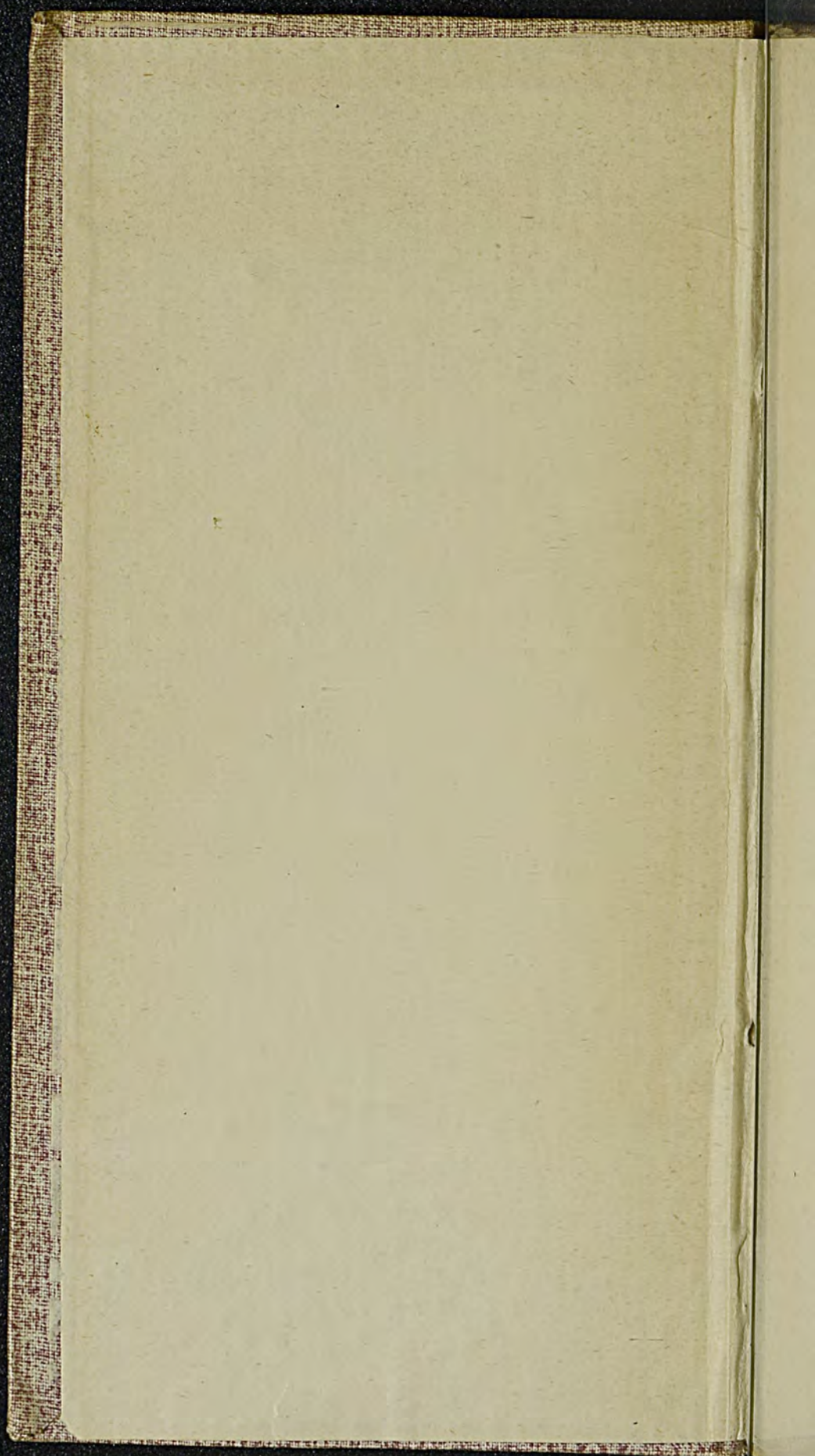


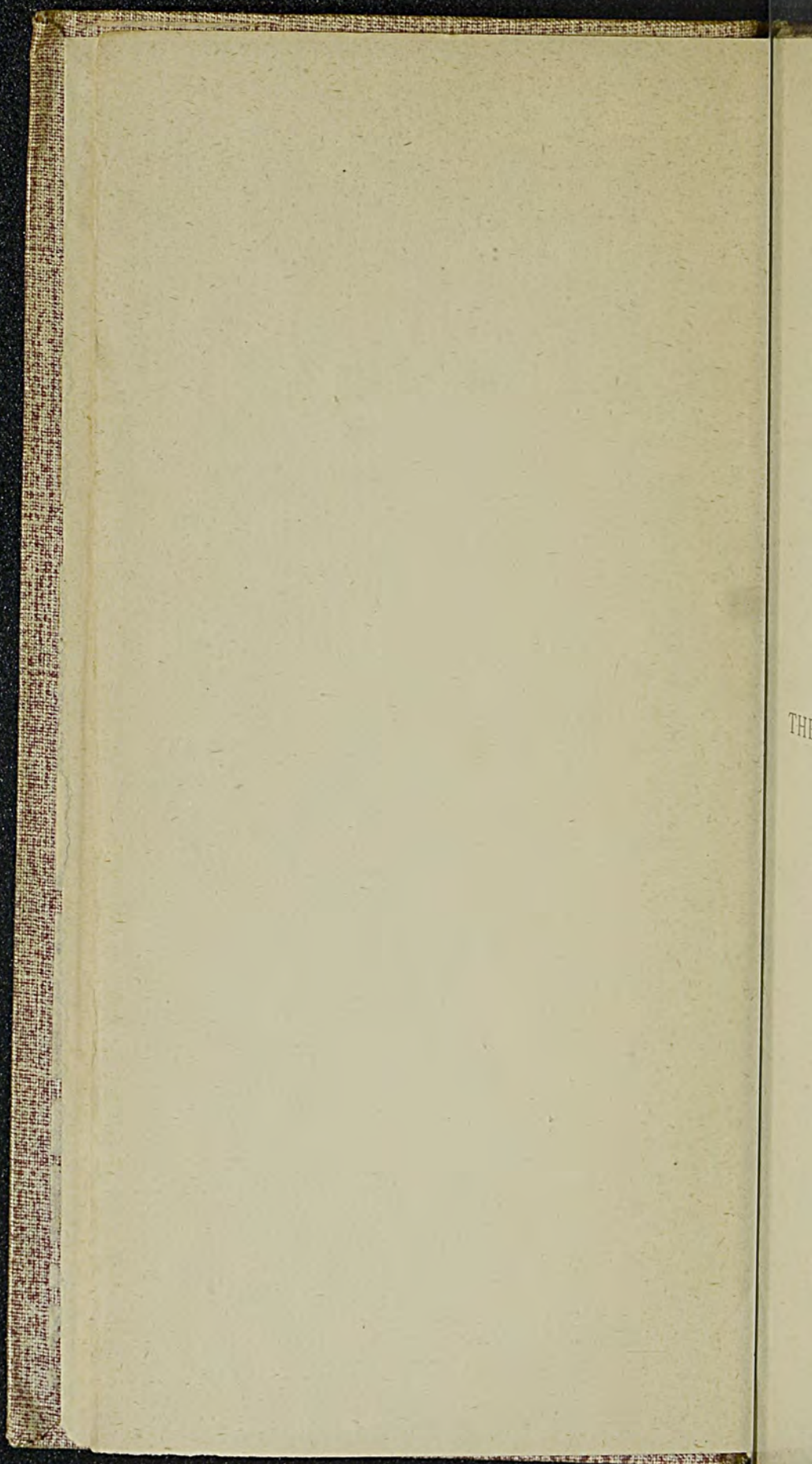
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THE FRIEND OF DEATH

A FANTASTIC TALE

ADAPTED FROM THE SPANISH BY

MARY J. SERRANO

TRANSLATOR OF "MARIE BASHKIRTSEFF, THE JOURNAL
OF A YOUNG ARTIST," ETC.

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THE FRIEND OF DEATH.

I.

MERITS AND SERVICES.

A SHABBILY dressed youth of nineteen, tall, thin, sallow, with fine black eyes, an intellectual brow and the most beautiful hands in the world ; haughty in his bearing and melancholy in his disposition—such was Gil Gil.

Gil Gil was the son, grandson, great-grandson, great great-grandson, and heaven knows what besides, of the most renowned family of cobblers in the Capital, and in coming into the world

he had caused the death of his mother, Crispina Lopez, whose father, grandfather, great-grandfather, and great-great-grandfather had also practiced with honor the same trade of shoemaking.

Juan Gil, the father of our melancholy hero, began to love his son only when he learned that the coming into the world of this son had left him without a wife; whence I make bold to infer that the poor artisan and Crispina Lopez did not afford a notable example of a happy union; although this union, in their case, had lasted for but seven months. Yet, to judge from appearances only, Crispina Lopez deserved to be more deeply mourned than she was, by her husband, for, when she left the paternal house for the house of the shoemaker, she took with her as a dowry, along with a beauty which might be said to be extraordinary, and a good store of house-linen and wearing apparel, a very wealthy customer—nothing less, indeed, than a count—the

Count of Rionuevo, who for several months—seven I think—had had the strange caprice of covering his small and delicate feet with the rude work of the good Juan, one of the humblest of the representatives of the saints and martyrs, Crispin and Crispinianus, may whose souls rest in glory.

But all this has nothing to do with my story, The Friend of Death.

What is important to know, however, is that Gil Gil was left fatherless, that is to say, without the protection of the honest shoemaker, at the age of fourteen, when he himself was beginning to attain a certain degree of skill as a cobbler, and that the noble Count of Rionuevo, either taking pity on the orphan, or attracted by his remarkable intelligence—which it was no one knew—took him to his own palace in the capacity of page, thereby giving great disgust to the countess, who had already heard of the boy

brought into the world by Crispina Lopez.

Our hero had received some education; he could read and write, knew something of arithmetic, and had learned the catechism, so that he could now take up Latin under the direction of a Hieronymite friar, who was a frequent visitor at the house of the count; and if the truth must be told these were the happiest years in the life of Gil Gil; happy, not because the poor boy was without his troubles (for the countess made him suffer bitterly, reminding him at every hour of the day of the awl and the strap) but because he accompanied his protector every evening to the house of the Duke of Montecarlo, and the Duke of Montecarlo had a daughter, the presumptive heiress to all the estates and revenues he had or ever might have, and exceedingly beautiful into the bargain—although the duke himself was ugly and ungainly enough.

Elena was entering her twelfth

spring when Gil Gil first saw her, and as he passed at her house for the scion of a noble but ruined family—a pious fiction of the Count of Rionuevo—the aristocratic maiden did not disdain to join with him in the customary sports of children, going so far as to give him, though of course in jest, the title of sweetheart, and even to bestow upon him some degree of affection when her twelve years had increased to fourteen, and his fourteen to sixteen.

In this way three years passed.

The shoemaker's son lived all this time in an atmosphere of luxury and pleasure ; he went to court ; he mixed with the nobility, copied their manners, acquired a smattering of French (then greatly in fashion), and learned, finally, horsemanship, dancing, fencing, something of chess, and a little necromancy.

But at this juncture Death came again, more pitiless this time than on either of the previous occasions, to blight the future of our

hero. The Count of Rionuevo died intestate, and the widowed countess, who cordially detested the *protégé* of her deceased husband, told him with tears in her eyes and venom in her smile, that he must leave the house without delay, as his presence there reminded her of her husband, and this could not but sadden her.

It seemed to Gil Gil that he had awakened from a delightful dream, or that he was the prey of a cruel nightmare. None the less, carrying under his arm such articles of clothing as he was permitted to take, he abandoned, weeping bitterly, the shelter of the roof, that was for him no longer a hospitable one.

Without resources, without family or home, the unfortunate youth remembered that in a certain lane, in the barrier of Las Vistillas, he owned a humble stall and a few shoemaker's tools packed away in a chest, all of which were in charge of the oldest old woman of the neighborhood, in

whose house the poor lad had always found a welcome, and sometimes even sweetmeats, during the lifetime of the virtuous Juan Gil. Thither, then, he bent his steps; the old woman was still living; the tools were in good condition, and the rent of the stall had produced him in these years some seven doubloons, which the good woman delivered to him, not without first watering them with tears of joy.

Gil decided to make his home with the old woman, to devote himself to his trade, and to forget completely horsemanship, fencing, dancing, and chess. But he by no means made up his mind to forget Elena de Montecarlo—a thing, indeed, which would have been impossible for him. He comprehended, however, that he was dead to her, or that she was dead to him, and before placing the tombstone of despair over the grave of his unconquerable love, he desired to take a last farewell of her who

for so long had been the soul of his soul.

He dressed himself accordingly one evening in the finest of the garments he had worn as a page, and bent his steps in the direction of the palace of the duke.

At the door was standing a traveling carriage to which four mules were harnessed.

Elena, followed by her father, was entering the vehicle.

"Gil!" she exclaimed softly, when she saw the young man.

"Drive on," cried the duke to the coachman. He had neither heard her voice nor seen the former page of Rionuevo.

The mules set off at a gallop.

The unhappy youth stretched out his arms toward the carriage which was bearing away his adored one without giving him time even to say farewell!

"Get out of the way," growled the porter, "I must shut the door!"

Gil recovered from his bewilderment.

"They are going away!" he said.

"Yes, Señor; to France," responded the porter curtly, shutting the door in his face.

The ex-page returned home, more miserable than ever, took off his fine garments and put them away, dressed himself in his shabbiest clothes, cut his hair short, shaved off the down that was beginning to appear on his upper lip, and on the following day took possession of the rickety chair that for forty years Juan Gil had occupied surrounded by lasts, knives, awls, and wax.

Thus we find him at the beginning of this story, which, as we have already said, is called *The Friend of Death*.





II.

FURTHER SERVICES AND MERITS.

THE month of June of 1724 was drawing to a close.

Gil Gil had worked for two years as a shoemaker, but do not for this reason imagine that he was resigned to his fate.

He was obliged to work day and night to provide himself with the barest necessities of life, and he lamented ceaselessly the consequent deterioration in the beauty of his hands; he read when he had no work to do, and not even by chance did he cross the threshold of his hidden retreat. He passed there a solitary, silent,

gloomy existence, his only distraction to hear from the lips of the old woman an occasional eulogy on the beauty of Crispina Lopez or the generosity of the Count of Rionuevo.

On Sundays, however, all this was changed. Gil Gil then arrayed himself in the garments he had worn as a page, carefully put away during the rest of the week, and went to take his stand on the steps of the church of San Millán, the church nearest to the palace of Monteclaro, and where his never to be forgotten Elena had been in the habit of hearing mass in happier days.

There he went to look for her, year after year, without ever seeing her appear. In exchange, he often met there students and pages whom he had formerly known, and who told him all that was going on in the exalted spheres which he no longer frequented, and from them he learned that his adored one was still in France. Of course no one im-

aged in these quarters that our hero was, in another quarter of the city, a poor cobbler; every one supposed that he had been left a legacy by the Count of Rionuevo, who had manifested in his lifetime so strong a predilection for the youthful page as to make it seem impossible that he should not have thought of providing for his future.

In this situation of affairs, and at the period mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, Gil Gil, standing at the door of the above-mentioned temple, saw two richly-dressed ladies followed by a numerous retinue approach, in one of whom he recognized, as she passed, his implacable enemy, the Countess of Rionuevo.

Our hero was about to conceal himself among the crowd, when the companion of the countess raised her veil and—oh joy! Gil Gil beheld his adored Elena, the gentle cause of his cruel suffering.

The poor youth uttered a cry of

frantic joy and rushed toward the beauty.

Elena instantly recognized him and cried in tones as tender as those she had used two years before :

“ Gil ! ”

The Countess of Rionuevo pressed the arm of the heiress of Monteclaro, and, turning to Gil Gil, said in a low voice :

“ I have already told you that I am satisfied with my shoemaker. I do not wear mended shoes. Do not be troublesome.”

Gil Gil turned pale as death, and fell upon the flagged pavement of the portico.

Elena and the countess entered the temple.

Two or three students who had witnessed the scene laughed boisterously, although they had not taken in its full meaning.

Gil Gil was taken to his home.

There another blow awaited him.

The old woman, who was all the family he had, had died, dur-

ing his absence, of old age, as we say.

He had a severe attack of brain fever and was, as one might say, at death's door.

When he recovered his reason he found that a neighbor, still poorer than himself, had nursed him during his long illness, finding himself obliged, however, in order to pay the doctor's fees and to buy medicines, to sell the articles of furniture, the tools, the stall, the books, and even the page's dress of our hero.

