
GUSTAVO ADOLFO BÉCQUER
ROMANTIC LEGENDS OF SPAIN

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ROMANTIC LEGENDS OF SPAIN

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PREFACE

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A WORD regarding the circumstances under which this translation was made will be pardoned by all children of dear mothers.

Mrs. Cornelia Frances Bates (1826-1908), a graduate of Mount Holyoke in the days of Mary Lyon and the widow of a Congregational minister, took up the study of Spanish at the age of seventy-one. Until her death ten years later, the proverbial ten years of “labor and sorrow,” her Spanish readings and translations were a keen intellectual delight. Her Spanish Bible, from which she had committed many passages to memory, was found at her death no less worn than her English one. Even a few hours before dying, she repeated in Spanish, without the failure of a syllable, the Shepherd’s Psalm and the Lord’s Prayer.

So youthful was her spirit that, of the various modern Spanish works with which she became acquainted, nothing fascinated her so much as Becquer’s strange, romantic tales. The wilder they were, the brighter would be the eager face, under its soft white cap, bent over the familiar little green volumes and the great red dictionary. Seeing the pleasure she took in these legends and learning that no complete English translation existed, I suggested that we unite in a “Becquer Book.” Her full share of the work was promptly done; mine was delayed; and the volume—which we had meant to inscribe to my sister—becomes her own memorial.

Gratitude for helpful suggestions is due to the late Mr. Frederick Gulick of Auburndale, Mass., formerly of San Sebastian, and to Señorita Carolina Marcial, formerly of Seville and now of Wellesley College. Especial and most cordial acknowledgment is made of the critical reading given the entire manuscript by Miss Alice H. Bushée of the *Colegio Internacional*, Madrid.

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GUSTAVO ADOLFO BECQUER

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THE writer of these tales was a young poet, oppressed by illness, care and poverty. His brief life held many troubles. Born in Seville, February 17, 1836, of a distinguished family that came to Andalusia from Flanders at about the end of the sixteenth century, he was but five years old, the fourth of eight little sons, when he lost his father. The bereavement was greater than anyone knew, for Don José Dominguez Becquer, a genre painter of repute, could have given this imaginative child, a genius in germ, parental sympathy and guidance in an unusual degree. Less than five years later, the mother died, and the disposition of the orphans became a puzzling problem for relatives and friends. Gustavo, who had already attended the day school of San Antonio Abad, was admitted, through the efforts of an uncle, to the *Colegio de San Telmo*, a naval academy, maintained by the government, on the banks of the Guadalquivir. This famous school of Seville was originally founded by the companions of Columbus in gratitude to St. Elmo, patron of mariners. Here Gustavo found a friend of congenial tastes, Narciso Campillo, with whom he composed and presented before their admiring mates what Señor Campillo, who also made a name for himself in Spanish letters, has described as “a fearful and extravagant drama.” But Gustavo had enjoyed barely a year of this new life when Isabella II suppressed the academy, bestowing building and grounds on her newly wedded sister, the Duchesse de Montpensier. Visitors to modern Seville know well the *Palacio de Santelmo*, with the

fountains playing in its marble courts, with its gardens of orange trees, palms and aloes, of trellised roses and luxuriant tropic shrubs; but who gives a thought there to the exiled boy thrown again, at the age of ten, upon the chances of the world?

His godmother, Doña Manuela Monchay, opened her doors to the waif, and in her comfortable home he dwelt for the next eight years. His schooling was over, but he read his way through Doña Manuela's library and, at fourteen, entered the studio of a Seville painter; here for two years he trained his talent for drawing. Then he changed to the rival studio, that of his father's brother, who was sufficiently impressed by the lad's literary promise to have him taught a little Latin. Meanwhile his godmother, childless and well-to-do, was urging him to adopt a mercantile career. Had he consented, it is supposed that she would have made him her heir, and his manhood, instead of the exhausting struggle it was for bread and shelter, might have been, from the worldly point of view, prosperous enough. But the visionary youth, who, says his friend Correa,[1] "had learned to draw while he was yet learning to write, whose unbounded passion for reading had given him wider horizons than those of book-keeping, and who could never do a sum in mental arithmetic," would not betray his ideal. While his prudent godmother was making her own plans for his future, he was composing with Campillo the opening cantos of an epic on *The Conquest of Seville*, or wandering alone on the banks of the Guadalquivir, his "majestic Bétis, the river of nymphs, naiads and poets, which, crowned with belfries and laurels, flows to the sea from a crystal

