

THE VENGEANCE OF SAKI.

To M. F. K.

(Hate is a madness of so insatiable a flame that when once lit it burns forever.)

WHEN the moon is red in the heaven, and under the night
Is heard on the winds the thunder of shadowy horses ;
Then out of the dark I arise and again am a woman,
And leap to the back of an ebon steed that knows me,
And hound him on in the wake of hoofs that thunder ;
Of smoking nostrils and gleaming eyes and foam-flecked
Flanks that glow and flash in the flow of the moonlight :—
While under the mirk and the moon out into the blackness,
Round the world's edge with an eerie, mad, echoing laughter,
Leaps the long cry of the hate of the wild snake-woman.

Ha ! Ha ! It is joy for the hearts that we crush as we thunder,
Ho ! Ho ! For the hate of the winds that laugh to my laughter ;
Ha ! Ha ! It is well for the shriekings that pass into silence,
As under the night out into the blackness forever
Rides the wild hate of Saki, the mad snake-woman.

I was a girl of the South with eyes as tender
And soft and dreamy and true as the skies of my people ;
But I was a slave and an alien, captured in battle,
Brought to the North by a people ruder and stronger,
Who held me as naught but a toy to be played with and broken,
Then thrown aside like a bow that is snapped asunder.
Lithe and supple my limbs as the sinuous serpent,
And quick as the eye and the tongue of the serpent mine anger
That flashed out the fire of my hate on the scorn of my scorers.
But hate soon softened to love, as fire into sunlight,
When my eyes met the eyes of the chieftain, my lord and my master.
Sweet as the flowers that bloom on the blossoming prairie,
Gladder than voices of fountains that dance in the sunlight,
Were the new and tremulous fancies that dwelt in my bosom ;
For he was my king and my sun, and the power of his glance
To me as at springtime the returning sun to the landscape ;
And his touch and the sound of his voice that set my heart throbbing.