

RACHEL AND AIXA;

OR,

The Hebrew and the Moorish Maidens.

AN INTERESTING HISTORICAL TALE.

CHAPTER XIX.—A Royal Feast and a Perilous Leap.

As soon as Bertrand had emptied his last sack he folded it in four, and laid it as a saddle on one of his mules, taking the road to the Alcazar, preceded by the little Pierce Neige.

Whilst crossing the court-yard of the Alcazar, and the magnificent halls which led to the saloon where the king awaited him, Bertrand appeared lost in wonder and admiration until Pierce Neige introduced him into the blue china saloon, where he found three persons, whom he recognised at first sight. They were the king and the young Jewess, seated side by side, in carved straight backed chairs before a large empty table, and old Paloma.

Bertrand, in accordance with his assumed character, stopped on the threshold, twirling his broad-brimmed hat between his fingers with an embarrassed air, waiting for the king to order him to advance.

"You have had rough work to-day, my good miller," said Don Pedro, making a sign for him to approach, "and I wish to know the name of the brave fellow who has so opportunely rendered me such service."

"I am called Antonio Mendes, sire," humbly replied the pretended miller.

At the sound of that rough voice Rachel and Paloma hastily raised their heads, and regarded Bertrand with singular attention, who began to experience some uneasiness, regretting that he had ventured into the Alcazar.

"Well, Master Antonio, you can boast of having arrived just in time to dispel the storm that was furiously raging round my palace," resumed the king.

"Oh, as the shepherds say in the country, 'Small rain abates a high wind,' my lord," said the miller, laughing awkwardly.

"And also to teach these fools," continued Don Pedro, "the gratitude they owe to her they dared pursue with their curses."

"Better than that, sire, better than that," returned the miller. "These madmen were hungry—want is a bad counsellor—and in their impatience they wanted to crucify your favorite to teach her not to starve them in future," and he laughed yet louder. Rachel covered her face with her hands.

"Peace," said Don Pedro, "let us forget these things. After so much trouble and fatigue, you must require repose and refreshment."

"Refreshment particularly, sire, for I am as thirsty as a wandering dog at noon," answered the Breton, with a frankness that made the king smile.

"Come then, and sit at this table, and you shall partake of our frugal meal."

When the eyes of the pretended miller fell on the bare table on which Gil had just placed some wooden porringers like those used by gypsies and beggars, with two or three jars of water, and some goat-skin bottles, he could not help making a significant grimace. Yet, pushed by little Pierce Neige, he advanced, and sitting down, said, "Long life to our master, Don Pedro."

"You do not appear to utter that wish heartily, Mendes," observed the king.

"It is perhaps because the stars are not propitious to-day," answered the miller.

"Why so?" said Don Pedro, surprised.

"Because a person can only live long on condition of eating; but probably to-day is a fast day."

"To-day is a day of famine," answered Don Pedro, sadly, "for the king as well as for his subjects."

"It seems your mill is well provided, Antonio Mendes," observed Paloma, ironically.

"How often have I been led to envy the lot of princes," replied the pretended miller, "because they have no need to work for a livelihood, because they eat and drink out of gold and silver, and because the most exquisite productions of the earth, and the finest wines, are reserved for their use. Well, to-day I would not change my lot for yours, Sir King. I would rather be the obscure Mendes than Don Pedro of Castile. It is hard to fall from such a height."

"And to see the gold tankards changed for wooden porringers, eh?" said the king, with a bitter smile; "but my affairs have not always been so bad, Mendes. I have expended all the treasures I had left to pay my men-at-arms, as well as to support the inhabitants of Seville. I have scarcely anything left after the losses I have suffered during the war with the pretender and his free-booting allies."

"Come, I see the king's couch is not a bed of roses. By my faith, Don Pedro has more cares than Antonio Mendes. A great fool is he who would exchange the miller's coat for a royal mantle. In your place, sire, I would give up struggling against stronger men than myself; and provided they gave me, as a fief, a rich and fertile territory, I would let the usurper enjoy the cares of royal power."

"This is strange advice," said the old nurse, again casting uneasy and suspicious glances on the pretended miller, whose voice continued to awaken in her mind some vague recollections.

"Good Mendes," resumed Don Pedro, "a knight and king cannot have the same sentiments as a miller."

"I don't gainsay that," replied the miller,

"but, noble or peasant, one must always yield in the end to the strongest."

"Listen, Mendes," resumed Don Pedro; "if you had a wife, and one of your friends or neighbors were to carry her away, or insult her before your face, and put her to a cruel death, what would you do?"