amphora.” In the shade of the white poplars he would lie and dream “of an independent, blissful life, like that of the bird, which is born to sing, while God provides it with food, ... that tranquil life of the poet, which glows with a soft lustre from generation to generation.” And when that life should be over, he saw his grateful city, the Sultana of Andalusia, laying her poet down “to dream the golden dream of immortality on the banks of the Bétis, whose praise I should have sung in splendid odes, in that very spot where I used to go so often to hear the sweet murmur of its waves.” His pensive fancy loved to picture that white cross under the poplars whose green and silver leaves, as they rustled in the wind, would seem to be praying for his soul, while the birds in their branches would carol at dawn a joyous resurrection hymn. And when the river reeds and the wild morning-glories, his favorite “blue morning-glories with a disk of carmine at the heart,” hovered over by “golden insects with wings of light,” should have grown up about the marble, hiding his time-blurred name with a leafy curtain, what matter? “Who would not know that I was sleeping there?” And so, to escape commercial drudgery and realize these fair visions, the young Andalusian, at eighteen, the mid-point of his life, with no more than sufficed for the costs of the journey to Madrid, started forth on his quest of glory.

It may truly be said of Becquer that, like Hakluyt’s staunch old worthies, he was “content to take his adventure gladly.” Nobody ever knew how narrow were the straits of those first years in Madrid. He had to turn his hand to anything, from odds and ends of journalism to a day’s job of fresco-painting. Homesick, hungry, ill, he kept through it all

a brave buoyancy of spirits and a manly reticence as to his sufferings. “He was never known,” testifies Correa, “to complain of his hard life or his physical distresses, nor to curse his fate. Silent as long as he was unhappy, he would find voice only to express a moment’s pleasure.” He made fun of his troubles, which he, more easily than grosser souls, could indeed forget in the ecstatic contemplation of beauty or in giving form to the crowding fantasies that clamored in his brain. A friend, more concerned over his privations than was Becquer himself, found him a position as copyist in an office of one of the state departments at a salary of one hundred and fifty dollars a year. The poet, more out of gratitude for the intended kindness than from any sense of personal relief, for he would rather starve body than mind, undertook the irksome employment. But the national finances, under the drain of the Carlist wars and the popular uprisings and official corruption of Isabella’s disastrous reign, had become so embarrassed that economy in the public service was imperative, and Becquer was pointed out —perhaps, after all, by his good angel—for a victim. In the *Dirección de Bienes Nacionales*, as in other departments, superfluous men were to be weeded out. The Director, as chance would have it, came into the office one day when all the clerks were gathered about Becquer’s stool, eagerly looking over his shoulders, lost in admiration of the sketches that his facile pen was turning off. The Director, joining the group and peering with the rest, demanded: “What is this?” Not recognizing the voice, the culprit, absorbed in the joy of art, innocently answered: “This is Ophelia, plucking the leaves from her garland. That old uncle is a grave-digger.

Over there”—At this point the awful silence smote his senses and he looked up only to meet the verdict: “Here is one that can be spared.”

But although Becquer thus failed to serve his country with proper zeal in the only direct opportunity she afforded him, the touch of the capital, with its sense of impending crisis, its call for patriotic leadership, had given a new turn to his dreams. Or perhaps it would be truer to say that the Gothic cathedrals, old castles and ruined abbeys so abundant in Castile, though not in the Crowned City itself, had fastened the hold of the feudal world, with its military ideals, upon his imagination. In these days he longed—or fancied that he longed—to be “a thunderbolt of war,” to exert a mighty influence on the destinies of Spain, so that every revolution of the future might be, as it were, a personification of himself, but most of all he indulged his musings in the glorious picture of a warrior’s death and burial. He would have chosen, his “thirst for triumphs and acclaim assuaged, to fall in battle, hearing as the last sound of earth the shrill clamor of the trumpets of my valiant hosts,—to be borne upon a shield, wrapped in the folds of my tattered banner, emblem of a hundred victories, finding the peace of the grave in the depths of one of those holy cloisters where dwells eternal silence and to which the centuries lend majesty and a mysterious, indefinable hue.” And then the artist in him revelled in all the detailed beauty of that visioned tomb “bathed in dusky shadow,” on which his statue, “of richest, transparent alabaster,” with sword on breast and couchant lion at the feet, was to sleep an august

sleep under the hushed watch of long-robed, praying angels.

