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LEILA

OR,

THE SIEGE OF GRANADA

BY

EDWARD BULWER LYTTON

Book IV.

CHAPTER. I.

LEILA IN THE CASTLE—THE SIEGE.

The calmer contemplations and more holy anxieties of Leila were, at length, broken in upon by intelligence, the fearful interest of which absorbed the whole mind and care of every inhabitant of the castle. Boabdil el Chico had taken the field, at the head of a numerous army. Rapidly scouring the country, he had descended, one after one, upon the principal fortresses, which Ferdinand had left, strongly garrisoned, in the immediate neighbourhood. His success was as immediate as it was signal; the terror of his arms began, once more to spread far and wide; every day swelled his ranks with new recruits; and from the snow-clad summits of the Sierra Nevada poured down, in wild hordes, the fierce mountain race, who, accustomed to eternal winter, made a strange contrast, in their rugged

appearance and shaggy clothing, to the glittering and civilised soldiery of Granada.

Moorish towns, which had submitted to Ferdinand, broke from their allegiance, and sent their ardent youth and experienced veterans to the standard of the Keys and Crescent. To add to the sudden panic of the Spaniards, it went forth that a formidable magician, who seemed inspired rather with the fury of a demon than the valour of a man, had made an abrupt appearance in the ranks of the Moslems. Wherever the Moors shrank back from wall or tower, down which poured the boiling pitch, or rolled the deadly artillery of the besieged, this sorcerer—rushing into the midst of the flagging force, and waving, with wild gestures, a white banner, supposed by both Moor and Christian to be the work of magic and preternatural spells—dared every danger, and escaped every weapon: with voice, with prayer, with example, he fired the Moors to an enthusiasm that revived the first days of Mohammedan conquest; and tower after tower, along the mighty range of the mountain chain of fortresses, was polluted by the wave and glitter of the ever-victorious banner. The veteran, Mendo de Quexada, who, with a garrison of two hundred and fifty men, held the castle of Almamen, was, however, undaunted by the unprecedented successes of Boabdil. Aware of the approaching storm, he spent the days of peace yet accorded to him in making every preparation for the siege that he foresaw; messengers were despatched to Ferdinand; new out-works were added to the castle; ample store of provisions laid in; and no precaution omitted that could still preserve to the Spaniards a fortress that, from its vicinity to Granada, its command of the Vega and the valleys of the Alpuxarras, was the bitterest thorn in the side of the Moorish power.

It was early, one morning, that Leila stood by the lattice of her lofty chamber gazing, with many and mingled emotions, on the distant domes of Granada, as they slept in the silent sunshine. Her heart, for the moment, was busy with the thoughts of home, and the chances and peril of the time were forgotten.

The sound of martial music, afar off, broke upon her reveries; she started, and listened breathlessly; it became more distinct and clear. The clash of the zell, the boom of the African drum, and the wild and barbarous blast of the Moorish clarion, were now each distinguishable from the other; and, at length, as she gazed and listened, winding along the steeps of the mountain were seen the gleaming spears and pennants of the Moslem vanguard. Another moment and the whole castle was astir.

Mendo de Quexada, hastily arming, repaired, himself, to the battlements; and, from her lattice, Leila beheld him, from time to time, stationing to the best advantage his scanty troops. In a few minutes she was joined by Donna Inez and the women of the castle, who fearfully clustered round their mistress,—not the less disposed, however, to gratify the passion of the sex, by a glimpse through the lattice at the gorgeous array of the Moorish army.

The casements of Leila's chamber were peculiarly adapted to command a safe nor insufficient view of the progress of the enemy; and, with a beating heart and flushing cheek, the Jewish maiden, deaf to the voices around her, imagined she could already descry amidst the horsemen the lion port and snowy garments of Muza Ben Abil Gazan.

What a situation was hers! Already a Christian, could she hope for the success of the infidel? ever a woman, could she hope for the defeat of her lover? But the time for meditation on her destiny was but brief; the detachment of the Moorish cavalry was now just without the walls of the little town that girded the castle, and the loud clarion of the heralds summoned the garrison to surrender.

"Not while one stone stands upon another!" was the short answer of Quexada; and, in ten minutes afterwards, the sullen roar of the artillery broke from wall and tower over the vales below.

It was then that the women, from Leila's lattice, beheld, slowly marshalling themselves in order, the whole power and pageantry of the besieging army. Thick-serried—line after line, column upon column—they spread below the frowning steep. The sunbeams lighted up that goodly array, as it swayed, and murmured, and advanced, like the billows of a glittering sea. The royal standard was soon descried waving above the pavilion of Boabdil; and the king himself, mounted on his cream-coloured charger, which was covered with trappings of cloth-of-gold, was recognised amongst the infantry, whose task it was to lead the assault.

"Pray with us, my daughter!" cried Inez, falling on her knees.—Alas! what could Leila pray for?

Four days and four nights passed away in that memorable siege; for the moon, then at her full, allowed no respite, even in night itself. Their numbers, and their vicinity to Granada, gave the besiegers the advantage of constant relays, and troop succeeded to troop; so that the weary had ever successors in the vigour of new assailants.

On the fifth day, all of the fortress, save the keep (an immense tower), was in the hands of the Moslems; and in this last hold, the worn-out and scanty remnant of the garrison mustered, in the last

hope of a brave, despair.

Quexada appeared, covered with gore and dust—his eyes bloodshot, his cheek haggard and hollow, his locks blanched with sudden age—in the hall of the tower, where the women, half dead with terror, were assembled.

"Food!" cried he,— "food and wine!—it may be our last banquet."

His wife threw her arms round him. "Not yet," he cried, "not yet; we will have one embrace before we part."

"Is there, then, no hope?" said Inez, with a pale cheek, yet steady eye.

"None; unless to-morrow's dawn gild the spears of Ferdinand's army upon yonder hills. Till morn we may hold out." As he spoke, he hastily devoured some morsels of food, drained a huge goblet of wine, and abruptly quitted the chamber.

At that moment, the women distinctly heard the loud shouts of the Moors; and Leila, approaching the grated casement, could perceive the approach of what seemed to her like moving wails.

Covered by ingenious constructions of wood and thick hides, the besiegers advanced to the foot of the tower in comparative shelter from the burning streams which still poured, fast and seething, from the battlements; while, in the rear came showers of darts and cross-bolts from the more distant Moors, protecting the work of the engineer, and piercing through almost every loophole and crevice in the fortress.

Meanwhile the stalwart governor beheld, with dismay and despair, the preparations of the engineers, whom the wooden screen-works protected from every weapon.

"By the Holy Sepulchre!" cried he, gnashing his teeth, "they are mining the tower, and we shall be buried in its ruins! Look out, Gonsalvo! see you not a gleam of spears yonder over the mountain? Mine eyes are dim with watching."

"Alas! brave Mendo, it is only the sloping sun upon the snows—but there is hope yet."

