

## ATHOLIC HRONICLE.

VOL. X.

## SEBASTIEN COMEZ;

THE MULATTO OF MURILLA.

A SPANISH STORY.

The sun had only just risen, and all Seville was still buried in repose, when several youths, the youngest of whom might have been about filteen, and the eldest twenty, met one morning in the month of June, 1558, at the door of a handsome house in the square of the little Cloister of San Francisco.

After an interchange of greetings, one of them having knocked, the door was opened by an old negro.

"Good morning, my old Gomez," said they, almost together. "Is the master up ?"

"Not yet, my young sirs !" replied the negro, speaking in a slow and guttural tone.

"How you drawl out that, Gomez," cried several of them, as they rushed simultaneously into the workshop, each one hastening towards his respective easel.

"By St. James of Compostello, but this is strange," exclaimed Saurez, who had opened his box and taken out his palette. "Which of you gentlemen stayed the latest in the workshop ?37 " Oh 1 the Zonbi is again at work," said Gomez, with every appearance of fear.

"The Zombi ! the Zombi !" said Saurez angrily. "If I could catch your Zombi I would baog his shoulders till he told his real name. It is a very bad joke to play off on me, gentlemen, who am more particular than any one of you in cleaning my palette. My brushes are as dirty as if I had only been using them."

"Stay! here is a head on the corner of my canvass," said Saurez, stopping before his easel. " It is the portrait of the canon Istenby," exclaimed Cordova. "Look, gentlemen, look !"

"The Zombi again," muttered Gomez. "In truth, if it is the Zombi of Gomez that makes all the heads which we find every morning on our canvas," said Villavicemio, " he ought, since he meddles at all, to have the goodness to paint the head of the Virgin in my descent from the Cross. I cannot succeed in giving it the expression which the Virgin-Mother ought to have. For these last eight days I have effaced every evening what I spent the day in painting."

While speaking, Villavicemto had been care-

to Senor Ozorio. Au revoir, my young friends." "Sebastien ! Sebastien ! Sebastien ! At these cries, reiterated a hundred times by the pupils, and in every variety of tone, a poor little mulatto hurried into the workshop. "Here I am, my masters," said he, trem-

bling. "Sebastien, some fresh canvas," said one.

" Sebastien, the oil !" cried another. "Sebastien, my palette "

"Sebastien !" grind some yellow for me."

"And some vermillion for me," said another. "Some ochre for me," said a sixth.

" Come, Sebastien, quick ! quick !"

In the vain endeavor to answer all these clashing and conflicting calls upon him, the poor little mulatto ran about from one to the other, meeting with rebuffs on all sides, for not attending to every one at the same time.

"Well, what is the matter with you all? one would think the workshop was on fire." These words, uttered in a sharp, stern voice,

hushed all to silence, while each one of the pupils bent before the new comer. He was a man of about forty, with a noble but somewhat haughty expression of countenance, and dressed with the utmost elegance.

"Look, Senor Murillo !" said Villavicemio, showing his picture.

" Very well, indeed ; bravo ! Villavicemio." said Murillo. "You are making visible progress."

"It was not I who painted that, master !" said Villavicemio, in a tone of regret.

" So much the worse ; but who was it, then ?" replied Murillo. "Speak, speak," added he, impatiently; "for it is admirable. What tone, what freshness, what coloring, what delicacy of touch ! I am not afraid, geatlemen, to say that he who has done this head of the Virgin will be one day the master of us all. Was it you, Baba ?"

" No, Senor."

" Or you, Saurez?" " Alas! not 1."

"Could it be Gaspard, by any chance?"

"He denies it, Senor Murillo," said Cheves.

"If he does, we must believe him," replied Murillo. "But who can it be, then? This

head of the Virgin has not come and planted itself of its own accord in the middle of Villavicemio's canvas." Senor Murillo," said " By our Lady !

## MONTREAL, FRIDAY, OCTOBER 21, 1859.

Sebastien thinks and speaks to the point." "Just as the parrot, by diut of speaking, sometimes hits upon the right thing," added Tobar.

