



POEMS

GEORGE ELIOT

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THE SPANISH GYPSY

BOOK I.

'Tis the warm South, where Europe spreads her lands
Like fretted leaflets, breathing on the deep:
Broad-breasted Spain, leaning with equal love
On the Mid Sea that moans with memories,
And on the untravelled Ocean's restless tides.
This river, shadowed by the battlements
And gleaming silvery towards the northern sky,
Feeds the famed stream that waters Andalus
And loiters, amorous of the fragrant air,
By Cordova and Seville to the bay
Fronting Algarva and the wandering flood
Of Guadiana. This deep mountain gorge
Slopes widening on the olive-plumed plains
Of fair Granada: one far-stretching arm
Points to Elvira, one to eastward heights
Of Alpujarras where the new-bathed Day
With oriflamme uplifted o'er the peaks
Saddens the breasts of northward-looking snows
That loved the night, and soared with soaring stars;
Flashing the signals of his nearing swiftness
From Almeria's purple-shadowed bay
On to the far-off rocks that gaze and glow—
On to Alhambra, strong and ruddy heart
Of glorious Morisma, gasping now,
A maimed giant in his agony.
This town that dips its feet within the stream,
And seems to sit a tower-crowned Cybele,

Spreading her ample robe adown the rocks,
Is rich Bedmar: 'twas Moorish long ago,
But now the Cross is sparkling on the Mosque,
And bells make Catholic the trembling air.
The fortress gleams in Spanish sunshine now
('Tis south a mile before the rays are Moorish)—
Hereditary jewel, agraffe bright
On all the many-titled privilege
Of young Duke Silva. No Castilian knight
That serves Queen Isabel has higher charge;
For near this frontier sits the Moorish king,
Not Boabdil the waverer, who usurps
A throne he trembles in, and fawning licks
The feet of conquerors, but that fierce lion
Grisly El Zagal, who has made his lair
In Guadix' fort, and rushing thence with strength,
Half his own fierceness, half the untainted heart
Of mountain bands that fight for holiday,
Wastes the fair lands that lie by Alcala,
Wreathing his horse's neck with Christian heads.
To keep the Christian frontier—such high trust
Is young Duke Silva's; and the time is great.
(What times are little? To the sentinel
That hour is regal when he mounts on guard.)
The fifteenth century since the Man Divine
Taught and was hated in Capernaum
Is near its end—is falling as a husk
Away from all the fruit its years have riped.
The Moslem faith, now flickering like a torch
In a night struggle on this shore of Spain,
Glares, a broad column of advancing flame,
Along the Danube and the Illyrian shore
Far into Italy, where eager monks,
Who watch in dreams and dream the while they watch,
See Christ grow paler in the baleful light,
Crying again the cry of the forsaken.
But faith, the stronger for extremity,

Becomes prophetic, hears the far-off tread
Of western chivalry, sees downward sweep
The archangel Michael with the gleaming sword,
And listens for the shriek of hurrying fiends
Chased from their revels in God's sanctuary.
So trusts the monk, and lifts appealing eyes
To the high dome, the Church's firmament,
Where the blue light-pierced curtain, rolled away,
Reveals the throne and Him who sits thereon.
So trust the men whose best hope for the world
Is ever that the world is near its end:
Impatient of the stars that keep their course
And make no pathway for the coming Judge.
But other futures stir the world's great heart.
The West now enters on the heritage
Won from the tombs of mighty ancestors,
The seeds, the gold, the gems, the silent harps
That lay deep buried with the memories
Of old renown.
No more, as once in sunny Avignon,
The poet-scholar spreads the Homeric page,
And gazes sadly, like the deaf at song;
For now the old epic voices ring again
And vibrate with the beat and melody
Stirred by the warmth of old Ionian days.
The martyred sage, the Attic orator,
Immortally incarnate, like the gods,
In spiritual bodies, winged words
Holding a universe impalpable,
Find a new audience. For evermore,
With grander resurrection than was feigned
Of Attila's fierce Huns, the soul of Greece
Conquers the bulk of Persia. The maimed form
Of calmly-joyous beauty, marble-limbed,
Yet breathing with the thought that shaped its lips,
Looks mild reproach from out its opened grave
At creeds of terror; and the vine-wreathed god