At the end of two months Gil Gil, clad in rags, hungry, weakened by his illness, without a maravedi, without family, without friends, without the old woman whom he had come to love as a mother, and, what was worse than all, without the hope of ever again approaching the companion of his boyhood, his beloved and constantly remembered Elena, abandoned the stall (once the asylum of his ancestors and now the property of another

shoemaker), and turned his steps wherever chance might lead, without knowing whither to go, what to do, to whom to turn, how to find work, or what to live for.

The rain was falling. It was one of those melancholy afternoons when the very clocks, as they strike, seem to sound a death-knell; when the sky is covered with clouds and the ground with mud; when the air, damp and close, depresses the soul; when the poor and the fatherless feel most keenly the pangs of hunger and cold, and when the unhappy envy the dead.

Night fell, and Gil Gil, who was burning with fever, crouched down on a doorstep and gave way to tears of infinite despair.

The image of death then presented itself to his mind, not wrapped in fearful shadows and convulsed with agony, but amiable, beautiful, and luminous, as Espronceda has described it.

The unhappy youth folded his arms over his breast, as if to shut

in the soothing image that offered him such glory and such happiness, and as he did so his hand came in contact with a hard object which was in one of his pockets.

The reaction was instantaneous; the love of life, the instinct of self-preservation, which had been about to yield, vanquished, to the desire for death, clung desperately to this unexpected ally that had presented itself on the very brink of the grave.

Hope whispered in the ear of Gil Gil a thousand seductive promises, which made him imagine that this hard object which he had touched was money, or some priceless gem, or some talisman ; something, in short, which should be for him life and fortune, happiness and glory (all which were included in the love of Elena de Montecarlo), and, saying to Death "Wait," he put his hand into his pocket.

But alas ! the hard object he had felt was the little vial of sulphuric acid, or, to speak in plainer

terms, of oil of vitriol, which he used in making blacking, and which, the last remnant of his cobbler's stock, he now found in his pocket by some inexplicable chance.

Thus, where the unfortunate youth had hoped to find an anchor of salvation he found a poison, and a most swift and deadly one.

"Let us die, then," he said to himself.

And he raised the vial to his lips.

A hand, cold as ice, was laid upon his shoulder, and a voice, sweet, tender, divine, murmured above his head these words:

"HAIL, FRIEND!"





III.

TELLS HOW GIL GIL MASTERED
THE SCIENCE OF MEDICINE IN
AN HOUR.

THERE were no other words that could have surprised Gil Gil so greatly as the words which he had just heard: "Hail! friend!"

He had no friend.

But he was still more surprised by the horrible impression of cold communicated to him by the hand of the phantom, and by the tone of its voice, which, sharp as a blast from the North pole, pierced to the very marrow of his bones.

We have said that the night was very dark.

The desolate orphan was consequently unable to distinguish the features of his companion, although he could distinguish the shape of his black robe, which did not seem to be precisely the dress of either sex.

Filled with doubt, with vague terror, and, at the same time, with keen curiosity, Gil rose from the doorstep on which he had been huddled and said in feeble accents, interrupted by the chattering of his teeth:

"What do you want with me?"

"That is what I ask of you!" answered the Unknown, linking his arm in that of Gil Gil with affectionate familiarity.

"Who are you?" demanded the poor shoemaker, who felt his heart sink with terror at the cold contact of that arm.

"I am the person you are seeking."

"I? I am seeking no one," responded Gil, trying to free himself.

"Why, then, have you called

me?" asked the Unknown, pressing his arm more closely than before.

"Ah! let me go."

"Calm yourself, Gil. It is not my purpose to do you the least injury," said the mysterious being. "Come! You are trembling with hunger and cold. I see there an inn which is still open, in which, by-the-by, I have some business to-night. Let us enter and you shall eat something."

"Very well, but—who are you?" again asked Gil Gil, in whom curiosity was beginning to get the better of every other feeling.

"I told you that when I first spoke to you—I am your friend. And bear in mind that you are the only being on the face of the earth to whom I accord the title of friend. I am bound to you by remorse! I am the cause of all your misfortunes."

"I do not know you," replied the shoemaker.

"And yet I have entered your

house many times ! Through me you were left motherless at your birth ; I was the cause of the apoplectic stroke that killed Juan Gil ; it was I who turned you out of the palace of Rionuevo ; I assassinated your old house-mate, and, finally, it was I who placed in your pocket the vial of sulphuric acid."

Gil Gil trembled like a leaf ; he felt his hair stand on end, and it seemed to him as if his contracted muscles must burst asunder.

"You are the devil !" he exclaimed, with indescribable terror.

"Child !" responded the black-robed figure in accents of amiable censure, "what has put that idea into your head ? I am something greater and better than the wretched being you have named."

"Who are you, then ?"

"Let us go into the inn and you shall learn."

Gil hastily entered, drew the Unknown before the modest lantern that lighted the apartment,

and looked at him with intense curiosity.

He was a person about thirty-three years old; tall, handsome, pale, dressed in a long black tunic and a black mantle, and his long locks were covered by a Phrygian cap, also black.

He had not the slightest sign of a beard, yet he did not look like a woman. Neither did he look like a man, notwithstanding his virile and strong cast of countenance.

What he really seemed to be was a human being without sex, a body without a soul, or rather a soul without a definite mortal body. It might be said that he was a negation of personality.

His eyes were absolutely lusterless. They resembled the blackness of darkness. They were shadowy eyes, funereal eyes, dead eyes. But so gentle, so mild, so profound in their silence that it was impossible to remove one's gaze from them. They attracted like the sea, they fascinated like a

fathomless abyss, they consoled like oblivion.

And as Gil Gil gazed into those lifeless eyes, he felt that he was being enveloped in a black veil, that earth was returning to chaos, and the sounds of the world were like a tempest which is vanishing in the distance.

Then the mysterious being uttered these tremendous words :

“ I am Death, my friend. I am Death, and God it is who sends me. God, who has a glorious place reserved for you in the heavens. Five times have I been the cause of misery to you, and I, the implacable divinity, have felt pity for you. When God commanded me to bring this night before his tribunal your impious soul, I supplicated him to grant me your life and to allow me to remain at your side for a time, promising to deliver to him afterward your spirit purified from stain and worthy of his bliss. Heaven was not deaf to my prayer. You, then, are the first

human being whose body has not turned to cold clay at my approach. You are my sole friend. Listen, then, and learn the way to happiness and to eternal salvation."

When Death had reached this point in his discourse, Gil Gil murmured a few words, almost unintelligibly.

"I understand you," returned Death; "you speak of Elena de Monteclaro."

"Yes," responded the young man.

"I swear to you that no arms but yours or mine shall ever embrace her. And I repeat that I will bestow felicity upon you, both in this world and in the next. For this the following will suffice: I, my friend, am not the Omnipotent. My power is very limited, very feeble. I have not the power to create. My power is confined to destroying. Nevertheless, I am able to bestow upon you strength, power, wealth, greater than is possessed by

princes or emperors. I am going to make you a physician, but a physician who shall be my friend, who shall know me, who shall see me, who shall speak with me. Divine the rest."

Gil Gil was amazed.

"Can this be true?" he exclaimed, as if he were striving to shake off some nightmare.

"All this is true, and more, which I will tell you later. For the present I need only tell you that you are not the son of Juan Gil. I hear the confessions of the dying and I know that you are the natural son of the Count of Rio-nuevo, your deceased protector, and of Crispina Lopez."

"Ah, be silent!" exclaimed the poor youth, hiding his face in his hands.

Then, struck with a sudden thought, he exclaimed with indescribable horror:

"Then you will one day kill Elena?"

"Calm yourself," responded the divinity. Elena for you will never

die! Answer me, then, will you or will you not be my friend?"

Gil answered with another question.

"Will you give me Elena in return?"

"I have told you that I would."

"There is my hand, then," said the young man, giving his hand to the Angel of Death.

But another idea, still more horrible than the former, assailed him at this moment.

"With this hand that clasps my hand," he said, "you killed my poor mother."

"Yes, your mother is dead," responded the Angel of Death. "Understand, however, that I caused her no suffering. I cause no one to suffer. The power that tortures until you draw your latest breath is my rival, Life—the life you love so much."

Gil threw himself, for answer, into the arms of the Angel of Death.

"Come, then," said the funereal being.

"Where?"

"To La Granja, to enter on your functions as a physician."

"And whom are we going to see?"

"The ex-king, Philip V."

"What! Is Philip V going to die?"

"Not yet; on the contrary, he is going to rule again, and you are going to bestow on him the crown."

Gil bent his head under the weight of so many new thoughts.

The Angel of Death took him by the arm and led him out of the inn. They had not yet reached the door when they heard behind them cries and lamentations.

The inn-keeper had just expired.





IV.

A DIGRESSION WHICH HAS NO BEARING ON THE CASE.

FROM the moment in which Gil left the inn, he began to observe such a change in himself and in everything around him that if he had not been supported by an arm as strong as that of the Angel of Death he would certainly have fallen dizzy to the ground.

This was because our hero felt what no other mortal has ever felt—the two motions of the earth, its motion around the sun and its motion on its own axis.

On the other hand, he did not

perceive the beating of his own heart.

Any one who had examined by the brilliant light of the moon the face of the ex-shoemaker would have observed that the melancholy beauty which had always distinguished him had increased to an extraordinary degree. His eyes, of a velvety blackness, now reflected that mysterious peace which reigned in the eyes of the Angel of Death. His long and silky locks, dark as the raven's wing, framed in a countenance pale as the alabaster of a tomb—with a pallor at once radiant and opaque, as if a funeral torch burned within, whose light glowed faintly through. His gestures, his looks, his bearing, all were transfigured, invested with a character majestic, supernatural, immortal, and which, beyond a doubt, wherever Gil should present himself, would cause the coldest of women, the haughtiest of potentates, the bravest of warriors to bend before him.

The two friends went on and on toward the sierra, at times keeping the highway, at times deviating from it.

Whenever they passed through a town or a hamlet, the slow peal of bells tolling the death-knell announced to our hero that the Angel of Death was not losing his time; that his arm reached to every part of the world, and that, though Gil felt it now weighing upon his breast like a mountain of ice, none the less did it scatter ruin and desolation over the entire surface of the earth.

As they went, the Angel of Death related many strange and wonderful things to his *protégé*.

The foe of history, he took pleasure in scoffing at its pretended utility, in disproof of which he narrated many facts as they had actually occurred, and not as they are recorded on monuments and in chronicles.

The abysses of the past opened before the entranced imagination of Gil Gil, revealing to him

facts of transcendent importance concerning the fate of man and of empires, disclosing to him the great mystery of the origin of life and the no less great and terrible mystery of the end to which we, wrongly called mortals, are progressing, and causing him, finally, to comprehend, by the light of this sublime philosophy, the laws which preside at the evolution of cosmic matter, and its various manifestations in those ephemeral and transitory forms which are called minerals, plants, animals, stars, constellations, nebulæ, and worlds.

Physiology, geology, chemistry, botany, all were brought clearly before the vision of the ex-shoemaker, revealing to him the mysterious springs of life, of motion, of reproduction, of passion, of feeling, of thought, of conscience, of reason, of memory, and of will or desire.

God, only God, remained veiled in the depths of those seas of light.

God, only God, remained apart

from life and from death, isolated from the universal solidarity ; sole and supreme in essence, single as substance, independent and all-powerful as force ! Death did not succeed in wrapping the Creator in his infinite shadow. He, only, was. His eternity, his immutability, his impersonability, dazzled the gaze of Gil Gil, who bowed his head and worshiped and believed, remaining plunged in greater ignorance than before he had descended into the abysses of Death.





V.

A CERTAINTY FOR AN UNCER-
TAINTY.

IT was ten o'clock on the morning of August 30, 1734, when Gil Gil, perfectly schooled by this negative potentate, entered the palace of San Ildefonso and demanded an audience of Philip V.

Let us recall to the reader's mind the situation of this monarch on the day and hour we have just mentioned.

The first of the Spanish Bourbons and the grandson of Louis XIV of France, he had accepted the throne of Spain at a time when no one dreamed of the pos-

sibility of his ever ascending the French throne. But several of the princes, his uncles and nephews, who had stood between him and the throne of his native land, died, and, in order to render himself eligible to occupy it in the event of the death of his nephew, Louis XV, a youth of fourteen and at this time very ill, he abdicated the crown of Castile in favor of his son Louis I, and retired to San Ildefonso.

At this juncture not only did Louis XV recover his health, to some extent, but Louis I fell dangerously ill of small-pox. Ten couriers, stationed between La Granja and Madrid, hourly carried news of his son's condition to Philip, and the ambitious father of the young king, influenced also by his renowned second wife, Isabel Farnese (who was still more ambitious than himself), long hesitated what course to decide upon in so grave and unexpected a conflict of interests.

Would the Spanish throne be-

come vacant before the French throne? Should he manifest his readiness to reign again in Madrid and to accept the succession of his son?

But what if his son should not die? Would it not be the height of folly to lay bare to all Europe the most secret recesses of his soul? Would it not render useless his sacrifice of having lived in solitude for seven months? Would it not be to renounce forever the alluring hope of occupying the coveted throne of St. Louis? What was best to be done, then? To delay was to lose precious time! The Council of State detested him and tried to deprive him of all political power. A single false step might destroy the ambitious hopes of a lifetime and compromise his name with posterity. A would-be Charles V, the temptations of the world assailed him in his solitude, and he expiated dearly by those hours of uncertainty the hypocrisy of his abdication.

Such was the position of affairs when our friend Gil Gil caused himself to be announced to the perplexed Philip as the bearer of important news.

"What have you to say to me?" asked the king, without raising his eyes, as our hero entered the room.

"Look at me, your Majesty," returned Gil Gil. "Do not fear that I shall read your thoughts; they are already known to me."

Philip V turned round brusquely to look at this man, whose voice, hard and cold as the truth he uttered, fell icily on his heart.

But his displeasure died away at sight of the funereal smile of the Friend of the Angel of Death.

He was seized by a superstitious terror when his eyes encountered the gaze of Gil Gil, and reaching a trembling hand toward the bell on his writing-desk, he repeated his former question:

"What have you to say to me?"

"Your Majesty, I am a physi-

cian," replied the young man quietly, "and I have so strong a faith in my science that I will venture to foretell the exact day, hour, and minute when the death of Louis I will take place."

Philip V looked more attentively at this youth covered with rags, whose countenance was as superhuman as it was beautiful.

"Speak," said the king.

"Not so fast, Your Majesty," replied Gil Gil, with a tinge of sarcasm. "We must first agree upon the terms."

The Frenchman threw back his head at these words as if he had awakened from a dream; the scene that had just passed appeared to him now in an entirely different light, and he was almost ashamed of having allowed it to take place.

"Ho, there!" he cried, touching the bell. "Seize this man!"

A captain of the guards appeared and laid his hand on the shoulder of Gil Gil.

The latter stood motionless.

The king, returning to his former superstitious fears, looked furtively at the strange physician. He then rose with some difficulty, for the debility from which he had been suffering for several years past had increased of late, and said to the captain of the guards:

“Leave us.”

He then confronted Gil Gil, as if to conquer his terror of him, and asked him, with feigned calmness:

“Who the devil are you, owl-face?”

“I am the Friend of the Angel of Death,” answered our hero gravely.

“Our Lady, pray for us sinners,” said the king with a jesting air, trying to disguise his childish terror. “And what were you saying of our son?”

“I say,” exclaimed Gil Gil, taking a step toward the king, who involuntarily drew back, “that I come to bring you a crown—whether the crown of Spain or the crown of France I will not yet mention, for that is the secret you are to

purchase from me. I say that we are losing precious time, and that consequently I must speak clearly and briefly. Listen to me, therefore, with attention. Louis I is dying! His malady, however, is not an incurable one. Your Majesty is like the dog in the fable."

Philip V interrupted Gil Gil.

"Speak! Say what you wish! I desire to hear all you have to say. In any case I shall have you put to death!"

The Friend of the Angel of Death shrugged his shoulders and continued:

"I have said that Your Majesty is like the dog in the fable. You had the Spanish crown upon your head. You stooped to pick up that of France; your own crown fell into the cradle of your son; Louis XV put on yours, and you were left without either."

"True!" assented Philip V, if not with his voice with his eyes.

