceforward displayed. Many had imagined that he was too grave, too wrapt in his many engrossing duties, alike as statesman and general, ever to play the lover; and he had seemed resolved that this impression should remain, and shrunk from the exposure of such sacred feelings; for none, save Isabella, knew he loved until they saw his bride.

CHAPTER V

*"And we have won a bower of refuge now
In this fresh waste."*

MRS. HEMANS.

The Vale of Cedars, as described in our first chapter, had been originally the work of a single individual, who had found there a refuge and concealment from the secret power of the Inquisition, from whose walls he had almost miraculously escaped: this individual was Julien Henriquez, the grandfather of Marie. For five years he remained concealed, working unaided, but successfully, in forming a comfortable home and concealed retreat, not only for himself but for his family. Nature herself appeared to have marked the spot as an impenetrable retreat, and Julien's skill and energy increased and strengthened the natural barriers. During these five years the secret search for his person, at first carried on so vigilantly that his enemies supposed nothing but death could have concealed him, gradually relaxed, and then subsided altogether. Foes and friends alike believed him dead, and when he did re-appear in the coarse robe, shrouding cowl, and hempen belt, of a wandering friar, he traversed the most populous towns in safety, unrecognized and unsuspected. It was with some difficulty he found his family, and a matter of no little skill to convey them, without exciting suspicion by their disappearance, to his retreat; but all was accomplished at length, and years of domestic felicity crowned every former effort, and inspired and encouraged more.

Besides his own immediate family, consisting of his wife, a son, and daughter, Henriquez had the charge of two nephews and a niece, children of his sister, whose husband had perished by the arm of the same secret power from which Henriquez had escaped; their mother had died of a broken heart, from the fearful mystery of her husband's fate, and the orphans were to Julien as his own.

As years passed, the Vale of Cedars became not only a safe, but a luxurious home. Every visit to the world Julien turned to profit, by the purchase first of necessities, then of luxuries. The little temple was erected by the active aid of the young men, and the solemn rites of their peculiar faith adhered to in security. Small as the family was, deaths, marriages, and births took place, and feelings and sympathies were excited, and struggles secretly endured, making that small spot of earth in very truth a world. The cousins intermarried. Ferdinand and Josephine left the vale for a more stirring life; Manuel, Henriquez's own son, and Miriam, his niece, preferred the quiet of the vale. Julien, his nephew, too, had loved; but his cousin's love was given to his brother, and he departed, uncomplainingly indeed, but he dared not yet trust himself to associate calmly with the object of his love: he had ever been a peculiarly sad and silent boy; the fate of his father never for an instant seemed to leave his mind, and he had secretly vowed to avenge him. Love, for a while, had banished these thoughts; but when that returned in all the misery of isolation to his own breast, former thoughts regained dominion, and he tried to conquer the one feeling by the encouragement of the other. His brother and his wife constantly visited the vale; if at no other time, almost always at those solemn festivals which generally fell about the period of the Catholic Easter and Michaelmas; often accompanied by faithful friends, holding the same mysterious bond of brotherhood, and to whom the secret of that vale was as precious and secure as to its natural inmates. Its aged founder had frequently the happiness of gathering around him from twenty to thirty of his secret race, and of feeling that his work would benefit friends as well as offspring. Julien alone never returned to the vale, and his family at length mourned him as one amongst the dead.

The career of his brother was glorious but brief; he fell fighting for his country, and his widow and young son returned to the parental retreat. Though the cousins had married the same day, the son

of Ferdinand was ten years older than his cousin Marie; Manuel and Miriam having lived twelve years together ere the longed-for treasure was bestowed. At first, therefore, she had been to the youthful Ferdinand but as a plaything, to pet and laugh with: he left the vale as page to his father's companion in arms, Gonzalos de Lara, when Marie was little more than five years old; but still his love for her and his home was such that whenever it was possible, he would snatch if it were but half a day to visit them. Gradually, and to him it seemed almost strangely, the plaything child changed into the graceful girl, and then again into the lovely woman; and dearer than ever became his boyhood's home, though years had snatched away so many of its beloved inmates, that, at the period of our story, its sole occupants were Marie and her father.

Had her mother lived, perchance Marie had never been exposed to the dangers of an introduction to the world. Betrothed, in the secret hearts of not only her own parents, but of Ferdinand's mother, to her cousin, if she lived to attain sufficient age, Miriam would not have thought it so impossible as Manuel did, that the affections of his child might be sought for by, and given to another, if she mingled with the world; she would at least have waited till she was Ferdinand's wedded wife, and then sent her forth secure. But such subtle fears and feelings are peculiarly *woman's*; not the tenderest, most devoted father, could of himself have either thought of, or understood them. He might perhaps have owned their justice had they been presented to him by the affectionate warnings of an almost idolized wife; but that voice was hushed, her sweet counsels buried in the grave; and the fond, proud father, only thought of his child's brilliant beauty, and how she would be admired and beloved, could she be but generally known. And so, for her sake, he actually did violence to his own love for the quiet retirement of the vale, and bore her to the care of Donna Emilie de Castro; seeing nothing, feeling nothing, but the admiration she excited, and that she was indeed the loveliest there. One wish he had, and that was, that his nephew could have been there likewise; but being engaged at that time on some important private business for the Queen, Ferdinand did not even know that his cousin had ever left the vale.

That his child's affections could be excited towards any but those of her own race was a circumstance so impossible, and moreover a sin so fearful, that it never entered Manuel's mind: he knew not woman's nature, dreamed not of its quick impulses, its passionate yearnings, its susceptibility towards all gentle emotions, or he could not have so trustingly believed in the power of her peculiar faith and creed to guard her from the danger. Even his dearest desire that she should become the wife of her cousin she knew not; for the father shrunk from revealing it to either his child or nephew, unless Ferdinand loved and sought her himself. What therefore had she to warn her from the precipice on which she stood, when new, strange, yet most exquisitely sweet emotions gradually obtained possession of her heart in her daily intercourse with Arthur Stanley? What they were indeed she knew not; the word love was never uttered by either; she only knew that his presence, his voice, the pressure of his hand, brought with it a thrilling sensation of intense happiness, such as she had never known, never imagined before. It was indeed but a brief dream, for when he spoke, when he besought her to be his, then indeed she woke to consciousness, not only that she loved, but of the dark and fatal barrier between them, which no human effort could o'erleap. The sacrifice of race, of faith, of family, indeed might be made; but to do this never entered the mind and heart of Marie, so utterly was it impossible. To her peculiar feelings it was sin enough thus to have loved.

Manuel Henriquez bore his child back to the vale, little dreaming of the anguish to which his unguarded love had exposed her. She had ever been rather a pensive and gentle girl, and therefore that she should be still serious was no matter of surprise. For fifteen months she had sought to banish every dream of Arthur, every thought but that in loving him she had sinned against her God. Time and prayer had in some measure softened the first acute agony of her feelings; she thought she was conquering them altogether, when his unexpected appearance excited every feeling anew. Yet in that harrowing interview still she had been firm. She had even told him a secret, which it was almost death to reveal, that he might forget her; for how could he wed with her? And yet even that barrier

he would have passed, and his generous, his determined love, would linger on her memory spite of every effort to think of him no more.

It was a fearful struggle, and often and often she yearned to confess all to her father, whom she loved with no common love; but she knew too well, not only the grief such tidings would be to him, but what his judgment must be, and she shrunk in agony from the condemnation of her feelings by another, constantly as she was condemning them herself.