Meanwhile, bad lodging and uncertain fare were telling on his delicate constitution. In one respect, Becquer was always fortunate—in friends. Early in his Madrid life he had won the faithful affection of Correa, another young literary aspirant leading a hand-to-mouth existence, but of vigorous physique and practical capabilities. When in the third year of his struggle Becquer fell seriously ill—“horribly” ill, says Correa—this devoted comrade not only nursed him through, but, finding among the poet’s papers a long legend purporting to be an East Indian tradition, managed to get it published in *La Crónica*,—the beginning of success. This legend, *The Chieftain of the Crimson Hands*, has to do with the expiation of a fratricide by a pilgrimage up the Ganges to its far sources in the Himalayas, that in the most secret of those sacred springs the clinging bloodstains might be washed away. But after forty moons of weary travel across the broad plains of India up into the very shadow of the dread Himalayan wall, a law of the pilgrimage was broken, and Vishnu could no longer shield the slayer from the wrath of Siva, who, himself the Destroyer, resents all other destruction as an infringement on his great prerogative.

Another Indian subject, *The Creation*, on which Becquer had tried his hand with a peculiarly light, ironic touch, yielded a more characteristic result. The fable tells how Brahma, utterly bored by the contemplation of his own perfections, took to chemistry. The astonished cherubs fluttered on their thousand-colored wings about the smoking, roaring tower where the Deity had his laboratory

and where his eight arms and sixteen hands were all kept busy with managing his test-tubes and retorts, for he was shaping worlds to people space. But one day, tired of his experiments, he went out to take the air and, for all his omniscience, absent-mindedly failed to lock the door. In swarmed the cherubs, ripe for mischief, and lost no time in turning everything topsy-turvy. They flung the parchments into the fire, pulled the stoppers out of the flasks, overturned the great glass vessels, breaking not a few of them and spilling their contents, and wound up their meddling by blowing a ridiculous, soap-bubble planet of their own. This imperfect globe, all awry, with flattened poles and with contradictory elements, heat and cold, joy and grief, good and evil, life and death, at war within itself, went rolling so grotesquely on its axis, that the peals of cherubic laughter brought Brahma hurrying back. In his vexation he was about to crush that preposterous, misformed world, our world, but the appealing cries of the celestial children moved him to let them toss their absurd toy out into the ether among his own beautiful, self-consistent, harmonious spheres. Ever since, the cherubs have been trundling it about the sky, to the amazement of the other planets and the despair of us poor mortals; but it will not last. “There is nothing more tender nor more terrible than the hands of little children; in these the plaything cannot long endure.”

It was not literature like this that the Spanish periodicals were seeking in the stormy fifties. It was a time of the keenest political strife, when even poets and novelists were bought by one party or another and made to fight in the

midst of the newspaper arena. But no extremity could bring Becquer to be a politician's tool. "Incapable of hatred," says Correa, "he never placed his enviable powers as a writer at the service of animosity ... nor was his noble character fitted for adulation or assiduous servility." Yet in his own way he played the patriot by earnest effort, continued unceasingly throughout his life, to assist in recording by pen and pencil the architectural beauties and devout traditions of Spain before these should have utterly perished under the march of progress. Putting politics out of his mind as a matter of little moment, Becquer undertook, with a few kindred spirits, what might have proved, with adequate support, a monumental work on the Spanish churches. As it was, there appeared only one volume, to which he contributed the Introduction, the chapters on the famous Toledo monastery, *San Juan de los Reyes*, and a number of drawings. In his story *Three Dates*, more descriptive than narrative, we catch a few fleeting glimpses of him, always with his sketch-book, pursuing his artistic and archæological researches in Toledo. A similar errand, in all probability, took him to Soria, an ancient city peculiarly rich in mediæval buildings, situated on the Douro, to the north-east of Madrid. In Soria he found several of his legends and, less fortunately, a wife, Carta Estéban y Navarro. The marriage, which took place about 1861, soon resulted in separation. Becquer retained possession of the children, two baby boys, for whom he tenderly cared, as best he could in his Bohemian life, until the last.