Fronts the pierced Image with the crown of thorns.
The soul of man is widening towards the past:
No longer hanging at the breast of life
Feeding in blindness to his parentage—
Quenching all wonder with Omnipotence,
Praising a name with indolent piety—
He spells the record of his long descent,
More largely conscious of the life that was.
And from the height that shows where morning shone
On far-off summits pale and gloomy now,
The horizon widens round him, and the west
Looks vast with untracked waves whereon his gaze
Follows the flight of the swift-vanished bird
That like the sunken sun is mirrored still
Upon the yearning soul within the eye.
And so in Cordova through patient nights
Columbus watches, or he sails in dreams
Between the setting stars and finds new day;
Then wakes again to the old weary days,
Girds on the cord and frock of pale Saint Francis,
And like him zealous pleads with foolish men.
"I ask but for a million maravedis:
Give me three caravels to find a world,
New shores, new realms, new soldiers for the Cross,
Son cosas grandes!" Thus he pleads in vain;
Yet faints not utterly, but pleads anew,
Thinking, "God means it, and has chosen me."
For this man is the pulse of all mankind
Feeding an embryo future, offspring strange
Of the fond Present, that with mother-prayers
And mother-fancies looks for championship
Of all her loved beliefs and old-world ways
From that young Time she bears within her womb.
The sacred places shall be purged again,
The Turk converted, and the Holy Church,
Like the mild Virgin with the outspread robe,
Shall fold all tongues and nations lovingly.

But since God works by armies, who shall be
The modern Cyrus? Is it France most Christian,
Who with his lilies and brocaded knights,
French oaths, French vices, and the newest style
Of out-puffed sleeve, shall pass from west to east,
A winnowing fan to purify the seed
For fair millennial harvests soon to come?
Or is not Spain the land of chosen warriors?—
Crusaders consecrated from the womb,
Carrying the sword-cross stamped upon their souls
By the long yearnings of a nation's life,
Through all the seven patient centuries
Since first Pelayo and his resolute band
Trusted the God within their Gothic hearts
At Covadunga, and defied Mahound;
Beginning so the Holy War of Spain
That now is panting with the eagerness
Of labour near its end. The silver cross
Glitters o'er Malaga and streams dread light
On Moslem galleys, turning all their stores
From threats to gifts. What Spanish knight is he
Who, living now, holds it not shame to live
Apart from that hereditary battle
Which needs his sword? Castilian gentlemen
Choose not their task—they choose to do it well.
The time is great, and greater no man's trust
Than his who keeps the fortress for his king,
Wearing great honours as some delicate robe
Brocaded o'er with names 'twere sin to tarnish.
Born de la Cerda, Calatravan knight,
Count of Segura, fourth Duke of Bedmar,
Offshoot from that high stock of old Castile
Whose topmost branch is proud Medina Celi—
Such titles with their blazonry are his
Who keeps this fortress, its sworn governor,
Lord of the valley, master of the town,
Commanding whom he will, himself commanded

By Christ his Lord who sees him from the Cross
And from bright heaven where the Mother pleads;—
By good Saint James upon the milk-white steed,
Who leaves his bliss to fight for chosen Spain;—
By the dead gaze of all his ancestors;—
And by the mystery of his Spanish blood
Charged with the awe and glories of the past.
See now with soldiers in his front and rear
He winds at evening through the narrow streets
That toward the Castle gate climb devious:
His charger, of fine Andalusian stock,
An Indian beauty, black but delicate,
Is conscious of the herald trumpet note,
The gathering glances, and familiar ways
That lead fast homeward: she forgets fatigue,
And at the light touch of the master's spur
Thrills with the zeal to bear him royally,
Arches her neck and clambers up the stones
As if disdainful of the difficult steep.
Night-black the charger, black the rider's plume,
But all between is bright with morning hues—
Seems ivory and gold and deep blue gems,
And starry flashing steel and pale vermilion,
All set in jasper: on his surcoat white
Glitter the sword-belt and the jeweled hilt,
Red on the back and breast the holy cross,
And 'twixt the helmet and the soft-spun white
Thick tawny wavelets like the lion's mane
Turn backward from his brow, pale, wide, erect,
Shadowing blue eyes—blue as the rain-washed sky
That braced the early stem of Gothic kings
He claims for ancestry. A goodly knight,
A noble caballero, broad of chest
And long of limb. So much the August sun,
Now in the west but shooting half its beams
Past a dark rocky profile toward the plain,
At windings of the path across the slope

