

Poetry.

GUESTS OF THE HEART.

Soft falls through the gathering twilight,
The rain from the dripping eaves,
And stirs, with a tremulous rustle,
The dead and the dying leaves:
Whilo afar, in the midst of the shadows,
I hear the sweet voices of bells
Come borne on the wind of the autumn,
That fitfully rises and swells.

They call and they answer each other,
And answer and mingle again,
As the deep and the shrill in an anthem
Make harmony still in their strain;
As the voices of southlands mingle
In mountainous regions of snow,
Till from hill-top to hill-top a chorus
Flows down to the valleys below.

The shadows, the firelight of even,
The sound of the rain's distant chime,
Come bringing, with rain softly dropping,
Sweet thoughts of a shadowy time,
The slumberous sons of aclusion,
From storm and intruders aloof,
We feel when we hear in the midnight
The patter of rain on the roof.

When the spirit goes forth, in its yearnings,
To take all its wanderers home,
Or afar in the regions of fancy
Delights on swift pinions to roam,
I quietly sit by the firelight,
The firelight so bright and so warm;
For I know that those only who love me
Will seek me through shadow and storm.

But should they be absent this evening,
Should even the household depart,
Deserted, I should not be lonely;
There still would be guests in my heart,
The faces of friends that I cherish,
The smile and the glance and the tone,
Will haunt me wherever I wander,
And thus I am never alone.

With those who have left far behind them
The joys and the sorrows of time;
Who sing the sweet songs of the angels
In a purer and holier clime;
Then darkly, O evening of autumn!
Your rain and your shadow may fall:
My loved and my lost ones you bring me—
My heart holds a feast with them all.

Tales and Sketches.

RACHEL AND AIXA;

OR,

The Hebrew and the Moorish Maidens.

AN INTERESTING HISTORICAL TALE.

CHAPTER VII.—Don Pedro's Foster-Brothers.

Squire Robert, who overheard the words of little Pierce Neige, answered jeeringly, "Let them try; they will find that there is but one way to save thy witch of a mother and thyself, which is, to extinguish the fire that begins to consume our insides."

"I!" exclaimed Poloma, with a ferocious aspect—"I save the accursed dogs, who thirst for the blood of my foster-son, their lord and master, whom they track like a wild beast! I save those ferocious robbers who devastate our country like clouds of locusts? Oh, that I could annihilate them all!"

Then she was silent, and neither threats, entreaties, nor promises could draw more from her than these words: "What should I do with your gold and treasures; those spoils stained with the blood of my son and his faithful servants?"

Squire Robert then put a cupful of the poisoned water to the lips of the inflexible woman, saying to her, "Let thy sons now come and save thee."

"My brother Lopez," said Pierce Neige, coolly, "is the first archer in the kingdoms of Castile and Leon." At the same time, he observed with anxiety a slight movement in a cluster of fir-trees that grew in the hollow of a rock that overhung the pile. At the same instant an arrow broke the bow in the hand of the squire, and a second struck him on the shoulder.

"Murder and fury!" exclaimed the Englishman, as he carried his bleeding hand to the handle of his sword; but immediately a thin, supple young man, wearing a cap with a heron's feather, like the royal foresters, came bounding from among the rocks with the swiftness of a wild goat, and two enormous dogs that ran before him flew at the throat of the squire, scarcely giving him time to call for help.

The archer cut the bonds of old Poloma, and those of Pierce Neige, and fled, carrying away the former to a place of safety. Some of the adventurers came to the assistance of Robert, and would have attempted to overtake the Castilian, had not their weakness, owing to the poison, obliged them to stop.

"That is a bold fellow," observed the Breton knight. "If Don Pedro had a thousand of his stamp in his service, he need not fear anything from Don Enrique." Then turning to the light-haired page, he said, "As to thee, Pero, thou hast shown thyself brave and generous; I owe thee some recompense. Thou shalt be my equire. Here, carry my battle-axe and helmet to begin thy apprenticeship. We must immediately put ourselves on the march, and endeavour to reach Toledo, there to find out some Jewish or Moorish physician. Probably there may be time to save some of these poor fellows. But we must procure horses."

Pero smiled at this address, and taking the battle-axe and helmet from the hands of the Breton knight, he replied, "The swiftest

horses of the vanquished king are here strolling around their ruined stables. They are palfreys that, with a good guide, would take us in a few hours to the gates of Toledo; but they are so fierce, that none but their keepers can bestride them."

"But," said the knight, "it seems to me as difficult to get hold of the keepers as of the horses."

