

FROM THE FRENCH.

I.

**K**ING PHILIP II. was playing at chess in the Escorial Palace. His opponent was Ruy Lopez, a humble priest, but a chess player of great skill. Being the King's particular favourite, the great player was permitted to kneel upon a brocaded cushion, whilst the courtiers grouped about the King were forced to remain standing in constrained and painful attitudes.

It was a magnificent morning. The air was perfumed with the orange groves, and the violet curtains of the splendid hall hardly softened the burning rays which streamed in through the windows. The blaze of living light seemed scarcely in harmony with the King's gloomy countenance. His brow was black as night, and from time to time he bent his eyes impatiently upon the door. The nobles stood in silence, darting meaning glances at each other. It was easily to be discerned that some event of great importance weighed upon the spirits of the assembly. No one paid any attention to the chess-board except Ruy Lopez, who, as he moved the pieces, hesitated between the temptation of checkmating his opponent and the deference due to his King. The

silence was unbroken except by the sound made by the players moving their pieces.

Suddenly the door opened, and a man of rude and savage aspect advanced into the hall, and, presenting himself before the King, stood waiting his commands to speak. This man's appearance was anything but prepossessing, and on his entrance the nobles, as if animated with one thought, shrank back with contempt and loathing, as if some unclean animal had entered into their midst. His massive, herculean figure was clad in a doublet of black leather, and his face, in which could be seen no trace of intelligence, expressed, on the contrary, nothing but villainess and villainy; a great scar, running right across his face and losing itself in a bushy beard, added still further to the natural brutality of his countenance.

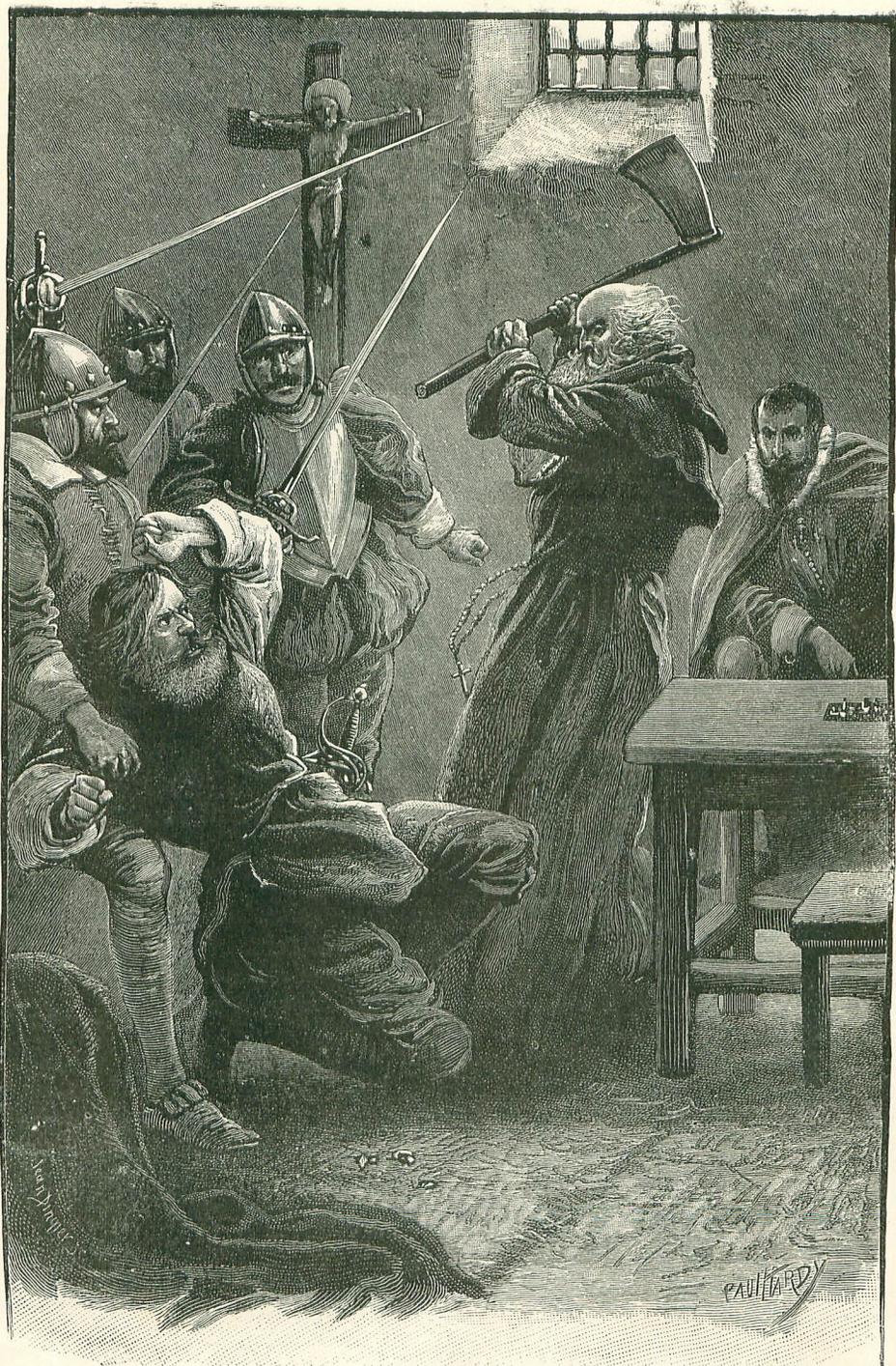
An electric thrill ran through the assembly. The new comer was Fernando Calavar, high executioner of Spain.