"Now," continued Gil Gil, intercepting the king's glance, "when you are nearer to the

crown of France than to that of Spain, you are going to expose yourself to the same risk. Louis XV and Louis I, the two young kings, are both sick. You may inherit the crown of either, but you must know a few hours beforehand which is to die first. Louis I is in the greater danger, but the crown of France is the more desirable. Hence, your perplexity. It is plain to be seen that you have learned from experience. You no longer dare to stretch out your hand for the scepter of St. Ferdinand, fearing lest your son should recover and you should be scoffed at by the public and deserted by your French adherents. To speak more plainly, you do not now dare to drop the substance you hold between your teeth, fearing lest the other crown that you perceive should prove to be only a new illusion, or a shadow."

"Continue, continue," said Philip eagerly, thinking Gil Gil had ended; "continue. In any

case you shall go from here to a dungeon, where only the walls can hear you. Continue, I wish to know what the world says about my thoughts."

The ex-shoemaker smiled disdainfully.

"Prison! Scaffold!" he exclaimed. "To this is confined the science of kings. But I do not fear you. Listen to me yet a little while, I shall soon finish. I desire, Your Majesty, to be made royal physician, to obtain the title of duke, and to receive this very day the sum of thirty thousand dollars. Your Majesty laughs? Well, I desire these things as much as Your Majesty desires to know whether Louis I will die of small-pox or not."

"And do you know it?" asked the king, in a low voice, unable to conquer the terror with which this youth inspired him.

"I shall know it to-night."

"How?"

"I have already told you that I

am the Friend of the Angel of Death."

"And what does that mean? Explain yourself."

"What does it mean? I myself do not know. Take me to the palace at Madrid; let me see the reigning king and I will tell you the sentence which the Eternal has written on his brow."

"And what if you should make a mistake!" asked Anjou, drawing nearer to Gil Gil.

"You will send me to the scaffold—for which purpose you shall hold me prisoner as long as you choose."

"So you are a wizard?" exclaimed Philip, in order to justify in some way the faith he put in the words of Gil Gil.

"Your Majesty, there is now no such thing as witchcraft. The last wizard was called Louis XIV, and the last person bewitched, Charles II. The crown of Spain, which we sent you to Paris, wrapped up in the will of an idiot, redeemed us from the power of the devil in

which we had been living since the abdication of Charles V. You know this better than any one else."

"Royal physician—duke—and thirty thousand dollars," said the king, in a low voice.

"For a crown that is worth more than you imagine," responded Gil Gil.

"You have my royal word," said Philip V, with solemnity, dominated by that voice, that face, that mysterious manner.

"Your Majesty swears it?"

"I promise," responded the Frenchman; "I promise it if you prove to me that you are something more than man."

"Elena—you shall be mine," murmured Gil.

The king called the captain of the guards and gave him some orders.

"And now," he said, "while preparations are making for your journey to Madrid, tell me your history and give me an account of your science."

"I shall do as Your Majesty desires; but I fear you will understand neither the one nor the other."

.

An hour later the captain of the guards was traveling post haste to Madrid in the company of our hero, who had exchanged his rags for a magnificent suit of black velvet adorned with costly lace; he carried a sword at his side and wore a laced hat.

Philip V had presented him with this dress, together with a large sum of money, on becoming acquainted with his miraculous relations with Death.

Let us follow the good Gil Gil, however far he may travel; he may chance to encounter in the chamber of the Queen his idolized Elena de Monteclaro, or the odious Countess of Rionuevo, and we ought not to remain in ignorance of the particulars of events so interesting.



VI.

PRELIMINARY CONFERENCE.

IT might be about six in the evening when Gil Gil and the captain of the guards alighted at the gates of the palace.

An immense crowd, aware of the young king's danger, had gathered in the neighborhood of the royal residence.

As our friend set his foot on the threshold of the castle he came face to face with the Angel of Death, who was hurriedly leaving the building.

"Already?" asked Gil Gil, full of terror.

"Not yet!" responded the sinister divinity.

The physician breathed more freely.

"When, then?" he asked, after a moment.

"I cannot tell you."

"Oh, speak! If you but knew what Philip V has promised me."

"I can imagine it."

"Well, then, I must know when Louis I is to die."

"You shall know it in due time. Enter."

"The captain of the guards has already entered the royal apartments. He brings instructions from the young king's father. At this moment you are announced as the first physician in the world. The people are crowding the staircase to see you as you pass. You are going to meet Elena and the Countess of Rionuevo."

"Oh, happiness!" exclaimed Gil Gil.

"It is a quarter past six," continued the Angel of Death, feeling his pulse, which was his sole and his unerring watch. "They are

waiting for you. Good-by for the present."

"But tell me——"

"True, I had forgotten. Listen! If, when you see King Louis, I am in the room, his malady will have a fatal termination."

"And shall you be there? Do you not say that you are going elsewhere?"

"I do not yet know whether I shall be there or not. I am ubiquitous, and if I receive superior orders you shall see me there, wherever else I may be."

"What were you doing just now?"

"I have just slain a horse."

Gil Gil drew back amazed.

"What!" he exclaimed, "Have you to do also with irrational beings?"

"What do you mean by irrational beings? Do men, perchance, possess true reason? Reason is one and is not found on earth."

"But tell me," replied Gil, "the animals, the brutes—those beings

whom we here call irrational—have they a soul?”

“Yes and no. They have a spirit, but neither freedom of will nor responsibility. But go to the devil. How inquisitive you are to-day. Good-by, then. I am on my way to a certain noble house—where I am going to render you another service.”

“A service to me? Tell me plainly what you mean. What is it you are going to do?”

“To prevent a certain marriage.”

“Ah,” exclaimed Gil Gil, conceiving a horrible suspicion. “Is it by chance——”

“I can tell you no more,” answered the Angel of Death. “Go in; it is growing late.”

• “You will drive me mad.”

“Let things take their course and it will be better for you. You have my promise that you shall be completely happy.”

“Ah, so, then, we are friends. You do not intend to kill either me or Elena?”

"Be at rest," replied the Angel of Death, with such sadness and such solemnity, tenderness, and joy, in a voice expressing so many and so different emotions, that Gil in that moment renounced the hope of comprehending the meaning of the words.

"Wait," he said at last, seeing that the black-robed being was going away. "Repeat to me what you said about the hours, for I do not wish to make any mistake. If you are in the room of a sick person but not looking at him, it signifies that the patient will die of his malady——"

"Right. But if I am facing him, he will die within the day. If I am lying down with him, he has three hours of life left. If you see him in my embrace, give him only an hour. And if you see me kiss his forehead, offer up a prayer for his soul."

"And will you not speak a single word to me?"

"Not one. I have no permission to reveal to you in this man-

ner the designs of the Eternal. The advantage you have over other men consists solely in that I am visible for you. Farewell, then, and do not forget me."

Having said these words, he vanished into space.





VII.

THE ROYAL BEDCHAMBER.

WHEN Gil Gil entered the royal abode, he was neither glad nor sorry for having made the acquaintance of the Angel of Death. But as soon as he had set foot on the staircase of the palace, and remembered that he was about to see his idolized Elena, all his gloomy thoughts vanished, as night-birds fly at the approach of dawn.

Accompanied by a distinguished retinue of courtiers and other members of the nobility, Gil Gil passed through several galleries and salons before he reached the royal bedchamber, and it must be

confessed that every one wondered at the extraordinary beauty and the extreme youth of the famous physician whom Philip V had sent from La Granja as the last effort of human power to save the life of Louis I.

The members of both courts—the court of Louis and that of Philip, were present.

These were, in a manner, two rival powers, who for the past week had lived in a state of constant warfare. They were the former adherents of the elder branch of the Bourbons and the new-comers, whom the Regent of France, Philip of Orleans, the Generous, had grouped around the throne of Spain to prevent the ambitious ex-duke of Anjou from springing from that throne to the throne of his ancestor; they were, in short, the courtiers of the docile boy who now lay dying and those of his beautiful wife, the indomitable daughter of the regent, the renowned Duchess of Montpensier.

The friends of Isabel Farnese, step-mother of Louis I, wished for the death of the latter, that there might be one obstacle the less between the children of the second marriage of Philip V and the crown of St. Ferdinand.

The partisans of the daughter of Orleans, the youthful queen, desired the recovery of the patient, not through love for the ill-mated pair, but through hatred to Philip, whom they did not wish to see reascend the throne.

The friends of the unfortunate Louis trembled at the thought of his death; for since it was they who had induced him to shake off the tutelage in which the hermit of La Granja had kept him, they knew very well that, should the former return to the throne, his first act would be either to exile them or throw them into prison.

The palace was, then, a labyrinth of contradictory desires, of opposite ambitions, of intrigues and suspicions, of fears and of hopes.

Gil Gil entered the bedchamber, searching with his glance for one person only—his never to be forgotten Elena.

Standing by the bedside of the king was her father, the intimate friend of the late Count of Rionuevo, the Duke of Montecarlo, in short, conversing with the archbishops of Santiago and Toledo, the Marquis of Mirabal, and Don Miguel de Guerra, four of the bitterest enemies of Philip V.

The Duke of Montecarlo did not recognize the former page, the playmate of his charming daughter.

On the other side of the bed the Friend of the Angel of Death saw, and not without a thrill of fear, among the ladies surrounding the young and beautiful Louise Isabel of Orleans, his implacable and life-long enemy, the Countess of Rionuevo.

Gil Gil passed so close to her as almost to touch her dress as he went to kiss the hand of the queen.

Nor did the countess, on her side, recognize the natural son of her husband.

At this moment the tapestry behind the group of ladies was drawn aside, and there appeared, among three or four ladies whom he did not know, a lady, taller than any of the others and with a pale and beautiful countenance.

It was Elena de Montecarlo.

Gil Gil fixed an intense gaze upon her, and the young girl trembled at the sight of that gloomy and beautiful face, as if she beheld the specter of a dead lover; as if she had before her eyes, not Gil, but his ghost enveloped in its shroud; as if she saw, in short, a being from the other world.

Gil at court! Gil consoling the queen, that haughty and disdainful princess who scorned every one! Gil, with this costly raiment, admired and courted by all the nobility!

"Ah, I shall doubtless wake and find it a dream," thought the lovely Elena.

"Come, Doctor," said the Marquis de Mirabal at this moment. "His Majesty is awake."

Gil cast off by a violent effort the ecstasy of bliss that had taken possession of him at seeing his adored one before him, and approached the bedside of the patient.

The second of the Spanish Bourbons was a youth of seventeen, thin, tall, and sickly, like a plant growing in the shade.

His face, which had not been without a certain refinement of expression, notwithstanding the irregularity of the features, was now frightfully swollen and covered with ash-colored pustules. It looked like the rough clay model for a piece of statuary.

The youthful king cast a look of anguish at the other youth who approached his bedside, and meeting his mute and somber eyes, unfathomable as the mystery of eternity, he uttered a low cry and hid his face in the bedclothes.

Gil Gil meantime looked around

the room in search of the Angel of Death.

But the Angel of Death was not there.

"Will he live?" some of the courtiers asked Gil Gil, in a low voice, thinking that they saw some indication of hope in the countenance of the latter.

He was about to answer in the affirmative, forgetting that he must give his opinion only to Philip V, when he felt his dress pulled from behind.

He turned round and saw a black-robed figure standing before him with its back to the bedside of the king.

It was the Angel of Death.

"He will die of his malady, but not to-day," said Gil Gil to himself.

"What is your opinion?" asked the Archbishop of Toledo, filled as were all present, with the involuntary respect which the superhuman expression of our hero's countenance inspired.

"Pardon me," responded the

ex-cobbler, "I must reserve my opinion for him who sent me."

"But you," said the Marquis of Mirabal, "you, who are so young, cannot have acquired so much knowledge by study. Doubtless it is God or the devil who has inspired you with it. You must be a saint who can work miracles, or a magician in league with witches."

"Think what you choose," responded Gil Gil. "At all events I read in the future of the prince who lies on that bed a secret which you would give something to know, for it decides the question as to whether you will be to-morrow the minister of Louis I or the prisoner of Philip V."

"What do you mean?" stammered Mirabal, pale with anger, but smiling slightly.

At this moment Gil Gil observed that the Angel of Death, not satisfied with lying in wait for the monarch, had utilized his stay in the royal bedchamber to seat himself beside a lady—almost in

the same chair with her—at whom he was gazing fixedly.

The person thus *sentenced* was the Countess of Rionuevo.

“Three hours,” said Gil Gil to himself.

“I must speak with you,” the Marquis of Mirabal was saying, meanwhile, the daring thought having occurred to him of buying his secret from the strange physician.

But a glance and a smile of Gil, who divined the thoughts of the Marquis, disconcerted the latter so greatly that he involuntarily drew back a step.

They were the same glance and the same smile that had dominated Philip V that morning.

During the momentary confusion of Mirabal, Gil took a step which firmly established his reputation at court.

“My Lord,” he said to the Archbishop of Toledo, “the Countess of Rionuevo, whom you see sitting tranquilly by herself in that corner” (we already know that the

Angel of Death was visible only to the eyes of Gil Gil) "will die within three hours. Advise her to prepare her soul for the great change."

The Archbishop drew back, terrified.

"What is the matter?" asked Don Miguel de Guerra.

The Prelate repeated the prophecy of Gil Gil to several persons, and every eye was at once fixed upon the countess who, in fact, was beginning to grow horribly pale.

Gil Gil meantime advanced toward Elena.

The latter was standing, motionless and silent, like a noble piece of statuary, on the marble floor of the chamber.

Thence, spell-bound, fascinated, filled with a terror and a joy which it would be impossible to describe, she watched every movement of the friend of her childhood.

"Elena," murmured the young man, as he passed close beside her.

"Gil," she answered mechanically, "is it really you?"

"Yes. It is I," he answered, "fear nothing."

And he passed out of the apartment.

The captain of the guards was waiting for him in the antechamber.

Gil Gil wrote a few words on a slip of paper and handed it to the faithful servant of Philip V, saying :

"Take this, and do not lose a moment, to La Granja."

"But—you?" said the captain. "I cannot leave you. You are a prisoner in my custody."

"I shall continue to be your prisoner, on parole," replied Gil, with dignity. "I cannot accompany you."

"But—the king——"

"The king will approve of your conduct."

"Impossible."

"Listen, and you will see that I am right."

At this moment a great commotion was heard in the royal chamber.

"The doctor! the doctor!" cried several persons, rushing out of the room together.

"What is the matter?" asked Gil Gil.

"The Countess of Rionuevo is dying," said Don Miguel de Guerra. "Come! This way. She is now in the chamber of the queen."

"Go, captain," said Gil Gil in a low voice. "It is I who tell you to do so."

And he emphasized the words with such a look and such a gesture that the soldier departed without a word.

Gil, following Guerra, entered the chamber of the consort of Louis I.





VIII.

REVELATIONS.

LISTEN," Gil Gil heard a voice saying close to him, as he walked toward the bed on which lay the Countess of Rionuevo.

"Ah, it is you," cried our hero, recognizing the Angel of Death.

"Has she already expired?"

"Who?"

"The countess."

"No."

"Why do you leave her, then?"

"I have not left her, my friend; as I have already told you I am in many places at once, under different forms."

"Well, what do you want with me?" asked Gil, with some displeasure, on hearing these words.

"I come to render you another service."

"Yes, a service like those you render. Speak."

"Do you know that you are wanting in respect to me?" said the Angel of Death slowly.

"Naturally," responded Gil. "Familiarity—complicity——"

"What do you mean by complicity?"

"Nothing. I was thinking of a picture I saw when I was a boy. It was an allegorical representation of Medicine. In the same bed were lying two persons, or rather a man and his disease. The physician, with his eyes blindfolded, and armed with a stick, was standing beside the bed, showering blows indiscriminately on the patient and the disease. I do not remember which of the two first fell a victim to his blows. I think it was the patient."

"An amusing allegory. But let us come to the point."

"Yes, let us do so, for every one is wondering at seeing me standing alone in this way in the middle of the room."

"Let them wonder. They will suppose that you are meditating, or that you are waiting for inspiration. Listen to me for a moment. You know that the past is mine by right, and that I may reveal it to you. Not so the future."

"Proceed."

"Patience. You are about to speak for the last time with the Countess of Rionuevo, and it is my duty to relate to you a certain story."

"It is useless. I forgive that woman."

"It concerns Elena, simpleton," exclaimed the Angel of Death.

"How?"

"I say that it is in your power to become a nobleman and to marry Elena."

"A nobleman I am already; Philip V has made me a duke."

"Monteclaro will not be satisfied with an upstart. You require ancestors."

"Well?"

"I have already told you that you are the last scion of the house of Rionuevo."

"Yes—but—without rights."

"You are mistaken. Your father legitimated you before his death."

"It may be so, but where is the proof of it?"

"That is precisely what I am going to tell you."

"Speak."

"Listen, and do not interrupt me. The countess is the terrible sphinx who holds the secret of your life."