It would seem to have been the unwonted sense of an assured income that gave him courage to undertake the

support of a wife, for in this year 1861 his constant friend Correa obtained for him a position on the staff of a new Madrid daily, *El Contemporáneo*, a journal into whose labors he threw himself with a zest far beyond his strength and which he came to love with a touching enthusiasm. "*El Contemporáneo* is not for me a newspaper like any other; its columns are yourselves, my friends, my comrades in hope or disappointment, in failure or triumph, in joy or bitterness." It was in *El Contemporáneo* that many of his legends appeared. But even as he thus became more and more closely identified with the life of Madrid, homesickness grew upon him for his own Andalusia "with her golden days and luminous, transparent nights,"—for his own Seville, "with her Giralda of lace-work mirrored in the trembling Guadalquivir, ... with her barred windows and her serenades, her iron door-screens and her night watchmen that chant the hour, her shrines and her stories, her brawls and her music, her tranquil nights and fiery afternoons, her rosy dawns and azure twilights,—Seville, with all the traditions that twenty centuries have heaped upon her brow, with all the pageantry and festal beauty of her southern nature, with all the poetry that imagination lends to a beloved memory."

He re-visited Seville, if *The Tavern of the Cats* can be taken as testimony, at about this time, and may so have renewed intercourse with his family, for in 1862 his next older brother, Valeriano, who, following in their father's path, had entered on a promising career as a painter of Andalusian types, came to him in Madrid. Valeriano, too, was of frail physique; he, too, had been unhappy in his

marriage; yet the brothers affectionately joined such forces as they had and set up, with the little children, a makeshift for a home. But in a year or two some wasting illness, apparently the early stages of consumption, forced the poet to leave “the Court” and seek renewal of health in the mountain valley of Veruela. During this sojourn he gathered several legends of the Moncayo, that precipitous granite wall—known to Martial as the haunt of Æolus—which bars Old Castile from Aragon and divides the basin of the Douro, the river of Soria, from that of the Ebro, the river of Saragossa. To Becquer its snowy crests looked “like the waves of a motionless, gigantic sea.” But the main literary result of that retirement is found in the series of eight exquisite letters, *From My Cell*, the high-water mark of Becquer’s prose, sent back to *El Contemporáneo*. In these he gives a vivid, humorous account of his journey, by rail to Tudela, by diligence to Tarazona, and by mule up the Moncayo to Veruela, in whose walled and towered old Cistercian abbey he found an austere refuge. He had his Shakespeare with him and his Byron, but the event of the day, in the earlier weeks of his banishment, was the arrival of the mounted postman with *El Contemporáneo*. He could not wait for it in the Gothic cloisters, but would wander halfway down the poplar avenue to the Black Cross of Veruela and, seated at its foot on one of the marble steps, would wait sometimes the afternoon long listening for the far-off beat of the horse’s hoofs. The journal came to him like a personal greeting from the life he had left behind. He loved even the odor of the damp paper and the printer’s ink, an odor that brought back to him “the incessant pounding