Makes suddenly luminous for all who see:
For women smiling from the terraced roofs;
For boys that prone on trucks with head up-propped
Lazy and curious, stare irreverent;
For men who make obeisance with degrees
Of good-will shading towards servility,
Where good-will ends and secret fear begins
And curses, too, low-muttered through the teeth,
Explanatory to the God of Shem.
Five, grouped within a whitened tavern court
Of Moorish fashion, where the trellised vines
Purpling above their heads make odorous shade,
Note through the open door the passers-by,
Getting some rills of novelty to speed
The lagging stream of talk and help the wine,
'Tis Christian to drink wine: whoso denies
His flesh at bidding save of Holy Church,
Let him beware and take to Christian sins
Lest he be taxed with Moslem sanctity.
The souls are five, the talkers only three.
(No time, most tainted by wrong faith and rule,
But holds some listeners and dumb animals.)
Mine Host is one: he with the well-arched nose,
Soft-eyed, fat-handed, loving men for nought
But his own humour, patting old and young
Upon the back, and mentioning the cost
With confidential blandness, as a tax
That he collected much against his will
From Spaniards who were all his bosom friends:
Warranted Christian—else how keep an inn,
Which calling asks true faith? though like his wine
Of cheaper sort, a trifle over-new.
His father was a convert, chose the chrism
As men choose physic, kept his chimney warm
With smokiest wood upon a Saturday,
Counted his gains and grudges on a chaplet,
And crossed himself asleep for fear of spies;

Trusting the God of Israel would see
'Twas Christian tyranny that made him base.
Our host his son was born ten years too soon,
Had heard his mother call him Ephraim,
Knew holy things from common, thought it sin
To feast on days when Israel's children mourned,
So had to be converted with his sire,
To doff the awe he learned as Ephraim,
And suit his manners to a Christian name.
But infant awe, that unborn moving thing,
Dies with what nourished it, can never rise
From the dead womb and walk and seek new pasture.
Thus baptism seemed to him a merry game
Not tried before, all sacraments a mode
Of doing homage for one's property,
And all religions a queer human whim
Or else a vice, according to degrees:
As, 'tis a whim to like your chestnuts hot,
Burn your own mouth and draw your face awry,
A vice to pelt frogs with them—animals
Content to take life coolly. And Lorenzo
Would have all lives made easy, even lives
Of spiders and inquisitors, yet still
Wishing so well to flies and Moors and Jews
He rather wished the others easy death;
For loving all men clearly was deferred
Till all men loved each other. Such mine Host,
With chiselled smile caressing Seneca,
The solemn mastiff leaning on his knee.
His right-hand guest is solemn as the dog,
Square-faced and massive: Blasco is his name,
A prosperous silversmith from Aragon;
In speech not silvery, rather tuned as notes
From a deep vessel made of plenteous iron,
Or some great bell of slow but certain swing
That, if you only wait, will tell the hour
As well as flippant clocks that strike in haste

