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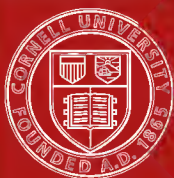
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Minstrel love.



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Arnald presenting the star-jewel to Alearda.—p. 209.

Front.

MINSTREL LOVE

A Romance

BY

Friedrich Heinrich
21
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P.S.



Introduction

IN the pleasant land of Provence, on the shore, at the summit of a soft grassy hill, there stood, many centuries ago, a heap of ruins, proclaiming far over the wide sea, to the eyes of all who passed, the departed glories of the fallen castle of Maraviglia. It is possible that some traces thereof may remain even to the present day. But at the time of which we speak,

those ruins wore but a half-forsaken aspect. On the hearth lay the expiring ashes of brands wherewith the last meal of cheerful hospitality had been prepared ; and had not the clouds which swept so far and so high aloft gazed in through the shattered roof, one might have found it in one's heart to ask, where tarried seneschal and cellarer, ay, and the lord of the castle himself.

One beautiful spring evening, there stood upon the open threshold three persons of very different aspect—a grey-haired and considerate warrior in his ancient armour ; a youth bright and beautiful as the morning, with sword on thigh and lute in arm ; and lastly a priest of tall and powerful form, in the best years of manly strength, with the wrath of a prophet on his stern brows, and the smile of a St. John upon his lips.

Silently, and for a long time, the three gazed upon the ruins. But at last the grey-headed warrior lifted up his voice with a touching smile, and said to the youth :

“Is it then so, and must it be so, O thou my best-beloved foster-son—goest thou forth into the world as a minstrel and a lute-player?—so be it! The finger of God points out to those whom we hold dearest on earth, often, very often, paths widely different to those which our own hearts had dreamed of for them. Yet I desired only this, that thou shouldst look once more with thine own eyes upon the ancestral castle of thy great forefathers, somewhat hoping that, before a spectacle so illustrious, God might turn thy heart. But it seems to me now that He hath not so turned it.”

“Truly, He hath not, dear foster-father Walter,” replied the young Arnald. He touched most sweetly the strings of his lute, and sang the following song :—

"From the moss-grown tower,
 With its dusky cells,
 A voice of power
 Now sinks, now swells,
 Stirring my spirit like whispered spells :
 Swaying on swan-like wing,
 The deep sound greets me thus :—
 ' Go forth into the world so wide and sing,
 Young, joyous, minstrel-hero, sing of us !
 Why rises in thy heart
 The strain impulsive swelling,
 Forth to a cold false world thy steps impeding ?
 'Tis that thou may'st impart
 The fate, the woe, the fame,
 That shroud thy mighty name
 To many a free and loving heart,
 To many a glistening eye all soft with tears.
 Up, gird thyself, the wide world hears !
 Burst is the chain that bound thee ;
 In thy hand
 Take, minstrel-hero, take the lyre and brand :
 The spirits of thy fathers are around thee.' "

" Nevertheless, it is pleasant to listen to him," said the old Sir Walter, seating himself on a projection of the ruined wall.

The priest gazed into the setting sun with eyes strong and stedfast as those of an eagle.

" Never yet have ye consented to tell me, ye noble and kindly friends," said Arnald after a short silence, " the nature of that terrible evil which brake forth like a tempest upon my forefathers, before the blast of which their castle and their whole earthly happiness were shivered

into atoms. Tell me thereof even now, I pray you, if duty and honour forbid it not. Lo, ye have yourselves pronounced me to be of age, inasmuch as ye have suffered me to choose my future path in life; and methinks ye would proceed rightly, and therefore wisely, were ye to open your lips and make unreserved answer to my question. Moreover, ye know me, that I am not stubborn; perchance the self-same feeling which now urges me forth from you, would, if better and more distinctly known, retain me at your side during half my life."

Sir Walter gazed into the eyes of the priest with an expression of doubtful hope, almost of entreaty; therewith he sighed right movingly, and said, "What thinkest thou now, Altarbol; is the right hour come, and dare we hope that henceforth the wishes of all three shall be one and the same?"

"Neither now nor ever may we hope for that," replied Altarbol with sorrowful solemnity. "Here below, dear Messire Walter, here below, our human hopes, ever striving after the blessed joys and full perfection of paradise, end in nothing. But this noble esquire hath very earnestly demanded to know the story of his race; and I hold it fitting that we should deliver over to him this portion of his inheritance also. Listen then to me, Arnald, my young minstrel. We have here to do with a great and solemn history."

Arnald cast himself down on the threshold of the ruined castle of his ancestors; and the mighty Prior Altarbol, still gazing fixedly into the evening sun, and leaning against a stately olive-tree, spoke in the following manner:

"The Church is a loving mother; and, even by reason of her love, severe. Gladly, but observantly, and, so to

speak, by connivance, she suffers her children to disport themselves at liberty, so long as such sport consists with their higher good; but when the unripe and feeble ones snatch up bare weapons, and begin to cleave each other through head and heart, under the delusion that *thus* they shall arrive at truth, freedom, and certainty, then she draws back the curtain of love wherewith at first she had shrouded the folly of their ventures. As a solemn judge, she sends forth eye and voice through the bewildered crowds; and if that avails not, alas! my son, then with bleeding heart she grasps the bloody sword."

"What! wears a mother such a weapon for her children?" asked Arnald, his cheeks burning with restrained displeasure.

"O bold and upward-striving spirit of Maraviglia," said Altarbol, smiling yet sighing; "how art thou true to thyself, even in this gentle youth! Consider, my son, that the Church is no temporal but an eternal mother; and that it is better to lose body than soul."

"Most true," replied Arnald, humbly inclining his head; "and yet it seems to me as though this sword of the Church must have often fallen on her dearest and noblest children. For he who seeks truth honestly, though he seek it by a path too daring, seeks, and at last must surely find, a merciful God!"

"Amen," said the Prior very earnestly, folded his hands, and remained long silent. The light of the sinking sun shone around him like a glory.

"My young Maraviglia," he continued after a space, "all the words which thou hast spoken are true; and once, when the sword of the Church fell upon one of the noblest and dearest of her sons—his name was Arnold of Brescia."

“Arnold of Brescia! Arnald of Maraviglia!” interrupted the wondering youth,—“Arnold! Arnald! the words are strangely similar. What think you, honoured sir, may there not be some secret bond of union between myself and him? For even the mere name has stirred my whole heart.”

Hereat, the prophet-like wrath which sat on the brows of Altarbol unfolded itself, as if threatening a tempest, and brake forth in flaming lightnings from his eyes, so that the young minstrel drew back in terror, and hung his head.

“Let no man,” said the priest slowly, but with severe earnestness, as a judge is wont to speak,—“Let no man outstep his own limits! Remain as thou art, Arnald, and trouble not thyself concerning the deep-minded doctrines of the illustrious Arnold. Thou shalt, by thy songs—such is my hope—delight both God and man; but in those abysses of fearful seeking and questioning, the light and spring of thy spirit would be at once quenched, and thou wouldst reel dizzily, and fall never to rise again. Then would thy only worth be as that of a terrible example, warning all who may resemble thee.”

Arnald sate still, hiding his face, and almost trembling; Altarbol, observing this, continued with a smile, and a voice of indescribable sweetness, “Thou art indeed fit to labour in the beautiful gardens of earth, my son; seek not to dive into the mines which are below its flowery surface.”

Arnald looked up again reassured, and the Prior, seating himself at the foot of the olive-tree, close beside the youth, said: “Thine ancestor, my noble Maraviglia, sought also thus to dive into things hidden. He joined himself to the teachers of the new, audacious, long-endured doctrine. Likewise for a long time did Arnold of Brescia live in the

shadow and protection of this castle, now in ruins. But at length, once more, it went so far, that the children of the Church snatched up their naked weapons, and soon, with their questionings and their sophisms, would they have stunned both head and heart, for time and for eternity. Alas, youth, the Church, constrained, put off her veil of love, and after many warnings, but all in vain, the sword of her judgments fell like lightning and thunderbolt upon the castle of thy fathers."

There was silence for a time; at length Arnald asked, "What became of Arnold of Brescia?"

Walter cast upon him a sidelong and somewhat displeased glance, saying, "Thou askest not what became of thy great grandfather!"

"My ancestor," replied Arnald with a somewhat masterful air, that was wont sometimes to come upon the youth, ordinarily so gentle,—“My ancestor would doubtless have inquired concerning Arnold before himself, and I will herein imitate him. What was the fate of Arnold of Brescia?"

"It is now exactly fifty years," replied Altarbol solemnly, "since that mighty and highly gifted spirit shook off from itself the flames and terrors of an earthly funeral pile, and, as we hope, ascended to the skies purified, and safe from the eternal fires."

Arnald sunk on his knees and prayed fervently; beside him prayed Altarbol. When they again arose, the Prior said, "I hope that our prayer may have wafted peace to his soul."

"To his soul, and to the souls of others also," added the youth, "for I prayed likewise for the souls of those who caused him to be burned. Altarbol, my honoured

master, truly that must ever be a rash and desperate deed. It is only He who dwells above who can look into the heart, and pronounce concerning its purification by fire, either here or hereafter."

This time the prophet-like wrath on the brow of Altarbol lay calm beneath the ashes of its former fire, and he embraced the youth, saying: "Thou hast done well so to pray. My tale is now at an end; what further befell thine ancestors thou shalt hear from Sir Walter."

Then the old Sir Walter de Vergi lifted himself up tall and stately, suddenly grasped his sword, and cried, striking upon the foundation-stone of the door, "Arise out of your graves, ye ancient heroes of Maraviglia, and breathe the glow of your spirit into the heart of your descendant, that so he may receive with dignity and honour the story of his race!"

"I am ready therefor," said Arnald, and he stood upright, filled with brave knightliness of spirit, while the starry heavens, in the rich abundance of their pomp, looked down upon him.

"Countless as those golden lamps above us," thus began the aged knight, "are, O my noble youth, the heroes of thy race. Its earliest origin is derived only from dark legends; but thus much we know—thou art descended from such as sate upon the kingly throne, or wore the ducal coronet. Till this day it has been enough for thee to learn that thou art of noble blood, and born to the privilege of arms; now, however, that the destiny of thy whole life is in question, every veil shall be withdrawn for thee. That wondrous minstrel-king, of whose life, so troublous, yet so perpetually bright, thou hast ever loved to hear the story, was thine ancestor."

“ My foster-father,” said Arnald, smiling in calm enthusiasm, “ now do I know right clearly, wherefore the lyre hath so grown into my heart.”

Walter looked upon the earth, saddened, and almost abashed. Altarbol said very softly — “ Thus is it ever with the words of man. How oft, when they are intended to check and to guide, they do but spur onwards ! O thou eternal Glory, which hast made us all, conscious or unconscious, thy ministers and servants !”

After a short silence, Walter spake again in the following manner : “ Thy grandfather had less communion of spirit with the minstrel-king than with those others among thine ancestors who fought and died on the bloody field. In those days of storm and trouble, often was he offered pardon, oblivion of the past, and I know not what fair and gentle gifts beside, if he would consent to do this or that, inconsistent with his principles, to reconcile to himself the State and the Church. Then was he ever wont to lean quietly upon his great sword, and to answer, ‘ It is for my fellow-men to decide how they will deal with me ; it is for God to determine what shall be the end ; but it is for myself to decide whether I shall be a hero or a dastard.’ At last no one any longer presumed to come before him with proposals of reconciliation. He, however, prepared himself in his fortress, calm, cheerful, and pious, ready, if it must needs be so, to repel force by force. It was so ; and, victorious in many combats, he drove his pursuers out of his own domains, far beyond the frontier. But at length the full array of superior force marched against him, to strike a decisive blow. Then he dismissed nearly all his warriors, only suffering those few to remain whom he knew to be not much unlike himself. In a terrible onslaught he

clave asunder almost the whole of that mighty host of 'oes, and was at length rather trodden than stricken down. There he lay beneath his dead horse; the general of the enemy summoned him yet once more to assent to the mild conditions formerly proposed. 'Nay, God forbid,' cried thy grandfather, 'that one hair from the head of a Maraviglia should be given in conciliation, when the question is of honourable resistance to unjust force!' And they showered their bolts upon him, and he died. Around him lay his little band of heroes, dying a death as noble and glorious as his own."

"They all departed to God," said Arnald; "may our dear Saviour grant me as fair an end as theirs!"

"Ah, thou gallant son of my heart!" exclaimed the old Sir Walter, embracing the youth; "now wilt thou certainly follow the heroic path of thine ancestors—but as a true son of the Church—and glory in arms shall be thy loftiest aim!"

"The golden lyre is my loftiest aim on earth," replied Arnald with a gentle firmness; "I am and will remain the not unworthy descendant of the great minstrelking. Be not thou therefore angry with me, dear foster-father."

"Angry!" returned Walter; "no, it is not so; so can it never be between thee and me."

But his gentle and kindly eyes gazed almost mournfully upon the earth, and slowly and noiselessly he sheathed the sword which he had just drawn in the warmth of his heart.

"Patience! Messire Walter," said Altarbol; "hast thou not been patient in many a hot day of battle, when the enemy wavered to and fro, without ever assuming the

precise position which would have promised thee certain victory? But thou didst wait, and at length it came even as thou wouldst, and thy brows were girt with the wreath of glory."

"Oh, that thou shouldst remind me of it *now!*" said Walter, sighing. "Victory, battle, and crown! Remember you when you read with the boy the lays of your famous Roman poet Horatius, and the child was at first quite in love with the rhyme and the language?"

"With the metre," said Altarbol, correcting him; "there is no rhyme in those ancient languages."

"Be that as it may," interrupted Walter angrily; "but the child forswore all his pleasure in the study when he found in one of the songs of Horatius a confession that the much-admired poet had once cast away his shield in battle. 'Oh, great God,' cried my gallant pupil, 'how could I then so long keep company with a coward—I, an honourable knight's son!' And we could never bring him to Horatius again. But now, Altarbol, my grey hairs stand up on my head as if before a spectre—now mine own beloved foster-son has forgotten it all, and will himself become such as Horatius!"

"Who told thee that?" cried Arnald, springing up in wrath from the threshold of the edifice, over which he had stooped during their discourse. "Sir knight, who told thee that? and who has empowered thee to repeat such honour-wounding words?" Suddenly, as if awakening from a fearful dream, the youth recollected himself and said, "Your pardon! I forgot that I was speaking to my foster-father."

"Thou hast outgrown me strangely in these few hours," replied Walter, muttering to himself. He was

silent awhile, but he soon arose in his wonted and familiar aspect, and asked, "Young esquire, if that thou be'st as high and strong of heart as were thy fathers, what hast thou to do upon their humble threshold? What soughtest thou in the dust yonder?"

"Only the holy dust, where sounded the tread of the minstrel Maraviglia," said Arnald. "I have sharpened my sword on the threshold of my fathers."

"The sword which, in the self-same moment, thou hast renounced," cried Walter, half angry, half pleased.

"Shame on the minstrel who renounces the sword!" exclaimed the inspired youth; "the Roman Horatius may have lost his shield, but I will bear mine aloft in honour through many a bloody battle, and friends shall gather around the weapon of Maraviglia, while foes shall flee from it in terror. Oh, that I were not an orphan! Oh, that my dear parents could live with me through whatever of beautiful or of noble is before me!"

"God bless thee, my young friend!" said Altarbol, "and preserve thee in humility during thy whole life; for many a great moment is before thee!"

"So think not I, dear father," answered Arnald.

"And thou art, perchance, the last of thy race," said Walter; "and often did thy father and grandfather pass by this spot, consoling themselves for their calm and dark course of life by the thought that one day there should arise a Maraviglia by whose hand the castle should be restored to a splendour far outshining its former glories. Yes, my Arnald, when thy dying father gave thee to my care, prophetic words flowed from his lips; and, as he dropped into his last slumber, there arose before his spirit the vision of a glittering palace, built by thee, which

should ennoble and render glorious the name of Maraviglia for all ages."

"Yet may the meaning of those words have been far different," said Arnald. "Believe me, sir, it is not with a prophecy as it is with those words which man speaks, in the fulness of his own strength, concerning his ways and doings. Yet even these are often unconsciously a prophecy—a mirror in which futurity visibly pictures itself; often misinterpreted, but at length confirming and explaining the wondrous riddle, sometimes in terror, sometimes in beauty; so that all men cry out in astonishment, when the word is spoken, 'Ah! was it that?' The glittering palace, which should make my name illustrious, which I was to build—but the foreboding is enough. I will not become an interpreter of dreams."

Long and silently he gazed up into the skies of night; and when Altarbol asked him on what he was looking so fixedly, he pointed to a beautiful constellation, and said, "Chiefly upon this. It stood ever above my head when I was wont to gaze forth, on autumn evenings, into the dark world, so full of forebodings; and it seemed to me like a power friendly and ready to aid."

"That constellation is called the Wain," said Altarbol.

"The Wain—the chariot of heaven," repeated Arnald thoughtfully. "O ye golden wheels, the clear music of whose sound reaches not to us below, roll ever on above me, and exhort me to bright and holy deeds! Your eternal Guide is also mine! And now see, honoured sir, the other constellation yonder"—he described it minutely—"the sight of that hath ever filled me with a thrill of melancholy, as though it would cost me many tears, but

was yet to be my purest and most blessed happiness on earth.”

Altarbol was about to pronounce the name of the figure thus designated, but Arnald checked him imploringly: “Oh, mine honoured master, say it not! Meseems the whole world is listening with me, ready to misinterpret me hereafter when I discover the import of my constellation, and celebrate it in song. The name which it shall bear in mine own heart will be revealed to me in due time.”

Altarbol was silent; and Arnald clasped both his arms around his foster-father, saying, “I dreamed not that parting from you would lie on my heart with a weight so heavy as I feel it to be now that the hour has come. My very heart is dying within me. But even because it is so, let us part this very instant. God bless you, and reward you for the great, great love which you have borne me. Ah! dear father and lord”—

“But thou must not weep, young knight!” said Walter; while at the same moment two bright drops glistened in the starlight as they rolled over his own cheeks. Altarbol laid his hand on Arnald’s head and blessed him, and the three parted in silence. Soon had the youth vanished in the neighbouring wood; and the two men, turning several times to look after his retreating figure, plunged into the shadows of the opposite valley. Lonely and silent stood the ruins of the Castle Maraviglia, clad in the brightness of the rising moonbeams.



Minstrel Love.

Chapter First.



HE noble esquire, whom we left at the close of the Introduction a youth in the early opening bloom of life, standing on the threshold of a world new and almost entirely unknown to him, meets us at the commencement of this history a man proved by manifold trials, and a minstrel of far-spreading fame.

The legend by which our footsteps are guided gives but an obscure and imperfect account of that which befel him in the interval. Thus much, however, may we gather from the whole,—that the youth of Arnald of Maraviglia was not poor in events of many and various aspects; that he bore with honour his noble sword in the battles of his early days; and that the storm of impassioned love, and the tender service of reverential devotion, swept across his spirit, sometimes in tones of thunder, thrilling fearfully; sometimes full of soft but dim forebodings. Nevertheless, it seemed to him as though he had always served idols instead of gods; and a dark veil of melancholy lay upon his wounded heart.

Fain would he have buried himself in some peaceful and poetic solitude, thence, and thence only, expecting the healing of his bruised spirit; and in this hope he traversed many valleys of France, then so beautiful, and at last imagined that he had found the retreat for which he sought: but then suddenly came tidings to his ears which caused him to cast from his loyal heart all longings for retirement as unknighly dreams and contemptible dalliance with duty. His fatherland, his fair Provence, was in danger.

In the Arabian states, on the southern coasts of Spain—then called *Moorish*, to designate their condition as heathen, though, in truth, fair and tender was the beauty of their maidens, war-like and sun-embrowned the aspect of their heroes—in these states a youthful prince had undertaken, for the honour of his ladye, to conquer Provence, and convert it to the faith of Mahomet. The land of the Franks was torn by various conflicts, and menaced by war; thence could no succour be expected. It seemed, indeed, as though the adventurous Moorish prince must succeed in this enterprise, for which it was well known that he was preparing himself, with many swelling sails, and many young but well-experienced warriors.

Mounted on a steed of a golden roan colour, which he had carefully selected for the present expedition, Arnald rode, in the odorous spring-time, towards the hour of sunset, over the rich and flowery frontier-hills which guarded his beautiful fatherland.

He wore upon his breast a hauberk, skilfully woven in links of gold, so that between the meshes, the silk of his green under-vest was visible, embossed with golden embroidery, and falling in graceful folds below the hips, nearly as far as the knee. A light silver morion, decorated with beautiful devices in gold, and shadowed by redundant and many-coloured plumes, adorned and defended the head of the minstrel; on his left arm sparkled a small golden shield, around the centre of which a garland of

dark-green leaves was entwined, while his long and glittering sword, fastened by a scarf embroidered in gold, clashed in its iron sheath, as though crying aloud for the battle.

Arnald beckoned to the attendant who rode behind him, gave him the golden shield, and received from him a lute of graceful and shapely form. As he rode onward, he played thereon a lively measure, and sang the following song:—

With thy shining seas, and shadowy trees,
 With thy sparkling rills, and soft green hills,
 And fields all gay with flowers,
 Oh! how familiar to mine eyes,
 How dear thou art unto me,
 Mine own, my fatherland!

Oft to thy praise I framed my lays,
 When borne along by wings of song,
 In blythe and sportive hours!
 But now, what altered scenes arise!
 We must be faithful to thee,
 Ready, with sword in hand!

Sound louder yet, and louder,
 Lift up thy voice, my lyre,
 Give forth thy thrilling chords,
 Bid notes of sorrow cease,
 Not now we separate,
 Come to the battle, to the clash of swords!
 Make thou the proud steed prouder,
 Kindle the warrior's fire,
 And scare the Paynim hordes!
 But, ah! the joys of peace
 Thou yet shalt celebrate,
 And victory's light; the battle is the Lord's!

As the song ceased, the horsemen found themselves in a shady vale, at the extremity of which they beheld a small castle, of very ancient architecture: then Arnald gave the lute to his attendant, and hung the golden shield again upon his arm, whispering softly to himself:

“The old hero Walter de Vergi would have but half a joy in beholding me, came I not before him in the complete panoply of a warrior. Now, perchance, through the trouble of these days, and the audacity of the heathen, it may be vouchsafed to him to witness my entrance on the path which he has so long desired for me; moreover, not *merely* as an honourable soldier, but also perchance as one whom his fellow-soldiers, and even his leaders, may name and honour above others: God prosper the work!”

Meanwhile he rode onward, in a kind of impatient melancholy, near and nearer to the fortalice wherein so noble a branch of the noble stock of Vergi had protected him during many years, and suffered him to grow up beneath the shadow of its knightly dignity. In the coolness of the evening-hour, tree, fountain, and cloud breathed upon his spirit, filling it with pleasant and blessed memories; he felt more vividly than ever how close, how needful, is the bond linking the fame of an honourable warrior to that of a true minstrel; and he rejoiced greatly that in this mood he should be able to understand the aged Sir Walter far better than he was wont to do, and in like manner also should he be understood by him.

But oftentimes in life, at the very moment when we imagine that we can open our hearts fully and unreservedly to some beloved kindred heart, we are withheld in a most sad and solemn manner; perchance in order to make us deeply feel, that true and everlasting Union of spirits will never be found, till it arises like a victorious sun upon the other world; shaking from it the storms and the whirlwinds of that which here below we are wont exclusively to name—life.

The doors of the little castle of Sir Walter of Vergi stood open; the windows partly so. Sounding and sighing, the evening wind wandered through the chambers; here and there in the castle-court grass began to shew itself between the clefts of the pavement.

Full of sorrowful forebodings, Arnald gave the rein of

his steed to his attendant, and hastened to enter the castle. But all things therein wore an aspect so solemn, nay, it might almost be said, so holy, that he soon began to tread softly and slowly, as though he feared to break the rest or some honoured sleeper.

He reached, without meeting a single human being, the small high and airy turret-chamber where Walter loved to sit at the open casement, on sunny days, reading ancient heroic legends. He found all here as it used to be ; the window open, parchment volumes, elaborately illuminated and fastened with golden clasps, spread forth upon the oaken table before the great arm-chair, as though the aged and kindly knight had but now gone forth from his apartment ; all was sparkling in the familiar light of the playing sunbeams.

Arnald now knew at once what had happened. Silently and patiently he wept to himself, and desired only to find the sepulchre : he soon discovered it. As he stepped forth through the gate of the garden he beheld a tall stone cross, upon a gentle turfy eminence, beneath the shadow of two gigantic fir-trees : thereon lay a tablet of black marble, inscribed with the following words, in letters of gold :—

The body of Sir Walter,
The gallant Knight
of Vergi,
Is here entombed ;
According to his honoured will.
We, the peasants of the surrounding country,
Have raised this memorial to him,
Whom we surname " The Good."

The day and hour of his birth and of his death were recorded below, and his noble escutcheon was accurately and gracefully depicted.

Arnald seated himself beside the grave, and softly sang the following words, accompanying them by the strokes of his drawn sword against his golden shield :

Sleep soft beneath the fir-tree's shadowy waving,
I hurry forth, the foe in battle braving ;
 Dream of my deeds, in sweet repose, dream on !
Oh, if those deeds that visioned promise keep,
Say to me, when the world awakes from sleep,
 " Come to my heart, thou hast done well, my son !"

Wondrously strengthened in spirit, Arnald remounted his steed, and descended to the huts of the nearest inhabitants of the valley. There he learned, that it had been Sir Walter's last will that his little castle should be left thus open and desolate, and exactly in the condition in which he had quitted it, as a mausoleum for the weary body which had passed so honourably through life.

Chapter Second.

ARNALD now directed his steps towards the castle of the Vicomte Bisiers; for that renowned warrior had planted his banner for the protection of his beleaguered fatherland; and all who felt within themselves strength and courage for the right, hastened to join the troops which were rallying around the noble cavalier. Arnald knew him only by the voice of fame, which had celebrated the names of the vicomte and of his fair and noble ladye throughout the whole world, as so pure and so illustrious, that the heart of the minstrel glowed with twofold battle-fire at the thought of fighting beneath such a chieftain.

Day and night had Arnald hurried forwards, eager to reach the rendezvous for which his spirit panted; and now as, in the early radiance of morning, he rode forth from the shadows of a flowery wood, he beheld Castle Bisiers—vast, and tall, and lordly—rising out of the rich and leafy plain. He spurred his noble steed to a swifter gallop; and joyfully did the gallant beast strain

its exhausted strength, filling the morning air with its exulting neigh, as though foreboding a happy end to the journey. Higher and higher throbbed the prophetic heart of Arnald as he beheld many glittering squadrons, both horse and foot, wending their way, in full array, towards the coast. He fancied that he could hear the joyous sound of their songs; and it struck almost painfully upon his heart that he did not as yet ride amongst them. Faster and faster he hurried on towards the hero's castle, so that his attendant was left following far behind; and at last he checked his steaming and almost breathless steed before a farm-yard, where shields hanging from the hedges, lances planted in the earth, and helmets glittering upon the posts, announced the presence of a squadron. Several horsemen¹ came forth from the gate, and gave him friendly greeting.

"Welcome, noble sir," said the eldest of the party. "Your aspect tells us at once whither you are going. Scarce half an hour ago, the Vicomte Bisiers marched with the first division of the vanguard. Please you to remain with us awhile; to-morrow we follow him, and shall doubtless arrive in right time for the battle: your gallant war-horse needs repose."

And as Arnald looked somewhat doubtfully around him, the soldier continued: "Or would you rather ride the beautiful animal to death, than arrive a day later? Nay, spare him for the first charge against the Saracens: nothing is too good to be freely expended *then*; but *now* it were indeed a pity to sacrifice him."

Arnald stretched out his hand in friendly acquiescence, and leaped from the saddle. Meantime his attendant had also ridden up; and the party mingled together like true brethren in arms.

During the morning meal, Arnald sang many stirring war-songs to his comrades, which caused them to glow

¹ *Reisigen*, an old word signifying horsemen, or members of a troop of horse.

with joyful ardour: at length they craved the name of their new and noble companion; and great was the rejoicing amid all the squadrons of the second division when they learned that Arnald of Maraviglia, the valiant and far-famed troubadour, would fight in their ranks.

Towards evening, the knightly minstrel ascended a neighbouring hill, whence he gazed down, solitary and thoughtful, upon Castle Bisiers. Beneath him lay a smiling flower-garden, all gleaming with bright canals and silvery pools. The mighty trees kept watch around, like solemn and heroic warders of olden days.

Then there came forth along the avenue a tall and slender female form, clad in snow-white garments, which solemnly floated around her; she was followed by several maidens, and by an attendant who carried tenderly in her arms a young child, adorned with kerchiefs and ribbons of various hues. Although the lady walked in calm and graceful dignity, with scarcely any movement of head or hand, Arnald seemed to know that she was speaking deep and powerful words to her companions—words such as stirred and kindled every right feeling within them. At length she took the infant from the arms of its nurse, and bent down to kiss it, so that her veil dropped forwards over her head; and the whole group passed on into a thick and leafy shrubbery.

“Oh, who could be deemed worthy to gaze upon the features of her face!” sighed Arnald, half-audibly; but he checked himself immediately, on becoming aware of the footsteps and breathing of a man close beside him.

As he turned, a good-humoured peasant accosted him, saying, “Ah, fair stranger and warrior, was it not well at your heart when you beheld yonder lofty Appearance in the garden? Yes, yes; but, could you see her closely, and see also the lovely babe which she bare two years ago to our prince—the little countess Berta! So fair a grace is often vouchsafed to us at our harvest-festivals and other innocent holydays; for we are the vassals of this far-famed

and angelic lady, the beautiful Countess Alearda, the spouse of Vicomte Bisiers; and she fosters us, and cherishes us, and makes our life a very heaven on earth, as though she were a messenger from paradise, sent by our gracious God."

The peasant had in this told no new nor strange tidings to the minstrel; yet did those simple words unspeakably touch his heart. He pressed a few gold coins into the hand of the narrator, who thanked him warmly, and murmured as he went away, "Lo! another blessing from the presence of the fair countess! Scarce any good befalls the whole land that comes not from her!"

Arnald returned to the bivouac of his comrades in deep thought. He found that he had been long expected, and, indeed, they had sent forth in various directions to seek him; for the Countess Alearda had sent her page to request his presence at Castle Bisiers, being moved thereto by her love and reverence for the fame and the lays of the noble troubadour.

Rejoicing at such an invitation, Arnald set forth instantly with his young conductor.

High and pure, the stars gazed down from the blue skies of the spring night. A solemn feeling thrilled through the breast of Maraviglia. He deemed that it might be the approaching crisis of his country's fate which thus stirred and roused his spirit; yet could he not conceal from himself that there was somewhat more than this, and different from this: and as he lifted up his eyes, and beheld the constellation unnamed by Al-tarbol shining directly above his head in fulness of glory, the thought arose within him, "Perchance the name shall be 'Alearda' for thee!"

Castle Bisiers was an ancient edifice, lofty and very extensive, strangely intersected by numerous winding stairs and vaulted passages. Long ere this had Arnald heard the legend of the castle-spirit that was wont to haunt the place—an ancestor of the family, brightly armed and

gleaming with light when his presence announced life and joy; but dark, gloomy, and veiled by the heavy cowl of a monk when he came as the harbinger of trouble or death. And now as the page opened and closed the doors, and he gazed along the dim staircases, it came into the heart of the minstrel that he should meet this prophetic apparition, and learn from its lips the fate of his beloved and suffering country. All things around him assumed a mystical and supernatural aspect. At last they reached the chambers of the countess. The page entered first, to announce his companion; and then beckoning the troubadour to advance, left the apartment. Arnald gazed upon the walls, wide and bright, adorned with flowers, and glittering with many beautiful pictures of saints; and at the same instant beheld the tall and glorious form of the lady as she entered or rather floated into the room through an opposite door, which communicated with a darker chamber. Fairer than her snow-white drapery was the light of her angelic countenance beneath its simple coronal of sable tresses; her smile was full of lofty sweetness; her courteous salutation was dignified and serious. Arnald bent his head more lowly than he had ever before bent it in his life: with effort he spoke a few words of reverential greeting; it seemed to him that he stood before one who was at once an enchantress and a saint.

The great castle-clock solemnly tolled forth the hour; and an unknown voice whispered in the heart of Arnald, "Lo! the decisive hour of thy whole life is striking!"

The countess motioned him to a seat opposite herself, and there soon arose between them a conversation of deep and serious import; beginning, indeed, with the Gai Science, but soon passing onward to the grave earnest of life, for in all true and pure hearts Art and Life are ever inseparably one and the same.

"We have of late been flattered by the hope," said Alearda, "that this projected invasion of the heathen will not take place. The terrible Moorish prince Tarfe—that

tyrannical and ambitious youth, has, say they, heard so great things of the preparations of the vicomte, that he suffers his enterprise to sleep for the present. What think you of this, noble master?"

"Lady," replied Arnald, "what should the delay of the menacing tempest avail these shores? God turn from us such a fate! Let us conquer honourably, if so we may; if so we must, let us die honourably with our swords in our hands; only one or the other speedily!"

"Humanly speaking, you are right," said Alearda; "yet are your lays too pious to suffer me to believe that you deal thus proudly with your God. It may be His will even that we should endure, and wait."

At this moment the martial music of advancing squadrons, as they defiled past the castle, struck joyfully on the ears of the speakers; Arnald's cheek glowed, and his eye sparkled. "Heavily, very heavily," sighed he, "would such a dispensation of God weigh upon many valiant hearts; yet would it not be the first time that a father hath, out of love, withheld from his children the gift which they too vehemently desired. The Lord's will be done!"

"And, Master Arnald of Maraviglia," added the countess very gravely, and even solemnly, "then will it become you to remain in your fatherland, during the pause of the whirlwind. Pleasant and cheerful is the wandering life of the minstrel, as he carelessly passes from one land to another—but only so, when the golden light of peace lies upon his own. In darker days the minstrel finds other and graver work to do. Truly it is the glory of chivalry to draw the sword for hearth and home; yet is there a calmer, less honoured, tenfold more arduous, and therefore infinitely and inexpressibly more noble glory for chivalry. It is this—to endure with one's fellow-countrymen, and aid them to watch and feed the eternal fire within their breasts, till the day when it shall be needed."

"I stir not from Provence," returned Arnald with energetic humility, "as long as the Moor and his squadrons,

be they near or be they far, menace the holy faith and freedom of my brethren."

"Thanks be to God, I was not mistaken in you!" said Alearda as she left him, with an approving smile.

When Arnald was again in the free air, he sang, with strong and joyous heart, the following strain amid the silent valleys:—

Welcome, peace and innocence !
 Welcome, war, where heroes meet
 Even the anguish of suspense
 I with words of welcome greet ;
 God, whate'er Thou wilt, dispense !
 Whatsoe'er Thou wilt, is meet.
 Welcome are all, in Thy good name !
 And yet, if burns my bosom's flame
 With eager and impatient glow—
 A gentle spell to quench the fire I know !

He looked up to the star which he loved so well, and saluted it by the name of "Alearda;" at the same time striking a full chord upon his lyre, the exulting sounds of which soared upwards to the golden lamps of heaven.

Chapter Third.

SURROUNDED by sparkling lakes, in a blooming valley not far from Castle Bisiers, there stood a huge minster, which was held in higher reverence than any other temple in the country. Here were the Provençals wont to hurry the noblest and wisest of their princes, and a magnificent vault near the high altar was devoted to this purpose.

On the evening of Arnald's return from Castle Bisiers he received the command of a squadron of light horse; and on the following day, at the fresh hour of morning, he passed through the consecrated valley. As they approached the house of God, the leader of the second division halted,

and summoned the assembled troops to pray beside the graves of the illustrious dead ; the abbot of the cloister of St. Anne was present, in compliance with the entreaty of the vicomte, and ready to bestow on the soldiers his blessing, for victory or for death. They leaped hurriedly from their war-horses, fastened them in couples, and gave them to the care of some peasants. Then the whole warrior-train moved on silently, but with great clashing of armour, through the lofty and resounding aisles.

The vault which contained the bodies of the brave and wise was open ; gleaming through the darkness, the escutcheons and golden inscriptions on their coffins were visible ; the squadrons ranged themselves around the spot in a semi-circle. The abbot of St. Anne's now stepped solemnly forward, his eyes full of enthusiasm, and glistening with tears ; with a thrill of delight Arnald recognised his Altarbol. The stately priest stood still in the midst of the warriors, and thus addressed them :—

“God's blessing be on ye ! God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost. Amen ! Ye, the flower of this land, as in the joyousness of life ye stand beside this land's noblest graves, I bid ye God speed upon the solemn path that leads to fame, and also to graves ; but to graves not less honourable than those which now admonish you of the great deeds of your forefathers.

“There is but one life ; life in God, who manifests Himself to us in truth. Aught else is but delusion and error. There is no truth without freedom ; ye are the defenders of our freedom. Men and youths, I was summoned hither to give you my blessing for victory or for death ; but I bless you for victory and for life. For the feeling glows within the inmost and holiest depths of my being, like a festal fire : not one of your band shall turn aside from the foe, in coward care for his own safety. Therefore is life yours, irrevocably yours ; whether the flowers of the coming spring shall bud forth from your graves on the battle-field, or be wreathed in garlands for your victorious brows at

the dance and the festival ; or perchance there may even be one in your ranks so highly honoured that he shall receive a place among the valiant and the wise who sleep here at our feet, and then, when May appears, we will bring our votive wreaths to his dark and solemn abode.

“ Thus, then, flower and pride of Provence, rise up in God’s name ; shine in the eyes of the heathens, and shatter their ranks, driving them down to the very dust ! The promise of God is yours, given you by the lips of His consecrated priest ; and in the midst of the strife of this world the peace of God shall be yours also. Amen.”

Moved with holy emotion, Altarbol had scarcely been able to speak ; but his words came from the heart, and went to the heart. Solemnly, with burning tears in their eyes, the warriors went forth, and mounted their steeds. As Arnald swung himself into his saddle, he felt a strong grasp upon his hand : it was Altarbol.

“ I knew well that thou wouldst not here be wanting,” said he. “ Yesterday I sought thee anxiously in the first division. But the Spirit tells me that thou wilt join the battle in good time. Stand thou stedfast and joyful, my son ; great trials are before us, and much need will there be of the deeds and exhortations of the minstrel !”

Herewith he gave him his blessing, and returned to the minster. Silent but joyful, the troops marched onwards amid the bloom and fragrance of spring.

Chapter Fourth.

SCARCELY had the first column of the Provençal army encamped on the sea-shore, opposite to the Isles of Hyeres, setting its line of watches along the whole extent of coast, when, one by one, in rapid succession, the sails of the Moorish fleet were seen to rise out of the sea, by the light of the ascending moon. Women and children fled, weep-

ing aloud; warriors exulted at the coming day of battle. Couriers were despatched to hasten the march of the second column, which was almost exclusively composed of cavalry: after riding at a quick and joyful pace from the hour of morning twilight, as noonday approached, the sea, the adverse fleet, and the allied camp, became at once visible to the eyes of all.

Tarfe, the gallant Moorish prince, had, with the quick eye of an experienced general, selected a promontory, which stretched far out into the sea, for his point of disembarkation. On either side, close to the place of landing, he caused a great number of barks, manned with his best archers, and laden with a terrible cargo of Greek fire, to cast anchor; thus the crossing range of their shot would cover his troops till they should have won firm footing, and were ready for a decisive charge upon the foe.

But he encountered in the Vicomte Bisiers a general not less skilful than himself. Well aware that the enemy would endeavour to seize on so favourable a position, he had taken up his head-quarters at this very point, hoping to break suddenly through the range of their cross-bows with a charge of his assembled cavalry, and so to drive back the enemy with slaughter to their ships. When the summoned squadrons trotted up to the spot, a large portion of the Moorish force had already landed on the promontory. It was evident that they intended there to entrench themselves. Before the ranks the young and regal Tarfe galloped to and fro in all the splendour of his gleaming armour.

Suddenly and swiftly the Provençal horse of the second division came forth, like a flight of birds, from the shadows of a neighbouring village embosomed in fruit-trees; Arnald eagerly directing the movement, and recalling with joy the warlike exercises of his boyhood. Glittering in steel, the whole body spread itself out over the wide plain; there was visible disorder in the ranks of the infantry on the promontory; hastily gathering themselves together,

and placing Tarfe, who looked proudly down from his steed on the rising battle, in their midst, they presented a front stiff and serried with lances, like the bristles of a porcupine, towards every side on which an attack seemed to be practicable. On board the ships, the archers and those who were skilled in the hurling of Greek fire made ready their murderous weapons.

“God save Provence! Now, my brave riders, for honour and death!”

Thus shouted, from the right wing, the mighty voice of the Vicomte Bisiers, and at the same moment the almost gigantic form of the hero, on his tall war-horse, was seen to dart along the ranks, clashing and rattling in his heavy armour. Arnald could not see the countenance of his leader through the closed visor, but it seemed to him as though his eyes flashed lightnings between the steel plates.

The general now halted once more before the centre, swung his gleaming sword through the air, high above his helmet-plume, and cried—

“In the name of Christ and all His saints, charge!”

All the trumpets sounded at once, and the squadrons thundered forwards against the expectant enemy, like riders contending in a race.

Right and left, fire, darts, and arrows were rained from the ships upon the flanks of the advancing army; but those who were stricken by the Greek fire sank down at once to earth, and were consumed in silence, while if a cry of pain was wrung from others by the bolt or the shaft, it was almost inaudible in the hurry and tempest of that charge.

“Forwards! Forwards! Hew down the heathen!” cried Arnald, exultingly, as he urged his troops far in advance of the main body.

Suddenly, through smoke and dust, he discerned that he was in the midst of the enemy's ranks. He had ridden down one spearman without being aware of it; his trusty sword disposed of another, while behind and around him his comrades were fighting gallantly.

He was about to attack a troop which had hitherto remained unmolested, when, as he closed upon its ranks, his good roan steed, pierced by an arrow from the ships, fell dead upon him. His followers, not seeing his danger, continued to rush forwards. Quick as lightning the thought shot through his mind, "Lo, here I lie, like mine ancestor whose tale Walter related to me; but if he would not surrender to Christians, how much less must I yield to a heathen." He saw a troop with bloody lances coming down upon him, and he looked firmly and patiently into the eyes of death; for beneath the burden of his dead horse he was scarce able to move his good sword. But at that moment a second charge of the Provençal horse broke the array of the Moors. All those in the enemy's army who had power to fly, fled. The Christian forces pursued them to the coast in all the exultation of victory; and as Arnald endeavoured to extricate himself from the body of his charger, he saw the sails of the haughty Tarfe swelling and spreading far over the sea, while the returning Provençals led with them a rich train of captive heathen.

Chapter Fifth.

ARNALD was yet standing by the body of his horse, in a mood at once glad and thoughtful, when the Vicomte Bisiers, having been informed of the presence of the troubadour, approached him at the head of a glittering troop of cavaliers, and, stooping from his tall war-steed, stretched out his victorious hand in friendly greeting. Beneath his vizor, now unclosed, was seen the countenance as of an inspired hero. With joyful reverence Maraviglia received the offered hand of his commander.

Many strong battalions were now despatched in all directions, with careful instructions from the vicomte to spread along the coast and scale the neighbouring heights,

in order to watch the motions of the Saracen fleet. Then the general caused a beautiful Arab steed, armed and caparisoned in all the pomp of Moorish array, to be led forward and presented to Arnald as a substitute for his slain horse. Arnald received the knightly gift with gratitude, leaped lightly into the broad shovel-shaped golden stirrups, grasped the silver-embossed reins, and, after having seated himself securely in the somewhat peculiar saddle, he galloped the noble animal up and down with daring and skill, and finally delivered it to his attendant.

“Thou hast ridden it fairly, Arnald,” said the vicomte. “But he also, whom it bore in the battle, rode it fairly. He was a young, tall, and slender Moorish knight, clad in black vestments, with many white and shining devices upon his breast. At first I mistook him for Tarfe; but on a nearer approach I perceived that this gallant youth was another, and was covering the retreat of the prince. I was on the point of attacking him, and he, eager as myself for the combat, had just swung exultingly his bright scimitar above his head, when we were separated by a crowd of the flying Moorish infantry. I could not penetrate them, and I saw that my gallant adversary would not ride down his fellow-countrymen. At this moment one of them, wounded by a random arrow from his own ships, fell on the earth, crying out lamentably that it was cruel to leave him to the mercy of his enemies. Light as a breath my black horseman sprang out of his saddle, lifted up the bleeding soldier, and half carrying half leading him, withdrew to the ships. Had it been Tarfe himself I could not have found it in my heart to pursue him. But his gallant white horse, being left masterless, ran towards my own charger, and him I captured as a memorial of the scene. Be thou also mindful of the noble Moorish warrior when thou mountest him, dear Arnald.”

The warriors reclined upon the fresh green grass for the feast of victory. According to the custom of those bard-loving days, Arnald was assigned a place beside the

general. Goblets circled around ; and those brave and confident hearts opened themselves to each other in gay and various communings.

There was one young knight—his name was Guy of Hauteroche—who appeared to take peculiar delight in gazing on Arnald. His words were generally addressed to the troubadour ; and if the latter spoke, he listened to him so heedfully, and found so many different ways of making himself acceptable to him, that Arnald was at first almost disposed to imagine him a youthful neophyte of the Gai Science, who was perchance desirous of committing himself to the guidance of the practised minstrel. But this idea vanished at once when it came into the head of the friendly Guy to volunteer a song. For it was not enough that his voice, naturally not unpleasing, stumbled from one discord to another without the singer's suspecting for a moment that any thing was amiss, but he likewise so maltreated the measure, rhyme, and sense of the words, with equal indifference and recklessness, that the vicomte, bursting into hearty laughter, was at length constrained to entreat him to cease, which entreaty Guy granted with a laugh as hearty as his own. For in the whole deportment and expression of the youth there was a warmth and a gracefulness which caused men utterly dissimilar both to him and to each other to become in a moment his friends, provided only they were good at heart like himself.

There was now much speech concerning the wrath and shame of the Moorish prince, and many a gay sarcasm was passed upon the vanquished ; during all of which the Vicomte Bisiers remained unchangeably silent.

At last he whispered to the troubadour : “ Maraviglia, these youths fancy themselves already high up above all the hills in the world ; nevertheless, we have still many a hard journey to make, more particularly if I rightly interpret the smoke-clouds which I see rising yonder above the cliffs. Sing to them some solemn and warning strain, I pray you.”

Arnald took his lyre, and all around became observant and mute at the sound of the grave music which he drew from its strings. He then sang the following verses:—

The Lord of Hosts hath won the strife,
 We owe it to His hands ;
 Patience, and humbleness of life,
 He now from us demands.
 Peace, peace, ye scoffers, one and all —
 What, know ye not His might ?
 Watch truly, lest your footsteps fall,
 Watch truly through the night.

Oh, brightly shines the summer morn —
 So soft, so pure, so warm ;
 Yet whispers in the forest warn
 Of the coming of the storm.
 Oh, blithe the bridal cup we fill,
 And the festive lamps burn clear ;
 But dark forebodings murmur still
 Of grave, and shroud, and bier.

Therefore be glad in pleasure's hour,
 But firm with lance in rest ;
 So shall not sorrow overpower
 When she assails thy breast.
 Stand fast, ye true confessors, then,
 Watchful, but not in fear ;
 So shall ye play your parts like men,
 And all at last be clear.

When the lay was ended, the captains looked down seriously and silently ; unwonted and foreboding thoughts arose within their bosoms. And this was well ; for at the same moment a troop of couriers came riding up from the coasts and from the cliffs, all pale, and in great disorder. The vicomte spoke with them apart ; the warriors began to look from their goblets to their swords.

“ Soldiers,” said the vicomte, stepping into the midst of the captains with calm gravity, “ while we were en-

gaged in repulsing the forces of the Moorish prince on this quarter, another of his squadrons was employed in effecting a landing on another part of the coast; and their attempt was successful. With that body he has now united the troops conquered by us, and the whole force has marched, with its overpowering numbers, upon Castle Bisiers, which is less distant from them than from us. In God's name, then, let them burn Castle Bisiers to the earth; be it ours to pursue the foe, and, by cutting off their communication with the sea-shore, annihilate with a single stroke the whole brood of serpents. Gentlemen and knights, I request you to betake yourselves to your respective troops. I will cause the signal for mounting to be given immediately."

Impressed by the steadfast composure of the general, the minds of all assumed a similar calmness, so that the arrangements for departure proceeded regularly and securely. One only amid all the leaders wore the paleness of death upon his face, and that one was Arnald of Maraviglia: yet he marshalled his squadron with his wonted care and order.

The Vicomte Bisiers beckoned him apart, saying, "Tell me, my noble troubadour, what is it that has so powerfully affected you? It must needs be something that concerns our whole enterprise; for, concerning *yourself*, your fame is well known; and to-day have you honourably attested it—concerning yourself, never would your cheek so lose its colour."

"God forbid!" replied Arnald, as a somewhat indignant glow chased the paleness from his countenance. "Nevertheless, sir, my anxiety is not on account of our whole enterprise. But the enemy has marched upon Castle Bisiers; and there dwells the lady Alearda."

"Now truly have I thoroughly understood you," cried the vicomte warmly; "a noble troubadour is the fittest guardian of noble ladies. Away, then, and lead your troop of light horsemen by the nearest roads to Castle Bisiers.

Your gallant troop is well able, singly, to outstrip the foe, and if you there find the countess, I commit her to your protection."

Oh, how gratefully did Arnald bend to his general! oh, how joyfully he galloped with his troop along the path that led to Castle Bisiers!

Chapter Sixth.

ARNALD reached the castle on a calm night, a little time before the hour of moonrise. Having carefully disposed his troops on the quarter from which the approach of the enemy was to be expected, and scrupulously guarded all the passes, he left his horse with the squadron, and set forth alone to the castle, in order to arouse the countess, and prepare her for departure as gently as possible.

The mighty edifice arose dark and gigantic beneath the skies of night, which were yet almost as dark as its own shadowy form. Arnald looked in vain for a warder upon the battlements, or a lamp gleaming from some casement or loophole: the stillness of death was every where. He was afraid to sound the great bell which hung beside the drawbridge, or to wind his horn, lest he should startle the lady out of her peaceful and holy dreams, and awaken her in terror.

But what was his astonishment when he found the drawbridge let down—what his dismay when he beheld both the wings of the great vaulted doorway standing wide open, so as to admit a free view of the castle-court, silent as death, and dark as the grave! Was it possible that the heathens had been here before him? Yet, as far as he could ascertain through the darkness, there were here no traces of violence—all things wore an aspect of peace and order. He ascended a staircase which he had before observed, and which conducted to the guard-room, formerly

peopled by a throng of fully-armed soldiers. The door sprang open at his first touch; but the chamber was black and silent as the doors and courts which he had left. As he advanced, his foot struck against some armour which fell together clanging and rattling, and almost shook him from his footing. "Are ye asleep, warders?" cried Arnald, thrilling with a kind of inexplicable awe.

A hollow echo rang along the walls; but there was no other answer. He stooped over the armour: it was empty, and appeared to consist only of old rusty iron, with strips of torn leather and clasps, crumbling with age. A thick vapour of dust arose in his face as he bent over the fragments.

While he yet stood in doubt, he saw, or fancied that he saw, light proceeding from a small ante-chamber, like the gleaming of mail, or the glimmering of a dim lamp. Thither he accordingly hastened; but he found no one, and all was darkness. The breath of the night-wind swept in low whispers through the open casements.

In this scene of strange, unwonted, and incomprehensible mystery, chilly forebodings crept upon the heart of the minstrel: earnestly craving after the living shapes of heaven and earth—after the wood, the stream, and the starlight,—he leaned far out of the unclosed window. At that moment the moon began to rise above a neighbouring grove of plane-trees. Strength and calmness returned to the heart of the lonely one.

But there stood without, beside the castle-moat, a group of dark forms, whispering softly together, all of whom appeared gazing up at him, and even pointing towards him. He had no fear of the Saracens; the wise disposition of his troops gave him ample security on that head. But that very security seemed to impart an unintelligible, nay, almost a spectral, mystery to the dusky group: he would have given much for the assurance that a visible and substantial human form stood in the soundless vacancy behind him.

It seemed as though this his desire were about to be fulfilled on the instant; for a ray of light suddenly gleamed through the small dim chamber. As Arnald looked around, there stood close behind him a tall knight in complete armour, who was gazing through the same window upon the landscape beneath, and nodding his head as if well pleased with what he saw.

The dark forms beside the castle-moat seemed to murmur low and undistinguishable prayers, and lifted their hands in thankfulness toward the window.

Arnald was about to address his companion, and to offer him the place next the casement, when with sudden horror he became aware that the colossal height of the stranger arose to the central point of the vaulted roof, and that his countenance, though it wore a friendly and condescending smile, was of the whiteness of snow, dazzlingly radiant, and with features of grave and ancient aspect. At the same moment the apparition motioned very solemnly towards the door and steps, and there arose a sound along the walls, like the ringing of a lyre, articulately whispering these words:—

“ Hence to fresh deeds of fame and power;
Pass'd is the storm, and saved the flower!
Away, away! 'Tis now mine hour!”

Arnald dared not disobey the mysterious command. He hastened to join the crowd before the castle-gates, and he found them in all the agitation of joy. They were the vassals of the surrounding country; shepherds, husbandmen, and burghers, assembled in great need and hope of succour: and well might they rejoice, for the castle-spectre had just appeared to them at the window, clad in glittering steel, and presaging happiness. It was thus manifest that the mighty spirit had been he who gazed over Arnald's shoulder into the valley; and the minstrel felt an icy thrill run along his veins at the thought.

Nevertheless the spirit had announced wcal and victory

by his bright appearance, and Alearda was rescued; for having been warned by her faithful peasantry, she had set forward on the preceding day with all her train, by a secure road, to a neighbouring and strongly defended state.

Arnald could therefore do nothing for his lady, and truly that was grievous to his heart, which had so lately hounded with joy and eagerness.

Chapter Seventh.

MEN who love God, and labour for the right, never suffer the weight of that feeble and selfish regret — “Lo, another has done it, and not I!” to remain long upon their hearts: they ask “not *who*, but *how*?”¹ and their spirits are refreshed and glad. So was it with our Arnald, and he rode forth very cheerfully with the dawn of morning, in the direction by which Tarfe was expected to arrive. That the Saracens must still be far distant, he had gathered from the information of the peasantry, and he purposed lying in ambush for them in a very woody and entangled part of the country, through which their road must inevitably pass, with the hope of dispersing the enemy by the first shock, or, at any rate, of detaining them with considerable loss till the vicomte should come up with the rest of the army. He accordingly despatched a body of scouts and pioneers to reconnoitre the chosen spot, while he himself tarried behind the hill, only posting a few solitary horsemen as sentinels along the neighbouring heights.

All the joys and sorrows of his life seemed now to pass in procession before his spirit; and when from time to time the overpowering shadow of some deep grief fell upon him, he looked down at the gleaming sword upon his thigh, and

¹ This ancient English motto seems to be the best equivalent for the proverbial form of the original phrase.

felt how glorious, and how fair a thing it was, thus to stand under arms for the defence and comfort of his beleaguered countrymen.

The sound of a solemn chant arose from the woods below. It was the illustrious abbot Altarbol, at the head of the monks of St. Anne's, bearing rich viands and refreshments of all kinds, as offerings to the Provençal army, of whose presence in their neighbourhood they had been informed. In his present position, Arnald might safely allow his horsemen to enjoy at their ease the proffered hospitality; and the whole troop, frank, friendly, and joyous, cast themselves down upon the dewy spring grass, amid a goodly array of flasks, wine-cups, and salvers.

Altarbol rejoiced greatly at finding his heroic pupil, the fame of whose deeds at the contest on the shore had already reached him, in command of the squadron; and for once he disdained not to pledge Arnald in a cup of noble Xeres wine, drunk to future victories in the cause of God and fatherland. The first subject of discourse between them was, the memory of the noble Walter Altarbol related, with affectionate particularity, how rapidly, and yet how softly, had that god-fearing hero fallen asleep. "Concerning thee, my beloved minstrel-hero," thus he closed his narration,—“concerning thee could he give me no charge, for the power of speech had forsaken him. But, I read it distinctly in his holy countenance, he prayed for thee in his last moments, and his blessing shall remain with thee, through time and through eternity.”

A few tears dropped from Arnald's eyes upon the soft grass of the meadow, fresh in all the hopeful hues of May. There was silence between the friends for a time. Then they discoursed again of the danger and deliverance of their dear country; and at length Arnald said —

“My dear and honoured master, do thou solve for me, one, only one solitary doubt, and there is no man upon earth who shall ride more joyously against the enemy than myself.”

“Speak, my son!” returned Altarbol; but he looked upon him wonderingly, and half shook his head.

“What,” said Arnald, in a suppressed voice, “what can have moved the Countess Alearda, of fame so pure and noble, to leave in her flight a castle not merely ungarisoned, but with gates and doors opened? Mark me, now, father; I live but in the image of my ladye; she is mine angel, pointing out to me all rightful paths on earth; she, mine angel also, exhorting, purifying, elevating me to God, I must needs comprehend all things in her actions, and perceive them to be pure and illustrious, as I lately perceived herself to be; for if there comes upon her the faintest shadow of darkness, my whole soul is at once darkened.”

The wrathful inspiration sleeping beneath the solemn brows of Altarbol once more awoke.

“I suspected,” said he, after a brief silence, “that thy question was as the question of a fool. For what profiteth it to doubt and to question, when days such as the present are dawning upon us? In such times a right-hearted man finds rightful comfort in his own valiant breast, or finds it nowhere. But that thou shouldst inquire of me concerning what the lofty lady Alearda has been pleased to do, and what to leave undone, *that* is an extent of folly greater than I could ever have dreamed; and I should call thee boy, hadst thou not so lately and so well approved thyself a man. Learn, then, that it becomes us all to receive instruction from that lofty lady: thee, me, the blessed Walter; ay, every human being. Her will and her deeds are simply light and truth; when she says, ‘Do this — and forbear that!’ it belongs not to any noble heart to ponder or hesitate, but to do and to forbear immediately, according to the will of that blessed angel-messenger, whom we know to be sent and inspired by God; little though her own humility would believe or acknowledge such a mission. But, with regard to her present conduct, the meaning of it is intelligible to mine own weak reason; therefore

will I open thy feeble eyes. It was impossible that the few soldiers who sufficed for the suite of the lady should hold out Castle Bisiers against the enemy; wherefore, then, defend, wherefore close that which cannot be effectually defended or closed against any foe? Away with all half-measures! Sooner let the plundering fury of the heathen lay waste the castle without hinderance! As Castle Bisiers hath stood more glorious than all other dwellings in the land, it is meet that it should draw first upon itself the thunderbolt; or, on the other hand, if God protect the lordly fortress, the most fenceless hut in the land shall partake its safety!"

"Oh, our lofty lady!" cried Arnald; "and our great commander likewise said, 'Let Castle Bisiers burn to the ground!' That was said according to the spirit of Alearda."

"Thou understandest her rightly now," said Altarbol. "Only trust! All things whatsoever, that we can do or think worthily, only come to good effect, according to the will of God, by the glory and blessing of her perfection."

Meanwhile Arnald's messengers had returned: the enemy had not yet come in sight of the woods. Inspired with lofty enthusiasm, accompanied by the blessing of his illustrious friend, the knightly minstrel rode at the head of his gallant troop into the shadow of the trees.

Chapter Eighth.

ARNALD waited for the enemy during several days, beneath the pleasant darkness of olive-trees and of many odorous shrubs; his reconnoitering parties spread far and wide through the country around, but nowhere could they discover any sign of the approach of the Moors. It became evident that Tarfe had entirely abandoned his expedition against Castle Bisiers; and the only object now to be effected was, a speedy junction with the vicomte's army.

Musing over this second instance of disappointed hope, Arnald rode forth with his squadron from the shades which so lately had seemed ready to drop certain and richly-blooming wreaths upon his brow. He directed his course once more towards the sea-coast, where, in fact, the Moorish prince, not daring to leave the main body of the Provençal army in his rear, had taken up a strong position, which was on this very day assailed by the vicomte, with all the forces that he could muster.

Maraviglia had not proceeded far before the distant tumult of battle sounded upon his ears. His servant sprang from the saddle, put his ear to the ground, and then exclaimed :—

“ In truth, noble sir, they have met ! That confused sound rising from the earth is the tramp of charging horsemen, and yonder strange and subdued roar must surely be the hissing of the Greek fireballs, as the enemy hurls them through the air in thousands.”

Rapid as flight was the gallop of Arnald’s troop towards the field of battle.

As Maraviglia ascended a gently sloping eminence, the scene of combat became visible to his eyes. The Provençal squadrons were charging from all sides up a strongly guarded height, from the summit of which the Moors were hurling their darts and their javelins, and whence—for rightly had the travellers foreboded the meaning of the mysterious sound which they heard but now—the Greek fire was rushing down in raging and terrific streams.

“ Forward, dear and joyous brethren in arms ! Forward—upon them, and through them !”

