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Thomas Wright

Excerpt

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SORCERY AND MAGIC.

CHAPTER XVIII.

ADVENTURES OF DOCTOR TORRALVA.

SPAIN had not in the sixteenth century ceased to be celebrated for its magicians, as we learn from a variety of allusions in writers of that and the subsequent periods. We have seen that it was then the country from which magical rings were procured, and that it was equally with other lands the scene of treasure-hunting and of witchcraft. Nor was it wanting in great magicians. One of these gave considerable celebrity to the village of Bargota, near Viana, in the diocese of Calahorra. The curé of Bargota, who is well known to every reader of the glorious romance of Cervantes, astonished the territories of Rioja and Navarre by his extraordinary feats. Among other exploits he was in the habit of transporting himself to distant coun-

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tries, and returning in an incredibly short space of time. In this way he witnessed most of the remarkable occurrences of the wars in Italy at the commencement of the sixteenth century, in which Spain had a special interest, and he announced his intelligence the same day at Viana and Logroño. He was forewarned of each event by the demon, his familiar. The latter told him one day that the pope would that night die a violent death. It appears that his holiness had an intrigue with a lady whose husband held a high office in the papal court. The latter was afraid to complain openly, but he was none the less eager for revenge, and he joined with some desperate ruffians in a plot to take away the pope's life. The demon was of course rejoiced at the prospect of evil, but his friend the curé determined to cheat him and save the head of the church from the danger which threatened him. He pretended to be seized with an eager desire to proceed to Rome, that he might hear the rumours to which such a remarkable occurrence must give rise, and to witness the pope's funeral. The desire was no sooner expressed than it was gratified. On his arrival at the eternal city, the curé hastened to the papal palace, forced his way into the presence of the sovereign pontiff, and told him the whole particulars of the plot against his life, and thus defeated the designs of the conspirators. After having thus outwitted him, the curé wished to have no further intercourse with Satan; he made a voluntary confession to the pope, and in return for the signal service he had performed, his holiness gave him a full absolution. On his return, he was delivered, as a

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DOCTOR TORRALVA.

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matter of form, into the custody of the inquisitors of Logroño, but he was acquitted, and restored to his liberty.

There lived at the same time a magician who gained far greater celebrity than the curé of Barga, and who adopted the same extraordinary mode of travelling. This was doctor Eugenio Torralva, a physician in the family of the admiral of Castille.* Torralva was born at Cuença, but at the age of fifteen he was sent to Rome, where he became attached to the bishop of Volterra, Francesco Soderini, in the quality of a page. He now pursued with great earnestness the study of philosophy and medicine, under dom Cipion and the masters Mariana, Avanselo, and Maguera, until he obtained the degree of doctor in medicine. Under these teachers, Torralva learnt to have doubts of the immortality of the soul and the divinity of Christ, and made great advances in scepticism. About the year 1501, when he was already a practitioner in medicine at Rome, he formed a very intimate acquaintance with one master Alfonso, a man who had first quitted the Jewish faith for Mahomedanism, from which he had been converted to Christianity, and he had then finally adopted natural reli-

* Torralva, un grande hombre, y nigromante,
Medico, y familiar del almirante.

LUIS ÇAPATA, CARLO FAMOSO, canto xxviii.

The authority for the details of the history of this extraordinary personage is Llorente, who derived his information from the original papers relating to his trial, preserved in the archives of the inquisition. Part of the story is told rather differently in the metrical history of Çapata.

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gion or deism. This man's discourses overthrew the little faith that still remained in Torralva's mind, and he became a confirmed sceptic, although he appears to have concealed his opinions from the world, and perhaps he subsequently renounced them.

Among Torralva's friends at Rome was a dominican monk, called brother Pietro, who told him one day that he had in his service "an angel of the order of good spirits," named Zequiël, who was so powerful in the knowledge of the future and of hidden things that he was without his equal in the spiritual world, and of such a peculiar temper that, while other spirits made bargains with their employers before they would give them their services, Zequiël was so disinterested that he despised all considerations of this kind, and served only in friendship those who placed their confidence in him and deserved his attachment. The least attempt at restraint, brother Pietro said, would drive him away for ever.