Henriquez had been absent from the vale during Stanley's unexpected visit, and he tarried long enough to excite the alarm, not only of his child but of their domestics; nor was its cause when explained likely to ease Marie's anxiety. He had been attacked on the day of his intended return by a strange sensation of giddiness, followed by insensibility, which appeared to have weakened him more than he had thought compatible with so brief an illness. He made light of it, but still he was uneasy, not that he feared death himself, but that it might take him from his Marie ere his wishes were accomplished, and her earthly happiness, as he thought, secured. The first attack was but the forerunner of others, sometimes very slight and brief, at others longer and more alarming, rendering Marie more and more determined to keep her fatal secret from him; for it appeared to her that any stronger emotion than customary would be followed by those attacks; and as her love for him seemed to increase in intensity with the anxiety his precarious health occasioned, so did her dread of occasioning him aught of grief. But how fruitless are our best and wisest resolutions! One little hour, and every thought was changed.

CHAPTER VI

*"Oh! praise me not—
Look gently on me, or I sink to earth
Not thus."*

DE CHATILLON.

It was the custom of the inmates of the Vale of Cedars, once in every year, and generally about the season of Michaelmas, to celebrate a festival, which ordained the erection of a booth or tent of "branches of thick trees," in which for seven days every meal was taken, and greater part of the day (except the time passed in the little Temple) was spent. Large branches of the palm and cedar, the willow, acacia, and the oak, cut so as to prevent their withering for the seven days, formed the walls of the tent; their leaves intermingling over head, so as to form a shelter, and yet permit the beautiful blue of the heavens to peep within. Flowers of every shade and scent formed a bordering within; and bouquets, richly and tastefully arranged, placed in vases filled with scented earth, hung from the branches forming the roof. Fruit, too, was there—the purple grape, the ripe red orange, the paler lemon, the lime, the pomegranate, the citron, all of which the vale afforded, adorned the board (which for those seven days was always spread within the tent), intermingled with cakes made by Marie.

This was one of the festivals for which many of the secret race would visit the vale; but it so happened that, this year, Manuel, his child, and their retainers, kept it alone—a source of disappointment and anxiety to the former, whose health was rapidly (but still to his child almost invisibly) failing. At the close of the solemn fast which always preceded by five days this festival of rejoicing, he had had a recurrence of his deathlike fits of insensibility, longer and more alarming than usual; but he had rallied, and attributed it so naturally to his long fast, that alarm once more gave place to hope in the heart of his daughter. Not thus, however, felt her father—convinced that death could not be long delayed, he but waited for his nephew's appearance and acknowledged love for his cousin, at once to give her to him, and prepare her for the worst. Parental anxiety naturally increased with every hour that passed, and Ferdinand appeared not.

It was the eve of the Sabbath; one from which in general all earthly cares and thoughts were banished, giving place to tranquil and spiritual joy. The father and daughter were alone within their lovely tent, but both so wrapt in evidently painful thought, that a strange silence usurped the usual cheerful converse. So unwonted was the anxious gloom on Manuel's brow, that his child could bear it no longer, and flinging her arms round his neck, she besought him in the tenderest accents to confide in her, as he had ever done, since her mother's death, to tell her what so pained him—might she not remove it? Henriquez could not resist that fond yet mournful pleading. He told her, that he felt health was departing, that death seemed ever hovering near, but that its pain, its care, would all depart, could he behold his long-cherished wish fulfilled, and his Marie the wife of Ferdinand, whose every look and tone during his last visit had betrayed his devoted love.

Marie heard; and her cheek and lips blanched to such ashy whiteness, that her father in alarm folded her to his breast; and sought to soothe a grief, which he believed was occasioned merely by the sudden and fearful thought of his approaching death; and sought to soothe, by a reference to the endearing love, the cherished tenderness which would still be hers; how Ferdinand would be to her all, aye more than all that he had been, and how, with love like his, she would be happier than she had been yet. Much he said, and he might have said still more, for it was long ere the startled girl could interrupt him. But when he conjured her to speak to him, not to look upon his death so fearfully, the beautiful truth of her nature rose up against the involuntary deceit. It was not his death which thus appalled her; alas—alas!—and she hated herself for the fearful thought—she had almost lost

sight of that, in the words which followed. Breaking from his embrace, she sunk down on her knees before him, and buying her face upon his hand, in broken accents and with choking sobs, revealed the whole. How could she do her noble kinsman such fearful wrong as to wed him, when her whole heart, thoughts, nay, life itself, seemed wrapt in the memory of another? And that other! Oh! who, what was he? Once she looked up in her father's face, but so fearful were the emotions written there—wrath struggling with love, grief, pity, almost terror—that hastily she withdrew her glance, and remained kneeling, bent even to the dust, long after the confession had been poured forth, waiting in fear and anguish for his words.

"Marie, Marie! is it my Marie, my sainted Miriam's, child, who thus speaks? who hath thus sinned sole representative of a race of ages, in whose pure thoughts such fearful sin hath never mingled. My child so to love the stranger as to reject, to scorn her own! Oh God, my God, why hast thou so forsaken me? Would I had died before!" And the heavy groan which followed, confirmed the anguish breathed in those broken words.

"Father!" implored the unhappy girl, clasping his knees in an agony of supplication, though she raised not her head—"Oh my father! in mercy do not speak thus! Words of wrath, of reproach, fearful as they are from thee, yet I can bear them, but not such woe! Oh, think what I have borne, what I must still bear. If I have sinned, my sin will bring, nay, it has already brought its own chastisement. Speak to me but one word of love—or, if it must be, wrath.—but not, not such accents of despair!"

Her father struggled to reply; but the conflux of strong emotion was too powerful, and Marie sprung up to support him as he fell. She had often seen him insensible before, when there appeared no cause for such attacks; but was it strange that at such a moment she should feel that *she* had caused it?—that her sin perchance had killed her father; he might never wake more to say he forgave, he blessed her,—or that in those agonized moments of suspense she vowed, if he might but speak again, that his will should be hers, even did it demand the annihilation of every former treasured thought! And the vow seemed heard. Gradually and, it appeared, painfully life returned. His first action was to clasp her convulsively to his heart; his next, to put her gently yet firmly from him, and bury his face in his hands, and weep.

No sight is more terrible, even to an indifferent spectator, than to behold tears wrung from the eyes of man—and to his child it was indeed torture. But she controlled the choking anguish—calmly and firmly she spoke, and gradually the paroxysm subsided.

"That I have sinned in loving a stranger thus, I have long felt," she said; "and had I been aware of the nature of these feelings, they should never have gained ascendancy. But I awoke too late—my very being was enchained. Still I may break from these engrossing thoughts—I would do so—pain shall be welcome, if it may in time atone for the involuntary sin of loving the stranger, and the yet more terrible one of grieving thee. Oh, my father, do what thou wilt, command me as thou wilt—I am henceforth wholly thine."

"And thou wilt wed Ferdinand, my child?"

"Would he still wish it, father, if he knew the whole? And is it right, is it just, to wed him, and the truth still unrevealed? Oh, if he do love me, as you say, how can I requite him by deceit?"

"Tell him not, tell him not," replied Henriquez, again fearfully agitated; "let none other know what has been. What can it do, save to grieve him beyond thy power to repair? No, no. Once his, and all these fearful thoughts will pass away, and their sin be blotted out, in thy true faithfulness to one who loves thee. His wife, and I know that thou wilt love him, and be true, as if thou hadst never loved another—"

"Ay, could I not be true, I would not wed," murmured Marie, more to herself than to her father; "and if suffering indeed, atone for sin, terribly will it be redeemed. But oh, my father, tell me—I have sworn to be guided by thee, and in all things I will be—tell me, in wedding him whom thou hast chosen, do I not still do foul wrong, if not to him (her voice faltered), unto another, whose love is mine as well?"