Thus shouted Arnald ; and the gallant band urged their weary chargers to the attack, sometimes spurring hastily, sometimes coaxing them by words of encouragement.

But the Arab steed of Arnald was neither faint nor weary ; he gaily caracoled beneath his rider to the spot

where the heroic vicomte had halted for a moment, at the head of his troops.

“She is saved; for thou lookest upon me cheerily!” cried the general, meeting the eyes of Arnald with a joyful and confiding gaze. Quickly, but intelligibly, in the hurry of the moment, Arnald related his brief history; then the vicomte said:—

“Thanks, thou noble lord of Maraviglia: and now marshal your squadron, and hasten therewith to the left wing of yonder cavalry: we will try a fresh assault!”

Arnald took the post assigned to him with joyful alacrity. Closely ranked, and offering a stern and resolute front, the assembled horsemen at a quick trot ascended the hill, which seemed all on flames with Greek fire. Right and left fell the terrible showers as Arnald rode onwards; but the will of God conducted him in safety through the midst of those hissing, roaring, and rustling flames. He fancied that the crisis of victory was again at hand, and of a victory yet more decisive than the last. But it was not so. The vicomte had only hazarded this onset in order to draw the enemy from their almost impregnable position, either by the formidable array of glittering and clashing cavalry, or by the eagerness of brave men to measure themselves, hand to hand, against their adversaries. But the eagle-glance of Tarfe had not slept. The bold Moorish prince restrained himself, and remained firm in his position, well knowing that no cavalry could storm those inaccessible heights, and that both his flanks were sufficiently protected by water and felled trees. The vicomte’s infantry was already so much exhausted by its heroic efforts, that there could now be no question save of the means of procuring for it a secure and honourable retreat.

The Vicomte Bisters halted, therefore, at the foot of the steepest ascent, ordered his infantry to withdraw by the neighbouring valleys and hamlets, and meanwhile made a gallant stand with his brave horsemen upon the plain, against the shafts and fire of the enemy.

At a signal from his commander, Arnald sprang forwards.

“ At this moment your own troops need you less than I do, valiant troubadour,” said the general. “ Stand by my side ; and if any thing occurs to you concerning the position of the squadrons, give me your opinion freely.”

Arnald felt deeply the honour thus conferred upon him ; nevertheless a voice said within his heart, in stern and wrathful accents, “ A lost battle ! A battle utterly lost !” Thus the two warriors stood silent and side by side for a time, in the midst of that fiery rain, but neither of them received any hurt.

At last a captain of the column of foot came up on a mule, swift as the wind, and announced that the troops had reached their destined position by passes and ravines, only that the Captain Lanzarossa had been unable to restrain his bold spirit, and was now leading the left wing to a fresh attack upon the hill.

At the same moment the loud “ Vive Provence !” of the advancing troop cleft the air, and they were seen to storm the nearest height by a desperate and successful charge, the valiant Lanzarossa leading them on with lowered partisan. A hot tear forced itself into the eye of Arnald, as he beheld with mournful exultation the heroism of his countrymen, which, alas ! could not avail to turn the gloomy destiny of the day. Even the general’s eagle-eye was not dry.

Before long a terrible stream of fire swept the gallant Lanzarossa away. “ Fare thee well, brave heart !” said the vicomte.

The small troop which had been commanded by the noble dead, now almost consumed, and, as it were, melted together, began to retreat with calm and melancholy composure. The Moors were heard to shout in exultation from their heights. Oh, how did the heart of Arnald bleed, and how far fairer and easier would it have been to him to bleed from open wounds upon a field of victory ! But he called to mind the words of Alearda, when she spake of that

hardest and heaviest task of chivalry, which bears with it neither glory nor outward joy; and he turned again to gaze stedfastly and cheerfully upon the showers of flame.

“Lord of Maraviglia,” said the vicomte very gravely, “how think you? Can I answer it to God, to keep my horsemen any longer in this position?”

Arnald mused for a moment, and then said, “No, noble sir, I believe not. In case the Moorish prince should charge this handful of infantry, we must be ready to repulse him from the borders of yonder village; so shall many a brave rider and many a good horse be spared.”

“I can see that you find it no easy task to counsel retreat,” returned the vicomte; “nevertheless you are in the right, and I thank you.”

Then he caused the standard of his cavalry to be wheeled around, and took up the position thus determined upon. Soon afterwards the remnant of Lanzarossa’s troop passed through the village. The horsemen followed, and were speedily beyond reach either of the weapons or the shouts of the enemy. Silently and gloomily they encamped on the opposite heights.

Chapter Ninth.

THE watchfires burned brightly, and the stars of heaven shone down upon them; Arnald looked upward to that beloved constellation which he was wont to name “Alearda.” Then Guy of Hanteroché, who had lain down beside him in all courtesy and friendship, thus addressed him:—

“The countess would greatly marvel, methinks, if she knew what things have befallen us this day. Her beautiful head was ever full of victories and all sorts of glory. And how is it with us now? Truly, a goodly gift of fortune!”

“The countess would *not* marvel hereat at all!” said Arnald, lifting himself up in sudden displeasure. “The

countess declared to you the Will of God, which Will ye have hitherto fulfilled, and therein consisted your duty. But the issue of all things is in the hands of God; and this is no new or strange intelligence to her, though it may well seem so to you, and such as are like you. Only be thankful that a light of so heavenly a radiance shines above your head, and do joyfully whatsoever pertains to your office beneath the glory of its beams; but dream not that the petty and sordid doubts which sometimes penetrate your souls can sully it."

"I had not thought," said Guy, "that you could be so vehement, lord of Maraviglia."

"Thou hast named me by my name," returned Arnald, "and by this is my bearing explained; for all mine ancestors have borne themselves in like manner when there was great and noble cause." Herewith he wrapped himself angrily in his mantle; and turning away from the young Hauteroche, lay down on the turf beside the watch-fire.

After a while Guy said gravely and gently, "I sought not to offend thee, lord of Maraviglia; let me hope that thou also wert not desirous of offending me."

"That am I not, gallant comrade," replied Arnald, turning towards him and grasping his hand. "It was rather the spirit of my race than of myself which did so break forth."

"Hem," answered Guy, "methinks that spirit seems sufficiently thine own. But let it rest, noble troubadour. My heart has warmed greatly towards you; and I know not what there is that I would not do rather than displease you."

"Heaven forbid that I should entertain displeasure against you!" cried Arnald. "Let us become brothers in arms and friends."

At these words Hauteroche fell joyfully upon his neck, and then hastily summoned an attendant whom he caused to bring a flask of the noblest wine. From this they filled

Arnald's silver helmet, and drank repeatedly to their new brotherhood, accompanying the draughts by discourse of various kinds.

"Sing me somewhat at this fair midnight-bivouac, my Arnald," said Guy; and the troubadour took his lute, touched the strings, and sang the following verses:—

The stedfast stars are filling
The calm and lofty sky,
And human hearts are thrilling
With heavenly melody.

Along the dark heaven burning,
They love our armour's light;
Their sparkling rays returning
So boldly and so bright.

O silent camp! O murmur
Soft breathing through the leaves!
Lo, freer, bolder, firmer
My warrior-bosom heaves.

A wondrous sport, unthinking,
We play with life and fate!
Now rising and now sinking,
But never satiate.

Hear'st thou no whisper'd warning,
O comrade, from afar?
What deeds shall grace the morning—
What fate shall close the war?

A golden Wain is wheeling
On high through heaven's blue halls;
It bears our fate—revealing
Who conquers and who falls!

And other lamps are shining
In the vault of heaven clear,
The warrior-bard divining
Their import deep and dear.

He sings, in strains of beauty,
 That power, that sacred charm,
 Which nerved for war's dread duty
 His soul, his sword, his arm.

He sings, he fights unshrinking,
 Till blood and life depart ;
 Then may his limbs be sinking,
 But not even then his heart.

His stars keep watch above him ;
 In earth's green lap he lies :
 Nay, weep not, hearts that love him !
 War is let loose—arise !

Deeply touched, Guy wrung the hand of the minstrel, and then gazed long upon the flames of the watchfire, around which swarms of flies were fluttering in the mild summer night, many of which, from time to time, fell, dazzled and giddy, into the devouring glow.

“How they reel! how they fall!” cried he at last, with unwonted energy of manner. “Hearken to me, dear Arnald, I would fain tell thee somewhat, which lies deep and painful within my soul, and thou must listen to me right heedfully.”

Arnald readily assented, when Guy thus spoke :

“About two years ago, the Marchese Rinaldo of Tagliadura, a young Neapolitan, came into our land ; he was then a blithe and gallant youth, and we were right dear to each other, and many a mirthful adventure have we had together. But, God knows, his mirthful days were soon over ! He became more and more silent day by day, and I soon perceived that he was possessed by an unhappy passion for the Countess Alearda. At first, truly, this developed itself after no sad or gloomy fashion. He approved himself the noblest and most graceful of dancers, runners at the ring, and hunters ; while he was, at the same time, very magnificent in fêtes, water-parties, angling-expeditions, and all things

whatsoever that he could imagine, pertaining to pomp and to fair pleasures. To win the love of that exalted lady—oh no! so mad and vain a fantasy can never have been suffered for a moment to overcome the wisdom of his spirit. He was but as one of yonder poor insects.”

And once more Hauteroche looked thoughtfully upon the flames, as they sported around their winged victims. At last he proceeded :—

“Rinaldo and I were bedfellows. Oftentimes was I wakened by his burning sobs; and when I cried out to him, and demanded wherefore he so bewailed himself, he was ever wont to answer that it was but a troublous dream. Truly, the feverish heart of the unhappy knight lay ever in a troublous dream; and at last he poured forth all his sorrows into my faithful bosom. Great heavens! what was there then that he did not attempt in order to render some high and knightly service to the beauteous lady? But, God knoweth the reason thereof, no opportunity was at that time afforded. Then at length he departed, and no man knows whither he went; but were it not too wild and childish a fancy, I could almost believe that he had melted away in sighs like the nymph of heathen fable, and that now from yonder woods and valleys he returns a mournful echo to the songs of despairing love.”

Arnald was touched to the heart; his tears flowed freely.

Then Guy said, very softly, “Ah, Maraviglia—but be not thou wroth with me again—ah, Maraviglia, were I ever to behold thee weep as wept the unhappy Rinaldo, methinks my heart would burst asunder.”

Much moved, the troubadour clasped the faithful youth in his arms, and said—“No, thou loving spirit, have no such fear for me! Greatly as the fate of thy poor Rinaldo has affected me, there is not one drop of his blood in my veins; and, in mine own proper being and nature, I understand not his grief. For what cause is there for weeping and complaining, as long as one is reckoned worthy to serve a noble mistress? As well might I consume myself

in sorrow because I cannot grasp yonder glorious star. Behold, it shines upon me—is not that enough?"

Calm and satisfied, the friendly-hearted Guy lay down to sleep; but Maraviglia gazed long in cheerful wakefulness upon that sparkling constellation which bore in his pure heart the name of Alcarda.

Chapter Tenth.

ON the following morning the troubadour was wakened by the friendly voice of his commander.

"Lord of Maraviglia," said the vicomte, who was already on his horse, and glittering in bright array, "I pray you to ride forth with me awhile. There are many matters whereof we may commune by the way."

Quickly and joyfully Arnald made ready at his word, and they rode onward in the fragrance of early dawn. Their course tended directly towards the enemy's quarter: the general was desirous of inspecting it more closely, and he justly believed that the composed and rapid glance of the minstrel would be very serviceable to him in this labour. During the whole forenoon they continued riding from eminence to eminence, careless of the bolts and fire-balls which were occasionally hurled against them from the Saracen camp, where a close watch had been kept on their proceedings from the first. When the sun stood nearly in mid-heaven, a Moorish horseman, clad entirely in black, came at a bounding pace over the green plain, not far from the two Provençals.

"Methinks yonder warrior is he whose white Arab thou art now riding," said the vicomte; and Arnald advanced towards the stranger at a light trot, expecting to receive a challenge. The Moor did indeed pause for a moment, looking earnestly upon the forms of his two antagonists; but then, as though his mind were occupied by far weightier

matters, he spurred past them with the speed of a whirlwind.

“His face was as that of a young hero,” said Arnald, as he returned to his leader’s side. “His eyes gleamed like two dark but beautiful fires, and he sate his noble charger right bravely and knightly! And nevertheless he hath made no effort to win back his steed of me. I comprehend him not.”

“It can scarcely have been the same,” replied the general, after a moment’s thought. “Ay, and now that I call it to mind, he bore not those bright devices on his breast whereby the rider of the white Arab was distinguished. So much the worse is it for us that Tarfe should possess two such sable horsemen: for he also whom we have just seen—true was your word, my minstrel friend—wore indisputably the aspect of a hero, tall, youthful, and valiant.”

Meanwhile Arnald’s attention was attracted by a hill which commanded an excellent view of the very heart of the enemy’s position; and the two friends galloped eagerly to its summit. The view of the Moorish camp was here both extensive and distinct; even the minutest particulars were discoverable by the keen glance of their practised eyes. The Saracens had been diligent in the work of fortification, which was peculiarly strengthened around the spot now under consideration; further in the background, they were erecting strong and ornate barracks for their captains, while the edifice prepared for Tarfe resembled a massive castle: on its loftiest battlement was paraded a gigantic crescent, shaped of virgin gold. The vicomte and Arnald looked very gravely upon each other.

“It is all as I feared,” said the general at last: “they are not easily to be unseated. Firm and strong as yonder forts and dwellings will Tarfe plant the foundations of a heathen empire on our coasts. O Maraviglia, on the coasts of our glorious, flowery, minstrel-land of Pro-

vence! Yet a few days, and yonder Moorish encampment becomes a citadel: safe beneath its protection, fresh troops of Saracens shall effect a landing, and then the foe may fearlessly venture to press onwards. If he be repulsed, he has a safe retreat at hand; if he conquer, he erects a second fortress some leagues in advance, and so goes on, deeper and deeper, into the very heart of the country."

"My heart bleeds that I cannot answer *no*," replied Arnald.

"And can it, must it, shall it be that a new Moorish empire shall thus arise?" cried the general, lifting up his hands to heaven — "a new serpent lying in wait upon the shores of Christendom! Arnald, methinks neither thou nor I shall survive it; and that thought is a comfort, though a poor one. If a mosque arise on the soil which covers our graves — if upon its walls our honourable weapons —"

His words broke off in a stifled and gloomy murmur, like distant thunder. He drooped his head and was silent.

"Come what will," said Arnald, "there must be many battles ere such a day."

"Yes — thanks be to God! — my gallant troubadour," replied the vicomte, more cheerfully. "Let us consider how we may best begin them."

They rode back to the Christian camp, revolving many weighty schemes not as yet developed in words.

They were met by two young Provençal peasants from the villages which were hemmed-in by the rear of Tarfe's camp. These brave and wary youths had effected their escape in order to fight beneath the banner of their fellow-Christians.

In answer to the vicomte's inquiries, they related that the enemy maintained most strict and orderly discipline, and even permitted them to celebrate the worship of God in the true Christian manner. Scarcely even were provisions demanded of them, for the Moorish vessels abounded with stores of all kinds; and if occasionally some trifles

were requisite, they were purchased either by bright gold pieces, or obtained in barter, with reckless profusion, by wares far more noble and costly than themselves. "In short, my honoured lord"—in these words one of the peasants concluded his narrative—"thus far might we be well content to seek no change. Nevertheless, foreign masters must ever be foreign masters; even their gentleness is but as condescension and pity. But when once they begin railing, chattering, and grumbling together in their heathen language, the last little spark of endurance is at once extinguished, and men have nought left but to do as we have done, and hasten to join the brave Provençals who fight for Christ and fatherland."

"Yours is the right faith," replied the gallant Bisiers, pressing warmly the speaker's hand. He then commanded that they should be furnished with arms and horses, and hospitably entertained. Grasping Maraviglia by the arm, he led him aside into a thicket of plane-trees.

"Mark you now," said he, "how sagacious is this Tarfe, and how deliberately he sets about his scheme of conquest! God, who sees my heart, knows well that it is pierced and wounded by every pain that afflicts my countrymen. But, in honest truth, Arnald, one of my hopes was, that the foe would so waste and desolate our land as to rouse at length the spirits of Provençals and stir up the whole people to war. The enemy is, however, more wary; and all hearts are not so strong as those of the courageous youths with whom we spake but now. What then, Arnald?"

"Battle! storm!" replied the minstrel, with glowing cheeks. "Be the cost what it may, choice is no longer left to us."

"But our infantry is weary even to death; shattered too in its best strength by Lanzarossa's rash heroism."

"A charge, then, with the horse, on the enemy's camp in the depth and darkness of night!"

"Over bastions and trenches?"

“Over mountains and torrents, if it needs must be so, when honour is in question! Many will fall, but many also will prevail; this attack may perchance be baffled, but others shall succeed. The balance of gain and loss is here quite unequal; the gain is a decisive victory—the loss a misfortune which faith and courage may hereafter repair.”

“Spoken as if from mine own heart!” cried the vicomte. “How does such an echo give life and gladness to resolution!”

They issued forth upon the plain once more, and Guy of Hauteroche, not observing his general's presenee, sprang eagerly forward to meet Maraviglia, and exclaimed, “Ah, my dear Arnald, where hast thou been tarrying so long? Trust me, my heart has been right heavy on thine account.” He suddenly perceived the vicomte, and with a courteous apology for having disturbed an interview of such importance, immediately withdrew.

“How comes he to call thee so familiarly by thy name?” asked the vicomte, smiling. “He is, and ever must be, the giddiest scapegrace in the whole army.”

“So think not I,” returned Maraviglia, gravely. “In him there dwells a fountain of warmth, faith, and sympathy, such as can rarely be found, in equal measure, even among those who stand highest in the opinions of their fellow-men. Had he addressed me thus familiarly only in the outpourings of his own glad and frank nature, where would have been the evil? Moments of deep emotion have drawn the like words even from my general. But last night I myself offered brotherhood of arms to the kindly-hearted Guy of Hauteroche.

The vicomte looked down, and was somewhat embarrassed. “Truly,” said he, “minstrels must be, even as they are reported to be, more free and open of heart than other men; I have never clearly comprehended these brotherhoods; and very few of them have I hitherto adopted in my life.”

“I very many, thanks be to God!” replied Arnald; “if after-life did not always correspond with that moment of enthusiasm, still could it never rob me of the moment itself. The bud continued to swell within me, and elsewhere and after another fashion expanded into the fruit, which had at first been checked and blighted.”

“If such be your temper, you must needs have made many friends, and of widely differing characters,” said the vicomte, with a smile.

“It is true,” replied Arnald; “but thanks be to God, I am conscious that I have never estranged from myself a single heart, by weakness, vacillation, or arrogance. Many are the faults which lie heavy upon my life; but of such a fault, not even the far shadow.”

“I feel that you are both good and brave,” replied the vicomte, “though often much unlike myself. Give me, then, your true right hand, and aid me to dispose all things for our night-attack quietly and vigorously.”

Chapter Eleventh.

SLOWLY and noiselessly the troops of the cavalry-banner traversed the plain, beneath the rising darkness of night; they made for the watchfires of the enemy; but the captains alone were acquainted with the object of the sally. The great difficulty was, that in order to attain that point where the defence offered by the unfinished fortifications was weakest, they were compelled to defile beneath the foot of the mountain, along a valley so narrow, that the squadrons were constrained to break their ranks. Arnald received the especial and weighty charge of commanding the rear; for the vicomte believed him to be capable of marshalling the troops in array more swiftly and securely than any other.

Now, beneath the black skies of midnight, he followed

the tramp of the foremost column, so dazzled by the rays of the heathen watchfires, near which they passed, that he could scarce tell whether he was riding along the height which bordered the ravine, or through the vale below. Frequently the former appeared to him to be actually the case; but, convinced that the vicomte could never select this line of advance, which terminated in a steep precipice just at the very point where they should reach the place of attack, he concluded that his senses had deceived him, and rode forwards with hopeful and bounding heart to the bright but perilous hour of crisis.

The Saracen warders gave challenge; silently the troops marched on; the challenge was repeated, and immediately afterwards Arnald heard the plunge of the foremost squadrons, and their exulting cry, "Vive Provence!" rang through the night-air. But, directly in front of Arnald, all was still. Fireballs and darts hissed thick as hail among his ranks; and from time to time arose the plaintive cry of the wounded. "Be still! Be still!" cried Arnald, to the impatient troops behind him. "Soon will the word be given, and then shall we fall upon the Moors, and crush them yet more effectually than we did of late by the sea-coast."

But the closely-ranked division before him still stood immovable; while the havoc of the enemy's fire among his troops became every moment more terrible. An angry laugh broke from his lips, and he strained his utmost power to discover some way by which he might reach the foe. Close beside him he perceived what seemed to be a deep abyss. "By my faith, we are on the ridge," he murmured to himself, in a suppressed voice; while at the same moment, from the opposite side, he beheld the gleaming of a thousand Provençal helmets in the light of the Moorish watchfires, as their wearers fled in frantic speed; before and around him all wavered and staggered, and at last fled at full gallop, bearing him onward against his will.

"Stand, Provençals, stand!" cried he, almost in the

fury of despair ; but right and left they rode against his Arab steed ; and, in order to escape being overthrown and crushed, he was compelled to follow the stream of that irrecoverable flight,—or rather, he had neither will nor choice. The wild tumult, and his terrified steed, swept him onwards ; and his voice, once so powerful in the joyous shout of onset, was drowned by the clamour of midnight defeat. The shrieks of the wounded, some lying helplessly on the earth, some dragged along clinging to stirrups, mane, or bridle, mingled fearfully in the general outcry.

At length the bewildered rout reached an open place ; on all sides the captains might be heard shouting, “ Halt ! ” By degrees the ranks began to resume their order ; now one, now another, and at last all simultaneously, till, in a little while, the squadrons once more presented themselves in battle-array, and most of the wounded, being placed on litters, hastily constructed of crossed lances, were conducted to a place of safety in the rear.

Guy of Hauteroche was despatched in advance, at the head of a few light horsemen, having it in charge to ascertain, as well as he could through the darkness, whether the enemy would risk a sortie in pursuit ; and also, if possible, to rescue the wounded who were left on the ground from which they had just been driven.

Arnald scarcely yet knew what had happened. He stood still at the head of his re-marshalled squadron, as if oppressed by some ghastly dream, but still clinging to the hope that the enemy would sally forth upon this open plain, and so give the brave Provençals an opportunity of atoning for their confused midnight flight by a chivalrous onslaught ; but all remained quiet ; the vicomte was nowhere to be seen, and fears for his safety weighed heavily on the breast of Maraviglia.

Arnald was now accosted by a veteran captain, who wore a mighty beard upon his lips and chin, and was named Messire Misura ; he loved the minstrel right well in consequence of some incidents which had befallen in the

late battle, and he now said, warmly grasping his hand, "Well was it that the vicomte withdrew you for once from your wonted post in front, amid the bands who led the assault! How might it have been with you now?—Either you would have shattered limb and nerve in that fearful plunge over the precipice, or the foe would easily have despatched you by the clattering hail of their javelins. No, verily thou seemest to me too noble for such a fate."

"Tell me, in God's name, brave Misura," interrupted Arnald, "what meant that mad flight, like the chase of the wild huntsman? Did we indeed ride along the steep cliff, instead of going through the ravine?"

"So was it in truth," replied Misura; "and when we charged at the cry, 'Vive Provence!' we plunged one over another down the hollow way, and lay there in the light of the watchfires, easy and helpless marks for the weapons of the heathen. I was one of those whose good steeds rather slipped than fell down the precipice, and so we gathered ourselves up together, and hewed vigorously right and left, as you did of late on the sea-coast. But what availed such a handful of men in the midst of the whole wakened camp of the Saracens? We could only congratulate ourselves on being able once more to clamber up the heights; but there stood all our people as if planted in the earth! Behind, you urged them impatiently onwards, and the foremost ranks could now clearly distinguish the nature of the precipice before them, having witnessed our fall. Then the foe showered his bolts upon us right lustily: and truly those captains who caused their troops to gallop back to the open ground, did what was wisest. At first, indeed, I disliked the movement; but I became reasonable after a while, and did for my own part what was not to be avoided."

"Then our troops were not put to flight by the shots and javelins of the heathen!" cried Arnald. "Now, praise and thanks be to God! But where is the vicomte?"

"Dear friend," answered Misura, "it is very likely that he has died the death of a hero. He was in the front

rank; and when I set upon the enemy, I could see him, by the light of the rushing balls of Greek fire, lying beneath his fallen horse. Since then I have nowhere been able to discover him."

"Follow me, comrade; we will seek him," said Arnald, and placing his helmet firmly on his brows, he laid strong grasp upon his sword.

"Of what avail should that be?" replied Misura. "The gallant Hanteroché has been already despatched in that direction, and certainly he will do all that is possible. Moreover, ought you and I to forget that we are captains of squadrons, for whom we must answer to the whole land of Provence, much more than for the life and death of a single hero?"

"You are right, Messire Misura," replied Arnald, somewhat abashed; and he remained standing calmly and composedly, though given up to very sorrowful thoughts.

"Noble sir," said Misura, after a brief pause, "this accursed and inactive tarrance is not more pleasing to me than to you; but there is no help for it. Pledge me, therefore, I pray you, in this flask—it is filled with the best wine of our dear fatherland."

Arnald declined his courtesy for the present; the life of his spirit was troubled by many painful thoughts. But Misura muttered to himself somewhat displeasely, "What the fiend, when an honourable comrade offers you a draught of wine, do you doubt and hesitate? Wherefore have we, then, ridden side by side when there was warm work around us, if we are not likewise to drink together?"

"It is true, I confess it, Misura," replied Arnald, and pledged him with a smile.

It seemed as though that health, drunk in truth and simpleness of heart, had appeased the demons of the wild midnight; for at that very moment the vicomte's voice was heard answering the challenge of the outposts. He soon appeared, still somewhat exhausted by his terrible fall from the precipice. Guy of Hauteroche had rescued

him, and now supported him on his horse, holding him firmly by the arm. As, however, they approached the troops, the vicomte desired him to withdraw his grasp, placed himself by a great effort firmly and uprightly in the saddle, and rode up and down the ranks, conversing familiarly both with soldiers and captains; reminding all that their coward foe had not once dared to pursue them, and that had they been able to come hand to hand, as they did formerly on the sea-shore, most certainly the victory would have been theirs.

He then caused the cavalry to re-enter the encampments. This movement took place amid mirthful songs and full chorus of trumpets. Arnald was filled with joyful astonishment in perceiving how much of the true and victorious ardour of a whole army lies in the strength and self-possession of a great general.

Chapter Twelfth.

THE martial foresight and ready address of the vicomte caused that the captains of infantry should be speedily and minutely informed of the occurrences of this night; so that no panic might paralyse their ranks at so unhappy a misadventure, still less should they indulge in murmurs against the valiant horsemen.

“If any man have erred,” said the true-hearted Bisiers to all with whom he discoursed, “it is I; for I mistook the entrance to the valley, and so rushed down from the mountain-ridge with those brave men who led the attack. But, methinks, in the depth and darkness of this night, with no guidance save that of the enemy’s dazzling and bewildering watchfires, another might easily have fallen into the like error.”

This cheerful and loyal spirit soon spread throughout the whole army. On the morrow the troops looked not

like men who had just sustained a disaster; unclouded gladness, and hold victorious defiance shone upon every brow: and Arnald took great pleasure in contemplating the brotherly affection wherewith horse and foot soldiers walked to and fro, arm linked within arm—the one not boasting of his past perils, the other taking no pride in being exempt from share in his failure. Careful, almost reverential attendance on the wounded, and heartfelt vows of vengeance against the Saracens, employed and united the whole camp.

Nevertheless, from this time forward the war assumed another and a gloomier aspect. Before it was possible to meditate a second attack on the position of Tarfe, his encampment had, as the vicomte prophesied, become a citadel. No course was left but to set vigilant watches upon all the passes communicating with the plain, and to make all ready for meeting the first sally of the Saracens, sword in hand, with joyful alacrity.

But even the bravest warriors, when unable to discover any outlet for their valour, incline at length to despondency and impotent murmurs. Arnald himself felt that the burden of this wearisome indolence was heavy. Though his heart was filled with brotherly affection for his comrades, even this could not quiet his longings after sights and sounds more in accordance with the joyous spirit of his art. It is true that from time to time he sang stirring war-songs to his companions; but the greater and fairer imaginings of his spirit—many old and wondrous legends which he had purposed embodying in verse, and various other bright visions—all these things could find no place here; and never did a genuine feeling of pleasure visit his heart, save when the scattered sorties of daring Moorish cavaliers summoned the squadrons to arms. Nevertheless, even in seasons of the most cheerless inaction, he was wont to speak fiery and rousing words to the knights and squires—words such as banished doubt, and gave wings to hope, even though they might seem strange

and unintelligible to some of those who heard them. Thus did he aid in chasing back the overhanging mists; and he was especially successful in animating the horsemen of his own squadron, who were wont to gather around him in a close circle whenever important news, or reports that seemed important, reached the camp.

After the same manner did the vicomte labour in his far loftier and more comprehensive sphere. Wherever his hero-countenance was seen, joy, confidence, and patience spread around; and often he purposely encouraged petty skirmishes in order to reanimate the ardour for battle and victory, and to break the shadows of that deedless tarrance. These jousts often became serious contests, from the bitter feeling on both sides; and, indeed, in days of less blood and terror, they might have been denominated battles. We will not follow our friend through every adventure of the kind; only thus much let us note, that the love and esteem in which his general held him rose every day to a higher degree, and that his comrades and subalterns—among whom Guy of Hauteroche and Messire Misura remained especially close to his heart—attached themselves to him with glad and increasing confidence. On one occasion Misura said to him, “This war must some day have an end, my brave troubadour, and then will you depart from our ranks: but neither now nor ever will I consent to be irrevocably separated from you. Should we both survive, I must visit you hereafter, and behold the life which you lead among your books and parchments, and lyres of various kinds.”

Such demonstrations always brought a rich gift of refreshment into the breast of Maraviglia; yet was his spirit ever brightest within him when he sank down on his grassy couch, cushioned with leaves and moss, and when, heralded by the evening benediction of clarions and trumpets, the fair star Alcarda came forth from the shadows of the clouds. “God be praised,” was he then wont to say in prayer, “that it is allotted to me to practise that hardest kind of

chivalry which is without glory and outward pleasure, when I speak strength and confidence to the hearts of my soldiers ; and thou, Father in heaven, give me henceforth grace and strength for the work. Sometimes, also, thou bestowest on me right gloriously the happier chivalry, and givest the bright sword into my hand. Praise be to thee for all things, thou gracious Father in heaven !”

Then seemed it to him as though a white and shining angel closed his weary eyes, and whispered in flute-like tones a blessing on his head.

Chapter Thirteenth.

It was not till the summer approached its close that the Saracens were seen to come forth from their fortifications in any considerable number. Their infantry formed in compact masses, under cover of which convoys laden with Greek fire proceeded to the summits of the most commanding heights. Their cavalry, having driven in the Provençal outposts, stood now in long and glittering ranks upon the plain. The vicomte almost indulged a hope that a decisive battle was about to take place. The archers of both armies began to exchange their airy missiles.

The figure of the proud and princely Tarfe was easily to be distinguished on the heights. Richly adorned, his turban flashing with gems, and surmounted by a soaring plume of heron's feathers, he spurred his noble chestnut horse, so that it bounded lightly and gracefully from troop to troop, closely attended by the two young heathen warriors whose black vestments and knightly bearing have before been noticed. Arnald's keen eye soon recognised the numerous shining devices embossed on the breastplate of the one, and he doubted not that to-day the mastery of his fair white Arab would be seriously disputed. And even so would it surely have been ; for the young Moorish

horseman seemed to recognise his good horse at a distance, and shook his curved scimitar menacingly in the air, while Arnald returned the defiance by waving his bright and beautiful sword, straight as a sunbeam.

But at that moment the impatience of a Moorish officer changed the face of the day. Observing that Tarfe had withdrawn towards the rear, in order to make a more advantageous arrangement of the Greek fire-bearers, this man conceived the idea of winning for himself the whole glory of conquest by a sudden charge of cavalry. He hurried to the banner of horse, and gave the signal for attack. The horns sounded, and forward rushed the Moorish squadrons in their gleaming array.

The troops of Provençal horse were still marshalled, rank behind rank, ready to form themselves in whichever direction they might be attacked by the foe; and possibly it was this disposition which excited the Saracen leader to so rash a movement, and so vain a hope of victory. But the vicomte, well knowing the ability of his captains and their followers, resolved that the troops should deploy in line as they charged, so as not to tarnish the honour of Provence, even by the semblance of a moment's delay. His war-cry sounded, and the whole body thundered, rapidly but in order, against the enemy. Maraviglia grasped his sword in both hands for very joy, and lifted it towards heaven in a brief but enthusiastic prayer of consecration. Then he resumed the ordinary posture of a horseman, his heart swelling with proud hope; beneath him his slender Arab steed neighed exultingly, playing lightly with the rein, and scarce seeming to touch the ground.

The unexpected alacrity, the exulting speed of this charge, appeared to have disconcerted the Moors. Some of the squadrons, moreover, were discouraged by painful doubts when they missed their prince and his two knightly companions at their head; they began to pause, to waver, and the result was such as may be easily foretold by any one familiar with the nature of a cavalry-charge. The

Moorish lines turned, and galloped in frantic flight towards the narrow mountain-passes ; while the Provençal cavalry sprang after them in swift pursuit, shouting aloud for joy.

Nevertheless, it was soon needful to check that eager and victorious charge. Right and left, crossing showers of darts from the sheltered infantry rained upon the Christian squadrons, while the deadly hissing of Greek fire blazed through the air. The ground, too, beneath one division of the Provençal troops was so moist and insecure, that their horses could obtain no footing. Arnald, while pressing onward to observe more closely the shameful flight of the enemy, was brought to a sudden halt, the forefeet of his noble Arab being absolutely embedded in the bog, so that it was with difficulty that his master extricated him, and guided him to a safer place. Some words of murmuring escaped his lips almost unconsciously ; but at that moment a fireball came whizzing downwards upon the very spot where he had just stood, and was extinguished in the wet meadow-grass.

“ Messire of Maraviglia, that was aimed at you ! ” cried several of his startled horsemen ; and Arnald besought God, in silence, to pardon his senseless murmurs.

The vicomte still hoped that the foe might once again venture forth from his fastnesses ; but there was a motive yet stronger which induced him to halt in his present position. He was desirous of making it clearly manifest to both armies that the Provençals had won the field from the Moors, and knew also how to maintain it.

But the Moors came not again. After so complete a discomfiture, Tarfe held it best to defer the projected battle to a more favourable day. Yet there went around a fearful report that, in the first outburst of his fury, he had, with his own hand, cloven asunder the skull of his rash subaltern.

While the Christians yet awaited the event, the vicomte, as he rode to and fro along the ranks, came up with the squadron of the troubadour just as the latter, in order to

keep alive the spirit and ardour of his soldiers, sang, with clear and powerful voice, the following words:—

Now welcome, Sir Arrow, that fliest so brave,
 Cleaving the air as a bark cleaves the wave ;
 Proudly and swiftly thou soarest indeed ;
 There is fear in thy sound, there is death in thy speed :
 Yet pause in thy headlong career of blood !
 Thou art but a thing of iron and wood ;
 Lowly thou liest on earth at last,
 The strength of thy terrible flight is past ;
 Peace to thy slumber, so powerless and deep !
 We can lift thee up in that senseless sleep,
 And hurl thee back in the face of the Moor,
 Slaying the lord thou didst serve before !

Oft hast thou sped on the hurrying wind,
 Mad in thy haste, in thy fury blind ;
 Instead of the breast thou wert sent to wound,
 Showering the innocent earth around :
 Boatest thou *now* of thy deathful fame ?
 Aha, go hide thee in helpless shame !
 Thou hast shed no blood, thou hast pierced no breast ;
 Peace to thy deep and powerless rest !
 Or if a brave heart bleed and die,
 Thou strikest thy victim unconsciously —
 No prompting mind and no judging glance ;
 As a blind man gathers a gem by chance !¹

The horsemen laughed ; and one even, whose arm was at that moment stricken by a bolt, said merrily, “ See there—I have had a blow from the accursed blind one ! ”

The vicomte gazed well pleased upon the minstrel and his youthful troop.

A fireball came hurtling and blazing through the air,

¹ This singular little poem appeared to me to be completely untranslatable. In the imitation which I have here substituted, I have attempted to preserve something of the quaint and grotesque humour of the original, without degenerating into the purely ludicrous ; but I am very doubtful whether I have in any degree succeeded.

and struck the earth at no great distance. While it was in the very act of bursting, sputtering and streaming with flame, a small bird fluttered upwards close beside it, singing, as he soared, a careless and gladsome song, as though the whole matter were nothing to him; he flew on, merrily flapping his wings, and warbling in ceaseless glee, till he disappeared in the blue depths of heaven.

“There goes an emblem of thyself, valiant troubadour,” said the general: “when the thunder roars and the lightning hisses around thee, thou abidest cheerful and fresh in song, and seemest, by thine untroubled gladness, to be the child of some fairer home than ours.”

Arnald could have desired to feel that these words were indeed and literally true; for they were contradicted by many a dark hour of his past life. Nevertheless, this he felt, that they were applicable to the present moment, and therefore deemed he that there was somewhat of truth in them on the whole.

Meantime the Moors, instead of making a second sally, had gradually withdrawn to their entrenchments; and the vicomte therefore wheeled round both horse and foot, and led them back to the camp himself, riding slowly apart, and gazing in deep thought from his own ranks to the position of the enemy.

Chapter Fourteenth.

A LITTLE while afterwards, the commander-in-chief summoned all his captains to his tent; and Arnald of Maraviglia received an especial intimation that his presence was desired. When he entered, he found the vicomte standing completely armed in mail overlaid with rich golden plates, a morion lying beside him, from which the high-soaring plumes towered almost to the full height of their lofty owner. He leaned, with a kindly smile on his lips,

against a very ancient sword, which he held peculiarly dear and precious, as an inheritance from his earliest ancestors. Arnald felt as though he were gazing upon some enchanted warrior from the days of Charles Martel, the great conqueror of the Moors.

“Knights and captains,”—thus spake the vicomte when all were assembled,—“I have a great and weighty boon to ask of you. Ye must not, however, resolve concerning it out of your kind love towards myself; but whatsoever shall happen must be the work of clear and deliberate conviction, willingly and cheerfully delivering into my hands the weal and freedom of our fatherland.”

They gazed upon him somewhat amazedly; and, after a short pause, he thus proceeded:

“How long shall the golden crescent of the infidel sparkle upon our noble and far-famed coasts? I know we are all agreed that it is unavailing to attack his position: therefore must some other means be devised; and such, I think, I have found. If ye will trust me right deeply, valiant brothers in arms, I will challenge the Moorish prince Tarfe to single combat, each to be armed according to the fashion of his own country; and then shall the question be decided whether the host of Tarfe shall take ship and abandon for ever all attempts upon our coast—”

He stopped suddenly, and looked thoughtfully on the earth; then Arnald, thrilling with secret horror, demanded, “Or else—my general—or else? I pray you name to me the alternative!”

“Maraviglia,” replied the vicomte, “no great deed was ever yet effected, in the opposite scale whereto there was not a fearful *or else*.”

“Such deeds, however,” said Arnald, “have ever been victoriously achieved by the general power, or have buried beneath their ruins the general life of a whole nation.”

“Not always,” answered the vicomte. “Remember Rome and Alba, the Horatii and Curiatii!”

The troubadour was silent, and fell into deep thought.

“My comrades and fellow-countrymen,” resumed the vicomte, “it is no vain ambition, no rash and self-sufficient audacity, which prompts me to crave this boon at your hands. But ye are yourselves witness how the foe has built his eyrie among us; how ship after ship, from the Moorish shores, comes to swell his legions troop by troop; how he pauses and pauses, that at length he may burst forth upon us in overwhelming force; and how our hopes of succour are far, uncertain, and shadowy. Believe not, valiant troubadour, that I would stake all upon a single cast! *Could* I do so, even if I dared? Many warlike and pious men of Provence are there who belong not to this army, and who can be bound neither by thy will, nor by mine. Moreover, our pledge to Tarfe shall only be, that if God withholds the victory from my sword, we will depart for this season from Provence, reserving to ourselves a right of returning and doing battle for our mother earth, to the death.”

“If he should consent—” said Arnald, musingly, and checked himself.

“Agreed, then, gallant Maraviglia!” cried the vicomte: “wilt thou do mine errand to Tarfe on these conditions?”

Arnald bent his head in silent assent. Immediately all the knights and captains declared their acquiescence in the proposal of their general; and the following morning was fixed for delivering the challenge.

When Arnald departed to his tent, in order to make ready his arms and adornments, the gallant Misura followed him, and asked, “May I be permitted to accompany thee as herald? I understand right well the blowing of a trumpet, and might also serve thee in other ways.” Arnald wrung the powerful hand of the experienced warrior, in token of joyful consent.

Chapter Fifteenth.

BRIGHTLY arrayed, as on that morn when he spurred his good roan steed over the frontier of his fatherland, Arnald presented himself before the vicomte at the hour of early dawn, accompanied by Misura, who craved, and readily obtained permission, to join the projected embassy. "Dull that I was," muttered Guy of Hauteroche to himself; "why did it not also occur to me?"

The vicomte meanwhile contemplated his graceful messenger with visible satisfaction; at length, however, he said, "Thou wearest but spurs of steel, Messire Maraviglia—hast thou by evil chance broken or lost thy golden spurs in charging against the Moorish infantry?"

"No man hath as yet held me worthy to receive the knightly accolade," replied Arnald; "how, then, should I wear the knightly spurs?"

"In God's name, then," cried the vicomte, "I will not abide an instant longer in the number of those forgetful men who have so long withheld from thee such a jewel. Kneel down, Messire Arnald of Maraviglia!"

There ran a suppressed whisper of approbation along the lines of surrounding knights. Full of deep and joyful emotion, the troubadour did his leader's bidding; at the same moment, well versed in the rules of knighthood, he ungirded his sword, and laid it beside him on the grass.

And the blade of the hero touched his shoulder, and the solemn words sounded upon his ear: "For the honour of God, and the fame of noble ladies, draw thou henceforward thy knightly sword!"

As the new-made knight arose, Guy of Hauteroche, having hastily unloosed his own golden spurs, bent joyfully before him, and said, "Let others forestall me in other things; this honour shall no man take from me, that

I am the first to clasp the golden spurs upon thy heel, my hero and minstrel; wear them, I pray thee, during thy lifetime in memory of me!" As he fulfilled his noble office, Misura once more girded Arnald with his good sword. "Glad were I to offer thee mine own weapon," cried he; "but thine hath ever borne itself too nobly to be lightly exchanged for another."

While Arnald yet stood in silent and thoughtful joy, in the midst of congratulations and good wishes from the knights and warriors around, the exulting neigh of his white Arab arose on the air, and the noble animal bounded so high aloft, that it was scarce to be restrained by the squire's hand. "See, this is my first essay of knight-hood!" cried Arnald with enthusiasm. "Thanks, noble general and commander; thanks, my beloved Guy; thanks to ye all, my dear friends and comrades; to thee, brave Misura, I need say no more—even in the first moment we are companions."

Misura nodded affectionately; and the friends swung themselves into their saddles, and flew, swift as the wind, across the meadow, followed by the esquire of Arnald.

When they were riding side by side somewhat more leisurely, as they entered the windings of a cool and shady woodland, Arnald said: "I am neither a child nor a woman; and I know right well that I have in no wise been made better by the accolade and the golden spurs than I was two hours since; nevertheless, Misura, my heart bounds far more highly and more proudly; ay, and I will confess to thee, that when just now I questioned mine esquire concerning some trifle, and he replied, 'Yes, sir knight!' a thrill of true pleasure shot through my soul. It may be somewhat childish, but so it is."

"And so it must be, sir knight of Maraviglia," replied Misura earnestly. "What! shall the servants of God, amid the heavenly host, be distinguished from each other, as archangels, thrones, dominions; and shall not we rejoice in the glory of our earthly distinctions? He in

whose eyes the knightly morion is but as a fool's bauble, carries the fool within him ; I mean, that he is himself a fool : and for him a beggar's bonnet would also inevitably become a fool's bauble. Wherefore, also, should our great forefathers, wherefore should our glorious princes, have shed forth blood and life to plant the order of knighthood, and many another fair institution of honour, if he who achieves them finds not his inmost heart truly exalted thereby?—ay, and if he feels not that the beams of a bright and purifying light have penetrated both soul and body ? Let those scowl and look askance hereat, who feel no strength within themselves for the attainment of high and holy things. Great honours come from God, and descend deeply into the spirits of all true-hearted men, filling them with humility and joyfulness."

"O my God," cried Arnald, breathing up a joyful sigh towards heaven ; "could but the glorified knight, Walter de Vergi, my noble instructor and friend, behold this moment ! In him truly have I lost a rich and fathomless fountain of pure delight. Yet do I believe that he knows of this hour."

"Assuredly he does," answered Misura. "Think you that our good God would withhold so choice a morsel of happiness from one of his elect?"

Arnald could not restrain a smile at the singularity of the expression ; but, nevertheless, he felt with profound emotion that it was the vehicle of a deep and prophetic truth.

They now issued forth from the woods upon a small plain at the foot of the mountains, and beheld the out-posts of the Moorish camp at no great distance in advance of them. The sentinels exchanged signals, and darted from every side with arrowy speed towards the new-comers, poising their javelins for the cast. But Arnald waved above his head a slender olive-branch which he had plucked upon his sylvan journey ; and Misura, taking from his shoulder the silver trumpet, wound a long and sus-

tained blast, which caused the field to re-echo with the power of its melody. Then the Saracens halted and held counsel together. Slowly and with reversed javelin—the many-coloured plumes that were wont to wing its flight now floating harmlessly towards the foe—a single Moor rode forwards and held parley with Arnald, who was well versed in the Arabic tongue, concerning his embassy. Then he despatched a soldier to Tarfe, and entreated the three Provençals to avert their eyes from the disposition of the Saracens, lest they should make any observation which they might afterwards employ to the disadvantage of the Moorish army.

Familiar with so fair and wise an ordinance of war, they readily complied with the request; and the adverse horseman now conversed with Arnald in a very friendly manner, praised his accoutrements, and finally remarked, “Your horse I know right well. It escaped from the noble cavalier Gryba when our infantry was so mishandled on the promontory near the isles of Hieres, and he was carrying a wounded man out of the tumult.”

“It is true,” replied Arnald; “and shall I meet the noble cavalier Gryba—is not this his name?”

The Moor nodded an affirmative.

“Shall I meet him in the tent of Prince Tarfe? If so, two errands can be done by a single journey.”

“You will not now meet with him,” said the Moor. “Several days ago was he despatched; but we know not whither nor to what end.”

“Doubtless,” returned Arnald, “he is sent to bring fresh succours from Andalusia or Granada.”

“Sir,” replied the Moor, “if I knew it to be so, it would ill become me to acquaint you with the matter.”

Arnald praised the cautious warrior, and now discoursed with him of Arabic lays and fables, and other pleasant things. In the years of early youth he had greatly delighted in the conversation of foreign ambassadors or prisoners of war. Such peaceful communings in the midst

of battles were especially pleasing to him, giving to war the aspect rather of a joyous contention wherein the champions were not at enmity with each other; and though the root of this strife against the heathens lay far deeper than that of any ordinary war, yet even these were also men, and of this, at all seasons, he was glad to be reminded. Moreover, at such interviews, deep and significant were the visions that arose before his spirit. "If on the morrow"—thus was he wont to reflect—"we meet as foes, and one of us should, after a valiant encounter, slay the other, and should then recognise in him the man with whom but yesterday he held such friendly intercourse, then the clear loving light of heaven will shine irresistibly through earthly storm-clouds upon his moved and mourning heart. War and peace, wrath and love, the pride of conquest and the pain of death, enter into a strange but perfect union; and the memory of that moment remains a solemn and a blessed thought through the whole after-life."

Chapter Sixteenth.

THE Moorish messenger now returned with Tarfe's orders that the ambassadors should be conducted to his presence. Then the horseman of the watch, in pursuance of the rule of war before noticed, bound thick veils around the heads of the Provençals, and led them thus blindfolded up to the elevated camp-castle of their prince.

During their darkened ride, Arnald and Misura could hear shouts of merriment, accompanied by the clash of meeting wine-cups, now to the right and now to the left. It seemed as though the whole army lived but to sing and to revel. Yet did the thought occur to those experienced knights that all this noise and tumult was but temporary, and was caused by a desire to impress them with great thoughts of the mirthful life and exulting spirit of the

Saracens; and they gave no heed therefore to the sounds of festivity.

Their horses were stopped, their veils loosened, and they found themselves before the abode of Tarfe. Around them strong embankments of earth, and barriers of felled trees, were constructed; while immediately before them arose a light and lofty edifice of wood painted in various colours, the walls decorated with many strange and tortuous shapes composed partly of flowers and partly of the heads of animals: the huge golden crescent upon the roof glittered in the eyes of Arnald, producing an almost painful sensation. Misra gazed with burning cheeks and flashing eyes on the heathen symbol of Mahometanism, and muttered to himself, "Came I not hither as a herald, yonder thing should have shone its last, though the deed cost me my neck."

In the mean time the doors of the lower hall were flung open, and they beheld Prince Tarfe lying in an attitude of careless repose, on a pile of cushions covered with carpets of purple flowered with gold; he was clad in garments of snow-white muslin, a turban of the same material was wound around his brow; behind, and on either side of his couch, stood a group of knights in armour, covered with various adornments. Above his head was suspended a broad scimitar, gleaming with precious stones, and a light circular shield, painted in green and gold. He held in his left hand a golden lyre of singular form, on which he struck some scattered chords; when, however, Arnald and Misra dismounted from their horses and advanced towards him, he gave the instrument to an attendant, and, courteously saluting them, raised himself to a sitting posture, at the same time requesting the two ambassadors, in tolerably good Provençal, to take possession of two seats which were prepared for them in the European manner.

"A good messenger," said Arnald, howing his thanks, "thinks not of repose till he has fulfilled his errand. And well know I, noble and knightly prince, that I hear you a message which you have long desired to receive. Our great

commander, the Vicomte Bisiers, invites you to decide the fate of the enterprise which you have undertaken against this fair land by single combat with him, in the presence of both armies, each champion to be armed according to the custom of his country."

"Praise be to Mahomet!" cried the knightly Tarfe, leaping up from his couch with a joyful countenance. But soon he cast himself again upon the cushions, and said calmly: "But give me to know, most noble Christian, does the vicomte bind himself, if conquered, to deliver up to me this land with all its people, to have and to hold for ever?"

"The Provençals are slaves to no man, and the vicomte could not so promise, if he would!" cried Arnald, his eyes gleaming with anger. The strong right hand of Misura closed almost convulsively upon the bare battle-axe which hung at his side.

"Ay, then," continued Tarfe, with a haughty smile, "what shall I gain by my victory? Or did you perchance mean a contest of life against life, and fame against fame? For that also I am ready. But if it be so, sir knight, methinks you have delivered your message somewhat indistinctly."

"By no means," returned Arnald, with difficulty restraining his fiery indignation. He then related all that had passed in the Christian camp on the previous evening, and concluded thus: "If you esteem it of doubtful wisdom thus to risk the greater against the less advantage, consider, Prince Tarfe, that he who desires to conquer a country fights only for his own fancy; while he who defends it draws his sword for all that is dear and holy to him upon earth. A warrior so consecrated dares not be magnanimous in his conditions. In your game, it is a matter of indifference how much you are pleased to stake—or, rather, the more the better; so shall the tale sound more fairly in the ears of the ladies of Seville and Cordova."

The eyes of Tarfe flashed like wildfire, but he controlled

himself and replied: "You are right, in a certain measure. But say to the Vicomte Bisiers that I hope here, in Provence, to relate many things to the ladies from Seville and Cordova. We will hold here a festal banquet after the fall of your leader; and all the young and fair of Andalusia and Granada shall be bidden as guests."

"That is in the hands of God," said Arnald. "Will you now inform me when and where you propose meeting the vicomte?"

Tarfe was on the point of answering, when a young knight in black garments stepped forward, whom Arnald immediately recognised as the same whom, on a former occasion, he had mistaken for Gryba. Though the beard was yet budding upon his lips and chin, still the grave benignity of his somewhat sunburned countenance, the calm fire of his dark eyes, and above all, the stately decision of his whole bearing, spoke of the spirit of a grown man in the form of a mere youth. With few words, and a respectful but not servile inclination, the knight craved permission of his prince to recall something to his mind in private.

"Speak openly here, Balta; the stranger may and shall be a witness," said Tarfe, with an air of some dissatisfaction.

"So be it," replied the youth with calm earnestness. "Then must I remind you that there are but few among us whom you call servants. Many, like myself, have followed you of free will, in the pursuit of fame and honour, but certainly not in order to stand by as witnesses while you conquer or lose the land of Provence in single combat. On the whole, yonder noble messenger has spoken truth; the conqueror stands not on the same footing with the defender of the soil, and may therefore readily risk much against little. But you are not the only man here who desires to conquer, and therefore it behoves you to take council with others ere you decide."

The face of Tarfe glowed fearfully beneath the white

folds of his turban. Balta met his eye with a steady and gentle gaze, and leaned in quiet expectation upon his sword, which, to the surprise of Arnald, was not crooked, according to the Saracen fashion, but straight like the weapon of a Christian knight, and furnished with a hilt suitable to its form.

The prince and the Moorish warrior remained silent during several minutes. At last—and it might easily be seen how hard a struggle it had cost the prince's haughty heart—at last Tarfe smiled again, and said :

“Truly Gryba could have left no fitter deputy than yourself, you bear yourself as though you were his twin brother—hungry as a wolf when honour is in question.”

“I have nothing in common with a wolf,” returned the youth, composedly, “neither do I hunger after the possessions of others. But the property of honour belongs, I trust, to me as well as to my companions.”

“Oh, you are yet worse than Gryba!” cried Tarfe. “Well do I know it. *He* would at least have become impatient with me; he would have spoken quick and vehement words, and the flush of anger would have passed across his open countenance. But you stand there tranquil and composed, like one who must needs be in the right from beginning to end; so be it. Gather the voices, then, and bring me the result!”

Therewith he led the two ambassadors forth by the other side of the building, to a carpet of green turf, which was roofed over in a most graceful manner by branches of the olive, the tamarind, and other fair trees abundant in those parts, forming a high and leafy dome, like the vault of a castle-hall.

“Thus would they gladly bend and bind us Provençals in their service!” whispered Misura to Arnald; while Tarfe, either not hearing or not choosing to hear the words, invited the two to place themselves upon one of the fair turf-seats which stood around, while he himself sat down between them. He called for refreshments, and appeared unusually

friendly and well satisfied, suppressing with remarkable power every trace of his late and scarce-extinguished wrath. But Misura, for that very reason, regarded him with a side-long glance, at once vigilant and distrustful; much as one might watch a tiger who rubs his gay-spotted skin gently and good-humouredly against the bars of his cage, and stretches out his sharp claws if the keeper withdraws but for a moment.

Boys, richly attired, now offered them sherbet and choice fruits; when, however, they approached Misura, he said, somewhat displeasably:

“Prince Tarfe, these viands like me not: but I would gladly drink a cup of right fiery wine.”

Tarfe smiled; at a signal from him the youthful attendants brought the noble wine of Xeres, sparkling in its crystal flasks, and foaming in the tall, elaborately carved glass goblets. The prince himself testified that he kept not too strictly the rules of Mahomet, for he drank to the envoys right courteously, and Misura felt pleased and satisfied at heart.

“When we have prevailed on a guest to partake of our food and our wine,” said Tarfe, with graceful courtesy, “it is permitted to inquire his name and rank. Tell me, then, ye noble messengers, what names bear ye among your countrymen?”

Scarcely had he heard the name “Arnald of Maraviglia,” when he plucked hastily a bough of laurel from the stem nearest at hand, twined it rapidly into a sort of wreath, and placed it upon the minstrel’s brows.

“Oh, see,” said he, smiling, “how rightly did you say but now that I should have many tales for the ladies of Cordova and Seville. For how will they rejoice, and how will they gaze upon me, when they learn that Messire Arnald of Maraviglia hath eaten and drunk at my side! I know that the dames of many Christian lands gladly listen to your strains, and honour you with the name of their minstrel and servant; but we also are not wholly unfamiliar

with the lays of Provence, and fame must doubtless have acquainted you with the grace and accomplishments of our ladies."

"Methinks I ought to answer you in song," said Arnald, all glowing with pleasure; "but the moment is well-nigh too solemn."

Tarfe once more contemplated him from head to foot with an admiring smile, and then turned to Misura, who gave his name dryly and abruptly, nay, almost sullenly.

"Oh, your name is also well known to us," cried Tarfe, his eyes flashing with a sterner light. "Our ladies also will learn it, when Gryba bears them word how many of their most favoured lovers lie slain by your heavy battle-axe! Well indeed—that we know—well hath Sir Arnald's sword done its work; but thou, Misura, with thy sharp axe, seemest like the accredited herald of Death himself!"

"Nay, sir," muttered Misura, "I strike quickly and fairly; nevertheless, I am no deathsman with his murderous axe."

"I desired not to offend you," said Tarfe, somewhat abashed.

"I believe it truly," returned Misura; "but it has often disturbed me that, because I am somewhat larger of stature and stronger of limb than other men, and because fighting comes naturally to me, therefore am I regarded as a kind of bloodthirsty ogre, and they would fain scare children with my name. But children are too wise for them; they look clearly and fearlessly into one's eyes, and many a time hath a dear little cherub sat laughing in mine arms, and playing with my beard."

As he said these words there came so true and kindly an expression into his honest countenance, that Tarfe involuntarily pressed his hand in some emotion. But craft and vigilance speedily resumed their ascendancy over the prince. He observed with satisfaction that Misura emptied the goblet before him at a single draught, and soon after, in absence of mind, swallowed also the contents of that

which stood by the prince; and the pages now received a sign to provide the gigantic soldier with incessant supplies of wine. It was possible that in the confusion of the moment some important intelligence might be obtained from him. Arnald, perceiving the danger, endeavoured to warn his comrade; but in vain: cup after cup of the fiery wine did Misura drain in mighty draughts. But however abundantly the glowing stream entered his lips, there issued from them no hasty or inconsiderate word: calm and clear as before was the light of his large blue eye, neither was there any flush perceptible upon his cheeks.

At length Balta appeared, bowed to the prince, and said with his wonted calmness and cheerfulness of demeanour, "I congratulate you, noble prince; I am outvoted, and you have won the day. It now only remains for you to determine when and where you will appoint a meeting with the Vicomte Bisiers, in order to contend with him to the death for the mastery of this beautiful land."

"Does this disturb you?" inquired Tarfe.

"Allah forbid!" replied Balta; "I am only desirous that all should be disposed in becoming order."

"Well, then, noble Arnald of Maraviglia," cried Tarfe, "greet your gallant commander from me, and say to him that to-morrow morning early, between the hours of eight and nine, I will await him in the field which is called, in the language of the country, 'The golden meadow.'"

Arnald bowed, and returned through the open halls of the camp-fortress to the place where his horse was tied. Tarfe then desired his Moors not again to bind the eyes of the envoys, for that the question was now no longer concerning skill as generals, but concerning honourable valour as knights, hand to hand.

Chapter Seventeenth.

THE sun of the appointed morning shone brightly from the blue heavens upon the flowery 'golden meadow;' Arnald and Guy of Hauteroche on the Provençal side, Balta and another Moorish warrior on the part of Tarfe, measured the area for combat, and so arranged it that the disadvantages of sun and wind should be equally divided, as is the manner of honourable warfare. Meantime from afar the two noble champions were seen to approach, each attended by a splendid retinue. On the heights the Saracen army, on the wide plain the Christian forces, stood with glittering arms and expectant faces, as solemn spectators of the contest. As Arnald and Balta paced side by side during the execution of their office, the eyes of the troubadour fell again upon his companion's sword, shaped after the fashion of a European knight; and Balta, who had observed his wondering gaze, inquired what occasioned it.

"That you wear not a Saracen sabre," replied Arnald. "Is yonder weapon, perchance, a trophy won in battle?"

"No," returned Balta, smiling; "it resembles not in this the noble white Arab which your esquire holds yonder by the glittering rein, and concerning which you will have to answer to my friend Gryba at the sword's point. My falchion was shaped in Seville; the steel thereof was tempered in Damascus; but I chose this form out of the pleasure which I took therein: methought that the crooked blade was akin to a serpent, but the straight sword to a sunbeam."

"I read an augury of good therein, young and courageous knight," said Arnald.

"How so?"

"Nay, when it is fulfilled, I will remind you thereof;

but if my foreboding and hope have deceived me, we should try in vain to understand each other."