And set off chiming a superfluous tune—
Like Juan there, the spare man with the lute,
Who makes you dizzy with his rapid tongue,
Whirring athwart your mind with comment swift
On speech you would have finished by-and-by,
Shooting your bird for you while you are loading,
Cheapening your wisdom as a pattern known,
Woven by any shuttle on demand.
Can never sit quite still, too: sees a wasp
And kills it with a movement like a flash;
Whistles low notes or seems to thrum his lute
As a mere hyphen 'twixt two syllables
Of any steadier man; walks up and down
And snuffs the orange flowers and shoots a pea
To hit a streak of light let through the awning.
Has a queer face: eyes large as plums, a nose
Small, round, uneven, like a bit of wax
Melted and cooled by chance. Thin-fingered, lithe,
And as a squirrel noiseless, startling men
Only by quickness. In his speech and look
A touch of graceful wildness, as of things
Not trained or tamed for uses of the world;
Most like the Fauns that roamed in days of old
About the listening whispering woods, and shared
The subtler sense of sylvan ears and eyes
Undulled by scheming thought, yet joined the rout
Of men and women on the festal days,
And played the syrinx too, and knew love's pains,
Turning their anguish into melody.
For Juan was a minstrel still, in times
When minstrelsy was held a thing outworn.
Spirits seem buried and their epitaph
Is writ in Latin by severest pens,
Yet still they flit above the trodden grave
And find new bodies, animating them
In quaint and ghostly way with antique souls.
So Juan was a troubadour revived,

Freshening life's dusty road with babbling rills
Of wit and song, living 'mid harnessed men
With limbs ungalled by armour, ready so
To soothe them weary, and to cheer them sad.
Guest at the board, companion in the camp,
A crystal mirror to the life around,
Flashing the comment keen of simple fact
Defined in words ; lending brief lyric voice
To grief and sadness; hardly taking note
Of difference betwixt his own and others';
But rather singing as a listener
To the deep moans, the cries, the wild strong joys
Of universal Nature, old yet young.
Such Juan, the third talker, shimmering bright
As butterfly or bird with quickest life.
The silent Roldan has his brightness too,
But only in his spangles and rosettes.
His parti-coloured vest and crimson hose
Are dulled with old Valencian dust, his eyes
With straining fifty years at gilded balls
To catch them dancing, or with brazen looks
At men and women as he made his jests
Some thousand times and watched to count the pence
His wife was gathering. His olive face
Has an old writing in it, characters
Stamped deep by grins that had no merriment,
The soul's rude mark proclaiming all its blank;
Aa on some faces that have long grown old
In lifting tapers up to forms obscene
On ancient walls and chuckling with false zest
To please my lord, who gives the larger fee
For that hard industry in apishness.
Roldan would gladly never laugh again;
Pensioned, he would be grave as any ox,
And having beans and crumbs and oil secured
Would borrow no man's jokes for evermore.
'Tis harder now because his wife is gone,

Who had quick feet, and danced to ravishment
Of every ring jewelled with Spanish eyes,
But died and left this boy, lame from his birth,
I!

And sad and obstinate, though when he will
He sings God-taught such marrow-thrilling strains
As seem the very voice of dying Spring,
A flute-like wail that mourns the blossoms gone,
And sinks, and is not, like their fragrant breath,
With fine transition on the trembling air.
He sits as if imprisoned by some fear,
Motionless, with wide eyes that seem not made
For hungry glancing of a twelve-year'd boy
To mark the living thing that he could teaze,
But for the gaze of some primeval sadness
Dark twin with light in the creative ray.
This little Pablo has his spangles too,
And large rosettes to hide his poor left foot
Rounded like any hoof (his mother thought
God willed it so to punish all her sins).
I said the souls were five—besides the dog.
But there was still a sixth, with wrinkled face,
Grave and disgusted with all merriment
Not less than Boldan. It is Annibal,
The experienced monkey who performs the tricks,
Jumps through the hoops, and carries round the hat.
Once full of sallies and impromptu feats,
Now cautious not to light on aught that's new,
Lest he be whipped to do it o'er again
From A to Z, and make the gentry laugh:
A misanthropic monkey, grey and grim,
Bearing a lot that has no remedy
For want of concert in the monkey tribe.
We see the company, above their heads
The braided matting, golden as ripe corn,
Stretched in a curving strip close by the grapes,
Elsewhere rolled back to greet the cooler sky;

A fountain near, vase-shapen and broad-lipped,
Where timorous birds alight with tiny feet,
And hesitate and bend wise listening ears,
And fly away again with undipped beak.
On the stone floor the juggler's heaped-up goods,
Carpet and hoops, viol and tambourine,
Where Annibal sits perched with brows severe,
A serious ape whom none take seriously,
Obliged in this fool's world to earn his nuts
By hard buffoonery. We see them all,
And hear their talk—the talk of Spanish men,
With Southern intonation, vowels turned
Caressingly between the consonants,
Persuasive, willing, with such intervals
As music borrows from the wooing birds,
That plead with subtly curving, sweet descent—
And yet can quarrel, as these Spaniards can.