Torralva's curiosity was excited, and when brother Pietro generously proposed to resign the familiar spirit to his friend, the offer was eagerly accepted. It appears that the person most concerned in this transaction made no objection to the change of masters, and at the summons of brother Pietro, Zequiël made his appearance, in the form of a fair young man, with light hair, and dressed in a flesh-coloured habit and black surtout. He addressed himself to Torralva, and said, "I will be yours as long as you live, and will follow you wherever you are obliged to go." From this time Zequiël ap-

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peared to Torralva at every change of the moon, and as often as the physician wanted his services, which was generally for the purpose of transporting him in a short space of time to distant places. In these interviews, the spirit took sometimes the semblance of a traveller, and sometimes that of a hermit. In his intercourse with Torralva, he said nothing contrary to Christianity, but accompanied him to church, and never counselled him to evil; from which circumstances the physician concluded that his familiar was a good angel. He always conversed in the Latin or Italian languages.

Rome had now become to Torralva a second country; but about the year 1502 he went to Spain, and subsequently he travelled through most parts of Italy, until he again fixed himself at Rome, under the protection of his old patron the bishop of Volterra, who had been made a cardinal on the 31st of May, 1503. With this introduction he soon obtained the favour of others of the cardinals, and rose to high repute for his skill in medicine. Having met at this time with some books on chiromancy, he became an eager student in that art, in the knowledge of which he subsequently surpassed most of his contemporaries. Torralva owed his medical knowledge partly to his familiar, who taught him the secret virtues of many plants, with which other physicians were not acquainted; and when the practitioner took exorbitant fees, Zequiél rebuked him, telling him that, since he had received his knowledge for nothing, he ought to impart it gratuitously. And when on several occasions Torralva was in want of money, he found a

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supply in his chamber, which he believed was furnished him by the good spirit, who, however, would never acknowledge that he was the secret benefactor who had relieved him from his embarrassment.

Torralva returned to Spain in 1510, and lived for some time at the court of Ferdinand the Catholic. One day Zequiél, whose informations were usually of a political character, told him that the king would soon receive disagreeable news. Torralva immediately communicated this piece of information to Ximenes de Cisneros, archbishop of Toledo, (who was subsequently raised to the dignity of cardinal, and made inquisitor general of Spain,) and the grand captain Gonzalo Fernandez de Cordova. The same day a courier arrived with dispatches from Africa, containing intelligence of the ill success of the expedition against the Moors, and of the death of don Garcia de Toledo, son of the duke of Alva, who commanded it.

Torralva seems to have made no secret of his intercourse with Zequiél. He had received his familiar from a monk, and the spirit is said to have shown himself to the cardinal of Volterra at the physician's wish; the latter now did not hesitate to acquaint the archbishop of Toledo and the grand captain how he came by his early intelligence. The archbishop earnestly desired to be permitted to have the same privilege as the Italian cardinal, and Torralva wished to gratify him, but Zequiél refused, though he softened his refusal by telling him to inform the archbishop that he would one day be a king, a prophecy which was believed

to be fulfilled when he was made absolute governor of Spain and the Indies.

The physician was frequently favoured with revelations of this kind. On one occasion, when Torralva was at Rome, Zequiél told him that his friend, Pietro Margano, would lose his life if he went out of the city that day. He was not able to see him in order to warn him of his danger, and Pietro went out of Rome and was assassinated. Zequiél told him on another occasion that the cardinal of Sienna would end his life in a tragical manner, which was verified in 1517, after the judgment of pope Leo X. against him. Torralva re-established himself in Rome in 1513, and soon after his arrival he had a great desire to see his intimate friend Thomas de Becara, who was then at Venice; upon which Zequiél took him thither and back in so short a space of time that his absence was not perceived by his friends in Rome.