Balta seemed about to make some reply, but the illustrious combatants now came near on either side. The four umpires of the strife sprang to their horses and hastened to assume their posts, each being stationed at an angle of the square which had been meted out for battle. Such were the boundaries that marked the space; no other lists had been provided. The suites of the two generals remained at such a distance that their respective armies could behold the combat freely on all sides. Courteously saluting each other, the two heroes rode upon the field. Notwithstanding a certain degree of resemblance in loftiness of stature and nobility of bearing, it was impossible to behold a greater contrast than that which they presented in arms and accoutrements. The vicomte and his panting steed were almost entirely covered by plates and scales of gold; the visor—of somewhat unusual form—concealed the features of his heroic countenance; on his arm he displayed an ample shield, shaped like a heart, emblazoned with the bearings of the house of Bisiers; while the redundant and waving plumes which crested his helmet, towered aloft so as almost to double the height of the wearer. He bore no lance; for he well knew that the Moors used not that weapon as did the Europeans for tilt and tourney; but his drawn sword was ready in his gauntleted hand—long, broad, stauless, and glittering. Opposite to him, clad in a light but closely-fitting cuirass, composed of silver scales, the Prince Tarfe reined his slender courser; whose bright Isabel-colour, undisguised by any heavier caparison than a bridle so slight and a saddle so small as to be almost invisible, seemed absolutely to shine across the field. It might almost have been supposed that the gallant animal had no guide save the will of his rider. In his right hand the prince carried two javelins, ebony-shafted, and pointed with double-edged steel; on his thigh glittered a magnificent sabre, and he seemed to wear his small and variegated shield, which

was painted with many strange devices, rather as an ornament than as a defence.

As if inquiring whether the moment of onset had arrived, Tarfe waved and poised in the air one of his javelins, the vicomte signed in the affirmative, and the light weapon took flight. It rebounded, indeed, from the forehead of the mailed war-horse, yet the animal started aside from the stroke, and reared high in the air. It seemed that the prince had attained his object. With the rapidity of thought he circled around his adversary, and, from the left side, struck with his swiftly-drawn sabre so terrific a blow upon the closed helmet that a portion of the visor was shattered, and the face of the vicomte became visible, his eyes sparkling with anger. Ere he could again subdue his lofty charger, by voice and spur, Tarfe had reached, with a light springing gallop, the further extremity of the area, saying at the same time, with a laugh :

“I was desirous to begin by looking you in the face, fair sir !”

“Pride goeth before a fall !” cried the vicomte, thundering upon the prince with a charge so rapid and resistless that there was not a moment left to escape from its fury ; but Tarfe bent in his pliable armour, till his head nearly touched the ground, without, however, leaving the saddle, and the terrible stroke of the vicomte’s sword hissed harmlessly through the air. Meanwhile the agile Saracen was again erect in his seat, and suffering his sabre to hang from his hand by the scarf which suspended it, he poised his second javelin, as if preparing to hurl it against his foe. When, however, the vicomte approached him closely, he wheeled suddenly around, and performed a thousand voltes and caracoles, his antagonist vainly endeavouring to come hand to hand with him, till both rider and horse glowed beneath their weighty armour. Arnald began to dread that this exhausting trial of skill might at last snatch the victory out of the hero-grasp of the Christian knight. “Oh, how hard !” sighed he to himself,

“how very hard it is to stand by idly gazing on a contest wherein heart and life itself are engaged; and how can I ever come into my lady’s presence, with the miserable intelligence—‘Your mighty lord was slain by the Saracen—and I stood calmly by!’”

Meanwhile Tarfe hurled his javelin; it was well aimed, for it whizzed forwards in a straight line towards the spot where the cleft vizor had left bare the hero’s eagle-glance; but the good and knightly sword cleft it as it flew, so that the severed halves of the weapon were whirled in opposite directions across the battle-field. It might be seen, by the resistless fury wherewith Tarfe now sprang upon his adversary, that he had greatly trusted to this cast. Each, at the same moment, without attempting to cover himself, aimed a mighty stroke against his antagonist. Arnald thought that Tarfe’s scaly cuirass must surely be crushed, and his breast cloven asunder; but the fine links of elastic steel had not been penetrated by the blade; while, on the other hand, the sabre of Tarfe had severed the joints, between harness and gorget, and blood began to trickle forth from the opening, down the vicomte’s right shoulder.

The prince seemed desirous of resuming his former game, but he began visibly to waver in his seat; his fiery horse no longer obeyed the rein; his face became paler and paler every moment. The vicomte advanced towards him with lifted sword; then Tarfe dropped the point of his sabre, and said, with a painful smile, “Hold, my brave foe; it is enough already;” and at the same moment the young and graceful hero sank gently from his horse, amid the flowers and grass of the meadow. Inexpressibly noble and beautiful was he to look upon, in the closely clinging scales of his armour, which displayed every motion of his shapely form. A few drops of blood welled forth from his pallid lips. The gallant Bisiers checked his foaming steed, and cried out to the four umpires of the combat, “Hither, gentlemen; aid, if it may be, to rescue and heal this hero-prince!”

All sprang lightly from saddle and stirrup, and endeavoured to raise the fallen knight with gentleness; but Tarfe motioned them to desist, whispering, in a scarcely audible voice, "Forbear! forbear! ye do but give me unnecessary pain!"

"Where lies your wound?" inquired Balta, with unshaken calmness, seeking to undo the links of the hauberk.

"I have no wound," replied the prince; "my good armour hath turned aside the edge of the falchion; but my breast is crushed, even to death, by the weight of that terrible blow. Be still; only be still—have patience but for a moment: it will soon be over. And thou, Balta, take heed that my word of honour is not broken! I mean, in the matter of retreat and departure; thou knowest I pledged my honour for ye all. Great prophet! let no man dare to say, that honour keeps not watch beside my grave." He looked up in Balta's face, with an anxious and supplicating expression; and the young Moor replied, his eyes overflowing with burning drops, "Trust to me, and sleep in peace!"

Then Tarfe smiled right cheerfully, and whispering, almost playfully, "Gryba, truly, will somewhat chide; but say to him, that I bore me honourably!"—he closed his majestic eyes, and breathed forth, from a mortal body, the sublime spirit of a hero.

Balta sank beside him on the earth, and wept in silence. When Arnald turned to seek his general, he beheld the vicomte close behind him, sitting on his lofty horse, and gazing forth from his cloven visor with a countenance so earnest and solemn, that the remembrance of the ancestral spirit at Castle Bisiers shot through the mind of Arnald with wondrous vividness; and he be-thought him, with a thrill of reverence, how that mid-sight apparition had foreboded victory.

Chapter Eighteenth.

SILENTLY and mournfully had the Moors embarked, under the conduct of Balta; their sails were no longer visible on the horizon. The Provençal army determined, before it should disperse and retire, each man to his delivered home, to offer up a general thanksgiving, in the venerable minster beside the blue lakes, and afterwards to hold a feast of victory on the plain before Castle Bisiers.

To the sound of clarion and trumpet, with mirthful songs, and banners flying aloft, the exulting band marched on through villages and cities, and beneath the battlements of stately castles; wherever they passed, chaplots of flowers and crowns of laurel were showered upon their heads, and maidens in the bloom of youth greeted them with song; mothers lifted up their infants to gaze on the intrepid warriors; eager children gambolled around their path, mimicking in sport the bearing of soldiers; aged men and honourable matrons stretched forth their hands to heaven, in praise to the God of armies; and most justly did every bright coronal of honour shine in tenfold glory around the brow of the gallant and victorious vicomte.

As they drew nearer to the minster, the jubilee of their merry war-songs melted gradually into a choral strain, solemn and holy; and even the mirth of the places through which they passed began to assume a different aspect. They were no longer entertained with reckless hospitality, and revelry bordering on excess, but with tranquil, serious, and thankful repasts, such as might fitly remind them of that high and holy feast which is the especial privilego of Christians; and they were followed in their progress by a multitude of citizens, clad in festive garments, crowned with wreaths of olive, and making the air resound with their psalms of praise.

The following strain arose in the heart of Arnald; and.

when he sang it to a well-known measure, it speedily spread along the whole procession :—

Holy is our God !
 Holy is our God !
 The Lord, the Lord Sabaoth !

Deeds great as those which Egypt saw
 His mighty hand can work at will ;
 And till the last great day of awe
 That hand shall work such wonders still !

Beneath the Red Sea's wave of yore
 His death full many a tyrant found ;
 And still, in seas of ruddy gore,
 Earth's godless tyrants oft are drown'd.

The cloudy pillar erst arose
 For many a hunted wanderer's eyes ;
 And still, in pain, or want, or woes,
 Its wondrous shape shall oft arise.

Age after age, revolving thus,
 The marvels of our God return ;
 Still Heaven more brightly shines on us,
 As nearer draws the last dread hourne.

Look up ! look up ! To faithful eyes
 God's starry characters appear ;
 Look up ! Eternal suns arise,
 Piercing the night ; soft, strong, and clear !

Manifest mystery ! blessed ray !
 Our guide to shining seats above,
 Where, death's brief darkness past away,
 We view Thy wonders and Thy love.

Holy is our God !
 Holy is our God !
 The Lord, the Lord Sabaoth !

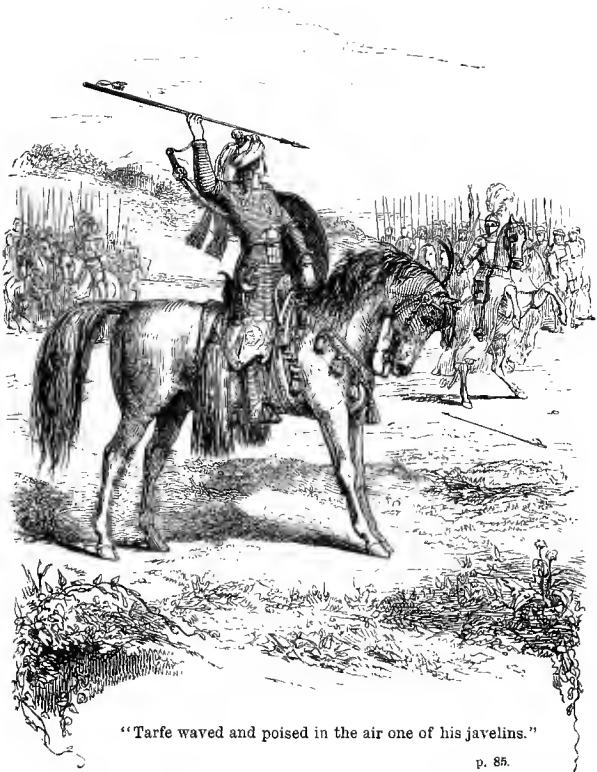
They stood in front of the lofty minster. Again, as

before on the eve of departure for battle, the warriors dismounted from their horses. By this time the infantry had come up; and the assembled band of conquerors now paced side by side along those magnificent aisles which were already thrilling from end to end with the organ's solemn tones. Before them were borne the coffins of two young knights who had fallen, with great honour, in the first battle on the sea-coast. Their entombment had been deferred in hope of so fair a day as the present; and now, before the faces of their brave comrades, those two young and honoured corpses were lowered into the famous vault sanctified by the presence of so many sleeping heroes and sages; their descent being timed to the melody of a soft requiem sung by the voices of young maidens.

That mute craving for the tomb which is sometimes wont to overshadow the hearts of pious minstrels, breathed upon the spirit of Arnald from the soft and solemn notes of the requiem. Nevertheless, he lifted up his heart joyfully in life and strength when he saw his Altarbol advance, with eyes full of heavenly inspiration, to celebrate the mass. And in a high gallery exactly opposite to the troubadour, surrounded by richly attired maidens, appeared the lofty ladye Alearda, simple in her magnificence; her eyes and hands lifted up in thankfulness to Heaven, bearing with them towards the better home the thoughts of every pure-hearted beholder.

“O favouring God,” sighed Arnald, with enthusiasm, “hast Thou, in the abundance of Thy mercy, suffered me to behold the solemnisation of this victory, and to behold it *thus!*”

He was lost in the feeling of his own unworthiness, and of the Divine mercy. He could do nothing but strive to rouse and cherish again and again the sacrificial fire upon the altar of his heart; and when he could not kindle thereon a flame sufficiently bright and transparent, he did but look upward to the face of that prayerful ladye, and immedi-



“Tarfe waved and poised in the air one of his javelins.”

ately his whole spirit was thrilling with the strength, the purity, and the joy of paradise.

The service of God was at an end; the troops reassumed their order, both horse and foot; Alearda had already gone forth on her way to Castle Bisiers.

Chapter Nineteenth.

IN the midst of the plain appointed for the feast of victory rose a gentle eminence overshadowed by a few tall bay-trees. Here had the choicest decorations been lavished; and here were placed seats of turf, whence the Vicomte and Alearda could overlook the gay, countless, and various throng beneath them.

The whole plain was already echoing with the sound of songs and of harp-strings. Here was to be seen a group of dancers within a circle bounded by slender trees overhung with wreaths of green leaves; there, warriors and peasants were gathering around the richly laden board, and many a blushing village-maiden was drawn with courteous violence to her seat; aged men, with bright and cheerful countenances, sought for themselves a retired and convenient resting-place beneath the cool shade of the foliage, whither they might be observed carrying flasks of sparkling wine; noble knights and ladies, in festive attire, walked to and fro amid the merry multitude, dispensing their friendly greetings on every side.

And now the noblest pair of that festival appeared on the hill. They were hailed by a chorus from all the trumpets; the dancers paused; and those who sate at the board or beside the wine-cup arose simultaneously: there was not a single eye which gazed not upwards to the mount sparkling with gratitude and joy. Caps, hats, and wreaths were tossed in the air on every side; and the joyous shout of "God save the victorious Vicomte! God save Alearda

the fair!" rose from the flowery plain, till it rang through the blue and sunny welkin.

Close beneath the hill stood Arnald, irradiated by the glory and grace of Alearda as she bowed her head to the multitude with lofty kindness, and her beautiful face beamed with reverential joy at the victory. Amid her dark tresses glittered a circlet of gems and dewy roses, which seemed to have been cherishing their bloom till that day, that so they might fitly grace her majestic loveliness.

"Is it not even as I told thee some months ago?" said a voice close beside him. "At this moment, indeed, we behold, visibly embodied before us, the source from which, under God, issues all that is lofty and pure, bathing these happy shores in song, and in the glory of great deeds!"

Turning round, the troubadour recognised his Altarbol.

"Yes," cried he, grasping the powerful hand of the monk,—“yes, my illustrious friend, it is the god-like privilege of a pure-hearted woman, by her holy beauty, to admonish man of eternity, and, in her daily existence, to be a living messenger of God. Whenever she stoops from this her sphere to achieve some separate and signal work,—such as would be the very head and front of a man's influence upon the world, and without which his labour were vain,—it seems in her but a voluntary gift, and grace above measure.”

"It is the truth, my valiant Arnald," replied the abbot; and leaning upon his friend's arm, he drew him to one of the numerous couches which were erected upon the festive plain. There they continued their discourse in celebration of the glory of true-hearted women; and perchance they might have proceeded yet farther, when Altarbol, suddenly recollecting himself, said, "I am detaining you from yonder eminence, where are assembled the noblest personages of the festival."

"I have not been bidden," replied Arnald, somewhat briefly.

“But your place is there, naturally and of necessity,” returned Altarbol.

“Perchance it may be so—perchance not,” said the troubadour. “But, at all events, it is better that men should ask, ‘Wherefore is he absent?’ than that they should demand, ‘What does he here?’ Christian humility would prompt us to withdrawal in such cases; but with myself—I confess it to you frankly—pride, rather than humility, renders easy such a demeanour. If any man have forgotten to summon the descendant of the great hero of our race, ay, and the representative of the noble minstrel-king, he must have heard so little of the house of Maraviglia that it were vain indeed to debate the point with him. I do not speak of the vicomte, who has hitherto ever honoured me far above my deserts, and who has this day many other and better themes to employ his thoughts. I mean only, that he who bears our honourable shield and arms must not even know how to assume the air of an intruder.”

“Ay, ay,” answered Altarbol, smiling, and slightly shaking his head, “I perceive it well—a Maraviglia is still a Maraviglia. Methinks, then, thou wilt not associate thyself to that band of troubadours who dwell in Castle Bisiers, and are, as it were, in the vicomte’s service?”

“Ere I do thus, the vicomte must have great need of me,” replied Arnald. “For the present, I have bethought me of a small farm hard by the walls of mine ancestral castle; and there, if it may be, I will take up my abode. Castle Bisiers will not be so distant but that, from time to time, I may pay my devoirs to my great commander and my noble lady; while, on the other hand, I can also visit Walter’s little fortress, and kneel upon his honoured grave.”

“Thou dost well, my son,” said the monk.

In the mean time a page approached, and invited the knight of Maraviglia, in the vicomte’s name, to celebrate

the evening of that festive day at Castle Bisiers, whither the whole assembly were about to betake themselves in the shadows of twilight.

"I rejoice greatly in this evening," cried Arnald to Altarbol, with a certain youthful vivacity which had not yet entirely forsaken him; and Altarbol replied, "Therein also dost thou right well, my dear son."

Herewith they parted in great affection, and Arnald hastily followed the page.

The illuminated castle shone with great magnificence through the darkening twilight and the mists which arose from the meadow. The sound of a joyous march, and the light of torches carried by numerous pages, sufficiently designated the course of the procession, and Arnald was soon in its ranks.

In this manner they entered the avenues of the garden in which Arnald had obtained his first distant view of the Lady Alearda. From the boughs of the trees were suspended innumerable lamps, glittering like golden fruits, the clear light of which, pleasantly intercepted by foliage, played over the adornments and gay attire of the advancing band. Arnald heard the vicomte's voice inquiring for him, and hastened forwards. His general warmly grasped his hand, and, pausing for a moment, presented him to the ladye who leaned on his arm.

"We are already acquainted," answered Alearda, with her wonted gracious dignity, slightly inclining her beautiful head. "But, since our conversation on that solemn evening, your name has often been recalled to me by the vicomte. Much did he write of your heroism and your noble ardour in battle; and I take pleasure in saluting you by a name which you have long deserved, sir knight of Maraviglia."

"I feel that I now first receive the full glory of knight-hood," said Arnald, his voice trembling with joy and reverence.

The vicomte signed to him to remain beside Alearda,

and they proceeded slowly through the illuminated avenues.

“You would perchance wish, noble minstrel,” said Alearda smiling, “to adjure the year, by strains of poesy, to scatter May-flowers and May-verdure on this our fair day of festival. But alas, we can no longer withhold Autumn from checkering with gold the summer foliage; and see how his watery mists are rising to drive us back from the festal meadows to our castle-halls.”

“I believe truly, noble lady,” replied Arnald, “that such would be the feeling of many an aged minstrel. But with me it is otherwise. To me Autumn has ever been dear above all other seasons. His gentle farewells, his mild forewarnings of winter’s peaceful sleep, his robes magnificent in their hues, like the vesture of a consecrated sacrifice,—all these fill me with a melancholy, deep but unspeakably sweet. And especially for a festival of peace, I know no fitter and no fairer herald than he, the earnest and solemn harbinger of sleep, in his garments of wondrous splendour.”

“Say it to me in graceful verse, according to the gift that is in you,” replied Alearda; and Arnald, full of solemn inspiration, began to speak the following words, with a low but deeply-thrilling voice:—

When war’s exulting storm is waking,
 ’Tis like the reign of liberal May,
 With songs of nightingales outbreaking,¹
 And free wind breathing fresh and gay.

But when calm peace at length is ruling,
 It seems like Autumn’s golden bloom,
 A thousand tongues our spirits schooling
 To deeper stillness—in the tomb.

The birds have fled o’er field and river;
 But winds that sweep the silent ground,

¹ I am not responsible for this extraordinary simile.—*Tr.*

And rustling corn, and leaves that quiver,
Have meaning in each murmur'd sound.

And solemn tales, and legends olden,
Are whisper'd gravely round the hearth,
Like Autumn's woods so rich and golden,
Various and full, in grief or mirth.

List to each whisper's low revealing,
Like leaves that stir in Autumn's breath;
Mark their dim shades, through twilight stealing,
Like mists that wander o'er the heath.

O golden Autumn, gently sweeping
The golden lyre with wondrous hand,
Wakening vague hopes and causeless weeping,
And loosing many a gloomy band.

Like thine the minstrel's life is wending,
In dreams and dim forebodings, past—
Oh! may our spirits, softly blending,
Together sink to sleep at last!

Knights and ladies had gathered eagerly around at the first intelligence that the troubadour was improvising verses: a murmur of approbation arose as he concluded, though but few of the circle could really have heard the low-breathed words of Arnald. But he was now a renowned minstrel; and Guy of Hauteroche, desiring in the warmth and friendliness of his heart to bespeak the favour of all for his friend, whispered, "Mark now how well he has acquitted himself! I heard what the countess imposed upon him—an ode to Autumn in verse! But a true genius knows how to adorn and embellish even the most ungrateful topics."

Alearda was in the mean time silent, and very thoughtful. At length she said, with deep earnestness of manner, "You have given voice to many a dim feeling which dwelt dreamlike and mute in the depths of my heart, and I thank you for it. Methinks I now understand better the reason

of those forehodings which have ever thronged upon my heart in the breath of autumn ; and henceforth that season will be far dearer to me."

At this moment the guests entered the bright gateway of the castle. Clarion-notes from the balconies mingled with the gay melody of march and dance, which had accompanied the procession, and drowned the tones of every voice. Above, in the magnificent saloon, the vicomte and his lofty ladye led the dance ; and the festivities of the evening now began their course, with all imaginable pomp, and after the noblest manner.

The happiness of Arnald was complete ; for scarcely for a moment did he lose sight of his ladye : and sometimes as she passed near him, she honoured him with a kindly greeting. About midnight she withdrew from the hall, leaning on the arm of her lord ; and the troubadour then hurried joyfully away, to the place where his squadrons had bivouacked beneath the shelter of the foliage. On the morrow they intended to take a solemn farewell of their victorious commander and his wondrously beautiful lady, defiling before them in stately march and full battle-array.

Scarce had the first light of dawn glimmered through the sky, when Arnald was on his horse, inspecting, marshalling, and adorning the ranks of his cavalry. The signal-trumpet sounded at length for the march. All blithely assumed their several positions ; and the whole body, wheeling around, marched amid joyous war-strains beneath the lofty battlements of Castle Bisiers, whence the vicomte and Alearda looked down and courteously saluted them. Arnald's troop of light horse sang meanwhile the following song, learned from the lips of their leader.

For the fame of noble ladies,
The faith of our Mother-Church to guard,
And to free our land from a foreigner's hand,
We have striven long, we have battled hard.

The Lord gave hours of darkness,
 Full many a hot wound bleeding fast,
 And death He gave to many brave ;
 But He gave us the dawning of hope at last.

For a hero-chief he gave us,
 Who brought the work to its glorious close
 His sons shall hear of the days of fear,
 When their valiant sire disdain'd his foes.

His fame to song is wedded ;
 So if the dark cloud gather again,
 The heart of each knight shall kindle in light,
 As he thinks of the hero and murmurs the strain !

Now, crown him, noble ladies !
 There's many a wreath in your garden-bowers.
 Oh, happy are we, if your courtesy
 Lets but a single leaf be ours !

Chapter Twentieth

AMONG the garlands showered upon the soldiers as they passed, by the hands of Alearda and her maidens, there was one, woven of laurel-leaves and autumnal flowers, which dropped exactly over the sword of Arnald, and remained resting upon his hand ; a joyous presentiment whispered in his ear that it came from the ladye herself. He carefully hung it on his shoulder, and then rode onwards in silent rejoicing ; while a vision of his future life arose before his spirit, populous with bright and holy shapes. Many a fair and heroic legend, many a motley fable, which he meditated recording and enveloping in the self-created flowers of fancy, appeared to him, beckoning him onward, from the glowing skies of morning ; amid these bright dreams of the future, arose from time to time

the dark and dewy clouds of memory, while the vicinity of his illustrious ladye seemed to steep the present hour in light, beauty, and enchantment.

The troops halted—all rapidly dispersed, having exchanged farewells as brethren—to seek their dear familiar homes.

Many a token of warmth and affection did Arnald receive, not only from his own troop, but also from the other squadrons. The stout-hearted Misura inquired minutely where he was to be found, and Arnald rejoiced greatly in his promise of seeking him.

When, however, he found himself alone with his esquire before the ruins of Castle Maraviglia, his heart became desolate and sorrowful, and his eyes filled with silent tears. "When my companions go to their homes," thought he, "how will they be greeted by the eager acclaim of a thousand dear and unforgotten voices! In every hut, which hath sent forth a single soldier to this hallowed war, there will now be a festival, which will be ever renewed on the anniversary of this day, and of every other day wherein the beloved wanderer has encountered honourable danger. But, what do I find? Sorrowful remembrances upon the threshold of the fallen and vacant castle of my fathers,—deathlike solitude within its dusky halls,—or, at the best, strangers, who are indifferent to me, who disturb not the friendless calm of my existence—these are all! Oh, that there were but one gentle child to smile when it saw me; one sweet flower, plucked amid the wanderings of a lifetime! How gladly would I then forget that there was no one beside to welcome me! Its smile should be a compensation for the festival which celebrates the return of other and happier warriors; and if, each year, as the hour of our battle on the sea-shore came round again, I could say to it, "thus fought we, and at this day," should I not be proud and satisfied, though not another human being on earth kept the anniversary in mine honour? Yet, take comfort, Arnald! That goodly

gift which God has vouchsafed to thee, so far beyond thy deserts, will never forsake thee: and if thy ladye takes pleasure in thy strain, and if sometimes thou art perchance so favoured as to accomplish for her some knightly service, what matters it that a few sighs should be wrung from thy heart, or a few tears from thine eye? O troubadour, blest beyond measure, seek not for themes of regret in thy glorious destiny!"

The colossal towers of Castle Maraviglia, their solemn ruins clothed in the mystical garments of ivy, and crowned with waving and whispering lichens, arose before Arnald's eyes; the half-sunken doors were visible through the tall grass; he could gaze through them into the castle-court, which was overshadowed by two mighty oaks, their leaves rustling in the wind.

Two young boys, about six or seven years old, came forth at this moment from the neighbouring wood of lindens; they held each other by the hand, and sang together the following words, as they carelessly strolled along the meadow:

Sleep, sleep in death!
 God watch each silent tomb!
 Our hands shall twine ye many a wreath,
 And strew your coffins with their fragrant bloom,
 Ye valiant lords of Maraviglia!

Well may ye sleep,
 For ye have watch'd right well,
 As faithful shepherds watch their sheep,
 Ere yet the glory of your castle fell,
 Ye valiant lords of Maraviglia!

Towers stoop and fall
 In dust upon the ground!
 Still from the loyal breasts of all
 The fame of your high deeds in song shall sound,
 Ye valiant lords of Maraviglia!

But here the children, suddenly perceiving the stranger

knight and his esquire, paused and stood still, with a half-fearful, half-curious expression; whereat an unspeakably sweet and homelike feeling thrilled through the heart of Maraviglia, like the breath of spring.

On inquiry, he learned that these were the sons of the peasant with whom he intended to take up his abode; and he now joyfully followed them, as two angels of hope and promise. . . Conversing merrily, they soon reached the rustic dwelling, which stood beneath the shadow of some magnificent cork-trees, on the slope of a gentle hill, overlooked by the stately ruins of Castle Maraviglia.

Arnald's keen eye soon detected a building of more recent construction than the rest; and the boys told him exultingly that it had been built for the reception of friends, and that their father had brought down the stones of the old castle for its erection.

For a moment the thought of this dismemberment of his ancestral halls pierced through the heart of the knight with a cold painful feeling; yet it afterwards seemed to him as though this little dwelling were built expressly for himself, the last, and in all outward things the poorest scion of that dying stem.

Scarcely had the true-hearted farmer pronounced his hospitable greeting, and learned the name of Arnald, when, with visible emotion, he placed all that he had at the service of the knightly minstrel, and at first insisted upon his remaining beneath his roof for as many years as should seem good to him, on no other conditions than his own pleasure and convenience. But when Arnald answered somewhat proudly, that by such terms he should be driven from the ruins of his ancestral castle, the peasant submissively assented; a distinct compact was concluded between them; Arnald paid for some years in advance, in order to disembarass himself of all petty, narrowing cares and anxieties, and after partaking a cheerful repast in company with his friendly host, he departed to the small mansion built out of the stones of Castle Maraviglia.

Chapter Twenty-first.

ARNALD'S arrangements were speedily completed. His wreath was suspended before his couch, so that its green leaves were the first sight that saluted his eyes on waking ; above it hung his well-tried sword, his golden shield, his gleaming helmet, and his knightly spurs ; but the lyre was placed in the centre of the wreath. On account of the autumnal season, a large table was placed beside the hearth, and soon was it covered with many old and goodly volumes, some of a devotional character, some inscribed with ancient and stately legends. Many of these were sent or brought to him by Altarbol, from the cloister. Others he had himself formerly possessed, and laid up in various places of safety at the first outbreak of war ; these he now caused to be once more collected by the faithful esquire, who would not consent to be separated from his master. Many sheets, also, of snow-white parchment were there, whereon he recorded, in graceful characters, such things as were revealed to him by his inspiration ; for the poets of those days possessed the art, I might well call it the happiness, of painting rather than writing the creations of their genius, fairly and delicately, upon parchment. Especially were they wont to illuminate the initial letters of their periods with gold and bright colours ; and they exulted greatly in considering the admiration wherewith such embellishments would be contemplated throughout all future times.

They are for the most part vanished, and many of them have mouldered away, those precious and fairly-adorned volumes ; nevertheless, the writer of this history can no otherwise than gaze with melancholy dissatisfaction upon the hasty and fugitive characters which arise beneath his own pen, and which are destined only for a worthless means of communication with the printing-press. Let the reader pardon him this strange and involuntary exclamation, and

turn with unimpaired interest to Arnald and the days of Provençal song.

The troubadour occasionally visited Castle Bisiers, and read to his ladye sometimes the lays of past ages, sometimes his own compositions; and not only did Alearda take delight in the deep and significant beauty of his tales and songs, but also the fair and angelic little maiden Berta loved to look upon the bright letters, and upon the many-coloured designs wherewith the text was interspersed. From every such visit Arnald returned to his calm solitude, carrying with him a rich store of the purest and happiest inspiration.

One day he found the vicomte in parley with a merchant who was laden with many goodly arms. The ladies stood also in the group of knights, contemplating wares so unfamiliar to them with a shudder, yet greatly admiring the brightness of their splendour. Especially noticeable was a long dagger with sheath and hilt of gold, attached to a girdle composed of delicate links of silver, which attracted the admiration of many a gentle eye. Alearda herself looked with visible pleasure on the gleaming weapon, though she was, after her wonted manner, silent and thoughtful withal; while her ladies were never weary of extolling the carved foliage of the hilt, whence a leopard's head peeped forth, the elaborate designs upon the sheath, and the mirror-like brightness of the polished blade.

Guy of Hauteroche, overlooking with his usual giddiness the admiration which Alearda had testified for the poniard, now began to ridicule the ladies for their enthusiasm, assuring them that it was but a woman's weapon after all, or at best was fit only for crafty heathens and Moors.

Alearda turned away, somewhat disturbed, and almost ashamed; but Arnald, thoroughly roused by this, and also admiring from his heart the goodly dagger, said with great vivacity—

“Valiant Guy, it is to me incomprehensible that thou shouldst contemn and depreciate a weapon, the use of which demands the closest encounter with the foe. Were I to hide

my sword beneath my mantle, and present myself as if unarmed, well might ye accuse me of a foul and unknightly deed; but when I carry openly this fair dagger, clasped by its shining silver chain about my waist, who dares lay any evil to my charge that I draw it in honourable strife? Nay, rather, I know nothing nobler than to press onward through the strokes and thrusts of foes, covered perchance with mortal wounds, yet never ceasing to drive this glittering point into the doomed heart, as God and honour dictate. Ay, and even if I wore it hidden, and were at the same time also outwardly armed, the blame would rest upon my antagonist if he ventured to approach me too closely, and received an unforeseen death-stroke. It is ill to handle an armed man in the battle as though he were a runaway hound whom you snatch up to restore to his master. And fair were those single combats with the dagger held by the heroes of ancient legend; now wrestling with each other, in their hands the small bright messengers of death, now hurling them from afar against breast or brow, with unerring eye and death-dealing arm! Then did the hasty stoop, or the lightning-swift guard of shield or mantle avail the warrior; but all was fair and open as the day. Believe me, dear brother-in-arms, every weapon is, in its proper splendour, as a fearful gift from God, the thunderbolt of the Lord in a weak human grasp; and yet all alike may we, if we so please, profane to vile uses and to the service of the evil spirit. But therefore should knights watch earnestly for the signs imparted to them by virtuous ladies, who are as the visible angels of heaven! and by them, sword and dagger, and spear and dart, and battle-axe, are all hallowed alike and aright, especially in the grasp of the favoured warrior who has received his first weapons from a fair hand."

The friendly Guy had listened well pleased during this oration; and he now began, after his usual manner, to extol the troubadour, who knew ever how to introduce gallant speeches, and courtous compliments to the ladies; and

who never lacked the right word at the right moment. Arnald, losing his patience, when he found himself so incessantly misunderstood, felt the fiery spirit of his race rising up within him, and turned angrily away from the well-intentioned youth.

But he met the eye of Alearda, and all was forgotten at the sight of her serious gaze, and of that which she now did. She seemed, as was indeed often the case with her, not to have noticed the words of Guy of Hauteroche; and she gazed for an instant on the dagger, in deep meditation. Then she unloosed from her girdle a silken net, heavy with gold pieces, laid it, together with the rich clasps which fastened it, in the hand of the merchant, who bowed deeply; and, taking up the beautiful weapon, she dropped the glittering steel into its golden sheath, and advanced to the troubadour. A thrill of rapture and of hopes, self-reproved as they arose, for over-holdness, penetrated his soul.

The ladye, however, bent towards him graciously, and said: "It seems that thou didst not receive thy first arms from female hands, however earnestly thy noble heart may have desired so to receive them; therefore, I pray thee, at least to accept the dagger, which thou hast known how to defend so worthily, from the pure hand of a woman."

And she girded him with the glittering weapon.

Chapter Twenty-second.

LET no one inquire how it was with the spirit of the troubadour after this high and holy inauguration. He to whom it might be imparted feels already the inspiring flame, kindling spontaneously in his own knightly bosom.

Arnald had kneeled in thankfulness before the ladye; and without greatly noticing what afterwards befel in that gay and glittering circle, he went forth alone from Castle

Bisiers, as the shadows of dusky evening began to close, and betook himself towards his quiet abode. His beautiful dagger clashed against its delicate chain of silver, awakening memories high, ineffable, and inspiring.

The country lay around him beneath the golden and tremulous mists of evening; and as Arnald wandered along the boundaries of the castle-garden, — a place to him so significant and so suggestive, — he mused within himself what name this day of great happiness might bear in the calendar. Then he suddenly remembered, that from this very day was the beginning of autumn reckoned: and now he thought that he perceived how his darling season had thankfully guerdoned him for the loving words wherewith he had lately commended it to Alearda. Rejoicing that he bore his lute with him, he tuned its strings, in the purest and clearest harmony; and then, leaning himself against the polished supports of the garden-fence, sang the following song:—

“ Autumn, clad in various hues,
Come with all thy chilling dews;
Come with all thy shadowy gloom!
Though thou whisper, ‘ Man must die,’
Germs of resurrection lie
Underneath thy golden bloom.

All I have or hope below,
To thy mystic leaves I owe;
Murmuring wonders as they fall:
All my stores of tale and song,
They, and I, to thee belong;
At thy feet I cast them all!”

By the monarch’s garden-side,
Thus a youthful minstrel cried,
Deep in gentle musings blest;
Like a dream, or like a spell,
From the fairest tree there fell
Golden fruit upon his breast.

He yet suffered the soft and lingering echo of the lute-strings to vibrate to and fro, when a familiar voice exclaimed near him: "Good luck to you, with your new gift!"

Looking around, he beheld Guy of Hauteroche, who had just issued from a side-door in the garden, apparently in search of his horse, which neighed to greet him, as the advancing squire led him out of the valley.

The troubadour was somewhat disturbed by this encounter; and because he knew not how to disembarass himself of his singular friend, he arose in some confusion, and was beginning to speak of indifferent things, quite in an ordinary manner, when Guy very unconcernedly asked,

"Well; where is this golden fruit?"

Arnald looked on him amazedly.

"The golden fruit of which you were singing," continued Guy: "methought that in very deed and truth such a gift had dropped on your bosom from one of the fruit-trees yonder."

"Thou hast not fully understood me," returned Arnald, smiling.

"Yes, truly have I," answered Guy; and by way of proof he repeated the last words of the lay:

"Like a dream, or like a spell,
From the fairest tree there fell
Golden fruit upon his breast."

"Or, perhaps, after all, your golden fruit was only a poetic fantasy?"

"Even so; according to your estimate," replied Arnald; "yes, my dear Guy, there is nothing more in the matter than what you are pleased to denominate—a poetic fantasy."

Hereat the friendly Guy laughed; swung himself upon his horse, which had come up in the mean time, and said: "Ye may be a happy race, ye minstrels; only ye are somewhat too much given to set your hearts upon air

and clouds ; therefore take it not ill, if I laugh at you a little."

But Arnald answered him in the same spirit of true-hearted good-humour : "Ye may be a happy race, ye no-minstrels ; only ye are somewhat too much given to set your hearts upon the meat that perisheth ; therefore take it not ill, if I laugh at you a little."

And herewith they parted, heartily laughing, and in perfect peace and good-will.

Chapter Twenty-third.

HENCEFORWARD the dagger was hung across the lyre, and in the centre of the wreath, from which, from time to time, a few faded autumnal blossoms severed and dropped, but the bright green of the laurel-leaves remained ever fresh and unchanging.

Fresh and green as those leaves was the whole tenour of our friend's life through this autumn ; and the season appeared to cherish and revive her favourite with her wonted graciousness. Over wood, and field, and sea lay vast encampments of clouds, built up in manifold and mighty forms, and sometimes the sun would pierce through them in all the abundance of its warmth and glory ; irresistibly calling to the beholder's mind those manifestations of heaven and things divine which may be seen in the pictures of inspired painters of old. Meanwhile, the soft mists curled quietly upwards from the grass, veiling heaven and earth together, as if in mournful affection ; and the giant trees of the forest, with their lofty crests, loomed mysteriously through the vapour.

These were days and nights rich in poetic creation and in deep heartfelt joy for Arnald. Formerly, perchance, in months had he not achieved so much greatness and

beauty of his art as now in a few weeks : and the happy one was not only permitted to impart to his illustrious ladye his works when complete, he might also speak freely to her of his schemes, and place the future under the guidance of her clear and holy eye. Yet not often did he enter Castle Bisiers ; and not seldom did he question himself, when the hour of his visit arrived, whether he were worthy or unworthy of such an expedition.

When he was at home, his favourite place of resort was a gentle eminence girdled by fair linden-trees. Thence he gazed down, through a solemn vista of lindens, upon a woody vale—green, peaceful, and silent as the slumberous grave. To the spectator from below, the bright summit of the hill seemed to beckon upwards, as if summoning him to an illuminated hall. Here Arnald was often reminded of the deeply significant relation between the tomb and heaven—between death and eternal glory ; and his Altarbol had already promised to take heed that he should be buried here, and that the place should be consecrated according to the rites of the Church : for, despite the wide difference of their years, it was ever in the hearts of both that Altarbol would certainly outlive Arnald, and all their measures were taken with that view. And, after all, it is no marvel that the peaceful heart of a pious priest, stirred only by the soft and holy breath of the Spirit, should continue to beat much longer than the burning and bounding pulses of a minstrel-breast—pure, and for the most part gentle though they be.

Frequently also did Arnald sit in Walter's fallen castle, beside the beloved grave of his friend. Then arose before him the aspirations of his peaceful childhood ; ay, and sometimes it seemed to him as though, in the whispers of the tall grass which now covered the hallowed spot, he heard the low voice of the mild old man speaking to him in friendly salutation ; and then would Arnald's eyes gush out with gentle tears. But never were they drops of bitterness ; they were full of the sweetest and most blessed

melancholy ; for in the glory of that pure minstrel-love wherewith the sublime loveliness of Alearda had penetrated him, life present and life to come were silently but certainly blended into one and the same vision of brightness.

At eventide, when stars came forth in the vapoury skies, or the moon, bright and golden, gleamed through the foliage, or even when sable clouds chased each other across her wan crescent, Arnald knew no dearer spot than the ruins of Castle Maraviglia. There would he roam at will through halls and chambers, now open on every hand, or seat himself in the recessed and vacant windows, and bethink himself how often on that very spot had a chief of the Maraviglia race reclined, with his beloved and loving wife opposite to him ; or he would ascend the towers and traverse the galleries, wherever the decaying wooden steps or the crushed and ruinous winding stair permitted him to do so. He soon felt himself here at home, as if in a familiar abode ; and to this feeling he was perhaps more readily inclined by one of those secret and mysterious thrills of foreboding which sometimes seems to link men in bonds of strange union with places whereto they belong rather through their forefathers than through themselves. Here, also, he encountered an adventure which had well nigh changed the whole aspect and purpose of his being.

Late one evening, beneath the dim and uncertain moonlight, he was approaching one of those well-known window-recesses, when he was somewhat startled by observing that his place was already occupied by a crouching shape, enveloped in the deepest shadow, whereof a long white beard was the only part distinctly visible. Doubting whether this might not be some deceptive illusion of the shadows of night, or whether, indeed, it were not some strange wild animal, which, having escaped from its place of confinement, sought itself a den amid these ruins, Arnald advanced silently, unsheathing his beautiful dagger, without which he now never left his dwelling. The strange appearance bowed itself slowly,

very slowly towards the earth, so that its head almost touched the stones and grass; it then began a low murmuring sound, but seemed to listen ever more and more heedfully; finally, it lifted up its head with these words—"I must go elsewhere; here I see nothing and hear nothing."

"Art thou here to disturb the repose of the heroes of Maraviglia?" cried Arnald, suddenly coming close to the stranger; and an echo sounded softly through the desolate hall, "Maraviglia!"

Arnald drew back, shuddering with a kind of half-fearful melancholy. The stranger, however, replied with much calmness, "No; I am here to disturb no one; therefore it is not meet that you should disturb me."

Herewith he arose from his seat in the wall, and would have departed; but Arnald crossed his path, saying, "Not so; I have a right to question here. Thou seest before thee the last Maraviglia of his race."

"That I know."

"Well, then, I would fain know what thou hast to do in these ruins, where dwelt my forefathers, and where many of them lie buried."

"Follow me, and thou shalt learn."

Therewith he drew forth a small lantern from the shadowing folds of his wide garments; and as he caused it to burn more clearly, the light shone exactly upon his face, and displayed to the wondering Arnald the features of a reverend old man, bold and sharp in all their outlines, but not destitute of beauty. Over his large and somewhat dark eyes there lay a kind of dewy mist, through which the solemn orbs shone forth like stars. Silently and without hesitation Arnald followed him. They proceeded to the furthest extent of the halls, and at length descended a small staircase, which Arnald, despite his minute acquaintance with the ruins, had never before observed, and which conducted to subterranean chambers, adorned with strange paintings.

From these low walls the pictured forms of knights and ladies looked down upon them, interspersed with singular hieroglyphics. Pointing to the latter, the stranger remarked, "The Arabs paint such things as these, and some such were here with Arnold of Brescia in days of old: those who go our way have need to observe very attentively these twisting branches and grotesque shapes."

"*Our way!*" cried Arnald, angrily; and it seemed as though every thing within that narrow vault shuddered at the sound. "*Our way!* Who told thee, thou mysterious midnight wanderer, that thy way was mine?"

"Hush! be still!" muttered the stranger; and without concerning himself about Arnald's words, he extended a small wand of black and polished wood, first towards the walls, and then towards the ground. At the last movement there was a rolling and rustling sound heard beneath the pavement; and the old man listened to it with a well-pleased smile.

"Man!" cried Arnald, grasping him by the arm, "forget not what I said to thee but now. Hast thou taken it upon thee to disturb the ashes of my fathers?"

"Once more, No," answered the old man, coolly. "This is but the mountain-stream, which, descending from the southern woods, rushes to its level far beneath our feet, and the sound of which becomes audible to us when I lift my wand. But it is to me a harbinger of good, and much that is beautiful must be at hand. Hush only—I pray thee, hush!"

And once more listening, and lightly but carefully holding his wondrous wand in both hands, the mysterious old man stepped forwards. But, on a sudden, the magic rod sprang from his fingers with such vehemence that he reeled backwards in the terror and feebleness of age: it rebounded from a part of the wall on which a crowned and bearded shape was delineated in bright colours. The picture seemed to start and shudder; and within, behind the ancient stones, was heard a sound, half like the tone

of mighty harp-strings, half like the roaring of thunder, hissing and murmuring along into far, far, unfathomable depths.

"I have found far more than I sought," groaned the old man. Pale and ever paler grew his face; and at length he sank slowly upon the earth, as if stricken with death.

Fortunately his lantern was not extinguished. Arnald extricated it from the convulsive clutch of his right hand, and with difficulty raised him upon his shoulders, that he might carry him forth into the fresh air, marvelling as he did so at the extraordinary weight of that meagre form. He could not refrain from shuddering as the head of the old man nodded and nodded upon his shoulder, and the long white beard flowed down upon his breast. "If he should begin to move," thought Arnald, "and to mutter fearful spells in mine ear, and to write softly and noiselessly his accursed characters of gramarye upon my neck"—but the old man remained stiff and silent as a corpse.

Nothing doubting that he should speedily remount the little staircase, Arnald had endeavoured to retrace his steps; but he found that he must have mistaken the way. He passed through a series of involved and narrowing vaults, which more than once led him back to the spot on which the old man had swooned, but only to bewilder him in mazes yet more intricate and labyrinthine. As often as he passed the picture on the wall, the crowned shape appeared, in the varying light of the lantern, to move half in menace and half in warning, till Arnald scarcely dared glance towards it. Yet was it on this very spot that at last, completely breathless and exhausted, he suffered his strange burden to glide from his shoulders. He cast himself on the ground beside it, grasped the lantern firmly in his hand, and overpowered with unutterable horror, wrapped his head and eyes closely in his mantle. In childhood he had sometimes experienced similar sensations during a horrible dream. Far above him, in extreme distance, he heard a sound like that which was wont to summon the

monks of St. Anne's cloister to their midnight prayers. His complete and perhaps hopeless isolation from all things living pressed upon his heart with melancholy heaviness.

He heard a low sad moaning, which he imagined to proceed from the crowned shape against the wall. At once he cast the cloak from his head, resolving to meet boldly and honourably, face to face, whatsoever he was now to encounter.

But the plaintive sound came not from that strangely form; on the contrary, it proceeded from the prostrate old man, who now once more began to move, and urged the knight, by many hurried gestures, to lead him forth from that dark midnight vault. Arnald, carefully supporting the stranger on his arm, readily began his pilgrimage; and contrary to his expectation, he found at once that moss-grown stair, and, after a few steps, stood with his companion in the cold free night-air, high above the ruins.

The old man glanced timidly around him, and at last said softly, "Thou mayest thank God that I died not in the vault. Without me thou couldst never have discovered the issue, and thou wouldest have perished miserably amidst those hollow winding ways. But prithee, let us quickly depart from the ruins. I still need thine arm. I dwell yonder to the west, in the fisher's hut by the mountain-lake."

Secretly shuddering, but with benevolent care, Arnald accompanied the mysterious old man to the place which he had designated. As they passed through the woods, all sparkling in the friendly radiance of the rising moon, the stranger opened his lips and said: "Hearken to me, Sir Arnald, and pay good heed to my word. Thy forefathers knew not how to strike the lute as fairly as thou dost, neither could they frame such graceful rhymes"—

"Thou must needs know but little of my forefathers," interrupted Arnald. "The great minstrel-king was a troubadour whose like it would be hard to find either before or afterwards."

“Ay, he indeed,” whispered the old man, visibly trembling. He was silent for a while, and then spoke again in a suppressed voice: “But he understood the value of seers and sages far better than thou dost. It was his likeness which we found in the vault below.”

“And, after all, thou didst disturb his repose!” exclaimed Arnald, in wrath. “*His* repose! the dearest of mine ancestors! Take heed to thyself!”

“No, I tell thee, no!” replied the old man, in a low and hurried whisper. “But speak not of it to me; and especially be silent for this night, sir cavalier and troubadour. This night am I weary even to death; and yonder by the shore I see already the roof of my hospitable hut. Ah, thou canst not imagine how sore is my need of rest! If thou desirest, however, to know further, come hither to-morrow at the hour of noon, and inquire for the Master Ultramonte. I tell thee thou wilt do well if thou comest. It will be for the advantage of both of us.” Therewith he signed his companion to retire, and hurried into the hut, his limbs quivering as though with icy cold. Arnald went home, lost in deep and doubtful thought.

Chapter Twenty-fourth.

NOT long, however, did he remain undetermined. The minstrel-king, Arnold of Brescia, and many another cherished thought, foreboded but not clearly understood, passed like sparks of showering fire through the breast of the troubadour; while his early longing after the secrets of the spirit-world fanned the wakening flame as if with invisible wings. At noonday he stood before the appointed place.

The master Ultramonte came forth to meet him. The horror of the past night had vanished from his aspect; and Arnald could scarcely conceive that a countenance so full of meditation, and of calm, kindly dignity, should ever

have appeared repulsive to him. Neither did the old man's tone and manner retain any trace of their former suppressed and anxious haste. With gentle but pleasant words he invited the cavalier to accompany him on a walk through the mountain-woods, and leaned at the same time familiarly upon his arm.

As they advanced into the depths of the forest, the sweet and confiding intercourse in which the Master Ultramonte lived with nature became more and more manifest. He communed with the flowers, the springs, the rocks—not after any mystical or bewildering manner, but so that the presence and the very breath of the spirit of freedom, truth, and life, became clearly perceptible.

Arnald had intended to question him closely concerning many things, but he was ashamed and reluctant to cast a single disturbing stone into the current of that clear and crystal stream of thought and feeling; so he remained silent.

“That which is to come will come,” thought he; and it came.

A reference to the secret import of numbers might be discerned in many a serious and significant expression, even in the midst of Ultramonte's most graceful discourse. He unveiled mysterious thoughts which, apparently hostile and often contested, live and move in the depths of the human heart. He climbed, as though by the steps of a golden ladder, to the heights of that power over nature which is the inborn and inalienable inheritance of man.

“Thine ancestor,” cried he at last, in words of burning inspiration—“thine ancestor the minstrel-king knew all this; and the self-same power dwells in thee. Whether thou wilt veil and stifle it as he did, or whether thou wilt go forth with it to rule, enlighten, and bless thy wandering fellow-mortals—the choice is before thee. But thou canst and thou shalt learn that thy hand, and thine only, is able to loose the spell which binds those glorious mysteries. Yesterday it struck the wand from my grasp, and over-

whelmed my spirit almost to distraction. Thus it was:— I was simply seeking after one of the wondrous points of junction between the wood-streams and the veins of the mountain; and I wished also to listen to those strains which often arise unbidden in the tombs of ancient heroes during the freedom and silence of the funereal midnight, telling of the great deeds of the past. But there came a change; my wand flew against the spot where Crescenzo, the friend of Arnold of Brescia, aided by a Moorish sage, has walled up a volume wherein are written the deepest mysteries of the visible and invisible world. The heroshape of the minstrel-king was delineated on the wall, as a guardian, by the accomplished hand of Crescenzo: his assistant only inscribed beneath it those strange characters, composed of curling branches and the heads of animals; for, like all other Saracens, he was forbidden, by an ordinance of Mahomet, to paint the form of man or the complete image of a beast. Thou seest I know all the particulars. But the treasure of that hidden wisdom it is not mine to lift: that belongs only to a Maraviglia, and thou art the last of the race. Bethink thee: shall the book of Crescenzo moulder into dust?"

"I think not," said Arnald, after a little reflection. "Shall we go thither to-night?"

"To-night?" repeated Ultramonte, smiling. "Knowest thou, then, already the rushing of the hidden springs? Canst thou say to the lightnings, 'Here strike, and here pass by?' Do the secret graves of trees and flowers stir thy mighty heart with a kindred pulse, imparting to thee, as though in friendly words, a message and a healing?"

Arnald looked at him in astonishment.

"Thou hast yet much to learn," continued Ultramonte. "But come again: with such a pupil my progress will be swift and strong. Wilt thou come, thou last Maraviglia, thou gifted son of nature?"

Arnald consented, and the strange alliance was concluded.

Chapter Twenty-fifth.

FROM this time forth the troubadour visited frequently the hut by the lake, and became every day more serious and more reserved. Seldom did he ascend his beloved hill of lindens; seldom sate he by the dear grave in Walter's castle; yes, even the number of his visits to Castle Bisiers diminished week by week—not, indeed, out of a feeling of unworthiness—not because he was conscious of beginning an unholy course,—but because he was desirous of attaining the highest goal before he brought his efforts beneath the eye of his ladye. Sometimes also he was withheld by a strange and peculiar reverence for the power of numbers, which was every day more significantly displayed to him in his studies. On many days of the month he knew that adverse powers prevailed, and so was it also with many hours of the day. But he knew how to give a reason for all these marvels, very decidedly—one might almost say, very clearly. Meantime Ultramonte was well contented with his pupil; and door after door in the secret treasure-chambers of nature opened at the touch of the energetic inquirer.

About this time it happened that Altarbol unexpectedly once entered the apartment of Arnald; and the latter somewhat hastily concealed a number of strange triangles and sections of circles, together with some parchments inscribed with unknown characters.

Altarbol sate down in silence, and looked long upon his youthful friend with a searching gaze, that seemed as though it would penetrate heart and soul.

“Arnald,” said he, at last, “have I ever seemed to thee to-day other than that I was yesterday? or canst thou remember me years ago other than that I am to-day? And thinkest thou that many, many days hence—should God vouchsafe to both of us so long a course—I shall appear to thee other than I am at this moment?”

“No, truly not,” replied Arnald, his eyes filling with unbidden tears, which arose he knew not why.

“Well, then,” proceeded Altarbol, “remain thou in that safe and holy path wherein we know each other so well; and continue to be that for which God created thee, a gladsome, open-hearted, richly-gifted minstrel, and an honourable knight. Beware, ah beware, my noble friend, of those who are at one moment friendly, at another terrible, and the next day full of seductive charms.”

“What change knowest thou in me?” inquired Arnald, after some silence.

“None,” answered Altarbol, “if thou speakest only of knowledge by outward signs; much, perhaps all, if we look within where the loving heart forebodes, even before it feels a change. Alas, Arnald! Seldom art thou found beside the grave of Walter; seldom dost thou go to Castle Bisiers; and this is because there is the grasp of another power upon thy heart, striving to develop therein wings which shall bear thee forth, far away from thy pleasant gardens, far from the wistful eyes of friends, over land and over sea, to regions unknown and unhallowed. Thou forebodest such an end thyself, and tears are in thine eyes at the thought; but thou sufferest not the silent feeling to speak; thou art pressing on, further and further still, with anxious and fearful speed, on paths thou knowest not.”

“Altarbol, if God has given wings to my soul, I must needs use them—but never, oh never, to soar away from the embrace of my friends! Deemest thou that I could ever forget thee—that I could ever forget Alcarda?”

“Not so, dear Arnald. But thou mightest mistake us for others; or others for us.”

“I understand thee not.”

“That is no good sign.”

“Nay, dear Altarbol—soon, perhaps very soon, shall I understand more than I do now—and then thou wilt be no longer a mystery to me.”

“Thou didst understand me right well, when thou

wert a loving child ; and well also didst thou understand the good Sir Walter. Ah how true, how transparent, how gentle was thy heart !”

“Altarbol, if there be any torturing grasp upon that heart, it is thine. Tears burst from mine eyes ; yet must I on even to the end !”

“I should be loath to menace thee with that power wherewith the church has endowed me. But what if I were to refuse thee absolution for thy sins, till thou shalt confess to me all that is in thy mind ?”

“I have no answer for an If.”

“The If is a warning. Soon no other course will be left me.”

The voice of Altarbol, that mighty and heroic voice, trembled as he spake these words. Arnald could no longer restrain his burning tears ; but he remained silent, and turning his gaze within, surveyed sternly and keenly his dark and troubled breast.

“Now may God send an angel to turn thy heart !” sighed Altarbol ; “and may He forbid the risen and wandering spirit of Arnold of Brescia to destroy another, a far nobler Maraviglia, than he whose fallen towers look on us warningly from the crest of yonder hill. Alas, a Maraviglia whose loss were irrevocable and irreparable !”

Covering his face, he strode from the chamber ; but Arnald forcibly repressed his deep agitation, and, resolved to follow his path till he found light, and to regard this opposition only as a trial of his fortitude, went with a heavy but unwavering heart to the hut beside the mountain-lake.

Chapter Twenty-sixth.

As Arnald approached, he beheld a group of the inhabitants of the neighbouring fishing-huts standing in grateful astonishment around Ultramonte. From the clefts of

some shattered rocks a spring, hitherto unknown, was bubbling forth in clear and silver streams; and men and women were discussing around it the best means of conveying its refreshing and long-needed treasures to their houses and courts, so as to put an end, at once and for ever, to the laborious practice of fetching water from the sea. Children were sporting around this novel bath, and tossing the foam-flakes in each other's faces.

Ultramonte had traced the passage of the unseen waters, and instructed the villagers how to liberate them from the rocks by which they were imprisoned. All gazed upon him as though he were a messenger from heaven; and Arnald felt that every vestige of mistrust in his bosom was at once effaced. With joyful heart he congratulated himself on not having been induced to abandon his present efforts and labours by the warning voice of Altarbol.

When the tumult had subsided, Ultramonte beckoned our friend into an orchard behind the house, and the lesson began. It seemed as though it would be the last; for with marvellous rapidity did mystery after mystery unfold itself; though the breast of Arnald was oppressed by silent misgivings, because that, according to the system which he had learned, he perceived that the day and the hour were alike unpropitious. Ultramonte, on the other hand, seemed to have forgotten the power of numbers, and hurried onwards, with audacious eagerness, to the goal of his enterprise. At the very moment when, by manifold gestures and incantations, he had consecrated a tree, and was about to deliver one of its branches, with great solemnity, into the hands of Arnald, their earnest occupation was interrupted by loud shouts at the garden-gate, and a voice was heard inquiring whether Sir Arnald of Maraviglia was here to be found.

“Hold thy peace, and suffer the fools to depart,” whispered Ultramonte, impatiently.

But Arnald had recognised the voice of Alearda's page, and he immediately concluded that his ladye had sent to

seek him. Then it seemed as though the star of his pure love shone forth at once through all the dark and heavy clouds of magic which overshadowed his breast; he threw open the door, swung himself upon his white Arab, which the page had brought from its stall for greater haste, and galloped away, the messenger following upon his swift-footed mule, while Ultramonte gloomily withdrew into a thick and leafy garden-walk.

On the way, however, the gladsomeness of the troubadour suffered some diminution; for he learned from his companion that divers unknown ladies had arrived at Castle Bisiers who were desirous of beholding the far-famed minstrel, and that for this purpose the countess had summoned him. Arnald was not insensible to fame, least of all did he despise its wreaths when bestowed by the hands of gentle ladies; nevertheless such deliberate and preconcerted encounters as the present did always greatly oppress and embarrass him. Moreover, all unwonted adjuncts to the presence of Alearda troubled him, as a gaudy frame interferes with one's enjoyment of a fine picture. Neither could he forget that the number both of the day and of the hour was unfavourable. Nevertheless his mistress had summoned him—and summoned him for the service of noble ladies; so, swift as the wind, he spurred his Arab steed through meadows and woods till he reached Castle Bisiers.

Here he was agreeably surprised. The stranger ladies thought not only on his fame: they chiefly regarded, with gentle and pious reverence, the divine gift which had been imparted to him; and all disturbing influences having been sedulously removed by Alearda, Arnald read gladly and with enthusiasm such lays and legends as they were desirous of hearing. He lacked only the presence of his noble commander, who had ridden forth on a hunting expedition; but sorely as Arnald missed him, when he recalled the idea of sundry members of his suite, he could not feel altogether dissatisfied with the stag-hunt. Ah, how often

had many a lofty moment of his life been troubled by the presence even of the friendly Guy of Hauteroche; and he was but as a dove, or sometimes perchance a peacock, to that interminable throng of hungry vultures! "Truly," thought Arnald to himself, "ye do better to hunt the hart than to hunt me."

So closed the evening, beneath the renewed brightness of poetic thoughts; and they went forth into the high arcades and shady avenues of the castle-garden full of gentle seriousness and grave familiarity. The heart of Arnald rose high and pure within him: he longed to reveal to his ladye the subject of his present hopes and efforts; and already he had begun to feel that the presence of strangers was burdensome, when it seemed as though, for this once, Guy of Hauteroche and his companions were destined to do the troubadour good service. At this very moment they returned, announcing the near approach of the vicomte; and they then considered it incumbent upon them to entertain the fair visitors after their ordinary fashion, so that it was impossible for the latter to attend any longer to the minstrel, even had they desired so to do. Beneath the tall trees of that pleasant garden, several steps in advance of the gay throng, Arnald wandered on unmolested by the side of Alearda, drinking the breath and basking in the smiles of his beloved Autumn.