"Yon are a judge of designs, too, I suppose," said Villavicemio.

"Oh, I only repeat, you know, what I hear the master say," said Sebastien, with a look of such perfect simplicity, that no one doubted but this was the fact. "For, after all, what am I but an ape or a parrot ?"-he paused an instant, then added-" or a slave !" and these last words were uttered in a tone of such deep sadness, that there was not one among the pupils-gay, thoughtless and sometimes inconsiderate, even to cruelty, as they were-that was not touched.

"What a droll little being you are !" said Baba, giving him a friendly pinch in the ear .--"Adieu, Sebastien, catch the Zombi or your back will pay for it."

" Catch the Zombi, or your back will pay for t!" repeated each pupil, as he left the workshop. "Adieu, Sebastien; good luck to you; my re-spects to the Zombi."

"The Zombi ! the Zombi !" repeated Sebastien, gazing after the last who left the workshop. "Will not these Christians have pity upon me?"

Ejaculating these words in the same tone as that in which he had pronounced the word slave. Night having surprised him in this occupation, he lighted a lamp, and, casting a timid but searching glance around him, as it to assure himself that he was really alone, he approached the casel of Villavicemto; and, as he gazed on the head slave, becarse animated, and murmuring between his teeth, " The master said, ' I only wish I had

Long had he stood thus motionless, when a hand was laid upon his arm, and so far had be been carried in thought from the present and the visible, that he started, and uttered an exclamation of terror at the touch.

" Sebastien !" said a timid and broken voice. " Is it you, father ?" said Sebastien, looking at

tali old negro, who was standing beside him. " What are you doing here, my son ?"

"Nothing, father. I was only looking at this picture."

now-a-days; and why should He work one for us ?"

No. 10.

"Who knows, father? His reverence tells me that a Christian must never despair, But now, dear father, you must go and he down ;-and you may sleep soundly, believe me. You know I am no longer a child. I am fifteen .---Good night, father."

"Good night, my son ; and may God set you free one day."

"You must be first free, father. You said yourself that I was a slave, and must by this time be accustomed to it. Good night, father."

" Good night," said the old negro, at last making up his mind to leave him. "Good night." As soon as Sebastien found himself alone, he ottered a joyous sound ; but, as if suddenly recollecting himself, he exclaimed, sorrowfully :

"Twenty-five tashes if I do not confess ;--thirty lashes if there should be no new figures to morrow ; and twenty-five lashes if the culprit be found out. Poor slave! what hadst thou to do with such high dreams? I will erase all, and it shall happen no more. But, oh! how sleepy I am," added he, yawning. " I will pray to God, and who knows but IIe may inspire me with some means of extrication."

And Sebastien knelt upon the mat which served him as a bed; but fatigued as he was by the labors of the day, sleep surprised him in the middle of his prayer, and falling against one of the marble pillars of the workshop, he awoke not till the first feeble rays of the new-born day had penetrated into the room. The clock of the cloister of San Francisco struck half-past three, and his very joints cracked in the effort thoroughly to awake. " Up, lazy one, up," said he; "you have three hours before you-three hours which you can call your own-three hours in which you are your own master. Avail yourself of them, poor slave ! Time enough, when they awake, for you to resume your chain, and feel it. Courage ! you may do what you like for three hours. It is little enough." The boy, now broad awake, approached the easel of Villavicemio. "In the first place," said he, "I must efface all these figures."