"I know it."

"She has your happiness in her hands."

"I know that also."

"Well, then, the moment has come to snatch it from them."

"How?"

"You shall see. Your father loved you too well——"

"Ah, he loved me, then?" exclaimed Gil Gil.

"I have told you not to interrupt me. Your father, I repeat, loved you too well to leave this world without thinking seriously about your future."

"What! Did not the count die intestate?"

"What reason have you for thinking that?"

"Every one says so."

"A pure invention of the countess to obtain possession of all the count's wealth, to bequeath it to a certain nephew of her own."

"Ah!"

"Calm yourself. It can be all made right. Your father procured the necessary documents to enable him to constitute you his legal heir, authenticating them before his death in the presence of a priest and a notary whom I saw at his bedside, and with whom I am very well acquainted. The priest, indeed—but this I must not reveal to you. In short, as I have said, the count named you

his sole heir—a thing he might do with all the more justice as he had no living relation, either near or distant. Nor did the efforts made by that tender father, from the very brink of the grave, to lay the foundations of your happiness, cease here.”

“Ah, my father!” murmured Gil Gil.

“Listen! You are already aware of the strong and disinterested friendship which had long existed between the good count and the Duke of Montecarlo, his companion in arms during the War of the Succession.”

“Yes; I am aware of it.”

“Well, then,” continued the Angel of Death, “your father, divining the love you bore the beautiful Elena, addressed to the duke, shortly before his death, a long and touching letter in which he told him everything, asking for you his daughter’s hand, and reminding him of all the proofs of friendship they had given each other in the past.”

"And that letter?" asked Gil Gil, with extraordinary vehemence.

"That letter alone would have sufficed to gain the duke's consent, and you would now have been for some time his son-in-law——"

"What became of that letter?" interrupted the young man, trembling with mingled love and anger.

"That letter would have prevented your becoming acquainted with me——" responded the Angel of Death.

"Oh, do not be cruel! Tell me that that letter is in existence."

"It is."

"It is in existence?"

"Yes."

"Who has it?"

"The person who intercepted it."

"The countess?"

"The countess."

"Ah!" cried the young man, taking a step toward the bed of death.

"Wait," said the Angel of Death. "I have not yet finished. The countess has also concealed her husband's will, which she almostsnatched from my hands——"

"From your hands?"

"I say from mine because the count was already dying. As for the priest and the notary, I will tell you where they live, and I think they will both declare the truth."

Gil Gil reflected for a moment; then, gazing fixedly at the black-robed divinity:

"That is to say," he exclaimed, "that if I succeed in obtaining possession of those documents——"

"To-morrow you can marry Elena."

"Oh, Heavens!" murmured the young man, taking another step in the direction of the bed.

Then he turned again to the Angel of Death.

The courtiers did not comprehend what was passing in the heart of Gil Gil. They thought

him either communing with his thoughts or wrestling with the miraculous vision to which he owed his knowledge; but so great was the terror with which he inspired them that no one dared to interrupt him.

"Tell me," continued the shoemaker, addressing his awful companion, "why it was that the countess did not burn those papers?"

"Because the countess, like all criminals, is superstitious; because she feared that she might some day repent; because she divined that in that event those papers might serve as her passport to heaven. In short, because it is a constantly recurring fact that no criminal effaces the traces of his crime, fearing to forget them in the hour of death and to be thus unable to retrace his steps to the path of virtue. I repeat, then, those papers are in existence."

"So that if I obtain them, Elena will be mine," persisted Gil Gil,

not yet convinced of the power of the Angel of Death to bestow happiness upon him.

"There would still be another obstacle to overcome first," answered the Angel of Death.

"What obstacle?"

"Elena is promised by her father to the nephew of the countess, the Viscount of Daimiel."

"How! Does she love him?"

"No; but that does not matter, since two months ago they were betrothed to each other."

"Ah! So that it is all of no avail," exclaimed Gil with desperation.

"Such would be the case but for me," answered the Angel of Death.

"But I told you at the door of the palace that I was taking steps to prevent a marriage."

"What! Have you killed the viscount?"

"I?" exclaimed the Angel of Death, with simulated terror. "God forbid. I did not kill him. He died."

"Ah!"

“Silence. No one is yet aware of his death. His family think at this moment that the poor youth is sleeping the *siesta*. So, then, let us see how you will conduct yourself. Elena, the countess and the duke are within two steps of you. Now, or never!”

Saying this, the Angel of Death advanced toward the sick woman's bed.

Gil Gil followed in his footsteps.

Several of those present, among them the Duke of Montecarlo, had already heard of Gil's prophecy, that within three hours the Countess of Rionuevo should have ceased to exist, and seeing this prophecy now on the point of being fulfilled, since she, who had so short a time before been well and cheerful, was now lying an inert mass, except for the violent convulsions that shook her frame at intervals, they all began to regard our friend with a mingled feeling of superstitious terror and blind adoration.

The countess, on her side, as

soon as she saw Gil, stretched toward him one trembling hand with a gesture of entreaty, while with the other she signified her desire to be left alone with him.

Every one retired from the bedside and Gil seated himself beside the dying woman.





IX.

THE SOUL.

ALTHOUGH the Countess of Rionuevo, the implacable enemy of Gil Gil, plays so odious a part in our history she was not, as some may have imagined, either an old or an ugly woman, or both at once. Physical nature, too, is at times deceitful.

The distinguished patient, who might now be some thirty-five years old, was in all the plenitude of her magnificent beauty. She was tall, robust, and well-proportioned. Her eyes, blue as the sea and as the sea perfidious, concealed fathomless depths under

their apparent languor and sweetness. The dewy freshness of her lips, the soft coloring of her complexion, the peaceful serenity of her features, all indicated that neither grief nor passion had ever distorted that insensible beauty. Therefore it was that seeing her now dejected and patient, subdued by terror and vanquished by suffering, the soul least prone to pity would have felt for her a strange feeling of compassion, resembling awe.

Even Gil Gil, who hated this woman with so intense a hatred, was not quite exempt from this mixed feeling of pity and terror, and taking mechanically in his the beautiful hand the sick woman extended to him, he asked with more sadness than resentment :

“Do you know me?”

“Save me!” responded the dying woman, without heeding Gil Gil’s question.

At this moment there appeared upon the scene a new personage, who, gliding behind the curtains,

placed himself between the two speakers, leaning one elbow on the pillow and resting his head in his hand.

It was the Angel of Death.

"Save me!" repeated the countess, who, with the intuition of fear, had divined that our hero hated her. "You are a wizard. They say that you hold converse with the Angel of Death. Save me!"

"You have great dread of death, Señora," answered the young man coldly, dropping the sick woman's hand.

This unreasoning fear, this physical terror, which overpowered every other thought, every other feeling, disgusted Gil Gil profoundly, for it gave him the measure of the selfishness of the author of all his woes.

"Countess," he exclaimed, "reflect on your past and on your future. Reflect on your duty to God and to your fellow-beings. Save your soul, since your body is no longer yours to save."

"Ah, I am going to die!" cried the countess.

"No, Countess, you are not going to die."

"I am not going to die?" cried the poor woman, with savage joy.

The young man continued, with the same severity of manner :

"You are not going to die, because you have never lived. On the contrary, you are going to be born to the life of the soul that for you will be eternal suffering, as for the just it is eternal bliss."

"Ah, then I am going to die!" murmured the sick woman again, shedding tears for the first time in her life.

"No, Countess, you are not going to die," again said the physician, with indescribable dignity.

"Ah, have pity upon me!" exclaimed the poor woman, recovering hope.

"You are not going to die," continued the young man, "since you weep. The soul never dies, and repentance can open to you the gates of eternal life."

“Ah, my God!” exclaimed the countess, tormented by this cruel uncertainty.

“You do well to call on God. Save your soul. Your beautiful body, your idol of clay, your impious existence, you are done with forever. The temporal life, the earthly enjoyments, the health and beauty, the luxury and the comfort that you tried so hard to keep, the wealth you usurped, the air, the sun, the world, that you have known until now—you are about to lose them all; they have all vanished already; they will all be for you to-morrow dust and darkness, vanity and corruption, solitude and oblivion; only your soul remains to you, Countess. Think of your soul.”

“Who are you?” asked the dying woman in a hollow voice, fixing her terrified gaze on Gil Gil. “I have seen you before. You hate me. It is you who are killing me. Ah!”

At this moment the Angel of Death laid his pale hand on the

head of the sick woman and said:

"Finish, Gil, finish; her last hour approaches."

"Oh, I do not wish her to die," cried Gil. "She may still repent; she may still atone for all the evil she has wrought. Save her body, and I will respond for her soul."

"Finish, Gil, finish," repeated the Angel of Death. "Her last hour is at hand."

"Poor woman," murmured the young man, looking compassionately at the countess.

"You pity me," said the dying woman, with ineffable tenderness. "I have never known gratitude; I have never loved; I have never before felt for any one what I now feel for you. Pity me, tell me you pity me. My heart melts within me when I hear your compassionate voice."

And this was true.

The countess, her imagination excited by terror in this supreme moment, tortured by remorse, dreading punishment, stripped of

all that had constituted her pride and her happiness on earth, began to feel the first whisperings of a conscience that until now had remained silent and hidden in the depths of her being; a conscience persistently despised but full of patience and heroism; a conscience, in short, that might be likened to the neglected daughter of criminal or vicious parents, who thinks in silence, keeps out of their sight, and weeps in secret until, some day, observing in them the first signs of repentance, she takes courage, flies to their arms, and speaks to them in her pure and divine voice — heavenly music greeting the dawn of virtue after the night of sin, as the song of the larks greets the dawn of day.

“You ask me who I am,” answered Gil Gil, comprehending all this. “I do not myself know. I was your deadly enemy, but now I do not hate you. You have heard the voice of truth, the voice of death, and your heart has responded. God be praised. I came

to this bed of pain to demand from you the happiness of my life—and now I would go away rejoiced without it, for I have saved your soul. Divine Jesus! Behold, I have pardoned offenses and done good to mine enemy. I am satisfied; I am happy; I ask no more.”

“Who are you? mysterious and sublime youth? Who are you, so good and so beautiful, who come like an angel to my death-bed and make my last moments so sweet?” asked the countess eagerly, seizing the hands of Gil Gil.

“I am the Friend of Death,” answered the young man. “Let it not surprise you, therefore, that I bring rest to your heart. I speak to you in the name of the Angel of Death, and therefore you believe me. I come to you, sent by that compassionate divinity who is the peace of the earth, the truth of worlds, the redeemer of the spirit, the messenger of God, who is everything except oblivion. Oblivion is life, Countess, not death.

Think and you will remember me."

"Gil Gil!" exclaimed the countess, falling back unconscious.

"Is she dead?" the physician asked the Angel of Death.

"No, she has still half an hour to live."

"Gil!" sighed the dying woman.

"Finish," said the Angel of Death.

The young man bent over the countess, whose beautiful face shone with a new, immortal, divine beauty; and from those eyes where gleamed fitfully the expiring fire of life; those eager, parted lips flushed with fever; those soft burning hands, that white neck stretched toward him with infinite anguish, he received so eloquent an expression of repentance and tenderness, so touching a caress, so frantic an entreaty, so unbounded and solemn a promise that, without an instant's hesitation he left the bedside, called the Duke of Montecarlo, the Arch-

bishop, and three others of the numerous nobles in the chamber and said to them :

“ Hear the public confession of a soul returning to God.”

The persons named drew near the dying woman, drawn by the inspired countenance rather than by the words of Gil Gil.

“ Duke,” murmured the countess, on seeing Montecclaro, “ my confessor has a key. My Lord,” she continued, turning to the Archbishop, “ ask it from him. This youth, this physician, this angel, is the natural and acknowledged son of the Count of Rionuevo, my late husband, who, before his death, wrote you a letter, Duke, asking you for Elena’s hand. With that key—in my bedroom—all the papers—I entreat it. I command it.”

With these words she sank back on the pillow, all the light gone from her eyes, the breath from her lips, the color from her cheeks.

“ She is dying,” exclaimed Gil Gil. “ Remain with her, my Lord,”

he added, addressing the archbishop. "And you, my Lord Duke, listen to me."

"Wait," said the Angel of Death in our hero's ear.

"What more?" asked the latter.

"You have not yet pardoned her."

"Gil Gil, your pardon!" cried the dying woman in trembling accents.

"Gil Gil!" exclaimed the Duke of Montecarlo. "Are you Gil Gil?"

"Countess, may God forgive you as I forgive you. Die in peace," said the son of Christina Lopez, in pious accents.

At this moment the Angel of Death bent over the countess and pressed his lips to her forehead.

The kiss resounded in the breast of a corpse.

A cold and turbid tear rolled down the cheek of the dead woman.

Gil brushed away his tears and responded to Montecarlo:

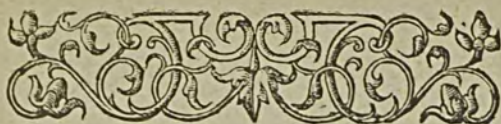
“Yes, Duke, I am Gil Gil.”

The Archbishop began to recite the prayers for the dead beside the bed.

Meantime the Angel of Death had vanished.

It was midnight.





X.

GOOD-BY UNTIL TO-MORROW.

LOOK for those papers, Duke," said Gil Gil, "and do me the favor to speak to Elena."

"Doctor, doctor, come! come! The king is dying," exclaimed Don Miguel de Guerra, interrupting the Friend of Death.

"Come with me, my Lord Duke," said the young man impressively. "The clock has struck twelve and I can now give you an important piece of intelligence; whether good or bad, I do not know. It is this: I can tell you whether Louis I will die or not during the day which is now beginning."

In fact, the 31st of August, the

day on which Louis I was to yield his spirit to his Creator, had already begun.

Gil Gil was assured of this when he saw the Angel of Death standing in the middle of the room, his eyes fixed on the royal patient.

"The king dies to-day," said Gil Gil in the ear of Montecclaro. "This piece of news is the wedding present I make Elena. If you know how to appreciate the value of such a present keep it secret and let it serve to guide your conduct toward Philip V."

"Elena is promised to another," replied the duke.

"The nephew of the Countess of Rionuevo died this afternoon," interrupted Gil Gil.

"Oh, what does this mean?" exclaimed the duke. "Who are you, whom I knew as a child, and who terrify me now with your power and your knowledge?"

"The queen calls you," a lady said at this moment to the Duke of Montecclaro, who was lost in amazement.

This lady was Elena.

The duke approached the queen, leaving the two lovers standing alone in the middle of the apartment.

Not alone, for three steps away was the Angel of Death.

Elena and Gil Gil stood looking at each other, neither able to utter a word, as if they were frightened at seeing each other, as if they feared this meeting was a dream from which they should awaken if they made a movement to greet each other or even to breathe a sigh.

Once before, to-day, on seeing each other in this same spot, they had experienced, in the midst of their ineffable joy, a certain secret anguish, such as two friends might feel who after a long and complete separation should meet in prison on the morning of their execution, unconscious participants in some fatal crime, or victims of the same persecution.

The painful joy with which Gil and Elena recognized each other

might also be likened to the gloomy satisfaction with which the corpse of a jealous husband (if corpses could feel) might smile within his tomb at hearing the door of the cemetery open some night, knowing that it was the corpse of his wife they were bringing to inter beside him.

“Now you are here” (the poor corpse might say); “now you are here. For years I have counted alone the days and the nights, thinking of what you might be doing in the world, you who are so beautiful, and so unloving that you put off your mourning a year after my death. You have waited long, but now you are here. If between us two love be no longer possible, neither on the other hand is faithlessness possible, still less oblivion. We belong to each other, negatively. Although nothing unites us, we are united, since nothing separates us. To jealousy, doubt, the turmoil of life, has succeeded an eternity of love, or of

remembrance. I forgive you everything."

These ideas, softened indeed by the gentle disposition of Gil and Elena, by the innocence of the one and the high intelligence of the other, and by the exalted virtue of both, shone in the souls of the two lovers, like funeral torches whose light illuminated a boundless future of peaceful love that no one could disturb or destroy—at least not unless all that was now taking place were a fleeting dream.

They gazed at each other then for a long time with wild idolatry.

The blue eyes of Elena pierced with their gaze the depths of the black eyes of Gil; the black eyes of Gil lost themselves in the unfathomable and limpid depths of the clear and heavenly eyes of Elena, as sight and thought and even feeling strive in vain to pierce the immensity of infinite space.

Thus they might have remained for an indefinite time, perhaps for all eternity, if the Angel of

Death had not made a sign to Gil Gil.

"What do you require of me?" murmured the young man.

