

"Is Don Diego Velasquez de Silva within?"

"He is, but much engaged; I doubt if he can see you."

"Will you give him this roll, and say one craves admission for his counsel and advice?"

The young artist placed in his hand the picture he had painted of Petrilla, as the young flower girl. He thought it would best explain his hopes, and from Velasquez's opinion upon it, he could judge of his future success.

In a few moments the man returned, and, requesting Esteban to follow, led the way through a vestibule and superb saloon, such as he had never before seen, into a circular hall, where sat a man, in the prime of life, before an easel, on which was extended a large painting. His brush and pallet, spread with glowing colours, in that kind of confusion which only an artist's eye could distinguish and blend, were in one hand, and in the other he held the roll which had just been sent up to him. He himself formed a beautiful "tableau vivant," surrounded as he was by the creations of his own pencil, which have made him famous throughout the world, and the glory and admiration of his country. His artist-like face was shaded by a purple velvet cap, and a dressing-gown of the same hue was wrapped loosely around him. He seemed the fit creator of the almost breathing figures that looked upon him from their gilded frames. The life-like aquatint, or water-carrier, which is now honoured by a conspicuous place in the palace at Madrid; the self-condemning brothers of Joseph, waiting their fiat of life or death, as the fearful truth dawns upon them, that they are in the power of their deeply-injured brother; the patient Job, bending in lowly submission to the will of his chastening Father; the infant Moses, in his dripping cradle, just taken from among the rushes; while the pining daughter of the hard-hearted Pharaoh, bends over him, with love and compassion in her melting eye; and, though last, not least in the glorious catalogue, the magnificent painting of the expulsion of the Moors, by Philip III., which had so delighted the king that he had honoured Velasquez with a command to paint himself and the royal family, and this was the picture on which he was now engaged, and which, when completed, won for him a patent of nobility.

As Esteban was ushered into the studio of the artist of Spain, he was more subdued than if led into the presence of royalty itself. He idolized the genius of painting, and he felt as if about to look upon its impersonation. He stood at the door, scarcely daring to enter, his mind so confused by the dazzling images which filled it, that he hardly perceived Velasquez himself; but

he, seeing the young man's embarrassment, rose, took him kindly by the hand, and, by the gentleness of his address, soon reassured him.

"Is this your work, young friend?" he said, as he opened the picture of Petrilla.

"It is, it is," said Esteban; "but it shames me, as now I look upon the speaking canvas about me, that I have dared to intrude upon you with it. I never realize my own weakness till I see the strength of others. Pardon me, I will disturb you no longer."

"Why is this, young man? You do not do yourself justice. Be assured that at your age I could never have produced any thing like this; and, though time, constant practice, and study, have given me more power, expression, and freedom of pencil, yet I have never attained the sweetness of colouring which distinguishes this picture, and which is more in the Coreggio style than any I have ever seen."

"Can I believe you? Is it truly so?" said Esteban, looking up as imploringly in the face of Velasquez, as if he held the fiat of life. "Is this your judgment? I cannot live without it! My life and soul are bound up in this divine art; and yet I would not strive, to be a nameless painter—to be lost among the thousands, whose names are never heard beyond the few, who become the unfortunate possessors of their pictures; but if I could paint a name, that should reverberate like that of Velasquez, from the Pyrenees to the Pillars of Hercules, while its echo reaches the glorious artist cities of Italy, then life would be a boon I could not be too grateful for, and every hour should be consecrated to the one great aim: Coreggio! Coreggio! Can you in truth say this rude sketch bears any of the marks of that great artist. The Holy Virgin bless you for the word!"

"Yes, my young friend, I can with truth encourage you. Fear not. With trustful boldness take the pencil, and this burning enthusiasm will soon carry you to the summit you desire. Your name shall be placed by the side of Caracci, and the gifted masters of the Italian school. But I would know your name, where you are from, and whither you are now going?"

The young man hesitated a few moments, then replied:

"My friends call me Esteban, and, though the Hidalgo blood flows in my veins, I am the son of poor parents, and the noble's cloak covers naked shoulders; yet let me, but be successful in my art, and the wealth my pencil earns shall restore us to our rank. I left Seville without the knowledge of my family, determined to find my way to Italy; but first I wished to see Don Velasquez, that I might say I had seen the pride of Spain."