"Who knows?" replied the pretended page. "Their chief is one of Poloma's sons, and, as the little fellow, Pierce Neige, announced, the whole troop is roving around us. If you will allow me to go a little way into the forest, I have no doubt I shall presently rejoin you with two of Don Pedro's best palfreys."

"Go then," answered the knight; "if thou art faithful to us, thou shalt be royally rewarded."

The light-haired page went rapidly off, and the Breton patiently awaited his return, blaming himself all the while for his excess of confidence.

Ten minutes had not elapsed when the servant of Samuel re-appeared, holding by the bridle two magnificent Arabian horses, which neighed, and fiercely pawed the earth.

"Come," said the Breton knight, "I see, friend Pero, that thou art among acquaintances who refuse thee nothing."

"Not even horses that may break my neck," answered Pero, "for they are not yet broken in. I will therefore make a trial of one of these savage beasts before you mount." Saying which, he sprang on the back of one of the horses, which at first reared bolt upright and had nearly thrown him, but soon finding that it had found its master, ceased kicking, and stood stock still.

"Oh, see now, the monster tamed, and as docile as the nag of a bishop or princess," said Pero. "Come judge of it yourself, mistress," he added, addressing the Jewess, and at the same time making a significant sign to Samuel Ben Levi, who immediately assisted his daughter to mount behind his courageous servant.

As soon as Pero felt the arms of Rachel clasping him tremblingly round the waist, wheeling his courser round, he turned to the Breton knight, and smiling, said to him, "But, sir, we have not yet talked of my ransom."

"Thou hast gained it by thy fidelity," answered the knight. "I owe my life to thee, honest Pero."

"Oh," answered Pero, "I could not pay you better for my liberty when I was on foot, but, mounted on this magnificent palfrey, and armed with this good lance, I venture to set myself at a higher price. First, I give you that golden table, around which we had all so nearly met death."

"Thou art a fine banterer," interrupted the Breton, with a shout of laughter. "Thou ransomest thyself like a king."

"And as to the Jewess, Rachel, the daughter of the treasurer, here is her ransom," said the light-haired page, at the same time throwing on the table with an air of indescribable air of majesty a diamond ring, bearing the arms of the King of Castile.

"What means this?" exclaimed the Breton, regarding the ring with the utmost astonishment. "By St. Ives, it is the king's ring! How fell it into thy hands?" and he fixed a look of mistrust and suspicion on the pretended page.

"That signifies," answered the latter imperiously, "that I will not take a treacherous advantage—that I will not owe alms to one of my enemies—to an obscure adventurer. I, the poor Pero—"

At these words, Tom Burdett, suddenly enlightened, tried to rise, notwithstanding the intolerable fire that the poison had kindled within him, and said to the stupefied Breton, "Dost thou not recognize in that look, in that voice the pride of the tyrant, and besides, that lip, cut by the dagger of Don Enrique, has it not told his name? Ah! here is a prize worth more than the golden table."

"The king, Don Pedro!" exclaimed the beautiful Jewess, seized with a sort of dread and admiration, which approached a more tender sentiment for her preserver.

"Yes," he cried, taking of his cap, "under page's bonnet is not hidden the shaven head of a serf or a monk; behold instead the light hair of a descendant of the Gothic kings! Dost thou now accept my ransom, knight of adventures? As for that English freebooter and his companions, who twist themselves on the grass like snakes as they are, I owe them nothing."

The Breton roared with rage. "Fool and blind that I was!" said he; "but you have spoken too soon, Sir King. I have sworn to take thee alive or dead, and thou shalt not escape me. Dismount then, I will fight thee with this quarter-staff, a varlet's weapon, since a varlet thou wert; and I wish to make thee retreat at sight of my face."

"Thou art certainly ugly enough," answered Don Pedro, laughing.

"If you have as much courage against men as against women, crafty king, I challenge you in the name of Blanche of Bourbon."

A cloud passed over the brow of the fugitive king at this invocation, but he answered with dignity, "Thou forgettest that I am the King of Castile, and it is not meet for me to fight a rude knight of adventures like thee. I can easily comprehend that it would be glorious for thy name, and lucrative for thy purse, to secure so rich a prize as I should prove. It would, doubtless, be a fine opportunity to gain theiefs, armorial bearings, and doubloons of gold that the usurper has promised to him who

takes me prisoner. Thou wouldst acquire the title of duke at the court of Enrique, and the renown of a great captain in history, for such a feat; but you must understand I am in no hurry to procure thee so much honour all at once."