Juan (near the doorway).

You hear the trumpet? There's old Ramon's blast.
No bray but his can shake the air so well.
He takes his trumpeting as solemnly
As angel charged to wake the dead; thinks war
Was made for trumpeters, and their great art
Made solely for themselves who understand it.
His features all have shaped themselves to blowing,
And when his trumpet's bagged or left at home
He seems a chattel in a broker's booth,
A spoutless watering-can, a promise to pay
No sum particular. O fine old Ramon!
The blasts get louder and the clattering hoofs;
They crack the ear as well as heaven's thunder
For owls that listen blinking. There's the banner.
Host (joining him: the others follow to the door).
The Duke has finished reconnoitring, then?
We shall hear news. They say he means a sally—
Would strike El Zagal's Moors as they push home

Like ants with booty heavier than themselves;
Then, joined by other nobles with their bands,
Lay siege to Guadix. Juan, you're a bird
That nest within the Castle. What say you?

Juan.

Nought, I say nought. 'Tis but a toilsome game
To bet upon that feather Policy,
And guess where after twice a hundred puffs
'Twill catch another feather crossing it:
Guess how the Pope will blow and how the king;
What force my lady's fan has; how a cough
Seizing the Padre's throat may raise a gust,
And how the queen may sigh the feather down.
Such catching at imaginary threads,
Such spinning twisted air, is not for me.
If I should want a game, I'll rather bet
On racing snails, two large, slow, lingering snails—
No spurring, equal weights—a chance sublime,
Nothing to guess at, pure uncertainty.
Here comes the Duke. They give but feeble shouts.
And some look sour.

Host.

That spoils a fair occasion.
Civility brings no conclusions with it,
And cheerful Vivas make the moments glide
Instead of grating like a rusty wheel.

Juan.

O they are dullards, kick because they're stung,
And bruise a friend to show they hate a wasp.

Host.

Best treat your wasp with delicate regard;
When the right moment comes say, "By your leave,"
Use your heel—so! and make an end of him.
That's if we talked of wasps; but our young Duke—

Spain holds not a more gallant gentleman.
Live, live, Duke Silva! Tis a rare smile he has,
But seldom seen.

Juan.

A true hidalgo's smile,
That gives much favour, but beseeches none.
His smile is sweetened by his gravity:
It comes like dawn upon Sierra snows,
Seeming more generous for the coldness gone;
Breaks from the calm—a sudden opening flower
On dark deep waters : now a chalice shut,
A mystic shrine, the next a full-rayed star,
Thrilling, pulse-quickenning as a living word.
I'll make a song of that.

Host.

Prithee, not now.
You'll fall to staring like a wooden saint,
And wag your head as it were set on wires.
Here's fresh sherbet. Sit, be good company.
(To Blasco) You are a stranger, sir, and cannot know
How our Duke's nature suits his princely frame.

Blasco.

Nay, but I marked his spurs—chased cunningly!
A duke should know good gold and silver plate;
Then he will know the quality of mine.
I've ware for tables and for altars too,
Our Lady in all sizes, crosses, bells:
He'll need such weapons full as much as swords
If he would capture any Moorish town.
For, let me tell you, when a mosque is cleansed . . .

Juan.

The demons fly so thick from sound of bells
And smell of incense, you may see the air

Streaked with them as with smoke. Why, they are spirits:
You may well think how crowded they must be
To make a sort of haze.

Blasco.

I knew not that.

Still, they're of smoky nature, demons are;
And since you say so—well, it proves the more
The need of bells and censers. Ay, your Duke
Sat well: a true hidalgo. I can judge—
Of harness specially. I saw the camp,
The royal camp at Velez Malaga.