Then taking a brush, which he dipped into the oil, he uncovered the Virgin's head, which, illumined as it was by the dim light of the approaching day, appeared still more soft and sweet .--"Efface it ! They did not dare to do it, notwithstanding all their tauots ; and I-shall I have more courage than they? No, no; a million times rather the scourge-rather death, if it must be so. But this head lives-it breathesit speaks. Were I to effice it, methicks its blood flows--it would be nothing short of murder. No, I will rather finish it." These words were no sooner attered than the palette was in the hands of Sebastien, the va-"I am not much afraid of him, father," said | rious colors mixed, and the boy at work. " After all, if it must be effaced, I shall have tune enough before the master gets up, or the pupils arrive," said he to himself. " Her hair does not wave gracefully enough-there is some hardness here-it wants a softer touch there-I must shade here-this line is too marked-it makes her look old-the Virgin ought to be in prayer, 100-her lips must be a little apartthere, that will do. But, do I dream? Seems she not actually breathing before me? Are her eyes fixed upon me? Methinks 1 hear a sigh from under the veil which is falling over her shoulders. Oht have beautiful, how holy she seems P Meanwhile the sun had arisen, and its rays shining through the window of the workshop, irradiated with their brilliant light all the objects it contained; but Schastien, quite absorbed in his work, perceived it not. He forgot everything-the advancing hour-the hard slavery, and the twenty-five fashes which awaited him,-Wholly carried away by his art (his genus for which, born with him, had been marvellously developed by his stay with Murillo), the young artist saw only the Virgin's face, with the lovely, benignant smile; be was no longer a slave-he was free-there was no bondage in the bright world in which he was hving. Suddenly, the noise of footsteps and the sound of well-known voices broke the charm, and brought him back to earth, once more a slave. Sebastien, without turning round, felt that Murillo and his pupils were beined him. Surprised and confounded, he thought not either of excasing himself or of trying to escape. He wished the floor of the workshop would open and swallow him up. But van was his wish ; and there stood the poor slave with his palette in one hand, his brush in the other; and without daring to raise his head, he awaited, in agonized dismay, the punishment with which he was threatened.

"Yes, master." "And do you sleep here ?" "Yes, master."

"Then tell who it is that comes into the workshop every night, or in the morning before the pupils arrive ?--who ? answer me.'

"No one, master,' replied the little mulatto, in affright, and twisting the buttons of his sleeve in his confusion.

"No one? You lie, rascally slave-you lic. Have you not eyes as well as we ?' And Murillo pointed to the head of the Virgin in Villavicemio's picture.

"Nobody-but-myself, master, I swear to you,' said Sebastien, with clasped hands.

"Now, listen to me !' said Murillo, with stern look and voice-'I must know who has done this head of the Virgin; do you hear me? as well as those little figures which the gentlemen find every morning on the canvas. I am determined I will know, I tell you. Now listen to me; to-night, instead of sleeping, you must watch; and if to-morrow you have not discovered the culprit, you shall receive twenty lashes, laid on by my major-domo, who does not beat the air, as you know by this time. Remember what I say. If you have anything to say, say it -speak-I give you full permission.

" I only wanted to say, master,' said Sebastien, with tears in his eyes, " that if everything Sebastien began to arrange the workshop .remain in its place to-night-and if there is nothing else on the gentlemen's canvas-

"That is another thing; instead of twentyfive lashes, you shall get thirty. Enough said-now, gentlemen, to work." The lesson commenced ; and while it lasted, a profound silence of the Virgin which had so miraculously appearwas observed. Such was Murillo's devotion to |ed on the canvas, the dull, heavy eyes, the slughis sublime art, to which he owed his brilliant gish features, the whole countenance of the poor fame and fortune, that he would not suffer a profane word to be uttered by the pupils while in his presence; and by a profane word the great done it," he appeared lost in ecstasy. master meant every word that related not to painting.

After the departure of Murillo, it seemed as if each pupil were determined to make himself amends for the silence imposed on him. If everything appeared dead while the master was present, his absence was the signal for a return to life ; even the very easels seemed to become animated. As at this moment the minds of all the pupils were occupied with the one subject, the conversation immediately turned upon those little

lessly approaching his easel. He now uttered a ery, and stood motionless before it.

They all rose, one after the other, and advancing towards him, gazed in silent astonishment.

In the centre of Villavicemio's picture, at the foot of the cross, whence the evening before the young Spaniard had effaced his head of the Virgin, there was now another. It was only a sketch, but the expression was so lovely, so chaste, the outline of such great purity, the coloring so soft that it spoiled the picture by its superiority to every other figure in it.