"Is he dead?" asked the King, in an imperious tone.

"No, sire," replied Calavar, bowing low.

The King frowned.

"Great Sovereign of Spain," Calavar continued, "the prisoner has claimed his privileges, and I cannot take proceedings against



“BY HEAVEN,” CRIED RUY LOPEZ, “THE DUKE SHALL FINISH HIS GAME!”

*(A Game of Chess).*

a man whose blood belongs to the noblest in Spain, without having a more imperative order from your Majesty," and he bowed again.

The nobles, who had listened with great attention to these words, broke into a murmur of approbation as the man finished speaking. The proud Castilian blood rushed like a stream of lava through their veins, and dyed their faces crimson. The manifestation became general. Young Alonza D'Ossuna openly asserted his opinion by putting on his plumed cap. His bold example was followed by the majority of the nobles, and their lofty nodding crests seemed to proclaim with defiance that their masters protested in favour of the privilege, which the hidalgos of Spain have always enjoyed, of covering their heads before their Sovereign.

The King gave a furious start, and striking his fist violently upon the chess-board, scattered the chessmen in all directions.

"He has been judged by our Royal Court of Justice," he cried, "and condemned to death. What does the traitor demand?"

"Sire!" replied the executioner, "he asks permission to die upon the block, and also to pass the three last hours of his life with a priest."

"Ah, that is granted!" replied Philip, in a

tone of relief. "Is not our confessor in the prison according to our orders?"

"Yes, sire!" said Calavar, "the holy man is there; but the Duke refuses to see St. Diaz de Silva. He says he cannot receive absolution from anyone below the dignity of a Bishop. Such is the privilege of a noble condemned to death for high treason."

"Yes, these are our rights!" boldly interrupted the fiery D'Ossuna; "and we claim from the King our cousin's privileges."