"By St. Ives!" exclaimed Bertrand, forgetting for a moment his assumed character, "I would not ask advice of the Pope, but would fall on with a good cudgel."

"If you had children," continued the king, "and one night, on entering your house, you found the cradle empty, your children stolen, your field and mill invaded, robbers encamped on your property, and driving you away as a beggar and an impostor, what would you do?"

"While an arm hung to my shoulder, they should feel the weight of it," answered Duguesclin.

"But if they were four, ten, twenty, against you alone, would you not at last yield to force, and make your escape?"

"No," replied the sham miller, in a gloomy voice, "I would fight till I was killed."

"Well, now you know why I condemned Don Fadrique, the lover of Blanche of Bourbon, and why I do not surrender Seville to Don Enrique, who comes to steal my kingdom, and the inheritance of my children. As to the repast, I cannot give you a better; but if you have meagre fare, you can at least boast of having had your king for cup-bearer. It is the only honor that your master can do you." And taking a goat-skin bottle, he poured out for Bertrand to drink, into one of the wooden porringers. The Breton could not help being moved at seeing that noble prince thus serve his most formidable enemy. Pierce Neige then placed before the pretended miller another porringer half full of large grey peas.

"I have yet a question to put to you, Mendes," said Don Pedro. "How is it that my foster-brothers did not enter Seville at the same time as you?"

"My lord," answered Bertrand, laying on the table the keys he had taken from the mower, "the poor devils have been the victims of their zeal."

Paloma turned pale, and darted a look of fire on the miller. Don Pedro rose, his heart beating with agony. "Continue!—speak quickly!" he said.

"At the moment of entering the aqueduct, where I waited for them," said the miller, "they met Duguesclin."

"Duguesclin!" repeated Don Pedro and Paloma at the same time.

"Unfortunately, he was asleep, which gave them the idea of surprising and making him prisoner."

"An excellent idea!" exclaimed Don Pedro.

"A deplorable idea, Sir King," said the miller; "in fact, they reckoned on taking him, and were taken by him instead."

"My poor brothers prisoners!" murmured the king, sorrowfully.

"You have lost your best servants, Pedro," said Paloma, mournfully, but more afflicted at the loss the king had sustained than at her own. "We should not be in this situation if you had not prevented the bulldog of Brittany drinking the waters of the cistern in the forest of Cardona," added she, in tones of the profoundest regret. "May God let this chief of robbers fall into our hands one day."

Bertrand looked askance at her, and although he was not sceptical on the score of beauty, the old nurse appeared hideous to him.

"Oh, he would be a fine prize?" exclaimed Don Pedro, while the miller lowered his eyes before the piercing and steady gaze of the Jewess. "That captain is the head and arm of the usurper, and without him, I swear the rebels would not long continue the campaign."

"You think so," observed Mendes, carelessly, stuffing himself with grey peas.

"Oh, he is a cunning fellow, and a terrible swordsman," said Don Pedro.

"Yet," continued the miller, "they relate that at the sheep-pens at Cardona, that cunning fellow might have laid his hands on the gold table, and that he let Tom Burdett, the captain of the English freebooters, steal it."

"Burdett!" exclaimed the king; "why did I not know this some hours earlier, when I had that Late Comer in my power?"

"And that terrible swordsman," continued Mendes, "who made you prisoner that day, did not know how to keep his royal captive."

"That is true," said Don Pedro, "thanks to my foster-brothers, who valiantly protected my flight."

"Bah! that Bertrand is a true adventurer, like his companions; he would serve the devil, if the devil paid him. He has followed Don Enrique to the spoliation of your kingdom; but if you were to give him two or three heaps of gold, he would abandon Don Enrique."

"You calumniate that generous and formidable knight, Mendes; although he is my enemy, I must do him justice. No man alive ever made him retreat. He is the father of his soldiers, and the best counsellor of the self-styled king. Oh, that I had similar adherents!"

"Yes, it might be better than the leaders that at present surround you, Sir King," resumed Bertrand, surprised to hear Don Pedro take up his defence so nobly; "still, I persist in saying I have not so good an opinion of that captain of marauders as you have; his figure don't please me at all."

"You have seen him, then?"

"Seen him! yes; he was as near to me as I am to you. First, he is the roughest knight,

and the worst made man I have ever encountered. He is as ugly as—"

"As thou. Is it not so?" interrupted Rachel; "and yet thou hast the advantage of him—hiding half thy ugliness under a layer of flour."