'Twas like the court of heaven—such liveries!
And torches carried by the score at night
Before the nobles. Sirs, I made a dish
To set an emerald in would fit a crown,
For Don Alonzo, lord of Aguilar.
Your Duke's no whit behind him in his mien
Or harness either. But you seem to say
The people love him not.

Host.

They've nought against him.
But certain winds will make men's temper bad.
When the Solano blows hot venom'd breath,
It acts upon men's knives: steel takes to stabbing
Which else, with cooler winds, were honest steel,
Cutting but garlick. There's a wind just now
Blows right from Seville—

Blasco.

Ay, you mean the wind . . .
Yes, yes, a wind that's rather hot . . .

Host.

With faggots.

Juan.

A wind that suits not with our townsmen's blood.
Abram, 'tis said, objected to be scorched,
And, as the learned Arabs vouch, he gave
The antipathy in full to Ishmael.
'Tis true, these patriarchs had their oddities.

Blasco.

Their oddities? I'm of their mind, I know.
Though, as to Abraham and Ishmael,
I'm an old Christian, and owe nought to them
Or any Jew among them. But I know
We made a stir in Saragossa—we:
The men of Aragon ring hard—true metal.
Sirs, I'm no friend to heresy, but then
A Christian's money is not safe. As how?
A lapsing Jew or any heretic
May owe me twenty ounces: suddenly
He's prisoned, suffers penalties—'tis well:
If men will not believe, 'tis good to make them,
But let the penalties fall on them alone.
The Jew is stripped, his goods are confiscate;
Now, where, I pray you, go my twenty ounces?
God knows, and perhaps the King may, but not I.
And more, my son may lose his young wife's dower
Because 'twas promised since her father's soul
Fell to wrong thinking. How was I to know?
I could but use my sense and cross myself.
Christian is Christian—I give in—but still
Taxing is taxing, though you call it holy.
We Saragossans liked not this new tax
They call the—nonsense, I'm from Aragon!
I speak too bluntly. But, for Holy Church,
No man believes more.

Host.

Nay, sir, never fear.
Good Master Roldan here is no delator.
Roldan (starting from a reverie).
You speak to me, sirs? I perform to-night—
The Plaça Santiago. Twenty tricks,
All different. I dance, too. And the boy
Sings like a bird. I crave your patronage.

Blasco.

Faith, you shall have it, sir. In travelling

Roldan.

I? no.

I pray your pardon. I've a twinging knee,
That makes it hard to listen. You were saying?

Blasco.

Nay, it was nought. (Aside to Host) Is it his deepness?

Host.

No.

He's deep in nothing but his poverty.

Blasco.

But 'twas his poverty that made me think . . .

Host.

His piety might wish to keep the feasts
As well as fasts. No fear; he hears not.

Blasco.

I speak my mind about the penalties,
Good.

But, look you, I'm against assassination.
You know my meaning—Master Arbues,
The grand Inquisitor in Aragon.

I knew nought—paid no copper towards the deed.
But I was there, at prayers, within the church.

How could I help it? Why, the saints were there,
And looked straight on above the altars. I . . .

Juan.

Looked carefully another way.

Blasco.

Why, at my beads.

'Twas after midnight, and the canons all
Were chanting matins. I was not in church
To gape and stare. I saw the martyr kneel:
I never liked the look of him alive—
He was no martyr then. I thought he made
An ugly shadow as he crept athwart
The bands of light, then passed within the gloom
By the broad pillar. 'Twas in our great Seo,
At Saragossa. The pillars tower so large
You cross yourself to see them, lest white Death
Should hide behind their dark. And so it was.
I looked away again and told my beads
Unthinkingly; but still a man has ears;
And right across the chanting came a sound
As if a tree had crashed above the roar
Of some great torrent. So it seemed to me;
For when you listen long and shut your eyes
Small sounds get thunderous. He had a shell
Like any lobster: a good iron suit
From top to toe beneath the innocent serge.
That made the tell-tale sound. But then came shrieks.
The chanting stopped and turned to rushing feet,
And in the midst lay Master Arbues,
Felled like an ox. 'Twas wicked butchery.
Some honest men had hoped it would have scared

The Inquisition out of Aragon.

'Twas money thrown away—I would say, crime—

Clean thrown away.