"Better for him, as for thee, to wed another, Marie! Would'st thou wed the stranger, wert thou free?"

She buried her face in his bosom, and murmured, "Never!"

"Then in what can this passion end, but in misery for both? In constant temptation to perjure thy soul, in forsaking all for him. And if thou didst, would it bring happiness? My child, thou art absolved, even had aught of promise passed between you. Knowest thou not that a maiden of herself hath no power to vow? Her father's will alone absolves it or confirms. Thou doest him no wrong. Be Ferdinand's bride, and all shall be forgiven, all forgotten—thou art my child, my Miriam's child once more!"

He pressed her again fondly to him; but though she made no reply, his arguments could not convince her. She had indeed told Arthur that she never could be his, but yet avowed that she loved him; and if he did meet her as the wife of another, what must he believe her? And Ferdinand, if he did so love her, that preoccupied heart was indeed a sad requital. She had, however, that evening but little time to think, for ere either spoke again, the branches at the entrance of the tent were hastily pushed aside, and a tall manly form stood upon the threshold. Marie sprang to her feet with a faint cry—could it be that the vow of an hour was already called upon to be fulfilled?—but the intruder attributed her alarm to a different cause, and hastily flinging off his wrapping mantle and deep plumed morion, he exclaimed, "What! alarmed by me, my gentle cousin? dearest Marie! am I forgotten?" And Henriquez, forgetting all of bodily exhaustion, all of mental suffering, in the deep joy his sudden appearance caused, could only fold the warrior in his feeble arms, and drooping his head on his shoulder, sob forth expressively, "My son! my son!"

CHAPTER VII

*"And thus how oft do life and death
Twine hand in hand together;
And the funeral shroud, and bridal wreath,
How small a space may sever!"*

MS.

One little week did Ferdinand spend within the home of his boyhood; and in that brief interval the earthly fate of Marie Henriquez was decided. He had deferred his visit till such peace and prosperity had dawned for Spain, that he could offer his bride not only a home suited to his rank, but the comfort of his presence and protection for an indeterminate time. He had come there purposely to reveal his long-cherished love; to conjure Marie to bless him with the promise of her hand; and, if successful, to return, in two short months, for the celebration of their marriage, according to their own secret rites, ere the ceremony was performed in the sight of the whole Catholic world. The intermarriages of first cousins had been so common an occurrence in his family, that Ferdinand, in spite of some tremblings, as a lover, had regarded his final union with Marie with almost as much certainty, and as a thing of course, as his uncle himself.

The effects of that agitating interview between father and daughter had been visible to Ferdinand; but he attributed it, very naturally, to the cause privately assigned for it by his kinsman—Marie's first conviction that her father's days were numbered. He had been greatly shocked at the change in Henriquez's appearance, and deeply affected at the solemn and startling earnestness with which he consigned his child to his care, beseeching him, under all circumstances, to love and cherish her. His nephew could scarcely understand, then, such earnest pleadings. Alas! ere his life closed, their cause was clear enough.

Unconscious that her father and cousin were together, or of the nature of their conversation, Marie had joined them, unexpectedly, ere the interview was over. From her father's lips, and in a tone of trembling agitation, she heard that his long-cherished prayer was granted, and that she was his nephew's plighted, bride. He joined their hands, blessed them, and left them alone together, ere she had had power to utter a single word; and when voice was recalled by the tender, earnest accents of her cousin, beseeching her to ratify her father's consent—to say she would learn to love him, if she did not then; that she would not refuse the devotedness he proffered—what could she answer? She had so long loved him, venerated him, gloried in his achievements, his honors, as of an elder and much-loved brother, that, had she followed the impulse of her nature, she would have thrown herself as a sister on his neck, and poured forth her tale of sorrow. But she had sworn to be guided by her father, and he had besought her to reveal nothing; and therefore she promised to be his, even while with tears she declared herself unworthy. But such words were of little meaning to her enraptured lover save to bid him passionately deny them, and excite his ardent affection more than ever—satisfied that she could be not indifferent, listening as she did, with such flushed cheek and glistening eye, to the theme of his life since they had parted—the favor of the sovereigns, and the station he had won.

During the two months which intervened between Don Ferdinand's departure and promised return, Marie strained every nerve to face her destiny, and so meet it with calmness. Had she not loved, it would have been impossible to feel herself the cherished object of her cousin's love without returning it, possessing, as he did, alike inward and outward attraction to win regard. She studiously and earnestly banished every thought of Arthur as it rose; she prayed only for strength to be faithful, not only in outward seeming but in inward thought; that Stanley might never cross her path again, or, if he did, that his very affections might be estranged from her; that the secret she had revealed

might alone be thought upon, till all of love had gone. The torture of such prayer, let those who love decide; but it was the thought of his woe, did he ever know she was another's bride, that haunted her. Her own suffering it was comparatively easy to bear, believing as she did, that they were called for by her involuntary sin: but his—so successfully had she conquered herself; that it was only when his countenance of reproach would flit before her, that the groan burst from her heart, and she felt bowed unto the earth.

Infirmity itself seemed conquered in the rejoicing thankfulness with which Henriquez regarded this fulfilment of his wishes. He appeared actually to regain strength and energy; his alarming fainting fits had not recurred since his nephew's visit, and Marie hoped he would be spared her longer than he believed. He never recurred to her confession, but lavished on her, if possible, yet more endearing love, and constantly alluded to the intense happiness which her consent to be her cousin's bride had given him. Once he left the vale, despite his precarious health, taking with him his old retainer, Reuben, and returned, laden with the richest gems and costliest silks, to adorn his child, on her bridal day, as befitted the bride of Ferdinand.

Time passed: the day specified by Ferdinand rapidly approached. He was there to meet it—and not alone. Thoughtful of his Marie's feeling, he had resolved that she should not stand beside the altar without one female friend; and he brought one, the sight of whom awakened associations with such overpowering strength, that Marie could only throw herself upon her bosom, almost convulsed with tears. It was Donna Emelie de Castro, at whose house she had joined the world; but her emotion, supposed natural to the agitating ceremony impending, and her father's precarious health, happily for her, passed without further notice than sympathy and love.

Henriquez, for once, was indifferent alike to the agitation of Marie, or the presence of Ferdinand. His glance was fixed on one of a little group, all of whom, with the exception of this individual, were familiar to his home and heart. He was clothed as a monk; but his cowl was thrown back, and his gaze so fixed on Marie that she blushed beneath it, and turned away.

"Do not turn from me, my child," he said; and Henriquez started at the voice, it was so fraught with memories of the departed. "Stranger as I must be, save in name, to thee—thou art none such to me. I seem to feel thy mother once again before me—and never was sister more beloved!—Manuel, hast thou, indeed, forgotten Julien?"

Almost ere he ceased to speak, the long separated relatives were clasped in each, other's arms. The five-and-twenty years, which had changed the prime of manhood into advancing age, and blanched the hair of each, had had no power to decrease the strong ties of kindred, so powerful in their secret race. The agitation and excitement of Henriquez was so excessive, not only then, but during the few days intervening before the celebration of the bridal, that Marie, in spite of the near approach of the dreaded day, could only think of him.

Ferdinand was no exacting lover: his affection for her was so intense, so true; his confidence in her truth so perfect, that, though he might at times have fancied that she loved not then with fervor equal to his own, he was contented to believe that his devotion would in time create in her as powerful a feeling. He had so watched, so tended her from infancy: she had so clung to and revered him, so opened her young heart, without one reservation, to his view—so treated him as her most cherished, most loved friend, that how could he dream she had aught to conceal, or believe that, did she know there was, she could have hesitated, one moment, to refuse his hand, preferring even the misery of so grieving him, to the continued agony of deceit? It was this perfect confidence, this almost childish trust, so beautiful in one tried, as he had been, in the ordeal of the world, that wrung Marie's heart with deepest torture. He believed her other than she was;—but it was too late—she dared not deceive him.

