

CHAPTER XL

BALIN-BALANT

Balin-Balant—from side to side—went the steed, swaying and plunging through the night. Balin-Balant—that was his name; and well he earned it on this great occasion of his life.

With silence between them—a silence as close as the embrace that held them as one and left the mule to his own madness or discretion—they rode down into the plains. And when, looking over his shoulder, Trillon perceived the flare of Castelar as little more than a constellation in the sky, he gave a whoop of joy, and urged the flying beast, which even then raised a cloud of dust like a mist about them. And so they were whirled through the darkness of the plains between the dense black cypresses that now and again shot up at the one side or the other, like gigantic demoniac figures or sentries to turn them back.

"Never, so help me God," swore the man—"God and the Holy Virgin, will I part from Trillon again until I lay a wreath on his grave and look about me for another husband equally good! Was that what you would say, Madeloun? By all that is holy, you spoke truth!"