"What should I require?" responded the Angel of Death. "That you should leave off gazing at her."

"Ah, you love her!" exclaimed Gil, with indescribable anguish.

"Yes," returned the Angel of Death gently.

"You intend to take her from me?"

"No, I intend to unite you to her."

"You said to me one day that only your arm or mine should embrace her," cried Gil Gil in despairing accents. "To whom will she belong first? To you or to me? Tell me."

"You are jealous of me."

"Horribly so."

"You are wrong," returned the Angel of Death.

"To whom shall she first belong?" repeated the young man, seizing the icy hands of his friend.

"I cannot answer you. God, you, and I dispute with one another her possession. But our claims are not incompatible."

"Tell me that you do not intend to kill her. Tell me that you will unite me to her in this world."

"*In this world!*" repeated the Angel of Death, with veiled sarcasm. "It shall be *in this world*. I promise."

"And afterward?"

"Afterward—she shall belong to God."

"And to you, when?"

"Mine—she has been already."

"You will drive me mad! Does Elena live?"

"As you do," replied the Angel of Death.

"But—am I alive?"

"More so than ever before."

"Speak, for pity's sake."

"I have nothing to tell you. You would not yet comprehend me. What is it to die? Do you know? What is life? Have you ever understood the meaning of

the word? If, then, you are ignorant of even the meaning of those words, why do you ask me whether you are living or dead?"

"But—shall I ever understand you?" cried Gil Gil desperately.

"Yes, to-morrow," answered the Angel of Death.

"To-morrow! I do not comprehend you."

"To-morrow you shall be the husband of Elena."

"Ah!"

"And I will give you your bride," continued the Angel of Death.

"You? Do you mean then to kill us?"

"Nothing of the sort. To-morrow you shall be rich, noble, powerful, happy. To-morrow, too, you shall know all."

"So, then, you love me?" exclaimed Gil Gil.

"You ask me if I love you," replied the Angel of Death. "Ingrate. How can you doubt it."

"Good-by until to-morrow,

then," said Gil Gil, giving his hand to the awful divinity.

Elena was still standing opposite Gil Gil.

"Good-by until to-morrow," she said, as if she had heard his last words, as if she responded to another secret voice, as if she divined the young man's thoughts.

And she turned away slowly and left the royal chamber.

Gil approached the bed on which lay the king.

The Duke of Montecarlo placed himself beside our friend and said to him in an undertone :

"Good-by until to-morrow. If the king dies, to-morrow your marriage with my daughter will take place. The queen has just communicated to me the intelligence of the death of the Viscount of Daimiel. I have announced to her your approaching marriage with Elena and she approves of it with all her heart. To-morrow you shall be the first personage of the court, if Louis indeed dies to-day."

“Do not doubt it, my Lord Duke,” responded Gil Gil, in a sepulchral voice.

“Good-by until to-morrow, then,” repeated Monteclaro solemnly.





XI.

GIL IS ONCE MORE HAPPY AND
THE FIRST PART OF THIS TALE
COMES TO AN END.



ON the following day, September, 1724, at nine o'clock in the morning, Gil Gil was pacing the floor in one of the salons of the palace of Rionuevo.

This palace was his own, for he was now Count of Rionuevo, and had been legitimated in virtue of the will and other documents left by his father, which the Duke of Montecarlo and the Archbishop of Toledo had found in the place designated by the countess.

In addition to this, on the previous night a messenger had de-

livered to him, on the part of Philip V, who had finally resolved to reascend the throne of St. Ferdinand, his appointment as royal physician, the title of Duke de la Verdad, and thirty thousand dollars in gold.

Finally, on the following day was to be celebrated his marriage with Elena de Monteclaro.

As for the Angel of Death, Gil Gil had completely lost sight of him since the day, a week before, on which he had left the royal palace bearing with him the soul of Louis I.

Our youthful hero could not forget, however, that the implacable divinity had promised to stand by his side at his marriage with Elena, and for this reason it was that he was now thoughtfully pacing the floor.

"I am now," he said to himself, "noble, rich, and powerful. The woman I adore is mine—and yet I am nor happy. Last night, when I looked at Elena, and during my last conversation with the Angel

of Death, I thought I divined I know not what terrible mysteries. I must break the bonds that bind me to the sinister *numen* who has taken me into his favor. Is this ingratitude? Be it so; the time will come when he will have the opportunity to avenge himself. No, I will not see the Angel of Death again. I am too happy."

The newly created duke then set himself to consider how he might shun the friendship of the Angel of Death until his final hour arrived.

"Certain it is," he said, "that I shall not die until God wills it. The Angel of Death by himself and through himself can do me no injury, since it is not in his power to hasten my end or Elena's. The question then is to avoid seeing him, and hearing him continually. What can I do to prevent his being a nightmare to me? Ah! now I have it. Death presents himself only where there is something to slay. Living in the country alone with Elena, my enemy will leave me in peace

until, by the decree of the Most High, he shall come directly in quest of one of us. And meantime, while I am in Madrid, I will shut him out from my sight.

Enchanted with this last thought, our youthful hero felt his heart expand with gladness, as if he had just recovered from a long illness and thought his life upon earth secure for all time to come.

At six o'clock on the evening of the following day Gil Gil and Elena de Montecarlo were united in marriage at a beautiful villa situated at the foot of the Guadarrama and belonging to the new-made count and duke.

At half past six the wedding guests took their departure for Madrid, and the youthful bride and bridegroom remained alone in a luxuriant garden.

The former Gil Gil had not again seen the Angel of Death.

And here this tale might end, yet here it is that its real interest and significance begins.



XII.

SUNSET.

ELENA and Gil loved each other, they belonged to each other, they were free, and they were alone.

The recollections of childhood, their own hearts, the wishes of their fathers, fortune, birth, the blessing of God, all joined to unite them, to bind them together.

These two, who had seen each other with delight from their childhood; who had been enamored of each other's beauty as youth and maiden; who had suffered at the same time the anguish of separation—Gil and Elena, Elena and Gil—these two souls, predestined to be united, lost at

last in this mystic and solemn hour their sad and solitary individuality to unite together in a future of ineffable bliss, as two rivers, rising on the same mountain peak and flowing apart in their tortuous course, unite and mingle in the infinite solitude of the ocean.

It was evening; but it did not seem the evening of one single day, but the evening of the existence of the world; the evening of all time from creation's dawn.

The sun was sinking with a melancholy luster in the west. The splendors of sunset gilded the façade of the villa, filtering through the luxuriant and verdant foliage of a large grapevine, that, like a canopy, sheltered the heads of the newly wedded pair. The calm, mild air, the last flowers of the summer, the birds, resting motionless on the branches of the trees, all nature in a word, assisted, mute and awestruck, at the death of this day, at this sunset, as if it were to be the last that humanity were destined to witness; as if the

day-star were not to return on the following morning, as generous and joyous, as prodigal of life and youth, as it had presented itself, morning after morning, for so many thousands of centuries.

It seemed as if time had for the moment paused in his course ; as if the hours, weary of their perpetual dance, had seated themselves on the grass to rest and were relating to each other pathetic stories of love and death, like young school-girls who, tired with playing, had gathered together in the garden of their convent to recount the pranks of their childhood and the dreams of their youth.

Or it seemed as if in this moment an epoch in the world's history was coming to a close ; that all created beings and things were bidding an eternal farewell to one another—the bird to his nest, the zephyr to the flowers, the trees to the rivers, the sun to the mountains ; that the intimate union in which all things had

lived, lending each to the other color or fragrance, music or motion, and blending together in the same palpitation of universal existence, had ceased forever, and that henceforth each one of these elements should be subject to new laws and influences.

Finally, it seemed as if on this evening the mysterious association which constitutes the unity and harmony of worlds, an association which renders impossible the death of the most insignificant of created things, which transforms and regenerates matters perpetually, in which nothing is superfluous, which makes all things one, which embellishes and renews all things—that this association was about to be dissolved forever.

Possessed more completely than bird or flower, or sun or zephyr, by this supreme intuition, this strange hallucination, Gil and Elena, motionless also, silent also, hand in hand, impressed by the august tragedy of the death of this

day, the last of their misfortunes, gazed at each other with eager intensity, with blind idolatry, unconscious of their thoughts, oblivious of the entire universe; ecstatic, breathless, like two images, like two statues, like two corpses.

Perchance they thought themselves alone on the earth; perchance they thought they were no longer on the earth.

From the moment in which the wedding-guests had disappeared from their view and the sound of their footsteps had died away in the distance, from the moment in which the world had left them completely to themselves, they had not uttered a single word, absorbed in the delight of contemplating each other.

There they were; seated on a grassy bank, surrounded by flowers and verdure, with a limitless horizon stretching before them, free and solitary as two sea-gulls resting in the midst of the desert wastes of ocean on a branch of sea-weed, rocked by the waves.

There they were ; rapt in the delight of contemplating each other, jealous of their very felicity, the cup of happiness in their hand, without daring to raise it to their lips, fearing that all might be a dream, or asking for no greater bliss lest they might lose that which they now enjoyed.

There they were, in short, ignorant, innocent, beautiful, immortal, like Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden before sin entered the world.

Elena, the maiden of nineteen, was in all the plenitude of her exquisite beauty ; or rather, she was at that fleeting moment in woman's youth when, crowned with all her charms, conscious of her own nature, rich in the gifts of heaven and the promise of future happiness, capable of feeling all, yet having felt nothing, she is at the same time a woman and a child. A rose which opens its heart to the vivifying influence of the sun, which has unfolded all its leaves, which displays all its

charms, which is caressed by the breeze, but which still preserves the form, the color, and the perfume only possessed by the chaste bud.

Elena was tall, slender, and statuesque in form; beautiful, graceful, seductive. Her well-shaped head, crowned with fair hair, golden on the temples, and deepening to chestnut where it was thickest, rose proudly on a neck, white and round as that of Juno. Her blue eyes seemed to reflect the infinite depths of increate thought. They were eyes that, however much one might gaze into them, one could never be said to have measured their depths. They had something in them of heaven besides its color and its limpidity.

And so it was; in Elena's glance there was a light reflected from eternity of pure spirit, of immortal love, which did not belong to earth. Her complexion, white and pale as the reflection of the moon on the water, had the

transparence of mother-of-pearl, but had not the rosy hue imparted by the blood ; only a slender blue vein here and there interrupted its calm, pure whiteness. One might have taken Elena for a marble statue.

Her angelic face, however, had the mouth of a woman. Red as the flower of the pomegranate, dewy and brilliant as the cradle of the pearl, those parted lips seemed bathed in a warm vapor, voluptuous as the sigh they breathed. Thus Elena might also be compared to the statue of Pygmalion, when for the first time its lovely mouth thrilled to life under the sculptor's kiss.

She was arrayed in white, which heightened the dazzling splendor of her beauty. She was, however, one of those women whose beauty dress can never disguise. She resembled the antique statues of Minerva, through whose robes the pure lines of Olympic beauty can be divined. The exquisite and supreme beauty of the newly-made

wife revealed itself, also, in all its splendor, even through the silks and laces of her attire. It seemed as if her form radiated light through the folds of her white robe, as the polished limbs of the naiads and the nereids radiate light through the waves where they dwell.

Such was Elena on the evening of her marriage to Gil Gil.

Such she appeared to Gil Gil—and such she was his.





XIII.

ECLIPSE OF THE MOON.

AH, yes, the youthful lover gazed at her, as the blind man gazes at the sun ; he cannot see it, but he feels its warmth on his sightless orbs.

After so many years of isolation and suffering, so many hours filled with lugubrious images, he, the Friend of Death, found himself plunged in an ocean of life, in a world of light, of hope, of happiness.

What could the unhappy youth say, what could he think, when he could not yet convince himself that this woman was Elena, that he was her husband, and that

both had escaped from the grasp of the Angel of Death?

"Speak, my Elena! Tell me all," exclaimed Gil Gil, at last, when the sun had set and the noise of the birds seeking their nests broke the silence. "Speak, my beloved!"

Then Elena told him all that she had thought and felt during the last three years; her grief when she no longer saw him; her despair on setting out for France; how she had seen him at the gate of the palace just before her departure; how the Duke of Montecarlo had opposed their love, which the Countess of Rionuevo had disclosed to him; how she had been gladdened by seeing him in the portico of San Millan three days before; how she had suffered at seeing him fall to the ground, stabbed by the cruel words of the countess. She told him all—all; because, far from lessening her affection for him, all this had increased it.

Night was falling, and as the

shadows deepened the secret anguish that embittered the happiness of Gil Gil diminished.

"Ah," said the young man to himself, drawing Elena to his heart, "the Angel of Death has lost trace of me, and cannot find me. He will not come here; no, our undying love would put him to flight. What has the Angel of Death to do with us? Come, come, tenebrous night, and wrap us in your black mantle! Come, though you be eternal! Come, though morning should never dawn!"

"You tremble, Gil," said Elena, in faltering accents. "You are weeping."

"My wife!" murmured the young man; "my treasure! my heaven! I weep for joy!"

So saying, and taking between his hands the lovely head of his bride, he looked into her eyes with an intense, delirious, wild gaze.

A deep and burning sigh—a cry of intoxicating passion—was stifled between the lips of Gil and

Elena. "Beloved!" stammered both at once, in the delirium of that first kiss, at whose ecstatic sound the invisible spirits of the solitude thrilled.

At the same instant the moon appeared in the heavens,—full, majestic, glorious.

Her weird light, suddenly illuminating the darkness, terrified the youthful pair, who both, with one impulse, looked toward the east, drawing apart by some mysterious and indefinable instinct, but without unclasping their trembling and rigid fingers, cold as the marble of a sepulcher.

"It is the moon!" cried both at once, in low, hoarse accents.

And they gazed at each other again enraptured, and Gil opened his arms to Elena with a vague fear, with mingled love and despair.

But Elena was pale as death.

Gil shuddered.

"Elena, what is the matter?" he said.

"Oh, Gil!" responded the

young girl. "How pale you are!"

At this moment the face of the moon was darkened as if a cloud had passed between it and the youthful pair.

But alas! it was not a cloud.

It was a long black shadow that, seen from the grassy bank on which Gil Gil was reclining, extended from the heavens to the earth, darkening almost the whole of the horizon.

It was a colossal figure, that seemed to his imagination, perhaps, more gigantic than it was in reality.

It was an awful form, shrouded in a long black mantle, that stood beside them motionless, silent, casting its shadow over them.

Gil Gil divined *who it was*.

Elena did not see the black-robed figure. She was still gazing at the moon.



XIV.

AFTER ALL—A DOCTOR.



UR hero stood between his beloved and the Angel of Death ; that is to say — between life and death.

Yes, for this funereal shadow that had interposed itself between him and the moon, clouding in Elena's countenance the light of love, was the divinity of darkness, the faithful companion of Gil Gil ever since the miserable night on which the then unfortunate youth had contemplated suicide.

"Hail, friend!" he said to him, as he had done on that night.

"Ah, be silent!" said Gil Gil

faintly, covering his face with his hands.

"What is the matter, my beloved?" asked Elena, observing her husband's anguish.

"Elena, Elena, do not leave me," cried the young man desperately, throwing his left arm around the neck of his bride.

"I must speak with you," continued the Angel of Death, seizing Gil Gil's right hand and drawing him gently toward him.

"Ah, come, let us go in!" said the young girl, drawing him toward the villa.

"No, come, let us go out!" said the Angel of Death in a low voice, pointing to the garden gate.

Elena neither saw nor heard the Angel of Death.

This melancholy privilege was reserved for the Duke de la Verdad.

"Gil, I am waiting for you!" continued the sinister divinity.

The unfortunate young man shuddered to the marrow of his bones. Copious tears fell from his

eyes, which Elena brushed away with her hand. Presently he released himself from her embrace and ran wildly through the garden, crying between his heart-rending sobs :

“To die, to die now !”

Elena would have followed him, but, doubtless from terror produced by her husband's state, at the first step she took she fell senseless on the grass.

“To die ! to die !” the young man continued to cry despairingly.

“Fear not,” replied the Angel of Death, approaching him kindly. “Besides, it is useless for you to flee from me ; chance willed that we should meet, and I do not intend to abandon you in this way.”

“But what brings you here ?” exclaimed the young man in furious accents, drying his tears, as if in renouncing hope he had renounced prudence also, and confronting the Angel of Death almost with an air of defiance. “What brings you here ? Answer.”

And he looked around angrily, as if in search of a weapon.

Lying near was a pick-ax belonging to the gardener; he seized it furiously, brandished it as if it were a reed (for despair had doubled his strength), and repeated for the third time, more angrily than ever:

“What brings you here?”