How did his heart, his true and tender heart, arise within him! Arnald now held solemn discourse of the mysterious treasures of wisdom in the ruins of Castle Maraviglia, of his own vocation to discover and remove them, of many wondrous bonds of affinities in the life of trec and stream, in the veins of rocks or of human beings, in metals and in animals; and of the power over all these things which the gifted are permitted to attain. At first he spake but by dim allusions, but eventually he brought the certainty of the whole clearly and distinctly to light, as well as his own vicinity to the goal of all his hopes. He spoke also of the mystical involutions of numbers, and their

prophetic significance; now as warning, now as encouragement. Silently and seriously, almost timidly—if one might have applied such an expression to the illustrious ladye—Alearda gazed upon the ground.

“I have perhaps done wrong,” said Arnald, observing her demeanour, “to speak of these things to you before I have actually attained the fulness of power over them; and, truly, it was not my intention to have done so. But how was it possible for me, noble mistress, to hide from you so long the highest aspirations of my existence? Methinks I owe you the best of all that I feel and do, as a votive tribute; and I cannot always stop to inquire whether I am presenting my offering precisely at the right moment.”

Alearda remained silent yet a little while longer; then she said gently—

“Thou knowest, sir knight, how the unearthly visions of thy minstrelsy, the forebodings of an unknown spirit-world, ever around us, and yet immeasurably removed from us, have thrilled and charmed me, as by a strange and magical power of attraction; nevertheless, I neither can nor will conceal it from thee, now that all these mysteries are about to become manifest, and tangible in thy life, I shrink back in terror, and could almost exclaim, *Maraviglia*, pause and turn!”

“Say but the word, lady, and it is done,” replied Arnald, somewhat startled, and, it may be, somewhat heavy at heart, but immediately resuming his wonted spirit of joyful and devoted submission to that exalted being.

“Nay,” returned Alearda, “it is not for me to bridle your daring steps. Whatsoever you do in God’s name you do well.”

“Moreover,” said Arnald, “is not my minstrelsy my life, and my life also my minstrelsy; just as the whole existence of a man is made up of day and night—of dreams and wakings? And shall that which on the one

side has well pleased you, disturb or even terrify you on the other?"

"That accords not exactly with my thoughts," answered Alearda. "It is true that a few chosen spirits may be able to walk well, uprightly, and safely, along the paths which you are now treading; yes, I would listen joyfully to the same words from other lips; from the lips of one good, true, and energetic as thyself, but not steeped in the glow of poesy, as thou art. Arnald, it seems to me as though all the higher and finer intuitions of thy nature must grow pale in the light of this terrible certainty of manifestation. If every day, and every hour, shall speak to you with audible and prophetic tongue; if the spirits of the trees and rocks shall come forth before your eyes, and knock at your heart, with loud and intelligible sounds; if even the numbers of your verses shall begin to develope wondrous secrets—how should the burning and swelling heart of a poet endure all this? I may be too careful in this matter, therefore let me not prevail against you: only thus much do I certainly know, that if the danger of your country, or your own honour, should once more summon you to the field, I could exclaim in joy, 'God be with you, valiant troubadour and knight; forward against the foe! Maintain your minstrelsy with your life, for both are one!' Here, however, I cannot so speak."

She was silent, and the light of a new morning arose upon the heart of Arnald. It seemed as though a grey and heavy mantle of enchantments fell from him, and he could behold Altarbol and Walter joyously beckoning to him, in the clouds of evening; he said, cheerfully and resolutely, "To-morrow I will seek, for the last time, the mountain-lake, and renounce the instructions of that man of wonders."

Alearda smiled upon him very graciously, and said, "God be praised; for I feel that this is right!"

Chapter Twenty-seventh.

THE vicomte returned home; a splendid repast closed the festivities of the day; and Arnald felt his spirit more and more raised and animated, and strengthened for all good, by the honouring confidence of his former commander.

They stood now upon a lofty balcony, and gazed up into the clear and star-lit skies of the autumnal night. Alearda became very silent, and her eye, itself a star, returned the pure radiance of the heavenly lamps, till it seemed that she had lost the power of averting her gaze from them.

“Wherefore do those fair eyes so hang upon the firmament?” inquired the vicomte. Thereat she pointed out to him a constellation; and Arnald, standing closely behind her, perceived, with deep emotion, that it was the same which, since the evening when he first beheld her, he had named Alearda.

“Thou canst doubtless call to mind,” said the ladye to her lord, “a certain jewel, which I inherited from mine ancestors. The stars which compose yonder constellation were figured, in glittering gems, upon a golden waist-clasp, and I prized it above all my other ornaments. I lost it in a very singular manner. In those gloomy days when, doubtful of the issue, thou didst contend against the Saracens, I desired to send a messenger to thee, my lord and husband; and because thou didst not know the person of the esquire to whom I was compelled to entrust the charge—he had but recently entered my service—I gave him that beloved jewel, as a credential.

“But how did he return to me? Pale, bleeding, crushed—yet had he not reached you! Weary to death, and lamed for life, his poor horse crept behind him: he had lost my token; and with his dying lips he narrated the following wondrous story:—

“Two Moorish cavaliers, named Balta and Gryba,

with a few followers, harassed the rear of the Provençal army. As my messenger was ascending a narrow mountain pass—close on his left the inaccessible rock, beneath him, on the right, the sheer precipice—he perceived one of these Moorish horsemen on the heights, while the other rode along the valley; both were apparelled in black armour, and he on the cliff bore many shining devices upon his bosom. They called to him to halt, and deliver up to them the costly jewel he had upon his person. He had boasted thereof in a neighbouring hostelry, and thus must its existence have been betrayed to them. Without giving them any answer, he turned and fled; the Moor on the heights hurled his javelin against him, but the missile harmed him not. Both warriors then spurred their nimble steeds to cross his path, as he issued from the pass. Then terror completely overcame him; and being for the moment concealed by bushes from his pursuers, he resolved to attempt descending into the valley, in the hope that, while he was thus occupied, they would pass without perceiving him. But his horse stumbled and slipped, and he fell with terrific violence into the abyss. In a moment the horseman of the valley was at his side, supporting him, and binding up his hurts, but at the same time gravely and earnestly demanding the jewel. Stunned and terrified, he yielded it up; and at the same moment the other cavalier, eager for the prize, plunged with rash precipitancy down the mountain, and fell, almost fainting, upon the earth beside the messenger; but soon, half raising himself from his recumbent posture, and looking upon the jewel in his comrade's hand, he said, smiling painfully, 'Good luck attend thee, Balta! I have the peril, and thou the prize; and the grace of Queen Soleyma belongs also to thee.' 'Nay, Gryba,' returned the other, 'our mistress herself only can decide this question. Mine was the gain, but thine was the hazardous deed. Art thou sorely hart?' 'Nay, not mortally,' cried Gryba, smiling and springing up; 'thou knowest it is not such an easy

matter to kill me.' Herewith they departed, conversing and singing merrily along the valley : and it is not only the loss of the jewel which pains me, but it is the thought that a heathen queen should wear the time-honoured relic of my race, in prideful ostentation, at her unholy revels."

"An expedition to Granada," muttered the vicomte, thoughtfully.

"In God's name," interrupted Alearda, very earnestly, and almost with severity : "in God's name, did, then, my blessed mother give me that fair jewel with her death-stiffening hands, in order that Christian warriors should sprinkle it with their precious blood? Lay not, my lord, so heavy a burden either on thy conscience or on mine ! Moreover, has not the Frankish monarch appointed to thee here matters of far higher import?"

The vicomte bowed submissively : but the whole heart of Arnald was filled with joy ; and when, shortly afterwards, he took leave of Alearda, he said : "My honoured mistress sees me with the jewelled star, or sees me not again!" She seemed but imperfectly to comprehend him ; nevertheless she smiled graciously, and Arnald received that smile as an omen propitious to his enterprise.

Chapter Twenty-eighth.

As Arnald proceeded homewards, beneath the tranquil night, through fair valleys, and over fruitful plains, the constellation of the Wain stood glittering above his head, not far from that which he had named Alearda ; and again did he receive true, calm, and holy joy from their aspect, as though from the visible presence of God.

Unwonted thoughts did, indeed, pass across his mind, as he remembered the unfavourable combination of numbers on the past day ; he said, however, to himself, "This

is right ; so it is, and so it should be. This day accorded not with my unhallowed striving and seeking after secrets which it was not given to me to attain ; but it is exactly the right day for the starting-point of my higher and holier life ; and therefore, seductive subtleties of numbers, and whatsoever else belongs to this realm of mystery and magic, depart from me, henceforth and for ever ! I renounce you all ; and with you I renounce the lessons of my dark teacher, as certainly as she, for whose love I do this, is the one only mistress of my heart."

Somewhat similar to this was the manner in which, on the following morning, he addressed Ultramonte, only that he abstained from naming Alearda.

"I am less surprised than angered," replied the master, "for yester morn when thou didst ride away from me with so much levity, I might have known what, sooner or later, must happen. So be it. He who is so greatly favoured as to have a magic staff committed to his grasp, and who then blindly casts it from him, for him, certainly, the mystery-revealing wand was not framed. Good luck attend you on your own way : I will to the Marchese Rinaldo of Tagliaduro." And before Arnald could collect his thoughts concerning a name which sounded familiarly to his ears, Ultramonte had entered the fishing-hut, and fastened the bolt on the inside.

The troubadour now remembered the narrative of Guy of Hauteroche concerning that Neapolitan knight ; but other and weightier themes chased it from his thoughts. He hastened home, arranged all matters for his departure, and then mounting his white Arab, and attended by his esquire, sought the cloisters of St. Anne's Abbey.

The porter, when he inquired for the abbot, pointed to the church, for it was now the hour of confession. Arnald comprehended this signal of divine favour, and hastened to obey it. When Altarbol beheld him kneeling at the confessional, he shook his venerable head, and said : "Oh, my son, my dearest and best-beloved son, thou

knowest the condition on which alone I can impart to thee absolution ! Art thou ready to confess every thing ?”

“Every thing !” replied the knight, joyfully ; and the history of his wondrous pupilhood, and of the reason and the manner of his renouncing it, flowed like a pure stream from his lips. Bright tears of thankfulness stood in the eyes of Altarbol as he said, “Thou bountiful God ! Thou hast yet again delivered a right precious soul !” Then he gladly absolved the minstrel-warrior.

Afterwards the two friends walked forth beneath the evergreen shade of the tall fir-trees in the cloister-gardens, and Altarbol said, after a long and thoughtful silence :

“Thou goest forth, my beloved son, into the land of heathenesse, where perchance yet lives a descendant of the Moorish necromancer, of whom Ultramonte told thee, who buried the wondrous volume of Arnold, and aided Crescenzio to paint the walls. Tell me, now, hast thou good hope that thou wilt have strength to resist the renewed temptations which may perhaps assail thee to become, from a gladsome and true-hearted minstrel, a mystical miner into the depths of necromantic wisdom ?”

“With God’s help, dear father and friend, such is my certain hope,” replied Arnald ; “thou knowest how glorious is the light by which I am encircled and defended.”

Altarbol thoughtfully replied in the affirmative. After a space, however, he thus continued : “Arnald, there dwelt once at the court of the vicomte an Italian knight, by name the Marchese Rinaldo of Tagliaduro.”

But the priest stopped in astonishment at the angry flush which arose in the cheeks of Arnald ; and the latter broke forth with the following impetuous words :

“What right hast thou, sir abbot, to name my name in company with that of the misguided Neapolitan ? When the same thing was done by the good-hearted Guy of Hauteroche, I let it pass, reflecting that it was impossible for him, in his light and irregular mode of life, to receive

clearly the rays of my stainless love, and I instructed him calmly, and with all gentleness. But thou, Altarbol, thou—to whom, scarce half an hour since, my soul stood open in the sacred light of confession; thou, who hast known me, my thoughts, and my actions, from earliest childhood; thou, who understanding the service acceptable to saints, must needs likewise understand the service acceptable to a pure-hearted woman,—thou comest to me with admonitions concerning the dark and unhallowed passion of the Marchese Rinaldo of Tagliaduro! O Altarbol!”

The old man looked upon him with piercing eyes, and at length replied: “It is to be hoped that the fountain from whence this wrathful stream of fire arose, is altogether pure and holy; and if so, I bid it welcome with my whole heart. But, Arnald, many a noble spirit which never deceived another has unconsciously deceived itself: Arnald, didst thou never feel a wish in thy heart which thou couldst not reveal to Alearda?”

The troubadour was silent a while, questioning himself earnestly and honourably. At last he said: “No, my father; concerning Alearda herself have I never entertained the shadow of a wish which I should blush to confess to her.”

“Thou art no longer a mere youth,” continued Altarbol, “prone to lose thyself in unsubstantial dreams of hope: life lies clear and open before the gaze of thy manhood. What demandest thou of life?”

“I desire, by God’s help, to remain a minstrel, good and true, and an honourable knight,” replied Arnald; “I will strive for the right in arms, and for the prize in song; and every wreath that I win shall be consecrated to my lofty ladye. If ever the highest of all possible blessings might be vouchsafed to me, then, oh, then I would pray that with her lips of wondrous sweetness she might pronounce these words: ‘I acknowledge thee for my knight, Sir Arnald of Maraviglia.’ But although this may never happen, yet she takes pleasure in my lays, and from time

to time a way is opened to me wherein to serve her ; therefore am I a happy and highly-favoured man."

"Go forth in God's name, my friend, and abide in truth and gladness of heart in that noble service which thou hast chosen for thyself!" said Altarbol, very cheerfully. He laid his hand in blessing on the knight's head.

Arnald bent in heartfelt reverence, and then said gently, "Nevertheless, dear father, I was far too warm with thee just now."

"I knew that I had to do with a Maraviglia," replied the old man, smiling ; and the friends then bade each other farewell, full of affection and hope.

For the last time, at least for a space, the white Arab carried his present master as far as the sea-shore, and then returned home in the charge of his faithful squire. The following morning beheld the white and swelling sails of the bark which contained Sir Arnald of Maraviglia already gleaming in the far horizon.

END OF THE FIRST BOOK.

Minstrel Love.



BOOK THE SECOND.



Minstrel Love.

Chapter First.

ONE of those pleasant showers wherewith Winter is wont to announce his coming in southern lands, and which are his frequent attendants during the few weeks of his sojourn, was scattering its soft and silver-splashing drops over the coasts of Granada, when Arnald's bark, which had been detained on its voyage by various accidents, cast anchor on the gently-sloping shore.

Arnald, seated on the poop, expressed his feelings in the following song:—

From yon pure skies aloft,
Ah, flow thou rain-stream soft,
Freshening my weary soul,
My drooping limbs reviving ;
For as thy murmuring waters roll,
For each of my bright lays
One of their bright pearls giving,
Calm grows my heart, as once in childhood's days.

The floods of sin are dry,
 Man's ancient fear gone by !
 Yet still, in nameless dread,
 Our footsteps wander darkling.
 Lo ! every cloud of doubt hath fled,
 When hopeful, clear, and bright,
 Amid the blue sky sparkling,
 The glorious rainbow lifts her arch of light.

 Oh, at your silvery sound,
 Mild tears, that drop around,
 My heart grows light again—
 Ye soften, ye subdue it ;
 And so, when sorrow's bitter rain
 That trembling heart shall shroud,
 Let Hope's bright form shine through it,
 Like thee, thou Benediction in the cloud !

At this very moment a rainbow arose over the plains of Granada in all its brightness and variety of hues, and Arnald hailed the sign of promise in a gladsome and thankful spirit.

During the landing, he perceived a Moorish cavalier riding slowly up and down in the rain on a beautiful mule, and, like himself, appearing to rejoice in the grateful coolness, and the sunlight sporting among the falling pearls.

As the stranger approached the coast, Arnald recognised the bright and many-coloured devices embossed on his black armour, and could no longer doubt his identity. It was Gryba, the Moorish warrior, whom he was now about to encounter on the borders of the sea. Pleasant, calm, and friendly was the aspect of the youthful hero, as he rode forwards, encircled, as it were, by the rainbow ; his smile was unspeakably gentle ; his countenance was full of a careless light-heartedness, which might have been deemed childlike, had it not been contradicted by a slight shade of melancholy upon the brows ; while his dark eyes flashed so gloriously, that the thought shot at once into the beholder's mind, " How terrible must be their fire ! how

fierce must be the ardour of the young knight in battle or in single combat! Nevertheless, he must certainly be at all times beautiful, and open, and noble!"

Arnald contemplated him with inward satisfaction; his whole spirit grew bright within him, and he said in his heart, "Behold a youth to whom the best and highest inspirations of a minstrel might be revealed in fulness of joy and confidence. He may, indeed, understand no language save Arabic, and of me he may know nothing. What matters it? I know much of him; and I see that he stands within the gates of the rainbow as in a home—a kindly and free-hearted child of heaven! It is a goodly gift of God, that the most unfamiliar faces, if they be only true and noble, are even as friends to the eyes of the minstrel; and that sooner or later they are mirrored back in his lays, sometimes consciously, sometimes unconsciously, but always to the rejoicing of many a kindred spirit in this wide and blooming world."

Gryba was now close before him, asking with his wonted grace and warmth of heart whether he could in any manner serve or aid the stranger.

"Thou art hospitable as are thy kinsmen the dwellers beneath the palm-trees of Araby," said Arnald, with a smile; "and thou questionest me not of name and fatherland till after thou hast shewn me some courtesy. But, nevertheless, I must here give answer of my name and my fatherland. How is it, fair sir; shall there be war or peace for me on these coasts? I am the Christian knight, Arnald of Maraviglia, a Provençal troubadour."

At these words the generous Gryba leaped out of his saddle, embraced his new guest with heartfelt eagerness, and cried, speaking in pure and beautiful Provençal—

"O thou dear minstrel, singer, and tale-teller, welcome, many thousand times welcome to us all! Knowest thou not that the ladies of our land read and sing, or cause to be read and sung, every where and at all times, thy lays, thy fabliaux, and thy chansons? And that we knights are

also went to kindle our valour thereat, as well as at the honourable deeds which are recorded of thee in battle? How would it be possible for us to receive *thee* on these coasts as an enemy? But that thou mayest more fully understand us, come with me to yonder slender turret upon the turfy hill."

He did not rest till he had persuaded Arnald to mount his mule; and he himself walking by the side of the animal, guided its steps by means of the silver-embroidered reins of green twisted silk, while he committed the care of the troubadour's baggage to some slaves who came up at the moment, and who received many injunctions not to neglect their charge.

Chapter Second.

THE turret to which Arnald and Gryba now betook themselves seemed to rise aloft with added grace and brightness at every step which they made towards it, while its polished surface distinctly reflected the light of each individual sunbeam that shone upon it. At the very moment in which they attained the ridge of the hill, the rain-clouds began to break and sever, and soon they sailed swiftly asunder, some hurrying across the sea, some clustering around the far mountains; so that the magnificent plain became at once visible, stretching forth in spacious and enchanting beauty, adorned with a rich profusion of edifices, all glittering with innumerable chateaux, and towers, and villages, and mosques. The breast of Arnald heaved with sweet astonishment, — his eager and sparkling glance was scarcely yet capable of embracing all that splendour of life and loveliness.

"Up in the tower yonder the prospect is far fairer; only come thither, dear minstrel," cried the smiling Gryba, caressingly grasping his arm. Arnald followed him the

more readily because the gently-winding steps which they now ascended circled around the exterior of the building, only here and there concealing the paradise below as if in sport, and for the express purpose of again exhibiting it in newness of beauty from a point of greater elevation.

“Ah,” cried Arnald, “this should be the abode of some mighty master of painting!”

“Such an one does indeed dwell here,” replied Gryba, opening a small door richly decorated with lattice-work, and with numerous graceful figures carved in shining bronze, which stood close to the highest summit of the edifice.

They entered a pleasant chamber, lighted on all sides by wide and lofty windows, some of which were, however, carefully curtained by rich hangings of arras. Around them stood the instruments and apparatus of a painter; several brightly-tinted pictures were displayed upon the pillars of the room. With his back towards them, in an easy and tranquil attitude, sat the artist, busily engaged in designing embellishments on the delicately-inscribed pages of a large parchment volume — from time to time dipping his brush into sundry receptacles of bright colours which were placed at his right and at his left. Gryba signed to his companion to be silent, and led him softly up to the easel. The artist had not perceived the entrance of his two visitors, and continued to bend over his labour with unabated industry. Gryba pointed to the volume, and Arnald read the following words, inscribed on the centre of the page in beautifully-formed letters, painted with lapis-lazuli and gold:—

“O lady,” said the knight,

“Love hath its home in holy paradise,
Guarded by many a golden barrier bright,
And watched by faithful eyes
And armèd hands. Him only they admit
To that fair garden of the upper skies
Who calmly waits, and nobly toils for it.”

Arnald immediately recognised one of the finest of his own heroic legends which was written in this book; and great was his pleasure in contemplating the skill wherewith the artist adorned the wide margin with branches and cloud-like forms, in tints of the freshest green, the most intense rose-colour, and the purest and most celestial blue, so that he had never seen shapes fairer or more blooming even in his dreams; and how all these wondrous designs had reference to the verses upon the centre of the page. The lights, which were almost exclusively laid on in pure gold, gleamed mysteriously through the midst of the mazy shadows. The next page, which lay open, was decorated in a like beautiful and significant manner. One thing, however, struck the troubadour as strange, namely, that all the shapes, whether of human beings or of animals, seemed to grow out of the cups of flowers, or to melt into the play of clouds, so that they rather resembled strange plants or air-born images than real and living creatures.

As Arnald stooped over the work in great delight, the lyre which hung from his shoulder struck against the hilt of Gryba's sword, and a sound arose in the chamber as of a chord struck by a skilful harmonist. The artist looked up in amazement. It was Balta. How could Arnald mistake, even for a moment, that composed gentleness, that serious smile, above all, that holy fire of the hero and the artist which shone in his dark and glowing eyes?

The two youths rejoiced exceedingly in the presence of a master so beloved; and from the lips of Balta, ordinarily so silent, flowed a stream of ready wit and childlike sportiveness, such as Arnald could never have expected from that grave spirit. When, however, the troubadour turned once more eagerly towards the paintings, Balta ceased to speak, and with busy delight displayed leaf after leaf of the manuscript, which was now almost finished, looking from each into the eyes of his guest with a friendly and half-inquiring smile. Almost dazzled by the richness of colour and variety of invention here manifested. Arnald

marvelled yet more at the deep and full appreciation of his poem which was visible in all. The words, the melody, the shadowy import of his minstrelsy, seemed to have suddenly assumed a visible presence and a tangible form, as if at the touch of an enchanter. With a sudden cry of joy the minstrel clasped the painter in his arms.

“Oh, this is beyond measure delightful!” exclaimed the warm-hearted Gryba, clapping his hands; “yet I knew well that it could not be otherwise.”

When they had completed their inspection of the manuscript, the conversation resumed its various and roving course. Balta withdrew the curtains from the windows, so that the scenes of the fairest land upon earth became visible, as in a magic-lantern, on every side. Afterwards he summoned his slaves, bearing costly refreshments; and the two young Moorish heroes did as Prince Tarfe had formerly done—they merrily pledged their noble guest in wine as noble, foaming in its gracefully-carved goblets of crystal.

“Do not for this hold us to be unworthy Mussulmen,” said Balta, earnestly; “it is true that many may, from levity, break this law of their Prophet; but were we in our own eastern land, we would observe it with unvarying strictness: here, however, in these foreign climates, even our priesthood demands it not of us.”

Arnald inclined his head out of reverence for the dutiful spirit manifested in the words of Balta; but Gryba merrily interrupted him: “Foreign climates! Nay, by such words thou givest ground to the Christians, who ever maintain that we are not at home in this country. In a certain sense they are right, in a certain sense wrong; but it boots not questioning the matter; for even if they be right, it gives us only so much the more reason for battle. However fair may be the beauty of ladies, however glorious the smiles of spring or the songs of minstrels, in spite of all these I must always esteem a battle the fairest and most glorious thing upon earth.”

“Again thou speakest,” replied Balta, with undiminished gravity, “after thy wonted indiscreet fashion; so that they who know thee not well must hold thee for some wild adventurer, who fancies himself called to ravage the earth in grim glee, and to fight only for the sake of fighting. Ah, Gryba! and thou art in very truth so kind and gentle of nature!”

“Thou knowest me,” cried the good-humoured youth, with a smile; “and I am certain that the noble master yonder thinks no evil of me: am I not right, fair sir?”

Full of the warmest affection, Arnald pressed his hand; and again did their discourse scatter its joyous words right and left, without any definite aim, but full of mirth and free-heartedness.

Among other subjects, they touched once more upon the illuminated manuscript; and Balta said, “Ah, my dear master! If thou couldst but know her for whom I am painting these graceful letters, and these mazy figures! They are for the Queen Soleyma, of wondrous beauty. Right deeply loves she thy tales and rhymes; and I hold myself greatly honoured in that she has given the commission of adorning with care and choice this her favourite work to no other than myself.”

Arnald looked down thoughtfully, and said, after a while, “Methinks it is now time that ye, my youthful friends, should learn the reason of my coming into this land. The clasp with the jewelled constellation, which ye won from a messenger of Provence, is it yet in your hands, or have ye already given it to the keeping of Queen Soleyma?”

Gryba and Balta looked wonderingly on each other; but at last both cried with one voice, “How say you, are we to do battle for this jewel? How say you, noble knight?”

“Such will indeed be the end,” returned Arnald; “for I demand that jewel in the name of the lofty Lady Alearda; and I have vowed to myself either to bear it

home with me to Castle Bisiers, or to remain dead on these shores."

"Is your purpose indeed so serious?" sighed Balta; and his eyes became dim with a cloud of tearful sorrow. Gryba, on the other hand, having overlooked the words of deadly meaning in Arnald's speech, joyously exclaimed, "Hurrah! To one of us at least shall be accorded the honour of a combat with you, most noble knight and master! As to the jewel, the case is this. When we took ship with Tarfe for the expedition against Provence, the fair Queen Soleyma promised her favour and a salute to that knight who should bring home with him any jewel concerning which he could declare, upon his word of honour, that the far-famed Countess Alearda had herself worn it, and that she held it dear. Ah, my dear knight, thou wilt soon behold the glorious Soleyma with thine own eyes; and then thou wilt not marvel that Balta and I ventured our lives to win this prize of heavenly sweetness from all the other knights. You seem to be acquainted with the particulars of our adventure with the envoy?"

Arnald signed in the affirmative, and Gryba proceeded. "Well, then, you have only now to learn that the question still remains undecided. The lovely Soleyma foresaw that a knight should come to demand the jewel, in the service of the lofty Lady Alearda; and because the glory of having achieved it was equally divided between us, she has determined to receive it from the hands of him alone who shall have compelled the Provençal warrior to abandon his claims. For the present it remains in my keeping; we cast lots for this office, and chance has awarded it to me. But it is our lady's pleasure that a second casting of lots shall decide which of us is first to have the honour of encountering you in combat for this cause."

"The aspect of the matter is right serious," answered Arnald, "but also right noble and knightly. When may I present myself to Queen Soleyma?"

They agreed to conduct their honoured guest to court

on the evening of that very day. Balta prepared himself for a visit to the queen's chateau of pleasance; while Gryba led the troubadour to a fair chamber, which he had caused to be constructed, lightly but strongly, and with all appurtenances of elegance and convenience, among the branches of a gigantic chestnut-tree, which grew in the neighbourhood. In this singular abode, Arnald arrayed himself richly and carefully, that he might appear as a worthy herald before the Moorish queen.

Chapter Third.

Two wide and gracefully-winding staircases, the sides of which were adorned with vases of bronze containing pomegranate-trees, which preserved their bloom at all seasons of the year, met together at the summit of an eminence, before the entrance to Soleyma's chateau of pleasance. Here the slender gilded pillars of the edifice stretched forth their delicately arching arms to form a hall, or rather a royal canopy, all undulating with gaily-coloured tapestries, and surrounded, after the Eastern fashion, with couches covered with costly stuffs. The walls between the pillars were composed almost entirely of windows, clear as a lady's mirror, through which the magnificence of the chambers within, glimmered forth, like the mysterious splendour of some fairy region. When Arnald, accompanied by the two young Moorish heroes, entered by a door of gilded lattice-work the wide green platform at the foot of the glowing and illuminated eminence, he beheld above him the Queen Soleyma, beneath the vaulted roof of the glittering saloon, reclining with proud and careless grace upon cushions embroidered with gold, attended by a splendid and respectful retinue, magnificently attired, and sparkling with gems, but yet more radiant with the pomp and majesty of her own exceeding beauty.

Arnald cast down his dazzled eyes, as though they had felt the beams of a noonday sun, suddenly piercing the clouds; and it was a relief to him that, during his ascent, the branches of the blossoming pomegranates concealed from him that overpowering loveliness.

Now, having quitted the highest step, he issued forth from those odorous shades, and stood before the saloon, in close vicinity to the radiant charms of the fascinating and yet somewhat haughty beauty. A diadem of gems was interwoven with her softly-flowing chestnut locks; proud and lovely was the brightness of her large eyes, and graciously did they regard the minstrel, while her lips, blooming as the rosebuds of spring, murmured a few words of greeting in the purest Provençal; and she signed him to approach with her snowy hand, revealing, by the movement, as the folds of her wide Arabian garments fell back, an arm so faultless, that the pencil of Balta himself could not have surpassed it. Arnald involuntarily thought on the fair heathen goddess Juno, of whom he had read many things in ancient legends; and almost believed that he beheld her bodily presence before him.

But he felt not now as he had felt when he beheld Alearda for the first time. Then language and thought were stopped, conscious of their insufficiency for his feelings; while now, on the contrary, after the first moment of dazzled surprise, his spirit became joyous and confident, his words arose in fair and expressive order, and he explained his errand, clearly and gracefully, in a few sentences.

Soleyma looked on him well pleased, and said: "The Countess Alearda has chosen for her knight a minstrel as accomplished as he is far-famed."

"You honour me with a title far above my deserts," replied Arnald, "when you call me the knight of the Countess Alearda. I have never presumed to solicit so high a dignity, neither have my poor services availed to induce her to bestow it upon me unasked. Rather might

I venture to call myself her minstrel. Yet even of that distinction am I not worthy, serving her rather as the nightingales serve the spring; they are neither commanded nor forbidden, but they sing only in that season of light and fragrance, and save for their songs thou wouldst not know their existence."

"Thou art of passing modest temperament," said Soleyma, with a somewhat scornful smile; "and in good truth Alearda may, without the slightest hesitation, grace a service so innocent as long as thou livest to pay it."

"Such is my hope, in God's name!" replied Arnald very gravely; and at those simple words Soleyma involuntarily cast down her haughty eyes.

In a moment, however, she looked up again, and continued with the same slightly ironical smile:

"For such a May-nightingale, thou hast a strange affection for battles."

"Though in the mysterious and doubtful animal sphere," said Arnald, "there is a wide difference between the nightingale and the lion, yet, thanks he to God, in the bright and abundantly-gifted sphere of man the case is far other and far better; and greatly should I compassionate your land if it possessed no minstrels who could unite the spirit of the lion to the voice of the nightingale. But I know well that you have many such; only you are pleased to play with the simpleness of a stranger. For the present, lady, I bend, as in duty bound, before your fair presence; and crave as a boon your permission that I may do battle, for life and death, with these two noble knights, for the sake of the star-jewel which is desired by the Countess Alearda."

The face of Soleyma assumed a grave but beautiful expression, as she watched a rapid and somewhat angry blush pass over the generally pale cheeks of the troubadour; and she replied, after a little reflection:

"I permit the combat. But, noble knight of Maraviglia,

When the joyous storm of war is waking,
'Tis like the reign of liberal May,
With songs of nightingales outbreacking,
And free winds roving, fresh and gay.

Thou seest that the lovely lay wherewith thou didst celebrate the praises of autumn to Alearda, is not unknown to us; and now shall the right which your own words have pronounced due to May, not be withholden from it. When the nightingales sing, then, thou war-desiring minstrel, thou mayest hold thy combat. Till then, thou shalt tarry with us, and for once suffer the ladies of Granada to enjoy the honour and delight of hearing thy songs and thy tales from thine own lips. Thou art too gallant to refuse my invitation; moreover, I bethink me that thou didst thyself choose me as judge of the combat."

Arnald could only bow in acquiescence, though the delay was as a weight upon his heart.

"I would entreat you," pursued Soleyma, "to pass the winter in my castle, only I know well I should thereby offend Sir Gryba, who has already allured you into his strange and sparkling leafy chamber. Perchance, however, the winter will consult my pleasure, and come upon us somewhat more harshly and coldly than is his wont in these climates. In that case, I hope you will not take flight to the moss-grown ancestral castle of the cavalier Gryba, but will rather betake yourself to this joyous abode."

Without waiting for an answer, she arose from her cushions, and leaning upon her visitor's arm, conducted him through her gay saloons, which were already all gleaming with golden lamps; many richly-attired pages, and maidens wearing garlands, preceded them, carrying waxen torches, and they were followed by the whole court.

A graceful and magnificent entertainment now took place in those lustrous halls. Dance and game alternated in the liveliest and most unconstrained manner; the noblest fruits and the rarest wines, not alone the productions of that favoured climate, but apparently culled from every

luxuriant region under the sun, wooed the appetite of the guests, in baskets of silver and cups of gold; while the vaulted ceiling of the chamber re-echoed with the sound of choice musical instruments, now lingering in harmonious chords, now breaking forth into the merry dance, and anon stirring the spirit by the tones of the warlike march. Arnald could not deny that he had never yet been the tenant of a realm of such radiant enchantments; nevertheless,—a single thought upon that holy chamber, adorned with the tranquil beauty of flowers and paintings, wherein he had first spoken with Alearda, or upon the high and leafy walk in Alearda's garden,—and he felt like the maiden concerning whom it is related in a legend that she had passed her childhood amid the joys and blessedness of paradise, and, in punishment for some committed sin, was banished thence to the tumult and confusion of earth. With a serious and yearning heart he withdrew at length, when the festivities began to break up, and accompanied by Gryba, sought the strange dwelling in the tree, amid the shadows of a calm moonlight night freshened by whispering showers.

Chapter Fourth.

GRYBA had enjoyed the dancing and festivities with his whole heart; he talked at random, jested, and sang with the maidens in all the buoyant gaiety of youth; and after the guests had taken their leave, his spirits appeared to rise higher and higher. On his way home he pressed a pomegranate-flower to his lips so frequently and with so much fervour, that there was little doubt or difficulty in guessing it to be a pledge and promise of love.

On a sudden, however, he asked the troubadour,
“Which is the fairer, my noble guest—the Countess Alearda or the Queen Soleyma?”

“Demand of me, rather,” returned Arnald, “which is the fairer, the cloudless sky or the summer earth! There can be neither comparison nor rivalry between them. As for me, however, mine eyes have so grown to the countenance of the transparent skies, that earth with all her treasuries of enchantment suffices not to them.”

Meanwhile they had arrived at the chestnut-tree, and mounting its easy and commodious staircase, they began to disrobe themselves in the chamber above.

Arnald was attended by a good-humoured Provençal peasant whom he had brought with him in the capacity of servant, and who now, supposing that Gryba was ignorant of every language but Arabic, addressed his master without restraint in the following words:—

“Is it your will to dwell here aloft always in the nest of this tricky heathen bird? Methinks the creature has, after all, somewhat the aspect of a knight! Ay, ay; in good sooth, great and marvellous are the productions of these outlandish regions.”

Gryba turned to the wall, apparently for the purpose of hanging up his scimitar, but in reality to conceal his laughter; and Arnald, willing to encourage the jest, answered his servant very composedly, that it certainly was his intention to remain in this abode for the present.

“Well, well,” said the Provençal; “the proverb is true—change of people, change of customs. One must know how to deport oneself under all changes, if one wishes to be a rational being. Will they believe me at home when I tell them of this bird? Exactly like a knight, on my life—exactly like a knight; not a feather to be seen upon him! Were it not for his nest up here, never should I have discovered, all the days of my life, that he was really a bird. And he talks his gibberish like the best parrot of them all; and the folks of the country here understand him readily, and pay him as much respect as though he were a lord! Ay, ay, he is a rare creature!

But tell me, my noble master, of what aspect is the queen?"

"Beautiful as an angel," replied Arnald.

"Marvellous, quite marvellous," cried the youth. "I had pictured her to myself as a kind of mermaid; one of that sort, you understand, who live upon shore, and don't spend their time in swimming to and fro like a set of irrational fishes. But you may turn and twist it as you will; she cannot be a real downright queen, after all. A Moorish queen! Nay, that is not half so great a thing as one of our countesses!"

"Herein, at least, thou art in a manner right, my good fellow," said Gryba in Provençal, giving him, at the same time, a friendly tap on the shoulder.

The poor peasant was quite struck dumb with confusion and amazement, and at last began to excuse himself with many deep reverences, assuring the gentleman that it was with no ill intentions that he had mistaken him for a bird; that he should incessantly regret his not really being a bird; and moreover, that he could not now rightly tell by what name to call him.

"Call me henceforth what thou hast hitherto called me, the tricky heathen bird," cried Gryba, smiling; "that name pleases me well. But truly, concerning Queen Soleyma, thou hast the right of it. This title belongs to her rather on account of her all-conquering beauty and her illustrious ancestors, than because she possesses any royal authority in our land. And yet," added he, turning to Arnald and speaking more seriously, "and yet, my noble master, if ever you should have to defend your fair Provence, ay, and all the flowery land of France, against the torrent of a Moorish host without number and without end, think then upon the Queen Soleyma! You know how often the beauty of such a mistress, even without the ordinary claims of empire over lands and lordships, has become terrible to a whole people, nay, even to a whole quarter of the globe!"

“Thou layest open before mine eyes a solemn future,” returned Arnald; “nevertheless, with God’s help and in the service of Alearda, I hope to endure it honourably and right joyfully.”

“Good night, most noble Sir Heathen Bird!” said the servant, as, bowing very respectfully to Gryba, he quitted the chamber.

Arnald cast himself down, in deep reflection, upon the cushion of his couch; and Gryba, laughing, seated himself in the window, took his lute upon his arm, and accompanying himself with much grace, if not very scientifically, sang the following words:—

Good night, good night!
 When all are asleep,
 In the moon’s pure light,
 So soft and so deep,—
 How sweet and how clear, in that hour of shade,
 Ariseth the tone of the low serenade!

In the night, in the night,
 They are slumbering all,—
 By the stars’ clear light,
 Oh, soft be the fall,
 Oh, gentle the sound of thy step through the shade,
 Thou lover that seekest thine own true maid!

Arnald could see distinctly through the open window that a white form, leaning from the battlements of a neighbouring castle, stretched forth her hand, holding a tall white lily, far into the darkness. Gryba looked round to him with a smile, laid his finger on his lips, snatched his scimitar from the wall, and taking it under his arm, stole through the window with the light and noiseless tread of a sylph.

Chapter Fifth.

AT noon, on the following day, Arnald and Gryba were seated upon the roots of their tree, cushioned with the softest moss and canopied by the ample shade of the branches over-head. They partook of a merry repast, and awaited at every moment the arrival of their friend Balta, who had promised to come, but had not yet made his appearance.

It so happened that a beautiful peasant girl passed them as they sate, bearing upon her graceful head, with its profuse tresses, a basket full of ripe pomegranates. Gryba sang these words as she approached :—

O wanderer with the sunny fruit,
 More lovely than the fruit thou holdest ;
 Art thou a maiden, chaste and mute,
 Whose modest eye might awe the boldest ?
 For one kind look from those bright eyes
 All vainly are our prayers ascending ;
 And must our hopes all vainly rise,
 Life's very breath on thee expending ?
 Nay, cast thy sunny burden down,
 O lovelier than the fruit thou bearest ;
 Or for a smile exchange that frown,
 And bless me with thy favour, fairest !

The maiden turned her head to look upon the knight with a pleased and downcast blush ; the basket tottered, and some of the pomegranates falling from it, destroyed the equilibrium, so that the whole fabric followed, in utter ruin, the golden fruit rolling in all directions about the field. The girl clasped her little hands in terror, and her eyes, before so transparent, were dimmed by tears of distress.

But Gryba, with his wonted alacrity, hastened after the

fugitive pomegranates, and having gathered them together, and re-arranged them in the basket with chestnut-leaves gracefully disposed among the fruit, he placed them once more upon the maiden's head, and took that opportunity of dropping a rich golden chain over her delicate shoulders. She saluted him gratefully, and sang, as she departed in the direction of a neighbouring valley,—

Under the leafy chestnut
 Dwelleth Sir Gryha the fair :
 Maids, in the ardour of summer,
 Beware of those pleasant shades !

But there in the icy winter
 The ardour of summer glows—
 Under the leafy chestnut,
 Sir Gryha the gay gallant !

“ Sing they often such warning strains concerning you ?” asked Arnald, with a smile.

“ Allah knows,” replied Gryba, frankly, “ that were there not such a superabundance of lovely maidens in this our land, I should not be of so amorous a temperament.”

“ The jest of the matter is, that he is after a fashion right,” interposed Balta, who, during this little adventure, had come up unperceived. “ He is not so much given to falling in love as one might imagine, only he cannot see a fair or graceful maiden without instantly desiring to engrave his image on her memory. When he has once attained this end he is satisfied, and flies onward to the next beauty, without troubling himself with any further efforts to gain the one from whom he has just parted. Yes, forsooth, as far as he is concerned, they might all of them possess the most adored lovers, or the most imperious husbands, in the world. Only let them give one sigh, once a year, to the thought of the noble and gallant Sir Gryba, and he is content. And it must be admitted that he has nearly brought it to this in the kingdoms of Granada, Mur-

cia, and Andalusia, ay, and even a little way into Provence and the Christian kingdoms of our peninsula."

"Sometimes, however, he is not quite so moderate in his expectations," said Arnald, thinking on the preceding night.

"In simple truth," replied Balta, "it is generally only as I have said; and I have known him perform the most neck-breaking exploits merely in order to place a flower on the table of his fair one during her absence; knowing, perhaps, all the while, that he shall never again during his life behold the object of his worship."

Gryba sate by, laughing heartily; greatly amused at the manner in which his friends were passing sentence upon his character.

While they sate thus merrily drinking and discoursing together, a great number of exceedingly beautiful horses, the property of the rich Gryba, were driven by them, returning from the water, and caracolling along with light steps and graceful bounds. The keen artistic spirit of Balta kindled in his eyes, as he contemplated their vigorous and shapely forms; and in the contemplation made them his own. But Gryba became serious, and, for him, almost sorrowful; a cloud of trouble spreading over his open brow, as he exclaimed, with a sigh, "Oh, my beautiful Pontifer! My noble milk-white steed! When shall I see thee once more among my herds? When wilt thou bear me again into the fire and dust of the battle, as if on wings?"

Looking suddenly upon Arnald, the expression of gravity on his face greatly deepened, as he added, "I had forgotten it, in the great joy of your presence, but now it comes once more in fear and sadness upon my spirit; it is with thee, ay, even with thyself, my beloved and honoured Arnald of Maraviglia, that I must do battle in such terrible earnest. Not only for the star-jewel; thou art master of my good war-horse, Pontifer; and I know thee too well not to be certain that thou wilt not abandon the gallant steed without blood. Alas, and I cannot, I must not, leave him

in your hands! He is descended from the favourite horse of Mahomet; and only Mussulmen know how to deal with him. Truly and rightly may he be proud to carry *thee*; but the people yonder who know him not, who love him not, who honour him not, as it has been his wont, and as it becomes him to be known, loved, and honoured, who understand not how to address him in Arabic, who see nothing in him but a beast of service—Arnald, my heart will burst in sunder!”

He turned away with tearful eyes, and Arnald's eyes were not dry; for no one could understand better than he the touching attachment which subsists between a noble horse and its master. How gladly would he have had the faithful Pontifer at hand, that he might at once restore him to the captivating Gryba! But honour commanded him to maintain with his life and his blood that illustrious token of victory, which had been bestowed on him by the knightly hand of the vicomte; so he restrained his softer feelings, and remained silent.

At length Gryba exclaimed, “Since, then, under all circumstances, there must needs be battle betwixt thee and me, let us at least unite the two combats in one, dear master and knight. Let us decide at once, and by the same issue, to whom the star-jewel, and to whom the noble white Arab Pontifer, shall belong.”

But an angry glow arose upon the cheeks of Arnald, and a rebuking fire kindled in his eyes. “When I contend for the merest trinket that pertains to my illustrious ladye,” cried he, “no other good upon earth may be held worthy to lie with it in the balance; no, not even an empire! For the rest, if it be your pleasure, Sir Gryba, to do battle for your gallant horse, I am at your command at all seasons; only, first of all, I must have re-conquered the star-jewel, and laid it at the feet of the Countess Alearda; therefore it seems to me best, that you should sail in my company to Provence. If I die in the combat, you, the victor, can carry your Pontifer home again; or if

you fall, believe me no goodlier sepulchre could be found for the mightiest heroes of the greatest days, than the turf which has been pressed by the foot of Alearda !”

“Thou knowest, indeed, how to honour ladies with a service worthy of them,” said Gryba softly ; “and oh, what an illustrious lady must she be who is capable of animating such a service ! But have I angered thee by my hasty words ?”

“God forbid !” replied Arnald ; and striking his lute, he sang the following rhymes.

O Pontifer, thou haughty steed—

Thou steed of wary eye !

Why gaze so wildly to and fro,

As if uncertain where to go ?

Two noble warriors wait for thee ;

Decide which shall thy chosen be !

O Pontifer, thou haughty steed—

Thou steed of wary eye !

O Pontifer, thou fiery steed—

Thou steed of rapid feet !

What mean these eager bounds of thine ?

Speak, wilt thou Gryba’s be, or mine ?

Whom wilt thou carry to the fight ?

Whom to the tourney blithe and bright ?

O Pontifer, thou fiery steed—

Thou steed of rapid feet !

O Pontifer, thou noble steed—

Thou steed of faithful heart !

The prize, if I or Gryba gain,

Changeless our love shall yet remain !

Grieve not,—the strife we hold for thee,

Though resolute, is brotherly.

O Pontifer, thou noble steed—

Thou steed of faithful heart !

Chapter Sixth.

SOME time afterwards, when Gryba had again departed on one of his adventurous love-expeditions, he left Balta behind him to do the offices of a host to Arnald; and charged him, moreover, to exhibit to the noble master, at fitting opportunity, the marvels of the ancient castle which had been in the possession of Gryba's ancestors many centuries ago.

Balta bethought him of this commission once when, in the shadowy night-season, he came forth with Arnald from the gardens of the chateau of pleasaunce, after one of the numerous splendid revels which Soleyma was then wont to hold. In a moment the troubadour was ready for the adventure; and mounting two noble mules, the friends, attended only by a single esquire, went forth through the dewy and silent darkness, turning from the cheerful plains and directing their course towards a hilly woodland, which formed the northern boundary of that bright landscape; and which, in Arnald's eyes, had ever worn a strange and mysterious aspect.

Before long, they had plunged into the depths of a solitary valley, tenanted only by a few far-scattered huts, with dim and dusky lamps glimmering through their casements, or dying firebrands sending forth a flickering light from the hearth through the half-open door, as if the arrival of the master, probably absent on some hunting-excursion among the distant hills, were momentarily expected.

Arnald sang these words softly to himself:—

This world it is so dark—so dark!
Strange is the rustling of its woods,
Deep the low voice of murmuring floods,
Black the stern silence of each glen,

Hollow the night-wind's swelling song :
 No voice is like a human tongue,
 And yet, and yet, O sons of men,
 How do ye love the world !

They rode on for a little while in silence side by side,
 and then Balta began to sing :

Strangely, strongly onward drawn,
 By mysterious impulses,
 Gaze we on the pomp of dawn,
 Gaze we on the midnight seas.

Somewhere must your answer dwell,
 Nameless hopes, that never die ;
 Somewhere must be found the spell
 Loving hearts to satisfy.

Silently our tears must stream ;
 Sweet, though ceaseless, is our woe :
 What we seek and what we dream,
 Alas, we do not even know !

“Nay,” exclaimed Arnald, in whose breast the simple song awoke higher aspirations and holier desires ; “nay, dear youth, we *do* know it, when once we know that truth which is the salvation of the world, and which thou too shalt one day recognise with unspeakable joy and certainty.”

It seemed as if another and mightier than himself had spoken—so unconsciously did the deeply significant words issue from his lips, and so incapable was he at that moment of drawing back the curtains of the spirit, when Balta, standing still, regarded him with inquiring eyes, thrilling with a strange forefeeling of the highest truth. Both felt that the right hour was not yet come, and they rode on their way in silence.

At the summit of a pine-clad hill, rising out of the depths of the dark forest, the sombre walls of the old castle now became visible through midnight clouds: it looked

like the abode of all solitude and gloomy remembrances. "My God!" said Arnald, "and this place belongs to the frank-hearted Gryba; and, moreover, it is his ancestral castle—nay, most probably his birthplace! Never—even when contemplating the hut of a hermit—have I felt the distance of all worldly joys, the nothingness of all human happiness, so thrill and penetrate my very heart, bones, and marrow, as at the sight of this wondrous knightly castle."

They rode rapidly beneath the branches of the pine-trees, all rustling in the blasts of night; solitary stars cast across the rarely-trodden path a faint and scanty light, which received a greenish hue from the foliage through which it passed. Balta wound a blast on his hunting-horn which he had taken from the hand of the squire, announcing to the castle-warder, by its long and undulating tones, the arrival of visitors. Multitudes of dark birds, startled out of their sleep by the unwonted sound, rose up with rustling wings from the branches, and fluttered around them on every hand with wild and melancholy cries. They now stood beside the fosse; and as they swung themselves from the saddle and committed their beasts to the squire, a light became visible, wandering among the numerous narrow casements of the castle, now low, now high, rapidly vanishing, and as rapidly re-appearing in another place. On a sudden they beheld it behind the battlements of the highest tower—a red and glowing torch, scattering sparks through the darkness. He who held it, and whose figure was enveloped in its wavering lustre, was a warrior, in Moorish costume, very dark of countenance, and with a long grey beard. Thus he sang to the midnight:—

Ha! who stands by the dusky fosse?

Ha! with what purpose cometh he?

A foe we can hail with the clash of mail,

But a friend with the hand of courtesy.

"Crescenzo!" cried Balta; and the dark man bowed

reverently, and they could see him hurrying down the staircase to receive his guests.

“Crescenzo!” repeated Arnald, in a low voice; and the memory of the ruins of Castle Maraviglia and the mysterious Ultramonte arose within him. Balta, immediately observing that the name moved his companion, said, “Such was the appellation of a Roman hero, concerning whom you shall hear more when we are within the gates; his name passes as a signal that the seneschal is to admit him who utters it, to witness the secrets of the castle. He now knows how to receive us.”

The heavy doors rattled on their hinges, the drawbridge dropped into its place with a prolonged and clashing sound; Arnald and Balta entered the castle, accompanied only by its sable warder, who now held in his hand a small lamp, shaped like a basilisk, from the mouth of which issued a pale and tiny flame, which yet spread its light extensively around. Silently and respectfully he conducted the two knights into a small vaulted chamber at one side of the entrance, brought forth costly wines and other choice refreshments from closets in the wall, and, without speaking a word, waited on their pleasure. No esquire, no page, not even a serving-man was to be seen.

After a while the warder stepped to the window, looked up into the clouds, and said, “Midnight is now past: it is full time—full time, nay, more than full time, for him who seeks to contemplate the mysteries of the castle, to bestir himself. The face of twilight in yonder lonely halls is far too wondrous to be looked upon.” His voice sounded indescribably hollow and strange: it seemed as though it were the voice of one departed.

“I know my way,” said Balta, taking the lamp from the table, and making a sign to the singular castellan, who immediately withdrew with a respectful inclination.

As Arnald and Balta ascended a stone winding-stair, the latter remarked, “We may possibly encounter on our way sundry figures with strange and very pallid faces: they

are beings of the kind whom one must not address ; and I pray you for the love of God, noble master, speak not a word to any of them."

As he spoke he opened a huge oaken door, and they entered a very spacious hall, against the walls and vaults of which the light of the lamp struck doubtfully, timidly, and questioningly. Arnald, stepping forward, perceived by the moonlight, which at that moment broke through the clouds and shone in at the casements, that an open door in the wall opposite to him communicated with a long, long range of chambers, all likewise open. He shuddered in a manner inexplicable to himself at the course which was before him, but rapidly suppressed his emotion. Balta approached the walls in various parts so as to illuminate them by his lamp ; and hereat many and various were the pictured shapes which became visible—wondrous in their beauty, but fearful and hazardous in their combinations. That which seemed the form of a reverend old man, suddenly terminated in a wild confusion of tendrils and creepers ; the graceful brow of a maiden was engirt and overshadowed by a huge pair of variegated wings, springing from the body of a moth which was affixed to that seraph-like head ; tall trees rested upon the steel-booted feet of warriors, as though they were about to stride from the walls into the chamber, horribly menacing the spectator with outstretched and gauntleted hands, while under the loftiest coronal of their foliage the features of an angry countenance seemed doubtfully shapen. Darting lines of a golden colour were interspersed among the pictures, looking like letters and syllables of fearful import ; rivulets and waterfalls were depicted in some places, in the midst of which the beholder fancied that he could distinguish the eyes of children and the beards of prophets : on a closer inspection, however, these proved to be nothing but the foam of the waters. And all these things were united as if in one huge and interminable interlacement, wherein no part could have existed without all the others, nor could

the whole have spared even the smallest of its component parts.

Some of the faces appeared very familiar to the troubadour ; and these were repeated over and over again in combinations ever new, and each more fearful than the last, whereby the countenance which was at first that of venerable old age assumed an aspect constantly younger as the beholder advanced further into the dim and far-stretching chambers. But whenever he would have considered these objects more minutely—as soon as their meaning began to dawn more clearly on his apprehension—his thoughts were irresistibly drawn away from them by the extraordinary implements and pieces of furniture wherewith the chambers abounded, some of which were ranged against the walls, and some stationed in the centre of the apartments. Many of these were composed of arms, combined in a manner so singular that the idea was involuntarily suggested that they, as well as the unnatural forms upon the walls, had a meaning and an end, and that there might exist some all-powerful word, which, perchance unthinkingly uttered, might endue all these at once with strange and spectral life. As often as Arnald would have questioned Balta, the latter placed his finger on his lips with anxious rapidity ; while the expression of horror in his countenance, usually so calm and so cloudless, awakened dim and uneasy forebodings. Occasionally too, they passed large tables, carefully covered with black drapery reaching to the ground, whereon lay magical instruments, the aspect of which recalled only too vividly to Arnald's mind the instructions of Messire Ultramonte.

At length they reached a chamber, apparently in the exterior wall of the building, the entrance to which was concealed by a heavy curtain of a dark-red colour, deeply embroidered with numerous gold-coloured devices. Arnald hesitated a moment, imagining that there was some fearful sight behind it ; but Balta hurried forwards with manifest pleasure, grasped the string of the curtain, and, as he drew

in aside, beckoned his companion to follow him. When both stood within, and the drapery had resumed its place, he drew a deep and relieved breath, like one who has attained a safe place of refuge.

"Here," said he, "we may speak openly and fearlessly as of old, and I may reveal to you all that I know concerning this strange edifice, though in truth that knowledge is but scanty. Here they cannot enter even if they would: nevertheless, we must take heed to depart before the morning twilight."

Arnald looked on him inquiringly, and as he did so, a slight shudder, like the farewell of departing fears, passed over the frame of Balta. With an evident effort to suppress even this, he took the arm of Arnald, and led him along the walls, pointing out to him their strangely interwoven designs, which, as if to render this chamber the very climax and acme of all wonder, surpassed in boldness of conception and artistic execution all the marvels of the former halls and apartments.

As Arnald walked around with his friend, he suddenly started back; for it seemed to him that he beheld himself and Balta in a mirror, but accompanied by a third countenance of fearful paleness and keen and terrible features. He looked in dismay over his shoulder, expecting to see this wan stranger behind him; but there was no one. That which he had imagined to be a mirror was, in fact, a painting.

Balta, entirely occupied with considering these three painted forms, and not perceiving the amazement of the troubadour, now remarked: "He in the middle is the great minstrel-king, concerning whom legends have recorded so many things; the right-hand figure is my ancestor, the deep-minded philosopher Abdul Hamet; and on the left you behold the Roman knight and necromancer Crescentius, whose name was the watchword which opened to us the gates of this castle."

"And the three heads," said Arnald, with an involun-

tary sigh, "spring from one gigantic and gaily-coloured stem, as if of a nettle!"

"Probably a fitting emblem of their thorny lives," replied Balta, thoughtfully. "Of the earthly wanderings of the minstrel-king, so troublous and so full of disappointment, thou probably knowest enough already—"

"Only thus much do I know," interrupted Arnald, with some vehemence, "that among the nettles there sprang up roses, mighty in power and abundant in beauty, clothing and concealing the stem of old and evil fate—I mean, the sweet strains of the pursued hero, and also the grace of his knightly deeds; and I hope, young friend, thou wilt not herein contradict my words."

"God forbid," replied Balta. "He was chosen by the two noble heads which thou here beholdest, long after his death, as their noblest model; neither did they esteem themselves worthy to be delineated in the same picture with him any where save here, where they believed that they had attained the mastery which they sought. In the other chambers thou hast seen his face many times depicted amid the winding foliage and flowers; but then ever old and satiate with length of days. Here have they represented him in the freshness and power of manhood, symbolising thereby their hope, that the art which he carried with him to the grave, hidden in mute forefeelings and unrevealed intuitions, has been re-animated in the truefulness of youth by their labours."

"Balta," demanded Arnald, shuddering, "can this terrible art bestow eternal youth on earth? And art thou, then, the omnipotent sage, Abdul Hamet himself? For look—oh, look, for God's sake—the portrait is in every line and feature thyself!"

Balta shrank back trembling, covered his face with both his hands, and said in a whisper, "Thou mockest me! Rather it is thyself who art certainly that old minstrel-king reviving from his ashes in a second youth! It flashes upon me as if by a lightning-stroke—in every gesture, in

every lineament, thou art he!" Both stood for a long time horror-struck and silent; but manning themselves, they approached each other, grasped hand in hand, and gazed fixedly into each other's eyes.

At last Balta said, "'Tis true that we greatly resemble these our ancestors. Yet are we not they—we are their newly-arisen progeny. Shall we not, then, lay claim to our inheritance? Thou knowest the name of Arnold of Brescia?"

Arnald bowed a silent affirmative.

"His master-work," continued Balta, "lies hidden behind yonder painting. I think that in this matter we shall be entirely agreed. Gryba's ancestor gave a refuge to the brave and most learned Crescentius of Rome in this castle, when your Christendom had spurned and disowned him. Here he buried that wonderful book, a copy of which is, as I suppose, concealed amid the ruins of your ancestral castle. Only a Maraviglia is permitted to liberate the pages of this mystery from their abode of darkness—neither is he ill-companioned for the work if a descendant of Abdul Hamet stands at his side. The deed will greatly delight Gryba; and lo, here are hammer, hatchet, and chisel to break the stone, long since set apart and consecrated for the work."

Herewith he took the implements which he had named, and which were framed of gold and silver, from a bracket whereon they lay, and offered them to the troubadour.

"Let me only reflect a moment," cried the latter. "But doubt nothing. Every pulse in my body throbs high with eagerness. I believe that I shall do according to your and Gryba's will."

Chapter Seventh.

ARNALD strode vehemently to and fro; but it was not long before his spirit, already troubled by the terrors of the castle, abandoned itself entirely to his early treasured love and longing after the incomprehensible, and to that thirst for the knowledge of Arnold of Brescia which had already cost his race so dear.

“I will!” said he, and grasped the wonder-working instrument. But in so doing he struck his hand against a costly casket, upon whose surface of blue lapis lazuli was embossed in gold the form of that constellation which he had named in his heart ‘Alearda.’ Startled and smit with shame he stood still, pressing his hand against his forehead; and at length he asked, “In God’s name, Balta, how came the figure of yonder constellation *here*?”

“It distinguishes the casket,” was the answer, “wherein Gryba keeps the jewel concerning which we must do battle.”

“O warning angel!” sighed Arnald, and bent his head lowly before the beloved sign. He stood long, lost in serious and repentant thought. After a while he said, “Restore the implements to their place, dear Balta. Alearda desires not this of me; and ah, she is now as ever so right, so pure, so heavenly-minded, in her decision; and yet I was fearfully on the brink of forgetting it, now in this moment of crisis.”

The regretful decision in Arnald’s tone and gesture repressed every argument that Balta might, perhaps, have urged against him. Sighing, but with affectionate submission, he laid the tools in their place again.

But suddenly his eye glanced towards the window, and he started forward in terror, exclaiming, “Great heavens! I verily believe that I can see the first dim gleaming of

dawn over yonder hills. Oh, let hasten to leave these gloomy halls!"

These words, instead of alarming the troubadour, seemed to speak mysterious peace to his soul; yet he made haste to comply with the entreating gestures of Balta, only paying a farewell reverence to the casket, and saying as he did so,

"We shall meet again soon, joyful, and at liberty, thou hidden light!"