The soldier's words terminated in a shrill and sudden cry of agony; and he fell dead by the side of Quexada, the brain crushed by a bolt from a Moorish arquebus.

"My best warrior!" said Quexada; "peace be with him! Ho, there! see you yon desperate infidel urging on the miners? By the heavens above, it is he of the white banner!—it is the sorcerer! Fire on him! he is without the shelter of the woodworks."

Twenty shafts, from wearied and nerveless arms, fell innocuous round the form of Almamen: and as, waving aloft his ominous banner, he disappeared again behind the screen-works, the Spaniards almost fancied they could hear his exulting and demon laugh.

The sixth day came, and the work of the enemy was completed. The tower was entirely undermined—the foundations rested only upon wooden props, which, with a humanity that was characteristic of Boabdil, had been placed there in order that the besieged might escape ere the final crash of their last hold.

It was now noon: the whole Moorish force, quitting the plain, occupied the steep that spread below the tower, in multitudinous array and breathless expectation. The miners stood aloof—the Spaniards lay prostrate and exhausted upon the battlements, like mariners who, after every effort against the storm, await, resigned, and almost indifferent, the sweep of the fatal surge.

Suddenly the lines of the Moors gave way, and Boabdil himself, with Muza at his right hand, and Almamen on his left, advanced towards the foot of the tower. At the same time, the Ethiopian guards, each bearing a torch, marched slowly in the rear; and from the midst of them paced the royal herald and sounded the last warning. The hush of the immense armament—the glare of the torches, lighting the ebon faces and giant forms of their bearers—the majestic appearance of the king himself—the heroic aspect of Muza—the bare head and glittering banner of Almamen—all combined with the circumstances of the time to invest the spectacle with something singularly awful, and, perhaps, sublime.

Quexada turned his eyes, mutely, round the ghastly faces of his warriors, and still made not the signal. His lips muttered—his eyes glared: when, suddenly, he heard below the wail of women; and the thought of Inez, the bride of his youth, the partner of his age, came upon him; and, with a trembling hand, he lowered the yet unquailing standard of Spain. Then, the silence below broke into a mighty

shout, which shook the grim tower to its unsteady and temporary base.

"Arise, my friends," he said, with a bitter sigh; "we have fought like men—and our country will not blush for us." He descended the winding stairs—his soldiers followed him with faltering steps: the gates of the keep unfolded, and these gallant Christians surrendered themselves to the Moor.

"Do with it as you will," said Quexada, as he laid the keys at the hoofs of Boabdil's barb; "but there are women in the garrison, who—"

"Are sacred," interrupted the king. "At once we accord their liberty, and free transport whithersoever ye would desire. Speak, then! To what place of safety shall they be conducted?"

"Generous king!" replied the veteran Quexada, brushing away his tears with the back of his hand; "you take the sting from our shame. We accept your offer in the same spirit in which it is made. Across the mountains, on the verge of the plain of Olfadez, I possess a small castle, ungarrisoned and unfortified. Thence, should the war take that direction, the women can readily obtain safe conduct to the queen at Cordova."

"Be it so," returned Boabdil. Then, with Oriental delicacy, selecting the eldest of the officers round him, he gave him instructions to enter the castle, and, with a strong guard, provide for the safety of the women, according to the directions of Quexada. To another of his officers he confided the Spanish prisoners, and gave the signal to his army to withdraw from the spot, leaving only a small body to complete the ruin of the fortress.

Accompanied by Almamen and his principal officers, Boabdil now hastened towards Granada; and while, with slower progress, Quexada and his companions, under a strong escort, took their way across the Vega, a sudden turn in their course brought abruptly before them the tower they had so valiantly defended. There it still stood, proud and stern, amidst the blackened and broken wrecks around it, shooting aloft, dark and grim, against the sky. Another moment, and a mighty crash sounded on their ears, while the tower fell to the earth, amidst volumes of wreathing smoke and showers of dust, which were borne, by the concussion to the spot on which they took their last gaze of the proudest fortress on which the Moors of Granada had beheld, from their own walls, the standard of Arragon and Castile.

At the same time, Leila—thus brought so strangely within the very reach of her father and her lover, and yet, by a mysterious fate, still divided from both,—with Donna Inez, and the rest of the females of the garrison, pursued her melancholy path along the ridges of the mountains.

CHAPTER II.

ALMAMEN'S PROPOSED ENTERPRISE.—THE THREE ISRAELITES—CIRCUMSTANCE IMPRESSES EACH CHARACTER WITH A VARYING DIE.

Boabdil followed up his late success with a series of brilliant assaults on the neighbouring fortresses. Granada, like a strong man bowed to the ground, wrenched one after one the bands that had crippled her liberty and strength; and, at length, after regaining a considerable portion of the surrounding territory, the king resolved to lay siege to the seaport of Salobrena. Could he obtain this town, Boabdil, by establishing communication between the sea and Granada, would both be enabled to avail himself of the assistance of his African allies, and also prevent the Spaniards from cutting off supplies to the city, should they again besiege it. Thither, then, accompanied by Muza, the Moorish king bore his victorious standard.

On the eve of his departure, Almamen sought the king's presence. A great change had come over the canton since the departure of Ferdinand; his wonted stateliness of mien was gone; his eyes were sunk and hollow; his manner disturbed and absent. In fact, his love for his daughter made the sole softness of his character; and that daughter was in the hands of the king who had sentenced the father to the tortures of the Inquisition! To what dangers might she not be subjected, by the intolerant zeal of conversion! and could that frame, and gentle heart, brave the terrific engines that might be brought against her fears? "Better," thought he, "that she should perish, even by the torture, than adopt that hated faith." He gnashed his teeth in agony at either alternative. His dreams, his objects, his revenge, his ambition—all forsook him: one single hope, one thought, completely mastered his stormy passions and fitful intellect.

In this mood the pretended santon met Boabdil. He represented to the king, over whom his influence had prodigiously increased since the late victories of the Moors, the necessity of employing the armies of Ferdinand at a distance. He proposed, in furtherance of this policy, to venture himself in Cordova; to endeavour secretly to stir up those Moors, in that, their ancient kingdom, who had succumbed to the Spanish yoke, and whose hopes might naturally be inflamed by the recent successes of Boabdil; and, at least, to foment such disturbances as might afford the king sufficient time to complete his designs, and recruit his force by aid of the powers with which he was in league.

The representations of Almamen at length conquered Boabdil's reluctance to part with his sacred guide; and it was finally arranged that the Israelite should at once depart from the city.

As Almamen pursued homeward his solitary way, he found himself suddenly accosted in the Hebrew tongue. He turned hastily, and saw before him an old man in the Jewish gown: he recognised Elias, one of the wealthiest and most eminent of the race of Israel.