and creaking of the presses" and all the eager activity of those hurrying nights in which the words "came palpitating from the pen." But with sunset the feverish memories of Madrid fell from him and his thoughts took on the serenity of faith, "the faith in something grander, in a coming, unknown destiny beyond this life, the faith in eternity." Again he found himself dreaming of death, but not now of a poet's cherished grave beside the Guadalquivir, not now of a great patriot's tomb in some sublime cathedral, but of a mound in a village burial-plot, forgotten under nettles, thistles and grass. Long tormented by insomnia, it seemed sweet to him to slumber in such untroubled peace, "wrapt in a light cloak of earth," without having over him "even the weight of a sepulchral stone." As the mountain air brought strength, he began to ramble over the Moncayo, sketching and gathering up traditions, while through *El Contemporáneo* he passionately urged the claims of the past, and proposed the state organization of archæological expeditions in groups made up of an artist, an architect and a man of letters, to explore the provinces for their hidden, perishing traces of that bygone Spain of Roman, Visigoth, Moor, mailed knight and saintly vision. Bent, as ever, on doing his part in this unprized service, he wrote out, in the quiet and leisure that had been so seldom his, masterly descriptions of the market-place of Tarazona, and of the peasant-women of the Amazonian hamlet of Añón. In the sixth letter he narrates, with a pen almost unendurably graphic, the recent doing to death of a reputed hereditary witch, a wretched old woman whom the superstitious Aragonese peasants had, in very truth, hunted to a peak of the Moncayo off which, bleeding

from stones and knives, she had been thrust down the precipice. In the seventh and eighth letters he goes on to relate, in his most attractive manner, two local legends of witchcraft,—one of the necromancer who built in a night the castle of Trasmoz, and one of the pious priest who exorcised the witches that had come, in course of time, to make its ruined tower their tryst, only to have his work undone by the girlish vanity of his niece. She tampered with the holy water and restored to the witches the freedom of the castle in return for their kind offices in scrambling down her chimney, gray cats, black cats, all manner of cats, the night before a festival, and stitching up for her such fascinating finery that she forthwith won a husband.

His brother followed Becquer to Veruela and together they made trial of the neighboring Baths of Fitero in Navarre, but they were in Madrid again by 1865, often sorely put to it in the effort to carry the costs of their little household. If one of the children fell ill and a doctor must be called in, a friend might be entreated for an emergency loan of three or four dollars; but as a rule these invalid brothers bore their burden unassisted. Valeriano drew woodcuts for such market as he could find, talking, says Correa, of “the great pictures he would paint as soon as he could get the canvases,” and Gustavo translated the trashy French novels that were in demand, writing, in the intervals of such hack work, an occasional fantasy of delicate beauty, as *Withered Leaves*, and ever looking forward to the time when he should have golden hours of calm in which he might give his higher and more mystical conceptions fitting utterance. Twice it seemed as if the way were opening. Isabella’s last

prime minister, Luis González Bravo, became interested in the poet and made him censor of novels. Becquer immediately availed himself of the comparative leisure thus afforded to gather together a volume of his poems, which González Bravo was proposing to print at his own expense. Then burst the long-gathering storm of 1868, the genial, unprincipled queen was dethroned, and her prime minister of literary tastes fled to the frontier with such precipitation that the precious manuscript entrusted to his keeping was lost. Becquer, with that scrupulous honor well known to his friends, promptly resigned his censorship; Valeriano's pension for the study of national types was withdrawn; and the year 1869 saw them again in straits. Yet they took daily comfort in their close brotherly love and their artistic sympathies, even though, in those troublous times, their joint enthusiasm for the beauties of Toledo once landed them in jail. They were then temporarily residing, with their little family, in their favorite city, "the city sombre and melancholy *par excellence*," and had sallied out, one evening, to contemplate its ghostly charms by moonlight. Their disordered dress, long beards, excited gestures and eager talk roused the suspicion of a brace of Civil Guards, who, drawing near and overhearing such dangerous terms as "apses, squinches, ogives," seized the conspirators without more ado and lodged them, for their further artistic illumination, in one of the historic dungeons of Toledo. The next morning the editorial room of *El Contemporáneo* resounded with merriment as a letter from Becquer went the rounds,—a letter "all full," says Correa, "of sketches representing in detail the probable passion and death of

both innocents.” The entire staff united in a written protest and explanation to the jailer, and it was long remembered in that office with what shining eyes and peals of laughter the delivered prisoners, on their return, set out their adventure in exuberant wit of words and pencil.