The nuptial morning dawned. The party, not more than twelve or fourteen in all, assembled within the little edifice, whose nature had so puzzled Arthur. Its interior was as peculiar as its outward appearance: its walls, of polished cedar, were unadorned with either carving, pictures, or imagery.

In the centre, facing the east, was a sort of raised table or desk, surrounded by a railing, and covered with a cloth of the richest and most elaborately worked brocade. Exactly opposite, and occupying the centre of the eastern wall, was a sort of lofty chest, or ark; the upper part of which, arched, and richly painted, with a blue ground, bore in two columns, strange hieroglyphics in gold: beneath this were portals of polished cedar, panelled, and marked out with gold, but bearing no device; their hinges set in gilded pillars, which supported the arch above. Before these portals were generally drawn curtains, of material rich and glittering as that upon the reading-desk. But this day not only were the curtains drawn aside, but the portals themselves flung open, as the bridal party neared the steps which led to it, and disclosed six or seven rolls of parchment, folded on silver pins, and filled with the same strange letters, each clothed in drapery of variously colored brocade, or velvet, and surmounted by two sets of silver ornaments, in which the bell and pomegranate were, though small, distinctly discernible. A superb lamp, of solid silver, was suspended from the roof; and one of smaller dimensions, but of equally valuable material, and always kept lighted, hung just before the ark.

Julien Morales, at his own particular request, was to read the ceremony; and three hours after noon he stood within the portals, on the highest step; a slab of white marble divided him from the bride and bridegroom, over whom a canopy was raised, supported by four silver poles. The luxuriant hair of the bride had been gathered up, and, save two massive braids, shading her brow and cheek, was concealed under a head-dress, somewhat resembling an eastern turban, but well suited to her countenance. Her dress, of the fashion before described, was all of white—the jacket or bodice richly woven with gold threads; but so thick a veil enveloped face and form, that her sweet face was concealed, until, at one particular part of the mysterious rite (for such, to the Spaniards, this ceremony must have been), the veil was uplifted for her to taste the sacred wine, and not allowed to fall again. Neither the bridegroom (agitated himself, for his was not a nature to think lightly of the nuptial rite), nor Henriquez (whose excitement was extreme) was conscious of the looks of alarm, blended with admiration, which the raising of the veil attracted towards Marie. Lovely she was; but it was the loveliness of a marble statue, not of life—her very lips were blanched, and every feature still, indeed; but a stillness of so peculiar an expression, so inexpressibly, so thrillingly sad, that admiration appeared indefinably and strangely transformed to pain. The wedding ring was placed upon her hand—a thin crystal goblet broken by Ferdinand, on the marble at his feet—and the rites were concluded. An almost convulsive embrace from her father—the unusual wildness of his voice and manner, as he blessed, and called her his own precious child, who this day had placed the seal upon his happiness, and confirmed twenty years of filial devotedness and love—awoke her from that stagnating trance. She folded her arms round his neck, and burst into passionate tears; and there were none, not even Ferdinand, to chide or doubt that emotion—it was but natural to her character, and the solemn service of the day.

Gay and joyous was the meal which followed the bridal. No appurtenances of modern pomp and luxury, indeed, decorated the board: its only ornaments were the loveliest flowers, arranged in alabaster vases, and silver baskets filled with blushing fruit. The food was simple, and the wines not choice; but the guests thought not of mere sensual enjoyment. In these secret meetings, each felt there was something holy; richer homes, more gorgeous feasts, were theirs in the world, whenever they so willed; but such intercourse of brotherhood seldom occurred, and when it came, was consequently hallowed.

Some time they sat around the board; and so unrestrained, so full of varied interest was their eager converse, that sunset came unheeded; and the silver lamps, fed with sweet incense, were placed upon the table. Julien then arose, and solemnly pronounced the usual blessing, or rather thanksgiving, after the bridal feast. Marie did not look up during its continuance; but as it concluded, she arose, and was about to retire with Donna Emilie, when her eye caught her father, and a cry of alarm broke from her. The burning flush had given place to a livid paleness—the glittering of the eye to a fixed and glassy gaze. The frame was, for a moment, rigid as stone, then fearfully convulsed; and Reuben,

starting forward, caught his master as he fell. There was something so startling and unusual in the seizure, that even those accustomed to his periods of insensibility were alarmed; and vain was every effort of Ferdinand to awaken hope and comfort in the seemingly frozen spirit of his bride.

Henriquez was conveyed to his room, and every restorative applied; but even the skill of Julien, well versed as he was in the healing art, was without effect. More than an hour passed, and still he lay like death; and no sound, no sob, broke from the torn heart of his hapless child, who knelt beside his couch; her large dark eyes, distended to even more than their usual size, fixed upon his face; her hands clasped round one of his; but had she sought thus to give warmth she would have failed, for the hand of the living was cold and damp as that of the seeming dead.

A slight, almost imperceptible flush floated over that livid cheek—the eyes unclosed, but so quickly closed again that it was more like the convulsive quivering of the muscle than the effort of the will; and Marie alone had marked the change.

"Father!" she almost shrieked in agony, "in mercy speak to me again—say but you forgive—bless—"

"Forgive" feebly repeated the dying man; and the strong feeling of the father, for a brief interval, conquered even death—"Forgive?—my beautiful—my own!—the word is meaningless, applied to thee. Art thou not my Ferdinand's bride, and hast thou not so taken the sting, the trial even from this dread moment? My precious one!—would I could see that face once more—but it is dark—all dark—kiss me, my child!"

She threw herself upon his bosom, and covered his cheek with kisses. He passed his hand feebly over her face, as if the touch could once more bring her features to his sight; and then extending his left hand, feebly called—"Ferdinand!"

His nephew caught the withered hand, and kneeling down, pressed it reverentially and fondly to his lips.

Henriquez's lips moved, but there came no word.

"Doubt me not, my more than father! From boyhood to youth, from youth to manhood, I have doted on thy child. Shall I love and cherish her less now, that she has only me? Oh, trust me!—if devotion can give joy, she will know no grief, that man can avert, again!"

A strange but a beautiful light for a single minute dispersed the fearful shadow creeping over Henriquez's features.

"My son! my son!—I bless thee—and thou, too, my drooping flower. Julien! my brother—lay me beside my Miriam. Thou didst not come for this—but it is well. My children—my friends—send up the hymn of praise—the avowal of our faith; once more awake the voice of our fathers!"

He was obeyed; a psalm arose, solemn and sweet, in accents familiar as their mother tongue, to those who chanted; but had any other been near, not a syllable would have been intelligible. But the voice which in general led to such solemn service—so thrilling in its sweetness, that the most indifferent could not listen to it unmoved—now lay hushed and mute, powerless even to breathe the sobs that crushed her heart. And when the psalm ceased, and the prayer for the dying followed, with one mighty effort Henriquez raised himself, and clasping his hands, uttered distinctly the last solemn words ever spoken by his race, and then sunk back—and there was silence. Minutes, many minutes, rolled by—but Marie moved not. Gently, and tenderly, Don Ferdinand succeeded in disengaging the convulsive hold with which she still clasped her parent, and sought to bear her from that sad and solemn room. Wildly she looked up in his face, and then on those beloved features, already fixed and gray in death;—with frantic strength she pushed aside her husband, and sunk down by her father's side.

CHAPTER VIII

*"Slight are the outward signs of evil thought:
Within, within—'twas there the spirit wrought.
Love shows all changes: hate, ambition, guile,
Betray no further than the bitter smile."*

BYRON.