Host.

That was a pity now.
Next to a missing thrust, what irks me most
Is a neat well-aimed stroke that kills your man,
Yet ends in mischief—as in Aragon.
It was a lesson to our people here.
Else there's a monk within our city walls,
A holy, high-born, stern Dominican,
They might have made the great mistake to kill.

Blasco.

What! is he? . . .

Host.

Yes; a Master Arbues
Of finer quality. The Prior here
And uncle to our Duke.

Blasco.

He will want plate:
A holy pillar or a crucifix.
But, did you say, he was like Arbues?

Juan.

As a black eagle with gold beak and claws
Is like a raven. Even in his cowl,
Covered from head to foot, the Prior is known
From all the black herd round. When he uncovers
And stands white-frocked, with ivory face, his eyes
Black-gleaming, black his coronal of hair
Like shredded jasper, he seems less a man
With struggling aims, than pure incarnate Will,
Fit to subdue rebellious nations, nay,
That human flesh he breathes in, charged with passion
Which quivers in his nostril and his hp,

But disciplined by long in-dwelling will
To silent labour in the yoke of law.
A truce to thy comparisons, Lorenzo!
Thine is no subtle nose for difference;
'Tis dulled by feigning and civility.

Host.

Pooh, thou'rt a poet, crazed with finding words
May stick to things and seem like qualities.
No pebble is a pebble in thy hands:
'Tis a moon out of work, a barren egg,
Or twenty things that no man sees but thee.
Our Father Isidor's—a living saint,
And that is heresy, some townsmen think:
Saints should be dead, according to the Church.
My mind is this: the Father is so holy
'Twere sin to wish his soul detained from bliss.
Easy translation to the realms above,
The shortest journey to the seventh heaven,
Is what I'd never grudge him.

Blasco.

Piously said.
Look you, I'm dutiful, obey the Church
When there's no help for it: I mean to say,
When Pope and Bishop and all customers
Order alike. But there be bishops now,
And were aforetime, who have held it wrong,
This hurry to convert the Jews. As how?
Your Jew pays tribute to the bishop, say.
That's good, and must please God, to see the Church
Maintained in ways that ease the Christian's purse.
Convert the Jew, and where's the tribute, pray?
He lapses, too: 'tis slippery work, conversion:
And then the holy taxing carries off
His money at one sweep. No tribute more!
He's penitent or burnt, and there's an end.
Now guess which pleases God . . .

Juan.

Whether he likes

A well-burnt Jew or well-fed bishop best.
[While Juan put this problem theologic
Entered, with resonant step, another guest—
A soldier: all his keenness in his sword,
His eloquence in scars upon his cheek,
His virtue in much slaying of the Moor:
With brow well-creased in horizontal folds
To save the space, as having nought to do:
Lips prone to whistle whisperingly—no tune,
But trotting rhythm: meditative eyes,
Most often fixed upon his legs and spurs:
Styled Captain Lopez.]

Lopez.

At your service, sirs.

Juan.

Ha, Lopez? Why, thou hast a face full-charged
As any herald's. What news of the wars?

Lopez.

Such news as is most bitter on my tongue.

Juan.

Then spit it forth.

Host.

Sit, Captain: here's a cup,
Fresh-filled. What news?

Lopez.

'Tis bad. We make no sally:
We sit still here and wait whate'er the Moor
Shall please to do.

Host.

Some townsmen will be glad.

Lopez.

Glad, will they be? But I'm not glad, not I,
Nor any Spanish soldier of clean blood.
But the Duke's wisdom is to wait a siege
Instead of laying one. Therefore—meantime—
He will be married straightway.

Host.

Ha, ha, ha!

Thy speech is like an hourglass; turn it down
The other way, 'twill stand as well, and say
The Duke will wed, therefore he waits a siege.
But what say Don Diego and the Prior?
The holy uncle and the fiery Don?

Lopez.