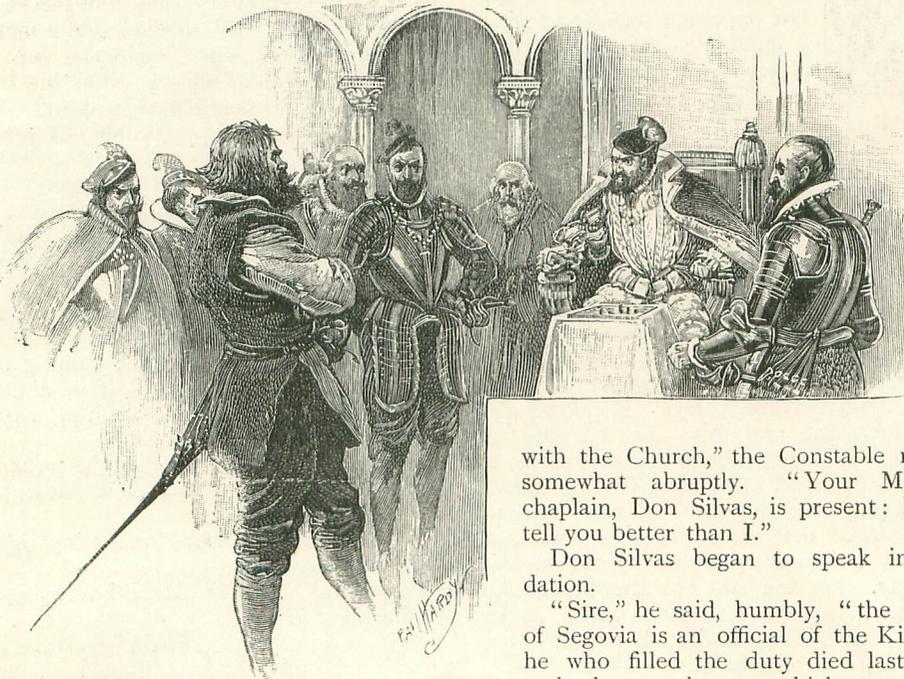
This demand acted as a signal.

"Our rights and the King's justice are inseparable," cried Don Diego de Tarraxas, Count of Vaience, an old man of gigantic stature, clothed in armour, holding in his hands the bâton of Great Constable of Spain, and leaning upon his long Toledo blade.

"Our rights and our privileges!" cried the nobles, repeating the words like an echo. Their audacity made the King start with fury from his ebony throne.

"By the bones of Campeador!" he cried. "By the soul of St. Jago! I have sworn neither to eat nor sleep until the bleeding head of Don Gusman lies before me. As I have sworn, so shall it be. But Don Tarraxas has said well, 'The King's justice confirms his subjects' rights.' My Lord Constable, where does the nearest Bishop reside?"

"Sire, I have more to do with camp than



WHAT DOES THE TRAITOR DEMAND?

with the Church," the Constable replied, somewhat abruptly. "Your Majesty's chaplain, Don Silvas, is present: he can tell you better than I."

Don Silvas began to speak in trepidation.

"Sire," he said, humbly, "the Bishop of Segovia is an official of the King, but he who filled the duty died last week, and the parchment which names his

successor is still upon the Council table, and is yet to be submitted to the Pope's seal."

At these words a joyous smile hovered about D'Ossuna's lips. This joy was but natural, for the young man was of the blood of the Gusmans, and his cousin, the condemned prisoner, was his dearest friend. The King perceived the smile, and his eye shot forth lightning.

"We are the King!" he said, gravely, with the calm which presages a storm; "our Royal person must be no butt for raillery. This sceptre appears light, my lords, but he who ridicules it shall be crushed thereby as with a block of iron. I believe that our holy father the Pope is somewhat indebted to us, so that we do not fear his displeasure at the step which we are about to take. Since the King of Spain can make a Prince, he can also make a Bishop. Rise, then, Don Ruy Lopez. I create you Bishop of Segovia. Rise, I command you, and take your rank in the Church."

The courtiers stood dumfounded.

Don Ruy Lopez rose mechanically. His head was whirling, and he stammered as he strove to speak.

"If your Majesty pleases——" he began.

"Silence, my Lord Bishop!" replied the King. "Obey your Sovereign. The formalities of your installation shall be performed another day; our subjects will not fail to acknowledge our wishes in this affair. Bishop of Segovia, go with Calavar to the condemned man's cell. Give absolution to his soul, and in three hours leave his body to the executioner's axe. As for you, Calavar, I will await you here; you will bring us the traitor's head. Let justice be accomplished."

Then Philip turned to Ruy Lopez.

"I give you my signet ring," he said, "to show the Duke as a token of the truth of your story."

The executioner left the chamber, followed by Ruy Lopez.

"Well, gentlemen," said the King, turning to the others, "do you still doubt the King's justice?"