Our readers must imagine that nearly a year and a half has elapsed since the conclusion of our last chapter. During that interval the outward life of Marie had passed in a calm, even stream; which, could she have succeeded in entirely banishing thoughts of the past, would have been unalloyed enjoyment. Her marriage, as we hinted in our fourth chapter, had been solemnized in public, with all the form and ceremony of the Catholic Church, and with a splendor incumbent on the high rank and immense wealth of the bridegroom. In compliance with Marie's wishes, however, she had not yet been presented to the Queen; delicate health (which was the fact, for a terrible fever had succeeded the varied emotions of her wedding day) and her late bereavement, was her husband's excuse to Isabella for her non-appearance—an excuse graciously accepted; the rather that the Queen of Castile was then much engrossed with political changes and national reforms, than from any failing of interest in Don Ferdinand's bride.

Changed as was her estate, from her lovely home in the Vale of Cedars, where she had dwelt as the sole companion of an ailing parent, to the mistress of a large establishment in one of the most populous cities of Castile; the idolized wife of the Governor of the town—and, as such, the object of popular love and veneration, and called upon, frequently, to exert influence and authority—still Marie did not fail performing every new duty with a grace and sweetness binding her more and more closely to the doting heart of her husband. For her inward self, Marie was calm—nay, at intervals, almost happy. She had neither prayed nor struggled in vain, and she felt as if her very prayer was answered in the fact that Arthur Stanley had been appointed to some high and honorable post in Sicily, and they were not therefore likely yet to meet again. The wife of such a character as Morales could not have continued wretched unless perversely resolved so to be. But his very virtues, while they inspired the deepest reverence towards him, engendered some degree of fear. Could she really have loved him as—he believed she did—this feeling would not have had existence; but its foundation was the constant thought that she was deceiving him—the remorse, that his fond confidence was so utterly misplaced—the consciousness, that there was still something to conceal, which, if discovered, must blight his happiness for ever, and estrange him from her, were it only for the past deceit. Had his character been less lofty—his confidence in her less perfect—his very love less fond and trusting—she could have borne her trial better; but to one true, ingenuous, open as herself, what could be more terrible than the unceasing thought that she was acting a part—and to her husband? Often and often she longed, with an almost irresistible impulse, to fling herself at his feet, and beseech him not to pierce her heart with such fond trust; but the impulse was forcibly controlled. What would such confession avail her now?—or him, save to wound?

Amongst the many Spaniards of noble birth who visited Don Ferdinand's, was one Don Luis Garcia, whose actual rank and office no one seemed to know; and yet, in affairs of church or state, camp or council, he was always so associated, that it was impossible to discover to which of these he was allied; in fact, there was a mystery around him, which no one could solve. Notwithstanding his easy—nay, it was by some thought fascinating manners, his presence generally created a restraint, felt intuitively by all, yet comprehended by none. That there is such, an emotion as antipathy mercifully

placed within us, often as a warning, we do most strenuously believe; but we seldom trace and recognize it as such, till circumstances reveal its truth.

The real character of Don Luis, and the office he held, our future pages will disclose; suffice it here to state, that there was no lack of personal attractions or mental graces, to account for the universal, yet unspoken and unacknowledged dislike which he inspired. Apparently in the prime of life, he yet seemed to have relinquished all the pleasures and even the passions of life. Austere, even rigid, in those acts of piety and personal mortifications enjoined by his religion—voluntary fasts, privations, nights supposed to be past in vigil and in penance; occasional rich gifts to patron saints, and their human followers; an absence of all worldly feeling, even ambition; some extraordinary deeds of benevolence—all rendered him an object of actual veneration to the priests and monks with which the goodly city of Segovia abounded; and even the populace declared him faultless, as a catholic and a man, even while their inward shuddering belied the words.

Don Ferdinand Morales alone was untroubled with these contradictory emotions. Incapable of hypocrisy himself, he could not imagine it in others: his nature seemed actually too frank and true for the admission even of a prejudice. Little did he dream that his name, his wealth, his very favor with the Queen, his influence with her subjects, had already stamped him, in the breast of the man to whom his house and heart alike were open, as an object of suspicion and espial; and that ere a year had passed over his wedded life, these feelings were ripened, cherished—changed from the mere thought of persecution, to palpable resolve, by personal and ungovernable hate.

Don Luis had never known love; not even the fleeting fancy, much less the actual passion, of the sensualist, or the spiritual aspirings of true affection. Of the last, in fact, he was utterly incapable. No feeling, with him, was of an evanescent nature: under the cold austerity of the ordinary man, lay coals of living fire. It mattered not under what guise excited—hate, revenge, ambition, he was capable of all. At love, alone, he had ever laughed—exulting in his own security.

The internal condition of Spain, as we have before said, had been, until the accession of Isabella and Ferdinand, one of the grossest license and most fearful immorality. Encouraged in the indulgence of every passion, by the example of the Court, no dictates of either religion or morality ever interfered to protect the sanctity of home; unbridled desires were often the sole cause of murderous assaults; and these fearful crimes continually passing unpunished, encouraged the supposition that men's passions were given to be their sole guide, before which, honor, innocence, and virtue fell powerless.

The vigorous proceedings of Ferdinand and Isabella had already remedied these terrible abuses. Over the public safety and reform they had some power; but over the hearts of individuals they had none; and there were still some with whom past license was far more influencing than present restraint and legal severity; still some who paused at no crime so that the gratification of their passions was ensured; and foremost amongst these, though by his secret office pledged to the annihilation of all domestic and social ties, as regarded his own person, was Don Luis Garcia.

For rather more than a year, Don Ferdinand Morales had enjoyed the society of his young wife uninterruptedly, save by occasional visits, of brief duration, to Valladolid and Leon, where Isabella alternately held her court. He was now, however, summoned to attend the sovereigns, on a visit to Ferdinand's paternal dominions, an office which would cause his absence for a much longer interval. He obeyed with extreme reluctance—nor did Marie feel the separation less. There was, in some measure, a feeling of security in his presence, which, whenever he was absent, gave place to fearful tremblings as to what might transpire to shake her faith in her, ere he returned.

Resolved that not the very faintest breath of scandal should touch *his* wife, Marie, during the absence of Morales, always kept herself secluded. This time her retirement was stricter than ever; and great, then, was her indignation and astonishment, when about a fortnight before her husband's expected return, and in direct contradiction to her commands, Don Luis Garcia was admitted to her presence; and nothing but actual flight, for which she was far too proud and self-possessed, could have averted the private interview which followed. The actual words which passed we know not, but,

after a very brief interval of careless converse on the part of Garcia—something he said earnestly, and in the tones of pitying sympathy, which caused the cheek and lips of Marie to blanch to marble, and her whole frame to shiver, and then grow rigid, as if turned to stone. Could it be that the fatal secret, which she believed was known only to herself and Arthur, that she had loved another ere she wedded Ferdinand, had been penetrated by the man towards whom she had ever felt the most intense abhorrence? and that he dared refer to it as a source of sympathy—as a proof that he could feel for her more than her unsuspecting husband? Why was speech so frozen up within her, that she could not, for the moment, answer, and give him back the lie? But that silence of deadly terror lasted not long: he had continued to speak; at first she was unconscious of his change of tone, words, and even action; but when his actual meaning flashed upon her, voice, strength, energy returned in such a burst of womanly indignation, womanly majesty, that Garcia himself, skilled in every art of evil as he was, quailed beneath it, and felt that he was powerless, save by violence and revenge.