Bertrand received this sarcasm without a frown, but he felt an inward tremor run through all his limbs.

"What matters his figure?" observed Don Pedro; "he is one of those men destined to become the heroes of ballads and romances."

"A fine advantage!" said the pretended Mendes, "when death shall have broken his lance and dismounted him; after a thousand dangers, a thousand fatigues, after having spilt his blood like water all his life, his corpse will not take up more room than mine, and he will no longer frighten any one. It is true there will be a fine inscription engraven on his tomb, which moss and mildew will prevent people from reading, and above his grave, will be placed a helmet and coat-of-mail, that will soon be eaten away with rust."

"Simple clown!" said the king, "thou reckonest as nothing the glory that renders a name immortal, that makes that tomb a sanctuary. But I forget, thou canst not comprehend that spirit of chivalry which separates the noble from the peasant, and which makes a man sacrifice his life in preference to his honor."

"In all humility I acknowledge I am a peasant, my Lord Pedro; but I would rather be a live peasant than a dead knight."

Bertrand, by this facetiousness, succeeded in destroying any vague suspicions that the old nurse might have succeeded in inspiring the king with. The latter, pouring some wine out of one of the skins into the porringer, said to him, "What dost thou think of this Jaen wine, Mendes?"

"I find it very good, but it must be excellent when drank while eating;" saying this he emptied the porringer, looking wistfully at a few stray peas that were still before him.

"And dost thou believe, thou who hast seen Duguesclin," resumed Don Pedro, "that this bulldog knows to what extremity this city is reduced?"

"He knows it as well as I do," said the pretended miller, with considerable phlegm. "He knows that the inhabitants can no longer endure the famine, and that they will deliver up their king, if he persists in defending the city. I have heard say with my own ears, that Don Enrique claims his share of the inheritance; and if you consented to concede it to him the war would be at an end."

"That is a good thought and well expressed," said the Jewess, casting a kind glance at the miller.

"Make peace with the pretender! Submit to his terms! See him reign within a few leagues of me! Never, never!" exclaimed Don Pedro, violently agitated.

"On his side," continued the miller, "Don Enrique has sworn that if he takes Seville by storm, he will avenge himself for this obstinate resistance by giving your favorite, Rachel, as a slave to the man-at-arms that takes her prisoner."

"Infamous!" exclaimed the king. "This, then, is what my love has been worth to you, my child—slavery and shame!" and, completely discouraged, he covered his face with his hands.

Paloma leant towards him and whispered, "Mistrust the advice of this man, my son, he is a spy sent to subdue your courage; let him be detained in the Alcazar, if you do not wish him to go and tell the Frenchmen the secret of our misery and desperate state."

But Don Pedro, regarding her with an indescribable expression of dignity, answered, "Loyal or false, this peasant is my guest. Mendes," he continued, turning to Bertrand, "thou wilt do well to leave the Alcazar without delay, for suspicions might arise against thee that would make my palace a very insecure asylum for thee."

The pretended miller arose, without suffering the least emotion to appear in his countenance. "To those who suspect me of treason I answer, that I did not seek to penetrate into the Alcazar. I only obeyed your orders, Sir King."

"My son," whispered Paloma in the ears of Don Pedro, "you must prove the sincerity of this man before you suffer him to pass out of the gates of Seville. Take care—be warned; there is an air of boldness and authority about him that seems to me altogether unnatural in an Andalusian miller."

"But, nurse," argued Don Pedro, "look at his broad shoulders, knock-knees, and flat nose; look at his neck stretched forward, as if bent under a heavy load. Is that the bearing of a knight, or even of an archer? The good man is a real miller in person, as well as in heart and language."

"He may be so; but put him to the proof," persisted Paloma.

"Come, you shall be satisfied," said the king; "and if Mendes hides a man of warlike pursuits under his white linen coat, we shall soon know it."

The king then made a sign to Pierce Neige, who advanced, received the orders which Don Pedro whispered in his ear, and disappeared.

"If thou seest Duguesclin again," resumed Don Pedro, addressing himself to Mendes, "thou wilt tell him that Seville can hold out yet longer than he expects, and that behind the walls of the Alcazar he will find another rampart, the breasts of my brave archers."

Without saying another word he bent his steps to the door of the saloon.

"I will faithfully fulfil your wish, sire," said Mendes, also preparing to depart.

"I depend on it, brave miller," said the king.

"Absolutely the same as if you had told it to him yourself," returned the miller.