The Angel of Death burst into a laugh which might be described as *philosophical*.

The echo of this laugh, reverberated from the four walls of the garden, lasted for a long time, resembling in its strident sound the clashing of dead men's bones against one another.

“You wish to kill me?” exclaimed the black-robed figure at last. “So, then, Life dares to challenge Death. This is curious. Let us see which will come off victorious.”

Saying this he threw back his long black mantle, displaying a hand armed with another species of pick-ax (seeming rather a

reaping-hook or a scythe), and placed himself on guard before Gil Gil.

The moon assumed the yellowish hue of the wax tapers that illuminate the churches on Good Friday; a wind sprang up, so cold that it made the fruit-laden trees groan as if in pain; the distant barking of many dogs, or rather prolonged howls of sinister omen, were heard, and it almost seemed as if far, far away, above, among the clouds, could be heard the discordant tolling of innumerable bells.

Gil Gil perceived all this and fell upon his knees before his antagonist.

"Pity! pardon!" he cried, with indescribable anguish.

"You are pardoned," responded the Angel of Death, hiding his scythe under his mantle:

And as if all these sinister omens had had their origin in the anger of the black divinity, no sooner did a smile appear on the lips of the latter than the coldness of the at-

mosphere was mitigated, the bells ceased tolling, the dogs ceased their howls, and the moon shone as mildly as in the early part of the night.

"You thought you could defy my power," exclaimed the Angel of Death jovially. "*After all—a doctor!* Rise, foolish youth; rise, and give me your hand. I have already told you that you need fear nothing—for to-night."

"But what brings you here?" repeated the young man, with growing agitation. "What brings you here? Why do you come into my house? You go only where you have some one to slay. Whom do you seek?"

"You shall know all. Let us sit down for a moment," responded the Angel of Death, stroking the icy hands of Gil Gil.

"But Etena——" said the young man in a low voice.

"Let her alone; at this moment she is *asleep*; I will watch over her. To the point, then. Gil Gil, you are an ingrate. You are

like *all the rest*. When you have reached the top, you kick away the ladder by which you have mounted. Oh, your conduct toward me is not to be forgiven! How much you have made me suffer in these last few days! How much! How much!”

“Ah, I adore her!” stammered Gil Gil.

“You adore her. Just so. You had lost her forever; you were a miserable shoemaker and she was going to marry a nobleman. I interfere on your behalf. I make you rich and noble and famous; I rid you of your rival; I reconcile you with your enemy and carry her with me to the other world; I give you, finally, Elena’s hand; and lo, at this moment you turn your back upon me, you forget me, and you cover your eyes with a bandage in order to avoid seeing me. Insensate! insensate! like all men! They who should behold me with the eyes of the imagination blind-fold themselves with the vanities of the world and live

without casting a thought upon me. My lot is indeed an unhappy one. I cannot remember ever to have approached a mortal without terrifying and surprising him as if he had never expected to see me. Even old men of a hundred think they have no business with me. You, for your part, who enjoy the privilege of beholding me with the eyes of the body, and who could not so easily forget me, you placed the other day before your eyes a bandage, a material aid to forgetfulness, and to-day you shut yourself up in an isolated garden and you fancy yourself rid of me forever. Imbecile! Ingrate! Disloyal friend! MAN, in a word."

"Well," stammered Gil Gil, whom his confusion and shame had not caused to desist from his suspicious curiosity, "what brings you to my house?"

"I come to continue the mission with which the Eternal has intrusted me with regard to you."

"But have you not come to *slay us*?"

"By no means."

"Ah,—then——"

"Now, however, that I have succeeded in seeing you, I must take certain precautions in order that you may not again forget me."

"And what are those precautions?" asked Gil Gil, trembling more violently than ever.

"I have also certain important revelations to make to you."

"Ah, come back to-morrow!"

"Oh, no; impossible! Our meeting to-night is providential."

"My friend——" exclaimed the unhappy youth.

"Your friend indeed!" responded the Angel of Death. "And it is because I am your friend that you must come with me."

"Whither?"

"To my habitation."

"Your habitation! You have come, then, to slay me? Ah, cruel one, is this your friendship? Terrible mockery! you have shown me what happiness is, only to snatch it from my grasp. Why

did you not let me die on the night I met you?"

"Silence, unhappy man," replied the Angel of Death, with sad solemnity. "You say you know what happiness is. How you deceive yourself! For this have I sought you—that you may know it."

"My happiness is Elena. I renounce every other."

"To-morrow you will see more clearly."

"Kill me, then!" cried Gil, with desperation.

"It would be useless."

"Slay her, then! Slay us both!"

"How you rave!"

"To go to his habitation, my God!"

"Calm yourself."

"But let me at least take leave of my adored one. Let me say farewell to her."

"Be it so. Elena, awake! Come, I command you!—Behold her—she comes."

"And what shall I say to her?"

At what hour shall I tell her I will return to-night?"

"Tell her—she will see you at daybreak."

"Ah no, I do not want to stay with you so many hours. To-day I fear you more than ever!"

"Take care!"

"Do not be angry!" exclaimed the unhappy husband. "Do not be angry, but tell me the truth. Will Elena and I indeed see each other at daybreak?"

The Angel of Death raised his right hand with solemnity and fixing his gaze upon the sky said, in melancholy accents:

"I swear it!"

"Oh, Gil, what is this?" cried Elena, advancing from among the trees, pale, beautiful, and resplendent as a mythological personification of the moon.

Gil, pale also as death, his hair in disorder, his glance somber, his heart filled with longing, kissed Elena's brow and said to her in sepulchral accents:

"Good-by until to-morrow.
Wait for me, my life!"

"His life," murmured the Angel of Death, in an accent of profound compassion.

Elena raised to heaven her eyes swimming in tears of tenderness, clasped her hands, and, filled with a mysterious anguish, repeated in a voice that was not of this world:

"Good-by until to-morrow."

And Gil and the Angel of Death departed and she was left standing there alone among the trees, her arms hanging powerless, her hands clasped before her, a motionless, majestic figure bathed in the dazzling splendors of the moon.

She might have been taken for a noble statue deposed from its pedestal and left forgotten in the garden.



XV.

TIME TURNED BACKWARD.

WE have a long distance to travel," said the Angel of Death to our friend Gil, as soon as they had left the villa. "I will order my chariot."

And he struck the ground with his foot.

A hollow rumbling, like that which precedes an earthquake, sounded under the ground. Presently there rose round the two friends an ash-colored cloud of vapor, in the midst of which appeared a species of ivory chariot, resembling the chariots we see in the bas-reliefs of antiquity.

A brief glance would have sufficed (we will not disguise the fact from our readers) to show that the chariot was not made of ivory, but solely and simply of human bones polished and joined together with exquisite skill, but retaining still their natural form.

The Angel of Death gave his hand to Gil and they ascended the chariot, which rose into the air like the balloons of the present day, but with the difference that it was propelled by the will of its occupants.

"Although we have a great distance to travel," continued the Angel of Death, "we have time and to spare for our journey, for this chariot will travel as rapidly as I choose; as rapidly as the imagination. I mean that we will travel swiftly and slowly, by turns, making the circuit of the globe during the three hours at our disposal. It is now nine o'clock in Madrid. We shall travel toward the northeast and thus avoid meeting presently the light of the sun."

Gil remained silent.

"Very good. You are resolved to be silent," continued the Angel of Death. "Well, then, I will talk to myself. You shall see how soon the spectacles you are going to witness will draw you from your sullenness and make you speak. Onward!"

The chariot, which had been oscillating aimlessly in the air since our travelers had entered it, rolled on, at a little distance above the earth, but with inconceivable velocity.

Gil saw beneath him mountains, trees, rivers, precipices, meadows—all confused together.

Occasionally some log fire indicated the abode of simple shepherds, but more often the chariot passed slowly above large square masses of stone crowded together, among which a shadow preceded by a light would glide, and at the same time sounds of bells tolling, or striking the hour, which is almost the same thing, could be heard, and the voice of the watch-

men repeating the hour. At such times the chariot of the Angel of Death rolled along again with the same velocity as before.

According as they neared the east the darkness grew less dense, the repose of the cities more profound, the silence of nature deeper.

The moon fled eastward like a frightened dove, while the stars changed their places in the heavens, like a disbanding army.

"Where are we?" asked Gil Gil.

"In France," responded the Angel of Death. "We have now traversed a large portion of the two belicose nations which waged so sanguinary a war with each other at the beginning of the present century. We have seen the theater of the War of Succession. Conquered and conquerors both lie sleeping at this instant. My apprentice, Sleep, rules over the heroes who did not perish then, in battle, or afterward of sickness or of old age. I do not

understand why it is that below on earth all men are not friends? The identity of your misfortunes and your weaknesses, the need you have of each other, the shortness of your life, the spectacle of the grandeur of other worlds, and the comparison between them and your littleness, all this should combine to unite you in brotherhood, like the passengers of a vessel threatened with shipwreck. There, there is neither love, nor hate, nor ambition, no one is debtor or creditor, no one is great or little, no one is handsome or ugly, no one is happy or unfortunate. The same danger surrounds all and *my presence* makes all equal. Well, then, what is the earth, seen from this height, but a ship which is foundering, a city delivered up to an epidemic or a conflagration?"

"What are those *ignes fatui* which I can see shining in certain places on the terrestrial globe, ever since the moon veiled her light?" asked the young man.

“They are cemeteries. We are now above Paris. Side by side with every city, every town, every village of the living there is always a city, a town, or a village of the dead, as the shadow is always beside the body. Geography, then, is of two kinds, although mortals only speak of the kind which is agreeable to them. A map of all the cemeteries which there are on the earth would be sufficient indication of the political geography of your world. You would miscalculate, however, in regard to the population; the dead cities are much more densely populated than the living; in the latter there are hardly three generations at one time, while, in the former, hundreds of generations are often crowded together. As for the lights you see shining, they are phosphorescent gleams from dead bodies, or rather they are the expiring gleams of thousands of vanished lives; they are the twilight glow of love, ambition,

anger, genius, mercy ; they are, in short, the last glow of a dying light, of the individuality which is disappearing, of the being yielding back his elements to mother earth. They are—and now it is that I have found the true word—the foam made by the river when it mingles its waters with those of the ocean.” The Angel of Death paused.

Gil Gil heard at the same moment a deafening noise below his feet, like the rolling of a thousand vehicles over a long wooden bridge. He looked toward the earth, but it had disappeared from view, and in its stead was a species of moving firmament into whose depth they were plunging.

“What is this ?” he asked, terrified.

“It is the sea,” said the Angel of Death, “We have just crossed Germany and we are now entering the North Sea.”

“Ah, no !” murmured Gil, filled with instinctive terror. “Let us

turn in some other direction. I want to behold the sun."

"I will take you to see the sun, although in order to do so we shall have to retrace our way. You will thus see the strange spectacle of *time moving backward*."

The chariot turned around in space and they began to hasten toward the southeast.

A moment later Gil Gil heard the murmur of the waves.

"We are in the Mediterranean Sea," said the Angel of Death. "We are now crossing the Straits of Gibraltar. Behold the Atlantic Ocean!"

"The Atlantic!" said Gil, in low, awe-struck tones.

And now only the sea and the sky, or rather only the sky was to be seen.

The chariot seemed to float in space outside the limits of the terrestrial atmosphere.

Stars were shining on all sides—below their feet, above their heads, around them, whithersoever they turned their gaze.

Thus another minute passed.

And now they descried in the distance a purple line, dividing the motionless sky from the sky in motion.

The purple line changed to red, and the red to orange, then this expanded, casting a brilliant golden light over the waste of waters.

One by one the stars disappeared.

It seemed as if day was about to break.

But at this moment the moon again appeared.

A moment later, however, a light above the horizon eclipsed its brightness.

"Day is breaking," said Gil Gil.

"On the contrary," said the Angel of Death, "night is falling, only that as we are traveling behind the sun and much faster than he, sunset will for us be dawn and dawn sunset. Here are the beautiful Azores."

In effect a graceful group of

islands rose from the bosom of the ocean.

The melancholy light of evening breaking through the clouds and lighting up the mists over the rivers, gave the archipelago an enchanting aspect.

Gil and the Angel of Death passed over these oases of the ocean without pausing for an instant.

Ten minutes later the sun rose out of the waves and mounted above the horizon.

But the Angel of Death stopped the chariot and the sun set again.

They proceeded on their course and the sun rose again.

There were two twilights in one.

All this greatly amazed our hero.

They traveled on and on, advancing further and further into the light and the ocean.

Gil's watch, however, indicated the hour to be a quarter past nine—at night, if we may say so.

A few moments later the continent of North America rose above the waters.

Gil caught a passing glimpse of men at work in the fields, sailing along the coasts in ships, or swarming in the streets of the cities.

At one point he descried a great cloud of dust. A battle was being fought.

On another side, the Angel of Death called his attention to a great religious ceremony — in honor of a tree, the idol of that people.

Further on he pointed out to him two youthful savages, alone in a wood, who were gazing tenderly at each other.

Presently the earth disappeared again from view and they entered the Pacific Ocean.

In the Island of Birds it was midday.

A thousand other islands presented themselves to their view on all sides.

In each one of them different customs, religions, and habits pre-

vailed. And what a variety of costumes and ceremonies !

In this way they reached China, where day was breaking.

Other stars, different from those they had seen before, studded the celestial vault.

The moon shone again in the east, and then again hid her light.

They continued to pursue their course with a velocity greater than that of the earth revolving on its axis.

Finally they crossed Asia, where it was night ; they passed to the right of the Himalaya Mountains, whose eternal snows glittered in the light of the morning stars ; they skirted the borders of the Caspian Sea, tacked a little toward the left and halted on a hill beside a certain city in which it was, at that time, midnight.

"What is the name of that city ?" asked Gil Gil.

"We are in Jerusalem," responded the Angel of Death.

"Already ?"

"Yes. A little more and we

shall have traveled completely around the globe. I pause here because I hear the hour of midnight striking and I never fail to kneel at this hour."

"Why?"

"To adore the Creator of the universe."

So saying, he dismounted from the chariot.

"I, too, desire to contemplate the city of God, and to meditate among its ruins," responded Gil, kneeling down beside the Angel of Death and clasping his hands together with pious fervor.

When they had ended their prayers, the Angel of Death recovered his loquacity and his gayety and ascending the chariot again, preceded by Gil Gil, spoke as follows:

"The village you see on that mountain is Gethsemane. In it was the Garden of Olives. On the other side you can distinguish an eminence crowned by a temple which stands out against a starry sky—that is Golgatha. There I passed the greatest day of my ex-

istence. I thought I had vanquished God himself—and vanquished he was for some hours. But, alas! on that mount, too, it was that three days later I saw myself disarmed and my power brought to naught on the morning of a certain Sunday. Jesus had risen from the dead. There, too, took place on the same occasion my great single combat with Nature. There took place my duel with her, that terrible duel (at the third hour of the day, I remember it well), when, as soon as she saw me thrust the lance of Longinus in the breast of the Saviour she began to throw stones at me, to upturn the cemeteries, to bring the dead to life, and I know not what besides. I thought poor Nature had lost her senses.

The Angel of Death seemed to reflect for a moment, then, raising his head, he added with a more serious air:

“The hour has come. Midnight is past. Come to my habitation, and let us finish what we have to say to each other.”

"Where is your habitation?" fearfully asked Gil Gil.

"At the North Pole," responded the Angel of Death, "where human foot has never trod, where human foot shall never tread. Among snows and ice as ancient as the world."

This said, the Angel of Death turned toward the north, and the chariot rolled on more swiftly than before.

Asia Minor, the Black Sea, Russia and Spitzberg disappeared beneath its wheels, like fantastic visions.

Presently the horizon was illuminated by dazzling flames reflected from a landscape of rock crystal.

All was whiteness, all was silence over the earth.

Around them the sky, of a dark purple, was sprinkled with stars.

The Aurora Borealis and ice! This was all the life of that awful region.

"We are at the Pole," said the Angel of Death. "We have reached our destination."



XVI.

DEATH REGAINS HIS SERIOUS-
NESS.

IF Gil Gil had not already beheld so many strange things during his aerial voyage, if his imagination were not filled with the recollection of Elena, if the desire to know whither the Angel of Death was taking him, had not disturbed his saddened spirit, the position in which he now found himself offered an admirable opportunity to investigate and solve the greatest of geographical problems—the form and position of the earth's poles.