Under the fire of this cutting railery the Breton had approached Don Pedro, who curbed his impatient steed with the bridle. Burdett, who had again fallen to the ground, overcome with pain, made a last effort, and cried out, "Help, help, comrades, seize the tyrant Don Pedro!"

A few of the men, endeavouring to overcome the pain that prostrated them, rose and approached the two champions.

"Let us flee, sire, or you are lost," whispered Rachel to the king.

"Fear nothing," he replied; "the sons of Poloma watch over me. Ruy, the mower, is lying in the ravine that borders the bye-road to the copper-mine; and Perez, the miner, awaits me at the entrance of the subterranean galleries."

He was about turning round and desiring the Breton, who nearly touched his horse's head, when the bold knight called to him—"It is plain that you are a coward, Don Pedro, since you shield yourself under the title of king, to refuse fighting against a single adversary."

"Coward!" repeated the king in a fury, "coward!"

"Oh, sire!" murmured Rachel, softly, in the ear of the King of Castile, "let us flee far from that brutal adventurer, who, in risking his life against yours, has everything to gain and nothing to lose."

"Flee!" answered Don Pedro, disdainfully, "not before he has called all these livid-faced robbers to his assistance." Saying which he urged his palfrey against the Breton, instead of fleeing before him. The latter immediately jumped at the bridle of the fiery animal, and dragged him forward with surprising strength, notwithstanding its struggles, while with his staff, which he handled with great dexterity, he parried the blows that Don Pedro aimed at him with the battle-axe.

"Who art thou, then, demon?" demanded the king, in his turn; astonished at the energy and physical power displayed by the courageous knight.

"Be not afraid of surrendering to a knight of too slight renown," replied the latter; "I am called Bertrand Duguesclin."

"Bertrand Duguesclin!" exclaimed Don Pedro, startled, and letting his battle-axe fall in the moment of surprise.

"Do you remember the horoscope, O king!" said Samuel Ben Levi, alluding to the predictions of the Jewess and Moorish astrologers, which menaced him with the eagle with two heads; thus succeeding in subjugating by superstition that haughty spirit, which was not to be curbed by any other fear.

Don Pedro was stupefied; astonishment had completely paralysed him, when the Jewess, who, notwithstanding her fright, had retained the one fixed idea of saving the king, touched with her poignard the neck of the noble Arabian steed, which, by a furious bound, shook Duguesclin on his enormous legs, and forced him to let go his hold; then, after two or three turns of rage and fury, it darted away like an arrow, in the direction of the copper-mine.

The terrible Breton captain, seeing his prey thus escape him, sprang towards the other horse that Don Pedro had brought, which began to retreat with uneasy and ferocious looks, but was secured by means of a long twisted cord and hook thrown around its neck. Bertrand having thus caught the horse in the manner which oxen are chased by the country people of his province, seized it by the mane, jumped on its back, pressed its flanks with his sinewy knees, and started on the track of the fugitive king.

In vain Don Pedro fled before this hot pursuit. He soon heard his enemy in his rear, and owing to the double weight that loaded his horse, he found, every time he turned his head, that the distance between Bertrand and himself had sensibly diminished. He could even see the threatening eyes of the latter, and, notwithstanding his rage and temerity, he turned pale, crying, "Forward, my good horse, forward!"

Suddenly he felt the arms of the Jewess, which had clasped him tightly, gently relax, and, turning his head, he saw her on the point of slipping from the horse to the ground.

"What are you doing, Rachel!" said he, panting.

"I leave you, sire," she answered, "for it is I who retard your flight, and who will be the means of giving you up to the enemy. I have nothing to fear for myself a knight will not hurt a woman. And, besides, what am I? A poor Jewess, scorned and despised for her fidelity to the worship and religion of her ancestors—ahamed and degraded as if she had committed a crime or lost her honour."

"And because thou art good and generous, am I to be vile and cowardly! because thou wishest to save me, ought I to allow thee to sacrifice thyself?" said Don Pedro.

"You are a great king, sire," replied the Jewess. "On your life depends the fate of many people, of many lands."

The sound of Bertrand's horse came plainer; he rapidly approached.

"But I will save myself only with thee, Rachel," replied the impulsive king in a firm voice. "Thy looks alone give me strength and courage; for from thee I shall want the energy, nay, the will, to recover my late

defeats. Yes, I avow it; I should yet like to reign once more, in order to divide my throne with her who has shared my adversity and my dangers."