But the nobles answered not a word.

The King, having taken his seat, made a sign to one of his favourites to place himself before the chess-board, and Don Ramirez, Count of Biscay, accordingly knelt down upon the velvet cushion.

"With a game of chess, gentlemen," said the King, smiling, "and your company, I cannot fail to make the time pass agreeably. Let no one leave the chamber until Calavar's return. We cannot spare a single one of you."

With these ironical words, Philip commenced a game with Don Ramirez, whilst the nobles, almost dropping with fatigue, resumed the positions about their august master which they had occupied at the beginning of this story.

## II.

CALAVAR, leading the way, conducted the new Bishop to the condemned man's cell. Ruy Lopez walked like one in a dream. Was he awake, or not? He hardly knew. At the bottom of his heart he cursed the King and his Court. He understood perfectly that he had become Bishop of Segovia, but he felt deeply at what a price he had bought his dignity. What had Don Gusman done that he should be thus sacrificed? Don Gusman, the best chess player in Spain! He thought of all this as he proceeded over the marble flags which led to the State prison, and as he thought he prayed that the ground would open and swallow him up.

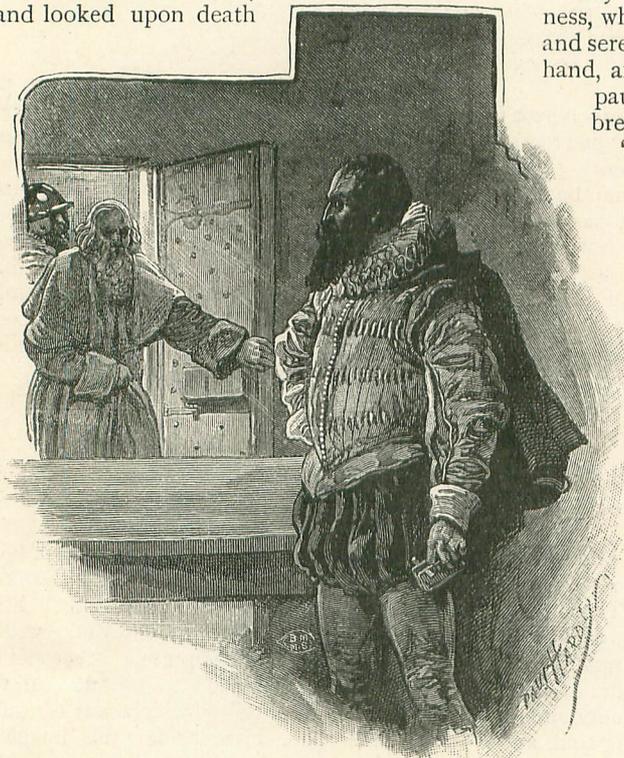
Don Gusman was pacing impatiently up and down his narrow cell with a hurried step that betrayed the feverish anxiety of his mind. The cell was furnished with a massive table and two heavy wooden stools, the floor being covered with coarse, thick mats. Shut out from all the noises of the outer world, here silence reigned supreme. A crucifix, roughly carved, was fixed to the wall in the niche of a high window, which was carefully barred with iron. Except for this image of resignation and mercy, the walls were bare. Well might this dungeon serve as antechamber to the tomb.

As Ruy Lopez entered the cell a sudden burst of sunshine flooded the walls as if in bitter mockery of him who was soon to see it no more.

The Duke saluted the new Bishop with great courtesy. They regarded each other, and exchanged in that look a thousand words which they alone could understand. Ruy Lopez felt the painfulness of his position deeply, and the Duke understood his embarrassment. Their thoughts were both the same, that in the condemnation of one of the principal favourites of the King an innocent life was threatened! The proofs of the crime imputed to the Duke were grave; the most important being a despatch written in Don Gusman's hand to the French Court, in which he unfolded a scheme for assassinating Philip II. This had sufficed to condemn him.