"Pardon me, wise countryman!" said the Jew, bowing to the earth, "but I cannot resist the temptation of claiming kindred with one through whom the horn of Israel may be so triumphantly exalted."

"Hush, man!" said Almamen, quickly, and looking sharply round; "I thy countryman! Art thou not, as thy speech betokens, an Israelite?"

"Yea," returned the Jew, "and of the same tribe as thy honoured father— peace be with his ashes! I remembered thee at once, boy though thou wert when thy steps shook off the dust against Granada. I remembered thee, I say, at once, on thy return; but I have kept thy secret, trusting that, through thy soul and genius, thy fallen brethren might put off sackcloth and feast upon the house-tops."

Almamen looked hard at the keen, sharp, Arab features of the Jew; and at length he answered, "And how can Israel be restored? wilt thou fight for her?"

"I am too old, son of Issachar, to bear arms; but our tribes are many, and our youth strong. Amid these disturbances between dog and dog—"

"The lion may get his own," interrupted Almamen, impetuously,— "let us hope it. Hast thou heard of the new persecutions against us that the false Nazarene king has already commenced in Cordova— persecutions that make the heart sick and the blood cold?"

"Alas!" replied Elias, "such woes indeed have not failed to reach mine ear; and I have kindred, near and beloved kindred, wealthy and honoured men, scattered throughout that land."

"Were it not better that they should die on the field than by the rack?" exclaimed Almamen, fiercely. "God of my fathers! if there be yet a spark of manhood left amongst thy people, let thy servant fan it to a flame, that shall burn as the fire burns the stubble, so that the earth may bare before the blaze!"

"Nay," said Elias, dismayed rather than excited by the vehemence of his comrade,— "be not rash, son of Issachar, be not rash: peradventure thou wilt but exasperate the wrath of the rulers, and our substance thereby will be utterly consumed."

Almamen drew back, placed his hand quietly on the Jew's shoulder, looked him hard in the face, and, gently laughing, turned away.

Elias did not attempt to arrest his steps. "Impracticable," he muttered; "impracticable and dangerous! I always thought so. He may do us harm: were he not so strong and fierce, I would put my knife under his left rib. Verily, gold is a great thing; and—out on me! the knaves at home will be wasting the oil, now they know old Elias is abroad." Thereat the Jew drew his cloak around him, and quickened his pace.

Almamen, in the meanwhile, sought, through dark and subterranean passages, known only to himself, his accustomed home. He passed much of the night alone; but, ere the morning star announced to the mountain tops the presence of the sun, he stood, prepared for his journey, in his secret vault, by the door of the subterranean passages, with old Ximen beside him.

"I go, Ximen," said Almamen, "upon a doubtful quest: whether I discover my daughter, and succeed in bearing her in safety from their contaminating grasp, or whether I fall into their snares and perish, there is an equal chance that I may return no more to Granada. Should this be so, you will be heir to such wealth as I leave in these places I know that your age will be consoled for the lack of children when your eyes look upon the laugh of gold."

Ximen bowed low, and mumbled out some inaudible protestations and thanks. Almamen sighed heavily as he looked round the room. "I have evil omens in my soul, and evil prophecies in my books,"

said he, mournfully. "But the worst is here," he added, putting his finger significantly to his temples; "the string is stretched—one more blow would snap it."

As he thus said, he opened the door and vanished through that labyrinth of galleries by which he was enabled at all times to reach unobserved either the palace of the Alhambra or the gardens without the gates of the city.

Ximen remained behind a few moments in deep thought. "All mine if he dies!" said he: "all mine if he does not return! All mine, all mine! and I have not a child nor a kinsman in the world to clutch it away from me!" With that he locked the vault, and returned to the upper air.

CHAPTER III.

THE FUGITIVE AND THE MEETING

In their different directions the rival kings were equally successful. Salobrena, but lately conquered by the Christians, was thrown into a commotion by the first glimpse of Boabdil's banners; the populace rose, beat back their Christian guards, and opened the gates to the last of their race of kings. The garrison alone, to which the Spaniards retreated, resisted Boabdil's arms; and, defended by, impregnable walls, promised an obstinate and bloody siege.

Meanwhile, Ferdinand had no sooner entered Cordova than his extensive scheme of confiscation and holy persecution commenced. Not only did more than five hundred Jews perish in the dark and secret gripe of the Grand Inquisitor, but several hundred of the wealthiest Christian families, in whose blood was detected the hereditary Jewish taint, were thrown into prison; and such as were most fortunate purchased life by the sacrifice of half their treasures. At this time, however, there suddenly broke forth a formidable insurrection amongst these miserable subjects—the Messenians of the Iberian Sparta. The Jews were so far aroused from their long debasement by omnipotent despair, that a single spark, falling on the ashes of their ancient spirit, rekindled the flame of the descendants of the fierce warriors of Palestine. They were encouraged and assisted by the suspected Christians, who had been involved in the same persecution; and the whole were headed by a man who appeared suddenly amongst them, and whose fiery eloquence and martial spirit produced, at such a season, the most fervent enthusiasm. Unhappily, the whole details of this singular outbreak are withheld from us; only by wary hints and guarded allusions do the Spanish chroniclers apprise us of its existence and its perils. It is clear that all narrative of an event that might afford the most dangerous precedent, and was alarming to the pride and avarice of the Spanish king, as well as the pious zeal of the Church, was strictly forbidden; and the conspiracy was hushed in the dread silence of the Inquisition, into whose hands the principal conspirators ultimately fell. We learn, only, that a determined and sanguinary struggle was followed by the triumph of Ferdinand, and the complete extinction of the treason.

It was one evening, that a solitary fugitive, hard chased by an armed troop of the brothers of St. Hermandad, was seen emerging from a wild and rocky defile, which opened abruptly on the gardens of a small, and, by the absence of fortification and sentries, seemingly deserted, castle. Behind him; in the exceeding stillness which characterises the air of a Spanish twilight, he heard, at a considerable distance the blast of the horn and the tramp of hoofs. His pursuers, divided into several detachments, were scouring the country after him, as the fishermen draw their nets, from bank to bank, conscious that the prey they drive before the meshes cannot escape them at the last. The fugitive halted in doubt, and gazed round him: he was well-nigh exhausted; his eyes were bloodshot; the large drops rolled fast down his brow; his whole frame quivered and palpitated, like that of a stag when he stands at bay. Beyond the castle spread a broad plain, far as the eye could reach, without shrub or hollow to conceal his form: flight across a space so favourable to his pursuers was evidently in vain. No alternative was left unless he turned back on the very path taken by the horsemen, or trusted to such scanty and perilous shelter as the copses in the castle garden might afford him. He decided on the latter refuge, cleared the low and lonely wall that girded the demesne, and plunged into a thicket of overhanging oaks and chestnuts.

