

The Dance of the Gypsies.

THE "flamenco," the dance of the gypsies, is of Oriental origin. It has the impassive quality, the suppressed, tantalized sensuousness belonging to the Eastern performances in the saltatory line. It forms a popular entertainment in cafés of the lower order throughout the southern provinces of Spain. If the reader were one of a visiting party he would be conducted toward midnight to a roomy, rambling dingy apartment in the crook of an obscure and dirty street, where there would be found a number of sailors, peasants and "chulos," with here and there a well-dressed citizen. The order would be to sit at the small tables and drink. In one corner is a stage rising to about the level of the face when seated. On this about a dozen men and women congregate, the latter quite as much Spanish as gypsy, and some dressed in tights. The star danseuse, the chief mistress of the art "flamenco," dresses in a voluminous calico skirt that does all it can to conceal the amazing skill of muscular movement involved.

At last the moment for the "flamenco" arrives. The leader begins to beat monotonously on the boards, just as Indians do with their tomahawks to set the shytun, the guitar striking into the strain. Two or three women chant a weird song, and all clap their hands in a peculiar measure, now louder, now fainter, and with pauses of varying length between the emphatic passages. The dancer still retains her seat, seeming to demand encouragement. The others call out "Olle" (a gypsy word for bravo), and smile with nods of the head to draw her out. All this excites a lively curiosity in the spectator, who wonders what is coming next. Finally she arises, smiling scornfully, her eyes light up, she throws her head back, and her face is suffused with an expression of daring and energy. Her arms are thrown out and up, and she snaps her fingers and makes easy passes with her hands before her face. Her body is also in gentle motion, there being a sort of vibration, while the feet beneath the flowing skirt take up a repressed rhythmic figure.

Slowly the dancer advances, then circles, without appearing to step. The music goes on steadily, the cries of the other performers becoming more and more animated, while she continues the gestures with the arms and snapping of the fingers. Her feet go a little faster, and can be heard tapping on the floor as they weave out the measure, but there is not the slightest approach to a spring. The progress is sinuous, gliding, shuffling.

Forward again! The dancer gazes intently in front as she advances, looking triumphant, and perhaps with a spark of mischief in her eyes. She stamps harder on the floor, the others clap their hands more enthusiastically, and cry out with increased zest:

"Olle! olle!"

"Bravo, my gracious one!"

"Muy bien! muy bien!"

The dancer becomes more impassioned, but in no way more violent. Her body does not move above the hips. It is only her eyes that twist and turn and bend. The crowning achievement is when the hips begin to sway, too, and while she, advancing and receding, executes what appears to be a rotary movement. All at once the stamping and clapping and twanging strings are stopped, the dancer ceases her gyrations, and the whole thing is over.

Stones Laid in Blood.

HERE is a ghastly story given by Thiele in his "Danish Folk Tales." Many years ago, when the ramparts were being raised around Copenhagen, the wall always sank, so that it was not possible to get it to stand. They therefore took an innocent little girl, placed her in a chair by a table, and gave her playthings and sweet-meats. While she sat thus enjoying herself, twelve masons built an arch over her, which, when completed, they covered with earth, to the sound of drums and trumpets. By this process the walls were made solid. When, a few years ago, the bridge-gate of the Bremen city walls was demolished, the skeleton of a child was found imbedded in the foundations. Heinrich Heine says on this subject:

"In the middle ages the opinion prevailed that when any building was to be erected something living must be killed, in the blood of which the foundation had to be laid, by which process the building would be secured from falling; and in ballads and traditions the remembrance is still preserved how children and animals were slaughtered for the purpose of strengthening large buildings with their blood."

The story of the walls of Copenhagen comes to us only as a tradition, but the horrible truth must be told that in all probability it is no invention of the fancy, but a fact. We have an allusion to this custom in the "British History" of Geoffrey of Monmouth, who relates how Vortigern was building a castle, when the foundation sank. Then he consulted wise men, and they told him that he must lay a fatherless boy under them, and so only could they be made to stand.

Throughout Norway, Sweden, Denmark and North Germany tradition associates some animal with every church, and it goes by the name of kirkgrim. These are the goblin apparitions of the beasts that were buried under the foundation stones of the churches. It is the same in Devonshire—the writer will not say at the present day, but certainly forty or fifty years ago. Indeed, when he was a boy he drew up a list of the kirkgrims that haunted all the neighbouring parishes. To the church of the parish in which he lived belonged two white sows yoked together with a silver chain; to another a black dog; to a third a ghostly calf; to a fourth a white lamb.

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