The second opportunity came with the founding of that now famous periodical, *La Ilustración de Madrid*; but it came too late. Becquer was appointed director and looked to for regular contributions, while Valeriano furnished many of the illustrations. The management had large schemes in hand, including a *Library of Great Authors*, for which Becquer began a translation of Dante. But now, when a certain degree of freedom, relief and recognition had been at last attained, the strained and fretted cord of life gave way. The first number of *La Ilustración* appeared January 12, 1870. On September 23, Valeriano died in his brother’s arms. On December 22, the poet, surrounded by devoted friends to whom, with his failing breath, he commended his children, sank exhausted into that mysterious repose on which, from boyhood, his musings had so often dwelt. But his mocking destiny was not yet content. His body was buried in one of those crowded city cemeteries always so repugnant to him, San Nicolás in Madrid. His younger son did not live to manhood; the elder, his namesake, went wrong.

His loyal friends, after raising what money they could for the children, gathered together and published in three small volumes the most characteristic of Becquer’s writings,—a series of lyrical poems,[2] the letters *From My Cell*,[3] some legends and tales of unequal merit;[4] and a few

miscellaneous articles[3] on architecture, literature and the like.

The *Rimas* almost immediately established Becquer's fame. He is counted to-day among the chief lyrists of the nineteenth century. These poignant snatches of song pass, in theme, from life to love and from love to death. So far as they give, or purport to give, a history of the poet's heart, they tell of passion at first requited, then of estrangement and despair. It is supposed that a certain Julia Espín y Guillén, later the wife of Don Benigno Quiroga Ballesteros, a living Spaniard of distinction, figures to some extent in the *Rimas*. The house of her father, director of the orchestra in the *Teatro Reál*, was a resort of young musicians, artists and men of letters, and here Becquer, during his earlier years in Madrid, was a frequent guest. There seems little doubt that his youthful devotion was given, though in silence, to this disdainful brunette, but the poems likewise tell of a love "of gold and snow." There is a green-eyed maiden, too, whom he essays to comfort for this peculiarity,—though, indeed, eyes of jewel green, strangely fascinating, are not rare in Spain. He may have had her in mind in writing his legend of *The Emerald Eyes*. And one of the most beautiful lyrics follows out the slight thread of story in *Three Dates*, representing the poet as gazing night after night up from that ancient Toledo square, with its glorified rubbish-heap, to the ogive windows of the convent where the nun who had so thrilled his imagination was immured. Over the spirit of Becquer, to whom the immaterial was ever more real than the material, no one actual woman held lasting sway. He tells the truth of the matter in his eleventh lyric:

I am black and comely; my lips are glowing;
I am passion; my heart is hot;
The rapture of life in my veins is flowing.
For me thou callest?—I call thee not.

Pale is my forehead and gold my tresses;
Endless comforts are locked in me,
Treasure of hearthside tendernesses.
'Tis I whom thou seekest?—Nay, not thee.

I am a dream, afar, forbidden.
Vague as the mist on the mountain-brow,
A bodiless glory, haunting, hidden;
I cannot love thee.—Oh, come! come thou!

Becquer himself was wont to ascribe the premature death of poets, that breaking of the harp while yet the golden chords have yielded but their least of melodies, to a restless fulness of life, the imprisoned vapor that bursts the vessel. This appears with pathetic emphasis in the *Introduction* that he wrote, not long before his death, for a projected volume of tales and fantasies. He felt that he must rid his fevered brain of their importunity, but he had begun to give expression to only one, *The Woman of Stone*, when death broke the magic pen. The story remains a fragment, [5] not passing beyond its opening pages of rich artistic description, nor can its course be clearly conjectured even though in *The Kiss*, and in the closing passages of his *Literary Letters to a Woman*, his imagination hovers about the theme. He left, like Hawthorne, many tantalizing titles that suggest the greatness of our loss. That drama on "The