At that hour, and in that garden, by the side of a little fountain, were seated two females: the one of mature and somewhat advanced years; the other, in the flower of virgin youth. But the flower was prematurely faded; and neither the bloom, nor sparkle, nor undulating play of feature, that should have suited her age, was visible in the marble paleness and contemplative sadness of her beautiful countenance.

"Alas! my young friend," said the elder of these ladies, "it is in these hours of solitude and calm that we are most deeply impressed with the nothingness of life. Thou, my sweet convert, art now the object, no longer of my compassion, but my envy; and earnestly do I feel convinced of the blessed repose thy spirit will enjoy in the lap of the Mother Church. Happy are they who die young! but thrice happy they who die in the spirit rather than the flesh: dead to sin, but not to virtue; to terror, not to hope; to man, but not to God!"

"Dear senora," replied the young maiden, mournfully, "were I alone on earth, Heaven is my witness with what deep and thankful resignation I should take the holy vows, and forswear the past; but the heart remains human, however divine the hope that it may cherish. And sometimes I start, and think of home, of childhood, of my strange but beloved father, deserted and childless in his old age."

"Thine, Leila," returned the elder Senora, "are but the sorrows our nature is doomed to. What matter, whether absence or death sever the affections? Thou lamentest a father; I, a son, dead in the pride of his youth and beauty—a husband, languishing in the fetters of the Moor. Take comfort for thy sorrows, in the reflection that sorrow is the heritage of all."

Ere Leila could reply, the orange-boughs that sheltered the spot where they sat were put aside, and between the women and the fountain stood the dark form of Almamen the Israelite. Leila rose, shrieked, and flung herself, unconscious, on his breast.

"O Lord of Israel!" cried Almamen, in atone of deep anguish. "I, then, at last regain my child? Do I press her to my heart? and is it only for that brief moment, when I stand upon the brink of death? Leila, my child, look up! smile upon thy father; let him feel, on his maddening and burning brow, the sweet breath of the last of his race, and bear with him, at least, one holy and gentle thought to the dark grave."

"My father! is it indeed my father?" said Leila, recovering herself, and drawing back, that she might assure herself of that familiar face; "it is thou! it is—it is! Oh! what blessed chance brings us together?"

"That chance is the destiny that hurries me to my tomb," answered Almamen, solemnly. "Hark! hear you not the sound of their rushing steeds—their impatient voices? They are on me now!"

"Who? Of whom speakest thou?"

"My pursuers—the horsemen of the Spaniard."

"Oh, senora, save him!" cried Leila, turning to Donna Inez, whom both father and child had hitherto forgotten, and who now stood gazing upon Almamen with wondering and anxious eyes. "Whither can he fly? The vaults of the castle may conceal him. This way—hasten!"

"Stay," said Inez, trembling, and approaching close to Almamen: "do I see aright? and, amidst the dark change of years and trial, do I recognise that stately form, which once contrasted to the sad eye of a mother the drooping and faded form of her only son? Art thou not he who saved my boy from the pestilence, who accompanied him to the shores of Naples, and consigned him to these arms? Look on me! dost thou not recall the mother of thy friend?"

"I recall thy features dimly and as in a dream," answered the Hebrew; "and while thou speakest, there rush upon me the memories of an earlier time, in lands where Leila first looked upon the day, and her mother sang to me at sunset by the stream of the Euphrates, and on the sites of departed empires. Thy son—I remember now: I had friendship then with a Christian—for I was still young."

"Waste not the time—father—senora!" cried Leila, impatiently clinging still to her father's breast.

"You are right; nor shall your sire, in whom I thus wonderfully recognise my son's friend, perish if I can save him."

Inez then conducted her strange guest to a small door in the rear of the castle; and after leading him through some of the principal apartments, left him in one of the tiring-rooms adjoining her own chamber, and the entrance to which the arras concealed. She rightly judged this a safer retreat than the vaults of the castle might afford, since her great name and known intimacy with Isabel would preclude all suspicion of her abetting in the escape of the fugitive, and keep those places the most secure in which, without such aid, he could not have secreted himself.

In a few minutes, several of the troop arrived at the castle, and on learning the name of its owner contented themselves with searching the gardens, and the lower and more exposed apartments; and then recommending to the servants a vigilant look-out remounted, and proceeded to scour the plain, over which now slowly fell the starlight and shade of night. When Leila stole, at last, to the room in

which Almamen was hid, she found him, stretched on his mantle, in a deep sleep. Exhausted by all he had undergone, and his rigid nerves, as it were, relaxed by the sudden softness of that interview with his child, the slumber of that fiery wanderer was as calm as an infant's. And their relation almost seemed reversed; and the daughter to be as a mother watching over her offspring, when Leila seated herself softly by him, fixing her eyes—to which the tears came ever, ever to be brushed away—upon his worn but tranquil features, made yet more serene by the quiet light that glimmered through the casement. And so passed the hours of that night; and the father and the child—the meek convert, the revengeful fanatic—were under the same roof.

CHAPTER IV.

ALMAMEN HEARS AND SEES, BUT REFUSES TO BELIEVE; FOR THE BRAIN, OVERWROUGHT, GROWS DULL, EVEN IN THE KEENEST.

The dawn broke slowly upon the chamber, and Almamen still slept. It was the Sabbath of the Christians—that day on which the Saviour rose from the dead—thence named so emphatically and sublimely by the early Church THE LORD'S DAY.

[Before the Christian era, the Sunday was, however, called the Lord's day—i.e., the day of the Lord the Sun.]

And as the ray of the sun flashed in the east it fell like a glory, over a crucifix, placed in the deep recess of the Gothic casement; and brought startingly before the eyes of Leila that face upon which the rudest of the Catholic sculptors rarely fail to preserve the mystic and awful union of the expiring anguish of the man with the lofty patience of the God. It looked upon her, that face; it invited, it encouraged, while it thrilled and subdued. She stole gently from the side of her father; she crept to the spot, and flung herself on her knees beside the consecrated image.

"Support me, O Redeemer!" she murmured—"support thy creature! strengthen her steps in the blessed path, though it divide her irrevocably from all that on earth she loves: and if there be a sacrifice in her solemn choice, accept, O Thou, the Crucified! accept it, in part atonement of the crime of her stubborn race; and, hereafter, let the lips of a maiden of Judaea implore thee, not in vain, for some mitigation of the awful curse that hath fallen justly upon her tribe."

As broken by low sobs, and in a choked and muttered voice, Leila poured forth her prayer, she was startled by a deep groan; and turning, in alarm she saw that Almamen had awaked, and, leaning on his arm, was now bending upon her his dark eyes, once more gleaming with all their wonted fire.

"Speak," he said, as she coweringly hid her face, "speak to me, or I shall be turned to stone by one horrid thought. It is not before that symbol that thou kneelest in adoration; and my sense wanders, if I tell me that thy broken words expressed the worship of an apostate? In mercy, speak!"

"Father!" began Leila; but her lips refused to utter more than that touching and holy word.