Don Gusman, strong in his innocence, had kept a rigorous silence when brought before

his judges, and the accusation not being denied, sentence of death was passed upon him. Don Gusman since his incarceration had not altered. He had braved the storm, and looked upon death



"RUY LOPEZ ENTERED THE CELL."

with an unmoved countenance. His last hours had no terrors for him. If his forehead was overshadowed, if his steps were agitated and his breathing hurried, it was because there rose before his eye the image of his betrothed, Dona Estella, who, ignorant of her lover's fate, was waiting for him in her battlemented castle on the banks of the Guadalquivir. If he felt weak at this fatal moment, and if a pang shot through his heart, it was because his thoughts were of her who was to him the dearest thing in all the world.

Ruy Lopez had not entered alone. Calavar was at his side; and it was he who announced to the Duke the King's decision and reply. Ruy Lopez confirmed the executioner's words, and the Duke, falling on his knees before the new Bishop, asked his blessing, then turning to Calavar with a gesture of authority, he dismissed him, saying:—

"In three hours I shall be at your disposal."

Calavar obeyed him and went out, and the Duke and Bishop were left alone.

Ruy Lopez was trembling with nervousness, whilst Don Gusman's face wore a calm and serene expression. He took the Bishop's hand, and wrung it warmly. There was a pause. The Duke was the first to break the silence.

"We have met before in happier circumstances," he said, smiling.

"It is true," stammered Ruy Lopez, who, pale and agitated, resembled rather the penitent than the confessor.

"Much happier," repeated the Duke, absently. "Do you remember, when you played your celebrated game of chess with Paoli Boy, the Sicilian, in the presence of the King and Court, that it was upon my right arm that the King leant?" Then after a pause he continued: "Do you remember also, father, those words of Cervantes, 'Life is a game of chess?' I have forgotten the exact place in which the passage occurs, but its meaning is, that upon earth men play different rôles. There are, as in chess, kings, knights, soldiers, bishops, according to their birth, fate and fortune; and when the game is over death lays them

all as equals in the tomb, even as we gather together the chessmen into a box."

"Yes, I remember those words of Don Quixote," replied Don Lopez, astonished at this singular conversation, "and I remember also Sancho's reply: 'That however good the comparison was, it was not so new that he had not heard it before.'"

"I was your favourite pupil, even your rival," said the Duke, without appearing to hear Don Lopez.

"It is true," cried the Bishop. "You are a great master of the game, and I have been often proud of having such a pupil. But now, on your knees, my son."

They knelt down together, and there before the crucifix Don Gusman made confession to Ruy Lopez, who as he listened could hardly restrain his tears.

When the Duke had finished, two hours after—for the confession under the Church seal was long and touching—the Bishop



"THEY KNELT DOWN TOGETHER."

blessed the prisoner, and gave him absolution. The face of Don Gusman, as he rose, was calm and resigned.

But there remained still an hour to wait.

"This delay is torture," cried the Duke. "Why do they not cut off the prisoners at once, instead of stretching their souls upon such a rack of agony? An eternity of suffering is in each of these minutes." And the prisoner began to walk impatiently to and fro, with his eyes constantly bent upon the door. The Duke's firmness was shaken by the thought of that weary hour of waiting. Ruy Lopez had fulfilled his duty. The prisoner's soul was purified, and now the priest could become the friend.

As Don Lopez heard Don Gusman utter this exclamation, and saw his face grow white, he understood what agony he was undergoing, and felt at once that something must be done to divert his thoughts. But in vain he racked his brain for an idea. He could think of nothing. What could he propose to a man about to die? For such as he, the flower has no longer perfume, woman has no longer beauty.

Then suddenly a thought flashed across his brain.

"How would a game of chess——" he began, timidly.

"An excellent idea!" cried Don Gusman, recalled to himself by this singular proposal. "A farewell game of chess."

"You consent?"

"Most readily; but where are the chessmen, my friend?"

"Am I not always provided with the instruments of war?" said Ruy Lopez, smiling. Then he pulled forward the two stools and set out upon the table a microscopic set of chessmen. "Our Lady pardon me!" he continued. "I often pass my spare time in the confessional in working out some problem."

The chessmen being set out, the players took their seats, and were soon absorbed in the excitement of the game.