Meanwhile Balta had drawn aside the curtain, but he stood still in the doorway, with widely opened eyes of fear and wonder. He pointed forwards, and whispered,

"They are all here at once—they are in their seats, the banquet has commenced."

Stepping forward, Arnald gazed into the hall, beyond the curtain. Its walls sent forth a cold and blueish light, and around a long table sate numerous forms, both male and female, dressed in antique costume, and solemnly pledging each other in goblets of wine. Instead of pages, a multitude of airy dwarfs tripped hither and thither around the board, emitting a green light, like that of glow-worms.

"These knights and dames," said Balta, in a suppressed voice, "were, almost all of them, living in the days of the Goths, long before the Arabs invaded the land. In general, that king Rodrigo, by whose wild passions the empire fell, is wont to take the highest place at the table. But heroes and ladies of later times are in his company. Among others, there is even a whisper of Crescentius himself."

"If he should now invite *us* to sit by his side at the table?" said Arnald, half unconsciously, and as if in a dream, but struck with horror at his own words, and the more so, because immediately two tall men, with ashy-grey faces, and bearing lofty torches in their hands, came striding across the chamber, with solemn and stately steps, as if commissioned to fulfil that hideous errand; but Balta in-

stantly drew the curtain across the doorway, and all remained quiet.

“How could you so rashly forget yourself?” demanded he, after a short pause.

“Is it, then, a matter of wonder,” returned Arnald, “that, amid the horrors of this wild night, and this mysterious castle, it is impossible for all things to keep exactly the paths assigned to them? But I know an antidote for this.” He took his lute from his shoulder, and began to tune it.

“What, would you make music?” cried Balta; “and while the children of the tomb are feasting in yonder hall!”

“Thou knowest not of whom I would sing, young friend!” said Arnald, with a smile. “But only have patience! Soon shalt thou feel the sweetness and blessedness of peace sinking down upon thy bosom; not, indeed, the work of my song, but of her to whom the song belongs!”

He touched the strings, and sang as follows:—

Image of beauty, pure and soft,
Which hath its home in heaven aloft;
Light of this sombre world, and theme
Of golden lyre and minstrel's dream;
Clear fount of noblest chivalry,
Star, shining as a guide, serene and high!

Oh, may I praise thee in my song
As I have wished to praise thee long?
Ay, rise my strains, so sweet, so deep!
The weary world is all asleep,
No faithless ear receives thy sound,
And spectres keep their ghastly watch around.

Full many a heart might tremble here—
Sweetest and best, I know not fear!
My life of life thy glory is,
Thy fame my fairest light of bliss,
To sing thy praise, to sing of thee—
This is the crown of fullest joy for me!

Was ever woman's sweetness yet
 With woman's loftiest honour met?
 Did ever tenderest bloom appear
 Blent with calm dignity severe?
 Yes! I have seen where all abide!
 So is my lyre repaid, my sword is sanctified!

Now shines the sun the casement through,
 Now sparkles fresh the morning dew;
 Hence, spectres, to your tombs below,
 But take my thanks before ye go!
 Thus strangely watched by you, my heart
 Its dear, long-cherished dreams has dared impart!

Balta listened to him with a joyous smile, and said,
 "Come forth with me to the bright sea-shore again!
 Verily, your spirit is too clear for this gloomy night of
 magic!"

Therewith they went forth through the chambers. It
 is true that as they entered the outer hall Balta shrank
 and shuddered, whispering, "Methinks I still see the pale
 Crescentius, cowering and crouching in yonder corner!"
 But Arnald said, "Turn away thine eyes; these are foes
 from whom one may with honour turn away one's eyes."

And thus he drew Balta onward; and before long the
 friends reached the outside of the castle, and rode away
 together in the coolness of morning.

Chapter Eighth.

GRADUALLY Spring had begun to open her rapturous eyes
 upon that land of celestial beauty, and Arnald, rejoicing as
 the decisive hour approached, exercised himself daily in
 the Moorish custom of hurling the javelin, mounted upon a
 slightly-built roan-coloured Arab horse, which Gryba had
 bestowed upon him for the combat. Soleyma had decided

that the first encounter of the champions should be with this weapon.

Gryba had returned from his expedition, and he shewed himself greatly pleased when he heard how the troubadour had refused to open that wall of mysteries. "In the first place," said he, "'twere shame and pity to mar the beautiful picture: who can say, whether the old mouldering volume is half so worthy of admiration as the screen which hides it? Moreover, I am altogether delighted to find that our dear master of Maraviglia desires as little as I do to hold intercourse with these dark secrets. Ah, God! this dear, blooming, changeful life is in itself so inexpressibly beautiful, that I always dread lest, in grasping it too strongly by the dark roots, we should cause the fairest blossoms on its tender and fragrant branches to droop and die."

Although Arnald certainly differed somewhat widely from this view, he could not but love with his whole heart the transparent and childlike gladness of spirit wherewith it was expressed; but the more Gryba's true-hearted gaiety, and Balta's meditative yet cheerful gravity, spoke pleasantly to his heart in the affection which both testified towards him, the more did the doubtful issue of their approaching combat for life and death weigh heavily upon him. Yes, it often happened, that when he was exercising his roan steed, and flinging the light darts, while the two friends watched his skill with wonder and admiration, he would suddenly leap from the saddle, his eyes filling with irrepressible tears, and then they would all three embrace with deep melancholy, and separate in silence, and with drooping heads. Arnald's consolation was this, that whatsoever was undertaken for the honour of a virtuous lady, and above all for Alearda, must needs lead to a joyful end, however darkly and menacingly the clouds of this world might gather around.

Often, too, the splendid entertainments given by Queen Soleyma threw such brilliant light over the space of



“Stepping orward, Arnald gazed into the hall, beyond the curtain.”—p. 167.

whole days, that there was scarce any room left for these more gloomy thoughts. With the most refined delicacy, the most graceful tact, and the most reckless expenditure, she would so order and conduct her revels, that her chateau of pleasaunce assumed the aspect of some fairy temple, overflowing with all the brightest gifts of earth.

During one of these festivals—as they sat beneath the golden and leaf-embowered trellis of the palace, while the warm hreeze of spring, daily increasing in strength, breathed over sea and shore in the bright noon-day, Soleyma commanded the troubadour to take his lute, and, as he had often done before, to accompany by occasional chords a story from her lips. Most sweetly did lay or legend sound from those lips of wondrous beauty. For though, amid all her other gifts, that choicest gift of song had not in its full abundance been vouchsafed to her, nevertheless she so far possessed it that she was able sometimes to invent little tales with much grace of fancy; sometimes to embellish fables or legends of older days; and herein words were ever ready at her command, like winged troops of glad and obedient spirits. On such an occasion it had once happened that Arnald involuntarily struck his lyre, and afterwards Soleyma greatly delighted in this accompaniment, as did all the hearers thereof, and especially Balta; now, for the first time, lyre and voice were blended into one harmonious whole, full of loveliness and grandeur.

Soleyma began to relate the ancient legend of the enchanter Virgilius; how magical towers had been erected by him, wherein stood pillars of prophecy, and how he had laughed to scorn his adversaries and avenged himself of them, having mastery over the seas, and guiding the storms in their course. There was a wild kind of horror in the chords with which Arnald accompanied this narration; for the mysterious wonders of Castle Maravighia and of Gryba's fortress, as well as the lessons of the dark Ultramonte, thrilled shiveringly through his whole soul, and it re-

quired a strong effort to enable him to pass to sweet and love-breathing harmonies, when Soleyma went on to speak of the love-adventures of Virgilius with fair women. But perhaps this very effort only rendered him the more successful; for Soleyma contemplated him with glowing and glistening eyes, and finally closed her narration in these words:—

But how Virgilius died
 Amid the joys of earth,
 Oh, hid me not record!
 Deep is the grief that sinks upon my heart!
 O Virgilius! O Virgilius!
 Can we not *one* retain—
 Not one, not one, of all
 The fair and joyous lights of this poor life?
 But I know the source of thy spells—
 The source of all spells I know:
 The magic dwells in song;
 The omnipotence of love abides in song:
 Sweet are the spells of minstrelsy;
 All other magic powers are stern and harsh.
 Thou too wert gifted thus—
 Thou too wert master of this sweeter magic.
 O Virgilius! O Virgilius!
 Hast thou not left behind
 A better legacy
 Than the vain impotence of weak regret?

The lyre of Maraviglia sent forth its sweetest and most undulating melodies; he was rewarded by an inexpressibly sweet, nay, almost a *promising*, look from Soleyma. Arnald well remembered to have read similar meanings in her eyes before; his fingers began to wander over the strings in dream-like melody; but at this moment the beautiful Moorish queen arose with visible effort, and said, laughing, "How one can lose oneself in such stories!"

Arnald closed his performance with a few hasty and disturbed chords, which, however, Soleyma did not seem

to remark. She turned haughtily from him; and when the trumpet summoned to the banquet, she this time selected Balta as her companion.

Chapter Ninth.

AMID the wide and mazy walks of that undulating garden, which were overshadowed by young foliage like veils of green vapour, the company went forth after the banquet, separating into scattered groups or solitary pairs when love invited knights and ladies to sweet and unbroken converse, while many a pining heart which had not yet ventured to confess its passion stole away, and indulged its hopes and fears alone. Arnald was of the last-mentioned number, although animated by no such feelings as those to which we have referred. The exulting hope that he should conquer for Alearda, and soon re-enter her heavenly presence bearing the prize, struggled in his spirit with a feeling of grief concerning his dear and noble antagonists. In gentle melancholy he walked along an avenue of dark pines and larches which had but just begun to feel the breath of spring, and he had a vague strange presentiment, as though he expected to see his lofty lady beneath their shade. Before long he perceived the glimmer of white and waving garments such as Alearda was wont to wear, far off, sometimes appearing through the boughs of trees and bushes, sometimes lost amid the windings of the walk, or hidden by its grassy inequalities, but ever approaching nearer and nearer, till at last Arnald distinctly recognised the modest attire of a Provençal matron, overshadowed by the deep hat, in form like a pilgrim's hat, such as he had often beheld on the brow of Alearda. Beneath it sable locks flowing in rich ringlets now became apparent, beautifully contrasted with the snowy vesture, and the dazzling whiteness of the alabaster forehead. Arnald scarcely knew whether he was

waking or dreaming; there was a sound in his heart like an interminable succession of strange and solemn music; he remembered the wondrous history of the necromancer Virgilius, in conjunction with all the enchantments concerning which he had heard during his life; it seemed to him that an unconscious power had gone forth from the intense longing of his heart; and with a thrill of hope he hastened forward to meet the appearance. At this moment, however, the form vanished in a thicket of cedars; nevertheless, the path which she had chosen must of necessity lead her to Arnald, if she were aught but a delusive and air-born vision. And it *did* lead her to him. As the knight turned from the clustering cedars, and entered an avenue of tall pomegranate-trees, she stood close before him, almost as much startled as himself—but it was not Alearda. It was Soleyma.

She soon recovered her composure, and said—“By this surprise you have only escaped another surprise, dear Arnald. I intended to have presented myself before you in the dance this evening as a Provençal lady, attended by a numerous suite of maidens in similar costume; and now——”

She stopped short, looking down in graceful embarrassment; but after a moment she once more raised her eyes, and said with a merry laugh, “Yes; and now, as to the chief point of the matter, it has fallen out exactly as I intended, and I am bewildered and astonished at it, like a simpleton! Ah, how silly and senseless we mortals almost always are, after all our far-seeing and carefully-arranged preparations!”

As she spoke these words she took the troubadour's arm, and allowed him to lead her backwards and forwards in the spacious avenue. Her unexpected graciousness, after the repulse of the morning, fell on Arnald's soul like a sunbeam on a grey and misty day.

She now began an interesting discourse concerning the unity of human life amid all its apparent diversities, and how

every land is to the poet as his own, as the one appointed to him by God, if he only greets it with an open spirit and a noble and self-approved heart; ay, with such marvellous richness did she weave before his eyes the web of what a minstrel's life might be, that it seemed to outdo all his dreams, and his eager heart received many a glowing spark, and many a voice arose within him, saying with seductive force, "Here, here is the true and joyful goal of thine earthly wanderings! Thy labours and longings hitherto have been but unreal deceptions and joyless delusions."

Many an answer must he have made in this spirit, for the graciousness of Soleyma's deportment manifestly increased, and ever more sweetly did the words of enchantment flow from her ruby lips; but just then a dove flew past them, and dropped an olive-leaf from its beak amid the locks of Arnald.

"Oh, Noah's dove!" cried he, involuntarily. "Oh, holy Christendom, and thou, my Provençal fatherland, with thy rich and abundant olive-woods!"

Gladly also would he have uttered another and a dearer name, yet he retained it in the silence of his loving heart.

Then Soleyma looked upon him with all that haughty displeasure which her beautiful eyes could so well express. It was as though all the thoughts which passed through Arnald's faithful breast were at once made visible to her.

"With all his necromantic wisdom, the great master Virgilius was powerless as a fool," cried she, with a disdainful smile; and quitting her hold on his arm, she hastened to join her maidens, who might be seen awaiting her at the end of the avenue.

Meanwhile the utter misery to which he should have abandoned himself, by following the promptings of that sweet seducing voice, rose with fearful vividness before the spirit of Arnald. He bethought him how soon Soleyma would have grown weary of her favourite; he remembered his own disturbed, discordant feelings and troubled

conscience: he pictured to himself all the pangs of unsatisfied longing which would have overcome him, when, sooner or later, he should have been expelled from that realm of enchantments; and when he now beheld himself saved from such an abyss, he felt deeply that it was not entirely the work of the dove with her olive-leaf, but that he must have fallen without hope of rescue, had not God long before vouchsafed to suffer him to behold a fair messenger from heaven to earth. He withdrew into a lonely grove and kneeled down to offer up his thanksgivings, and to pray that it might be permitted to him, now and ever, to serve the angel Alearda in true devotion, virtue, and purity.

Chapter Tenth.

HE stepped out of the shadows of the grove into the light of the purest sunset; and as he did so he encountered the thoughtful Balta, who, grasping his hand with the most graceful and affectionate warmth, said, "My heart ever grows unspeakably glad within me when I behold you in all the untroubled cheerfulness for which you have been specially created. I can endure the clouds of earth better in any case than when they take upon themselves to darken a poet's life; and—deem me not officious, I beseech you—I confess frankly to you that the golden nets which have been here woven for you with so much dexterity and circumspection, have made me anxious lest you should find yourself engaged in a combat far more to be dreaded than that which awaits us in the lists. But now you come out of yon leafy darkness with an aspect so radiant and so clear, that the evening beams which shine around you are but as a reflection of the far more lustrous brightness of your sunny spirit. God prosper you with victory, most noble master!"

“My early loved Balta,” replied Arnald, “it is no marvel that I am able to sail past the syren-strains. Thou knowest what a pure and celestial star shines ever above my head as a protector and a guide. Truly, I have long navigated the sea of this world, and have seen with deep regret how many a noble spirit, vainly struggling for aid in such a whirlpool as this, has been drawn down into its depths, shuddering with agony; and I feel gratefully that I am rescued from the rock and the abyss only by the mild radiance of my constellation. But, Balta, what is it that saves you—the youthful artist, the glowing spirit, all penetrated by the electric force of beauty? Ay, what is the power which hath so marvellously protected you, that amid all your courteous gallantries, amid all these richly-blooming parterres of the fairest and sweetest womanly loveliness, I have never yet seen your eyes flash with the fire of love?”

Balta hung down his head, and was silent for a while; at last he lifted up his face—all bright and beaming—to heaven and said, “Why should I conceal that which is dearest and most beautiful in my soul, from him whom that soul so entirely loves? Know then, Arnald, my noble master, that there dwells within me a vision of perfect and peerless beauty, to which nothing that lives upon earth can approach in dignity, and grace, and loveliness, whereby I feel myself bound to love and honour all ladies right truly, and yet never to link my affections, nor dedicate my exclusive service, to any one who lives, and moves, and has her being upon this imperfect earth.”

“And where, then, is the picture of her?” inquired Arnald, “wherein your skilful pencil has made permanent those lineaments of lofty beauty, and animated them with radiant colours?”

“The picture!” cried Balta, visibly shuddering; “her picture? I pray you in God’s name speak not thus: though I have sometimes amused myself by painting the fair faces of earthly beauties, peeping forth from clusters of leaves

and twining plants like blossoms of wondrous grace, I should never dream of presuming to imprison my peerless vision within the paltry circle of mine earthly art. She—my divine mistress—to be brought to light as the crown and chief of a sportive world of flowers !”

“But why thus?” replied Arnald; “represent her rather in her entire form of heavenly beauty, shadowed by radiant garments, wearing on her brow a glory of stars, canopied by clouds——”

“Yes, thus doth she appear to me,” anxiously interrupted Balta; “yes, thus doth she appear to me; and whence did you learn it? and though you have learned it, in the name of God and the Prophet, who inspired you with the fearfully audacious thought that a man might dare to paint her thus? I see, then, it is no fable that your artists of Christendom presume to delineate entire human forms; thus seeking to copy the Creator, and not troubling themselves as to the soul which should animate those their outward shapes. Terrible will it be for such audacious triflers with things forbidden, if at the last day of resurrection and judgment all these their pictures shall gather around them in a strange and mournful crowd, with lifelike but lifeless gestures, inquiring anxiously, and ever more anxiously, after the souls which should be theirs! And if I should thus be questioned by my picture—by mine own peculiar blessed vision—oh, how much more fearful were my portion than that of all your rash artists taken together !”

“Nevertheless, thou shalt one day paint her,” said Arnald, slowly and softly; “and thou shalt be very happy, or rather highly blessed.”

These words escaped him in a like manner to those which he had uttered on the night when Balta accompanied him to the mysterious castle. He had spoken more and higher things than he was himself conscious of, at the moment of speaking them, and now meditated with effort upon the peculiar and deep meaning of his words. Balta

appeared to be similarly occupied ; and thus they approached, without being aware of it, the chateau of pleasure, which was already brightly illuminated.

As the two friends issued from a flowery thicket, the intense beams of light from the castle-casements struck upon their eyes with a suddenness that well nigh dazzled them. "It is now high time," said Arnald, "that we should expedite the hour of our encounter. This middle and doubtful state, dear Balta, cannot longer be endured ; and spring is already amongst us."

"It is most true," answered Balta, suppressing his emotion ; and that very evening he, Arnald, and Gryba, solemnly presented themselves before Soleyma, entreating with grave courtesy, that she would fix the day of the combat.

"Let it be the day after to-morrow, if you will," said the Moorish queen, turning from them with a haughty inclination ; for that evening the festivities were over.

Chapter Eleventh.

Now from the heaven's roseate towers
 The sun looks forth on sparkling dews,
 And makes the earth a world of flowers,
 The sea a garden of bright hues.

Full oft in hoary times of old,
 At this bright hour of opening day,
 A Maraviglia, blithe and bold,
 Hath donned his arms and sought the fray.

Now, with a minstrel's joyous strain,
 Now, in his armour's dazzling light,
 A Maraviglia seeks again
 The field where honour rules the fight.

Souls of my sires ! and chieftest thou,
The minstrel-king of olden day,
Bless ye my knightly path below,
And guide me on your valiant way !
So at my lady's feet at last,
With reverent joy and chastened glee,
The burning hour of battle past,
I may as victor bow the knee.

On the morning of the decisive combat Arnald stood within the chestnut-tree chamber, which was now all enfolded in wondrous wealth of blossoms, and sang the words written above with loud and joyous tones ; Gryba accompanied his voice by clashing his sword and shield merrily together ; and in this manner both shook aside, or endeavoured to shake aside, the melancholy feeling which overshadowed them, as often as each thought on the other as his adversary ; and, kindled by these outward words and gestures, the fire of battle did indeed arise and gather strength in their hearts.

Gryba was now completely armed. Attired in a rich suit of gilded plate-armour—for, on this day, he had abandoned his black surcoat—he stood, splendid as a king, tall, graceful, and slender. Arnald having hastily but carefully fastened his precious dagger to the silver chain which hung over the golden links of his hauberk, grasped two javelins of the finest ebony, whose sharp and exquisitely-polished barbs of steel gleamed with inlaid gold ; and thus the two champions hurried to the spot where their steeds awaited them with neighs of impatience.

The honest Provençal squire wept bitterly as he led forward his master's richly-caparisoned Arab horse.

“Thou art a good youth,” said the kind-hearted Gryba, casting into his hat a purse filled with gold pieces ; “I know well that my gift cannot comfort thee ; nevertheless, there is always a pleasure in it.”

“God repay you,” said the lad, through his tears, “as richly as it is possible for Him to repay a heathen bird ;

—and you, my noble Sir Arnald, if you must needs catch him, only be quick about it, and don't let him chafe and flutter longer than you can help."

Gryba sprang into his saddle with a hearty laugh; and his light dun-coloured charger leaped and plunged furiously beneath him; its mane and tail of silver whiteness streaming wildly on the air. But Gryba stirred not so much as a hair's-breadth upon the purple saddle-cloth; and said, stroking the animal's slender neck, "Oho, my palfrey, my pretty palfrey, wouldst thou act Pontifer?"

Swiftly and lightly, so that the hoofs of the far-springing steeds scarcely swept the grass, Arnald and Gryba galloped to the field.

There, from the fair turfy eminence whereon his turret stood, came Balta to meet them; earnest and solemn of aspect, but clad in richly-embroidered garments of divers colours, the wide skirts of which, according to the Moorish custom, floated around him in peaceful and festal fashion; strangely did this garb contrast with the straight sword, like that of a Christian knight, which glittered at his waist; while the two sparkling javelins, entirely of silver, which he bore in his right hand, called up the idea of Saracen warfare. As soon as he beheld his friends, he spurred his coal-black horse into the swiftest gallop, and did not check it till he stood close beside them, greeting them with grave and graceful affection. The three gallant combatants shook each other warmly by the hand, and gazed thoughtfully in each other's faces.

Then Arnald said, "Let the issue be what it will, we can at least enjoy, by anticipation, the delight of having called each other brother! Is it not so, my beloved comrades in battle—we are brothers?"

The youths embraced him with heartfelt emotion; repeating softly, "We are brothers!"—while the three noble Arab horses, as if sympathising with the affection of their masters, rubbed their graceful necks caressingly against each other.

“Up, young heroes, to the battle!” shouted Arnald, with that resounding voice which was so peculiar to himself in times of honourable danger; and the three friends loosened their embracing arms, and the noble war-steeds reared high, neighing for joy, and sprang apart with lofty curvets, measured by the rider’s will. They were about to give them the rein, and seek the further extremities of the field, when Gryba said :

“Patience, yet a moment! Mine esquire yonder carries a flask of the choicest wine of Xeres; I originally intended it for the refreshment of the wounded; but the ladies will take care of them, and methinks ’twill be fairer and fitter to empty it now, in fulness of joy, to the honour of our new brotherhood. Let each drink to that which he holds dearest on earth!”

At a sign from the young warrior, his squire produced the costly flask, and Arnald was requested to drink first. He took three draughts, and pronounced a separate pledge for each, as follows :

“Alearda!” “Provence!” “Fair fame after death!”

Balta’s turn came next. He spake thus :

“The vision seen by no eye save mine own!” “Mine own dear art of painting!” “Our friendship!”

And Gryba concluded in this manner :

“All beautiful women!” “Life in their memory!” “If it may be so, many more joyous combats on this earth!”

Herewith they entered the area marked out for battle, where they were solemnly received with the echoing sound of clarions, cymbals, and trumpets.

Chapter Twelfth.

THE enclosure wherein the three knights now stood was very large, and perfectly circular; around its limits were ranged a gay and many-coloured throng of spectators,

who, according to the light and almost reckless custom of their nation, had assembled, eager to behold the approaching combat for life and death, as though it were some gay spectacle at the theatre. On lofty scaffoldings, covered with rich carpets and cushions, sate a multitude of beautiful ladies. Queen Soleyma, the most beautiful of all, sate upon the richest cushions, beneath a canopy blue as the heavens. She was inexpressibly fascinating and magnificent to look upon, in her glittering adornments of jewellery, her brows girt with a sparkling turban, which did not, however, wholly conceal the dark abundance of her tresses, but rather displayed their wavy rings more gracefully and to greater advantage. Gryba's gaze of fire was ever directed towards her, and she appeared to observe it with a well-pleased smile. Arnald, when the three champions passed before her to pay their reverence, drooped his head as if dazzled, as he had done when he first beheld her. But he speedily recalled the idea of Alearda, as she had appeared to him in her heavenly purity, on that festive eve on the plain before Castle Bisiers, when she came forth upon the hill in her calm and benignant beauty; and from that moment he was able to gaze firmly, and with unquivering eyelids, upon the sun of mere earthly loveliness which now illumined the battle-field. When he had taken up his position, having been conducted to it by two Moorish warriors, he contemplated the figure of Balta, who stood opposite to him. The youthful artist suffered the calm light of his eyes to rest for a moment upon Soleyma; but then he lifted them up, at once brighter and more calm, to the free and cloudless skies; and Arnald understood in a moment what that gesture signified, and what vision manifested itself to him in the heavens.

It was not yet decided who should be the first to do battle with the troubadour. Four pages carrying a great silver vase now approached Gryba and Balta; they were followed by four others bearing a lofty pedestal covered with purple hangings, whereon the vase was carefully

deposited. The two competitors now received a pair of costly dice shaped of the purest gold, and having the ciphers inlaid with precious stones. Gryba threw first; he gazed discontentedly into the vase. When Balta's die had fallen, three aged Moorish princes, who had stationed themselves by the vase as witnesses, declared that the right of the first engagement belonged to the cavalier Balta. All except the two combatants quitted the area of battle, and Gryba also rode slowly out of the lists. A loud clarion-peal now resounded above the plain, making the very air tremble. Instantly Arnald and Balta put their horses to a full gallop, entered the circle with the speed of lightning, and rode rapidly around its outer limits, occasionally menacing each other with their javelins. From time to time the warriors stood upright in their wide and closely-buckled stirrups, advancing the left shoulder, and covering head or breast with the shield, as the direction which the missile was apparently about to take, warned them. The well-trained horses dashed unweariedly around their appointed way, never varying the pace of their gallop, and never requiring either spur or rein.

Suddenly Balta's lance whirred through the air, and, true to its aim, rebounded from the shield which Arnald rapidly interposed, making the air quiver with its clash, and falling to earth in the midst of the spectators, who at first started back with cries of terror, but afterwards contended together for the glittering weapon with shouts and laughter.

Immediately afterwards Balta hurled his second spear. Slightly grazing the neck of Arnald's steed, it glanced harmlessly aside, and buried itself ell-deep in the turfy ground. Arnald flung his own weapon almost at the same moment; but Balta, impatient of his failure with the javelin, had wheeled his horse hastily around, in order to charge his antagonist with drawn sword; so that the animal, in the very act of turning, received in his forehead

the missile which had been intended for his master, and rearing wildly, fell over, carrying his rider with him. Frantic with agony, the steed struggled to its feet in a moment, and galloped furiously around the lists with the javelin in its forehead, dragging the dismounted knight—whose left spur had become inextricably entangled in the rich housings—hither and thither apparently without possibility of rescue. A loud cry of horror resounded along the ranks of the spectators, maddening still further the terrified and suffering horse.

But Arnald was out of the saddle in a moment.

“Holy Virgin! Balta!” he cried in dismay; and dauntlessly springing across the path of the raging animal, he seized the reins, and compelled it to stand still by a grasp to which wrath and anxiety lent the strength of a lion. The frantic steed attempted to strike Arnald both with hoofs and teeth, but the latter neither shrank nor swerved aside, and at length gave the animal an angry stroke on the bit, so that it fell a second time, but fortunately not against Balta. And now a crowd of grooms and pages ran to their assistance; Balta was easily extricated from the housings, and the foaming beast led out of the lists.

Somewhat pale from his fall and his peril of death, but friendly and composed as ever, Balta advanced to Arnald, stretching out his hand and saying, “Thou hast merited thy victory by right brotherly conduct, thou noble hero. My claim on the star-jewel is yielded to thine.”

He had exerted himself to speak as loudly as possible; and now the victory of Arnald was announced by the joyous strains of lute and clarion, while many a wreath woven of the earliest spring-flowers was thrown by fair hands to the valiant minstrel-warrior.

“God speed you on your last encounter!” said Balta, smiling, as he went, somewhat exhausted, out of the lists.

Fresh and joyous, Gryba sprang within the barriers, gallantly saluting the Queen Soleyma, and greeting his antagonist with friendly warmth; and the circling course,

swift as the wind, began again. But this time, the irrepressible ardour of the Moorish knight, the hopeful impatience for victory of the Provençal warrior, allowed no deliberation. With lightning-speed, yet with fearful certainty of aim, each hurled in rapid succession his two javelins. Blood streamed from Gryba's head and side, and from Arnald's right shoulder. The latter unsheathed his good sword, but felt his arm grow heavy and feeble from the streaming wound. "Methinks I must needs die," said he within himself; "for without the star-jewel I will never return."

Then Gryba swung himself out of the saddle, and cried, "Forward to the fight, brave Maraviglia! Sword to sword and arm to arm, and leave we our horses loose!"

With effort, but with knightly grace, Arnald dismounted, cast his shield upon his shoulder, and grasping his sword with both hands, that he might swing it aloft with the more terrible effect, charged furiously against Gryba.

Meanwhile the Moorish warrior had also suffered his light shield to glide back along its purple string, but with a widely different object. For, with his left arm he parried Arnald's shattering sword-stroke, whereat, indeed, the scales of his golden panoply sprang asunder, but neither sleeve nor skin was pierced, and then in a moment he had rushed within the guard of his adversary, grasped him around the waist with both arms—letting his sword hang by its strap from his wrist—and with great strength and skill hurled him to the ground. Kneeling upon his breast, he cried, "Brave Maraviglia, the star-jewel is mine!"

"My life, perhaps," cried Arnald, in answer, "but the star-jewel neither now or ever, while breath is left me!"

Gryba strove to wring the sword-hilt out of his grasp. Arnald loosed the hold of his left hand thereon, desperately struggling to clench it with the fingers of the wounded right; then drawing forth with his free hand the dagger of Alearda, in a moment the small and glit-

tering weapon was plunged into Gryba's arm, just where the golden plates had previously been hewn asunder, and the stroke was followed by a gurgling torrent of blood.

Startled by the sudden pain, the Moorish warrior relaxed his hold, and with the last effort of expiring strength the troubadour extricated himself; and now the two heroes stood for a moment opposite to each other, leaning on their swords, pale, bleeding, and breathless. A wondering and sorrowful silence filled the whole assembly.

Arnald was the first who attempted to recover himself for a new attack. He did indeed succeed in lifting his sword with both hands, though by a great and visible effort; and with noble demeanour he advanced ready for battle. But after he had made a few steps forward he was constrained to halt, and once more to plant his sword in the earth, supporting himself with difficulty by resting his clasped hands on the hilt. Gryba, on the other hand, could not, with all his efforts, succeed in standing without his sustaining weapon. He became paler and paler every moment, as the blood flowed more and more rapidly from his wounds.

Then the three aged Moorish princes advanced into the lists, and commanded, by virtue of their knightly office as judges of the field, that the combat should cease for the present, and should not be renewed till both the noble warriors should be entirely healed of their wounds. The esquires now approached to lead the two bleeding knights out of the area; but Arnald, with authoritative earnestness, signed to those on his side to stand back; and as soon as Gryba observed the gesture, he exerted the little remnant of his strength, and followed the example of his friend.

“That the battle is ended for to-day,” said Arnald, speaking as loudly and distinctly as he possibly could, “good! I must needs be content to submit. But that after our complete recovery, we should renew and finish the combat which we have here begun—nay, dear Gryba,

thou must thyself be conscions that must not be. I have waited long enough for this encounter; I neither can nor will depart hence leaving the issue uncertain. See, Gryba; from this moment I bid thee defiance concerning the star-jewel. Wherever it may be, day or night, secretly or openly, I will take it away from thee; and thou knowest I am acquainted with the place of its concealment. Hide it, then—I counsel thee in all friendship—hide it elsewhere; yet wheresoever thou mayest place it, I will seek it out and make myself master of it, or else lie dead upon the spot.”

“God forbid the last!” said Gryba affectionately, as he gradually sank, in graceful exhanstion, upon the battle-field. But a moment afterwards he upraised himself gladly and proudly, adding, “But I am still as far from having received my death-wound, as thou art from having won the star-jewel. From its present abode it shall not stir, for terrible are the sentinels—thou hast seen them thyself, Maraviglia—who keep watch beside the chamber. Moreover, I will dwell for the future in the lower apartments of the castle; and herewith, dear brother, I cheerfully accept thy defiance.”

The troubadour turned towards him with effort, and their hands met in the clasp of friendship. Then they signed to their esquires, who approached with litters, and carried the two combatants out of the lists. The ladies, full of wonder, departed from their seats; the crowd dispersed, whispering and astonished; and Soleyma, very pale and with tears in her eyes, withdrew to her enchanted chateau of pleasaunce.

Chapter Thirteenth.

IN Balta's turret Arnald took up his abode for the present; and here he was attacked by a fever of terrific violence

the result of his wounds. Sometimes he imagined that he was fighting for the star-jewel; sometimes he supposed himself to be that ancestor of his line who lay beneath his bleeding horse in the midst of the foe; and often did he rend asunder his bandages by the vehemence of his movements. Then would the burning blood burst forth in torrents, purpling the white coverings of the couch, till the sufferer sank back in the languor of total exhaustion; and not till then did his wonted smile of benignity visit his pale lips.

“Two more such paroxysms,” said the physician at last, “and we must bury the noble troubadour beneath the spring-flowers of our country.”

Balta, who sat day and night, like a guardian angel, beside his couch, but who had never yet succeeded in checking those deadly outbursts of fever and frenzy, now mused with tearful eyes, but with his wonted calm collectedness of spirit, on some means of deliverance for his friend. It seemed as though he had discovered what he sought; for he took Arnald's lute from the wall with a cheerful smile, and then resumed his seat by the sick man, over whom the impatience of fever had once more begun to obtain the mastery. Balta now played the melody of that song to autumn which Maraviglia had composed, in the castle-garden, on the memorable day on which he received the dagger from Alearda. The troubadour listened: the wild glow of his eyes seemed to abate and soften. Then Balta sang with harmonious voice the words of the melody, and Arnald sank back upon his pillows with a smile, and slept peacefully. As night approached, however, he sprang up again, and once more did the black wings of wild fantasies hover above him; but scarcely had Balta touched the strings, when he became calm and docile. Yes; gazing forth through the open window upon the skies of the clear night, the sufferer recognised at once the constellation of Alearda, looked upwards with a sweet and satisfied smile, and once more enjoyed a soft and healing slumber.

Afterwards, as often as he became excited, it was only necessary for Balta to whisper the name, "Alearda!" and all was calmness and peace.

Thus he recovered day by day. It is true that his right arm still continued somewhat feeble and heavy; but the clear and kindly radiance of his spirit, and the warm but gentle flow of his feelings, completely resumed their former cheerful consciousness.

The most favourable accounts were received of Gryba's progress. He was already so far recovered that he was able to ride forth among the woods on his war-horse of sunny hue. Yet he only allowed himself this enjoyment during the hours of morning twilight, because it was only at that season that he believed the star-jewel to be secure from Arnald, by reason of the spectral warders who then guarded the entrance of the chamber. Moreover, day and night the castle was closed and guarded with the most heedful care; so that, to all appearance, the highest combination of skill and daring would not avail to attain the object of the troubadour's wishes.

One day a shepherd delivered to the knight Balta a tablet inscribed with the following rhymes addressed by Gryba to Maraviglia:—

In closer siege than erst Marseilles,
Girt by King Charles's forces, lay—
My pleasures die, my spirit fails,
And in my towers I waste away.

Her child benignant Nature calls;
I pine for fount, and field, and dell;
Yet, lo! in these accursed walls
I stay, a lonely sentinel.

While lovely maids, in graceful glee,
Lead the gay dance along the plain,
I wait, my valiant foe, for thee;
But pleasure waits for me in vain.

And must I thus, in youth's bright days,
 Fly from bliss, and love, and hope,—
 Quit the fields of fame and praise,
 Like some white-haired misanthrope ?

Free beneath the free blue sky,
 Let me, let me stand once more !
 Let me conquer, bleed, or die ;
 But quickly, gentle troubadour.

“Thou shalt have thy will, my dearest friend !” said Arnald, as he rose with a smile from his couch ; and girding himself with Alearda's dagger,—for his wounded arm was not yet capable of wielding the sword,—called to his attendant to saddle two mules, one for himself and one for his master. Meantime he gazed forth upon the mild transparency of the evening skies with unwonted cheerfulness.

“Arnald, Arnald !” cried the astonished Balta, “in God's name, what meanest thou ?”

“I mean to deliver my friend and myself at once,” answered Maraviglia. “I hope to reach his castle by the hour of morning twilight ; and I pray thee to have ready for me, by noonday to-morrow, a right strengthening repast, graced with thy choicest wine ; for by that hour I shall certainly have returned to thee with the star-jewel.”

“Thou wilt !” began Balta ; but the words froze in horror on his lips. Nevertheless he added, “But at least suffer me to bear thee company.”

“Wherefore should I do so, beloved youth ? I must certainly enter the castle alone ; for how could I presume to present myself before my lady, with the jewel as a trophy, if any other living man had aided me to achieve it ?”

“And Crescentius ? And the bloody Goth-king, Rodrigo ? And all those fearful companies of the long-time dead—heroes, knights, and ladies ? Arnald, thou art not yet wholly recovered. What if the frenzy of fever should overpower thee anew ?”

“Dear Balta, I carry with me that angel-name by

whose sweet sound thou wert wont so tenderly to soothe and to heal me. And, Balta, there lives in my heart another and a higher name—”

“A higher name than Alearda?”

“A name before which both Alearda and I ever do reverence in our spirits, and which unites for eternity both us and all who seek and strive for the right.”

“Arnald, God and his prophet are my witnesses that I too seek and strive for the right. Wherefore, then, do I not carry this name in my heart?”

“Thou dost in truth bear it in thy heart, my friend; and thou shalt one day learn to utter it!”

Balta bowed his head in deep reverence which he himself scarcely comprehended. Meantime the esquire had led forth the mules. Arnald kissed the brow of Balta, and set forth upon his singular journey, somewhat graver than he had been, but not on that account the less glad of heart.

Chapter Fourteenth.

THE bright Wain and the constellation of Alearda were already dipping behind the mountains; the morning mists were curling upward from the valleys; there was silence in the woods, for the choral band of birds had not as yet awakened, and hawk and vulture, wearied with their nocturnal wanderings after their prey, had dropped into their morning slumbers; the stag and the roe, too, had not begun the joyous sports of the day. Then Arnald bade his esquire remain quiet with the mules amid the thickets, and ascended slowly to Gryba's mysterious castle, concealing himself behind the trunks of the thickly-growing pine-trees. He had not proceeded far when he heard the gates of the castle opened, and the sound of the drawbridge, clashing as it turned upon its hinges, speedily followed.

Then was heard the voice of Gryba's hunting-horn, joyously calling to the forest-echoes: the wild deer sprang startled from their couches, and at no great distance from Arnald the young Moorish hero, fearless of any peril to his castle, and looking neither to right nor left, vaulted gaily down the grassy declivity. Arnald cautiously approached the building. Within was heard a wondrous sound of jubilee and tumult, so that at first the troubadour supposed that the spectral hosts of the castle were holding special holyday. But he soon perceived that the noise proceeded from Gryba's merry squires and servants, who were readily permitted by their light-hearted lord to enjoy, like himself, the freshness of life for this one hour, trusting entirely to the horrors of the spirit-world for the defence of the fortress. Gaudily attired, and discoursing with each other in gladsome songs, like so many larks, the gay multitude of horsemen and pedestrians rushed confusedly down the mountain-side, filling the air with dust, and dispersing in various directions amid the shadows of the pine-trees. Thoughtful and weary, the sable seneschal gazed a while after the young and merry troop, and then withdrew to his couch, leaving the gates open and the drawbridge down to await their return.

But as silence sank down upon the lower parts of the castle, which were the ordinary abode of the household, above in the uninhabited chambers every thing seemed to become alive. Lights glanced to and fro along the casements, and there began the sound of strange unearthly melodies; ay, from time to time bearded countenances, of wondrously gloomy aspect, looked forth through the windows, sometimes as if in invitation, sometimes sternly and menacingly. Arnald felt indeed that here was no place for a gladsome-hearted and poetic child of man; but quite as strongly did he feel that his vocation in the service of the lofty ladye Alearda would enable him to look the whole world of spirits unconcernedly in the face. And so he strode across the drawbridge, and passed beneath the

vaulted doorway, and before long the knightly spur of gold that adorned his heel clashed against the steps which ascended to the mysterious hall of spirits. The doors sprang open at the first light touch of the solitary wanderer. Long, dim, and full of twilight, the chambers stretched out before him; throughout the whole space there seemed a dusky light, and a somewhat like a mist-cloud of the morning; but when Arnald looked more closely he perceived that the place was thronged with shapes, and truly shapes of such a sort that he could not turn his eyes away from them; for, in spite of their spectral nature, their aspect was dignified and full of authority, or graceful and touching in a strange and inexplicable manner.

At the head of the board sat King Rodrigo—wild and full of trouble, like the olden times wherein he lived, but wearing a terrible youthfulness upon his long-dead features, which were full of melancholy enthusiasm. Beside him, very pale and very beautiful, like the autumnal moon at midnight, his spouse and queen Egilona, whose truth and love he betrayed, looked forth from her long and waving mourning garments; every time that she sighed, there bloomed a white lily on her bosom, and she dropped a tear thereon, and the lily became a faint and softly-glimmering light, which passed across the face of King Rodrigo with a lustre so soothing that it almost seemed as though he began to smile. But then a woman with glowing countenance, and wide and wildly-streaming tresses, looked over the shoulder of the slain hero—it was the wicked Cava, for whom he had conceived a frantic passion, and whose vengeance caused his own destruction and the overthrow of his Gothic kingdom; and then the wine in his goblet was turned into blood, and, bubbling upwards, it stained his brow with a red and glowing spot, just in the place where he had been stricken by the death-wound; and then his lips were contorted with a grim and ghastly laugh. Arnald, with reeling and well-nigh frenzied brain, turned away his face and trembled. But his eye fell upon Alear-

da's dagger, which glittered at his waist, and thereat courage and cloudless confidence returned to his heart. "I am here in the name of Alearda, my lofty ladye," cried he aloud; and the spectral company started and huddled themselves together, while a low and angry mutter ran along their ranks. But he, no longer fearing any thing, strode with resounding tread past that terrible banquet-table, through the long lines of dusky chambers, even to the entrance of the last momentous apartment. It was not till he had advanced some way that he perceived a form preceding him, and occasionally looking back as if to observe his progress. He could not, however, recognise the face: it was not Gryba—could it be the black seneschal? Arnald grasped his dagger-hilt with all the strength that was left in his wounded arm, and prepared himself for a desperate encounter. But as he approached the curtain he became aware that no earthly weapons were needed here. The Unknown stood still before the entrance, and, turning towards Arnald, lifted up its long, wan, corpse-like finger as if in menace, and sternly shook its pale head:—it was the dead Crescentius! With unshaken spirit Arnald elevated the dagger of Alearda, so that the cross-shaped weapon gleamed in the eyes of the ghost, and said slowly and solemnly, "By this holy sign I adjure thee that thou depart from hence and give me passage!" With a low wailing cry the shadowy figure melted into air.

The minstrel entered the chamber. One slight stroke of the dagger's sharp and well-hardened edge severed the fastenings of the casket, and the sparkling gems of the constellation Alearda greeted the eyes of the happy adventurer. Reverently he took it in his hands. He would gladly have pressed it to his lips; but he presumed not to do so, for he held that, which had been touched by the hand of Alearda, far too high and holy for such a profanation. As he returned through the halls with his trophy, he perceived that a few of the spectral figures in the banquet-

chamber were still in motion ; but even these also began —like lights which had burned themselves out— to disappear in the approaching morning. Unopposed he passed through the castle-doorway, and went forth into the fresh and pleasant fragrance of early dawn.

Chapter Fifteenth.

ONCE more did Gryba's sonorous hunting-horn resound through the forest, and in a moment afterwards the young Moor himself came flying down the valley on his fleet horse in the midst of his glittering retinue. Not one of the party perceived the troubadour, who, resolved to fight to the last gasp, had stationed himself behind a cluster of pines, having the jewel hidden in his bosom, and his drawn dagger in his hand.

The whole train now gathered around the knight, who, halting in front of the castle, wound a few low and sustained notes upon his horn, which sounded like the opening of some strain of reluctant farewell, and afterwards sang the following words :—

Farewell to mirth and sport !
 Oh, merry chase, farewell !
 Back to his gloomy fort
 Returns the sentinel ;
 And there by night and day
 He sighs his heart away.
 A sound of soft lament
 Floats round each battlement:
 For fame the captive sighs—
 For the love of ladies' eyes—
 For the dance's mazy glee—
 For the lost festivity.

When morning o'er the land
 In shadowy twilight dawns,

MINSTREL LOVE.

Forth sweeps the joyous hand
O'er fields, and woods, and lawn ;
Then on the shield so round
The clashing sword may sound ;
Then tinkling casements rise,
And forth peep lovely eyes ;
While for our castle-guard
A spectral host keeps ward.

Again he sounded a few suppressed notes, and at this signal his troop slowly defiled past him through the doorway ; Gryba himself lingered behind them for a moment, waved his hand towards the valleys, as a parting salutation, with a melancholy smile, and then turned his horse's head.

But it seemed to Sir Arnald of Maraviglia as though it were an unknighthly action thus to lurk behind the trees, and steal away unobserved with his victorious trophy, almost like a fugitive or a midnight robber. He rapidly forced a passage through the branches, holding the glittering jewel in one hand and the gleaming dagger in the other, and sang these words :—

Up, up, my Gryba, to the fight !
For thee there waits a noble knight ;
He hath passed the halls of the wild pale dead,
Saved from frenzy and from dread
By the sun which is his light.

Up, Gryba, up ! As then she shone,
Lo, still she shines my heart upon !
If dead beneath thy sword I lie,
Her willing sacrifice I die—
The turf mine altar-stone !

In a moment Gryba was out of the saddle, and swinging his sabre over his head, he advanced solemnly towards the challenger. The latter having once more thrust the jewel into his bosom, wrapped his mantle defensively around

his left arm, in expectation of Gryba's sabre-stroke, and awaited the favourable moment, when, keeping his dagger in readiness to plunge into his antagonist's side, he might venture on the attack.

But as Gryba came nearer, he dropped the point of his crescent-shaped falchion, and gazed into Arnald's eyes with all the brightness of his open and kindly smile. At length he said, "No, thou knightly minstrel, the jewel is thine, by all rights both human and divine. I confess myself conquered!"

Chapter Sixteenth.

OH, that I might invite you to that gay and gladsome feast which the three friends now held together in Balta's turret, rejoicing that the tempest was past! It is true that the loving Three could scarcely indulge in the same intercourse of joyous confidence, should a stranger join himself to their company; nevertheless, dear reader, thou mayest take to thyself the wings of the spirit, and look down unseen through gilded covers, salvers, and goblets; and I assure thee that in taking wings thyself, thou givest them also to thy chronicler.

During the gay and varied discourse, Balta lifted the lute from its place, and as he now began gently dallying with its strings, both his friends became silent, and listened to him attentively, while he half sang, half spoke the following words:

A kiss from the lips of Soleyma,
A promised kiss,
Yet scarce expected;
For this, O Gryba, O my brother Gryba,
We sought the bloody field!
And who shall dare to marvel

That for a meed of such enchanting sweetness
 We have contended long,
 In high and knightly deeds?
 A fugitive and lightly-passing kiss
 Still is a recompense, and still is bliss!

He suddenly changed the measure of his song, and sang in the following manner, accompanying himself by slow and solemn chords:

Higher does the knight aspire
 Who but seeks his lady's praise;
 Dream, and hope, and vain desire,
 Are as nothing in his gaze.

But to see her face he seeks;
 If he seek that boon in vain,
 Still the tears that dew his cheeks
 Shall her holy light retain.

Not like drops of grief or sin,
 But the rainbow's sport they are;
 And the patient knight shall win
 Crowns of fame, in song and war.

Noble knight, and minstrel vowed
 To a ladye pure and high,
 Do the darkness and the cloud
 Ever sweep across thy sky?

Though the depth of many a woe
 Hides within thy shadowed eyes,
 Yet those bitter griefs, I know,
 Part thee not from holy joys.

Suffer us to see her face,
 Lady of such stainless name;
 She who grants her minstrel grace
 Dearer even than knightly fame!

"Ah, if I could ever hope for permission to behold

that face!" cried Gryba, with a half-melancholy smile. "But I know well," he added, "the Christian dames are haughty, and deign not to look upon a poor Moorish cavalier."

"Have I so ill described Alearda, that you can name her and haughtiness in the same breath?" answered Arnald. "Verily, indeed, the inborn high-heartedness of pure womanhood dwells in her lofty spirit, after a loftier and more subduing fashion than I have ever beheld in another, and she is moreover joyous in the consciousness of her noble race, and rejoices yet more in that higher nobility which belongs to all the true confessors of Christ's doctrine. But who can say that she has ever turned away from the meanest of her vassals who sought aid from her, trusting to her benign authority, or who implored the comfort and benediction of her gentle words? Whether decorum and the rule of the Church will permit a Moorish knight to shew himself at the court of my ladye, I know not. She herself, and my instructor, the pious Altarhol, must decide that question. But take confidence, dear friends, and hear me company: besides, Gryba, thou must needs come to fetch thy noble horse Pontifer, in case thou winnest him of me in combat."

"Ay, too true; yet another combat against thee!" replied Gryba, looking on the ground with unwonted seriousness.

"Trouble not yourselves on that account, noble warriors," cried the smiling Balta; "God has once already vouchsafed us His good help, and there will be no combat à l'outrance concerning Pontifer."

"Methinks Balta can be extremely volatile on occasion," exclaimed Gryba, in astonishment.

"And methinks Gryba can be marvellously serious on occasion," replied Balta; "almost like other reasonable beings."

Hereat they all began to laugh heartily, and it was very cheerfully decided that they should undertake to-

gether the expedition to Provence, and take leave of Queen Soleyma on that very day. As soon as the repast was finished, the three knights mounted three beautiful and fleet mules, and rode with all speed to the castle of the wondrous heathen princess.

Chapter Seventeenth.

SERIOUS and severe, yet with a strange smile playing upon her lips, Soleyma listened to the petition of the friends.

“Let every one seek his own place,” said she, after a while; “let every one obey his own heart. I have before expressed my opinion to you on such matters; and if, in truth, this fair cold Christian lady so magnetically attracts you—away, sir knights, to the sea, and fill your sails with the first morning breeze.”

“Such is exactly our intention, lady,” replied Arnald, with grave courtesy.

“It is like you,” replied she, smiling; “and it suits well with thee, artist Balta. But as for thee, gay and light-hearted Gryba, what thy feelings will be among all those wise and pious persons, Allah and his prophet alone can tell.”

“For yourself, lady,” answered Arnald, “I maintain truly such reverence as belongs of right to your sex, your noble race, and your marvellous beauty. But for your false gods I have no feeling that approaches to reverence. Allah and Mahomet, and by whatever other name ye call your divinities, can, in truth, foretell nothing concerning the bright and happy days which await my dear Gryba in Provence.”

“Audacious Christian!”

“Not audacious, hut free; as becomes one who was

born noble, and who has been since set free for eternity by his gracious Saviour."

At these words Queen Soleyma turned angrily towards her retinue, among whom there stood by chance a mighty heathen priest, who cried aloud that Mahomet had been blasphemed beneath her roof, and that the rash criminal was worthy of death. Arnald stood in the midst, firm and courageous, with his unsheathed dagger in his hand. "To die for Alearda I have ever deemed an honour beyond my hopes," said he within himself; "shall I now be so far exalted as to be deemed worthy to shed my blood for Him whose blood was shed for Alearda, for me, for the whole world? I am ready, Lord."

Yet this illustrious doom was not reserved for him; for Gryba and Balta placed themselves before their friend, and vowed death and destruction to every man who should presume to advance but a single step. Soleyma also rebuked the heathen priest, and drove from her presence, with threats and frowns, all those who had upheld him; then she turned towards the three knights, with composed and smiling dignity, and thus addressed them:

"Reserve your heroism, your holy self-renunciation, and whatever other praiseworthy virtues your bootless zeal was desirous of displaying, for some more pressing need than the present; you see that you are menaced by no danger here; Heaven prosper your journey! For Balta—with his wondrous designs of flower and foliage, and shapes of men and animals—he will probably take root in Christian soil; for Gryba, I expect soon to see him return; and, as for thee, Arnald, thou art a noble knight, a captivating minstrel, an honourable man; but thou mightest be somewhat more discreet than thou art. And so, a fair good night to all!"

Chapter Eighteenth.

BLESSED art Thou
 Eternally,
 Lord of the angel-hosts and upper sky ;
 Whose radiant brow
 Laid glory by,
 For us vile men to suffer, bleed, and die !

Blessed art thou,
 O stainless maid,
 Who didst bring forth on earth the Babe divine
 Who reignest now,
 Redeemed, repaid,
 At God's right hand, the Son's own glory thine !

Blessed are ye
 Eternally,
 By principdoms, dominations, powers, and thrones ;
 Oh, let us too,
 In service due,
 Swell the loud chorus with our feeble tones !

This hymn was sung, in pursuance of an ancient custom, by the pious Altarbol and his monks, before a marble statue of the Holy Virgin, which stood upon the sea-coast. The peasantry having gathered together from all sides, had garlanded that revered image with the fairest blossoms of flowery Provence, and now, clad in their Sunday attire, they stood around, to pay their homage to it, with uncovered heads and folded hands. The holy sounds were wafted tranquilly across the sunny and sparkling waters, and the fulness of their melody, and even some half-distinguished words of the psalm, reached to the bark wherein our three friends were sailing towards the shore.

“ Oh, what a wonderful and mysterious strain ! ” said Balta. “ Little can I distinguish, still less can I under-

stand ; yet there is a voice in my heart telling me that it contains the secret balm of comfort for my whole life. Maraviglia, my dear master, I thank thee for bringing me to these shores."

Weeping for joy, he fell upon the neck of Arnald, who answered him with a benignant smile. "Every virtuous heathen has listened to the unintelligible accents of that inward voice ; and thou, above all, my dear and true-hearted Balta !"

Meanwhile the bark glided softly upon the shores of that bay, all bright with the verdure of early spring. The three friends sprang to land, and advanced, arm in arm, discoursing together of pleasant matters, to join the festival ; which, after the solemnisation of divine service, was concluded by a merry dance among the peasantry.

The Moorish costume of the two strangers at first somewhat startled the crowd ; but in a moment they recognised the troubadour, Arnald of Maraviglia, and hastened to welcome the Three, as though all were dear and long-expected guests. Wine, flowers, and fruits were offered in abundance on every side ; and the facility wherewith Balta and Gryba spake the Provençal tongue greatly increased the joy and satisfaction occasioned by their arrival.

But Altarbol stood serious and thoughtful at the head of his monks, and for a long while contemplated in silence the joyous throng, from which Arnald found it impossible to extricate himself, in order to salute, as he desired, his friend and instructor. He was at last summoned from the crowd by a grave sign from Altarbol. Arnald stood before his friend, his cheeks glistening with joyful tears ; out the abbot laid his finger on his lips to impose silence, and led the minstrel-warrior apart from the shouting multitude. Then began the following dialogue.

"Arnald of Maraviglia, thou hast returned home ; but *how* hast thou returned ?"

"As I went forth, venerable father. I return a faithful

and believing Christian ; but I have passed through manifold trials, and I am come back to you, if I may so hope, a better, or at least, a less feeble man."

"Recount to me thy trials, my beloved son !"

And Arnald did according to the desire of his venerable friend ; neither concealing the smallest particular, nor in any manner embellishing it, as he was sometimes wont to do when discoursing with ordinary men, inconsiderately enough, but without any intention of deceiving. Altarbol testified much contentment at the history. "Yea, verily," said he, "thou hast returned as thou wentest forth, only better. For after these, thy spiritual combats, methinks the august errors of Arnold of Brescia can have no further power on thy soul ; still less the necromancy of Crescencius. But answer me yet further, whence and who are these two Moorish cavaliers?"

On this subject also, Arnald gave him full information, and concluded by demanding whether he might venture to present his friends to Alearda.

"My son," replied Altarbol, "I know not what the customs of a court may enjoin, nor what they may prohibit. Concerning this thou must inquire of the ladye herself. But I know that our God suffers His beautiful sun to shine even upon thorns and thistles ; and yonder Moorish warriors, methinks, deserve no such name ; but may rather be compared to fair and goodly fruit-trees, which yet lack grafting and cultivation. Therefore, if the countess both can and will permit it, thou mayest fearlessly conduct thy friends into her heavenly presence."

Chapter Nineteenth.

AT this moment a loud and angry shout from the neighbouring woods, attracted all eyes to the quarter whence it proceeded. With arrowy swiftness, a white horse darted

out of the shades, hearing a tall rider of almost gigantic proportions, who was vainly endeavouring to master it by the utmost exertion of his strength and skill, chiding it meanwhile with loud and vehement words. But the steed carried him backwards and forwards in a wild irregular gallop; and finding that it could not obtain its free will and do exactly as it listed, it began to vault and bound aloft with such wondrous power and rapidity, that it was almost like a wheeling and whirling flash of light to look upon; and finally it tossed the rider from the saddle to a great distance upon the green turf.

“Thunder and lightning! Such a mishap has not befallen me since the days of my boyhood!” cried the fallen man, sitting upright on the ground, and looking around him in great astonishment. Arnald recognised the voice and countenance of the valiant Misura; and ran hastily to him, fearing that he might have sustained some injury. But he was on his feet in a moment; and straining the troubadour’s hand in his powerful grasp, according to his custom, he cried, “Welcome home, my friend! But tell me now, is your white Arab gone clean mad? Some while ago I went to visit you, and finding that you had departed, I bethought me that one brave knight could render no better nor more brotherly service to another, than the nurture and care of his horse during his absence. Who knew whether your esquire would rightly comprehend the management of the goodly beast, and whether he might not at last give it a sprained shoulder? So I caused the barb to be saddled for myself, and I exercised it daily. Verily it was already somewhat marred by ill riding; it pressed against the thigh, and champed the bit; for your esquire has a hard hand. But this was speedily cured, and I took great delight in the animal. Now methought I would ride him a little way upon the beach; ’twould be a pleasant excursion, and I could cause him to bathe in the sea-water. So far so good,—but as soon as he came in sight of the meadow here, clean mad, I tell you—clean mad—and at

last he has unseated me. Neither you nor I would have believed it, if we had heard it; but lo! we have seen it with our own eyes."

While the smiling Arnald listened to his doughty comrade, the white Arah, neighing for joy, had galloped up to Gryba, and now caressed him in the most touching manner, resting its slender neck upon the shoulder of the knight, who, stroking its mane, murmured from time to time, in pleased emotion, "Ah, Pontifer! Ah, mine own dear Pontifer!"

But Arnald stepped forward with a grave and somewhat severe countenance, saying, "Your pardon, my dear Gryba; we have agreed to regard this matter as an affair of honour; and, for the present, Pontifer is mine." Gryba bent his head in sorrowful acquiescence, and Arnald led the horse away from him. He had prepared himself to encounter opposition from the loyal animal; but it recognised its second master, and patiently suffered him to mount on its back, only casting one regretful glance on Gryba.

Scarcely, however, had Arnald spurred the horse once or twice around the meadow, proving thereby his knightly authority over it, when he sprang from the saddle. Tears were glistening in his eyes as he patted the steed's graceful head, and said, "No, loyal Pontifer, thou art Gryba's again. I bestow thee on him. It were truly sin to part thee from him." And Pontifer was no sooner free than he bounded joyfully to Gryba, and again laid his head on his master's breast.

Arnald then explained to the brave Messire Misura how it stood between Gryba and himself, asking in conclusion: "I demand of thee, dear comrade, as an honourable umpire, is this matter rightly ended; or is there need that Gryba and I should yet again do battle concerning it?"

"'Twould be the act of a madman," cried Misura, impatiently; "and I will in no wise justify it,—on the truth of this judgment thou mayest stake body and soul."

“Well, well,” said Arnald, “be not wroth. In matters of honour one would rather do a great deal too much than the least jot too little.”

“You are right enough there,” replied Misura; “and I count myself honoured that you have chosen me as umpire. But confide in me. The affair is honourably ended; and if any man be of a contrary opinion, I will whisper somewhat in his ear in confidence.”

“Methinks ’twould be rather a shout than a whisper,” rejoined Arnald, laughing. “But now, Misura, help me to two good horses. I must, with all speed, to Castle Bisiers; and you will surely bear me company.”

“Good,” said Misura; “my servant waits yonder in the wood with two right noble chargers.”

He went to summon them. Gryba, mounted on his Pontifer, caused him to execute many lofty curvettes and graceful evolutions on the turf, to the delight of all beholders. The slender and spirited horse seemed created for the slender and spirited rider; and each understood the other at a word or a glance.