Almamen rose; and plucking the hands from her face, gazed on her some moments, as if he would penetrate her very soul; and Leila, recovering her courage in the pause, by degrees met his eyes unquailing—her pure and ingenuous brow raised to his, and sadness, but not guilt, speaking from every line of that lovely face.

"Thou dost not tremble," said Almamen, at length, breaking the silence, "and I have erred. Thou art not the criminal I deemed thee. Come to my arms!"

"Alas!" said Leila, obeying the instinct, and casting herself upon that rugged bosom. "I will dare, at least, not to disavow my God. Father! by that dread anathema which is on our race, which has made us homeless and powerless—outcasts and strangers in the land; by the persecution and anguish we have known, teach thy lordly heart that we are rightly punished for the persecution and the anguish we doomed to Him, whose footstep hallowed our native earth! FIRST, IN THE HISTORY OF THE WORLD, DID THE STERN HEBREWS INFLICT UPON MANKIND THE AWFUL CRIME OF PERSECUTION FOR OPINIONS SAKE. The seed we sowed hath brought forth the Dead Sea fruit upon which we feed. I asked for resignation and for hope: I looked upon yonder cross, and I found both. Harden not thy heart; listen to thy child; wise though thou be, and weak though her woman spirit, listen to me."

"Be dumb!" cried Almamen, in such a voice as might have come from the charnel, so ghostly and

deathly sounded its hollow tone; then, recoiling some steps, he placed both his hands upon his temples, and muttered, "Mad, mad! yes, yes, this is but a delirium, and I am tempted with a devil! Oh, my child!" he resumed, in a voice that became, on the sudden, inexpressibly tender and imploring, "I have been sorely tried; and I dreamt a feverish dream of passion and revenge. Be thine the lips, and thine the soothing hand, that shall wake me from it. Let us fly for ever from these hated lands; let us leave to these miserable infidels their bloody contest, careless which shall fall. To a soil on which the iron heel does not clang, to an air where man's orisons rise, in solitude, to the Great Jehovah, let us hasten our weary steps. Come! while the castle yet sleeps, let us forth unseen—the father and the child. We will hold sweet commune by the way. And hark ye, Leila," he added, in a low and abrupt whisper, "talk not to me of yonder symbol; for thy God is a jealous God, and hath no likeness in the graven image."

Had he been less exhausted by long travail and racking thoughts, far different, perhaps, would have been the language of a man so stern. But circumstance impresses the hardest substance; and despite his native intellect and affected superiority over others, no one, perhaps, was more human, in his fitful moods,—his weakness and his strength, his passion and his purpose,—than that strange man, who had dared, in his dark studies and arrogant self-will, to aspire beyond humanity.

That was, indeed, a perilous moment for the young convert. The unexpected softness of her father utterly subdued her; nor was she sufficiently possessed of that all-denying zeal of the Catholic enthusiast to which every human tie and earthly duty has been often sacrificed on the shrine of a rapt and metaphysical piety. Whatever her opinions, her new creed, her secret desire of the cloister, fed as it was by the sublime, though fallacious notion, that in her conversion, her sacrifice, the crimes of her race might be expiated in the eyes of Him whose death had been the great atonement of a world; whatever such higher thoughts and sentiments, they gave way, at that moment, to the irresistible impulse of household nature and of filial duty. Should she desert her father, and could that desertion be a virtue? Her heart put and answered both questions in a breath. She approached Almamen, placed her hand in his, and said, steadily and calmly, "Father, wheresoever thou goest, I will wend with thee."

But Heaven ordained to each another destiny than might have been theirs, had the dictates of that impulse been fulfilled.

Ere Almamen could reply, a trumpet sounded clear and loud at the gate.

"Hark!" he said, gripping his dagger, and starting back to a sense of the dangers round him. "They come—my pursuers and my murtherers!—but these limbs are sacred from—the rack."

Even that sound of ominous danger was almost a relief to Leila: "I will go," she said, "and learn what the blast betokens; remain here—be cautious—I will return."

Several minutes, however, elapsed before Leila reappeared; she was accompanied by Donna Inez, whose paleness and agitation betokened her alarm. A courier had arrived at the gate to announce the approach of the queen, who, with a considerable force, was on her way to join Ferdinand, then, in the usual rapidity of his movements, before one of the Moorish towns that had revolted from his allegiance. It was impossible for Almamen to remain in safety in the castle; and the only hope of escape was departing immediately and in disguise.

"I have," she said, "a trusty and faithful servant with me in the castle, to whom I can, without anxiety, confide the charge of your safety; and even if suspected by the way, my name, and the companionship of my servant, will remove all obstacles; it is not a long journey hence to Guadix, which has already revolted to the Moors: there, till the armies of Ferdinand surround the walls, your refuge may be secure."

Almamen remained for some moments plunged in a gloomy silence. But, at length, he signified his assent to the plan proposed, and Donna Inez hastened to give the directions of his intended guide.

"Leila," said the Hebrew, when left alone with his daughter, "think not that it is for mine own safety that I stoop to this flight from thee. No! but never till thou wert lost to me, by mine own rash confidence in another, did I know how dear to my heart was the last scion of my race, the sole memorial left to me of thy mother's love. Regaining thee once more, a new and a soft existence opens upon my eyes; and the earth seems to change, as by a sudden revolution, from winter into spring. For thy sake, I consent to use all the means that man's intellect can devise for preservation from my foes. Meanwhile, here will rest my soul; to this spot, within one week from this period—no matter through what danger I pass—I shall return: then I shall claim thy promise. I will arrange all things for our flight, and no stone shall harm thy footstep by the way. The Lord of Israel be with thee, my daughter, and strengthen thy heart! But," he added, tearing himself from her embrace, as he heard steps ascending to the chamber, "deem not that, in this most fond and fatherly affection, I forget what is due to me and thee. Think not that my love is only the brute and insensate feeling of the progenitor to the offspring: I

love thee for thy mother's sake—I love thee for thine own— I love thee yet more for the sake of Israel. If thou perish, if thou art lost to us, thou, the last daughter of the house of Issachar, then the haughtiest family of God's great people is extinct."

Here Inez appeared at the door, but withdrew, at the impatient and lordly gesture of Almamen, who, without further heed of the interruption, resumed:

"I look to thee, and thy seed, for the regeneration which I once trusted, fool that I was, mine own day might see effected. Let this pass. Thou art under the roof of the Nazarene. I will not believe that the arts we have resisted against fire and sword can prevail with thee. But, if I err, awful will be the penalty! Could I once know that thou hadst forsaken thy ancestral creed, though warrior and priest stood by thee, though thousands and ten thousands were by thy right hand, this steel should save the race of Issachar from dishonour. Beware! Thou weepst; but, child, I warn, not threaten. God be with thee!"