While that terrible interview lasted, the wife of Morales had not failed; but when once more alone, the most deadly terror took possession of her. She had, indeed, so triumphed as to banish Garcia, defeated, from her presence; but fearful threats of vengeance were in that interview divulged—allusions to some secret power, over which he was the head, armed with authority even greater than that of the sovereign's—mysteriously spoken, but still almost strangely intelligible, that in her betrayal or her silence lay the safety or the danger of her husband—all compelled the conviction that her terror and her indignation at the daring insult must be buried deep in her own breast; even while the supposition that Don Luis knew all the past (though how, her wildest imagination could not discover), and that therefore she was in his power, urged her yet more to a full confession to her husband. Better if his heart must be wrung by her, than by a foe; and yet she shrunk in anguish from the task.

She was, however, deceived as to the amount of Garcia's knowledge of her past life. Accustomed to read human nature under all its varied phases—employing an unusually acute penetration so to know his fellows as to enable him, when needed, to create the greatest amount of misery—he had simply perceived that Marie's love for her husband was of a different nature to his for her, and that she had some secret to conceal. On this he had based his words: his suspicions were, unhappily, confirmed by the still, yet expressive agony they had occasioned. Baffled, as in some measure he had been, his internal rage that he should have so quailed before a woman, naturally increased the whirlwind of contending passions: but schooled by his impenetrable system of hypocrisy to outward quietness and control, he waited, certain that circumstances would either of themselves occur, or be so guided by him as to give him ample means of triumph and revenge.

CHAPTER IX

*"You would have thought the very windows spake;
So many greedy looks of young and old
Through casements darted their desiring eyes."*

SHAKSPEARE.

In an apartment, whose pale, green hangings, embroidered with richly-colored flowers, and whose furniture and ornaments, all of delicate material and refined taste, marked it as a meet boudoir for gentle blood, sat Marie and her husband. She occupied her favorite seat—a cushion at his feet, and was listening with interest to his animated history of the Sovereign's welcome to Saragossa, the popular ferment at their appearance, the good they had accomplished, and would still accomplish, as their judicious plans matured. It was clear, he said, that they had resolved the sovereign power should not be merely nominal, as it had been. By making himself proclaimed and received as grand master of the three great orders of knighthood—Saint Iago, Compostella, and Alcantara—the immense influence of those associations must succumb to, and be guided by, Ferdinand alone; the power of the nobles would thus be insensibly diminished, and the mass of the kingdom—the PEOPLE—as a natural consequence, become of more importance, their position more open to the eyes of the sovereigns, and their condition, physically and morally, ameliorated and improved.

"I feel and acknowledge this, dearest; though one of the class whose power must be diminished to accomplish it;" he continued, "I am too anxious for the internal prosperity of my country to quarrel with any measures which minds so enlightened as its present sovereigns may deem requisite. But this is but a grave theme for thee, love. Knowest thou that her Grace reproached me with not bringing thee to join the Arragonese festivities? When Donna Emilie spoke of thee, and thy gentle worth and feminine loveliness, as being such as indeed her Grace would love, my Sovereign banished me her presence as a disloyal cavalier for so deserting thee; and when I marked how pale and thin thou art, I feel that she was right; I should have borne thee with me."

"Or not have left me. Oh, my husband, leave me not again!" she replied, with sudden and involuntary emotion, which caused him to throw his arm round her, and fondly kiss her brow.

"Not for the court, dearest; but that gentle heart must not forget thou art a warrior's wife, and as such, for his honor's sake, must sometimes bear the pang of parting. Nay, thou tremblest, and art still paler! Ere such summons come, thou wilt have learned to know and love thy Queen, and in her protecting favor find some solace, should I be called to war."

"War! talk they of war again? I thought all was now at peace?"

"Yes, love, in our sovereign's hereditary dominions; but there can be no lasting peace while some of the fairest territory of Spain still dims the supremacy of Castile, and bows down to Moorish masters. It is towards Grenada King Ferdinand looks, yearning for the day when, all internal commotions healed, he can head a gallant army to compel subjection; and sad as it will be to leave thee, sweet, thou wilt forgive thy soldier if he say, would that the day were come!"

"And will not their present extent of kingdom suffice the sovereigns? When they recall their former petty domains, and compare them with the present, is it not enough?"

Morales smiled. "Thou speakest as a very woman, gentle one, to whom the actual word 'ambition' is unknown. Why, the very cause thou namest urges our sovereigns to the conquest of these Moors. They are the blot upon a kingdom otherwise as fair and great as any other European land. They thirst to raise it in the scale of kingdoms—to send down their names to posterity, as the founders of the Spanish monarchy—the builders and supporters of a united throne, and so leave their children an undivided land. Surely this is a glorious project, one which every Spanish warrior must rejoice to

aid. But fear not a speedy summons, love; much must be accomplished first. Isabella will visit this ancient city ere then, and thou wilt learn to love and reverence her as I do."

"In truth, my husband, thou hast made me loyal as thyself; but say they not she is severe, determined, stern?"

"To the guilty, yes; even the weak crafty will not stand before her repelling glance: but what hast thou to fear, my love? Penetrative as she is, seeming to read the heart through the countenance, she can read nought in thee save qualities to love. I remember well the eagle glance she fixed on King Ferdinand's young English favorite, Senor Stanley, the first time he was presented to her. But she was satisfied, for he ranks as deservedly high in her favor as in her husband's. Thou hast heard me speak of this young Englishman, my Marie?"

Her face was at that moment turned from him, or he might have started at its sudden flush; but she assented by a sign.

"He was so full of joyousness and mirth, that to us of graver nature it seemed almost below his dignity as man; and now they tell me he is changed so mournfully; grave, sad, silent, maturity seems to have descended upon him ere he has quite passed boyhood; or he has some secret sorrow, too sacred to be revealed. There is some talk of his recall from Sicily, he having besought the king for a post of more active and more dangerous service. Ferdinand loves such daring spirits, and therefore no doubt will grant his boon. Ha! Alberic, what is it?" he continued, eagerly, as a page entered, and delivered a packet secured with floss silk, and sealed with the royal signet, adding that it had been brought by an officer of the royal guard, attended by some men at arms. "Give him welcome suited to his rank, boy: I will but peruse these, and attend him instantly."

The page withdrew, and Don Ferdinand, hastily cutting the silk, was speedily so engrossed in his despatches, as to forget for the time even the presence of his wife; and well it was so; for it enabled her with a strong effort to conquer the deadly sickness Morale's careless words had caused—the pang of dread accompanying every thought of Arthur's return to Spain—to still the throbbing pulse and quivering lip, and, outwardly unmoved, meet his joyous glance once more.

"'Tis as I thought and hoped," he said, with animation: "the sovereigns hold their court for some months in this city; coeval, in antiquity, associations, and loyalty, with Valladolid and Leon, Isabella, with her characteristic thought for all her subjects, has decided on making it occasionally the seat of empire alternately with them, and commissions me, under her royal seal, to see the castle fittingly prepared. Listen, love, what her Grace writes further—'Take heed, my good lord, and hide not in a casket the brightest gem which we have heard adorns thy home. We would ourselves judge the value of thy well-hoarded jewel—not that we doubt its worth; for it would be strange, indeed, if he who hath ever borne off the laurel wreath from the competitors for glory, should not in like manner seek and win the prize of beauty. In simple language, let Donna Marie be in attendance.' And so thou shalt, love; and by thy gentle virtues and modest loveliness, add increase of honor to thy husband. Ha! what says Gonzalo de Lara?" he added, as his eye glanced over another paper—"Tumults in Sicily—active measures—Senor Stanley—enough on which to expend his chivalric ardor, and evince his devotedness to Ferdinand; but Sicily quieted—supposed the king will still grant his request—assign him some post about his person, be at hand for military service against the Moors.' Good! then the war is resolved on. We must bestir ourselves, dearest, to prepare fit reception for our royal guests; there is but brief time."