Don Pedro did not reply, but silently descended the grand marble staircase, and when he arrived in the court-yard he turned to the pretended miller, saying, "Don't you think my Andalusian archers are fully equal to the Breton adventurers or the English freebooters?" And he made his guest pass in front of a group of archers.

"I say, my lord, that they are terrible companions," returned Bertrand, "and if my mule could speak it certainly would be of my opinion, for they can boast of having frightened the poor beast dreadfully." The king frowned. "But *ayyopos* of my mule; where the deuce have you lodged it?" continued the pretended miller, addressing himself to one of the archers.

"I don't know," answered the soldier, "it must have run into the city; for I no longer see the iron ring to which we tied it."

"Into the city?" exclaimed Mendes, with an accent of despair. "Ah, I am unfortunate, I am sure there is now not the least vestige of him left, for from head to tail he will have been devoured by the hungry inhabitants of Seville."

"Comfort yourself, my friend," said Don Pedro, "however ruined and besieged a king may be, he cannot leave uncompensated so great a service as the one thou hast rendered me in saving my beloved Rachel. Thou shalt therefore choose the reward that pleases thee best of the only three gifts I can offer thee."

At the same instant Mendes perceived little Pierce Neige advance, leading a magnificent Arabian horse.

"Hold!" exclaimed the king, "here is a steed that will advantageously replace thy mule, and with which it will be easy for thee to escape the pursuit of the plundering adventurers."

"What! would you give me that noble animal?" exclaimed Mendes, examining with astonished eyes the valuable horse, a gift to Don Pedro from the King of Granada. "What sinewy flanks! what fire in his look! He starts, he neighs, and his ears are pointed, as if he already heard the clash of battle. He is a true steed of the desert, and swift as the wind. Oh, a knight mounted on that gallant beast would not need to use the spur. So brave a horse in an enclosed field would half ensure the victory."

Paloma, who had followed the king, said to him, "Well, my son, don't you find that this miller is as well acquainted with horses as a knight of high degree?"

"Stop, good mother," said Don Pedro, astonished at the enthusiasm of the pretended miller, and feeling his suspicions aroused.

"So, honest miller," said he, loudly, "you accept this horse for your reward?"

"Alas! no," replied the wary Breton, shrugging his shoulders, "I like to see a fine horse run, but I don't use one. What could I do with it? I who am no warrior, but a plain miller. It would embarrass me, and I should be obliged to sell it. If I used it to carry my sacks of flour it would be injured and broken-winded in less than a month. So fine a steed is only fit to prance in the lists. I like my slow, but sure-footed mule better. It is not so handsome, but it is more useful, for it can carry a heavy load a long way without wincing."

"Thou art right, and wilt make a fortune in thy trade," said Don Pedro, smiling; "but accept at least my good battle-sword to defend thyself against the Late Comers." So saying, he loosened from his belt that sword which had so often been tinged with the blood of his enemies. "I have been obliged to deprive it of the jewels and precious stones that ornamented the hilt," added he; "it has now no other value than the confidence it inspires in a resolute hand and brave heart, for it is excellently tempered."

The pretended miller seized it in his large hands, and made it bend like a reed. "Oh, it is an admirable Toledo blade!" exclaimed he, "how light it is in the hand! one might cut through iron, and shield, buckler, and steel jacket with this sword. Nothing could give such confidence as the possession of an instrument of this temper."

"The miller betrays himself," said Paloma to Don Pedro. "See, my son, at the sight of your sword his eyes sparkle like burning coals; his nostrils dilate, as if he prepared himself to rush on an enemy."

"Take it, then, Mendes," said the king, whom that martial enthusiasm had also made mistrustful, "take it, and thou canst then bravely face the adventurers of Duguesclin."

"Oh, I would not hesitate to choose that fine blade as a reward," replied the miller, "if I were a man-at-arms, but do you not see, sire, if I am armed the adventurers will attack me; but on the contrary, I travel peaceably, like a poor inoffensive fellow, who has neither a purse in his pouch nor a rapier at his belt; they will let me pass with, at most, a few shouts. Besides, I don't know how to handle swords," added he, raising the Toledo blade, and turning it like a stick over his head, "the vagabonds would snatch it from me, and might very well run me through with this terrible weapon."

Don Pedro turned towards his nurse, "Well," said he, "do you yet believe this poor Mendes can be a knight in disguise? I

could more easily make a head cook or *major-domo* of him than a sergeant-at-arms."