"Why banter me thus, sire?" said Rachel. "I repeat it, I am but a humble maiden, in whose life no one is interested, except my old father. And should I become a captive, Samuel is rich enough to redeem me. But to you, Don Pedro, captivity is the loss of a throne—the humiliation, the shame of defeat—a conquered brother before a victorious usurper. It is death. It is the ruin and proscription of those who love and defend you—of faithful subjects who fight and die for you." "But," she added, hurriedly, "it seems to me that I feel the hated breath of Duguesclin's horse—let me quit you."

She then endeavoured to disengage herself from the hold of Don Pedro, who said, in a hollow and faltering voice, "You are free, Rachel; but I swear to you that, if you leave me, I will instantly stop my horse, and suffer myself to be taken by that bulldog of Brittany who pursues me."

Rachel no longer persisted, and who shall say whether, notwithstanding the imminent danger, her heart did not beat with unbounded joy at this passionate avowal of the king's love.

The two horses arrived nearly at the same time at the ravine, where, in the grass, stood Ruy, the mower. He was a thin, tall youth, supple as a serpent. As soon as Don Pedro had passed, he stood suddenly upright across the road, as if he had neither seen nor heard the other horseman.

"Make way, make way, fellow!" cried the Breton; but Ruy did not move.

"Hollo! art thou deaf?" roared Bertrand, who arrived at full speed like a thunderbolt.

The king's foster-brother drew on one side, and, stooping to the ground as if seized with fright, he picked up his long scythe that was hid in the grass. It was his favorite weapon, and he used it with rare dexterity. At the moment Bertrand passed him at full gallop, the son of Poloma stood upright, and with a blow of his scythe, cut the hinder hams of the horse, which instantly fell to the ground with its rider.

"Ah, wretch!" exclaimed Duguesclin, getting up, "it was thou who in the battle killed my squire, Ivon: I will pay the double debt of a single blow."

But Ruy had already disappeared, by letting himself roll to the bottom of the ravine, covered with long grass and brushwood.

The discomfited captain saw the king and the Jewess jump from the horse at four or five hundred steps' distance, and enter a place which opened like the mouth of a well. It was the entrance to the copper mines; and the two fugitives exchanged a few words with a dwarf, whose broad shoulders, bony legs, and black face, iron pick-axe, and torch, gave him some slight resemblance to a gnome or subterranean god, though he was simply Perez, the miner, another of the king's foster-brothers.

The bold Bertrand did not lose his courage, but some minutes afterwards penetrated into the mine. Here the indefatigable warrior regained his advantage over the fugitive, obliged to stop to guide the weary young girl, to make her avoid the pools of water, and to disengage her dress, which caught on the points of the rocks.

In vain Rachel supplicated Don Pedro to abandon her, in vain the miner joined his prayers to those of the poor girl, the king would listen to neither of them. The heavy steps of Duguesclin soon resounded through the vaulted gallery, which was supported at each end by a stone pillar, and his stentorian voice was heard shouting, "For the last time, Don Pedro, I summon you to surrender, or I will kill you like a dog."

"There is no longer time to hesitate, then," said the miner. "Pass on, my brother and king, and take the torch, I undertake to arrest his progress."

"What art thou going to do?" demanded Don Pedro; "he will kill thee."

"My life is in the hand of God, but not in that of the adventurer," replied Perez. "Go, go; I will soon rejoin you." Then he placed himself behind the pillar, and raised his iron pick-axe. "Go back," cried he to Bertrand, who came forward brandishing his staff—"go back, or thy last hour has come."

"Retreat!" repeated the Breton; "it is for thee to teach me how a person retreats, for that has never yet happened to me."

"Then may the Lord protect and assist us," said Perez, and he struck the pillar with his pick-axe which shook with the blow.

The light of the torch no longer illumined the gallery, but, in spite of the obscurity, Duguesclin made some steps forward. A second blow of the pick-axe threw down the pillar; the vault it supported shook, and a shower of earth, sand, and stones descended. Duguesclin stopped on finding himself impeded by this rubbish, and while Perez ran forward to rejoin the king, he resolved, notwithstanding his hardihood, to retreat. He acted wisely, for the pillar crumbling, the roof suddenly gave way and fell, placing an insurmountable barrier between him and the fugitives.

"Heaven is against me this day," said the valiant Breton. "He has not willed that we should push our victory too far. It is he who permitted a child to destroy the sacrilegious company of freebooters of Tom Burdett. That is retribution. As to thee, Don Pedro, pray thy guardian angel to preserve thee from again seeing my face so closely. Thy foster-brothers will not always prevail against the bulldog of Brittany, as thou callest me."