Brothers of Sorrow," that poem on the discovery of America, those Andalusian novels on "The Last Minstrel," "To Live or Not to Live," those Toledo legends on "The Foundress of Convents," "*El Cristo de la Vega*," "The Angel Musicians," those fantasies on "Light and Snow," "The Diana of the Indies," "The Life of the Dead,"—these are but a few of the conceptions that teemed in his mind but found no outlet to the world. It seemed to his friends, who knew the man and had listened to his marvellous talk, that the scanty handful of tales they could collect from newspapers here and there made so inadequate a showing as almost to misrepresent his powers. Yet however thwarted and wronged by circumstance this harvest of his imagination may be, it deserves attention if only for its finer and less obvious qualities. Becquer charges himself with a melancholy temperament, and seldom, in fact, do we find in these pages the blither humor playing in *The Set of Emeralds*; but the occasional morbidness of his tone is due rather, it would seem, to illness and its consequent despondency than to any native quality of his thought. He deals too much in the horrible for modern taste, but he cannot claim, like Baudelaire, to have "invented a new shudder." Tales grounded in folk-lore are bound to contain elements of superstitious terror, and the affinity of these legends in that respect is rather with German balladry and the earlier romanticism in general than with the genius of Poe. Becquer's truer kinship is with Hawthorne, whose outer faculty of close and minute observation is his as well as the inner preoccupation with mystery and symbol. All the senses of this young Spaniard seem to have been of the

finest, his exquisite hearing entering into these tales as effectively as his keen sight; but he is most himself in presence of the dim, the fugitive, the impalpable. His mind was essentially mystical. His religion was not without its human side. In brooding on the inequalities of the mortal lot, he finds comfort in the reflection: “God, though invisible, yet holds a hand outreached to lift a little the burden that presses on the poor.” But faith in him was of the very fibre of imagination. He even lent a certain sympathetic credence to the mediæval legends of the Church, at least when the spell of Toledo was upon him. “Outside the place that guards their memory,” he says, “far from the precincts which still preserve their traces, and where we seem yet to breathe the atmosphere of the ages that gave them being, traditions lose their poetic mystery, their inexplicable hold upon the soul. At a distance we question, we analyze, we doubt; but there faith, like a secret revelation, illuminates the spirit, and we believe.” In a letter from Veruela to a lady of his acquaintance, a letter relating a brief but lovely legend[6] of an appearance of the Virgin, he asserts: “Only the hand of faith can touch the delicate flowers of tradition.” “God,” he elsewhere says, “is the glowing, eternal centre of all beauty.”

The writer of these tales described himself thus: “I have a special predilection for all that which cannot be vulgarized by the touch and the judgment of the indifferent multitude. If I were to paint landscapes, I would paint them without figures. I like the fleeting ideas that slip away without leaving a trace on the understandings of practical folk, like a drop of water over a marble shelf. In the cities I visit, I seek

the narrow, lonely streets; in the edifices I examine, the dusky nooks and corners of the inner courts, where grass springs up, and moisture enriches with its patches of greenish color the parched tint of the wall; in the women who impress me, the hint of mystery that I think I see shining with wavering light in the depths of their eyes, like the glimmer of a lamp that burns unknown and unsuspected in the sanctuary of their hearts; even in the blossoms of a shrub, I believe there is for me something more potent and exciting in the one that hides beneath the leaves and there, concealed, fills the air with fragrance, unprofaned by human gaze. In all this I find a certain unsullied purity of feelings and of things."

Becquer goes on to admit that this "pronounced inclination sometimes degenerates into extravagances."

FOREWORD

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In dim corners of my mind there sleep, hidden away and naked, the freakish children of my imagination, waiting in silence for art to clothe them with language that it may present them in decency upon the stage of the world.

My Muse, as fruitful as the marriage-bed of poverty, and like those parents who bring to birth more children than they have means to rear, is ever conceiving and bearing in the mystic sanctuary of the intelligence, peopling it with innumerable creations, to which not my utmost effort nor all the years that are left to me of life, will be sufficient to give form.

And here within me I sometimes feel them, all unclad and shapeless as they are, huddled and twisted together in confusion indescribable, stirring and living with a dim, strange life, similar to that of those myriad germs which seethe and quiver in eternal generation within the secret places of the earth, without winning strength enough to reach the surface and transform themselves, at the kiss of the sun, into flowers and fruits.

They go with me, destined to die with me, leaving no more trace than is left by a midnight dream which the morning cannot recall. On certain occasions and in face of this terrible idea, there rises in them the instinct of life, and trooping in formidable though silent multitudes they seek tumultuously a way of escape from amid the shadows of their dwelling-place forth to the light. But alas! between the world of idea and the world of form yawns an abyss which only the word can bridge, and the word, timid and slothful, refuses to aid their efforts. Mute, dim and powerless, after the unavailing struggle they fall back into their old passivity. So fall, inert, into the hollows by the wayside, when the wind ceases, the yellow leaves which the autumn storm blew up.