He wrung the cold hand of his child, turned to the door, and, after such disguise as the brief time allowed him could afford, quitted the castle with his Spanish guide, who, accustomed to the benevolence of his mistress, obeyed her injunction without wonder, though not without suspicion.

The third part of an hour had scarcely elapsed, and the sun was yet on the mountain-tops, when Isabel arrived. She came to announce that the outbreaks of the Moorish towns in the vicinity rendered the half-fortified castle of her friend no longer a secure abode; and she honoured the Spanish lady with a command to accompany her, with her female suite, to the camp of Ferdinand.

Leila received the intelligence with a kind of stupor. Her interview with her father, the strong and fearful contests of emotion which that interview occasioned, left her senses faint and dizzy; and when she found herself, by the twilight star, once more with the train of Isabel, the only feeling that stirred actively through her stunned and bewildered mind, was, that the hand of Providence conducted her from a temptation that, the Reader of all hearts knew, the daughter and woman would have been too feeble to resist.

On the fifth day from his departure, Almamen returned to find the castle deserted, and his daughter gone.

CHAPTER V.

IN THE FERMENT OF GREAT EVENTS THE DREGS RISE.

The Israelites did not limit their struggles to the dark conspiracy to which allusion has been made. In some of the Moorish towns that revolted from Ferdinand, they renounced the neutrality they had hitherto maintained between Christian and Moslem. Whether it was that they were inflamed by the fearful and wholesale barbarities enforced by Ferdinand and the Inquisition against their tribe, or whether they were stirred up by one of their own order, in whom was recognised the head of their most sacred family; or whether, as is most probable, both causes combined— certain it is, that they manifested a feeling that was thoroughly unknown to the ordinary habits and policy of that peaceable people. They bore great treasure to the public stock—they demanded arms, and, under their own leaders, were admitted, though with much jealousy and precaution, into the troops of the arrogant and disdainful Moslems.

In this conjunction of hostile planets, Ferdinand had recourse to his favourite policy of wile and stratagem. Turning against the Jews the very treaty Almamen had once sought to obtain in their favour, he caused it to be circulated, privately, that the Jews, anxious to purchase their peace with him, had promised to betray the Moorish towns, and Granada itself into his hands. The paper, which Ferdinand himself had signed in his interview with Almamen, and of which, on the capture of the Hebrew, he had taken care to repossess himself, he gave to a spy whom he sent, disguised as a Jew, into one of the revolted cities.

Private intelligence reached the Moorish ringleader of the arrival of this envoy. He was seized, and the document found on his person. The form of the words drawn up by Almamen (who had carefully omitted mention of his own name—whether that which he assumed, or that which, by birth, he should have borne) merely conveyed the compact, that if by a Jew, within two weeks from the date therein specified, Granada was delivered to the Christian king, the Jews should enjoy certain immunities and

rights.

The discovery of this document filled the Moors of the city to which the spy had been sent with a fury that no words can describe. Always distrusting their allies, they now imagined they perceived the sole reason of their sudden enthusiasm, of their demand for arms. The mob rose: the principal Jews were seized and massacred without trial; some by the wrath of the multitude, some by the slower tortures of the magistrate. Messengers were sent to the different revolted towns, and, above all, to Granada itself, to put the Moslems on their guard against these unhappy enemies of either party. At once covetous and ferocious, the Moors rivalled the Inquisition in their cruelty, and Ferdinand in their extortion.

It was the dark fate of Almamen, as of most premature and heated liberators of the enslaved, to double the terrors and the evils he had sought to cure. The warning arrived at Granada at a time in which the vizier, Jusef, had received the commands of his royal master, still at the siege of Salobrena, to use every exertion to fill the wasting treasuries. Fearful of new exactions against the Moors, the vizier hailed, as a message from Heaven, so just a pretext for a new and sweeping impost on the Jews. The spendthrift violence of the mob was restrained, because it was headed by the authorities, who were wisely anxious that the state should have no rival in the plunder it required; and the work of confiscation and robbery was carried on with a majestic and calm regularity, which redounded no less to the credit of Jusef than it contributed to the coffers of the king.

It was late, one evening, when Ximen was making his usual round through the chambers of Almamen's house. As he glanced around at the various articles of wealth and luxury, he ever and anon burst into a low, fitful chuckle, rubbed his lean hands, and mumbled out, "If my master should die! if my master should die!"

While thus engaged, he heard a confused and distant shout; and, listening attentively, he distinguished a cry, grown of late sufficiently familiar, of, "Live, Jusef the just—perish, the traitor Jews!"

"Ah!" said Ximen, as the whole character of his face changed; "some new robbery upon our race! And this is thy work, son of Issachar! Madman that thou wert, to be wiser than thy sires, and seek to dupe the idolaters in the council chamber and the camp—their field, their vantage ground; as the bazaar and the market-place are ours. None suspect that the potent santon is the traitor Jew; but I know it! I could give thee to the bow-string—and, if thou Overt dead, all thy goods and gold, even to the mule at the manger, would be old Ximen's."

He paused at that thought, shut his eyes, and smiled at the prospect his fancy conjured up and completing his survey, retired to his own chamber, which opened, by a small door, upon one of the back courts. He had scarcely reached the room, when he heard a low tap at the outer door; and, when it was thrice repeated, he knew that it was one of his Jewish-brethren. For Ximen—as years, isolation, and avarice gnawed away whatever of virtue once put forth some meagre fruit from a heart naturally bare and rocky—still reserved one human feeling towards his countrymen. It was the bond which unites all the persecuted: and Ximen loved them, because he could not envy their happiness. The power—the knowledge—the lofty, though wild designs of his master, stung and humbled him—he secretly hated, because he could not compassionate or contemn him. But the bowed frame, and slavish voice, and timid nerves of his crushed brotherhood presented to the old man the likeness of things that could not exult over him. Debased and aged, and solitary as he was, he felt a kind of wintry warmth in the thought that even he had the power to protect!

He thus maintained an intercourse with his fellow Israelites; and often, in their dangers, had afforded them a refuge in the numerous vaults and passages, the ruins of which may still be descried beneath the mouldering foundations of that mysterious mansion. And, as the house was generally supposed the property of an absent emir, and had been especially recommended to the care of the cadis by Boabdil, who alone of the Moors knew it as one of the dwelling-places of the santon, whose ostensible residence was in apartments allotted to him within the palace,—it was, perhaps, the sole place within Granada which afforded an unsuspected and secure refuge to the hunted Israelites.

When Ximen recognised the wonted signal of his brethren, he crawled to the door; and, after the precaution of a Hebrew watchword, replied to in the same tongue, he gave admittance to the tall and stooping frame of the rich Elias.

"Worthy and excellent master!" said Ximen, after again securing the entrance; "what can bring the honoured and wealthy Elias to the chamber of the poor hireling?"