Suddenly Gryba threw himself from the saddle, clasped his arms about the neck of Maraviglia, and said, almost with tears, “Ah, my Arnald; thou art so kind, thou art so unspeakably kind!” And Pontifer, on the other side of the troubadour, seemed to seek to express the same sentiment by his mute caresses.

Chapter Twentieth.

WHEN Arnald and Misura came in sight of Castle Bisiers, the latter observed, “Truly, it will be a pleasure to me once more to act as your faithful herald. You will suffer me to ride on in advance, and announce your approach?”

“With pleasure, brave companion in arms. Only blow not too mighty a blast on your hunting-horn, as you are

wont commonly to do, lest the people within should fancy that wars and tumults have broken loose from all the ends of the earth."

"Humph," returned Misura; "'tis only the weak-minded who are so ready to fancy such things. There is no need to be so cautious with the gallant vicomte and the lofty ladye Alearda. Yet set your heart at ease. I know how to wake pleasant and gentle strains as well as another." And in truth, as he ascended the easy slope, he drew from his hunting-horn the most joyous and captivating sounds.

As Arnald rode after him alone, and beheld the flowery valleys of his liberated fatherland all sparkling in the clear radiance of spring, the shepherds playing on their pipes in cheerful security, the peaceful multitude of fleecy herds wandering around, the peasants ploughing and sowing the fields to the music of their own merry songs—ah, and as he felt within his bosom the restored and conquered jewel—his soul arose in deep though silent thankfulness to Him who had rained upon his earthly life such rich and abundant blessings.

Some time had passed unconsciously in such thoughts as these, and he was already close to Castle Bisiers, when he heard once more the sound of Misura's joyous horn; and the faithful herald, springing forth to meet him from a thicket of olives, announced that Alearda and the vicomte were ready to give him glad reception and to hear his intelligence. The two comrades now rode merrily through the castle-gateway.

Surrounded by their train, all radiant with noble pomp and tranquil dignity, Alearda and the vicomte awaited the knightly troubadour in the great hall of the castle. The folding-doors were opened, and Arnald of Maraviglia entered.

He dropped on one knee before his ladye, and said, as he presented to her the star-jewel, reposing upon a cushion of purple silk,—“Ladye, deign to receive graciously the

ornament which was snatched from you by heathen force and borne to distant lands, from the hand of a minstrel who desires, in humble reverence, to dedicate to you not merely the flower of his songs but the whole of his life."

She took the jewel with a gracious inclination of the head, fastened it to her girdle, and answered, "You have acquitted yourself nobly, sir knight; but not more so than I have ever been justified in expecting from you."

"And blessings on the bright hour when I was permitted to invest you with the order of knighthood!" added the vicomte, stretching out his hand to the minstrel.

Then Arnald arose, and inquired whether his ladye would permit him to present to her the two noble Moorish warriors from whom he had obtained the star-jewel.

Slightly bending her beautiful head, Alearda turned to the vicomte. "It belongs to my honoured lord and husband to decide such a question," said she.

"Ladye," said the vicomte, "it is no new or strange thing in our Christian realms that we should suffer heathen cavaliers, of noble race and qualities, to take part in our festivals and in our warlike exercises. Hospitality is a virtue most pleasing in the eyes of our God, and one which has belonged to all heroes of right noble race, even from the days of their infancy. Moreover, here is a means whereby many a generous spirit may be won to the only true doctrine. Therefore, if you appeal to me, I joyfully accede to the proposal of our valiant friend—provided always, that you shrink not from entertaining in Castle Bisiers guests of so new and strange a kind."

"It can never be needful to shrink from those who are brought to us by a true-hearted minstrel and warrior," replied Alearda; and herewith she charged Arnald to cause Gryba and Balta to be invited to her presence. Misura undertook the embassy; and Arnald was entreated to pass the remainder of that day at Castle Bisiers.

When evening approached, and the festive pleasures died away after all kinds of melody, and song, and diver-

sion, he returned silently and unobserved to the ruins of Castle Maraviglia. He felt his whole heart unusually joyful and pure within him; and he swept the strings of his lute, and sang the following words:—

Oh, service pure, unchidden!
 If thou be not forbidden,
 If thou by angel-beauty
 Be graced and thanked as dnty,
 In the glad minstrel's bosom
 A paradise shall blossom;
 And to his heart is given
 A bright foretaste of heaven!

Yet the fallen dwelling of his fathers arose before him in the starlight, solemn and lonely. His own small and rustic abode seemed dark and narrow, as it received him within its precincts; nor could the hearty welcome of the esquire, and the joyous greetings of the children and their parents, avail to make him forget that he was not, in the full sense of the words, *at home*, either here or any where else on the face of the wide world. "Homeless!" whispered he to himself, as he hung up his lyre and his weapons in their accustomed place. Nevertheless, as he fell asleep, he said in his heart the following words right cheerfully:—

Nay, how should causeless plaints avail?
 To thee remains thy noble name,
 And the service of a noble dame;
 Thy soul is fresh for combats, bright with songs—
 To the wild lark, I ween, no home belongs,
 No sheltering roof-tree to the nightingale.

Chapter Twenty-first.

A FEW days afterwards, Gryba and Balta stood in the presence of Alearda. How were those two noble countenances irradiated by the lustre of so benignant a sun! Arnald felt his spirit refreshed and elevated by the sight.

Before long the graceful eloquence of Gryba was developed in a multitude of expressive phrases and pleasant histories. He seemed some wondrous child of the East, wafted into these more tranquil regions to tell of the tall flowers, the gorgeous birds, and the abundant forests of his own far land, with its aromatic breezes, and the strange but beautiful phenomena of its seas and its mountains. It was not that he spake much of the oriental countries, which, indeed, he had only passingly seen during one of the expeditions of his youth, but it was that every shape bodied forth by his burning words, though its local habitation were in the cloudy West or the cold regions of the icy North, seemed, nevertheless, to be invested with eastern splendour, and to breathe an eastern fragrance. And the whole was, moreover, shadowed by a veil of soft regret and tender melancholy, so that no ray dazzled, no figure became terrific, in its splendour.

One of the numerous band of troubadours whom the hospitality of the vicomte, together with his love of the gai science, had collected at Castle Bisiers, broke forth at last with the involuntary exclamation, "Oh, what a gifted minstrel must thou be, sir knight! Oh, that thou wouldst impart to us some of thy poems!"

"Gentle friend," returned Gryba, smiling, "that would be but a sorry jest both for thee and for the whole company. Believe me, the few rîymes which I have occasionally attempted to string together have always lacked the necessary merits; nay, to speak bluntly, have been

altogether worthless, being wont to transgress and defy all rules, yea, even the mildest, after a most blind and frantic manner."

And he began to pour forth anew his rich store of fable and metaphor, without, however, checking or disturbing the varying course of the conversation.

Balta, on the contrary, was even more silent than was his wont when introduced into an assemblage of strangers. His eyes alone, in their deep and eloquent light, expressed the holy gladness wherewith he was penetrated by the contemplation of Alearda. Yet did his gaze often stray from her face to that of a blessed and beautiful Madonna, wherewith the art of a distinguished painter had adorned the wall of the chamber.

Late in the evening, canopied by the full magnificence of the starry heavens, our three friends stood once more outside the castle: for Gryba and Balta had specially desired to share the rustic tenement of Arnald amid the ruins of Castle Maraviglia, during their sojourn in these parts.

They walked a while in silence side by side; till at length Gryba brake out, as it were, into a rapturous hymn concerning the glory which it had that day been given him to behold, and continued sometimes singing, sometimes speaking, without heeding the silence of his companions. As to Arnald, his spirit became hereat unspeakably joyful, like one who loves the spring with his whole heart, and who with the deepest delight beholds the buds, flowers, and leaves breaking forth in far-spread beauty over fields and valleys to celebrate the approach of his darling season. For even in the quiet spirit of Balta the troubadour could well detect the germs of bright and blessed thoughts, which arose and unfolded ever more and more as he contemplated the ladye.

When they had arrived at the farm, and Gryba had fallen asleep in the midst of his pleasant songs, tales, and jests, Balta arose from his couch, wrapped his mantle

around him, and said to Arnald, "Do as I do, dear master, and follow me to the ruins of Castle Maraviglia. I have many things to ask thee, which cannot be spoken of, save in solitude."

Arnald instantly complied with the entreaty of his youthful friend, and in a few moments they stood together alone amid the mossy piles of ruin, looking down upon the slumbering land.

"Hearken to me, my friend and master," began Balta; "it is not only that the sight of the noble countess has, as it were, kindled in my heart a light and source of exhaustless inspiration; it is, moreover, that I cannot but ask myself, 'Wherefore should I not paint that which I have seen?' Or, again, if the prohibition of the Prophet be indeed right, of what worth is the whole art of painting? Is it not, thus considered, only one vast and fearful sin, as indeed the whole of life itself would be, without the expectation of heaven, and the joyful reflection of its glories?"

"Thou art altogether right," answered Arnald. "An art to which the attempt to delineate such glorious purity were forbidden, would indeed be but a dark and damnable matter, presided over by the apostate powers."

"But the art of painting deserves not such a name!"

"God forbid, dear youth. But your Prophet may be detected in deep and fearful errors."

"Arnald, thou knowest him not. But assuredly a foreboding horror must fall even upon thee, when thou imaginest to thyself how, on the day of the resurrection of all things, the shapes which have been created by the rash painter's hand shall also arise and gather around their master, dumb, and stiff, and speechless, seeking for the souls which should inhabit their counterfeited bodies; while the hapless juggler, unable to satisfy them, is compelled to gaze for ever and for ever upon their pale and vacant faces."

He stopped, trembling, and Arnald also shuddered.

But, quickly composing himself, he replied: "Balta, my beloved youth, thou knowest well that it is not given to me to utter the clear words of wisdom. But it is manifested to my spirit, with brightness and vividness as of the sun, that this and all the errors of your Prophet spring from his unbelief in the possibility of divine love becoming human."

"What connexion has this with painting, dear master?"

"It has connexion with the whole realm of art; ay, it is its inmost and only true foundation, its life, its joy, its heart. And it speaks with special and unmistakeable distinctness in that wondrous branch of art which we denominate painting. Tell me, dear friend, what but this is the high, the unspeakable aim of all Christian artists, never attained, indeed, but unceasingly sought with manifold and holy efforts, serious even when they seem but sportive?"

"I can feel some such dim consciousness within me," cried Balta, his eyes sparkling with an expression of rapture.

"They seek," continued the minstrel—"they seek to represent by earthly means the Eternal, which, out of infinite goodness and compassion, was clothed with our mortality; this they seek to represent, or at the very least, by their faithful suggestions, to awaken in our hearts that divine love which has for us put on humanity."

"Divine love which has for us put on humanity!" echoed Balta. "Before now, some such words as these have passed through my spirit like the solemn sound of a harp. How went that beautiful hymn which Altarbol sang on the sea-shore?"

' Blessed are ye
Eternally—
For us vile men to suffer, bleed, and die.
Blessed art thou,
O stainless maid !'

Oh, the mighty mystery trembles on my weak and stammering lips, yet seems there a twilight in my heart, like the first faint yet blessed promise of morning!"

Arnald embraced him, full of pious and joyful hope; and the moonlight, breaking forth from the clouds, was reflected as in a solemn mirror from the upturned eyes of the two friends.

Chapter Twenty-second.

ARNALD found his Altarbol, whom he sought on the morrow on behalf of Balta, in the cloister-gardens. Carrying a vessel of water in his hands, the venerable old man walked to and fro amid the beds of roses, pinks, and lilies, to aid by gentle sprinklings the kindly work begun by the dews of night.

Without interrupting his pleasant labours, he listened with a smile of approbation to the communication of Arnald, and said in answer, "Here is yet again an instance of God's gracious and unwearying providence, thus easily and pleasantly leading the young heathen warrior into the right path. Yea, truly, this youth, with the mild fire in his dark speaking eyes, seemed to me from the very first like one destined to conceive and to confess the highest truths. Perchance he may one day become one of the most favoured lights of our Church. And rememberest thou what I once said to thee concerning Alearda? Behold her now yet again in her character of a bright and blessed angel, entrusted with a divine mission, yet in her calm and holy humility unconscious of her exalted office. Such is the true calling of virtuous women. They do many things whereof the beauty and goodness are clearly manifest; nevertheless, there is always present an unseen and heavenly power, causing the fairest flowers to spring up around their feet inexplicably, yet,

as it were, necessarily and naturally—almost like the soft and viewless influence of May.”

Arnald pressed his hand warmly.

“May my dear Balta come to you?” inquired he.

“It is better, at first, that I should visit him,” answered Altarbol. “It becomes the true shepherd to go in search of his wandering lambs; besides, how should the young man be able thus early to comprehend the cheerful quietude of our cloistral life?”

“The gladsome innocence of his temperament seems to me peculiarly in sympathy with such a life,” said Arnald.

“For that very reason would I abstain,” said Altarbol. “Spirits so highly gifted and so naturally prepared, do yet need a higher kind of preparation; and we must take heed lest, by withdrawing the veil too suddenly, we rob them of the first contemplation of truth in its purity and perfection. I have no fear for the gentle youth—he has no hard struggle before him; but, Arnald, O Arnald, a far more fearful spiritual combat awaits, perchance, a man to me far dearer; and, noble minstrel, thou art thyself the man!”

“What mean you, Altarbol? would you again mistake me for such a man as the infatuated Rinaldo of Tagliaduro?”

“No, my dear Arnald, I have no such idea; I know well the purity and reverence of thy love for the ladye; but I know, moreover, that the purest affection for one of God’s creatures may derogate from the everlasting love for God himself. What evil was there in the rapture wherewith the Persians gazed on the beautiful sun, and the eloquence wherewith they celebrated his splendour above all other created things in their enthusiastic strains? But they became sun-worshippers:—immediately the glory of the Eternal Light was extinguished in the glory of the earthly. Take heed to thyself, Arnald, lest a like thing befall thee!”

“Altarbol, my father, this solemn and well-nigh terri-

ble warning leaves my bosom free and joyous. The spirit of prayer is alive within my heart—its words are fresh and abundant upon my lips, and chiefly are they so on the days wherein I see, or hope to see, Alearda.”

“Yet hast thou well considered, dear son, that most solemn saying of our Lord, ‘He who loveth me not above all things is not worthy of me?’ Thou shouldst be capable of leaving every thing for His sake; but how were it with thy heart if thou wert commanded to abandon, for His sake, that calm and holy minstrel-service which thou devotest to Alearda?”

Arnald shrank back and gazed on the earth, becoming deathly pale. After a pause he said, “Oh, my father, what a word hast thou spoken! Yet if it must be, so be it. Did not He leave all things for my sake? Speak but freely to me—does He require this of me?”

“I know not that, my son; thou must ask the question of thine own heart, in all sincerity and earnestness. The All-present hath His temple even there also. If thou art constrained to confess to thyself, that the earthly glory has begun to darken the heavenly, at once, then, pluck all that is worldly out of thy heart, and get thee from this land, or at least from Castle Bisiers, and put to silence for ever thy lays in honour of the grace and the virtue of Alearda.”

“And my goodly legends, for her sake only inscribed on parchment, that she might drop one favouring smile upon their characters—must I cast them to the flames? and the strings of my lute, must I loose them for ever? and the dagger which she gave me, must I bury it in the ruins of Castle Maraviglia? Oh yes, oh yes, it is in no wise impossible that all these things should befall me! I feel it by the anxious shudder which thrills through my whole being at the mere thought.”

“Take courage, beloved son; was not Abraham commanded to offer up that which was dearest to him? and nevertheless the Lord in His mercy restored it to him, se-

cured and sanctified. Perchance it shall be so with thee. But it may be otherwise; therefore present thy sacrifice with all thy strength and all thy submissiveness, without reserve and without condition. Will my dear son do this?"

"I will."

In the deepest anguish the trouhadour departed and sought the grave of Walter. There in the lonely fortress, which was now almost entirely in ruins, he began his inward contest, full of agonising, nay, almost annihilating, self-renunciation.

Chapter Twenty-third.

WE will not accompany our hapless friend into the mysteries of the sorest and most terrible strife which he had ever encountered in his life; for he stood in array against his own heart—having on one side the warnings of eternity, on the other all that was pure, elevating, and exhilarating in the joys of time. And herewith came the fearful question, Art thou really, entirely, and from thy heart, ready to renounce this thine earthly happiness? and is the consolation which from time to time breathes healing upon thy heart a vain and self-loving illusion, or is it indeed the benignant voice of God?—Such hours as these can endure no witness, and as little can they be adequately portrayed in words. But thus much I may say, — and I say it with great joy, — in the first light of the opening dawn Arnald came forth refreshed and certain from the towers of Walter, with youthful brightness upon his cheeks, and the light of happy confidence in his eyes. Every one that gazed upon him could not but feel fresh life in his heart. The valleys sent up a steam of fragrance to greet him; in the heavens the solemn clouds shaped themselves into a purple dome, making way for the youthful sun: the nightingales filled every thicket with melody; the streams danced merrily down

from the hills, and sported with the many-coloured stones which had barred their course as if in mockery. Arnald sang :

Whate'er we give to Thee, O Lord,
 Is by Thy bounteous hand restored ;
 Whether 'tis life itself we give,
 Or all for which we love to live.
Before, I paid her service due,
 Yet little of myself I knew ;
Now, bliss and confidence arise
 In cloudless light before mine eyes.
 Out of a deep and deadly strife
 Came forth my star of faith and life ;
 Now chains are rent and clouds are past,
 Calm is the storm and mute the blast ;
 The minstrel goes upon his road
 Rejoicing in the fear of God,
 And every where before his eyes
 A thousand guiding lights arise.

“Amen!” said a pious solitary, who had come forth into the flowery woods to say his matin prayer ; “one can see in thy face, gentle minstrel, that thou hast obtained blessing and consolation from the Lord : only receive the divine gift into a good heart, and hold fast thy life in truth and purity.”

“Amen!” returned Arnald on his part. He inclined his head, touched and impressed by the friendly admonition, and set forth on his homeward way composed and full of joy.

At the peaceful hour of evening, the mossy watch-towers and walls of Castle Maraviglia gleamed before him in the sunset, and he addressed them with this lay :—

It is not mine, ah, ruin hoar,
 Your fallen towers to raise,
 And crown them with the pomp once more
 They owned in olden days !

But, like the quivering beams that now
Wreathe their bright halo round your brow,
A deathless crown ye shall retain
In the last Maraviglia's strain !

This was the dream that ministered
Joy to my sire's last sleep ;
This was the thought my heart that stirred,
So burning and so deep.
Though changeful time may fleet and pass,
Like mists that melt along the grass,
Yet never quite shall die away
The latest Maraviglia's lay.

At this moment he encountered Altarbol, who was just returning to the cloister after his visit to Balta. The saintly abbot gave his blessing to the minstrel, and added, in an under-tone, " God be praised ; I can see in thy face that it hath been vouchsafed to thee to serve her, and to sing of her !" Arnald passed him in silence, full of quiet rapture. Then Balta came forth from a thicket of olive-trees, and advanced thoughtfully towards Arnald. " I will commune with myself to-night, under the free heavens : wait not for me," said he, clasping the hand of his friend with a close but gentle pressure ; and in a moment he had vanished amid the shadows of the trees, which deepened as evening rose around them. But one happy glance of his eyes, all gleaming through bright tears, told more plainly than a thousand words, of the light and glory that was dawning upon his heart.

The bright casements of the little farm-house shone peacefully through the foliage, and Arnald felt a sensation of inward satisfaction as he followed the course of the narrow and mazy path, which wound onwards through the rustling grass, weighed down by evening dews. As he entered his chamber, the warm-hearted Gryba started up from the perusal of a huge volume over which he had been intently stooping, and came joyously forward to greet

his returning friend, with as much eagerness and emotion as though they had been parted for many years. He disburdened the minstrel of dagger, sword, and lute, and with attentive care hung each up in its customary place; he then produced the best viands which the cottage afforded, without suffering the attendants to interfere in the performance of this office; and thus, after a few minutes, the two friends sat undisturbed and alone opposite to each other, enjoying their cheerful meal in pleasant confidence.

“Thou hast missed a visit,” said Gryba, among other things, “a strange and merry visit, which I myself cannot as yet rightly comprehend. There came hither a jovial cavalier, richly attired, and mounted on a steed beautiful as a vision; and when he heard that you were not at home, he declared that he must wait for your arrival. I thought at first that some affair of honour was in question; but when I expressed this idea he denied it. On the contrary, he spoke all manner of good of you, though in most extravagant and piebald phrase—as thus: ‘Thou wert a brave, true-hearted comrade, a droll fellow; thou couldst sing right merry songs at a carousal;’ yes, at last he exalted thy praise above all measure, maintaining ‘that thou wert thyself capable of writing very pretty verses, of a kind exactly calculated to succeed in society.’ Thus did he prate and chatter for a long time, till my brain was quite bewildered with his absurd but well-meant and seriously-intended prattle. But at last he said he could wait no longer—perhaps it was that he did not find me a very congenial companion. He was on the eve of an expedition to Paris, and his name——”

“Oh, you need not tell me his name,” interrupted Arnald, smiling; “I recognised him at your first word; and I know well that his name is Guy of Hauteroche.”

“Even so,” answered Gryba. “But tell me now, I pray you, how came he to be your brother in arms? for such he maintained himself to be, and he looks to me far

too frank and straightforward for falsehood, or even exaggeration."

"His frankness and straightforwardness are the key to the mystery, dear Gryba. Does not one's heart open readily to such qualities? And is it not, in truth, a high tribute to every true minstrel, that such knightly natures as these, without any particular love of art, do nevertheless recognise and love in us, with true and kindred hearts, that deep and inmost spirit, in the strength of which, casting aside all other gifts, we hope one day to stand before the Almighty? O Heaven! I know not whether that holy gift of God which we name poesy is capable of descending in fulness of life upon the head of any man to whom this warmth and kindness of nature belongs not!"

"Ah, how completely art thou right, Arnald! And I, too, am no artist. Thou art about to speak words full of kindness to me; I can see it, but it needs not. My loving spirit has already plucked the unspoken words from thy lips. And now listen to me, for I have a tale to tell, the theme of which is far higher and far lovelier than all this.

"Once during thine absence I visited Castle Bisiers, my beloved master. When I entered, the lofty ladye was in the act of exhibiting to her maidens, and to a group of troubadours, a manuscript which thou hadst copied and illuminated for her, after the pattern of an antique volume. I stood at first unperceived among the gazers, and gazed with them. The lines were interspersed with many goodly paintings; but I was chiefly struck by one wherein a knight, tall, slender, and magnificent, armed cap-a-pie in gold, was crushing a dragon by the aid of his noble white horse. I could not but think on my dear Pontifer, and I exclaimed aloud, in pleasure and admiration. The ladye looked round upon me smiling; but when she perceived that it was I who had spoken, O Maraviglia, how severe was the gravity which overspread her delicate features! She instantly closed the volume, fastening it carefully with

its golden clasps; while I was scarce able to lift mine eyes from the ground, overpowered by burning shame, whereof I myself knew not the reason. Then did a reassuring smile dawn upon her angel-countenance, so that I resumed my wonted courage and dared to address her. 'Ladye, pardon my unasked intrusion; but methought I also might be permitted to look upon the fair pictures and enjoy their beauty.' 'Thou seemest to me as a good and gentle-hearted child,' replied she, 'and in good sooth I meant not to give thee pain. But this is the history of St. George, and may only be opened for such as are of one faith with myself.' 'St. George!' replied I; 'is that the slender warrior, with the snow-white horse, painted on a background of azure-blue?' 'Yes, truly,' returned the ladye; 'and that ground of pure blue betokens the heaven-like purity wherewith St. George began and closed all his knightly deeds in the fear of God. Oh, that it were appointed to thee one day to take him for thy patron saint! But patience, sir knight, and I will fetch other fair pictures and manuscripts, which I may be permitted to shew thee.' And with inexpressible gentleness she did as she had said; and many of the noblest characters and legends of the far Northland passed before mine eyes; but it seemed as though St. George had made himself the door-keeper of my heart, and would only suffer to enter therein that which had some reference to himself—such as, for example, the tale of Sigurd and the dragon. Alearda appeared to observe this with pleasure.

"Then, dear Arnald—I could no otherwise—I was scarcely here, before I sought for the history of St. George, and I have found it; and if I have sinned in that, being a Saracen knight, I have presumed to read therein, I pray you, in all gentleness and friendship, pardon me the fault, for I have well nigh finished the volume. But I must needs have St. George for my patron, and to this end do thou aid me—thou, and thy holy Altarbol."

"O virtuous women, ye ambassadors of God!" whis-

pered Arnald, as he kneeled down to offer up silent but rapturous thanksgivings.

Chapter Twenty-fourth.

FROM this day forward, most grave but most joyful was the course of life near Castle Bisiers. With the first early dawn of each morning, Altarbol was at the cottage, there to join the three knightly friends in solemn prayers for enlightenment and power; after which he conducted Gryba and Balta through the ruins of Castle Maraviglia, to walk with him in lonely and luxuriant valleys, where they examined together the mightiest questions which concern time and eternity. During these hours Arnald remained alone at home, and his spirit shed forth many fair lays and legends upon the stainless parchment. Late in the afternoon; would Altarbol and his two disciples return, generally having their eyes filled with tears, and their demeanour grave and meditative; frequently would Gryba and Balta then withdraw, to pray separately, amid the ruins. When, after such retirement, they returned, Altarbol was wont to demand of the troubadour a joyous lay, with accompaniment on the lute; and thus, pleasantly reconciled to the things of time and mortality, they sate down to their cheerful repast. Towards evening the three knights generally visited Castle Bisiers; for the viconte took especial pleasure in the light javelin-combats of the Moorish warriors; while Gryba and Balta, on the other hand, rivalled each other in their eagerness to become masters of the graver system of German jousting, man to man, and lance to cuirass. Arnald often took part in these active exercises, and ever greatly distinguished himself; but it more commonly happened that he desired to speak with the lofty lady, Alearda concerning the numerous

poetic visions which he nursed within his heart, and also to read aloud to her. Sometimes Balta was present on such occasions, when, now completely freed from the dark and fearful delusion of Mahomet's teaching, he would seek to fix the full expression of the ladye's fair and heavenly face in his designs on costly and polished wood, or on the finest linen. But besides this, in his hours of silence and solitude, he laboured to delineate a far different female form, with an Infant in her arms; a form which undeniably possessed some faint shadow of the glory of the Mother of God. Often did he say to Arnald, "This is the vision which hath ever floated before mine eyes; after what manner I shall wholly dedicate myself to her service, I rather forbode than know, but I hope ere long to know it completely; and then first shall I feel the fulness of gratitude which I owe to Alcarda, who, in her cloudless beauty, has been my conductress to this eternal mistress, and to the benign and blessed radiance which circles the throne of Madonna!"

One day, when the friends were discussing the approaching festival of baptism, Gryba inquired whether it would be inconsistent with his profession as a Christian knight to retain his black Moorish garments, and his long-trusted and well-used scimitar.

"I should prefer to see you in other vestments," returned Altarbol; "methinks a robe of heaven-blue colour would best become you, for your whole nature seems to me bright and transparent as the cloudless firmament."

The warm-hearted Gryba bent his head gratefully over his teacher's hand, as he replied, "Ah, now I seem to understand wherefore the azure ground of that picture seemed to greet me with smiles of promise and encouragement. It shall be even as you will, dear lord and father."

"But thou mayest for ever retain thy good sabre," said Altarbol, "and hallow it by many a good and great deed of heroism; although, in sooth, it has always ap-

peared to me as an omen of peculiarly fair import, that Balta should be girt with the straight sword of a Christian knight, even while he was yet amid the Moors."

"Oh, yes," cried Gryba with eager frankness, "Balta has ever stood far above me in real worth; and ye will see that he will now far outstrip me in all piety and virtue; nevertheless, I hope not to be altogether left behind in the race."

"God preserve thee in thine angel-like humility!" said Altarbol, murmuring the words to himself, scarce audibly, as he laid his hand in benediction on the head of the youth.

After a while Balta observed, with his ordinary thoughtful smile: "There is yet another thing which lies upon our Gryba's heart; but I see that he will not venture to speak of it, therefore I must become his interpreter. You see those beautiful polished characters upon his breast—must he cast them aside with his Saracenic garments?"

"Nay, Balta," cried Gryba, hastily, "I am perfectly willing to do so. Speak not of it."

"What is the import of these characters, my dear son?" inquired Altarbol.

"Ah, my beloved father," replied Gryba, "they are Arabian hieroglyphics, which I have been at various times commanded to bear on my bosom, sometimes by a prince, sometimes by a renowned hero, sometimes by a popular assembly in our land, as memorials of honourable battles wherein I was not altogether fameless. Look here! this one refers to our battle of disembarkation under Tarfe, wherein our valiant Arnald was well-nigh slain."

"And is the name of Mahomet, or of any other false god, contained in these inscriptions?"

"No, dear father; they are simply the names of the mountains or tracts of country by which we fought."

"Then continue to wear thy bright characters, with God's blessing, my son!"

"Ah!" exclaimed Gryba, "it was right kindly and

pleasant in thee, dear Balta, to think and speak of this matter." And he embraced his comrade with the glee of a child.

Chapter Twenty-fifth.

THE solemn day whereon the two young Saracen heroes were to receive the bath of holy baptism had arrived. Multitudes of gaily-attired peasants had gathered around the farmhouse, in order to accompany the new converts in procession; moreover, the blithe crowd had adorned the ruins of Castle Maraviglia with wreaths and ribbons, so that those aged and long-forsaken walls seemed to glow with the semblance of a second spring-time of happy youth.

Amid the music of holy psalms they went their way to Castle Bisiers. Their eyes were greeted by many banners and garlands of flowers, waving from its tall battlements far over the summer-brightened plains, and the chorus of flutes, horns, trumpets, and clarions mingled strangely with the solemn and spiritual harmonies of the procession.

In this manner they proceeded to the high-vaulted and richly-decorated chapel of the castle, where Alearda stood beside the font in her snowy garments, like an angel of light, awaiting her god-sons; for, at the request of both youths, she and Arnald had assumed the office of sponsors. Balta and Gryba had each thought to request a like favour of the vicomte; but the strict regulations of the church in those days suffered not wife and husband to enter together into such a spiritual bond of union, which was rather esteemed as an insurmountable barrier to temporal alliance, such as subsists between a brother and a sister.

But, like a priest of earthly glory, the vicomte stood near at hand, all gleaming in the pomp of princely armour, ready, as soon as the novices should have received their spiritual consecration, to confer upon them the highest of temporal gifts—the consecration of Christian knighthood.

Gryba was arrayed according to the request of Altarbol; and he shone like a summer's morning in his garb of sky-blue silk, with the inscriptions of victory embossed in golden embroidery upon his gallant breast. The tranquil Balta was clothed in dark green and silver, like the tints of a forest in the moonlight. Dark curls of abundant hair waved gracefully around the brow of either youth, now freed for the first time from the restraint of the turban.

Altarbol appeared. In compliance with the wish of the two brothers-in-arms, he gave them the holy bath simultaneously, as is customary at the baptism of twin-brothers; and Gryba was named, after his chosen knightly saint, George; while Balta received the name of Sebastian, in honour of that hero of the faith, whose life and deeds had won his especial love and reverence.

George and Sebastian now advanced to their stately and warlike prince, who solemnly bestowed on them the accolade as Christian heroes. Arnald then girded on their swords; and Messire Misura clasped the golden spurs.

Then followed a quiet and somewhat serious repast, over which the spotless Alearda presided; and whereat the guests conversed rather with thoughts than in words; and nevertheless made themselves intelligible to each other in a strange and inexplicable manner, like that which one may conceive to characterise the intercourse of angels. Alearda herself scarcely spoke; but the benediction of her smile was felt by every heart, which responded to it by silent and thankful hymns of praise.

When the meal was ended, George and Sebastian did reverence to the ladye and the prince, praying their leave to depart forth into the world, in order to undertake some enterprise of fame and difficulty in behalf of the Christian faith.

Alearda bent her beautiful head in gentle affirmative; and the vicomte said: "God knows how gladly I would retain you in my company, ye noble and blithe-hearted warriors, ye new-won jewels in the coronet of our chi-

valry. But, in good sooth, this life is no excursion of pleasure; but rather half a pilgrimage and half a battle. Only I would fain know, unless it interfere with your intentions, what is the object which each one of you has set before his heart, so that I may at least bear you faithful company in my thoughts."

"For myself," returned Sebastian, "I desire to seek the Holy Sepulchre. There I expect that the nature of the service which I have vowed to the Mother of God will be fully revealed to me; and during my season of probation, I hope to achieve many an honourable deed in defence of oppressed women and unarmed pilgrims."

"I, on the other hand," said George, "desire to take ship for Africa. I scarcely comprehend the impulse which so wondrously attracts me to those hot and sunny coasts; but this I feel, that it must needs be somewhat tending to the glory of my Saviour, and the advantage of my dear brothers in the faith."

"God speed you!" said Alearda, as she signed a cross above the heads of the adventurers.

"God speed you!" repeated the vicomte, clasping each youth to his gallant heart, in an embrace full of earnest affection. They departed gravely, accompanied by Arnald and Altarbol.

Chapter Twenty-sixth.

ON the sea-shore, before the marble statue of the holy Virgin, where Arnald had formerly landed with his Saracen friends, he had now taken his leave of the same friends, and Altarbol had laid his hand in benediction on their heads.

Many a bitter pang thrilled through the hearts of all, while their eyes filled with bright and burning tears.

George and Sebastian begged eagerly that Arnald

would accompany them with song, when their barks, which lay close on the shore, should separate and begin their course—the one to the south, the other to the east. “That is to say,” added George, “if thy warm and true heart be not too heavy for music; for I can feel in myself how hard it is to thee to part from us, thou valiant knight and honoured master.”

Arnald could not restrain his tears, and wept freely. “Ah,” sighed he, “who would not weep to part from thee, and from Sebastian? And why, why, in these last moments, do ye make yourselves so above measure dear, true, and noble—the one with the blossoming language of his heart—the other with his mute but eloquent eyes? Shall we ever again behold each other with bodily eyes on this side the grave?”

“It is a weighty question—nay, it is almost improbable,” said Sebastian.

“Nevertheless, I believe that you will do so,” said Altarbol, with great assurance. “Whether the interval be long or short, I know not; the spirit of prophecy within me has nought to do with times and seasons. But that we three shall one day again stand around Arnald, even as we stand now, when he has cast himself upon the turf in the midst of us; thus much, dear knights and friends, I feel to be certainly and irrevocably decreed.”

“*Au revoir*, then!” cried George and Sebastian, bending with eager embrace over the troubadour, and striving to smile; but hot tears forced a passage from their eyes, and mingled upon the cheeks of Arnald.

At that moment the signal for departure sounded from both galleys, and the young knights hastened to embark. Instantly afterwards the sails rose, swelling and rustling in the wind; and George and Sebastian were visible, each standing at the prow of his vessel, and affectionately waving farewell, sometimes to each other, sometimes to their friends on the shore. Then Arnald bethought himself of their request; and controlling his emotion, he struck

his lute with powerful hand, and breathed forth after his friends across the blue waters the following strain :

For the love of God, to the Saviour's grave,
 Go forth, Sebastian, go !
 Break thou the honds of many a slave ;
 Of wrongs the bold redresser,
 Scourge thou the strong oppressor,
 And aid the weak and low ;
 Then, crowned with clear and changeless light,
 And clad in hues for ever bright,
 As knight, as painter, thou shalt see
 The Holy Virgin shelter thee !

For the love of God, to Afric's land,
 George, cross the ocean-foam !
 By thee shall joyous angels stand,
 Through poisonous deserts leading thee,
 Through gloom and danger speeding thee,
 To many a kindly home :
 Thy child-like smile the storm shall soothe,
 And make the angriest billows smooth ;
 And much that smile shall aid thy sword
 In winning souls to serve the Lord.

For the love of God, in mine own dear land,
 I, cheered at heart, remain ;
 My task to tend, with watchful hand,
 (A poet's happiest duty,)
 Flowers, dreams, and thoughts of beauty—
 My ladye's grace to gain ;
 The music of my lyre shall wake
 To noble themes for her sweet sake ;
 And by high deeds my heart may prove
 The spirit of its stainless love.

Ginstrel Love.

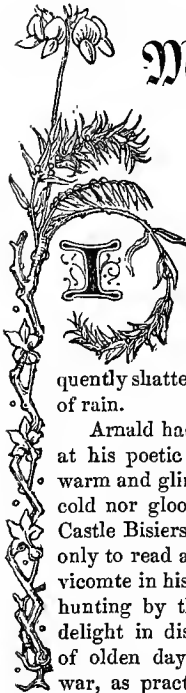


BOOK THE THIRD.



Minstrel Love.

Chapter First.



IT was now winter. The solemn season rested upon the land of Provence with deeper gloom than was its wont in a climate so beautiful, filling the valleys with grey fog, and not unfrequently shattering the woods and gardens with storms of rain.

Arnald had laboured much and right pleasantly at his poetic art, in his little chamber, beside the warm and glimmering hearth. Nevertheless, neither cold nor gloom had prevented his frequent visits to Castle Bisiers, where he was now often needed, not only to read aloud to Alearda, but also to attend the vicomte in his chamber, where, being prevented from hunting by the wild and desolate season, he took delight in discussing with Arnald the heroic deeds of olden days, and especially how far the art of war, as practised among the Greeks and Romans, might be applied to the contests of their own modern chivalry. Arnald had acquired much knowledge on these subjects, during the days of his boyhood and early youth,

from the noble Sir Walter of Vergi, whose warlike learning equalled his experience in arms, and who laboured with affectionate anxiety to form his fiery-hearted foster-son upon his own model; an endeavour in which he had only partially succeeded, but which nevertheless manifested its happy effects throughout the whole course of Arnald's life and pursuits, both as minstrel and as knight.

One afternoon the general and the troubadour had been arguing upon the possibility of marshalling infantry in close phalanx, as had been the custom with the Greeks and Romans, and producing by this manœuvre a like deadly effect. So earnest grew the discussion, that when supper was ended, the vicomte entreated his friend to return with him to his chamber, in order to attain if possible to a satisfactory decision of this point.

Many an ancient manuscript was unfolded by the knightly inquirers, many a battle of olden times between Romans and Gauls was fought over again in imagination by their eager spirits; but greatly though the vicomte inclined to the revival of that famous and departed art of warfare, Arnald ever missed in such encounters the genuine action of cavalry, such as was familiar to the noble customs of their younger chivalry.

“One such charge,” he maintained, “would have scattered the best infantry of the ancients, or at least have robbed them of those triumphant laurels wherewith their brows are now crowned for all time. What availed,” cried he, “the glittering Persians with their shouts of onslaught, their wild leapings and vaultings, their idle arrow-shooting, against a firm array of closely-ranked men, well covered with their shields? But charge them with a resolute body of horse, lances levelled, speed like lightning—and lo! the fortune of the game changes sides.”

“But the Romans had cavalry at Pharsalus,” said the vicomte, doubtfully.

“As though it were not recorded,” exclaimed Arnald,

“that they were effeminate cowards, anxious only to spare their own smooth faces, and shuddering at the stern and bearded countenances of the German foot by whom they were opposed!”

“Well, then,” said the vicomte, with pleased animation, “we horsemen may still esteem ourselves certain masters of the field?”

“Undoubtedly,” replied Arnald; “unless, indeed, the field should bristle with hedges and palisades like a battery, or unless our leader should not understand how to make use of us—a mishap which we need never fear as long as we have the honour to fight under your orders!”

“God grant,” cried the vicomte, “that I may often demonstrate the truth of that assertion in your company, my brave troubadour!”

He grasped Arnald’s hand, and the two warriors gazed in each other’s faces with eyes glowing with the anticipation of glorious deeds, which passed in bright procession before their impatient spirits.

At that moment a night-owl, driven wildly through the air by the tempest, fluttered against the neighbouring casement with such a sudden impulse that one of the lattice-leaves flew open with a clashing sound, and for an instant the gleaming eyes of the startled bird stared into the chamber. It then turned round and fled with a wailing cry, its wings whirring in the wind.

“That portends war!” cried the vicomte, with a joyful glance at his sword.

But Arnald sighed deeply and answered, “For thee, perchance, but not so for me! Rather did it seem to me as though all my hopes of victory fell, clashing, into a heap of ruins, over which a wailing death-song mournfully floated! Be sure that an early death awaits me, a death by sickness; and never again shall I march to battle under your victorious banner.”

“Arnald, my blithe and brave-spirited Arnald, wherefore do words so gloomy flow, on a sudden, from thy lips?”

“I know not, my noble general; but they are spoken, and doubtless they mean much. Let it come, then, if it must come! I am in the hands of a gracious God! For the present, my dear lord, good night. I must hasten to reach my dwelling, if I would get to rest before the twilight of dawn.”

“You must abide this night in my castle, dear Arnald,” said the vicomte. “I will not suffer you to go forth in this furious tempest.”

Herewith he summoned a page, and bade him light the troubadour to a guest-chamber.

Along vaulted galleries, and up wide and winding stairs, the boy, carrying a waxen torch in his hand, preceded the troubadour, who vividly remembered the evening, whereon he had been for the first time summoned to the presence of Alearda, when all things within Castle Bisiers had appeared to him so full of wonder and mystery. The boy seemed likewise to think on the sundry strange tales which were recounted concerning that ancient building. He advanced timidly, holding the torch far before him at every angle of the stairs or passages, and yet hurriedly and cautiously withdrawing it from dark corners and recesses in the walls, as though he feared to arouse the horrors that might be lurking therein.

In this manner they reached a spacious saloon, surrounded by many doors communicating with neighbouring chambers. Scarcely, however, had the boy entered it when, with a loud cry of terror, he let the torch fall so that it was extinguished on the pavement, and fled.

Arnald has since confessed to his friends that his first impulse was to follow the fugitive child. What, indeed, can be more terrific than the sound of a scream of fear, aroused by some horrible but unseen object, the nature of which we do not know! And then there was the storm raging and rattling against the casements, and the wan flickering twilight of a few solitary stars, sometimes appearing, sometimes altogether darkened by the rapid

wheeling of the arrowy clouds. But, uttering first the name of his ladye, and afterwards that of his own noble race, Arnald advanced unconcernedly, save for the momentary blush which overspread his face, as he thought that Walter of Vergi might possibly know that his pupil had meditated flight, though but for a moment.

A gleam of light glimmered through the fastenings of a neighbouring door. As Arnald approached it cautiously, he perceived that something was moving to and fro before it, rustling and peeping around the bolts. From within was heard the voice of a weeping child, and the low anxious whispers of women. He then remembered that this was the chamber of the little Countess Berta; and fearing lest alarm or peril might threaten that tender flower, he stepped softly but quickly up to the Appearance, and demanded, "Who has any business here?"

"*I!*" was the answer, in a voice like the roar of a thunderclap, and the howls of the storm were fearfully redoubled; while suddenly, from a cleft in the tossed and rent clouds, the moon shone through the casement, round, and bloody-red.

Oh, on what did it shine!

Wrapped in the dark and heavy garments of a monk, with a fearful and menacing expression upon its death-pale features, the gigantic castle-spectre swept past Arnald, and muttered as it sank through the floor in the centre of the hall, "Man! Ask me not a second time who I am. It were thy death!"

The spectre had vanished, and the night grew calmer; but still the wailings of the child, blent with the louder tones of weeping women, sounded from that chamber. Cold with fear, and oppressed by horrible forebodings, Arnald entered the nearest guest-chamber; and the refreshing unconsciousness which fell upon him as he sank on a couch, without divesting himself of his garments, was rather stupor than sleep.

Chapter Second.

THE morrow dawned gloomily—dark and grey with mist. Very gloomy also was it to the dwellers in Castle Bisiers ; for in the night the little Countess Berta had been suddenly attacked by a violent fever, which increased every hour. Altarbol, who was a right skilful leach, had already been summoned ; but his efforts to abate the disorder seemed unavailing. With a painful smile on her lips, and her hands folded in pious submission on her bosom, Alearda sat by the little bed. Arnald could have died with grief to look upon her, especially once, when a gleam of hope passed across her face ; for, alas, he had seen the death-portending castle-spirit before the door of the young child's chamber, wearing its most ominous and menacing aspect. The ladies appeared not to be ignorant of the cause of the fearful disturbance in the saloon ; Alearda even felt a faint presage of its import within her bosom ; but she shrank from inquiring, while her attendants also shrank from explaining it unasked. The day passed in earnest prayer and tender watchfulness over the child. Evening had once more arrived ; Berta lay in a hot and feverish sleep ; all were sitting or standing around her in silence,—Alearda and her ladies with eyes wearied with tears ; the men deeply sorrowful, and without hope. Then began the gouvernante of the castle—a venerable widow, who was always attired in garments of the deepest mourning—to speak in a low and cautious whisper, thus saying :

“At the furthest extremity of Bretagne stands a rock in the midst of the sea ; when the ebb-tide is at the lowest it may hardly be attained with much difficulty and peril—many a pilgrim has perished in the attempt. Upon this rock stands the image of a saint. I know not to which of the inhabitants of heaven it is dedicated ; but this I know, that if a man vows a pilgrimage thereto, the power

of all evil omens and threatening spirits is held in abeyance; and if he fulfil his pilgrimage and offer up his prayers upon the summit, the dark prophecy is annulled, and becomes a blessing and a presage of happiness. These things did my blessed husband impart to me on his death-bed, and I have this day for the first time disclosed them. He who hath ears to hear, let him hear. When need is greatest, aid is often nearest."

Confidingly, as though lifted up out of the depths of grief upon the wings of some rescuing spirit, Alearda smiled upon the minstrel, who, all glowing with the joyful consciousness of power, arose, stretched forth his right hand in solemn asseveration to heaven, and said in low but earnest tones, "Hereby do I vow a pilgrimage to the rock on the coast of Bretagne, and hope, by the favour of God, to set forth by the hour of dawn to-morrow;—and," added he, kneeling down upon the ground, "give me thy blessing for this enterprise, dear Altarbol."

With overflowing eyes the abbot complied with the entreaty of his friend and pupil. The heroic vicomte clasped the troubadour joyfully to his breast; and Alearda bowed her head before him in thankfulness, but as though she felt that thus it must needs be; and when Arnald perceived her undoubting confidence, his heart swelled high within him, disdaining all toil or peril with a fulness of joy which he had never before experienced. The gouvernante, however, earnestly pointed to the child. From the moment in which Arnald pronounced his vow, the flush of fever had begun to fade from its cheeks, so that it now lay, breathing softly and deeply, in a sweet and refreshing sleep. All kneeled around the bed in silent prayer.

Chapter Third.

THE morning had arisen. Arnald had bidden a low farewell to the ladye and the warrior-chief beside the couch of the little one, who still remained in a slumber so tranquil and refreshing that even Alearda—having received Altarbol's assurance that there was nothing more to fear, and trusting implicitly to the faith and resolution of the minstrel in his solemn enterprise—withdraw cheerfully to seek repose. And now, beneath the early light of a red and wintry sun, struggling through sombre clouds, Arnald stood before the door of Castle Bisiers, completely attired as a pilgrim, and ready to set forth. But there issued from the castle another form in pilgrim array—tall, strong, and stately—who eagerly signed to him to stand still and await his approach. The thought of the castle-spectre thrilled through Arnald's heart, causing an involuntary shudder; but as the unknown advanced, it became manifest that he was not only well known, but well loved; for he was no other than Messire Misura, who had heard of Arnald's vow, and was inexorably determined to accompany him upon his dangerous and toilsome pilgrimage.

"Thou dear and faithful comrade," cried Arnald! deeply moved; "but if it should interfere with the terms of my vow?"

"Ask *him* concerning that," replied Misura, pointing to Altarbol, who at that moment issued from the vaulted doorway to give his parting blessing to his beloved Maraviglia and commend him to the care of God. In fact, Misura had already spoken of his project with the abbot, and the latter now solemnly authorised Arnald to accept the companionship of his gallant friend.

"But, my dear spiritual father," began Misura, "there is still a question at my heart. Is it certainly God's will that we should go forth in the desolate winter, and per-

chance break our necks over the cliffs of Bretagne? We might surely offer up our prayers as well here as there, for the Lord is present every where."

"If thou doubtest, go not, my dear son," said Altarbol; "an uncertain deed hath ever the nature of sin."

"Well, well," grumbled Misura, "must not one ask a simple question? You are so mighty quick with your yes or no."

"Yes or no!" replied Altarbol; "those little words comprise our destiny for time and for eternity. Right or left! We stand daily on the spot where two roads part, and the space between is the abyss itself!"

"But I will not descend into it!" cried Misura, indignantly; "I will to the right—do you hear me?—to the right with my brave Arnald; but there is no reason why you should not make it a little intelligible to one beforehand, why men should go on pilgrimages."

"My son," said Altarbol, "faith truly can remove mountains; nevertheless, the outward and tangible gifts which it receives must ever have a local habitation and a name. How these things are, and how they might be—over these questions there lies a veil, which is perpetually assuming another and a more wondrous form, as the position of earthly affairs shifts and changes. It may be that Arnald's prayers for the healing of the child might have received a blessing, here in Castle Bisiers, by the strength of his true will. But the terms of his vow have now decreed it otherwise: Arnald believes in it; Alearda and the vicomte believe in it; perhaps even the child, in its half-conscious dreams, has faith in it;—in a word, my friend, the trial is evidently *there*, and no where else. Who in such a case would occupy himself with refinements, and subtleties, and doubts?"

Misura bowed his head in silence, and hastily followed the troubadour, who had already departed on his solemn journey.

Chapter Fourth.

It seemed as though the northern blast was determined to render the progress of the two pilgrims impracticable for many days; for it roared and blew furiously against them, driving the rain, and hail, and even—as their way led them farther and farther from their temperate Provence—the snow, into their faces; so that frequently Arnald, and sometimes even the powerful Misura, sank exhausted upon the earth. But on such occasions the troubadour was wont to say with a smile, “Up, and away! What were the merit of a pilgrimage, if it were but as an evening walk of pleasure?”

“We need not trouble ourselves on that head,” replied Misura one day; “matters must be greatly changed indeed before they wear any pleasurable aspect; and as far as I can see, they have no disposition to change at all. But Arnald, my dear and valiant Arnald, methinks thou mightest at least allow thyself four-and-twenty hours repose. Why didst thou hurry forth so eagerly from the cloister yesterday, where we were so warmly and so hospitably entertained? Yonder pious monks must needs understand such things; and they were of opinion that a brief sojourn amongst them, during this season of fearful tempest, and on account of your great exhaustion, would in no wise impede the holy work which we have in hand.”

“Misura,” replied the weary Arnald, standing still and leaning upon his pilgrim’s staff—“Misura, I frankly confess to thee, that yester evening as I fell asleep I entertained thoughts like to yours and to those of the good brethren; but then I beheld in a dream how the little Berta again fell sick, and Alearda was awakened, and how the aged gouvernante said consolingly, ‘Our pilgrim has but paused a little while upon his toilsome way, for very weariness. Have patience, dear lady; so

soon as he shall once more advance, the fever will lose its power over the child.' And Alearda answered with her heavenly gentleness, 'Yes, truly, I will have patience; in good sooth our poor and loyal knight must well-nigh perish amid these storms. But, alas, my dear child! And when I saw the soft falling of her tears, dream, slumber, and fatigue departed from me at once. Forward, my beloved Misura, forward!'

He uttered these words in the well-remembered tones of his joyous battle-cry, and, leaning upon Misura's strong and sustaining arm, strode rapidly forwards amid the closing shades of evening, though the forest, laden with snows and well-nigh pathless, stretched around him in a thousand uncertain shapes of tree and mountain.

And now it was the depth of midnight. A distant gleaming athwart the frozen boughs had more than once lured the wanderers to the edge of a slippery ravine: they determined, therefore, no longer to follow its guidance, and cast themselves wearily down, on the trunk of a fallen tree. While Misura was endeavouring to excite a spark, by rubbing the dry boughs together, Arnald sang the following words softly to himself:—

How dark, how cold the night of earth!
 How bright, how clear heaven's morning is!
 Hence, gloomy cares and shadowy mysteries!
 The watchman is waking,
 Hopes are outbreaking,
 And soon we all shall hail the glorious birth
 Of fadeless splendour and abundant bliss!

"Ye may wait long for that," howled a wild voice amid the underwood; and suddenly a tall swarthy man stood before Arnald, swinging his hunting-spear high above his head, and exclaiming, "What do ye here in my woods, fellows? and who bade you scare my game with your whining and wailing?"

"Stand off from me a little space," said Arnald; "in

the work which I now have on hand I were loath to hurt any human being." Herewith he sprang to his feet with knightly alacrity, and opposed the intruder with his pilgrim's staff, half defensively, half menacingly.

"Ho, ho!" laughed the wild stranger; "we can easily dispense with such doings:" and he blew his horn; whereat six or seven huntsmen sprang from the bushes in various directions, with bare weapons and tightened cross-bows.

Then did all the wrath of the ancient Maraviglias awake in Arnald's gallant heart. "Down with your shameless odds!" cried he, striking the stranger's hunting-spear with his staff, so that the light weapon was shattered into a thousand splinters. With oaths and curses the huntsmen rushed upon him. But then Messire Misura strode forwards, wielding a flaming firebrand in each hand: he smote the heads of the foe with these sputtering torches till they fell to earth; and when two of the prostrate huntsmen endeavoured to regain their feet, he thrust their foreheads together with such violence that they sank backwards, howling, and completely stunned. On the breast of a third, who was beginning with many oaths to move, he planted his foot, and said, "Knave, lie still; else will I stamp upon thee till every joint in thy body shall split asunder."

The conquered wretch groaned and was still. But the man who seemed the leader of the party had, by an adroit leap, extricated himself from the tumult, and he yet stood erect, although disarmed by Arnald's wrathful blow. To him Misura addressed himself in the following manner:—

"That you are possibly a knight, and perhaps even one of old and illustrious race, is truly grievous to think upon. You seek a quarrel, and when the dance begins, you put ten paces between yourself and the actors."

"I am disarmed," said the stranger, in a tone of half-ashamed defiance.

"Nay; in the true ardour of battle," returned Misura, "a true-hearted soldier can make a weapon of any thing:

methinks that I and my brave friend here have given you proof to that effect."

"Nevertheless, it becomes not me," said the stranger, "to bandy blows with every nameless churl I meet."

"Nameless churls!" shouted Misura in a rage; "do you know us, then, already, most sublime and illustrious sir? I would have you to know——"

"That thou must on no account acquaint him with our names," interrupted Arnald; "our pious work has nought to do with such worldly matters."

And Misura instantly checked his words. But he breathed and blew vehemently upon one of his firebrands, till it flamed up into a bright torch; and then, holding the light close before Arnald, he said, "Look here, thou unknown Bramarbas; shews this man like a nameless churl? Yonder lute which peeps from his pilgrim mantle may avail to bring you into great trouble: how would it sound, think you, to hear songs made upon your midnight lurkings and bush-trampings,—songs which in a little while should fill all France, Germany, and Spain, ay, and even the Moorish lands?"

"Fear not," said Arnald to his adversary; "the solemn path whereon I now walk would admit of no such songs as might treat of your deeds."

The stranger, however, seemed somewhat disconcerted; for in those song-loving days, it was ill having a minstrel for your foe. Princes, knights, and people—above all, noble ladies—were eager to take part with such an one, if outraged; and the universal love of poetry gave wings to every goodly lay, carrying it up and down from one end of the land to the other.

"Forget mine overhasty deed," said the stranger, after a little hesitation; "and let us be good friends. I am the Marquess Raymond, lord of yonder castle, which thou mayest see with its lights twinkling through the boughs; and I invite you thither to partake cordially of my hospitality."

“We will not set foot within your castle,” answered Misura, shaking his head; “but if you will accompany us to its vicinity, and there refresh us with wine and food—but, mark you, let the wine be right good—there shall be complete peace betwixt us.”

This singular proposal was agreed to; and although Arnald at first testified a little dissatisfaction, he yielded with a good grace when he perceived the shame and penitence of the marquess. Meanwhile the huntsmen had recovered themselves; and the two friends now followed the whole party towards the castle.

Chapter Fifth.

OVER slippery paths, which connected, as if by a slender thread, the edges of wide and yawning chasms, between narrow and wildly-tossed rocky passes, and up the sides of steep and jagged crags, the way led at last to the abode of the marquess. As they proceeded, Misura had taken all possible precautions to prevent any surprise, on the part of the treacherous huntsmen and their yet more treacherous lord. At every turning of the road, he caused them all to go in advance; and wherever there appeared to be a shadow of danger, he drew a small but keen Provençal sword, which he carried under his mantle, and suffered it to gleam through the darkness in the eyes of his mistrusted guides. The latter, however, had learned to reverence him greatly; and were obedient to every sign and gesture.

When they had arrived in front of the castle, the marquess once more urgently solicited them to enter; but Misura answered, “I am not so much at my ease amid walls and bolts; but I can deal with men. We will abide without.”

Stamping and muttering the Marquess Raymond strode into his castle, and flung the doors violently together be-

hind himself and his huntsmen. The huge and brightly-illuminated windows of a spacious hall shed their light beyond the walls, as far as the place where Arnald and Misura had remained, and shewed a small chapel which stood near, within whose sheltering walls the friends now sought refuge from the unabated tempest.

Attendants carrying wine and food speedily issued from a postern door of the castle, and proffered refreshment to the wanderers, with scornful smiles.

But—"Taste!" cried Misura; and when they sought with some embarrassment to evade the demand, he seized one of the party by the throat, and compelled him to swallow a considerable quantity of wine.

"Now sit down here beside us, my man," said he; "we will see first how it agrees with thee."

No one dared to make any opposition; the others retired in silence; and he who had drunk soon sank upon the earth, overpowered by a deep slumber.

"A right serviceable sleeping-potion," said Misura, with a grim smile; "who can say how they would have dealt with us?"

But Arnald tuned his lute, struck thereon a few stern and wrathful chords, and, gazing upward to the castle-windows, sang the following lay:

Sleep, powerless sleep,
 Death-like and deep,
 This didst thou mean for us!
 Waking, bright waking,
 From chains eternal breaking,
 We give thee answer thus!

Narrow and vile
 This earthly isle,
 Circled by death's dark sea;
 Look upward where,
 Willing to spare,
 The Lord looks down on thee!

As warning cries
 Our words arise,
 Up, gird thyself, away !
 The gates are barred,
 The battle hard,
 Weary and long the way.

But to sink low,
 Mid wails of woe,
 Down to eternal night ;
 Where fires of death,
 By demon-breath,
 Are kindled ever bright—

Is this, we ask,
 A fairer task ?
 Sinner, not so, not so !
 Thy God yet stands,
 With outstretched hands,
 To aid thee from below.

Thy fiend-like deed
 To hell must lead—
 Hell opens wide her gate ;
 There yet is time—
 From death, from crime,
 Flee, ere it be too late !

The bold Misura visibly shuddered at these words of solemn and fearful exhortation ; but very different was the effect which they seemed to produce upon the inhabitants of the castle. A woman, very beautiful, but with strongly-marked features and flushed cheeks, looked through the panes of a casement, then suddenly flinging it open and stooping far over the edge, so that her raven tresses floated wildly on the winds of the midnight storm, she exclaimed :

“Gramercy for thy miserere ! I will answer thee with a goodlier strain.”

Herewith she sate down and began to play upon a fair

lute with wondrous grace and power, and to sing a love-strain full of ardour and passion, which Arnald had composed in the years of his youth. Leaning upon the back of the lady's seat they beheld the Marquess Raymond, splendidly attired, wearing three chains of solid gold, to each of which was attached a large medal. In his hand he held a gleaming silver goblet filled with wine; and at every pause in the music he pledged the beautiful singer, who also sipped the juice of the grape with apparent pleasure; and then continued her performance with the most fascinating movements of her fair arms and hands. The flames of a hearth in the background overspread both figures with a strange and lurid glow; so that, circled by the frame of the tall, arched, gothic window, they looked like some mysterious painting, expressing at once the full seductiveness of worldly pleasures, with a terrible suggestion of future retribution.

Arnald clasped both his hands before his face, and whispered to Misura, "Can I, even in my days of wildest error, have imagined a strain which is a fit accompaniment to this jubilee of hell? My hours of song and poetry were surely never so utterly impure and wild!"

"Be satisfied," returned Misura. "The gifts of God are oftentimes abused in this world. Witches and wizards are able to extract poison from the most innocent flowers."

The repulsive beauty had now completed her song, and she cried from the casement, "See now, thou miserable songster, with thy feeble and ghostly chirpings, how little thou knowest of thine own art, and how despicable thou appearest beside the glorious Master Arnald of Maraviglia; for by him was my lay composed."

Arnald turned from her, and kneeled in silent prayer before the crucifix in the chapel. But Misura could no longer restrain his anger: and he addressed the scornful lady, who had risen from her seat and thrown her arm caressingly around the neck of the marquess, in a mighty voice:

“He who here appeals to his Saviour in the chapel is himself the far-famed Master Arnald of Maraviglia; and he is come to give you the choice between salvation and destruction. Choose, therefore, quickly; for the time of repentance is short, and your sins are many!”