These seditions on the part of the rebel sons of my imagination explain some of my attacks of fever; they are the cause, unrecognized by science, of my excitements and depressions. And thus, although in ill estate, have I lived till now, walking among the indifferent throngs of men with this silent tempest in my head. Thus have I lived till now, but all things reach an end, and to these must be put their period.

Sleeplessness and fantasy go on begetting and producing with monstrous fecundity. Their creations, crowded already

like the feeble plants of a conservatory, strive one with another for the expanding of their unreal existences, fighting for the drops of memory as for the scanty moisture of a sterile land. It is needful to open a channel for the deep waters, which, daily fed from a living spring, will at last break down the dike.

Go forth, then! Go forth and live with the only life I can give you. My intellect shall supply you with nutriment enough to make you palpable; I will clothe you, though in rags, so that you need not blush for nakedness. I would like to fashion for each one of you a marvellous stuff woven of exquisite phrases, in which you could fold yourselves with pride, as in mantles of purple. I would like to engrave the form that must contain you as the golden vase which holds a precious ointment is engraved. But this may not be.

And yet, I need to rest. I need, just as the body through whose swollen veins the life-blood surges with phlethoric force, is bled, to clear my brain, inadequate to the lodging of so many grotesqueries.

Then gather here, like the misty trail that marks the passing of an unknown comet, like atoms dispersed in an embryonic world which Death fans through the air, until the Creator shall have spoken the *fiat lux* that divides light from darkness.

I would not that in my sleepless nights you still should pass before my eyes in weird procession, begging me with gestures and contortions to draw you out from the limbo in which you lead these phantom, thin existences into the life of reality. I would not that at the breaking of this harp already old and cracked the unknown notes which it

contained should perish with the instrument. I would interest myself a little in the world which lies without me, free at last to withdraw my eyes from this other world that I carry within my head. Common sense, which is the barrier of dreamland, is beginning to give way, and the people of the different camps mingle and grow confused. It costs me an effort to know which things I have dreamed and which have actually happened. My affections are divided between real persons and phantasms of the imagination. My memory shifts from one category to the other the names of women who have died and the dates of days that have passed, with days and women that have existed only in my mind. I must put an end to this by flinging you all forth from my brain once and forever.

If to die is to sleep, I would sleep in peace in the night of death, without your coming to be my nightmare, cursing me for having doomed you to nothingness before you had been born. Go, then, to the world at whose touch you came into being, and linger there, as the echo which life’s joys and griefs, hopes and struggles, found in one soul that passed across the earth.

Perchance very soon must I pack my portmanteau for the great journey. At any moment the spirit may free herself from the material that she may rise to purer air. I would not, when this moment comes, take with me, as the trivial baggage of a mountebank, the treasure of tinsel and tatters that my Fancy has been heaping up in the rubbish chambers of the brain.

ROMANTIC LEGENDS OF SPAIN

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MASTER PÉREZ THE ORGANIST

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In Seville, in the very portico of Santa Inés, and while, on Christmas Eve, I was waiting for the Midnight Mass to begin, I heard this tradition from a lay-sister of the convent.

As was natural, after hearing it, I waited impatiently for the ceremony to commence, eager to be present at a miracle.

Nothing could be less miraculous, however, than the organ of Santa Inés, and nothing more vulgar than the insipid motets with which that night the organist regaled us.

On going out from the mass, I could not resist asking the lay-sister mischievously:

“How does it happen that the organ of Master Pérez is so unmusical at present?”

“Why!” replied the old woman. “Because it isn’t his.”

“Not his? What has become of it?”

“It fell to pieces from sheer old age, a number of years ago.”

“And the soul of the organist?”

“It has not appeared again since the new organ was set up in place of his own.”

If anyone of my readers, after perusing this history, should be moved to ask the same question, now he knows why the notable miracle has not continued into our own time.

I.