He embraced and left her as he spoke; and for several minutes Marie remained without the power even to rise from her seat: one pang conquered, another came. Arthur's recall appeared determined; would it be so soon that he would join this sovereigns before they reached Segovia? She dared not think, save to pray, with wild and desperate fervor, that such might not be.

Magnificent, indeed, were Don Ferdinand's preparations for the banquet with which he intended to welcome his sovereigns to Segovia. The castle was to be the seat of their residence, and the actual *locale* of their court; but it was at his own private dwelling he resolved, by a sumptuous

entertainment, to evince how deeply and reverentially he felt the favor with which he was regarded by both monarchs, more especially by Isabella, his native Sovereign.

In the many struggles which were constantly occurring between the Spaniards and Moors, the former had become acquainted with the light yet beautiful architecture and varied skill in all the arts peculiar to the latter, and displayed their improved taste in both public and private buildings. Morales, in addition to natural taste, possessed great affluence, which enabled him to evince yet greater splendor in his establishment than was usual to his countrymen.

There was one octangular room, the large panels forming the walls of which were painted, each forming a striking picture of the principal events in the history of Spain, from the descent of Don Palayo, and the mountaineers of Asturias, who struck the first blow for Spanish freedom, to the accession of Ferdinand and Isabella. The paintings were not detached pictures, but drawn and colored on the wall itself, which had been previously prepared for the reception of the colors by a curious process, still in use among the Orientals.² The colors, when dry, were rubbed, till the utmost brilliancy was attained; and this, combined as it was with a freedom and correctness of drawing, produced an effect as striking then as it would be novel to modern eyes. One side, divided into three compartments, contained in one a touching likeness of the young Alfonso. His figure, rather larger than life, was clothed in armor, which shone as inlaid with gold. His head was bare, and his bright locks flowed over his shoulders as he wore them in life. His brilliant eye, his lofty brow, and peculiarly sweet expression of mouth, had been caught by the limner, and transferred to his painting in all their original beauty. Round him were grouped some of the celebrated cavaliers of his party; and the back-ground, occupied by troops not in regular battalions, but as impelled by some whelming feeling of national excitement, impossible to be restrained. Answering to this was a full length of the infanta Isabella I., in the act of refusing the crown offered by the confederates. The centre compartment represented the union of Castile and Arragon by the nuptials of their respective sovereigns in the cathedral church of Valladolid. Over these pictures were suspended golden lamps, inlaid with gems; so that, day or night, the effect should remain the same. Opposite the dais, huge folding-doors opened on an extensive hall, where the banquets were generally held, and down which Don Ferdinand intended to range the tables for his guests of lesser rank, leaving the octangular apartment for the royal tables, and those of the most distinguished nobles; the one, however, so communicating with the other, as to appear one lengthened chamber. On the right hand of the dais, another large door opened on a withdrawing-room, the floor of which was of marble, curiously tinted; and the walls hung with Genoa velvet, ruby-colored, and bordered by a wide fringe of gold. Superb vases of alternate crystal and frosted silver, on pedestals of alabaster and of aqua-marine, were ranged along the walls, the delicate beauty of their material and workmanship coming out well against the rich coloring of the hangings behind. The roof, a lofty dome, displayed the light Arabesque workmanship, peculiar to Moorish architecture, as did the form and ornaments of the windows. This apartment opened into another, much smaller, each side of which, apparently formed of silver plate, reflected as mirrors every object; and the pillars supporting the peculiarly light roof of the same glittering material. Some parts of the extensive gardens Morales intended to illuminate; and others, for the effect of contrast, to be left in deepest shadow.

Nothing was omitted which could do honor to the royal guests, or cast a reproach upon the magnificent hospitality of their hosts. The preparations were but just completed, when an advance guard arrived at Segovia with the tidings of the rapid approach of the sovereigns; and Morales, with a gallant troop of his own retainers, and a procession of the civil and military officers of Segovia, hastened to meet and escort them to the town.

With an uncontrollable impulse, Marie had followed the example of almost every female in Segovia, and, wrapt in her shrouding veil, had stationed herself, with some attendants at a casement overlooking the long line of march. The city itself presented one scene of gladsome bustle and

² See Art Union Journal, August, 1845.

excitement: flags were suspended from every "turret, dome, and tower," rich tapestries hung over balconies, which were filled with females of every rank and grade, vying in the richness and elegance of their apparel, and their coquettish use of the veil and fan, so as to half-hide and half-display their features, more or less beautiful—for beautiful as a nation, the Spanish women undoubtedly are. Bells were ringing from every church; ever and anon came a burst of warlike music, as detached troops galloped in the town, welcomed with shouts as the officer at their head was recognized. Even the priests themselves, with their sober dresses and solemn countenances, seemed touched with the universal excitement, relaxing into smiles and hearty greeting with the laymen they encountered. As the hours waned, popular excitement increased. It was the first visit of Isabella to the city; and already had her character been displayed in such actions as to kindle the warmest love towards the woman, in addition to the enthusiastic loyalty towards the Queen.

At length the rumor rose that the main body was approaching—in little more than a hour the sovereigns would pass the gates, and excitement waxed wilder and wilder, and impatience was only restrained by the interest excited towards the gallant bodies of cavalry, which now in slow and measured march approached, forming the commencement of a line, which for three hours continued to pour within the city in one unbroken strain.

Even Marie herself, pre-occupied as she was in the dread search for one object, could not glance down on the moving multitude beneath her without in some degree sharing the enthusiasm of her countrymen. There were gallant warriors of every age, from the old man to the beardless youth; chargers, superb in form and rich in decoration; a field of spears glittering in the broad sunshine, some bearing the light gay pennoncelle, others absolutely bending beneath the heavy folds of banners, which the light breeze at times extended so as to display their curious heraldic bearings, and then sunk heavily around their staffs. Esquires bearing their masters' shields, whose spotless fields flung back a hundred-fold the noonday sun—plumes so long and drooping, as to fall from the gilded crest till they rested on the shoulder—armor so bright as to dazzle the eyes of the beholders, save when partly concealed under the magnificent surcoats and mantles, amongst which the richest velvets, slashed with gold or silver, distinguished the highest nobles. Pageantry like this mingled with such stirring sounds as the tramp of the noble horse, curveting, prancing, rearing, as if disdainful of the slow order of march—the thrilling blast of many trumpets, the long roll, or short, sharp call of the drum; and the mingled notes of martial instruments, blending together in wild yet stirring harmony, would be sufficient even in this prosaic age to bid the heart throb and the cheek burn, recognizing it, as perhaps we should, merely as the *symbol*, not the *thing*. What, then, must it have been, when men felt such glittering pageant and chivalric seeming, the *realities* of life?

At length came the principal group; the pressure of the crowds increased, and human hearts so throbbed, that it seemed as if they could not breathe, save in the stunning shouts, bidding the very welkin ring. Surrounded by a guard of honor, composed indiscriminately of Castilians and Arragonese, mounted on a jet black steed, which pawed the ground, and shook his graceful head, as conscious of his princely burden, magnificently attired, but in the robes of peace, with a circlet of gold and gems enwreathing his black velvet cap, his countenance breathing this day but the kindly emotions of his more youthful nature, unshadowed by the wile and intrigue of after-years, King Ferdinand looked the mighty monarch, whose talents raised his country from obscurity, and bade her stand forth among the first of European nations. But tumultuary as were the shouts with which he was recognized, they were faint in comparison to those which burst forth at sight of the Princess at his side. Isabella had quitted her litter on re-entering her own dominions, and now rode a cream-colored charger, which she managed with the grace and dignity of one well accustomed to the exercise, alike in processions of peace and scenes of war.