Pale as death the lady sank into Raymond's arms; pale as death he tottered with her from the casement.

Arnald and Misura walked forth in silence through the midnight forest.

Chapter Sixth.

WHEN morning began to shine down between the trunks of the trees, Misura said, “Art thou displeased with me, dear troubadour, for having transgressed thy command, by naming thee to yonder children of evil?”

“At first I was startled, and well-nigh angered,” returned Arnald, “that thou shouldst break out so inconsiderately with the history of my minstrel fame, which truly belongs not to our present path. But the manner in which thou didst conclude thy speech instructed me better. I saw clearly that thy tongue had been loosed by the avenging and redeeming will of God; so, be it as it may, it must needs be well.”

Then Misura answered, “Thou seest to the very bottom of my heart; just such a feeling as thou hast described in those few words was within me: the syllables escaped unbidden from my lips, nevertheless I was conscious that it was the work of God.”

During this discourse they had issued forth from the woods; a wide landscape, all glittering with frost, was outspread before them in the light of morning. Wearied with the difficulties of the night, they gazed around upon the castles and hamlets of the plain, inquiring with their

eyes whether they were likely to meet any where with a friendly and courteous reception.

Then a young man in a simple hunting-dress rode towards them, and said, courteously saluting them :

“Fair pilgrims, ye seem right weary ; if it like you to take up your quarters in a small and somewhat ruinous fort, with poor fare but good-will, I will gladly conduct you to the abode wherein I have dwelt, with my two sisters, since the death of our parents. My name is Godfrey, and I am of the not-unknown race of Moutalban ; but fortune has robbed the branch to which I belong of much of its old and wonted splendour.”

Arnald was inexpressibly touched by these simple words. Here too was an impoverished, but not therefore a less noble, branch of an ancient stock of heroes. He gave his hand in warm and grateful acquiescence ; and Godfrey rested not till he had induced him to mount the palfrey and ride on slowly, while the friendly youth himself hurried forwards to prepare his sisters for the reception of welcome guests.

While they were yet afar they could perceive a cheerful bustle in the little tower ; and as they approached nearer, it was pleasant to see how the crackling faggots upon the hearth sparkled through the transparent panes, filling the little hall with light and with grateful warmth. In the doorway they were received by Godfrey, who led them respectfully within, consigning the palfrey to a very aged attendant, and saying, good-humouredly, “Thou must care for the horse to-day, good Robert ; thou seest I have fairer business on hand.” The old man nodded his head, well-pleased ; it was evident that he rejoiced in being invited for once to undertake a labour for his young lord.

In the hall, one of the sisters stood beside the hearth, watching the preparations for a meal, while the other was carefully busied in the arrangement of pillows, on two couches which had been placed beside the glowing fire.

Both maidens were of that delicate and somewhat too slender shape which is characteristic of the females of ancient and noble race, among the Franks. Their poverty had in no wise impaired the soft and serious dignity of their whole deportment, nor diminished the precision and grace of their attire. The glow of the blazing hearth played cheerfully upon their morning garments of spotless white, and irradiated the finely-chiselled features of their somewhat pallid faces.

The hospitable family compelled the pilgrims to recline upon the cushioned couches, after which the sisters proffered to each a cup of mulled wine, and then entreated them to abandon themselves to a refreshing morning slumber after the fatiguing journey of the night; for which end, Godfrey and the two maidens withdrew to the further side of the hall.

As Arnald fell asleep, he could hear them softly whispering together.

"My brother Godfrey," said one of the damsels, "hast thou perchance had the courtesy to bring with thee some game, wherewith we may entertain these strangers?"

"Nay, sweet sister Honorine," was the answer; "I had scarce set forth when I encountered these gentle guests. But I am too well acquainted with thy skill in all household arrangements, and thine also, my dear Clementine, to disturb myself concerning the reception of the pilgrims; if, however, ye deem it not discourteous that I leave you alone with the strangers, I would fain once more try my fortune as a huntsman."

"Only take heed that thou weary not thyself overmuch, brother Godfrey," said Clementine; and with a graceful inclination, to which the damsels responded with equal grace, the youth quitted the chamber. Smiling, but for pleasure and not in mockery, the exhausted Arnald fell asleep.

Wooed by strains of lovely and familiar melody he awoke, after some hours had passed. Honorine and Cle-

mentine were singing and playing that lay to Autumn which he had composed, beside the garden-walls of Castle Bisiers, after Alearda had bestowed on him the goodly dagger. A nameless longing after the presence of his distant ladye thrilled through his whole heart, and while his graceful hostesses were relating to him, with much particularity, when and how the renowned Arnald of Maraviglia had composed that song, the soul of Arnald burned with impatience to prosecute his journey, half in order that he might the sooner return to Castle Bisiers, half because every unnecessary delay seemed to him as treason to Alcarda, and peril to the little Berta ; yet still the leaden weight of weariness was on his limbs, and he could not choose but lie down once again upon the couch.

Meanwhile Godfrey had returned with game ; and the sisters were now busily engaged in preparing it, maintaining, even during that menial employment, the easy dignity of highly-born and highly-nurtured ladies. Godfrey waited on them in the most attentive manner, supplying the hearth with wood and coals, and never omitting an opportunity of addressing them in lively and gallant phrase.

The principal theme of their conversation was the Master Arnald of Maraviglia ; and they forgot not to explain to the two pilgrims who this celebrated man was, and of what nature were the place and tenour of his life. Misura did not now feel tempted to acquaint his entertainers with the true character of their guest ; on the contrary, the whole scene afforded him so much enjoyment and diversion, that any change whatsoever would have appeared a disturbance.

The board was now spread ; the game was served in a great number of small and delicate dishes, and the aged Robert brought forth several flasks of good home-made wine, from which Godfrey, with much satisfaction, supplied his sisters, his guests, and himself. From the manner in which Clementine presented a beaker to the aged Robert, Arnald guessed that in the order of their daily life

he also was wont to sit at table with his superiors. He therefore rested not till he had induced the venerable domestic to assume his place at the board, whereat all testified great contentment, and seemed now, for the first time, to lay aside all formality, and indulge the frankness of familiar intercourse.

The conversation soon returned to Master Arnald of Maraviglia, whose presence seemed to abide within the house like that of some friendly though invisible spirit. Even the aged Robert had learned some of his war-songs, which he now sang, full of glowing enthusiasm, with reverend and somewhat tremulous voice. The eyes and cheeks of Godfrey glowed as he proceeded, the sisters looked down in some embarrassment, and then turned their wistful eyes upon Robert, as if beseeching him not to continue. Arnald did not observe this gesture, and said to Godfrey :

“ I know a lay which the troubadour Maraviglia composed on an ancient legend of your race, most noble Baron of Montalban. It is not probable that you are acquainted with it, therefore I will recite it for your pleasure and that of the ladies.” Then with deep, solemn, and significant tones, he uttered the words of the following romaunt :

Chased from the towers of Montalban,
 Chased by the treason of Ganelon,
 Mournful before his castle
 The valiant Sir Reinald stood.
 Wistful he gazed on the portals,
 But, ah, they unclosed not for him !
 Wistful he gazed on the battlements —
 The banners of foes were there !

He winded his wrathful clarion ;
 It cried to the voiceless breezes ;
 But lo, in the clouds of evening
 There gathers a shade and a storm :
 Faces look down upon him,
 Bloody, and corpse-like, and pale.

These are his hero-fathers—

Alas, he knoweth them well !

He hears through the roar of the tempest

The voice of their angry grief.

' Who mourns by the castle-portals ?

Wherefore unclose not the gates ?

What floats from the airy turrets —

Is it the flag of the foe ?

Heard ye the lord of the castle ?

Heard ye, and answer ye not ?'

O'er the pale cheeks of the warrior

Glisten the tears of his' blood ;

But soon he refreshed his spirit,

Resuming the strength of his heart ;

He lifted his brow, all fearless,

And spake to the ghosts of his sires.

' I am chased from the halls of my fathers ---

I wander an exile alone ;

But the soul of the old Montalbans,

Spirits, it still is mine own !

Bold in my wrath will I wander

Far over earth and sea ;

Souls of the great departed,

Scorn not, and weep not for me !

'Mid the strokes of resounding falchions,

'Mid trumpets, and wounds, and war,

The tree shall once more be planted,

Casting its shadow far !'

Proudly those gathered heroes

Listed the words of might,

And they smoothed their threatening foreheads,

And they smiled in bold delight.

Rejoice, O ye fallen Montalbans —

Rejoice in your ancient name ;

For the deeds of the hero Reinald

Bloom with a fadeless fame !

“ Oh, I can no longer endure it !” cried Godfrey, as,

forgetful of all decorum, he sprang from his seat, clasped the hoary Robert in his arms, with a stormy impetuosity which seemed reflected in the joyous glow that overspread the old man's pale features ; and then seizing an ancient sword which stood in a dark corner, and pressing it to his heart, he exclaimed, "Oh, my father's sword ! Oh, my valiant father's sword !"

Robert doffed his cap, leaving his bald head uncovered, folded his hands, and said, lifting his eyes to heaven, "God bless the brave knight Arnald of Maraviglia ! He has composed a lay of honour, which, if my hopes deceive me not, shall greatly avail to the welfare of this house."

Shaking their heads in sorrowful wonder, Honorine and Clementine beheld the whole proceeding.

"But, my brother Godfrey," said Honorine at last, "hast thou forgotten, how in thy gentleness thou didst promise long since, that thou wouldst never leave us unprotected, and wouldst renounce all visions of going forth to the world and to wars ?"

"Thou didst then call us tender flowers," added Clementine ; "thou didst promise to be to us a watchful gardener ;—but now, meseems all such thoughts are changed. Certainly, my brother Godfrey, it is for thee to act according to thine own pleasure, and we truly will address the Lord with fervent prayers for thy welfare ; but——"

She melted into gentle tears. Then Godfrey replaced the sword in its former position, resumed, with great and manifest effort, his former courtesy of deportment, and assured them that he would not only be faithful to his promise, but that he should also find the greatest pleasure in keeping it, as there could be found no fairer occupation in the world than the care and company of two such noble and graceful ladies. "Even the poverty in which we live," said he in conclusion, "adds its own charms to the pleasantness of this our rustic household."

Robert looked silently and sorrowfully on the ground ;

the sisters spake many loving and thankful words to their brother; and at last Honorine said:

“Believe me, my brother, couldst thou appeal to the Master of Maraviglia himself, his courtesy and nobleness would give thee no other counsel, than that which thou hast received from thine own loving and chivalrous spirit!”

“Lady,” replied Arnald, “I would not recommend you to entrust the decision of this matter to the knight of Maraviglia; for though he has ever sought to serve all noble ladies in purity and humility, he well knows that they can seldom be served so meetly and so well, as by him who is covered with helmet and shield, and carries his trusty sword in his right hand.”

The maidens gazed wonderingly upon him; and the aged Robert exclaimed, “By Heaven, at every word of this pilgrim I feel more and more as though Messire Arnald of Maraviglia himself were speaking!”

“Do not think upon him,” continued Arnald, evading the subject; “but think upon your own name, beautiful Honorine. Honorine of Montalban! Is there a nobler title in the wide world? And would *you* tremble when honour calls your valiant brother? When the Baron Godfrey restored his father’s sword to sloth and darkness, it sounded to me as though that noble weapon of heroes sighed as it clashed within its iron scabbard! And you, Lady Clementine of Montalban, can it content your high-souled gentleness that this noble scion of knighthood should fade away in mournful longing after deeds worthy of himself and of you, only now and then kindled to brighter thoughts by the voice of the hunting-horn in the forest? Oh, he who is born to arms and must never wield them—think you, think you that he can ever know one fresh and joyous hour in his life?”

He had arisen from his seat; and he stood now in deep and melancholy reflections, his sparkling eyes fixed on Godfrey, and full of noble pity. The latter covered his burning face with his hands.

Slowly but resolutely Honorine approached the sword, bowed her head lowly before it, and then, grasping it in her delicate hands, placed it with a sudden movement upon the arm of her brother. Meanwhile, Clementine had taken from the wall a beautifully painted shield, bearing the device of the Montalbans, somewhat discoloured by age; she let it fall with a clashing sound upon the table before the youth, and said, "God speed thee, brave Montalban, my brother; ride forth to fame and victory!"

Godfrey arose like one inspired, waving the weapons high above his head. In that moment, he seemed to have grown taller, goodlier, and more manly. As the breath of spring, ascending from a half-closed blossom, presages the noblest fruit, so did the conception of future deeds of heroism float, almost visibly, upon his free and princely forehead, half shadowed by its waving curls.

Robert cast himself at the feet of the sisters with tears of joy, and assured them that during their brother's absence he would be to them a true seneschal and warder; and he knew well that God would richly endow his age with thought and vigour for such a purpose.

Then Arnald and Misura laid hold upon their pilgrim-staves, and made ready to depart.

"I think I know whom we have entertained," whispered Honorine.

"That which I have spoken, I have spoken in the name of the Lord," returned Arnald. "The name of the messenger matters nothing. God's blessing be on you!"

And the wanderers went forth into a land all sparkling in the wintry sun.

Chapter Seventh.

THE toilsome journey approached its termination. Already from the hills of Bretagne they had beheld the Aquitanian sea; and now, when after a night of labour and difficulty the pilgrims issued from wood and thicket, and gazed upon the light of day, they saw the green waters of the mighty ocean washing the base of the steep cliff whereon they stood. Grey rain-clouds were wheeling in wild rapidity across the firmament, and the heads of the waves arose high and proud, with diadems of white foam. The weary Arnald leaned against the balustrade which was erected on the brow of the cliff as a protection for unwary wanderers, and gazed upon the limitless and solemn extent of gloomy sky and agitated sea; it seemed to him as though his earthly being were struggling in those dark waters, and he felt in his heart that the islands beyond, were sunny, blessed, and abundant in flowers. Misura too stood in silent thought, occasionally drawing a deep breath, which seemed almost like a sigh—unwonted sound from that heroic breast.

“God be gracious to him who would seek the shrine upon the rock to-day!” said a voice close beside them. It was an aged shepherd, with simple and reverend countenance, and long grey hair and beard. He saluted the strangers with warmth.

“Thanks for thy good wish,” said Arnald. “It is uttered in my behalf; for if only the rock be near enough, I hope to ascend it to-day; or, if such be the will of God’s unsearchable providence, I am ready to die in the attempt.”

“The last is the more likely of the twain,” answered the old man. “See you not yonder giddy whirl of wind, and cloud, and flood? The birds of the air can scarce keep themselves steady, and reel in wild and involuntary

flights! How, then, can a human being hope to climb the precipitous crag? Defer your enterprise till the morrow, or till the next day; for this stormy whirlwind will continue, and truly it seems to me scarcely the work of nature."

"And thou art so sorely enfeebled by the journey, dear Arnald," said Misura, tenderly.

"But sounds not the breath of the blast like an uneasy sigh?" cried Arnald. "Drop not these solitary rain-plashes like tears from an anxious heart? Oh, perchance even now, at the mere possibility of my hesitation, the sick infant moans, the gentle ladye weeps! And shall this last till to-morrow, or perchance even till the next day? Thou hast heard that the tempest threatens to continue thus long."

"It may last the whole week," added the shepherd.

"Sigh not, Berta—weep not, my lofty ladye!" said Arnald to himself, in low out determined tones; "even this very day will I close my pilgrimage."

And turning to the old man, he requested him to conduct him to his dwelling, if perchance it were not far off, that he might there be instructed in the nature and difficulties of the pilgrimage; being irrevocably determined to look his last upon the sun this day, or to behold it in thankfulness from the summit of the rock.

"Irrevocably determined!" Thus sighed Misura, like a mournful echo; but he knew well that after such an expression it was useless to plead with a Maraviglia, and he followed his friend in silence. The shepherd led them along various winding paths which descended to the shore, whereon stood his moss-built hut, in the centre of a small meadow, hedged in and fenced from the waves by surrounding crags and cliffs, a picture of quietness and solitude.

They sate down upon rush mats in the interior of the lowly abode; and Arnald, enjoying the pleasantness of this brief interval of repose, emptied at long draughts a

goblet of excellent cider which their host had produced for the refreshment of his weary guests.

“Seest thou, Arnald,” said Misura, “how much good repose does thee?”

“Nay, if it do me good,” returned the troubadour, smiling, “it strengthens me at the same time; and therefore let us not waste a moment. Tell me, my good and trusty shepherd, what saint is it who has his shrine upon the rock, and in what manner must a pilgrim proceed who seeks to achieve the adventure, in the same spirit in which it was originally undertaken, for the glory of God and the good of His creatures.”

The old man looked a while thoughtfully on the ground; at last he said, “If you are resolved to know the whole, fair sir, I must needs give you fitting answer. Thus it is, then. When the ebb-tide commences, you must take pious thoughts into your soul, and holy words upon your lips, and follow the retreating water, step by step, from the shore, till you have advanced far into the realm of the sea; and so you will attain the rock, which you will behold lying at a great distance from the land, tall, steep, and sombre, like a tower abandoned by men and tenanted by spirits. But good spirits only dwell thereon; for the summit is hallowed by the statue of St. Sebastian.”

“Sebastian!” exclaimed Arnald, exultingly. “Oh, the fair, the auspicious sign!”

“Nay, but the saint is something strange to look upon, in his antique image,” interposed the shepherd, warningly. “His weather-worn features, all rusted, discoloured, and faded with the violence of winds and waves, look down upon one in dark solemnity; while brazen spears and darts protrude right terribly, from the stone figure, in memory of that death which the blessed knight endured, at the hands of heathens. The pilgrims—that is to say, those who have returned successful—
vix with each other in striving to portray the sensation

of awe which overpowered them when they beheld the mighty appearance."

"But do thou only remember, Arnald," said Misura, "that thy beloved Balta chose Sebastian for his patron-saint; and that he himself now bears the name of Sebastian."

Arnald nodded his head with a warm expression of agreement, and entreated the old man to continue his directions, professing that at every word, he felt more and more strongly impelled towards the enterprise.

"Even at ebb-tide you cannot pass thither with dry feet," said the shepherd. "You must wade through waves waist-high at the very least; waves which gurgle and splash, and toss around you with such wondrous rapidity, that in good sooth you must have a steady brain to keep exactly the right road to the rock, and not at last to feel doubtful whether you are advancing or retreating—whether you are still standing erect, or already bending over the mirror of the waters with waving, reeling, and oblique movement."

Arnald pressed his hand against his weary brow, like one dizzy.

"What boots it," cried Misura, somewhat angrily, "that you should disturb and overpower my friend beforehand with your marvellous descriptions? If, indeed, there were any hope of deterring him from the adventure to-day, I would gladly do that myself; but I certify you the attempt is useless. Therefore leave him quietly in possession of such strength as fatigue has spared to him, and proceed quickly with your tale; only omit not the mention of all possible precautions."

"There are none," sighed the old man, "save that when he reaches the rock he must climb it at once, and without deliberation, wherever it is practicable; for there is neither path nor stair. Take heed also that thou look not back upon the sea, and keep thy faith in God steadfast within thy heart, and His holy name upon thy lips.

But methinks, gentle pilgrim, thou needest not this last suggestion ; for thine own heart would have recommended to thee such an observance."

Herewith he grasped Arnald's hand with warmth ; and gazed, fixedly and with emotion, into his eyes.

"God will help !" added he. "Thou wilt hardly return from the rock before morning dawn ; for the flood-tide will commence ere thou hast completed thine orisons — nay, most probably, before thou hast reached the summit. Prepare thy spirit, therefore, for a dark, stormy, and solitary night."

"Fear me not," replied Arnald. "There lives within me no such memory as can ever rob me altogether of joy and comfort. And over all, and within us all, abides the light of God's omnipresent love ; and my weary limbs will rest upon the resting-place of the holy Sebastian."

"Yet one thing more," said the shepherd. "There dwell near the shore, amid the ruins of a Roman temple, two strange and mysterious persons. These are wont to cast all kinds of obstacles and mockeries in the way of pilgrims. Hold no communion with them."

With these words he left the chamber, in order to provide for his little flock for the rest of the day ; for he purposed serving the pilgrims as a guide, as far as the heathen temple whereof he had spoken.

Chapter Eighth.

WHEN the two friends were alone, Arnald said, with considerable solemnity, "It was right noble in thee, Misura, that thou didst not for a moment doubt that I would fulfil that which I had once spoken, if only soul and body parted not in the attempt. And therefore, thou strong and faithful heart, I will confide to thee yet one thing

more, which, on the eve of this enterprise, I would confide to no other mortal—scarcely even to Alearda.

“Thou must have marked but now, how strangely the shepherd’s description of the dizzying floods affected me: dear friend, among all those men who are capable of looking calmly into the eyes of death, there is probably not one so subject to dizziness of brain as myself. It may perhaps be a result of that divine gift, which has been so abundantly vouchsafed to me, and which we are wont to call fancy. Even now, methinks I see myself plunging downwards, with frantic impulse, to the irrecoverable depths; ay, there are fearful voices within me, crying, ‘Down! Down with thee for ever! Thy struggle profits thee nothing; and one plunge will set thee free from thy torments.’”

He stopped, shuddering. A few heavy tears dropped from the full eyes of Misura.

“Wherefore should it move thee so deeply?” resumed Arnald, with his wonted kindly smile; “I am not yet lost. Only, in case such should be my fate, oh, my faithful Misura, the dark prophecy of the castle-spectre must still be conquered, and Berta must be rescued, and the tears of Alearda must be dried! Say I not rightly, good comrade: thou wilt gird thyself to the task, and accomplish that enterprise, the full achievement of which was denied to thine Arnald’s earnest will?”

“I will instantly prepare myself for the attempt,” returned Misura. “To-morrow, at early dawn, I will set forth.”

“Nay,” cried Arnald, smiling, “thou art over-hasty with thy comfort.”

“Thou livest yet, my gentlest friend,” answered Misura; “ay, truly, thou livest yet. But, see I not how that placid smile plays upon thy wan cheeks, only like the parting gleam of life? Fare thee well! Fare thee well! Thou fulfillst thy vow, thou diest in a holy work; but we must needs part.”

Arnald remained long without speaking. "Thou mayest be right," said he at last; "and I am ready for the end—nay, it sometimes seems to me as though the deep, dark wings of death overshadowed me, very distinctly, very near, very sure of their prey. But God can avert or soften even this. And hast thou less confidence in me than our good host? He truly thought he could see in my face that I should pray, with gladness and with power; and therein he hoped much."

"I know that Heaven is ever the highest good," said Misura; "nevertheless, humanly speaking, my heart is very heavy for thee."

The door was slowly opened, and the shepherd entered with a grave aspect, saying, "The commencement of the ebb-tide is at hand." Arnald took his hat and staff.

"May I not go with thee as far as the shore?" asked Misura.

"Heaven will perchance direct thee thither to-morrow," replied Arnald, in a low voice. "For to-day I must needs be quite alone."

Silently but strongly the two friends pressed each other's hands, and parted.

Chapter Ninth.

IN the midst of a dark thicket of pines, many tall columns became visible, interspersed with shattered walls. Beyond them, the sea might be seen; and the space between was a waste of low and level sandhills.

"There dwell the hateful strangers," said the shepherd, pointing to the ruins; "and yonder is the way to the rock of thy vow. God and St. Sebastian protect thee, my beloved pilgrim!"

With these words he warmly saluted the troubadour, and returned on his way, slowly, and in manifest dejection.

When Arnald had advanced a few paces he beheld the rock. Tall, and marvellous to look upon, the solitary figure of the saint gazed from the naked cliff into the damp air, which grew darker and darker every moment with gathering storm-clouds. The immeasurable sea washed around the desolate crag, with plaining and melancholy sounds; it seemed one vast and ever-yawning grave, overhung with undulating veils of mourning.

“Lord, Thy will be done,” said Arnald, kneeling in silent prayer. He then arose rejoicing, and went forward in a spirit of complete resignation, with lightened conscience, and with fresh vigour both in heart and limbs. When he was close upon the edge of the water he heard the voice of singing behind him, loud and wild. Ill pleased with the disturbance, he turned to ascertain whence it arose. Then there came from the depths of the pine-grove, a shape in wide and waving garments, which beckoned to him with its hand, singing at the same time the following words in the Provençal tongue:—

Where lies, where lies the stone of the wise?
 Not in the depths of the sea it lies.
 Why shouldst thou rove o’er the spreading tides?
 On thine own threshold the spell abides:
 Thy home contains that secret light,
 Nameless, and glorious, and full of might.
 Crescentius speaks, Crescentius!

Answer me, what is human life?
 Seeking and losing, hope and strife.
 Leave thou its troubles, and scorn its bliss,
 A noble task thy calling is:
 It is thine in the stillness of night to look
 On secrets and spells in the hurried book.
 Arnold of Brescia speaketh!

Seek not thy gift in the breeze of spring;
 Seek it not from a living thing:

Afar, in the cleft of a gloomy cave,
 A Moorish hero lies in his grave.
 He found it:—ere the spell he spoke
 His heart, too daring, heaved and broke.
 'Tis Abdul speaks! 'Tis Hamet!

Back, then, back from the fruitless shore;
 Enter, oh, enter our temple-door!
 Learning and strength will we there impart;
 Comfort, and guidance, and cheer of heart;
 The gnomes shall make to thy charmèd sight
 The earth all green, and the skies all bright.
 Now guess who speaks! Now guess who speaks!

“I believe that I have heard thy voice before; but I have now nobler thoughts in my heart than consist with inquiry into such a matter.” Thus saying, Arnald strode onwards without looking behind him, and continued to advance farther and farther into the depths, as the ebbing sea retreated, leaving a wider and a wider space of ground, hitherto untrodden. The troubling song arose anew, but was interrupted by a distant and very plaintive cry:

“Ultramonte!” said a voice from the walls of the temple—“Ultramonte, come, shew me fresh images, or I shall become distracted!” And, with a muttered expression of annoyance, the pursuer paused, and then hastened back to his fearful abode.

Arnald now knew well what foe had been upon his traces; but he averted his thoughts from the subject, and fixed them exclusively upon God, and afterwards upon the ladye, and the holy enterprise towards the completion of which he was now taking the first steps, all glorified by the light of God. It seemed truly as though the tumult of the waters had become obedient to him; for as he advanced, they continued to retreat further and further, with a low sullen, yet timid murmur. But the things which were left upon the earth, now divested of its watery veil—impotent

sea-beasts of hideous form, and odious fishes, and the poly-pus-like excrescences which grew thereon, stretching forth their long and spiteful arms to grasp each other—at the sight of all these the breast of Arnald was penetrated by wild, spectral, and ever-deepening forebodings of death. Verily there is not in the world one true poet, whose vocation is to his art, who feels not a cold and chilly shuddering when he beholds such creatures: only be it understood that he must face them fearlessly if duty and goodwill require it; and thus was it with our Arnald. Already the first ripples of the now stationary billows had wetted his feet; already had he stepped into the green and gleaming depths, and higher and higher did the irregular and undulating torrents foam upwards around the wanderer. The rock before him seemed to partake of the motion of the waves; and it seemed to him as though he himself were driven powerlessly to and fro—now sideways, now backwards, and anon almost past the goal which he was striving to reach. The marvellous descriptions of the shepherd returned upon his memory; he well-nigh lost his footing upon the slippery, uneven, and invisible ground; the waves had well-nigh lifted him from the earth, and dashed him forth into the boundless depths; but he cried earnestly to God and His saints, and then was he able to utter in his heart the name of Alearda. Immediately he found himself beneath the rock, and, grasping firmly one of its craggy projections, he swung himself out of the tumultuous sea, and, breathing deeply, rested his weary limbs.

Bare, steep, and wild, the cliff arose above him; the figure of St. Sebastian was hidden from his eyes by the overhanging rock. In fearful solitude the pilgrim stood between sea and land: he felt that it was no moment for hesitation, and, exerting his utmost strength, he began his pathless ascent. Often he felt as though his scarcely-planted foot would glide from its resting-place—as though his weary hand must needs loosen its grasp. The loud

billows rushed and roared beneath him; the wind whistled through the interstices of the cliff with a hollow and howling sound; his pilgrim's hat fell from his brow—the storm whirled it around two or three times in rapid circles, and then carried it down into the abyss; before long the staff rolled downwards also—Arnald could hear it striking against the rocks as it fell. He would now have given himself up for lost but that his prayers endued him with fresh vigour, and at every free moment the form of Alearda was present to his spirit. Thus, as an impetuous and enthusiastic warrior scales the wall of a castle, Arnald, his heart glowing with inspiration, struggled upwards to the summit of the rock. God had been with him. The pilgrim stood upon the height before the statue of St. Sebastian. Half actuated by devotion, half overcome by fatigue, he fell silently on his knees. Long did he remain in this posture; his brain full of strange and thick-coming fantasies, and overshadowed by that unconscious dreaminess which springs from the exhaustion of the body. But he felt unspeakably happy: Berta was delivered; Alearda wept no more.

At length the tumult of the sea, ever increasing in wildness, awakened him to a full perception of external things. The flood rushed boiling onwards, impelled by the roaring blast, and rode victoriously over the distant sands, while the colossal waves lifted their tall white heads and foamed against the cliff on every side. The darkness of evening dropped heavily upon the horizon; before long the shores of Bretagne were no more discernible. Strange to look upon was the rock-hewn shape of St. Sebastian, all bristling with darts, and canopied by the opaque rain-clouds.

But Arnald was sensible of none of that horror which was wont to trouble other pilgrims, at the aspect of the saint: on the contrary, the words of the song to which he now gave vent were poured forth by a strong and joyful spirit.

Mid sombre shades of evening dim,
 Upon the rock, so lone, so drear,
 Scorning weak frame and sinking limb,
 My heart grows bright and hold of cheer ;
 Out of the depths of stormy night
 My hope looks up with cloudless eyes,
 And to the one true deathless Light
 Its joyful pinions swiftly rise.
 Thanks to the seraph-shape that beamed
 Benign upon my darkened breast—
 Lo ! for her service worthy deemed,
 My grateful heart abides in rest !
 Have we not read of heavenly love ?
 Have we not read of angel-forms,
 Who beckoned to the bliss above,
 And shed their light through earthly storms ?
 Still does our God vouchsafe to share
 His glory with His creatures here ;
 Still do His heralds, pure and fair,
 Shed blessings on our earthly sphere !
 And such a grace to me was given,
 And such a bliss with me remains —
 Rage, floods, and pour thy torrents, heaven ;
 Ye can but swell my thankful strains.
 For holy eyes, like stars of eve,
 Their poet's blameless love did light ;
 And thus my wreath of song I weave,
 Joyous, amid the gloom of night.
 Therein calm strength and beauty soft
 By my deep spirit blended are,
 Till it may dare to rise aloft,
 And join the stars, itself a star.
 Then, dropping from the heavens above,
 As sunny founts may drop and roll,
 The gradual stream of sinless love
 Shall fill the happy minstrel's soul.¹

¹ The confusion of metaphor in the original stanza is quite inextricable. This is, indeed, Fouqué's great and frequent fault, and it is very embarrassing to a translator.

Then do not chide my sparkling songs,
 Nor deem too bold their daring aim ;
 Not unto me my work belongs—
 Thine, Lord, the deed, and Thine the fame !
 Oh, suffer me to sing Thy praise,
 And hers, Thy herald half divine :
 Mighty and wondrous are Thy ways,
 And earth and heaven alike are Thine.
 Lo ! upon me, well-pleas'd the while,
 By darkening storms assail'd in vain,
 The marble saint with favouring smile
 Looks down, and listens to my strain.

Hark, how the thundering waves are flowing !
 See, how the darkness spreads her wings !
 See how, in fury ever growing,
 His giant limbs the Ocean swings.
 Spectres are sweeping through the air !
 But at my ladye's casement now
 Sweet peace keeps watch, and weaveth there
 A fadeless chaplet for her brow.
 Then let the gathering tempest burst,
 And let the scourg'd billows chafe ;
 Winds, waves, and lightnings, do your worst—
 I scorn ye all, for she is safe !

Yet even this rock, so lone, so dreary,
 Do seraphs' shadowy wings invest ;
 And even for me — the weak, the weary—
 They shed soft drops of balmy rest ;
 With storms above and depths below,
 I court calm slumber fearlessly ;
 Ay, even with joy, for well I know
 What radiant dreams shall visit me :
 Their floating forms I now behold—
 Even now on their soft wings I rise,
 O'ershadowed by their nets of gold,
 Up to the wide and crystal skies !

Chapter Tenth.

THE hope which Arnald thus expressed was speedily fulfilled. Scarcely was he cradled in the arms of a gentle slumber, when the world of dreams opened to him, in its most radiant splendour.

He seemed to stand upon one of the towers of Castle Maraviglia; but the whole edifice was sparkling and beaming with unspeakable magnificence, like a fairy palace. Moreover, the walls were transparent, and every chamber within was tenanted by fair and stately dames, and knights of gallant and princely presence. Arnald knew that these were his ancestors. In the gardens, those of his race who had died during childhood were disporting themselves; they wore the shapes of cherubs, and were playfully pelting each other with blossoms, which, as they passed through the air, were transformed into beautiful butterflies, which entwined themselves in fluttering wreaths above the heads of the little ones. Heroes who had been slain in youth were pacing through the halls, all glittering in golden armour, and playing upon lutes of gold, or wandering through the shady avenues, with maidens of wondrous beauty, who had early fallen into their graves, or dancing with them upon carpets of blossoming grass. In the riding-court, Arnald's great grandsire was exercising the noble steed which had borne him in his last battle: around him were numerous youthful knights, his pupils, exulting in him, and taking pleasure in each other's skill. But in the balcony of the castle, adorned with a radiant crown, and wearing above his gleaming knightly mail a troubadour's mantle embroidered in silver, sat the great minstrel-king, playing upon his harp. The tones issued forth like rays, passing through gardens, courts, and chambers; and the ladies wove them into their elaborate tapestries, or spun them upon their distaffs, as delicate threads of gold; the knights polished their swords

against them with a harmonious sound ; the youths and damsels linked them into slender nets, and caught each other therewith, in merry sport ; the boys rode thereon, as if upon bright mimic horses ; the little maidens planted them in the earth, as the stems of golden flowers.

“ Surely this must be the region of heaven,” thought Arnald ; “ nevertheless, in good sooth, it is also Castle Maraviglia.”

Meantime, the turret whereon he stood began to arise into the air ; it seemed as though it rested upon bright and melodious arches, which were ever widening and deepening their curve, with sweet, strange, and wistful harmonies. “ These also are the tones of the minstrelking,” thought Arnald, as he felt himself approaching the starry heavens ; for he now first perceived that it was night, and that the radiance which he beheld emanated from Castle Maraviglia.

Suddenly, the constellation Alearda sparkled upon him, startling him by its nearness and its brilliance. Reverently he cast his dazzled eyes upon the earth, and beheld the interior of Castle Bisiers.

There sat Alearda in her bright and flowery chamber, reading one of those books which Arnald had composed and written for her. The little Berta was playing beside her mother, merrily, yet after the manner of a discreet and well-trained maiden ; and Arnald greatly desired to bestow on her some of those bright playthings, wherewith the children of Castle Maraviglia diverted themselves. Then the child arose, caressingly approached her mother, and said : “ Ah, let me see pictures ! No toy is so beautiful as a picture ! And read me somewhat out of the heroic legends of the good Arnald !”

And with thoughtful seriousness Alearda complied with the child’s entreaty ; and while she was reading, the vicomte entered, and inquired the meaning of the cloud of melancholy which lay as a veil upon the gentle countenance of the ladye.

Then she answered, "I was reading the poems of the blessed Arnald of Maraviglia, and musing upon all his faith and piety."

"He was a true and gallant knight," said the vicomte. "Sorely miss I such a companion in the path of honour."

"God be praised that it is so," said a mild and familiar voice close beside Arnald; "I am content with the course of thy life!"

It was the beloved Walter who spoke; and the dream died away from the excess of its heavenly bliss.

Chapter Eleventh.

MORNING was clear and bright upon the waters; the stony face of St. Sebastian seemed to smile in the reflection of the young sun; the ebb-tide was advancing fast towards its victory, and leaving a passage to the shore more and more free at every moment; while the song of the land-birds was audible, as they rose in joyous circles towards the blue skies, and the shepherds drew mirthful music from their pipes, as they drove forth their flocks over the budding grass. Never had Arnald awakened to a scene more beautiful and more blissful. He kneeled once more upon the summit of the rock, to thank the Lord of Hosts, and to praise the good knight¹ Sebastian for his conquest of the preceding day—for his enchanting dreams of the past night. Then, full of a gaiety pure as that of angels, he set forth upon his homeward way.

At first the depths caused him to feel somewhat dizzy, as he looked down upon them from the precipitous cliff. But to a man who has been so greatly guerdoned with success as our friend, it may well seem that success is his irrevocable portion during his whole life; and thus Arnald

¹ Sic in orig.

climbed downwards amid the projections of the rock, now rough, now slippery, swift and sure of foot as a chamois. The blithe breezes of morning played freshly upon his brow; the beams of the young and radiant sun shone around him like a glory. It almost seemed as though that rock were one of the golden towers of Castle Maraviglia, illumined by the celestial radiance which had imparted such splendour to his dreams.

But when the pilgrim sprang from the lowest ledge of rock, and alighted upon the ground of the sea, thinly covered by gentle ripples, a sudden shooting pang passed through all his limbs, and a band of iron seemed bound about his breast, while within was burning pain like that of a wound. Never had he so felt before. The frost of fever, creeping to his heart, seemed to say, "This is Death, or at least his near and certain harbinger." But how should such things trouble Arnald? The tears of Alearda were dried, the tender rosebud Berta was blooming once more, the vicomte would never forget his honourable comrade in arms—with fresh and cheerful spirit the minstrel completed his way to the shore. There lay his pilgrim's staff, which had been thrown on shore by the floods of yesterday, and left there by the morning's ebb. Arnald eagerly grasped it, esteeming this pre-eminent among many omens of good.

He had already entered the path to the hut of the kindly shepherd, vividly picturing to himself the joy of Misura, at meeting the friend whom he supposed to be lost, but who returned victorious, when suddenly a figure darted out of the thicket of pines which enveloped the Roman temple, shouting wildly—nay, well-nigh roaring—and waving in its right hand a broad and naked scimitar. Arnald stood still, as was his wont when menaced by danger.

"Tagliaduro! Tagliaduro!" shouted the maniac, with furious countenance and thundering voice, directing a fierce stroke at Arnald. The latter, willing to spare, warded

off the blows with his pilgrim's staff; but after a while, when the impetuosity of the stranger caused the peril to increase, the inherited wrath of a Maraviglia awoke in the troubadour, and by a single mighty stroke on the breast he felled his assailant to the earth.

Beside the fallen man there now kneeled an aged personage in long garments, carefully chafing his temples with costly and odorous salves.

"Did yonder madman hold me for a Marchese of Tagliaduro?" demanded Arnald. "He shouted forth that name as he attacked me."

"This," replied the other, still busily engaged with his patient—"this is himself the unhappy Rinaldo of Tagliaduro; and after the manner of knights, he shouted the name of his race as he charged his opponent."

"What! is it he, the poor misguided one?" said Arnald, stooping thoughtfully over him. But suddenly looking into the face of the assistant, he exclaimed, "And you are the wonder-working master, Ultramonte!"

"Thou mightest have learned as much yesterday," answered the person addressed, "only that, like an irrational creature, thou didst rush into the sea, where, with thy wrestling, and climbing, and praying, thou hast perchance won thy death, unless, indeed, I save thee by mine art."

"I hope not to need it," said Arnald. "But, even in the last extremity, I would reject such dark, unholy aid."

Ultramonte shook his head with a bitter smile, and continued in silence his attendance upon Rinaldo, who at length unclosed his eyes, arose slowly from the earth, and stood before Arnald, pale and thoughtful. His face, like some shattered ruin, retained the most affecting vestiges of its former nobleness. After a while he spoke, gracefully inclining his head.

"Pardon my wild assault, gentle pilgrim. The fault lies wholly with my wise friend here. Understand me: an angel-shape has descended from heaven, and, alas!

it has alighted within my soul. I know not what it should seek there, for truly the house is far too dark and narrow for a guest so glorious. But it dwells there still, thou mayest believe me. Look, it abides here," and he touched his forehead between the eyes—"just here, in the seat of the power of vision. And there I am ever constrained to contemplate it, till the gloomy closet, which they call my soul, begins in that dazzling light to whirl and wheel giddily around. Ultramonte says it is like the course of the moon; but my soul is no cloudless and peaceful moon. Rather does it resemble a fiery comet—"

The burning glow of passion once more kindled upon his cheeks. But controlling himself in a moment, he added, with a melancholy smile, "Thus was it with me when I attacked you. Had but Ultramonte been at hand with his pictures! For it is his office to shew me pictures, unknown, wondrous, and glimmering forms, which dance to and fro along the walls of our temple-dwelling, and sing, as they move, beauteous strains in the ancient and long-past language of the Greeks. They possess, moreover, names of goodly sound. One is called Pallas Athene, and she chiefly resembles the angel-form in my soul. But she attains not to its glory—ah no, not by a far distance! But we speak not of this. And when I gaze on these pictures, fair sir, the figure which I bear within me seems to melt and pass away; and then, for the moment, I seem to myself proud, and powerful, and joyous—"

"Devilish illusions!" cried Arnald, angrily turning to Ultramonte. "Thus wilt thou never heal him; thus wilt thou destroy him now and for ever!"

"If thou couldst but see our pictures, our goodly pictures," murmured Tagliaduro, "thou wouldst then think differently."

"Well spoken, my poor son!" added Ultramonte. "And he shall see them, the audacious stranger, the truant disciple—he *shall* see them!"

"SHALL?" repeated Arnald, proudly erecting his

figure. "A Maraviglia endures such a word only from his God, his ladye, or his liege lord!"

"Combat to the death with us both at once, thou exhausted fool!" cried Ultramonte, white with rage, "or receive our hospitable entertainment yonder in the temple! Choose!"

"I will fight you both at once to the death," replied Arnald, coolly. "The choice is not difficult."

And herewith he elevated his staff as a club, and stood still, in a ready and warlike attitude. The dagger of Alearda still gleamed beneath his mantle, reserved for the last extremity. Rinaldo once more lifted his flashing scimitar. Ultramonte drew forth from his long garments a formidable scythe, which looked like the instrument of sure and speedy death. The combat began. It would have required all the force of an untired and vigorous arm to withstand victoriously these two opponents. Arnald, utterly worn out and enfeebled, was indeed able to ward off several terrible wounds; nevertheless, the hour of his fall and of his death drew near, very near.

Suddenly the combatants were interrupted by a loud and indignant shout, like a thunderclap. It was followed by sundry blows which fell crashing on the heads of Ultramonte and Tagliaduro, till both began to totter, and in a moment Misura—for he was the terrible umpire of the fray—had stretched Rinaldo upon the earth. He then lifted the helplessly-struggling Ultramonte on his shoulders, and ran with him towards the sea-shore, crying, "I will drown the reptile! I will drown the reptile!" He half sang, half spoke the words, in marvellous fury.

Then said the troubadour with much earnestness, "Halt!" and Misura paused and looked on him, shaking his head.

"I know thou wilt not suffer me to do strict justice," said he. "But are not, then, the lives of these assassins and wizards forfeit to us? and shall we not confer a blessing on the neighbourhood, by drowning the vermin where the

sea is deepest? Wait only till I have carried this one to the shore; he is still restive. Then will I return, and make an end of the other."

"To me it will be a service! a true service of love!" thus murmured the fallen Rinaldo.

But for the second time the minstrel cried "Halt!" And words of Christian love and faith, even towards our enemies, dropped like honey-dew from his lips. "Has not God," he concluded—"has not God, then, been over-gracious to me, His poor sinful creature? And to thee also Misura? for well do I know how dearly thou lovest me. And is it for us to judge and to condemn in an hour like this?"

Then Misura suffered the dark-browed Ultramonte to slide from his shoulders, and running to Arnald, laid his head upon his breast, and wept softly and noiselessly, like a repentant child. After a while, lifting up his face, he said: "Let them live, then, for I also am a poor sinful worm before God! Well was it, however, that I had just determined to complete the pilgrimage for thee; our old shepherd and I held thee for dead; and in this one night I have wept far more than in all the rest of my life, not excluding my years of childhood; and had I not arrived in time, I should have found cause to double my tears, or rather to change them into bloody vengeance, O my Arnald, O my dearest and most beloved Arnald!"

Meanwhile the two enemies had arisen, pale and streaming with blood.

"Ye would have constrained me but now to visit your heathen temple," said Arnald, addressing them. "A Maraviglia never suffers constraint; but, likewise, he never knows fear—under God's good guidance. After to-morrow, when I have somewhat reposed myself, thou mayest seek me, Rinaldo, yonder in the little shepherd-hut upon the meadow. Whether it will ever be for you to visit me in any place, Ultramonte, your own dealings must decide."

At these words Misura shook his head with a doubtful and meditative air. At last he said, "That which a Maraviglia hath spoken, he will surely do. But that which Messire Misura speaks, he also will do. And-hereby I swear, that I will not depart a hand's breadth from Arnald's side, as long as he abides within the precincts of your grove of darkness and witchery."

Silently, but with gestures of submission, the two misguided men turned away. Arnald, very pale, but with a tranquil smile upon his lips, re-entered the hospitable hut, leaning on the arm of his faithful Misura.

Chapter Twelfth.

Two days afterwards Arnald sate upon the shore, not far from the hut. It was the refreshing hour of dawn; a soft breeze played around him, like a prophecy of spring; before him lay the sea, all glittering beneath the rising sun beams. He touched his lute and sang;

Cradle thee, my spirit!
 O my gladsome spirit, cradle thee!
 On the hillows dancing,
 On the sunbeams glancing,
 Pour forth psalms of joyous minstrelsy!

From the Lord, my spirit,
 O my joyous spirit, from the Lord,
 Glory, as of heaven,
 To thy life was given;
 Victory with lyre, and staff, and sword!

By the Lord, my spirit,
 O my cloudless spirit, by thy God,
 Out of realms elysian
 Came an angel-vision,
 Lighting gently on earth's barren sod

Now for her, my spirit,
 O my tranquil spirit, many a wreath
 Thou mayest weave, entwining
 Lyre and falchion shining,
 Soon—

A sudden shooting pang convulsed his feeble breast. He was obliged to desist from singing; and, with a smile of strange cheerfulness upon his lips, he looked upon the earth before him, faintly shadowed with the first greenness of spring, and drew breath, deeply, and with difficulty.

Then Rinaldo came forth from behind a projection of the rock, pale and weeping, and said: "If thou canst, I pray thee, for God's sake, sing on to the end that strain of consolation and healing. My bewildered soul thirsts after it."

And Arnald, his strength being renewed, bent his head with an expression of kindness, and sang on—thus closing the interrupted stanza :

Soon for her thou mayst lie down in death.

Then, oh then, my spirit,
 O my blessed spirit, wakenest thou,
 Clothed in angel whiteness,
 Watching in thy brightness
 This her angel-walk on earth below !

"I might have been as happy as thou art!" sighed Rinaldo, as, covering his face, he sank on the earth at Arnald's feet. "But the anguish raged within me so wildly, and I found myself by this wild sea, and in Ultramonte's picture-realm."

"Ultramonte's picture-realm!" interrupted Arnald. "That truly may be very wild; but this sea is so but seldom. Seest thou not how the kindly sun mirrors himself therein, and the spring breathes so deliciously over its waters?"

"For thee—for thee, thou pure heart!" said Rinaldo.

“For me such things are past. And if I might give thee friendly counsel, I would say, gaze not at all on the dark marvels of our heathen temple: there is danger in them.”

“I am impelled by no idle curiosity,” replied Arnald. “I seek to rescue thee; and, if it may be, Ultramonte also. Let us go.”

Therewith he arose and began his way; at the same moment the faithful Misura issued from the hut, and walked thoughtfully beside his friend. Rinaldo preceded them by a considerable distance—a gloomy and ominous guide.

Chapter Thirteenth.

THE wild and confused entanglement of the pine-branches spread, even under the brightest noon-day sun, a sombre twilight around that heathen temple, sheltering also, with their dark canopy, many breaches in the ruinous roof. As the strangers entered, there arose among the boughs a rustling sound, loud, but indistinct, discordant, and repulsive; which seemed half like scorn, and half like warning. Crouching in a dusky heap, Ultramonte sate in a corner of the vestibule.

When he beheld Arnald, he arose, eyed him in defiance, and exclaimed, “Here comes the drivelling fool, who gave up his power over all nature for the smile of a woman; the fool who, in self-sought and pitiful servility, gave himself to the service of a mistress, satisfied if she would perhaps vouchsafe to permit him to die for her!”

His insolent and disdainful laugh was answered by a ghastly echo from every chamber of the building.

“It seems thou hast invisible company here,” said Arnald; “but methinks it must consist of miserable slaves, whose chorus attends the laugh of their tyrant, whenever he so pleases. Bid them begone.”

“That will I not. No householder without his household.”

“Thou wilt not, dark master? Nay, then, thou constrainest and empowerest me to do my part.”

And he held up Alcarda’s dagger in his right hand, advancing the hilt, and spoke with a slow and solemn voice :

“By the figure of this Cross, I adjure thee, thou unhallowed race that dwellest in these walls, make thyself manifest.”

A strange light shot along the walls, and speedily began to shape itself into the forms of heroes and lovely ladies. Rinaldo stretched out his arms towards them yearningly; Ultramonte smiled with satisfaction, and whispered, “Continue thus! Continue ever!”

Then Arnald, straining to its utmost his exhausted breast, thundered forth in tones which for the moment had resumed their ancient power :

“Did I *so* summon ye? Is this your veritable shape? Ye shall manifest yourselves as ye are. I demand truth; by this sign, TRUTH!”

And, as we sometimes see the clouds of the firmament, which lie peacefully shaping forth to the eye tranquil seas, and gentle slopes of wood, and forms of winged cherubs, suddenly arouse themselves beneath the lash of the whirlwind, and present the giant shapes of phantom-fiends, and gryphons with hideously-spread wings, even so did it now befall, even such was the change which followed the decree of Arnald. Oh, what horrors became suddenly apparent on the walls; ay, even in the midst of the chambers, dusky and distorted figures wrestling in frantic strife!

“I have heard much of your harmony,” said Arnald. “I command ye to sing now. But, Truth! By this sign, Truth!”

Then there arose within the edifice such ghastly sounds, such yelling, howling, shrieking, and roaring, that Rinaldo sank in horror upon the earth. Misura retained his

wanted composure only by the exertion of all his powers. Ultramonte whined for mercy.

Arnald standing fast, in the unshaken authority of his faith, now motioned the raging fiends to depart. They vanished; and he, raising the unhappy Tagliaduro from the ground, said, "Now, truly, thou knowest thy beautiful pictures! Beware of them in future!"

There was unbroken silence for a while. But at length Ultramonte arose out of his degradation, and resuming his haughty demeanour, he came close to Rinaldo, and cried with a scornful smile, "Dost thou indeed put faith in yonder mountebank, with his brain-bewildering jargon? At first I own he staggered even me; but one recovers speedily from such delusions. Now the whole matter appears to me simply absurd. *Those* the divinities of Hellas! *That* their temple hymn! Now, in good sooth, the most fanatical monk on the earth never gave vent to a more extravagant fantasy!"

"Miserable scoffer!" replied Arnald, calmly; "such and so narrow is thy comprehension! The beautiful images whereby, even amid the wildest wanderings of fallen man, deep-thinking sages and rich-hearted poets were able to form dim conceptions of God and nature, and to which they raised immortal strains of praise and hymns of sweetness, flowing from consecrated lips, and all shadowing forth the one universal truth—dreadedst thou, that over those forms of sunlight and purity thy dark magic has any power? Oh, contemplate them aright; contemplate them in the light of Christianity, and thou must needs prostrate thyself before God, in heightened reverence and love, recognising even here His marvellous glory, and purity, and mercy. Blessed were the hours wherein my Altarbol was wont to lead me, as it were, into these chambers of the wide and universal manifestation of eternal goodness! But your knowledge is only the refuse and corruption of all this: coarse sensuality in bright and festive garments; daring blasphemy girt with a sunlike glory; obstinate

blindness to death and resurrection, beneath the light of God; profane rending in sunder of all the veils which shield the mysteries of nature; in short, you possess that which the vulgar possessed of these glorious things, and to you they are goblins whom you worship as false gods—they are the demons within your own bosom, and as such they pay you outward homage. Alas, Ultramonte! thou that wert once a child upon the breast of nature—for well could I see that spirit in thee, when I walked with thee formerly amid the woods, and all things around us were to thee so dear, so familiar, so intelligible, caressing thee, and opening to thee their mysteries with a thousand invisible tongues—whither hast thou been misled? Alas, Ultramonte!”

The troubadour paused sorrowfully, and looked with tearful eyes upon the ground.

Over hill, over vale,
In joy or in wail,
It hath led me apart—it leads me apart;
It is life, it is heaven,
By the ancient gods given,
To the conquering, ruling, exulting, and glorying heart!

Into this wild strain Ultramonte suddenly broke out. He began to dance, with frantic gestures, around the hall; with high and almost incredible bounds, he rent away the branches of the pine-trees, and with marvellous rapidity wove them into a crown amid his upward-streaming grey locks. From time to time, it seemed as though he were about to summon his spectres, but he desisted when Arnald looked upon him warningly, or lifted up the cross-shaped dagger; and after a while, he disappeared among the interior chambers of the building, with a sound of angry murmurs.

Sinking wearily upon Maraviglia's breast, Rinaldo asked—"May I go with thee to the hut upon the shore? Were I to be left here, now that I know the reality of

these horrors, mine old frenzy would surely come upon me, and utterly overpower me."

Arnald supported him, speaking to him pleasant and comfortable words, full of gentleness and truth; and thus the three issued forth into the clear sunlight, and approached the shepherd's hut, while the air above their heads resounded with the song of the lark.

Chapter Fourteenth.

As the bloom of spring burst forth, the early blossoms of holiness, submission, and sinless love began also to awake in the heart of Rinaldo, called into life by the words and lays of Arnald. Seldom, however, was the troubadour able to sing; for a deadly pang, which increased day by day, was wont to contract his breast, once so ample and so vigorous. If Ultramonte had lied in many things, in this at least he had spoken truly—the health of Arnald was irrecoverably shattered by the toils of his pilgrimage. But the true minstrel-knight—mindful of the saying, that "we must work while it is day, for the night cometh when no man can work"—laboured, for this reason, all the more earnestly in the composition of fair lays and goodly legends, but chiefly of consolatory instructions for Rinaldo, who was scarcely ever absent from his side. His yearning desire to return to Castle Bisiers was checked partly by the feebleness of his health, but more by the obligation under which he believed himself to lie, of not abandoning the unfortunate Tagliaduro, till he had seen him safely established in the path of salvation.

But one morning there came to the side of Arnald's couch a being with joyful and sparkling countenance, with bright and transparent eyes, with lips wearing a smile of unspeakable sweetness—it was Rinaldo. Thus, as it were transfigured, he stood beside the minstrel, and spoke :

“Methinks it has been made manifest to me what shall hereafter be my vocation in this goodly world. I dare not presume again to enter the presence of Alearda. I will worship its reflection in the brightness of your songs, with quiet and holy reverence. And all the misdeeds of which I have been guilty upon this shore; the scoffs and opposition wherewith I have encountered the pilgrims; the aid which I have frequently given to Ultramonte, when he conjured up storms to overpower, and, haply, even to slay them (alas, Arnald! even the recent tumult amid the clouds and waves, which placed such terrible impediments in your way, was not the work of nature!)—hearken to me, dear Arnald—for all these sins I hope to make atonement and reparation, in that for the rest of my life I will abide upon the shore as a true and fearless sentinel, expediting the progress of pilgrims to the shrine of St. Sebastian, as far as the extremest exertion of my powers can achieve. Ah, Arnald!—and if then I should gently entreat the pilgrims, when they shall ascend the rock, to remember in their prayers the name of our ladye Alearda—tell me, shall I not by so doing, also do the will of our gracious God?”

“Therein wilt thou do the will of our gracious God!” repeated Arnald, warmly embracing him. “Oh, thou valiant and true-hearted Rinaldo! No friend in the world has so fully and entirely understood me as thyself; and meseems that I leave my other and better self, as my victorious substitute on these coasts.”

At this moment, Misura entered the chamber with a very serious countenance: “Gentlemen and dear friends,” said he, “arm yourselves with weapons bodily and spiritual. The fishermen and peasants are assembling in haste and fear upon the shore; they dread a new and destructive outbreak of Ultramonte’s malignant artifice; for above his dark abode there hangs the appearance of a heavy, heavy cloud, wherein lurid tongues of flame are shooting and twining like serpents.”

Arnald was dressed in a moment; and with as much speed as the pain of his breast would permit, he hastened with his friends in the direction designated by Misura.

“God’s blessing attend you, valiant pilgrims!” cried the terrified women and children, as they advanced. “God bless you, and aid us in this strait by your courage and piety!” A considerable number of men were standing in various but closely-thronged groups; they did reverence to the friends as they hurried forwards; but only a few stragglers ventured to follow, and those at a great distance.

They were now in sight of the temple, the appearance of which corresponded with Misura’s description. Deep silence reigned within the walls and throughout the entire grove; the shooting flames darted incessantly up and down, amid the dark and weighty masses of cloud. The three friends stood still.

“Rinaldo!” said the troubadour, after a while, “thou knowest these unhallowed marvels by former experience. Is this only a snare to seduce us to our destruction? or can we, by advancing, do aught for the deliverance of the land, and for our own renown?”

“Let me first consider,” replied Rinaldo; and he fixed a steady gaze upon the ominous appearances.

Suddenly, from the midst of the clouds, there arose a tall and upright flame, which ascended towards the skies; the other flames seemed to gather and form themselves into an inscription of fearful import, as they circled around it; while that central column of fire appeared gradually shaping itself into the figure of a man, but of an aspect so terrible and so overwhelming, that the three friends covered their faces with their hands, and buried them in their mantles.

When they looked up again, a refreshing breeze from the rock of St. Sebastian had dispersed the clouds. Brightly and peacefully the morning sun shone upon the ruined abode of Ultramonte, tinging with fair and golden hues the edges of the dark-green pines and larches.

“He is dead, and has appeared to me!” said Rinaldo. “In one of the darkest hours of the past he bound himself thereto, by an oath of awful import!”

A feeling of deep compassion entered the breasts of all, dispersing the last remnants of wrath and fear. Mournfully, but with their spirits free and strong within them, the three friends crossed the flowery meadow, and entered the precincts of the shunned and terrible fir-grove.

Chapter Fifteenth.

IN the background of the temple-vestibule, upon a pile of dry wood festooned and garlanded with wreaths of flowers and foliage, lay the soulless body of Ultramonte, surrounded by many strange instruments of magic. It appeared that in the hour of death he had sought to consume himself to ashes; for a half-extinguished torch had dropped from his hand upon the paved floor, and a few scattered and powerless flames and sparks were still crackling among the branches of the pile, dying out one after another without producing any effect. “The unhappy wanderer had ever a great affection for this heathen mode of sepulture,” said Rinaldo. “Sometimes even was he wont to give utterance to the idea, that it might perhaps be with him as with that wondrous bird the phoenix, which soars up to the sky, in second youth and vigour, out of its funereal flames.”

“Oh, marvellous compound of falsehood and truth!” sighed Arnald. “Ah, had he but gazed upon the countenance of those Hellenic legends with an honest and virtuous heart, doubtless they would have guided him upon the traces of the Saviour, and he might now indeed be as a phoenix, arising to heaven in renewed youth!”

“And may he not, even now, attain to this asked?” Rinaldo, softly; “if not immediately, yet one day at last,

in the eternal light of that never-ceasing mercy which streams upon the souls of men? Ah, he shewed often bright sparks of goodness; and I know not how I should endure the thought—Ultramonte is condemned!”

“Therefore, upon earth, God permits thee not this knowledge,” said Misura, sternly. “Leave to the Lord the unquestioned exercise of His office as Judge; and strive only to cling fast by the right, lest thou thyself shouldst fall into that destruction which has, very possibly, overtaken the dark Ultramonte.”

The fear of eternity thrilled through the hearts of all. Silently they sank on their knees beside that strange couch of death.

“Be of better cheer, dear friend,” said Arnald at last to Rinaldo, who was weeping bitterly. “Look, look yonder! There is the sign of the cross upon the wall! It must have been hewn in the stone by Ultramonte, even in the agonies of death. See you not how the fingers of his right hand still clutch his terrible sickle?”

“The form of the cross was not there before,” exclaimed Rinaldo; and smiling in the faint light of awakening hope, he lifted the locks which overhung his tearful eyes.

“Oh, what a blessed omen!” continued Arnald; “and his face is wholly turned towards it, and by that movement he suffered the hideous torch to fall, and the wild flames were gradually quenched around his dying bed.”

“Worked he not enchantments amid the clouds immediately before his death?” cried Misura, in doubt and wonder; “and did not his spirit arise out of the ruins before our eyes in a fiery and fiend-like shape?”