"My friend," answered the Jew; "call me not wealthy, nor honoured. For years I have dwelt within the city; safe and respected, even by the Moslem; verily and because I have purchased with jewel and treasure the protection of the king and the great men. But now, alas! in the sudden wrath of the heathen—ever imagining vain things—I have been summoned into the presence of their chief rabbi, and

only escaped the torture by a sum that ten years of labour and the sweat of my brow cannot replace. Ximen! the bitterest thought of all is, that the frenzy of one of our own tribe has brought this desolation upon Israel."

"My lord speaks riddles," said Ximen, with well-feigned astonishment in his glassy eyes.

"Why dost thou wind and turn, good Ximen?" said the Jew, shaking his head; "thou knowest well what my words drive at. Thy master is the pretended Almamen; and that recreant Israelite (if Israelite, indeed, still be one who hath forsaken the customs and the forms of his forefathers) is he who hath stirred up the Jews of Cordova and Guadix, and whose folly hath brought upon us these dread things. Holy Abraham! this Jew hath cost me more than fifty Nazarenes and a hundred Moors."

Ximen remained silent; and, the tongue of Elias being loosed by the recollection of his sad loss, the latter continued: "At the first, when the son of Issachar reappeared, and became a counsellor in the king's court, I indeed, who had led him, then a child, to the synagogue—for old Issachar was to me dear as a brother—recognised him by his eyes and voice: but I exulted in his craft and concealment; I believed he would work mighty things for his poor brethren, and would obtain, for his father's friend, the supplying of the king's wives and concubines with raiment and cloth of price. But years have passed: he hath not lightened our burthens; and, by the madness that hath of late come over him, heading the heathen armies, and drawing our brethren into danger and death, he hath deserved the curse of the synagogue, and the wrath of our whole race. I find, from our brethren who escaped the Inquisition by the surrender of their substance, that his unskilful and frantic schemes were the main pretext for the sufferings of the righteous under the Nazarene; and, again, the same schemes bring on us the same oppression from the Moor. Accursed be he, and may his name perish!"

Ximen sighed, but remained silent, conjecturing to what end the Jew would bring his invectives. He was not long in suspense. After a pause, Elias recommenced, in an altered and more careless tone, "He is rich, this son of Issachar—wondrous rich."

"He has treasures scattered over half the cities of Africa and the Orient," said Ximen.

"Thou seest, then, my friend, that thy master hath doomed me to a heavy loss. I possess his secret; I could give him up to the king's wrath; I could bring him to the death. But I am just and meek: let him pay my forfeiture, and I will forego mine anger."

"Thou dost not know him," said Ximen, alarmed at the thought of a repayment, which might grievously diminish his own heritage—of Almamen's effects in Granada.

"But if I threaten him with exposure?"

"Thou wouldst feed the fishes of the Darro," interrupted Ximen. "Nay, even now, if Almamen learn that thou knowest his birth and race, tremble! for thy days in the land will be numbered."

"Verily," exclaimed the Jew, in great alarm, "then have I fallen into the snare; for these lips revealed to him that knowledge."

"Then is the righteous Elias a lost man, within ten days from that in which Almamen returns to Granada. I know my master: and blood is to him as water."

"Let the wicked be consumed!" cried Elias, furiously stamping his foot, while fire flashed from his dark eyes, for the instinct of self-preservation made him fierce. "Not from me, however," he added, more calmly, "will come his danger. Know that there be more than a hundred Jews in this city, who have sworn his death; Jews who, flying hither from Cordova, have seen their parents murdered and their substance seized, and who behold, in the son of Issachar, the cause of the murder and the spoil. They have detected the impostor, and a hundred knives are whetting even now for his blood: let him look to it. Ximen, I have spoken to thee as the foolish speak; thou mayest betray me to thy lord; but from what I have learned of thee from our brethren, I have poured my heart into thy bosom without fear. Wilt thou betray Israel, or assist us to smite the traitor?"

Ximen mused for a moment, and his meditation conjured up the treasures of his master. He stretched forth his right hand to Elias; and when the Israelites parted, they were friends.

CHAPTER VI.

BOABDIL'S RETURN.—THE REAPPEARANCE OF GRANADA.

The third morning from this interview, a rumour reached Granada that Boabdil had been repulsed in his assault on the citadel of Salobrena with a severe loss; that Hernando del Pulgar had succeeded in conducting to its relief a considerable force; and that the army of Ferdinand was on its march against the Moorish king. In the midst of the excitement occasioned by these reports, a courier arrived to confirm their truth, and to announce the return of Boabdil.

At nightfall, the king, preceding his army, entered the city, and hastened to bury himself in the Alhambra. As he passed dejectedly into the women's apartments, his stern mother met him.

"My son," she said, bitterly, "dost thou return and not a conqueror?"

Before Boabdil could reply, a light and rapid step sped through the glittering arcades; and weeping with joy, and breaking all the Oriental restraints, Amine fell upon his bosom. "My beloved! my king! light of mine eyes! thou hast returned. Welcome—for thou art safe."

The different form of these several salutations struck Boabdil forcibly. "Thou seest, my mother," said he, "how great the contrast between those who love us from affection, and those who love us from pride. In adversity, God keep me, O my mother, from thy tongue!"

"But I love thee from pride, too," murmured Amine; "and for that reason is thine adversity dear to me, for it takes thee from the world to make thee more mine own and I am proud of the afflictions that my hero shares with his slave."

"Lights there, and the banquet!" cried the king, turning from his haughty mother; "we will feast and be merry while we may. My adored Amine, kiss me!"

Proud, melancholy, and sensitive as he was in that hour of reverse, Boabdil felt no grief: such balm has Love for our sorrows, when its wings are borrowed from the dove! And although the laws of the Eastern life confined to the narrow walls of a harem the sphere of Amine's gentle influence; although, even in romance, THE NATURAL compels us to portray her vivid and rich colours only in a faint and hasty sketch, yet still are left to the outline the loveliest and the noblest features of the sex—the spirit to arouse us to exertion, the softness to console us in our fall!

While Boabdil and the body of the army remained in the city, Muza, with a chosen detachment of the horse, scoured the country to visit the newly-acquired cities, and sustain their courage.

From this charge he was recalled by the army of Ferdinand, which once more poured down into the Vega, completely devastated its harvests, and then swept back to consummate the conquests of the revolted towns. To this irruption succeeded an interval of peace—the calm before the storm. From every part of Spain, the most chivalric and resolute of the Moors, taking advantage of the pause in the contest, flocked to Granada; and that city became the focus of all that paganism in Europe possessed of brave and determined spirits.

At length, Ferdinand, completing his conquests, and having refilled his treasury, mustered the whole force of his dominions—forty thousand foot, and ten thousand horse; and once more, and for the last time, appeared before the walls of Granada. A solemn and prophetic determination filled both besiegers and besieged: each felt that the crowning crisis was at hand.

CHAPTER VII.