O there be sayings running all abroad
As thick as nuts o'erturned. No man need lack.
Some say, 'twas letters changed the Duke's intent:
From Malaga, says Bias. From Rome, says Quintin.
From spies at Guadix, says Sebastian.
Some say, 'tis all a pretext—say, the Duke
Is but a lapdog hanging on a skirt,
Turning his eyeballs upward like a monk:
'Twas Don Diego said that—so says Bias;
Last week, he said . . .

Juan.

O do without the "said!"
Open thy mouth and pause in lieu of it.
I had as lief be pelted with a pea
Irregularly in the self-same spot
As hear such iteration without rule,
Such torture of uncertain certainty.

Lopez.

Santiago! Juan, thou art hard to please.

I speak not for my own delighting, I.
I can be silent, I.

Blasco.

Nay, sir, speak on!
I like your matter well. I deal in plate.
This wedding touches me. Who is the bride?

Lopez.

One that some say the Duke does ill to wed.
One that his mother reared—God rest her soul!
Duchess Diana—she who died last year.
A bird picked up away from any nest.
Her name—the Duchess gave it—is *Fedalma*.
No harm in that. But the Duke stoops, they say,
In wedding her. And that's the simple truth.

Juan.

Thy simple truth is but a false opinion:
The simple truth of asses who believe
Their thistle is the very best of food.
Fie, Lopez, thou a Spaniard with a sword
Dreamest a Spanish noble ever stoops
By doing honour to the maid he loves!
He stoops alone when he dishonours her.

Lopez.

Nay, I said nought against her.

Juan.

Better not.
Else I would challenge thee to fight with wits,
And spear thee through and through ere thou couldst
draw
The bluntest word. Yes, yes, consult thy spurs:
Spurs are a sign of knighthood, and should tell thee
That knightly love is blent with reverence

As heavenly air is blent with heavenly blue.
Don Silva's heart beats to a loyal tune:
He wills no highest-born Castilian dame,
Betrothed to highest noble, should be held
More sacred than Fedalma. He enshrines
Her virgin image for the general awe
And for his own—will guard her from the world,
Nay, his profaner self, lest he should lose
The place of his religion. He does well.
Nought can come closer to the poet's strain.

Host.

Or farther from his practice, Juan, eh?
If thou'rt a sample?

Juan.

Wrong there, my Lorenzo!
Touching Fedalma the poor poet plays
A finer part even than the noble Duke.

Lopez.

By making ditties, singing with round mouth
Likest a crowing cock? Thou meanest that?

Juan.

Lopez, take physic, thou art getting ill,
Growing descriptive; 'tis unnatural.
I mean, Don Silva's love expects reward,
Kneels with a heaven to come; but the poor poet
Worships without reward, nor hopes to find
A heaven save in his worship. He adores
The sweetest woman for her sweetness' sake,
Joys in the love that was not born for him,
Because 'tis lovingness, as beggars joy,
Warming their naked limbs on wayside walls,
To hear a tale of princes and their glory.
There's a poor poet (poor, I mean, in coin)

Worships Fedalma with so true a love
That if her silken robe were changed for rags,
And she were driven out to stony wilds
Barefoot, a scorned wanderer, he would kiss
Her ragged garment's edge, and only ask
For leave to be her slave. Digest that, friend,
Or let it lie upon thee as a weight
To check light thinking of *Fedalma*.

Lopez.

I?

I think no harm of her; I thank the saints
I wear a sword and peddle not in thinking.
'Tis Father Marcos says she'll not confess
And loves not holy water; says her blood
Is infidel; says the Duke's wedding her
Is union of light with darkness.

Juan.

Tush!

[Now Juan—who by snatches touched his lute
With soft arpeggio, like a whispered dream
Of sleeping music, while he spoke of love—
In jesting anger at the soldier's talk
Thrummed loud and fast, then faster and more loud,
Till, as he answered "Tush!" he struck a chord
Sudden as whip-crack close by Lopez' ear.
Mine host and Blasco smiled, the mastiff barked,
Roldan looked up and Annibal looked down,
Cautiously neutral in so new a case;
The boy raised longing, listening eyes that seemed
An exiled spirit's waiting in strained hope
Of voices coming from the distant land.
But Lopez bore the assault like any rock:
That was not what he drew his sword at—he!
He spoke with neck erect.]