“Judge not, and thou shalt not be judged,” said Arnald, with benign severity. Then Misura was silent, Rinaldo looked upwards with a smile of kindling hope, and all three prayed fervently and trustfully for the repose of that great but erring spirit, and laid the weary body in its quiet grassy grave, amid pious hymns.

When the friends issued forth, they were greeted with

shouts of exultation. The inhabitants of the coast had gathered around the fir-grove as soon as the menacing cloud was dispersed; and they now gave honour and renown to the pilgrim-strangers, to whose prayers of wondrous power they ascribed their deliverance.

Arnald explained to them their mistake, and related the whole matter as it had really occurred. "But he who shall in future protect holy pilgrims," said he in conclusion, "and convert these once-dreaded halls into a place of refuge for all the oppressed, is this noble hero, once the Marquess Rinaldo of Tagliaduro—now and henceforth the beneficent hermit Emendatus!"

He did not himself know by what impulse this name had arisen to his lips; but he recognised the inspiration, and so also did Rinaldo and all the people. The hearts of all poured themselves forth to heaven in a loud and solemn *Te Deum*; while the sunlight traced upon the transparent waters a golden path to the rock of St. Sebastian, and the figure of the saint sparkled in the clear radiance, as if glorified.

Chapter Sixteenth.

EMENDATUS had taken leave of Arnald and Misura with sweet and grateful tears, and departed to his former abode—a place now ennobled and hallowed by the blessing of a pious priest, and by the holy vocation of its hermit occupant. The two friends, having richly rewarded the trusty shepherd for his hospitable entertainment and ready aid, set forth upon their homeward course amid the benedictions and good wishes of all the dwellers on the coast.

Arnald went on his way with a right gladsome spirit, but with a body so enfeebled that he could only travel during a few hours of each day, and, nevertheless, was in a state of utter exhaustion when he paused to repose himself at convent or hostelry. The faithful Misura beheld him

with deep and painfully-repressed emotion, which Arnald observing, endeavoured to chase away, by saying with a gay smile, "Let me only reach my home amid the ruins of Maraviglia, and find myself once more near Castle Bisiers, and thou shalt see how all my troubles on earth will depart unbidden."

"Ay, there indeed," returned Misura, pressing his hand upon his eyes; "there, indeed, mayest thou at least find solace and refreshment. But how are we to arrive there?"

"Somewhat slowly, as it seems," said Arnald, striving to jest in his wonted manner; nevertheless his brow had lost its openness, and was shadowed by a cloud: his heart was filled with fervent longings, only too conscious of their own fruitlessness.

While they conversed thus, they were reclining by the edge of a rivulet, which wound its clear and serpentine course through a hilly meadow-land, and amid whose tranquil waters Misura was engaged in cooling the wickerwork flask which contained costly wine, intended for the nourishment of his friend. To both the wanderers the scene appeared to be familiar; but lost in other and deeper musings, they had not deemed it worth while to express this idea.

There came along the nearest glade a second pair of pilgrims, wrapped in dark vestments, who, having saluted the first-comers with a mixture of timidity and respect, seated themselves also upon the turf, but much lower down beside the course of the rivulet, and began to quench their thirst by drinking the water out of the palms of their hands.

"Why so distant, fair companions?" inquired the kindly-spirited Arnald. "Like gladly associates with like. And so low down too, beside the stream; 'tis as though ye might not taste of the pure waters till they have paid us service due!"

The strangers bowed their heads with a grave gesture of acquiescence, as if thus it must be.

“Nay, nay,” continued Arnald; “moreover, we have goodly wine here. Come and partake our refreshment.”

The strangers eagerly signed in the negative, and stirred not from their place.

“Marvellous!” said Arnald to Misura; “some rigid vow must bind them. Yet go to them, dear friend; speaking from such a distance is too great an exertion for me, and thou mightest perchance affright them with thy deep voice. Go to them, and pray them right sweetly and courteously, that they will at least make use of our vessels to draw water.”

Misura complied with his friend’s request. But, as soon as he approached the pilgrims, one of them exclaimed, in a voice of terror, “Jesu! the fierce, gigantic man!” and hastily wrapped himself more closely in his dusky garments.

“Be not a child!” cried Misura, impatiently. “There are many taller men in the world than I, but not one who is better disposed to aid those who are in need—I except not even my companion yonder, for he cannot mean better than myself. Therefore conduct yourselves reasonably, and come to us. Or if your vow suffers it not, and you must not accept our aid, not even our cups for drawing water, and if you are also forbidden to speak,—well, then, explain yourselves by signs; only be speedy, for I would fain revive the exhausted strength of my friend with yonder wine. To speak the truth, I shall be all the better pleased if you drink no wine, for it is a most necessary support for my Arnald; and we have just now a peculiarly choice kind, which I do not well know where to procure when we have finished our present stock: only say nothing of all this to him. And now, will ye come or not? and will ye drink or not?”

“Let my lord deal with us according to his pleasure!” replied the pilgrim whose outcry had awakened Misura’s wrath; “we are bound by no vow.”

And herewith he took his companion’s hand, who arose

with a heavy sigh, and they both followed Misura with drooping heads.

“Here they are!” said the latter to Arnald; “they may speak, but they drink not wine. Thou mayest be certain of that beforehand.”

“Why so, if thou hast not asked the question of them?” answered Arnald, with some appearance of dissatisfaction. Turning to him who seemed to be the younger of the two pilgrims, he added, “How is it? Have ye then forsworn wine upon your pilgrimage? Bethink you that the slightest shadow of an untruth renders man displeasing in the eyes of God; but not so a thankful enjoyment of food and drink. Ye are more feeble than I—far more feeble. Have ye forsworn wine?”

“We drink no wine!” replied the elder, in a suppressed voice, drawing his deep hat over his brows.

“At least your companion greatly needs it,” persisted Arnald; and he ceased not till by dint of gentle entreaties and urgent arguments he had induced the younger pilgrim to swallow a goblet of the generous wine, almost by compulsion. The latter raised himself up, like a parched blossom refreshed by dew, lifting towards heaven his wan face and large black eyes, with an unspeakably touching expression. He stammered forth a few agitated words of gratitude, and sank upon the grass, to seek the pleasant repose he so much needed; his companion kneeled down by his side, and they entered into low and earnest conversation.

Meanwhile Misura stood apart, muttering discontentedly to himself, “He’ll go on preaching till he has preached all his wine down their throats, and left himself none wherewith to moisten his parched and weary tongue.”

“No, Misura,” cried the smiling Arnald; “it shall not go quite so far. Thou knowest I myself love the good gifts of God right dearly. For the proof—look here!” He filled a goblet brimful, and merrily drained it at a single draught. When, however, he perceived that Misura main-

tained a dissatisfied silence, he added, "Seest thou not that the younger of those two strangers is a lady, doubtless all unused to weariness and want?"

"Fool that I was not to discover it!" exclaimed Misura, so loudly that the female pilgrim started at the sound, without, however, comprehending the meaning of his words; and from this moment he was ready, with knightly alacrity, to attend upon her slightest want. All the more sternly, however, did he regard her companion, who, indeed, had not suffered Arnald to persuade him to taste the wine, but who stood there dark and gloomy, with eyes fixed on the ground, as though the whole world disturbed him not.

"Though thou lovest not to speak," said Misura at length, "thou wilt surely vouchsafe to direct us how we may attain the nearest and most hospitable castle. We are out of the highway, the darkness of evening is gathering around us, and I would fain find a fitting shelter for my friend during the night."

"The goodliest castle in the whole country stands but a few thousand steps from this spot," returned the stranger; "and in requital of your courtesy and hospitality, we will gladly be your guides thither. But you must not marvel that we lead you suddenly into a more desolate region; for the singular taste of the ancient lords of the castle has caused them to place it in the very heart of the woods and mountains. Seest thou yonder heech-covered crags? This rivulet has its source among them, and thither must we ascend."

"Well, well, make not so many words about it," cried Misura; "we have looked upon sterner sights than your castle of the crags, and are right willing to attend you thither, if only the path be not too rugged for your companion."

But the pilgrim whom they supposed to be a lady had already sprung lightly to her feet, and hurried on in advance, with visible delight, so rapidly that Misura more than once prayed her to slacken her pace, because Arnald's

feble breast strained and panted with the effort of mounting the craggy path.

As had been foretold, the forest and the battlements of rock now looked sternly and strangely upon the wanderers, as though imparting fearful tales of the olden world; solitary crosses gleaming upon the heights, or planted close beside the narrow footpath, seemed to be memorials of travellers who had perished by misfortune, or perhaps even by murder; the whole scene wore a repulsive and melancholy aspect, yet one strangely familiar—although neither Arnald nor Misura could recollect when or how they had traversed these woods during their pilgrimage. This was, however, the less unaccountable, as the forest had now cast aside its stiff garments of ice and snow, and clothed itself in the full array of emerald foliage.

And now a lofty castle became visible, steeped in the last glorious rays of the setting sun. It stood on the further side of a yawning precipice, which was rendered passable by two uprooted trunks of trees, extending from edge to edge.

“Man!” cried Misura, grasping the elder pilgrim by the shoulder—“Man! is not this the castle of Marquess Raymond?”

The stranger signed an affirmative.

“And thou—art not thou an old acquaintance?”

Again the pilgrim bowed his head.

“Thou speechless traitor, thou hast nevertheless betrayed thyself!” shouted Misura, thrusting his guide to the earth upon a little elevation of stones which impeded their pathway, and was surmounted by a cross. “Speak! The Marquess Raymond would have had us sleep, as sleeps the murdered victim beneath us! Is it not so? Speak!”

The pilgrim groaned and was silent; but the female cast herself on her knees at the feet of Misura, and lifted up her hands pleadingly, while her shadowing hat dropped backwards, and suffered a profusion of waving black tresses

to become visible, thus confirming Arnald's previous conjecture. "Spare him!" said she half weeping, but in tones of flute-like melody—"spare him! I pledge my life, that he meant no evil towards you."

Loosening his grasp, Misura answered: "Nay, if you desire it, lady, I needs must comply."

"I am an unhappy fugitive!" sighed the stranger. "If you would take my life—it is undoubtedly forfeit to you, if not for the deeds of this day; and truly, by taking it you would do me good service. It was a childish and irrational fear of your judicial vengeance which fell upon me by the stream yonder. Only grant your protection to this lady."

"Look we then like men who would slay the weaponless?" cried Arnald, indignantly. "Your words are to me strange, dark, and unintelligible."

"Know ye not who I am?"

"No; neither know we the lady."

"Ah, truly, Arnald, thy heart cannot conceive horror such as that which overmasters mine, when I contemplate thee and thy mighty and warlike friend."

"Let that pass for the present," interrupted the female, "and have pity upon our wretchedness. We trusted that ye would have spoken to the lord of the castle in our behalf, and won us grace in his eyes. We are driven forth thence into the wide wild world, and we know no place of refuge."

"Ye have chosen a goodly pair of advocates truly," laughed Misura. "Those whom we present are likely to find a fair reception in yonder walls."

"Oh nay—oh nay!" answered the female; "ye know not." She stopped, looked on the ground, and wept.

"Be the end what it will," cried Arnald, "we see the tears of a tender and helpless woman, and there is no room for hesitation. Follow me, then, at once!"

And gallantly struggling with the dizziness which assailed him at the sight of the sheer precipice, he strode

quickly and firmly along the prostrate trees which communicated with the opposite edge, and reached the other side in safety. Misura, still somewhat mistrustful, kept close behind him, ready to repel any treacherous attack. The two pilgrims followed with slow and mournful steps.

When the little party was re-assembled, Arnald requested the strangers to acquaint him with the cause of their expulsion from the castle, and with the object of their present desire. The female, instead of replying, cast an imploring glance upon his lute; and when with courteous alacrity he placed it in her hand, she seated herself on a projection of the rock, swept her fingers across the strings, and sang the following words in a voice of great sweetness:—

Our couch hath been of silken sheen,
 The costliest wine our board hath graced:
 But, exiled and forsaken now,
 We drink but of the streamlet's flow,
 And sleep upon the dreary waste.

Such hardy plight beseems a knight
 In warrior's garb or pilgrim weed:
 But when a woman's trembling form
 Shrinks from the blast and flies the storm,
 Oh, speak! can this be fitting meed?

But, well-a-day! we went astray—
 We sinned; yet who from sin is pure?
 Ah, look on us with pitying eyes!
 Ah, end our heavy miseries!
 If but by judgment stern and sure!

“And if these words touch you not,” said she in conclusion, as she restored the lute to its owner, “I have nought more to say; for in sooth, by strict rule of justice, we deserve no pity.”

“I promise you both help and pity,” replied Arnald. “Only let me know what I am to demand of the castle-

lord on your behalf, always supposing that he grants me an audience."

"I will tell it you in an enigma," replied the female, and was silent, as if in reflection. But suddenly she started, looked around, then stooping forward and listening, as if to catch some sound athwart the rapidly darkening foliage, she exclaimed, "Heaven help us! He comes himself! The lord of the castle comes!" And like hunted deer, she and her companion plunged into the thickest part of the wood."

"We are not going to run away too?" asked Misura, laughing.

"Nay, God forbid!" replied Arnald; "though I cannot say that I expect a joyful meeting."

And thus they remained standing still, calmly leaning on their pilgrim-staves.

Chapter Seventeenth.

A JOYOUS chorus of horns resounded through the valley; a procession approached, gleaming and glittering like flames through the darkness in their steel array. As they advanced towards our friends, a large number of prisoners became visible, led in bonds after the baron as he returned home.

"He seems little changed," whispered Misura, sternly, in the ear of Arnald.

"Let us await the end," replied the latter, calmly. "If fair speech avail not, we may perchance prevail with other means; for a returning pilgrim is far more a member of the ranks of knighthood than one who is departing."

Misura nodded his approbation of this sentiment.

"Ye have received your charge," said the baron to his soldiers; and gracing them with a friendly salutation, he passed through the gateway, attended by a few squires.

Those who remained behind formed themselves into a circle around the prisoners.

“Do ye confess,” inquired a captain, “that ye are men who have vowed allegiance to my lord in all true and honourable service?”

A tremulous “Yes” of conscious guilt was the answer.

“Can ye deny that ye were found in evil ways, promoting and encouraging anew the ancient trade of robbery and treachery? Can ye deny it? Or has any one aught to say in his own defence?”

A gloomy but universal “No!” was now heard. Many of the prisoners kneeled down, and besought a merciful death, in manifest terror.

Then said the captain: “Thanks be to God, my liege lord has no cause to fear you, and may therefore safely and gladly accord you grace. For this time ye have only experienced his power; but at the next offence ye will encounter his inexorable justice. Return home, and live as becomes good vassals, who not only fear and honour their liege lord, but also regard him and their fellow-vassals with affection.”

And at a sign from the speaker the bonds of the prisoners were stricken off; and as they passed before him in grateful procession, he bestowed on each of the band, in the name of his master, a few gold pieces, as a compensation for the terror which the offender and his family had undergone. Full of thanks, the pardoned culprits descended the valley; while the soldiers, singing merrily, rode through the castle-gates.

“The marquess must be greatly changed,” said Arnald. “Truly our solemn admonitions must have sunk into his heart. Seemed he not to thee more graceful, I might almost say more youthful, than when we beheld him before?”

“I scarcely know how to answer,” said Misura. “At one moment I am ready to say Yes, at another, No; almost like yonder captives, only, God be thanked, not after so

lamentable a fashion. But prudence never injured any man; and it is now my turn to say, 'Let us await the end!'

The two friends entered the little chapel in which they had formerly found refuge; and sitting down beneath its hallowed shelter, they gazed forth upon the casements of the castle-hall all glittering in torchlight.

"They hold high festivities again, methinks," said Misura, with severity.

"Well, well," returned Arnald, excusingly, "what fault is there in that? A noble cavalier may well hold a feast after such deeds of victory and mercy."

"Ay, if he have not so heavy an account to make up as this Marquess Raymond," cried Misura. "For him it would be well to continue thoughtful for a little while, and not to begin a great jubilee because he has once been capable of an honourable action."

Meanwhile a richly-attired knight became visible within the hall; he was advancing towards the window, attended by several esquires, who appeared to wait his orders. Doubtless this was the lord of the castle. He had scarcely dismissed his attendants, when two youthful damsels approached him; one presented him with a goblet of wine, while the other leaned with graceful familiarity on his arm, apparently wearied with the dance.

"There! Two instead of one!" muttered Misura. "A goodly reformation, truly!"

"She with the raven tresses," said Arnald, "who before stood at his side by the window, is not present."

"He is weary of her, and has driven her away," replied Misura. "And verily, Arnald, verily the truth flashes upon me like a torch at midnight—our lady-pilgrim yonder is no other than that maid of the raven locks."

Arnald thoughtfully assented; and Misura continued, with an angry laugh, "We have an honourable commission truly, to reconcile the truant mistress to the worthless

profligate, and probably also to procure a good reception for her paramour, for doubtless such was the character of her companion; and I warrant you she has given the baron good cause for her dismissal."

"Peace, Misura, peace! A far different—a far nobler idea arises in me."

"O yes, I can readily believe it; 'tis the way with poets! Always in the clouds, always surrounded by stainless virtue. It is enough to drive one distracted that you can never open your eyes at the right moment; and afterwards, when the unpleasant reality strikes upon your heart with heavy and unmistakeable force, you lift up your lamentations, and declare that the world has treacherously deceived you."

"It is enough, Misura. At this moment thou art doubtless very sage in thine own eyes; and if all these words were spoken by a man of the ordinary stamp, I should trouble myself no further than to bid him hold his peace, and gladly make good my words with my sword. But thou, Misura—thou! No, no, thou true and kindly spirit; speak not thou after the fashion wherein the worldly-wise are ever striving to overcloud the pure light which God hath bestowed on the poet, and make him atone for his elevation, by expelling him from the world of reality—like a juggler or mountebank forbidden to enter into an honourable community. Think on mine ancestor, the minstrel-king! He knew how to strike the lute, and also how to strike with the sword right gallantly; and thou knowest that such a man does not ordinarily walk the earth with his eyes shut."

Misura pressed his friend's hand, and replied, with shame, "I will not so offend again."

"Ah, I also was far too warm with you," said Arnald, with a sigh; and the two friends embraced with the affection of brothers.

Chapter Eighteenth.

THE baron had withdrawn from the window, but the aspect of the castle continued bright and joyous, and the chambers resounded with sweet and mirthful music. Suddenly a postern-door moved softly upon its hinges, and thence there issued a female form in long and modest garments, bearing a small lamp in her hand. She bowed courteously to the strangers, and said, "The lord of the castle invites you within his doors. He has observed you through his casement, shelterless in this desolate night; and it is not his wont to feast merrily, while poor pilgrims lie without his walls under the roof of the bleak sky."

Arnald and Misura bowed doubtfully to the graceful speaker.

"Once before we were invited into this castle, lady," said the troubadour after a while, "and then we did well to decline the invitation; I scarcely know whether we should now do well to accept it."

The lady answered gently, "Since my brother Godfrey, who, with his wonted goodness, has permitted me to come forth and accost you myself, ye holy men—since my brother Godfrey has dwelt here, no man has repented visiting these halls. Of the scenes which they have witnessed heretofore, it becomes me not to speak, scarcely even to think."

"Godfrey of Montalban!" cried Misura, in amazement.

"The same," replied the maiden; "and I have the honour to be his sister, and am called Clementine de Montalban."

"O my poet, how clear and keen were thine eyes, and how blind were mine!" exclaimed Misura; and at the same moment the light of the lamp fell on Arnald's face.

Then Clementine forgot all her rules of decorum, and

broke forth into an outcry of joy: "Messire Maraviglia! Messire Maraviglia!"

Godfrey, having mistaken the words, and supposing that she called for assistance, came swift as an arrow out of the castle, carrying a torch in his left hand, and a flashing sword in his right. But immediately comprehending the scene, he inclined his head in joyful emotion and said, "Oh, now thou needest no longer conceal thy name, my knightly pilgrim! And if I have found favour in thine eyes, I beseech thee suffer me not to rise till I have received the stroke of knighthood from thine honourable hand! I have declined accepting it at any other hand, in the hope that thou wouldst one day grace me with the honour."

As he spoke he sank upon his knees, and gave the hilt of his unsheathed sword to the troubadour, who, greatly moved, imparted to the young Montalban the same noble gift which he had himself received from the vicomte on the shores of Provence. "May the ancestors of thy great race be with thee," added he, embracing the new-made knight, "and likewise the ancestors of the race of Maraviglia, which is now well-nigh extinguished!"

Full of chastened exultation the whole party entered the castle.

Honorine, in the midst of a rich circle of honourable knights and virtuous ladies, gave the new-comers a most respectful and truly joyous welcome; and the intelligence of Godfrey's knighthood added a fresh charm to the gladness and animation of the assembly. Though the demeanour of all was courteous, polished, and almost restrained, nevertheless the true-hearted gaiety, which was then characteristic of all races of the Franks, displayed itself in a most enchanting manner. There was much sporting, and talking, and laughing: each listened to the others with the same readiness as to himself. No one endeavoured to obtrude himself beyond the others; but all rejoiced alike in the honour and delight of belonging to so fair a company.

In a more serious moment Godfrey related the manner in which he had been aroused from his visionary life in the little tower, by the romaunt sung by Arnald; and the troubadour then inquired how it had been with him since that day, and by what means he had attained to such fortune and renown.

Godfrey cast down his eyes with a maidenly blush, and said, "I know not how I may speak aright of the happy issue, wherewith a gracious God hath crowned my poor efforts, far above their deserving."

"Then let me speak!" said an aged and honourable knight who had previously been presented to the troubadour as a near relative of the race of Vergi, and who now proceeded very cheerfully to relate the following narrative:—

"This young hero-scion of the stock of Montalhan had projected a far journey into foreign lands, in order to achieve such renown among other names, as should justify him in claiming before the world the name of his great forefathers. A fairer lot was, however, reserved for him. For lo! here in his dear country, the wild Marquess Raymond, once the possessor of this castle and the terror of the whole neighbourhood, encountered him with insolent mockery, deeming that it would be an easy matter to overcome the young unpractised warrior. Ah, he little knew how the blood of the heroes of old bubbled and boiled in those youthful veins! Godfrey hurled him from the saddle: he lay half senseless on the earth. But then the unknighthly squires of the base knight fell upon the young victor; and though he slew two of their number, they overpowered him at length, and dragged him into this castle. The marquess would have stricken off his head; but there was a lady of noble birth, whom therefore I will only call by her Christian name, Odalinda, who had lived for several years in bonds of unseemly union with the marquess, and whose heart was won by his youthful and heroic prisoner. Raymond, weary of her, offered her in marriage to the noble

Montalban, and, with her, freedom and the lordship of two castles, on condition that one of the beautiful demoiselles of Montalban should consent to restore the marquess to nobility, by the gift of her fair hand. I need scarcely tell you what was the answer of our Godfrey; and, on the following day, he was led to the scaffold. But he then began to speak such words of power to the baron and his vassals, and to contemplate them so fiercely with those flashing eyes, the light of which was his inheritance from the hero Reinald, that all stood around him as if spell-struck. Odalinda fainted; the marquess hurried to her assistance; and Godfrey then boldly commanded one of the esquires to undo his bonds. The man complied; and Godfrey, taking the sword from his side, strode composedly forth from the castle, the troops making room for him as he passed. And now Raymond discovered his loss, and would have retaken his captive; but it was too late. Our young Montalban went with the speed and fire of lightning through the valley, and summoned us all, to rise for honour and vengeance; and the sparks within our bosoms were kindled into flames by his breath. And now he stood at the head of our united forces, and fought like his great ancestor Reinald, and conquered in three bloody battles; and Raymond and Odalinda have fled from our vengeance forth into the wild world—no one knows whither. But Godfrey has become the rightful lord of all the lands and castles of the exiled tyrant; and what use he makes of his authority your own eyes have seen.”

“O my glorious Montalban!” cried Arnald. “And where is the loyal Robert? And what says he to his famed and honoured master?”

“When the knights accompanied me home with shouts and songs of victory,” answered Godfrey, in a low voice, “the good old man died of joy.”

Chapter Nineteenth.

THE drops which stood in the eyes of Godfrey as he spoke these words were answered by sympathising tears from all present. The company were silent for some time, in deep and heartfelt emotion.

At length the grey-haired knight before mentioned spake these words: "In the name of the good old Robert, I declare to you that you will pay the meetest homage to his memory, by maintaining the innocent and seemly joyousness which has hitherto reigned amongst you. In all probability I shall be the first of the company to rejoin that true and gladsome spirit; and, believe me, I will then answer to him for that which I now take upon myself. And now, Messire Arnald of Maraviglia, I pray you to entertain us with your minstrelsy; for I can devise no better way of passing the time."

"Yon must then be content with a right solemn strain," replied Arnald; "for such is the temper of my spirit now. But perchance the return to our former cheerfulness may thus be rendered easier." Herewith he struck full and strange harmonies upon his lyre, and recited the following romaunt:—

Dread are the judgments of our God,
 When soul and quivering body part;
 Dread is the foretaste of His wrath
 Even now unto the guilty heart!
 Two such sad and chastened spirits
 Even now are wandering near—
 Do ye miss the haughty Raymond?
 Seek him in the woods so drear!
 There he wanders, pale and hopeless
 As a tenant of the tomh—
 Would ye seek for Odalinda,
 Her so proud in beauty's bloom?

Shelterless, and wan, and weary,
 Hear her piteous voice complain !
 God awaken thoughts of mercy,
 God be gentle to the twain ;
 Or the hapless ones must perish,
 Craving help and hope in vain !

He paused, and all gazed upon him with doubtful and inquiring eyes. Then he drew from his lute tones of unspeakable sweetness, and proceeded in the following manner :—

Raymond, Raymond, darksome warrior,
 Wherefore wander through the midnight ?
 Odalinda, timid maiden,
 Wherefore roam o'er pathless mountains ?
 Lo, your conqueror loveth mercy,
 Come ye to his towers, and fear not ;
 Seek his face with mild entreaty,
 And his heart shall surely open !
 Listen, listen, midnight wanderers,
 These my strains announce your pardon :
 Come, submit thee, darksome warrior ;
 Come, and fear not, Odalinda.

“Thou hast expressed the very thought of my heart, noble Maraviglia,” cried Godfrey ; “and if I knew where to find the unhappy penitents—” He stopped, for the low sound of a guitar was heard from the chapel without, and two imploring voices sang the following words :—

We mourn by the lonely shrine ;
 No comfort, no hope are ours ;
 Though once we did blithely twine
 Our tresses with festal flowers.

God hath chastised our crime—
 We weep for the sins of the past
 But all shall end in time,
 And death is sure at last.

But strains of pardon flow
Down from yon dreaded tower :
Oh, if ye pity our woe,
Soft be your parting hour !

The three gentle-hearted Montalhans had already hastened forth to meet the penitents. Misura, bearing a large torch, accompanied them. In his present state of exhaustion it was impossible for Arnald to follow ; so he seated himself by the window, took his lyre upon his arm, and filled the midnight air with the music of a lofty and consoling psalm. Raymond and Odalinda, utterly crushed in spirit, kneeled down before their pitying conquerors, and submitted themselves wholly to their will, be it stern or be it merciful. Then Godfrey cried, " Ah, when a sinner so submits himself to our heavenly Father, pardon is ready at once : how, then, should a fellow-sinner refuse forgiveness to such touching humility ?" And from this moment the only question was, how Raymond and Odalinda might receive the fairest welcome, consistently with due honour to God and to the laws of morality. For the present they besought permission to withdraw themselves from society and open shame, and take refuge in a small, solitary farmhouse belonging to the castle : in the course of a few days they hoped to be united in wedlock, and afterwards to lead a tranquil and secluded life under the eye of Godfrey.

" Dear friends," said the young and kindly hero, " as far as I comprehend the matter, it would seem to me better that Raymond should retire into a monastery, and Odalinda into a nunnery. But perhaps ye are not sufficiently ripe in penitence and sanctification for such a retirement ; therefore be it according to your will."

When the baron returned with his sisters into the castle-hall, and acquainted the company with all that had passed, there were not wanting some who accused him of incaution, in suffering the dangerous Raymond to remain at

liberty and in the neighbourhood of the castle. But with the true and heroic highheartedness of a Montalban, Godfrey looked around him and smiled as he answered: "I think that I have done the will of God; and if so, the Lord will be my defence against all evil, and, under Him, my good right hand and my good sword."

Moreover, Honorine and Clementine stood in cloudless and holy confidence beside their gallant brother, like tall and slender lilies beside the statue of a warrior, testifying by their tranquil and fearless smiles, how truly they also belonged to the illustrious race of Montalban.

Chapter Twentieth.

ON the following morning, when Arnald was about to proceed on his journey, he found a milk-white mule, of wonderful beauty, awaiting him in the castle-court, caparisoned with all needful array for the road. Godfrey and his sisters besought him to accept it from them as a parting gift. "I implore thee, dear friend, reject it not," said Misura; "wouldst thou wound this young descendant of heroes and these noble ladies by a disdainful resistance to their entreaty? Moreover, thy vow is now fulfilled; thou art on thy way home; and thou art in danger of perishing from exhaustion before beholding the towers of Castle Bisiers and the venerable ruins of Maraviglia."

Arnald bent his head in friendly and grateful acquiescence, and received the silver-embroidered reins from the hands of Clementine and Honorine. The noble animal seemed familiar to him, and after a little reflection he remembered that it had often been ridden by the bold captain Lanzarossa, who was swept away by a torrent of Greek fire at the storming of the Moorish encampment in Provence. Godfrey stated that he had purchased it from an old soldier who had fought under the Vicomte Bisiers

against Tarfe two years before, and who had parted with the beautiful animal because it was a legacy from his captain, and he desired to procure for it better nurture and care than he could himself supply.

“Such shall he not lack while in my keeping, if it be God’s will,” said Arnald; and deeply touched by the recollection of his brave comrade, he leaned his forehead against the neck of the gentle beast. Then he swung himself into the saddle,—alas, not with his wonted lightness and vigour, for his feeble breast underwent a painful and breathless convulsion,—saluted the noble Montalbans, and rode slowly away. Misura strode joyously by his side.

Their journey was prosperous and speedy. On a beautiful spring evening they beheld the metal-roofed towers of Castle Bisiers gleaming in the distance; but Arnald restrained his longing after the presence of his ladye, and, turning aside, directed his steps towards the cloister of St. Anne, in order that he might first be fully absolved from his vow by his beloved Altarbol. They passed the night in a secluded hamlet, and by noon on the following day they arrived at the minster. Weeping for joy, Altarbol came forth to meet the troubadour, and announced to him, that bloom, and freshness, and beauty had completely returned to the sweet child of Alearda: but when the abbot perceived how the glow of health which once animated the cheeks of his beloved son was exchanged for the fitful flush of fever, a few burning tears of grief dropped from his venerable eyes. He speedily repressed his emotion, and gave thanks to God that his Arnald was restored to him, at least for the present; he then led the way to the church, and solemnly divested the troubadour of his pilgrim attire, placing on his head a cap of honour, surmounted by rich and nodding plumes, and girding him with that good sword, so well proved on the shores of Provence, which had been committed to his charge till the vow was achieved.

“Thou hast borne thee honourably as a pilgrim, Ar-

nald," said Misura, "and valiantly also; nevertheless, I cannot conceal from thee that thou art, at the very least, ten times goodlier in thy knightly costume. And now, venerable sir, be pleased to relieve me also of this somewhat voluminous and inconvenient garb."

His request was granted; and Altarhol now invited the two friends to partake of food and wine in his cell. "For thee, my dear Arnald," added he, "I have been able to provide a peculiar and heart-strengthening cordial."

On entering the chamber they beheld, hanging upon the opposite wall, the picture of a Madonna, large as life, painted on a background of sparkling gold, so matchless and inconceivable in its beauty, that it seemed as though the invisible had miraculously taken to itself a body; and Arnald and Misura, dazzled and overpowered, yet penetrated by a feeling of delicious confidence, sank on their knees, as if before an actual apparition of the Queen of Heaven. She resembled no earthly beauty in the world—not even the purest—she was the very being chosen and glorified by the Almighty, above all the daughters of Eve, for her holiness and humility.

Rising as he completed his prayer, Arnald said, "O too-blessed painter, whose pure spirit could conceive such a vision!"

"God has perfected much in my weakness!" said a voice full of familiar sweetness; and behind Arnald there stood a Knight Templar, in the white mantle of the order, with a large blood-red cross upon his breast. It was Sebastian.

The first rapture of re-union was mild and silent in those noble spirits; tempered also by the presence of the sacred picture, and by the alternations of death-like paleness and fevered flushes in the face of Maraviglia, which warned his friends of the hour of final separation, visibly and rapidly approaching; the short but painful spasms in his breast awakened a like solemn anticipation in himself.

"But tell me, dear Sebastian," said Arnald, at last—

“tell me in what manner the manifestation of this blessed vision was vouchsafed to thee.”

Altarbol placed bread and wine on the table, the friends sate down, and Sebastian commenced his narration in the following words :

“I might, perhaps, be able to represent to thee, dear master and friend, all details and particulars of the event ; but I hope that we shall be long together ; and then the whole will explain itself to thee in many a word, and song, and sign. For the present take all that I can give, amid the bewildering joy and sorrow of this meeting. It is at least something.

“Many, very many beautiful pictures of the Virgin have I beheld during my manifold pilgrimages to cloister, church, and shrine. Each one seemed to possess a single lineament of the eternal Queen ; but not one was as the picture in my heart. Oh, I would far rather have delineated the features of the lofty ladye Alearda, as a tribute to the holy Madonna, than any one of those faces which professed to represent the glorified Queen of Heaven ! And yet I felt that it was *not* Alearda. Alearda was as an angel-messenger ; but she before whom all the hosts of heaven do homage must be other than Alearda.

“Then I had a dream. I was already in the service of the order as a loyal warrior ; but I had not as yet assumed the cross. I dreamed that as I lay beside the camp-fire, I was approached by a tall veiled figure, and a voice of flute-like sweetness murmured in my ear, ‘It is herself!’ I stretched forth my hands to her beseechingly, and could only find utterance to repeat the same words, ‘O beautiful Sun ! O dear Sun ! O golden Sun ! Oh, that thou wouldst disperse the clouds!’ Then the figure stooped down over me ; and when she perceived that my left breast was without the sign of the order, she gently shook her head. I wept like a child. ‘How, then, can I be found worthy to become a Knight Templar,’ sighed I, ‘when I have so few opportunities of distinction?’ Then

the vision pointed to a line of mountains which lay to the north, and I started from my slumber. An irresistible impulse drove me in the appointed direction. Silently I saddled my good horse and rode thitherwards.

“When I came near to the mountains, I beheld the gleaming of arms in the moonlight, between the stems of cedar and palm-trees. The Saracen army was approaching. Their reconnoitring parties soon discovered me beneath that cloudless night, and I sustained a hard encounter. By God’s help I made my way through them, and returned, all bleeding, to rouse the camp with clarion and war-cry. I, being the least surprised of the party, was first able to muster troops, and lead them to a rapid charge against the foe. We obtained a complete victory; the cross of the order was offered to me; and, in deep thankfulness to God and the blessed Virgin, I became a member of the illustrious brotherhood.

“In the night when I kept my vigil of arms,—Arnald, here language fails me—I know not whether it were a trance or a reality,—but since that hour I have worn the picture of the Queen of Heaven within my heart, in such bright and vivid reality, that it has often seemed to me that I beheld her with my bodily eyes; and in this place, where I have been for some time detained by the business of my order, it befell, by the superabundant grace of God, that lines and tints presented themselves; and lo! there is the picture!”

“Thou knowest, Arnald,” said Altarbol, after a short silence, “how long ago I prophesied that this youth should one day become a great light in our church. Gloriously is that prophecy fulfilled; though in far other sense than it was conceived by my feeble mind!”

“And,” added Arnald, “once, when I stood with Sebastian in George’s dark ancestral castle, and he exclaimed in sudden terror, ‘Sir, sir, methinks I behold the morning twilight faintly glimmering upon the hills; oh, let us hasten to leave these gloomy halls!’—the strange words thrilled

and impressed me in an inexplicable manner, and have remained imprinted on my memory. Now is the meaning clear to me; now have those faint glim merings deepened into sunlight; now has he left those gloomy halls far behind him, and many shall bear him company upon his glorious path, and gaze with him upon the sun, even when he and we also shall have paid the debt of mortality, and shall perish in the dust, leaving perchance not even a name behind!"

Chapter Twenty-first.

THE soft light of evening was playing upon the gilded trellis of the gardens of Castle Bisiers, and flickering amid the shadows of trees, grass, and flowers within. Odours, songs, and buds of May arose on every side towards heaven. Maraviglia entered those beloved precincts with his Altarhol and his Sebastian. Misura had severed himself from their company, and departed on another expedition; "for," he said, "in the midst of all this joy, I find myself somewhat tearfully disposed; and that becomes me very ill, and will appear scarcely intelligible to others, especially to women."

Along the broad walk, overshadowed by venerable trees, a group of figures might be seen approaching from the castle. Well did Arnald know who led the train. He could scarcely breathe—his knees trembled—his companions supported him. "Trouble not yourselves," said he; "the joy which can so wondrously overpower can likewise yet more wondrously strengthen." And now he advanced joyfully, as though he were upheld by invisible wings, and inspired by exultant strains of victory, heard only by himself.

Alearda stood before him, surrounded by a reverential band of maidens, holding by the hand her blooming child.

“See, Berta,” said she, “yonder is the good knight, Arnald of Maraviglia, who has composed so many fair songs and histories, and has done for thee so much—ah, more, far more than thou canst understand!—but thou shalt understand it one day, if God shall bless thee with ripeness of thought and reason.”

The child kissed her tiny hands to the troubadour, and showered blossoms upon him, saying, “Thanks for thy beautiful songs! Thanks for thy beautiful tales!” But suddenly she turned to her mother, and added, “But I fancied that the dear Arnald of Maraviglia would always be blooming like my roses in May; and now, behold, he is so very pale!”

Pearly tears glistened in the eyes of Alearda, and at the same moment the vicomte approached from a shady walk, kissed the brow of the troubadour, and said, “It may perchance cost thee thy life; nevertheless, thou hast obtained the victory: and amid all my conquests, I cannot boast of one more glorious.”

The enraptured Arnald gazed around him, doubtful whether he were waking or dreaming; and the gleaming trellis of the garden, and the deep red of the evening sky, did, as it were, encircle that moment of his life with a frame of costly gold.

Ah, that it were vouchsafed to the writer of this history also to encircle this picture with a frame of virgin gold, as was the practice of the poets of bygone days when they wished to distinguish the most precious and significant parts of their manuscripts!

Chapter Twenty-second.

It has often been said that a slowly-consuming disease of the body must needs weigh heavily upon the soul, which is thus constrained to behold its final severance from this fa-

miliar earth approaching step by step, and at the same time to count the petals of the fading flower, as, one by one, they drop off. But when the gradual decay is accompanied by no acute pains, and when the departing spirit neither loves too greatly that which we choose to call life, nor loathes too unreasonably that which we are pleased to stigmatise as death, it is scarcely so hard a matter. Do we not drain the last cup from a flask of noble wine with a feeling of enjoyment unknown to us before? And why should it not be so with the last drops of this earthly life? As we glide thus calmly down the stream, we encounter but few obstacles and cares; we have scarce any thing to do but pluck the flowers which grow upon the banks; a foretaste of the blessedness of the disembodied state is vouchsafed to us; those who love us attend us with a deepening and solicitous affection,—those who love us not we can gently and easily pardon, in obedience to the command, “Forgive, and thou shalt be forgiven!” Though truly not unmindful of the shortness of the time during which we may yet continue side by side; though a tear may sometimes escape from our eyes, it drops almost visibly as the seed of a pearl into the life of paradise. He who has witnessed so sweet a sadness as this, will not refuse us his testimony. At least it was entirely thus with Arnald.

Very slow was his passage to the grave, and more than once did he behold the seasons change. During these days there arose out of his heart many songs and tales of beauty, perhaps even more joyous and vivid in their colouring than any which he had produced during the time of his unimpaired bodily vigour. Frequently did Lanzarossa’s snow-white mule carry him with easy and cautious pace to Castle Bisiers; and when the feebleness of his breast forbade him to read aloud, Alearda herself would take his poems into her delicate hands, and give soul to the words, by the sweet and solemn melody of her voice. Sebastian, who departed but seldom, and was ever recalled to this neighbourhood by the business of his order, greatly

refreshed the heart of his friend by the mild brightness of his own spirit ; and among other pictures which he executed for him, was one, which represented a crucifix upon a rock, surrounded by winged angels who reverently received in vessels the blood which dropped from the holy wounds ; beneath the rock was the figure of a hermit engaged in study, and on either side stood a knight bearing a lofty banner ; the one stern, sombre, and menacing of aspect, the other young, of angelic beauty, and all glittering in golden armour. If sometimes the fiery spirit which Arnald inherited from his ancestors was about to blaze forth, he had but to look on this solemn and mystical picture ; and, wholly unable as he was to express its meaning in words, it was nevertheless all the more deeply graven upon his glowing and penetrated heart ; and even in his darkest hours the land beyond the grave was visible to him by the light of those radiant shapes.

One morning—that autumnal season so deeply loved, and so often celebrated by Arnald, was once more approaching—Sebastian entered the little farmhouse in much haste, and went directly to the chamber of Arnald. Under the mantle of his order he was attired in complete and clashing armour ; he carried his lofty helm of knight-hood in his hand ; and his benign features were radiant with the holy fire of battle.

“War, dear friend and master !” cried he, with a joyous smile. “A Moorish fleet is visible from our coasts. The vicomte is about to sally forth, and he prays that you will meanwhile abide in Castle Bisiers for the comfort and protection of the ladye.”

A dark glow passed over the face of Arnald. “Is there, then, no sword left for me?” cried he ; and in a moment he girded himself with his faithful weapon. “It is a goodly thing,” he continued, “to console fair and noble ladies ; but it is goodlier yet to die for their deliverance in a victorious battle.”

“Arnald, thine exhausted breast—”

“It is so short a way to the sea-shore, dear Sebastian; and what fairer could befall this breast than to shed forth its last strength for Alearda? Moreover, my beautiful and radiant autumn is reigning now, and methinks it shall bring me an end beautiful and radiant as itself.”

“But in truth thou canst no longer rein and guide a horse, my brave Arnald; no, not for a single hour.”

“That we shall presently see.”

In a moment he had crossed the threshold, and beckoned the peasant, who was leading Sebastian's horse to and fro, to approach with the fiery animal. “He is so impatient of control, dear Arnald,” interposed Sebastian, warningly; but Maraviglia, thirsting for battle, heeded him not. He rapidly placed the gilded reins on the horse's neck, and set his foot in the stirrup. The wild steed foamed, and stamped wrathfully on the ground; the watchful Sebastian carefully soothed and subdued him; and Arnald mounted the saddle, slowly indeed, and feebly, but with right noble bearing. When he was in his seat, he smiled and seemed about to speak, but his breast heaved violently up and down, and withheld all power of speech from the exhausted warrior. Meantime the impatient horse broke from Sebastian and the peasant, and rushed forth with wild bounds into the courtyard. Both looked after the troubadour, anxiously, and with clasped hands; but he had now recovered from the exertion of mounting, and exercised the knightly art of *manège* with skill and self-possession. The good horse, too, speedily became aware that he was guided by the hand of a true knight, and cheerfully submitted to his will; and Arnald returned across the court in triumph, drawing his sword, and galloping hither and thither, as he essayed the various exercises of war. Then he rode away again, and having taken space for a rapid charge, he shouted aloud sportively, with the full vigour of his old battle-cry, “Now for it! Upon them!” and spurred forward, brandishing his weapon aloft. He checked his

steed, by the power of hand and thigh, close in front of Sebastian, with an effort so sudden and vehement that it stood as if rooted to the ground; but in the same moment the rider became deathly pale and wavered in the saddle, the sword dropped from his weary hand, and as the impetuous animal began once more to become unmanageable, he whispered, in scarcely audible tones, "Now hold him, Sebastian!" His friend complied with the entreaty, and, assisted by the trusty yeoman, received in his arms the fainting form of Arnald.

When he came to himself he wept bitterly. "It will not be!" he said, sighing, and hid his face on the breast of Sebastian. The latter consoled him after his wonted calm and cheering manner, and bade him bethink himself how great and warlike was the office of command in Castle Bisiers, as protector of the revered ladye Alearda, and how completely Arnald was qualified for these duties by his keen glance and indomitable courage, without being in any manner impeded by his loss of power as a soldier. Arnald submitted with resignation, and rode slowly up to Castle Bisiers on his docile mule; but when from time to time the spirited steed of Sebastian leaped beneath its powerful rider, so that the armour of the man and the caparisons of the horse clashed together with a clear and ringing sound, a tear would force its way into the eye of the feeble Maraviglia, and Sebastian himself would find some pretext for turning aside to conceal that his eyes were also wet.

Chapter Twenty-third.

IN the great hall of Castle Bisiers, on the following day, the vicomte, with his assembled chivalry, awaited the arrival of an embassy which had been announced on the part of the Moors, having it in charge to declare the

object of their fleet in approaching the coasts of Provence. Aloft, in a glittering gallery which wound around the saloon, stood the Countess Alearda, arrayed in the utmost magnificence, attended by her maidens, and accompanied by Arnald of Maraviglia, in the capacity and dignity of seneschal.

The folding-doors were opened. Amid the deafening clangour of Saracen trumpets, cymbals, and tambourines, a rich train of gaily adorned Moorish warriors entered. With reverential salutations they advanced across the hall, and ranged themselves in a glittering phalanx before the vicomte; but who shall describe the amazement of all, when the ambassador himself appeared, in garments profusely embroidered with gold and silver, all gleaming with the lustre of strange and brilliant armour—for it was no other than Gryba, who in this very castle had received, by holy baptism, the name of George!

At a signal from him, the festive music of the Moors ceased. Crossing his arms upon his breast, he bowed before the vicomte, and was about to speak; but the latter checked him by saying—“Ere we proceed further, fair sir, let me demand whether it is your pleasure to be addressed as Gryba or as George? for if you solicit the name of Gryba, I, on my part, must solicit another ambassador from your general.”

“My general,” said the Moorish warrior, smiling, as he leaned on his sabre—“my general can in truth send you no better ambassador than myself; for I am myself the leader of the whole squadron which has now anchored upon your coast. But, dear my prince and master in arms, how came you to imagine that I could seek another name than that of George, or come on other errand than that of love, gratitude, and friendship?”

Herewith he greeted Alearda with a respectful reverence, and Arnald with a brotherly salutation, and began, still smiling, to recite the following romance:—

O'er Afric's far and desert coast —
Unhallowed home of poisonous snakes —
I on my weary steed went forth,
What time the darkening hand of eve
Had curtained earth with solitude :
A cry of terror met mine ear,
And from an emerald isle of turf,
Which bloomed amid that sea of sands,
Clustering with odorous thickets, fled a woman ;
Behind her, tall, and fierce, and terrible,
A giant snake uncoiled his monstrous form !
I waked my dull, unthinking steed
With the keen spur, and raised
My trusty spear for battle ;
I saved the shrinking fugitive,
And underneath my charger's feet
Trampled the hideous serpent's prostrate corse.
Weary and pale with fear the lady stood —
I proffered food and wine ; but could it be,
Or did mine eyes deceive me ? 'Twas Soleyma !
In mere audacity of mirthfulness,
Trusting the care of her forgetful train,
She venturously had sought these savage scenes ;
But no brave Weigand dwelt within their bound
To keep at bay that monster in his wrath,
When, ravenous as Freihart, he disdained
The meaner things who turned and fled before him,
Seeking the fairest booty for himself !
I thought upon St. George !
And having freed her from the dragon's grasp,
I sought to save her from that feller dragon
Which preys upon the heart !
I preached salvation to her — the good seed
Dropped on a generous soil ; and now, my friends,
Queen Soleyma believes and loves !

At the commencement of this narration, the whole company had answered with their smiles the smile of the graceful speaker ; and now, with him, they raised their

tearful eyes to heaven in rapturous thanksgiving. A solemn silence pervaded the assembly; Alearda looked like a seraph in the act of devotion.

At last, George spoke again, in a subdued voice: "Yes; now Queen Soleyma believes and loves, and she has landed on this shore with many noble dames and knights of our nation, in order to seek the seal of holy baptism from the hand of the saintly Altarbol. When that great and chief ceremony is concluded, I doubt not that the illustrious priest will so far grace and honour me, as to bless the union of Soleyma and myself; for we are betrothed."

Chapter Twenty-fourth.

O beauteous plain on the Provençal sea-coast, hallowed, protected, and glorified by the statue of the Mother of God, how radiant wert thou, sportively emulating the sun-bright floods, on that clear autumnal morning which witnessed the assembly of so many illustrious Moorish ladies and heroes for the baptismal feast!

Full of zeal and of gentleness, a meet successor of the apostles, Altarbol passed from rank to rank of those fervent worshippers, bearing the waters of baptism; and as form after form, all glittering with splendour and beauty, bent before the venerable old man in his simple priestly garments, and thronged around him in supplication, the holy, and, alas! oft-forgotten power of the eternal over the temporal became sensibly manifest even to the weakest faith.

Soleyma was baptised by the name of Carola, according to the desire of Alearda, who declared that it well became that imperial beauty to be named after the mighty Charlemagne,¹ the wondrous hero of the past; and imme-

¹In German, the name of Charlemagne is Karol.

diately it appeared to every one that the lovely lady must needs bear that name and no other.

Altarbol blessed the blooming bride as he consigned her to the embrace of her heroic bridegroom; and a festive repast was then prepared on the meadow, pleasantly overshadowed by many scattered chestnut and olive-trees.

Amid the joyous discourse of that noble circle, which became every moment more open and unrestrained, it was at last mentioned, that the greater number of these Moorish knights had heretofore projected an invasion of Provence, in honour of her who was once Soleyma, and that the progress of the tempest had only been checked by the fair queen's conversion. Arnald bethought him of the warning spoken by George in the days when he yet bore the name of Gryba; meantime, Altarbol beckoned him aside, and they paced to and fro together, beneath the shade of the nearest trees.

“Arnald!” said the venerable priest, deeply moved; “my dear Arnald, how does this bear testimony to the unconscious glory of a virtuous woman! The countess was robbed of her star-jewel, and she maintained her wonted gentleness and tranquillity; but the one low murmur, which at last escaped her pious lips, fell upon the ear of a minstrel, and he went forth into the lands of heathenness and redeemed the lost treasure. But at the same time he achieved a far greater conquest—the two noblest knights whom Christianity ever won to herself from the errors of Mahomet. What deeds hath Sebastian done since then with sword and pencil! And how hath George approved himself the worthy imitator of his patron saint! Provence is rescued, the whole land of the Franks is saved, and, in the converted Carola, there arises for us a new star, whereat heroism, and art, and many a happy spirit, shall be kindled! I know not, my son, whether thou rightly comprehendest the manner in which painters of true and divine vocation are wont to portray their angels. These benign shapes fulfil in sweet and humble

joy the commands of God—childlike in their sportiveness, which is nevertheless full of deep and serious earnest. Sometimes have I seen thoughtful children thus play, without noise, without laughter, yet with a smile whereby the whole young spirit is visibly irradiated; lost in their mimic games, wherein the boys are knights or monks, and the girls nuns or empresses. Seldom do boys retain this purity amid the tumults of the world—it is impossible that they should retain it in this our fallen position; but women—yes, to them it is possible, and they may remain messengers of God, even as the angels are. Look upon Alearda! She knows not what she has done, she knows not what is yet reserved for her to do; nevertheless, her whole life is as the fulfilment of a heavenly mission to wake and cherish the flowers of paradise on earth.”

At that very moment she gazed upon the two friends with her serious smile, and a thrill passed through the bosom of Arnald, like the salutation of a near and blessed eternity.

Chapter Twenty-fifth.

RIGHTLY had Arnald understood the import of that sudden feeling. More and more did the vigour of life depart from his spirit and his body; and sometimes it seemed as though the joy of life also were stealing softly away from him. At this season he was often wont to visit that linden-shaded nill which he had already chosen as the place of his burial; and on this spot, late in the twilight of evening, he once composed the following lay:—

The sun's departing glow
Plays softly on thy brow,
And solemnly the lindens o'er thee wave,
My future grave!

Soon on thy silent crest
 Shall rise the low grass-hill,
 And soon, henceath, this beating heart shall rest,
 Pure, calm, and still.

Oh, shall my spirit's song
 These linden-halls among
 Wander and waver in the midnight lone
 When I am gone ?
 The will of God be done !
 But this full well I know,
 Sweet voices oft shall sound above the stone,
 Soothing the heart below.

Sing ye mine own poor lays,
 Fair dames ? or do ye raise
 New strains, yet born of that old melody ?
 Oh, blessedness for me !
 Lighted by your fair eyes,
 My bark hath dared the deep ;
 And now, when in the haven safe it lies,
 Your voices soothe my sleep.

He had recited these words in an audible though very feeble voice, and it so happened that Sebastian, who had ascended the hill unperceived, heard the whole. Approaching Arnald with a cheerful smile, he said, "Ay, truly, if so it please God, thou shalt not lack thy lullaby from the lips of noble ladies. Seest thou how tall and vigorous the grass of this place has grown ? The spot has pleasure in you, and therein it does rightly. Only the end is not so near as thou seemest to think. Let us still gaze cheerfully upon the cheerfulness of life. If thou mislike it not, George and I will enjoy a festive noon-day repast with thee to-morrow."

Arnald nodded in friendly acquiescence, and returned some right glad at heart. That night he dreamed much of old Sir Walter ; and when the friends met at noon he could not leave speaking of that departed hero—of his pious be-

nevolence, and of the iron strength of his nature, hidden, as it were, amid pleasant flowers, till the clash of duty or of honour struck sparks from out of its noble depths.

“Methinks,” said he in conclusion, “he would have better loved to see me rise to heaven from the midst of a knightly combat, full of fame and brightness. Yet he, too, died a tranquil death: slowly and gently was his light extinguished; and perchance, as the end draws near, many such wishes as those, seem but childishness and vanity in the eyes of the blessed spirits who behold the face of God. The messenger whom the Lord sends to His faithful, to summon them home, is ever an angel, whether his apparel be the glitter of harness and the flash of battle, or he be garmented in the cool breath of evening and the fragrance of the fields of home.”

Meanwhile Altarbol had joined the party, and the discourse now turned almost exclusively upon the point at which man bids farewell to the life of earth.

“Methinks,” said George, “no man falls asleep so softly and so sweetly as a poet.”

“Amen,” whispered Arnald, folding his hands, as his friend, without heeding his gesture, continued with much animation:

“For to the poet—in so far as I can conceive his nature, being none myself—to the poet, life has long freed itself from the chain and coil of the body, has taken to itself the wings of inborn impulse, and, in its loftiest moments, has attained the unearthly and impalpable beauty of the sunlight and the rainbow; so that now, without effort, he can leave the lifeless chrysalis behind him, and soar upwards to the region which is his own by divine right of inheritance.”

Arnald shook his head with a smile expressive of disagreement, and said, “If those wise men who call the poet an inventor of pleasant fables, wherewith reality has nought to do, are in the right, thou hast thyself been a poet for the moment, dear George. But, alas, ’tis not so sweet and

so easy as thou imaginest. The ancient mother, whom we commonly call Nature, grasps after the poet with a thousand arms; and because she holds him very dear, he also greatly loves her, and when he thinks right seriously of severance from her, his heart grows weak and sorrowful, and hers also. Though she blooms beyond the grave more lovely, and yet always the same, nevertheless it is in this very earth, and no other, that he has taken root, like all other flowers. Often, indeed, he behaves as a wayward child, whose mother hath withheld from it some plaything, and says defyingly, with tears in his eyes, 'Then I will go away from home at once and for ever.' I know many lays of this spirit, and, in truth, I have myself composed many such. But let the mother only turn from him gravely, and say, 'Go; I will have thee no more;' then the audacious heart is melted, and resolutely as we may labour to restrain it, it is only needful for her to take us once more in her arms, and weeping we hide our faces upon the doubly-loved bosom, and that reconciliation draws the bonds of both into a closer and more impregnable union. But the voice of God—praise be to Him therefor throughout all eternity—the voice of God awakes within us, and we go forth singing, into many a field of fame, and we die singing in the fulness of joy; or we feel ourselves at home, our daily work being done, and smiling we lay ourselves down to sleep; and then also may it be said of us, that we die singing in the fulness of joy. The swan may have struggled with many a burning pang before he lifts up his death-song; but with the first note of that hymn, every pang ceases; and when one has reached so far, it becomes as you have said, and the passage is swift, and sweet, and easy."

They looked upon him in much emotion; but he suddenly changed to a tone of sportive lightness, confessing that he had done after the manner of many skilful orators, and unconsciously suffered the end of his speech to contradict the beginning. George, with reviving cheerfulness, produced a flask of noble Xeres wine; and while he poured

out for his friends, he noticed for the first time that during the meal Arnald had not drunk a single drop of wine.

“No, truly, I have not,” replied Arnald; “nevertheless ye know how much I generally prize that goodly gift of God. But do not for this reason think that I am ill: on the contrary, it is rather that I feel so well that I need no cordial, and had quite forgotten that there was such a thing as the juice of the grape in the world. But now that thou recallest it to me in so friendly a fashion, George, thou shalt bestow thy fair wine of Xeres on me also.”

He scarcely touched the foaming goblet with his lips, however. Then he sprang joyously from his seat, took his lyre on his arm, and invited his friends to accompany him to Castle Maraviglia. Sebastian would have supported him; but he waved him aside, and bounded like a deer towards the ruins, saying that they should be right joyful on the morrow at Castle Bisiers.

“Control yourselves,” said Altarbol to George and Sebastian; “our friend shall in truth be right joyful tomorrow—but not at Castle Bisiers.”

Chapter Twenty-sixth.

ARNALD had caught some of the words of Altarbol, without understanding the depth of their import. It was only when, having ascended to the highest point of the ruins, he sank down upon the mossy stones under the shadow of the keep, and felt a painful sense of exhaustion, hitherto forgotten, unstringing his limbs, while his breast quivered with shooting pangs such as he had never before experienced, and his three friends stood weeping around him—it was only then that he became clearly aware of the deep and awful meaning of that hour. Silently he lifted his head towards heaven; then drooping it, he gazed upon the beautiful landscape, while the autumnal mists

of evening rose from all sides towards the heights like solemn funereal veils. "Beautiful, beautiful earth!" sighed he, scarce audibly, while his eyes grew dim with tears. He remained a long time silent. A magnificent oak-tree showered upon him a perfect torrent of red and yellow leaves, so that he was, as it were, enveloped in mourning but golden garments. His smile became more and more tranquil and kindly; at length, with a last effort he lifted himself up, touched his lute, and sang the following words—the death-song of the swan:

As the stream pauses ere it plunge below,
 So on the last dread verge my spirit stands—
 Thou who hast guided me through earthly lands,
 Eternal Love, lift me to heaven now!

Great were thy gifts—the bard's transparent soul,
 Pouring for knights and ladies many a song,
 And the swift charge athwart the scattered throng,
 Bearing to fame, where battle's thunders roll.

Thou gavest bitter grief and deep delight,
 The fiery trial and the resplendent wreath,
 And now—a grave beside a rescued hearth.
 The lamps of Eden gleam through death's dark night—
 Lord, I will praise Thee with my latest breath!
 Lie gently on my brow, O native earth!

As the last chords of the lute died away, a wailing echo passed through the ruined halls of the castle; and Sebastian afterwards said, that he had seen a shape like that of the minstrel-king arise from the misty meadows, wrapped in mourning garments, and disappear amid the gold-besprinkled clouds of evening. Deep in the noble hearts of those three friends lay the solemn thought—

NOW DIES THE NOBLE RACE OF MARAVIGLIA!

Finally—the sun had already sunk—Arnald once more lifted himself up and said, with a sigh, "Beautiful would

it have been, if once only before this my blessed end she had expressly named me her minstrel and her knight."

"Such were the names which she gave thee yestern-even," said Altarbol, "before the vicomte and myself."

Then Arnald rapturously stretched forth his arms to heaven, and said, "Now—oh, now truly! I shall never more behold Alearda with these mortal eyes; yet has my whole life been abundantly, nay over-bounteously, crowned!"

And the mists unveiled the firmament, and the constellation Alearda shone down upon the dying minstrel. He greeted it with a smile of perfect consciousness, and fell asleep beneath the prayers of Altarbol.

Most of the minstrel's rhymes,
 Nay, truly all,
 Are lost amid the tumult of the times,
 Nor shall the music of their rise and fall
 Woo the consenting ear again
 From common life's discordant strain;
 But the pure knightly service which he gave
 Unto that purest queen of womanhood
 Lives in the legend, calm, and sweet, and grave,
 Peopling with thoughts his tomb's mute solitude,
 Ye who yet struggle with the storms of life,
 Look on this picture of the minstrel's strife,
 Behold it with calm love and reverent bliss;
 And utter then, with hearts as pure as his,
 "Sleep, minstrel, sleep beside thy rescued hearth,
 And gently lie on thee thy native earth!"

THE END.

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