This strange contest, between a priest and a condemned prisoner, made a picture worthy of the brush of Rembrandt or Salvator Rosa. The light which streamed from the arched windows fell upon the pale, noble features of Don Gusman, and upon the venerable head of Ruy Lopez.

The emotions of the two players were very different. Ruy Lopez played with a preoccupation which was not usual to him, and which rendered him much inferior to his ordinary strength. Don Gusman, on the contrary, stimulated by excitement, played with more than his ordinary skill. At this moment his noble Castilian blood did not fail him, for never had the Duke given better proof of the clearness of his mind. Such a flash of intellect must be compared to the last flickers of the failing lamp, or to the last song of the dying swan.

Don Gusman suddenly attacked his adversary with an impetuosity which nearly gained him a certain victory; but Ruy Lopez, recalled to himself by this vigorous effort, defended himself bravely. The game became more and more complicated. The Bishop strove to gain a mate which he saw, or believed he saw, at hand, whilst Don Gusman played with the eagerness of certain victory. Everything was forgotten, and time passed unnoticed. The chess-board was their universe, and a life of anxiety was in each move.

The minutes, the quarters, the half-hours flew by, and the fatal hour arrived at last.

A distant sound struck on their ears; it grew nearer, it increased, and the door swing-



"THE GAME BECAME MORE AND MORE COMPLICATED."

ing open gave admittance to Calavar and his assistants, who advanced into the cell with torches in their hands. They were armed with swords, and two of them bore the block, covered with a black cloth, on which lay an axe.

The torches were placed in the receptacle prepared for them, whilst one of the men scattered cedar sawdust on the floor. All this was the work of a moment, while the executioner stood waiting for the prisoner.

As Calavar entered, Ruy Lopez started to his feet, in a tremor of alarm, but the Duke did not move. His eyes were fixed upon the chess-board. It was his turn to play. Calavar, seeing his abstracted gaze, advanced to the Duke's side and placed his hand upon his shoulder.

"Come," he said.

The prisoner shuddered as if he had trodden upon a serpent.

"I must finish this game," he said, imperiously.

"It is impossible," Calavar replied.

"But, fellow, the game is mine! I can force mate in a few moves. Let me play it out."

"I cannot. It is impossible," repeated the executioner.

"Are the three hours gone already?"

"The last stroke has just struck. We must obey the King."

The assistants, who had until then stood leaning on their swords, came forward at these words.

The Duke was sitting against the wall,

under the high window, with the table between him and Calavar. He started to his feet.

"I shall not move until the game is over. In half an hour my head shall be at your disposal."

"My lord," replied Calavar, "I respect you deeply, but I cannot grant you this request. I answer for your life with mine."

Don Gusman made a gesture of impatience, and pulling off his diamond

rings, he threw them at the executioner's feet.

"I mean to finish the game," he said, carelessly.

The jewels sparkled as they rolled and settled in the dust.

"My orders are imperative," cried Calavar, "and you must pardon us, noble Duke, if we have to use force; but the King's orders and the law of Spain must be carried out. Obey, then, and do not waste your last moments in a useless struggle. Speak to the Duke, my lord Bishop. Tell him to submit to his fate."

Ruy Lopez's reply was as prompt as it was decisive. He seized the axe which lay upon the block and swung it with both hands above his head.

"By Heaven!" he cried, "the Duke *shall* finish his game!"

Scared by the gesture which accompanied these words, Calavar drew back in such a fright that he stumbled and fell back on his companions. The swords flashed from their scabbards, and the band prepared for attack. But Ruy Lopez, who appeared to have put forth the strength of a Hercules, cast upon the ground his heavy wooden stool.

"The first of you who passes this limit dies!" he cried in a loud voice. "Courage, Duke!—to the attack! There are only four of these miscreants. The last desire of your Grace shall be gratified, were I to lose my life in the attempt. And you, wretched man, beware how you lay a finger upon a Bishop of the Church. Down with your swords and respect the Lord's anointed!" And Ruy Lopez continued to hurl forth, in a jargon of

Spanish and Latin, one of those formulas of excommunication and malediction which at that period acted so strongly upon the masses of the people.