THE CONFLAGRATION.—THE MAJESTY OF AN INDIVIDUAL PASSION IN THE MIDST OF HOSTILE THOUSANDS.

It was the eve of a great and general assault upon Granada, deliberately planned by the chiefs of the Christian army. The Spanish camp (the most gorgeous Christendom had ever known) gradually grew calm and hushed. The shades deepened—the stars burned forth more serene and clear. Bright, in that azure air, streamed the silken tents of the court, blazoned with heraldic devices, and crowned by gaudy banners, which, filled by a brisk and murmuring wind from the mountains, flaunted gaily on their gilded staves. In the centre of the camp rose the pavilion of the queen—a palace in itself. Lances made its columns; brocade and painted arras its walls; and the space covered by its numerous compartments would have contained the halls and outworks of an ordinary castle. The pomp of that camp realised the wildest dreams of Gothic, coupled with Oriental splendour; something worthy of a Tasso to have

imagined, or a Beckford to create. Nor was the exceeding costliness of the more courtly tents lessened in effect by those of the soldiery in the outskirts, many of which were built from boughs, still retaining their leaves—savage and picturesque huts;—as if, realising old legends, wild men of the woods had taken up the cross, and followed the Christian warriors against the swarthy followers of Termagaunt and Mahound. There, then, extended that mighty camp in profound repose, as the midnight threw deeper and longer shadows over the sward from the tented avenues and canvas streets. It was at that hour that Isabel, in the most private recess of her pavilion, was employed in prayer for the safety of the king, and the issue of the Sacred War. Kneeling before the altar of that warlike oratory, her spirit became rapt and absorbed from earth in the intensity of her devotions; and in the whole camp (save the sentries), the eyes of that pious queen were, perhaps, the only ones unclosed. All was profoundly still; her guards, her attendants, were gone to rest; and the tread of the sentinel, without that immense pavilion, was not heard through the silken walls.

It was then that Isabel suddenly felt a strong grasp upon her shoulder, as she still knelt by the altar. A faint shriek burst from her lips; she turned, and the broad curved knife of an eastern warrior gleamed close before her eyes.

"Hush! utter a cry, breathe more loudly than thy wont, and, queen though thou art, in the centre of swarming thousands, thou diest!"

Such were the words that reached the ear of the royal Castilian, whispered by a man of stern and commanding, though haggard aspect.

"What is thy purpose? wouldst thou murder me?" said the queen, trembling, perhaps for the first time, before a mortal presence.

"Thy life is safe, if thou strivest not to delude or to deceive me. Our time is short—answer me. I am Almamen, the Hebrew. Where is the hostage rendered to thy hands? I claim my child. She is with thee—I know it. In what corner of thy camp?"

"Rude stranger!" said Isabel, recovering somewhat from her alarm,— "thy daughter is removed, I trust for ever, from thine impious reach. She is not within the camp."

"Lie not, Queen of Castile," said Almamen, raising his knife; "for days and weeks I have tracked thy steps, followed thy march, haunted even thy slumbers, though men of mail stood as guards around them; and I know that my daughter has been with thee. Think not I brave this danger without resolves the most fierce and dread. Answer me, where is my child?"

"Many days since," said Isabel, awed, despite herself, by her strange position,— "thy daughter left the camp for the house of God. It was her own desire. The Saviour hath received her into His fold."

Had a thousand lances pierced his heart, the vigour and energy of life could scarce more suddenly have deserted Almamen. The rigid muscles of his countenance relaxed at once, from resolve and menace, into unutterable horror, anguish, and despair. He recoiled several steps; his knees trembled violently; he seemed stunned by a death-blow. Isabel, the boldest and haughtiest of her sex, seized that moment of reprieve; she sprang forward, darted through the draperies into the apartments occupied by her train, and, in a moment, the pavilion resounded with her cries for aid. The sentinels were aroused; retainers sprang from their pillows; they heard the cause of the alarm; they made to the spot; when, ere they reached its partition of silk, a vivid and startling blaze burst forth upon them. The tent was on fire. The materials fed the flame like magic. Some of the guards had yet the courage to dash forward; but the smoke and the glare drove them back, blinded and dizzy. Isabel herself had scarcely time for escape, so rapid was the conflagration. Alarmed for her husband, she rushed to his tent—to find him already awakened by the noise, and issuing from its entrance, his drawn sword in his hand. The wind, which had a few minutes before but curled the triumphant banners, now circulated the destroying flame. It spread from tent to tent, almost as a flash of lightning that shoots along neighbouring clouds. The camp was in one continued blaze, ere a man could dream of checking the conflagration.

Not waiting to hear the confused tale of his royal consort, Ferdinand, exclaiming, "The Moors have done this—they will be on us!" ordered the drums to beat and the trumpets to sound, and hastened in person, wrapped merely in his long mantle, to alarm his chiefs. While that well-disciplined and veteran army, fearing every moment the rally of the foe, endeavoured rapidly to form themselves into some kind of order, the flame continued to spread till the whole heavens were illumined. By its light, cuirass and helmet glowed, as in the furnace, and the armed men seemed rather like life-like and lurid meteors than human forms. The city of Granada was brought near to them by the intensity of the glow; and, as a detachment of cavalry spurred from the camp to meet the anticipated surprise of the Paynims, they saw, upon the walls and roofs of Granada, the Moslems clustering and their spears gleaming. But, equally amazed with the Christians, and equally suspicious of craft and design, the Moors did not issue

from their gates. Meanwhile the conflagration, as rapid to die as to begin, grew fitful and feeble; and the night seemed to fall with a melancholy darkness over the ruin of that silken city.

Ferdinand summoned his council. He had now perceived it was no ambush of the Moors. The account of Isabel, which, at last, he comprehended; the strange and almost miraculous manner in which Almamen had baffled his guards, and penetrated to the royal tent; might have aroused his Gothic superstition, while it relieved his more earthly apprehensions, if he had not remembered the singular, but far from supernatural dexterity with which Eastern warriors and even robbers continued then, as now, to elude the most vigilant precautions and baffle the most wakeful guards; and it was evident that the fire which burned the camp of an army had been kindled merely to gratify the revenge, or favour the escape of an individual. Shaking, therefore, from his kingly spirit the thrill of superstitious awe that the greatness of the disaster, when associated with the name of a sorcerer, at first occasioned, he resolved to make advantage out of misfortune itself. The excitement, the wrath of the troops, produced the temper most fit for action.

"And Heaven," said the King of Spain to his knights and chiefs, as they assembled round him, "has, in this conflagration, announced to the warriors of the Cross, that henceforth their camp shall be the palaces of Granada! Woe to the Moslem with to-morrow's sun!"

Arms clanged, and swords leaped from their sheaths, as the Christian knights echoed the anathema—"WOE TO THE MOSLEM!"

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK LEILA OR, THE SIEGE OF GRANADA, BOOK IV ***

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