He then quitted the mine, and without difficulty regained the sheepfold, where he found only the corpses of the English freebooters. The golden table had disappeared, as well as Tom Burdett, and the treasurer, Samuel Ben Levi.

CHAPTER VIII.—Aixa, the Moorish Maiden.

In the evening of the following day, as the rays of the setting sun wore yet gilding the battlements of the Alcazar of Seville, a horseman rode at full speed in the direction of the Jaen-gate. His reeking horse stopped and stumbled at every step; as to the rider, his dusty gait-skin cap, his rope sandals shaking on the large stirrups of gilt wood, his torn linen trowsers, his features lengthened and worn by fatigue, all tended to prove that he had, notwithstanding all his strength, a long and perilous journey.

When he perceived the top of Golden Tower, a massive octagon embattled building of three receding storeys, washed by the Guadalquivir, a sigh of joy escaped him, and he murmured, "Oh, I shall arrive in time!"

In the meanwhile, the nearer he approached the city, the more was he astonished at seeing the country people follow the same direction as himself, exhibiting no signs of uneasiness or alarm, but, on the contrary, wearing an expression of curiosity and gaiety. Then he heard the sound of trumpets and cymbals, and saw an enormous line of tents stretching beneath the walls of Seville, while the guards, Moorish horsemen in light coats of mail, and cloaks of quilted linen, amused themselves by hurling their *djerrids*, or javelins, in the ground, and then picking them up, leaning on the necks of their horses at full gallop.

The gate of the city was guarded by Almo-gaveros, so termed from the iron hood they wore, which covered their heads as well as their shoulders, according to Arabian costume, and these soldiers gravely contemplated the exercises and warlike games of the guards, which seemed to indicate perfect security, and formed part of the diversions of a holiday.

While the stranger was gazing with astonished looks on this scene, the richly-comparised and harnessed horse he rode stumbled against the roots of a tree; he snorted, neighed plaintively, and made a desperate effort to start towards the horses of the guards, but his strength was exhausted, his legs trembled, and he fell to the ground.

The horseman, cursing his ill-luck, rose, and was proceeding to continue his journey on foot, but unfortunately this accident had drawn the attention of the guards and Moors towards him, and all expressed surprise that such a high-mettled steed, comparised magnificently with velvet, should carry a man of so mean and pitiful an appearance.

"Allah is great!" exclaimed one of the guards, advancing towards the poor animal stretched on the ground. "Is not that the horse of our Lord Mohamed, King of Granada, that so miraculously escaped from the stables this morning?"

"It is he," replied one of his comrades, "I recognize him by that white star on his forehead. Help me, brothers; do not allow this ragged gentleman to escape; he is probably the magician that performed the miracle."

An expression of acute despair appeared to pass over the countenance of the stranger at hearing these ill-omened words, and, notwithstanding his exhaustion and weariness, he made an effort to flee. This only excited the suspicions of the guard the more, who immediately pursued him, and he was overtaken by two of the Moors. He did not attempt to resist, but assuming a calm and composed air, he asked them why they intercepted his passage.

"Art thou going to play the innocent?" asked one, "dost thou pretend to deny that this poor beast is one of the twenty steeds that our master, King Mohamed, has just presented to the noble Don Pedro, King of Castile?"

"That is very possible," answered the stranger, coolly, "but I positively know nothing about it."

"Come, come, play not the buffoon, but acknowledge that thou hast stolen this horse," said the guard.

"No, I have not stolen it," answered the stranger, "I met it wandering in the fields on the Jaen road, and as I was exhausted with fatigue I mounted it, but only with the intention of returning it to the owner as soon as I should meet with him."

"Ah, ah! that was an excellent and honest intention; but I think his master will not be much obliged to thee for returning it in so pitiful a condition."

"Since the king of Granada is here, I demand to be taken before him as quickly as possible," said the stranger, in great agitation.

"You are rather hot-blooded, friend," observed the guard, tranquilly; "but I think you will appear too soon before our Lord King Mohamed. If thou hadst carefully brought back this valuable horse to the stables of the Alcazar, thou wouldst have been richly rewarded; but, for having so brutally destroyed it, thou mayest expect nothing less than to make acquaintance with the sticks of the black slaves that guard the door of the apartments belonging to the beautiful Aixa."

"Aixa, the favorite of the King of Castile!" exclaimed the stranger.

"The daughter of Mohamed, King of Granada, and Queen of the Alcazar of Seville," answered the Moor, significantly.

"Oh," said the stranger, "I bring a piece