The mysterious shores of the Polar Sea, hidden under eternal

snows, the height or abyss—according to opposite opinions—which indicates the situation of the axis upon which our globe revolves, the aspect of the starry vault in which he could see at once all the stars that stud the skies which hang over North America, over Europe, over Asia from Troy to Japan, and over the northern part of the two oceans, the glowing fires of the Aurora Borealis and, in short, the innumerable other phenomena which science for so many centuries and at the cost of the lives of so many illustrious navigators, who have perished in those awful regions, has vainly sought to explain, would have been for our hero as clear and plain as the light of day, and we might now be able to communicate to our readers——

But as Gil Gil was in no mood for making such observations, and as we, for our part, cannot undertake to enter on any subject which bears no relation to our story, humanity must continue to

remain in its ignorance with respect to the Pole, while we go on with our narration.

Besides, when we remind our readers that it was now the beginning of September, they will understand that the sun was still shining in that sky where for more than five months there had not been a single hour of night.

By its pale, oblique light our two travelers descended from the chariot, and the Angel of Death, taking Gil Gil by the hand, said to him with affable courtesy :

“You are now at home ; let us enter.”

An immense iceberg loomed before his eyes.

In the midst of this iceberg, a kind of crystalline wall, whose foundations were set in snows as ancient as the world, was a prolonged fissure, scarcely wide enough to admit the form of a man.

“I will show you the road,” said the Angel of Death, leading the way.

The Duke de la Verdad stood still, not daring to follow his companion.

But what alternative was there? Whither could he fly in this infinite waste? What road follow in those white and endless fields of ice?

"Gil, will you not come in?" cried the Angel of Death.

Gil, casting a last look of supreme anguish at the pallid sun, entered the iceberg.

A winding stairs, cut out of the same frozen substance, led up to a vast square apartment without furniture or ornament, also constructed of ice, that resembled the extensive salt-mines of Poland or the marble rooms of the baths of Ispahan and Medina.

The Angel of Death had seated himself cross-legged, like the Orientals, in one corner of the apartment.

"Come here; sit down beside me and let us talk together," he said to Gil.

The young man obeyed mechanically.

So profound was the silence that the breathing of an insect so small as to be invisible to the naked eye could be heard, if in those regions a creature could exist which had not the protection of the Angel of Death.

The cold was so intense that there are no words in which to describe it.

Imagine a total absence of heat, a complete negation of life, the absolute cessation of motion, death as a mode of being, and you will still have failed to form an exact idea of that dead world, worse than dead, since it was incapable of corruption or transformation, and consequently afforded neither food for worms, nor manure for plants, nor elements for minerals, nor gases to the atmosphere.

It was chaos without the embryo of the universe; it was nothingness, under the appearance of eternal snows.

Gil Gil, however, was able to

support this cold, thanks to the protection of the Angel of Death.

"Gil Gil," said the latter, in calm and solemn accents, "the hour has now come in which truth shall shine before your eyes in all its naked splendor ; I am going to sum up in a few words the story of our relations and to reveal to you the mystery of your destiny."

"Speak," responded Gil Gil, with intrepidity.

"It cannot be denied, my friend," continued the Angel of Death, "that you desire to live ; that all my efforts, all my arguments, the revelations I am continually making to you, are unavailing to extinguish in your heart the love of life."

"The love of Elena, you would say," interrupted the young man.

"The love of life," replied the Angel of Death. "Love is life, life is love ; convince yourself of that. If you doubt it, reflect on a thing which must have been very plain to you during your glorious career as a physician, and during

the journey we have just made. What is man? What is the meaning of his existence? You have seen him sleep between the setting and the rising of the sun, and dream sleeping. In the intervals of this sleep he had twelve or fourteen hours of wakefulness daily on his hands which he knew not what to do with. In one place you have seen him take up arms to destroy his fellow-beings; in another you have seen him brave the dangers of the ocean in order to provide variety in his food. Some toiled to array themselves in garments of one or another color; some excavated the earth to extract from it metals with which to adorn themselves. Here, they were putting one fellow-creature to death; there, they were rendering blind obedience to another fellow-creature. In one locality virtue and right consisted in such or such a thing; in another in the reverse. These held as a truth what those believed to be error. Beauty itself must have appeared

to you conventional and fictitious as you traversed Circassia, China, the Congo, and the country of the Esquimaux.

“It will also have been made plain to you that science is only a blundering experimenting with proximate effects, or a wild guessing at obscure causes, and that glory is a vain word affixed by chance, only by chance, to the name of this or that corpse. You have learned, in short, that all the occupations of man are like the sports of children that serve to pass away the time, that his misery and his greatness are relative, that his civilization, his social organization, his most serious interests, are lacking in common sense, that fashions, customs, hierarchies, are smoke, dust, vanity of vanities. But why say vanity? They are still less than vanity. They are the playthings with which you amuse the idleness of life, the delirium of fever, the hallucinations of madness. Young and old, nobles, plebeians, the

wise, the ignorant, the beautiful and the deformed, kings and slaves, rich men and beggars—all are equal before me—a handful of dust which a breath of mine disperses. And you still clamor for life? And you still say to me that you desire to remain in the world? And you still love this fleeting show?"

"I love Elena!" replied Gil Gil.

"Ah, yes!" continued the Angel of Death, "life is love, life is desire. But the ideal of this love and of this desire should not be such or such a beauty of clay. Deluded beings, who always take the near for the remote! Life is love; life is feeling; but the greatness, the nobility, the true significance of life is in the tear of pain that courses down the cheek of the new-born or the dying; the sad plaint of the heart which is weighed down by the misery of the earthly life and which hungers for life eternal; the sweet longing for another life, or the pathetic memory of another world. The disgust and the uneasi-

ness, the doubt and the disquiet of great souls whom the vanities of the earth do not satisfy, are but the foreshadowing of another home ; of a mission higher than the exercise of power, of knowledge ; of something, in short, greater than the fleeting greatness of man or the fragile beauty of woman. Let us speak now of yourself and of your history, of which you are ignorant ; let us come down to the mystery of your anomalous existence ; let us examine the reason of our friendship. Gil Gil, you yourself have said it,—of all the imaginary joys that life has to offer, you desire only one—and that is the possession of a woman. I have, then, in great measure, succeeded in my task. Neither power, nor glory, nor honors, nor riches seduce your imagination. You are, consequently, a consummate philosopher, a perfect Christian, and to this point I wished to bring you. Now, then, tell me, if that woman were to die, would you still desire to live ? ”

Gil Gil rose to his feet with a cry of terror.

"How!" he cried, "Elena—"

"Calm yourself," resumed the Angel of Death, "Elena is now as you left her. We are speaking hypothetically. Answer me in the same manner."

"Before you slay Elena, deprive me of life. This is my answer."

"Excellent!" replied the Angel of Death. "And tell me: If you knew that Elena were waiting for you in heaven would you not die tranquil, happy; blessing God, and commending your soul to him?"

"Ah, yes, death would then be resurrection," exclaimed Gil Gil.

"So that," continued the awful Being, "provided Elena be at your side you desire nothing more"

"Nothing."

"Well then, learn all. This is not all over Christendom the 2d of September, 1721, as perhaps you imagine. You and I have been *friends* many years longer than

we should be if that were the case."

"Great heaven! what do you tell me? What year is this, then?"

"The eighteenth century has come to an end, and the nineteenth, and the twentieth, and a few more centuries besides. The church offers up its prayers to-day for San Antonio, and it is the year 2316."

"So, then, I am dead?"

"You have been dead for nearly six hundred years."

"And Elena?"

"Elena died when you did? you died on the night on which we formed each other's acquaintance."

"How! I drank the oil of vitriol?"

"To the last drop. As for Elena, she died of grief when she learned of your unhappy end. For six centuries, therefore, you have both been under my rule."

"Impossible! you will drive me mad," exclaimed Gil Gil.

"*I drive no one mad,*" replied

the Angel of Death. "Listen, and you shall hear all I have done in your behalf! Elena and you both died on the day I have named—Elena, destined to ascend to the mansion of the angels on the Day of Judgment, and you, condemned to suffer the pains of hell; she for her innocence and purity; you for having forgotten God and nourished base ambitions. Now, then, the final Judgment will take place to-morrow, when the third hour of the day strikes in Rome."

"Oh, my God! so the world is coming to an end!" cried Gil Gil.

"It was time," replied the formidable Being. "At last I am going to rest!"

"The world is coming to an end!" stammered Gil Gil, with indescribable terror.

"It does not matter to you. You have nothing now to lose. Listen. Seeing, to-day, that the Last Judgment was approaching I (who have always had a predilection for you, as I told you the

first time we met) and Elena, who continued to love you in heaven as tenderly as she had loved you on the earth, supplicated the Eternal to save your soul from perdition. 'I can do nothing for a suicide,' the Creator responded; 'I give his spirit to you for an hour; redeem it, if you can.' 'Save him!'" Elena said to me. I promised, and descended to the tomb in quest of you. I seated myself there beside your coffin and caused you to dream that you were alive. Our meeting, your visit to Philip V, the scenes you took part in at the court of Louis I, your marriage with Elena, all this you dreamed in your grave. *In a single hour you imagined the events of three days; as in a single instant you have passed six hundred years of death.*"

"Ah, no, it was not a dream!" cried Gil Gil.

"I understand your amazement," replied the Angel of Death. "All you dreamed appeared to you real. This will

show you what life is. Dreams seem realities and realities dreams. Elena and I have triumphed. Knowledge, experience, and philosophy have purified your heart, exalted your spirit, made you behold the grandeurs of the earth in all their repulsive vanity, and thus, fleeing from death as you did yesterday, you fled only from the world, and crying out for a deathless love as you do to-day, you cry out for immortality. You are saved."

"But Elena——" murmured Gil Gil.

"The question now is of God. Dismiss Elena from your thoughts. Elena does not exist, has never really existed. Elena was Beauty, the reflex of Immortality. Now that the Sun of Truth and Justice gathers in his splendors, Elena shall be one with Him forever. Toward Him, then, you should turn your desires."

"It was a dream!" exclaimed the young man, with indescribable anguish.

"And such will be the world within a few hours—a dream of the Creator."

So saying, the Angel of Death rose, uncovered his head and gazed at the sky.

"Day is breaking in Rome," he murmured. "The *Last Day* is beginning. Farewell Gil, farewell for ever!"

"Ah, do not abandon me!" exclaimed the unhappy youth.

"You say, *do not abandon me*, to the Angel of Death. And yesterday you fled from me."

"Ah, do not leave me here alone, in this region of desolation! This is a tomb."

"What!" responded the black-robed divinity ironically. "Has it gone so ill with you in it for six hundred years?"

"How? Have I lived here?"

"*Lived?* Call it as you will. Here you have slept during that time."

"So, then, this is my sepulcher?"

"Yes, my friend; and as soon as

I shall have disappeared you will be convinced of it. Only then will you experience in all its intensity the cold that reigns in this mansion."

"Ah, I shall die on the instant," exclaimed Gil Gil. "I am at the North Pole."

"You will not die, for you are already dead; but you will sleep until the third hour of the day, when you will awaken with all the past generations of men."

"My friend," cried Gil Gil, with ineffable anguish, "do not abandon me, or let me go on dreaming. I do not wish to sleep. That sleep terrifies me. This sepulcher stifles me. Let me return to the villa at the foot of the Guadarrama where I dreamed I saw Elena, and let the ruin of the universe overtake me there. I believe in God, I acknowledge his justice, and I appeal to his mercy, but let me return to Elena!"

"What an immense love!" said the divinity. "It has triumphed over life and it will

triumph over death. It scorned the earth and it will scorn heaven. Be it as you desire, Gil Gil. But do not forget your soul."

"Oh, thanks, my friend! I see that you are going to take me to Elena."

"No, I will not take you to her. Elena sleeps in her tomb. I will summon her here to sleep beside you the last hours of her death."

"We shall sleep in the tomb together! It is too much glory, too much bliss for me! Let me but see Elena, let me but hear her say she loves me, let me know that she will remain at my side forever, whether it be on earth or in heaven, and the darkness of the sepulcher matters not to me!"

"Come then, Elena, I command you," said the Angel of Death, in a hollow voice, striking the earth with his foot.

Elena, such as she had seemed in the garden of the Guadarrama, clad in her white robes, but pale as alabaster, appeared in the middle of the chamber of ice in which

this marvelous scene was being enacted.

Gil Gil fell upon his knees at the apparition, tears coursed down his cheeks, and with clasped hands he fixed a glance of profound gratitude on the peaceful countenance of the Angel of Death.

"Farewell, my friends!" exclaimed the latter.

"Your hand, Elena," said Gil Gil, in a trembling voice.

"My Gil!" murmured the young girl, kneeling down beside her husband.

And with clasped hands and eyes raised to heaven they responded to the farewell of the Angel of Death with another sad farewell.

The black-robed divinity meantime slowly turned away.

"Farewell forever!" murmured the Friend of Man, as he withdrew.

"Mine forever!" cried Elena, pressing between hers the hands of Gil Gil. "God has pardoned you and we shall dwell together in heaven."

"Forever!" repeated the young man, with ineffable joy.

At this instant the Angel of Death passed out of sight.

A horrible coldness pervaded the apartment and Gil Gil and Elena remained stiff, petrified, motionless in the reverent attitude they had taken, kneeling, hand clasped in hand, their eyes raised to heaven, like two noble statues adorning a tomb.





CONCLUSION.

A FEW hours later the earth burst like a ripe pomegranate.

The stars nearest he attracted and drew into their mass the fragments of the disrupted globe, whence resulted tremendous cataclysms, deluges, deviations from their axes, and the like.

The moon, almost intact, became the satellite, I know not whether of Venus or of Mercury.

Meantime, the Last Judgment of the family of Adam and Eve had taken place, not in the valley of Jehosaphat, but in the comet called the Comet of Charles V,

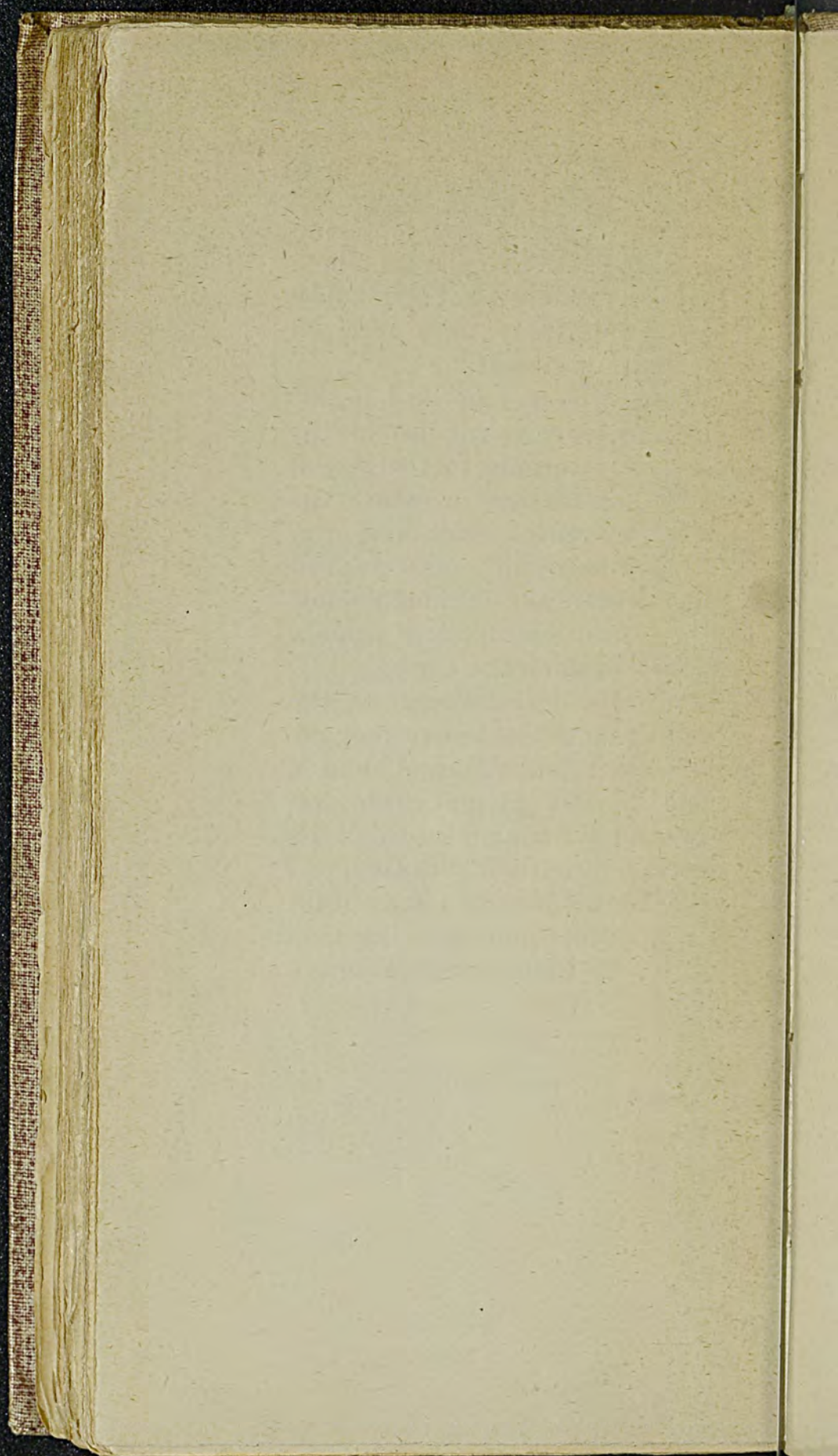
and the souls of the reprobate were exiled to other planets, where they were doomed to begin a new life. Could they have received greater punishment?