"How beautiful ?" cried all the young people, in ecslasy.

"Indeed, I know not who could have done that head," said Saurez, " unless it might be Gaspard ?"

"Who calls Gaspard?" gayly exclaimed a youth of sixteen, entering the workshop, followed by a man of middle age, whom the pupils saluted by the name of Mendez Ozorio.

"What a close fellow you must be, Gaspard," prefer literature to painting, and now it seems paint by night and study by day.

"Who accuses me of painting by night ?" demanded Gaspard, laughing.

had received an aduntion of figures, heads, or [ arms.

Mendez looked, and said gravely :

" Upon my word, gentlemen, this is not Gaspard's doing .!

"What reason have you for thinking it is not, Senor Ozorio ?" said Cheves.

"Sumply because Gaspard is incapable-" "Of playing a trick ?" said Tobar, completing his sentence.

"Of doing so well !" continued Ozorio.

This was haded with bursts of laughter from the pupils.

"Turn it is you, Senor Ozorio," said they.

"I should be right glad to own such touches object than to play tricks on you."

" Then who can it be ?"

"The Zombi," mattered old Gomez again. "To work, gentlemen, to work " sant Gaspard, looking up towards the ceiling. "I hear my father coming down. His toilet is soon made. For my part, I will make my escape, ond get out of his way.

" Where are you going ?"

"To read some verses of my own composition ' night ?"

dova, the youngest of the class, "if Gormez is to be believed, and the little Sebastien-" "Well?"

" It is the Zombi who-" Cordova was interrupted by a shout of derision from all the pupils. " Nay," he added, warmly ; " you may laugh if you like, and make game of me; but nevertheless, gentlemen, you cannot deny that for some time most extraordinary things have occurred here-things which do not happen every day."

" That is true, for it is at night they happen," replied Villavicemio.

"What happens every night?" demanded Murillo, without taking his eyes off the head of the Virgin, so miraculously painted.

## Cordova began to explain:

" According to your orders, Senor, none of us could ever leave the workshop until we have put everything aside, cleaned our palettes, washed and dried our brushes, arranged our easels, and turned our canvas wrong side up. Well, Senor said Baba. "Your father complains that you | Murillo, for about a month-yes-certainly it is at least a month, if not more-for the last month, that you reverse the usual order of things, and then, every morning, on arriving, one finds his palette all full of paint; another his brushes is too long. But tell us, Schastien, who is the dirty ; and here and there upon our canvas, one discovered an arm finished which be had only "Look here !" cried at the same instant all sketched; another, in the corner of his picture, the pupils; all of them, at least, whose canvas | a devil grunning at him and showing his horns ;-others find, at one time the head of an angel, some one who had been in the workshop the evening before. In short, Senor Murillo, I pressly to do mischief." should never have done if I were to relate all the supernatural doings that take place every night in your workshop."

" Is Gaspard a somnambulist ?" inquired Villavicemio of his master.

" No; but even if he were, it is not credible that he should work better at night with his eyes shut, than in the day with his eyes open. No, my young friends; he who has produced that head is more than a pupil, more than an initator. as these," replied Ozorio, " but it is not I; I am [ It is incorrect, it is unfinished ; nevertheless, the | purpose that you make everything blue ?" not of an age to stay up all night for no other sacred fire of genius is in that pencil. However,

it is very easy for us to find out-Sebastien !" " If you want to find out from Sebasticu, Se-

nor," said Villavicemio, " he knows no more than we do;-but no, I am mistaken, he positively affirms it is the Zombi !"

" We shall soon see that-Sebastien." "Here, master," stid the little mulatto, who had run at the first call.

"Dul Luot order you to sleep here every

creations, so delicate, so sweet, so soft, which seemed to be called forth every morning, and vanish every night-but only to give place to others.

" Tell us now, Sebastien," said Villavicenno, as soon as the door had closed on Murillo, and the sound of his steps had died away in the long corridor. "Tell us why, when the master asked you who had done all these little heads, why did you not give the same answer as to us, "The Zonbi ?"