The difference of age between the sovereigns was not perceivable,³ for the grave and thoughtful character of Ferdinand gave him rather the appearance of seniority; while the unusual fairness of Isabella's complexion, her slight and somewhat small stature, produced on her the contrary effect. The dark gray eye, the rich brown hair and delicate skin of the Queen of Castile deprived her, somewhat remarkably, of all the characteristics of a Spaniard, but, from their very novelty attracted the admiration of her subjects. Beautiful she was not; but her charm lay in the variable expression of her features. Peculiarly and sweetly feminine, infused, as Washington Irving observes, with "a soft, tender melancholy," as was their general expression, they could yet so kindle into indignant majesty, so flash with reproach or scorn, that the very color of the eye became indistinguishable, and the boldest and the strongest quailed beneath the mighty and the holy spirit, which they could not but feel, that frail woman form enshrined.

Round the sovereigns were grouped, in no regular order of march, but forming a brilliant *cortége*, many of the celebrated characters of their reign—men, not only of war, but of literature and wisdom, whom both monarchs gloried in distinguishing above their fellows, seeking to exalt the honor of their country, not only in extent of dominion, but by the shining qualities of her sons. It was to this group the strained gaze of Marie turned, and became riveted on the Queen, feeling strangely and indefinably a degree of comfort as she gazed; to explain wherefore, even to herself, was impossible; but she felt as if she no longer stood alone in the wide world, whose gaze she dreaded; a new impulse rose within her, urging her, instead of remaining indifferent, as she thought she should, to seek and win Isabella's regard. She gazed and gazed, till she could have fancied her very destiny was in some way connected with the Queen's visit to Segovia—that some mysterious influences were connecting her, insignificant as she was, with Isabella's will. She strove with the baseless vision; but it would gain ground, folding up her whole mind in its formless imaginings. The sight of her husband, conversing eagerly with the sovereign, in some degree startled her back to the present scene. His cheek was flushed with exercise and excitement; his large dark eyes glittering, and a sunny smile robbing his mouth of its wonted expression of sternness. On passing his mansion he looked eagerly up, and with proud and joyous greeting doffed his velvet cap, and bowed with as earnest reverence as if he had still to *seek* and win her. The chivalry of Don Ferdinand Morales was proved, yet more *after* marriage than *before*.

It was over: the procession had at length passed: she had scanned every face and form whose gallant bearing proclaimed him noble; but Arthur Stanley was not amongst them, and inexpressibly relieved, Marie Morales sunk down on a low seat, and covering her face with her hands, lifted up her whole soul in one wild—yet how fervent!—burst of thanksgiving.

³ Isabella was eight or ten years Ferdinand's senior.

CHAPTER X

*"Yet was I calm. I knew the time
My breast would thrill before thy look;
But now, to tremble were a crime:
We met, and not a nerve was shook."*

BYRON.

The excitement of the city did not subside with the close of the procession. The quiet gravity and impressive appearance of age, which had always marked Segovia, as a city more of the past than present, gave place to all the bustling animation peculiar to a provincial residence of royalty. Its central position gave it advantages over Valladolid, the usual seat of the monarchs of Castile and Leon, to sovereigns who were seeking the internal peace and prosperity of their subjects, and were resolved on reforming abuses in every quarter of their domains. The deputation from the city was graciously received; their offering—a golden vase filled with precious stones—accepted, and the seal put to their loyal excitement by receiving from Isabella's own lips, the glad information that she had decided on making Segovia her residence for the ensuing year, and that she trusted the loyalty which the good citizens of Segovia had so warmly proffered would be proved, by their endeavors in their own households to reform the abuses which long years of misrule and misery had engendered. She depended on them, her people, to aid her with heart and hand, and bade them remember, no individual was so insignificant as to remove his shoulder from the wheel on plea of uselessness. She trusted to her citizen subjects to raise the internal glory of her kingdom, as she did to her nobles to guard their safety, elevate her chivalry, and by their untarnished honor and stainless valor, present an invincible front to foreign foes. Isabella knew human nature well; the citizens returned to their houses bound for ever to her service.

Don Luis Garcia had joined the train of Morales when he set forth to meet the sovereigns. His extraordinary austerity and semblance of lowly piety, combined as they were with universal talent, had been so much noised abroad as to reach the ears of Ferdinand and Isabella; and Morales, ever eager to promote the interests of a countryman, took the earliest opportunity of presenting him to them. He was graciously enough received: but, though neither spoke it, an indefinable feeling of disappointment took possession of their minds, the wherefore they knew not. Don Luis had conversed well, both as to the matter and the manner; but neither Ferdinand nor Isabella felt the smallest inclination to advance him to any post about themselves. In virtue of his supposed rank, however, he of course mingled with the courtly crowd, which on the appointed evening thronged the mansion of Don Ferdinand.

Tremblingly as Marie looked forward to that evening, she spared no pains to gratify her husband in the choice of her toilet. Sorrow had never made her indifferent, and she sought to please him even in the most trifling occurrences of life. Her beautiful hair still lay in soft, glossy bands against the delicate cheeks, and was gathered up behind in a massive plait, forming, as it were, a diadem at the back of the exquisitely shaped head, from which fell a white veil—rather, perhaps, a half mantle, as it shaded the shoulders, not the face—of silver tissue, so delicately woven as to resemble lace, save in its glittering material. A coronet of diamonds was wreathed in and out the plait, removing all semblance of heaviness from the headgear, and completely divesting it of gaudiness. Her robe, of blue brocade, so closely woven with silver threads as to glisten in the light of a hundred lamps almost like diamonds, had no ornament save the large pearls which looped up the loose sleeves above the elbow, buttoned the bodice or jacket down the front, and richly embroidered the wide collar, which, thrown back, disclosed the wearer's delicate throat and beautiful fall of the shoulders, more than her

usual attire permitted to be visible. The tiny white silk slipper, embroidered in pearl, a collaret and bracelets of the same beautiful ornament, of very large size, completed her costume.

Not even the presence of royalty could restrain the burst of undisguised admiration which greeted Marie, as, led forward by her eager husband, she was presented to the sovereigns, and knelt to do them homage. Ferdinand himself gazed on her a moment astonished; then with animated courtesy hastily raised her, and playfully chid the movement as unmeet from a hostess to her guests.

A strange moisture had risen to the eyes of the Queen as she first beheld Marie. It might have been that marvellous perfection of face and form which caused the emotion; for if all perfection, even from man's hand, is affecting even to tears, what must be the work of God? It might have been that on that young, sweet face, to the Queen's mental eye, a dim shadow from the formless realms of the future hovered—that, stealing from that outward form of loveliness, she beheld its twin sister, sorrow. Whatever it might have been, kind and gentle as Isabella's manner ever was, especially to her own sex, to Marie it was kinder and gentler still.

How false is the charge breathed from man's lips, that woman never admires woman!—that we are incapable of the lofty feeling of admiration of our own sex either for beautiful qualities or beauteous form! There is no object in creation more lovely, more fraught with intensest interest (if, indeed, we are not so wholly wrapt in the petty world of self as to have none for such lofty sympathies) than a young girl standing on the threshold of a new existence; beautiful, innocent, and true; offspring as yet of joy and hope alone, but before whom stretches the dim vista of graver years, and the yearning thoughts, unspoken griefs, and buried feelings, which even in the happiest career must still be woman's lot. There may be many who can see no charm and feel no interest in girlhood's beauty: but not in such is woman's best and holiest nature; and therefore not by such should she be judged.

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