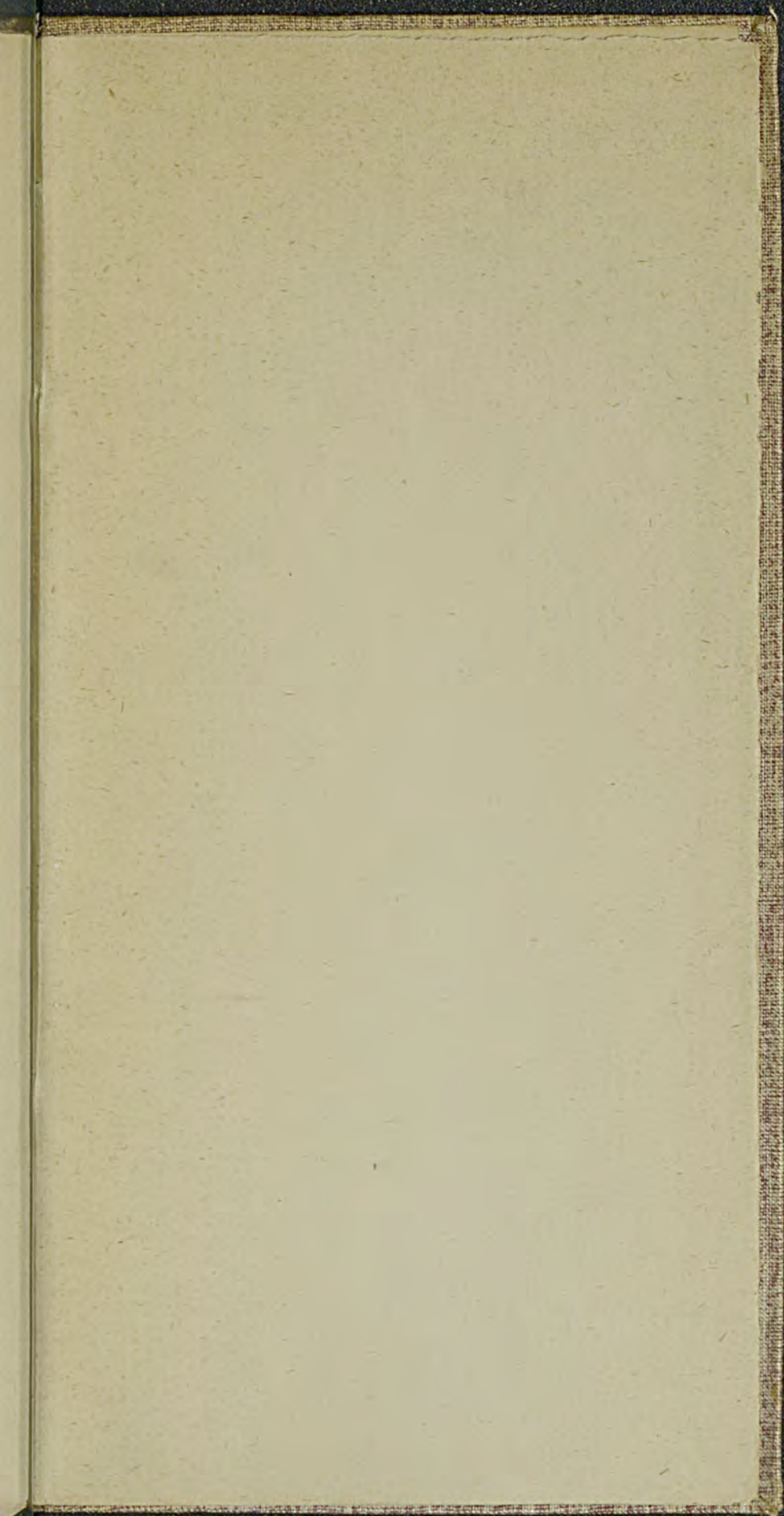
Those who are purified in this new existence shall attain the glory of returning to the bosom of God on the day on which the stars they inhabit shall disappear.

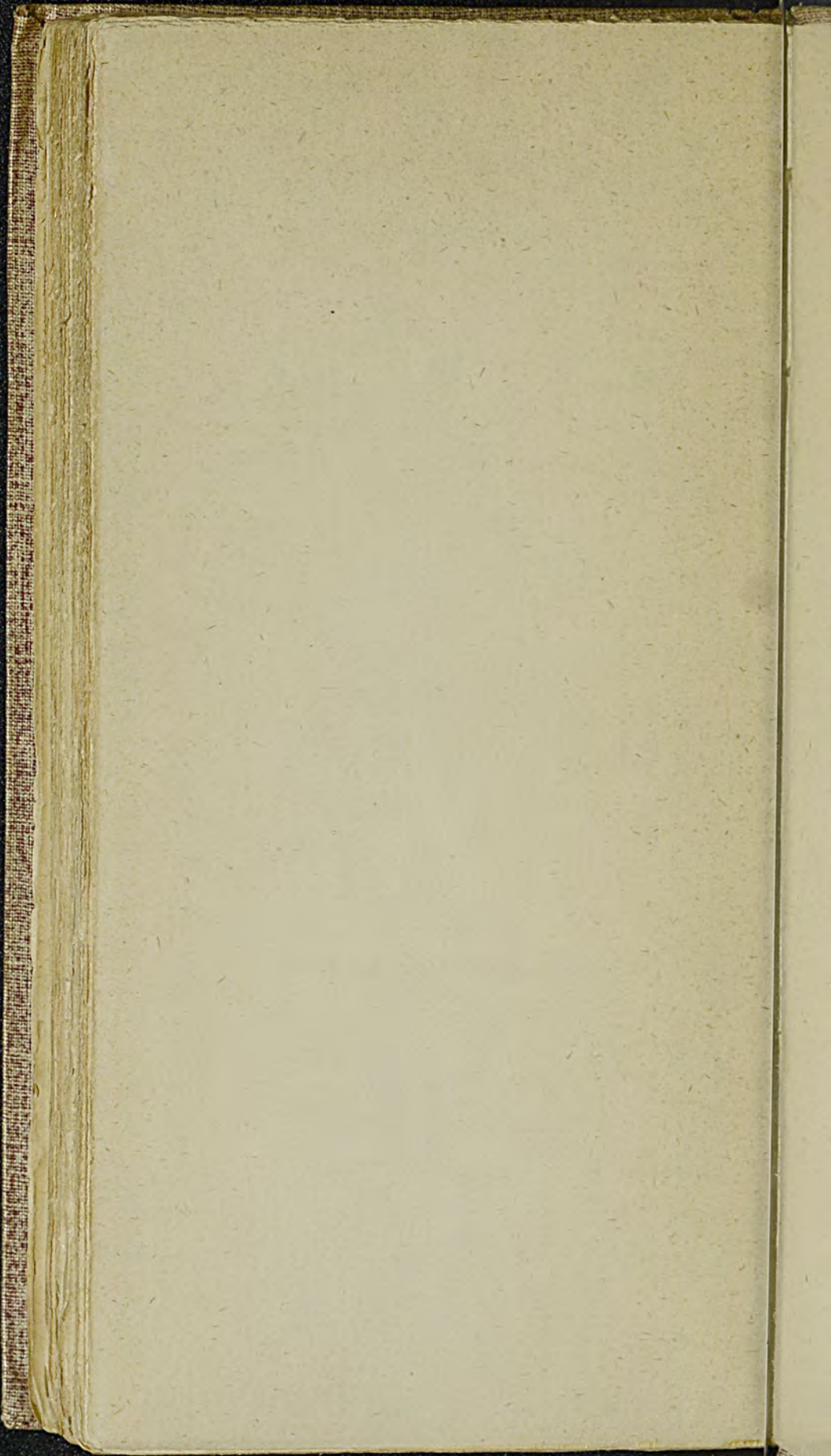
Those who are not purified must live again in innumerable other worlds in the same manner as they lived on the earth.

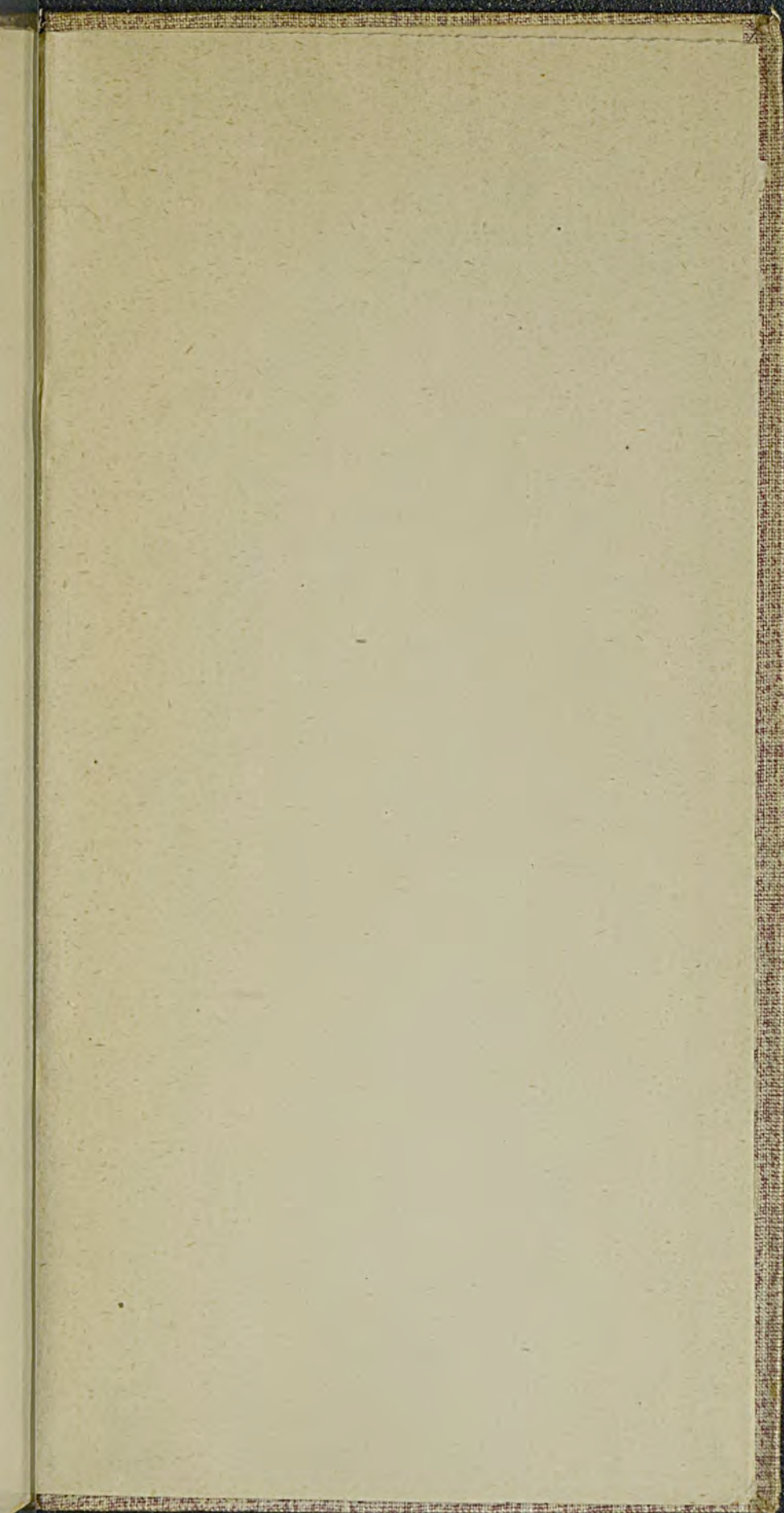
As for Gil and Elena, on the evening of the same day they entered the Promised Land hand in hand, forever exempt from sorrow and suffering, saved and redeemed, reconciled with God, partakers of his bliss and heirs of his glory, neither more nor less than the rest of the just and the purified.

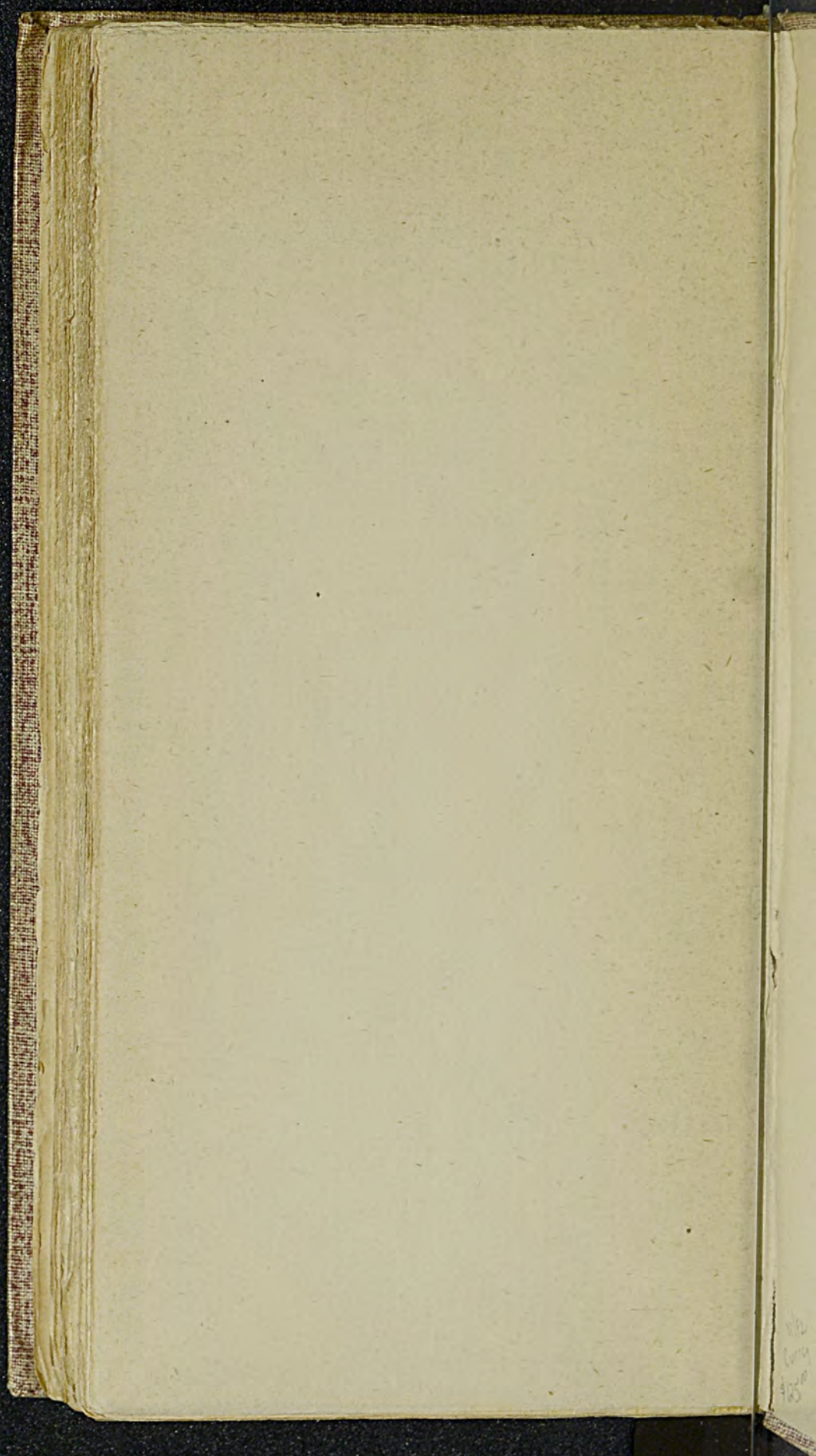
THE END.











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