It was not long before he again returned to Spain, where, about the year 1516, the cardinal of Santa Cruz, don Bernardino de Carbajal, consulted him on a subject of some importance. A Spanish lady named Rosales had complained to don Bernardino that her nights were disturbed by a phantom which appeared in the form of a murdered man. The cardinal had sent his physician, Dr. Morales, who watched at night with the lady, but saw no apparition, although she gave him notice of its appearance, and pointed out the place where it stood. Don Bernardino hoped to know more of the matter by the means of Torralva, and he requested him to go with the physician Morales to pass the night in

the lady's house. They went together, and an hour after midnight they heard the lady's cry of alarm, and went into her room, where, as before, Morales saw nothing. But Torralva, who was better acquainted with the spiritual world, perceived a figure resembling a dead man, behind which appeared another apparition in the form of a woman. He asked with a firm voice, "What dost thou seek here?" to which the apparition replied, "A treasure," and immediately disappeared. Torralva consulted Zequiél on this subject, and was informed that there was buried under the house the corpse of a man who had been stabbed to death with a poignard.

Torralva was soon at Rome again, and among his more intimate friends there was don Diego de Zuñiga, a relative of the duke of Bejar, and brother to don Antonio, grand prior of the order of St. John in Castile. In 1519, the two friends returned to Spain together. On their way, at Barcelonetta near Turin, while they were walking and conversing with the secretary, Azevedo, (who had been adjutant-general of the Spanish armies in Italy and Savoy,) Azevedo and Zuñiga thought they saw something indefinable pass by Torralva's side. He told them it was his angel Zequiél, who had approached him to whisper in his ear. Zuñiga had a great desire to see Zequiél, but Torralva could not prevail with the latter to show himself. At Barcelona, Torralva saw in the house of the canon Juan Garcia, a book of chiromancy, and in the margin of one of the leaves was written a magical process to enable a person to gain money at play. Zuñiga, who appears to have been a man of no very exalted morality,

wished to make himself master of this art, and Torralva copied the characters, and told his friend that he must write them with his own hand on paper, using for ink the blood of a bat, and that the writing must be performed on a Wednesday, because that day was dedicated to Mercury. This charm he was to wear on his person when at play.

In 1520, Torralva went again to Rome. Being at Valladolid, he told Diego de Zuñiga of his intentions, informing him that he had the means of travelling there with extraordinary rapidity, that he had but to place himself astride on a stick, and he was carried through the air, guided by a cloud of fire. On his arrival at Rome, he saw the cardinal of Volterra and the grand prior of the order of St. John, who were very earnest with him that he should give them his familiar spirit. Torralva entreated Zequiél to comply with their wish, but in vain. In 1525, Zequiél recommended him to return to Spain, assuring him that he would obtain the place of physician to the infanta Eleanora, queen dowager of Portugal, and subsequently consort of François I. of France. Torralva obeyed the suggestion of his monitor, and obtained the promised appointment.

It was after his return to Spain, and before he obtained this appointment, that a circumstance occurred which added greatly to Torralva's celebrity. On the evening of the fifth of May, of the year last-mentioned, (1525,) the physician received a visit from Zequiél, who told him that Rome would be taken next day by the troops of the emperor,* and

* Çapata, who gives an account of this voyage according to the popular tradition, makes Torralva leave the admiral's town

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Torralva desired to be taken to Rome to see this important event. They left Valladolid together at eleven o'clock at night, on foot, as if to take a walk; but at a short distance from the town Zequiél gave his companion a stick full of knots, and said, "Shut your eyes, and fear nothing; take this in your hand, and no harm will happen to you." After a little time, at Zequiél's bidding, Torralva opened his eyes, and he found himself so near the sea that he could have touched the water with his hand; and the black cloud which had previously enveloped him gave place immediately to so bright a light, that he was afraid

of Medina de Rioseco instead of Valladolid. He says that Torralva was sitting pensive and sad in his chamber contemplating the sky, when Zequiél appeared to him, who is described thus:—

"Zaqueil un familiar, qu'en la figura
De un viejo sano ant'el se aparecía,
Con un bordon, y en cuerpo en vestidura
Blanca que hasta el suelo le cubría:
Y con la barba blanca a la cintura,
Como assi tan pensoso estar le vía,
En la cerrada pieza en este instante
Se aparecío a Torralva nigromante."

CARLO FAMOSO, cant. xxx.

Zequiél asked him why he was pensive, to which he replied that he was puzzled with the stars. The familiar then informed him that the constable of Bourbon was before Rome, which would be taken next day.

"Havra sangre y crueldad en abundancia,
De que yo espero háver muy grand ganancia."

Çapata imagined that the familiar might be a demon, and that he would naturally delight in the horrors which attended the sack of Rome.