The effect was prompt. The men stood rooted to the spot with terror, whilst Calavar, thinking that to kill a Bishop without a sealed order from the King was to run the risk of putting his life in jeopardy in this world and his soul in the next, avowed himself vanquished. He knew not what to do next. To rush with the news to the King, who was waiting impatiently for Don Guzman's head, was only to expose himself. To attack the prisoner and the priest would be too hazardous, for Ruy Lopez was a man of no mean strength. The position of affairs was critical. At last he decided to take the easiest way out of the difficulty—to wait.

"Will you promise me faithfully to give yourself up in half an hour?" he demanded of Don Gusman.

"I promise," replied the Duke.

"Play on, then," said the executioner.

The truce being thus concluded, the players returned to their seats and their game, whilst Calavar and his companions, forming themselves into a circle, stationed themselves round the two players. Calavar, who was himself a chess player, looked on with interest, and could not prevent himself from involuntarily considering each move the players made.

Don Gusman looked up for an instant upon the circle of faces which surrounded him, but his *sang froid* did not abandon him.

"Never have I played in the presence of such a noble company!" he cried. "Bear witness, rascals, that at least once in my life I have beaten Don Lopez." Then he returned to the game with a smile upon his lips. The Bishop gripped the handle of the axe which he still held in his hand.

"If I were only sure of escaping from this tigers' den," he thought, "I would break every head of the four of them."

### III.

IF three hours had dragged in the prisoner's cell, they had not passed more quickly in the Royal chamber of King Philip.

The King had finished his game with Don Ramirez de Biscay, and the nobles, still compelled from etiquette to remain standing, appeared almost ready to drop with fatigue, rendered still more painful from the weight of their armour.

Don Tarraxas stood motionless, with closed

eyes like one of those iron figures which ornamented the castles of the savage Goths. Young D'Ossuna, with drooping head, stood propped against a marble pillar, whilst King Philip strode impatiently about the apartment, only stopping at intervals to listen to some imaginary noise. According to the superstitious custom of the age, the King knelt for a few moments at the foot of a figure of the Virgin placed upon a porphyry pedestal to pray the Madonna to pardon him the deed of blood which was about to take place. Silence reigned, for no one, whatever his rank might be, dared to speak before his Sovereign without his commands.

As the King's eyes saw the last grain of sand fall in the hour-glass he uttered an exclamation of joy.

"The traitor dies!" he cried.

An almost inaudible murmur ran through the assembly.

"The hour is passed, Count of Biscay," said Philip, turning to Don Ramirez, "and with it your enemy."

"My enemy, sire?" asked Ramirez, affecting surprise.

"Why do you repeat my words, Count?" replied the King. "Were you not a rival to Don Gusman in the affections of Dona Estella, and can rivals be friends? Dona Estella shall be yours. This young girl will bring you her beauty and her fortune. I have not spoken of this to our Council, but my Royal word is pledged. If the ingratitude of Sovereigns is ever spoken of before you, Count, you will be able to reply that we did not forget the true friend of the King and of Spain who discovered the plot and the correspondence of Don Gusman with France."

Don Ramirez de Biscay seemed to listen to the King with uneasiness. He kept his eyes fixed upon the ground, as if he disliked to be thus praised in public. Then he made an effort to reply.

"Sire!" he said, "it was with great repugnance that I fulfilled such a painful duty"—he hesitated, and then was silent.

Tarraxas gave a slight start, whilst D'Ossuna struck sharply the pommel of his sword with his iron glove.

"Before Dona Estella shall belong to this man," thought D'Ossuna, "I will have vengeance or perish in the attempt. Tomorrow shall be the day of my revenge."

The King continued:—

"Your zeal, Don Ramirez, and your devotion must be rewarded. The saviour of our throne, and perhaps of our dynasty, merits a

particular gift. This morning I ordered you to make out some *lettres-patentes*, which confer upon you the rank of Duke and Governor of Valence. Are these ready to be signed?"

Don Ramirez grew pale with pleasure. He shook like an aspen and his eyes grew dim. But the King made an impatient movement, and the Count, drawing a roll of parchment hastily from his breast, presented it on his knees to the King.