Paloma shook her head doubtfully, but did not answer. The archers laughed at the singular evolutions the miller made with the sword. He brandished it about like a pitchfork or a ploughshare.

"Sampson's weapon, the jaw-bone of an ass would be almost as useful to thee as my old fighting blade," resumed the king. "Well," added he, holding out to Mendes a leathern bag which Pierce Neige had just brought him, "accept, at least, as a remembrance of our interview, this handful of marabolins; I had rather see them in thy pocket than in those of Don Enrique's soldiers."

The pretended miller knitted his thick brows, but this first movement was immediately succeeded by an affectation of clownish joy.

"Bravo!" he exclaimed, "marabolins are wanted in every purse, in that of the peasant, as in that of the adventurer or nobleman."

Don Pedro, reassured by this vulgar contentment, then said to him, "Thou mayest depart, Mendes, and I pray for thy speedy return; but I wish thee to keep the horse and sword with the bag of coin. If they escape the rapacity of the adventurers, if the horse and sword assist thee to save thy pieces of gold, I will come and reclaim them from thee either as conqueror or conquered. Conqueror, they will recall to me the royal reward I owe thee; conquered, they may probably assist me to escape from my enemies."

"The first child you meet at Camona will show you the mill of Antonio Mendes," said Bertrand, bowing awkwardly before the king.

Meanwhile, the horse pawed the ground impatiently, and Pierce Neige had some trouble to restrain its bounds and starts. It was a magnificent fiery animal; no one but the centaur, Blas, had yet been able to mount him, and the archers prepared to laugh at the inexperienced rider who looked comically frightened at his horse.

(To be continued.)

HOPE.

The gray eastern sky heralded the coming day, and still the lamp burned dimly in the sick man's chamber; still the watcher was unweary. Anxiety, deep and most intense, was depicted on that pale, lovely face, and yet hope was not banished from her brow; for ever and anon did the calm eye of him she idolized, rest with holy, pure affection on the form of his loved wife, as in days gone by, and then she felt she could not give him up. She yet hoped the "cup might pass." But ere another dawn the purified spirit of all her earthly hopes had flown to its eternal rest, and left the young wife and her child desolate.

'Twas then despair, deep and dark, did bow her to the earth, and grief, such as the widowed heart alone feels, was hers.

But, blessed be God, there is a voice that whispereth unto the mourner's heart, "thou mayest still hope"—hope for resignation to the will of him who drieth the mourner's tears; who doeth all things well; hope, that however dark and dreary this world may oft seem unto thee, there may be a bright, holy light, to guide thee and to cheer thee; hope that the sainted spirit of him or her that has gone before thee may still hover around thee and be a guardian angel unto thee. Hope that "as thy day is, so shall thy strength be," and that thou even mayest find consolation in this life, in performing as best thou canst thy duties here; hope that when thy duties here are ended, when thy journey here is over, thou wilt again meet those thou hast loved on earth, in a home of eternal day, where the tears of separation will be no more known, "where the wicked cease from troubling and the weary are at rest." There is a deep spring of joy in hope to the human breast, whose waters while life remains, never cease to flow. It is this that renders existence tolerable, and even precious to the bereaved and desolate wayfarer, as he treads his downward path to the grave.

When all around is dark, and want and wretchedness stare us in the face, when in the past all is barren, and in the future there is no way to light the wanderer in his pilgrimage, there is still a spirit of hope within him teaching him to gather the few flowers that yet remain within his reach, though they be of fading beauty and dying fragrance. The faint glimmerings of the pale-faced moon on the troubled billows of the ocean, are not so fleeting and inconstant as the fortune and condition of human life. We one day bask in the sunshine of prosperity, and the next, too often, roll in anguish on the thorny bed of adversity and affliction. How many are doomed to roam in this wide world alone, unloved and unknown! What can cheer the mind, raise the drooping soul, calm the agitated bosom, and throw a cheering light on the future? It is Hope, sweet Hope! thou ministering spirit of Heaven! who visitest the abodes of misery; wipest the tear from sorrow's eye; chasest away the anguish of despair; sweetenest the cup of affliction with thine all-soothing and siren voice. And when the solemn hour of death should come, and the lamp of light but faintly glimmers in the feeble frame, Hope shall bid us look to a better and brighter world than this, to live and reign with the Blessed Redeemer in never, never ending joys, such as "ear never heard nor eye hath seen, nor has it ever entered into the human mind to conceive" that never ending bliss which is prepared for those who love and serve God.