

Selections.

CASILDA, THE KING'S DAUGHTER.

The Moor Almenon—with whom Don Ferdinand the Great, King of Castile, maintained a cordial friendship—was King of Toledo.

This Moorish king had a beautiful and tender-hearted daughter named Casilda. A Castilian slave had related to the Moorish king's daughter that the Christians loved their God, their parents, their brethren and their wives. This slave had also told the daughter of the Moorish king how the Christians are never left motherless; for when they lose the ones who bore them, there still remains another named Mary, who is an immortal mother.

Years and years passed away, and Casilda grew in body, in beauty and in virtue. Death deprived her of her mother, and then she envied the happiness of the Christian orphans. On the confines of the garden that surrounded the palace of the Moor were a number of dark dungeons, where many Christian captives, hungry and laden with chains, sighed for liberty. It happened one day that Casilda, while walking in the gardens of her father, heard the sighs of these poor captives. Her heart filled with sorrow; the Moorish princess returned to the palace weeping bitterly. At the door of the palace Casilda met her father and kneeling down at his feet, she said:—

"My father and my lord, in the dungeons on the other side of the gardens sigh many captives. Strike off their chains; open for them the doors of their prison, and let them go back to the land of the Christians, where are weeping for them parents, brethren, wives and children."

In the depths of his heart the Moor blessed his daughter for her goodness, and he loved Casilda as the apple of his eye. The Moor had no other daughter than her. The poor Moor loved Casilda because she was his child; and, moreover, because she was the living image of the cherished spouse whose loss he had mourned for years. But the Moor, before being the father, was a Mohammedan and a king, and therefore he thought himself bound to punish the audacity of his daughter; for to pity the Christian captives and to ask their liberty was a crime that the prophet commanded to be punished with death. He therefore dissembled the gladness of his heart, and said to Casilda, with an angry air and threatening voice:—

"Away, unbeliever away! Thy tongue shall be cut out and thy body given to the

flames, for such punishment merit those who plead for the Christians."

And he was about to call on the executioners, in order to give up to them his daughter. But Casilda fell again at his feet, asking pardon by the memory of her mother—of the queen whose death Almenon had mourned for years. The poor Moor felt the tears rushing into his eyes, and pressing his daughter to his heart he pardoned her, saying:—

"Refrain, my child, from again petitioning for the Christians, and even from pitying them, for then there will be no mercy for thee. The holy prophet has written: 'Destroyed shall be the believer who destroyeth not the infidels.'"

The birds sang; the sky was blue; in the golden sunshine the flowers opened, and the gentle morning breeze bore to the Moorish king's palace the perfume from the gardens. Casilda was full of sorrow, and to banish her melancholy thoughts she drew near to her window. The gardens then appeared to her so beautiful that, unable to resist their charm, she descended there to walk away her sadness under the shade of the sweet smelling trees.

It is related that the Angel of Compassion, in the form of a brilliant butterfly, started up at her feet and enchanted her heart and eyes. The butterfly flew away—flew from flower to flower, Casilda following without being able to overtake it, until a strong wall stopped the way. Over this the butterfly disappeared, leaving the child immovable and enraptured at the foot.

Behind this wall Casilda heard mournful lamentations; and then she remembered that there, hungry and laden with chains, sighed the poor Christians, for whom, in Castile, were weeping parents, brethren, wives and lovers; and charity and compassion strengthened her soul and enlightened her understanding.

Casilda returned to the palace, and, taking meats and gold, went back towards the dungeons, following the butterfly, which had again presented itself in her path. The gold was to soften the jailors, and the meats were to nourish the captives. With the gold and meats hidden in the fold of her robe she proceeded on her way, when suddenly, at the turn of an alley of rose bushes, she was met by her father, who had come out into the garden there to dissipate his melancholy.

"What has brought thee here so early, light of mine eyes?" inquired the Moor of his daughter.