"My first public duty to-day shall be to sign these papers," said the King. "The executioner has already punished treason; it is now time for the King to recompense fidelity."

The King unrolled the parchment and began to read. As he read, his face became convulsed with fury, and his eyes shot forth flames of wrath.

"By my father's soul!" he shouted; "what do I behold?"

#### IV.

THE game of chess was finished. Don Gusman had beaten Ruy Lopez, and his triumph was complete. He rose to his feet.

"I am now, as ever, ready to obey the wishes of my King," he said to Calavar.

The executioner understood him, and began to prepare the block. Whilst this was being done Don Gusman advanced towards the crucifix, and said in a firm voice:—

"Oh, Heaven! may this unjust and rash act which is about to take place fall upon the head of him who is the instigator of this treachery; but let

not my blood recoil upon the head of my King."

Ruy Lopez, crouching in a corner of the cell, and burying his face in his mantle, began to recite the prayers for the dying.

Calavar approached Don Gusman, and putting his hand upon the Duke's shoulder began to loosen his ruff. Don Gusman shrank back from the contact.

"Nothing that belongs to you, except this axe, shall touch a Gusman," he said, taking off his ruff himself and placing his head upon the block. "Strike!" he added, "I am ready!"

The executioner raised the axe—the King's justice was at last to be satisfied, when shouts, rapid footsteps and confused voices arrested the sweep of the executioner's arm.

The door gave way under the united efforts of a troop of armed men, and D'Ossuna, rushing into the cell, threw himself between the executioner and his victim. He was just in time.

"He lives!" cried Tarraxas.

"He is saved!" repeated D'Ossuna. "My beloved cousin, I never hoped to have seen you alive again. God in His mercy has not let the innocent perish for the guilty. God be praised!"

"God be praised!" echoed all the spectators, and louder than the rest rang out the voice of

Ruy Lopez.

"You have arrived in time, my friend," said Don Gusman to his cousin; "but now I shall have no longer strength to die," and he sank back fainting on the block. The shock had been too much for him.

Ruy Lopez seized the Duke in his arms, and, followed by all the nobles, bore him along the passages to the King's apartment. When Don Gusman opened his eyes he found himself in the midst of a circle of his friends, amongst which stood



the King, looking down upon him with an expression of joy.

Don Gusman could hardly believe his senses. From the axe and the block he had passed to the King's apartment. He did not understand why this change had taken place. He did not know that Don Ramirez, in giving his *lettres-patentes* to the King to sign, had, in his agitation, given him instead a paper containing a plot in which he schemed to get rid for ever of Don Gusman, a detested rival, and one of the firmest supporters of the throne. He was ignorant of all that had passed, and did not know how he had escaped from the clutches of the executioner. It was some time before everything could be made clear to him.

Three days afterwards, at the same hour as Gusman's miraculous delivery, Calavar beheaded Don Ramirez, Count of Biscay, traitor and false witness. Don Gusman was overwhelmed with congratulations on all sides. King Philip grasped him cordially by his hand.

"Gusman," he said, "I have been very unjust. I can never forgive my folly."

"Sire," replied the Duke, "let us speak of

it no more. Such words spoken by my King are worth a thousand lives."

But the King continued.

"I desire," he said, "that henceforth, in commemoration of your almost miraculous deliverance, you carry upon your escutcheon a silver axe emblazoned on an azure chess-board. This month we shall celebrate your marriage with Dona Estella. The marriage shall take place in our Escorial Palace."

Then he added, turning to Ruy Lopez:—

"I believe that the Church will possess a good servant in its new Bishop. You shall be consecrated Lord Prelate, with a scarlet robe, enriched with diamonds; that will be the recompense of your game of chess with Don Gusman."

"Sire," replied Don Lopez, "never before this day have I been satisfied to be checkmated."

The King smiled, and the courtiers followed his example.

"Now, my lords," continued Philip, "we invite you all to our Royal banquet. Let Don Gusman's seat be placed upon our right, and the Bishop of Segovia's on our left. Give me your arm, Don Gusman."



PHILIPPA