" Because that answer would have earned for me a flogging. Senor Villavicemio," replied Sebastien, whose tongue, as well as that of the other pupils, seemed to be let loose by the departure of the master.

"All! well, I have good hopes you shall not escape to-morrow morning with your Zombi," cried Mendez.

" Do not speak ill of the Zombi, Senor Mendez," said Sebastien, affecting an air of terror; " for look how he is revenging himself on you by stretching the arm of your St. James-this arm is at least an inch longer than the other."

" Sebastien is right, Mendez," said Baba, Zombi?"

"Yes, do, Sebastien ; tell us who is the Zombi ?" excluimed several voices at once.

"Indeed, gentlemen, I have never seen him invself; but iny father, who never saw him any another time that of an old man, or, it may be, more than I, was told by his grandfather, who body else. Who would put it there if not the the profile of a young girl, or the caricature of never saw him either, that he was a spectre, an Zombi ?" evil spirit that visits the earth every night ex-

"I wish I could do in the day what he does at night," said Tobar. "Hand me some bright leave you. Only think, child, what you are to yellow, Sebastien."

"Do not you think it is yellow enough, already, Senor Tobar ?" answered Sebastien. "Look at mine, Sebastien; is mine too yel-

low ?' inquired Cheves.

deep, dark blue. Your water is blue, your trees be a slave " said Sebastien, bursting into tears. are blue, your meadows are blue. Is it on set

" No, indeed," said Cheves.

"One would think so, then," returned Sebastien.

"It is very odd, but this little slave, with his simple face, is as full of mischief as an ape."

ape ?" said Villavicenno.

Tobar.

"With this difference only-that the parrot does nothing bat repeat," replied Baba, " and

" Sebastien," said the old negro, turning on his son a look of feverish inquietude, "I heard what the pupils said as they went out. Are you going to watch ?"

" Yes, father, replied the boy.

"And the Zombi I" said the old man, with a errified glance around the large workshop, which the feeble light of the lamp seemed only to throw into deeper shade.

Sebastien, with an involuntary smile of incredulity.

"Oh, my son, do not jest thus," said the old man, the reality of whose fears was evidenced by the trembling knees that could scarcely support him. "Do not brave him. Oh! if he were to carry you off, tell me what would become of old Gomez. I will remain with you, my son. 1 am very much afraid-but that is no matter. Let him take us both off together, if it must be so." " My good father," said the young inulatto, there is no such thing as the Zomoi; it is only an old superstition of our country. His reveence, Father Ambrose, who often comes here, has often told you so, father; and you must beleaning over his neighbor's easel. "That arm lieve him, for he is a holy man, and would not say anything that was not true.1

"But these little heads, and especially that head of the Virgin, which has thrown them all into such surprise, that even the master himself was speaking of it at dinner to Senor Mendez Ozorio, to young Master Gaspard, and to every-

"Some time or other it will be known, father ; but you had better leave me now."

"It is vain for you to talk, boy; I will not me. The white men have houses, money-they have liberty-liberty, child / But you know not what that is. You were born a slave; but 1-1 have been made one. I-1 was born free, Sebastien 15

" Oh, it is too true, father. It is horrible to "Horrible !" repeated the old negro. " Horrible! and no hope of ever breaking the chain; certainly no hope for thee, Sebastien !"

"Father " said the young inulatto raising his eyes to the glass dome of the workshop, through which was seen the bright starry heavens, "on high there is a God who is a God for every one, "Atter all, what is the negro but a kind of for the negro as well as the white man ; for the slave as well as the master. Let us pray to " Mixed with a little of the parrot," observed him, my father, and he will hear and answer us." " Bat only a iniracle could help us, my son."

" God can work miracles, father."

There was a moment's silence on both sides ; for, if Sebastien was petrified on finding dimuself ; thus caught in the fact, Murilo and his pupils were no less astonished at what they beheld .----The young men, with all the vivacity of their "Alas! my son, He does not work them age, were about to have expressed their appro

"On the contrary, Senor, yours is blue-a