

The character of these books clearly indicated the bent of the old Moor's genius. He had evidently been an alchemist, perhaps a necromancer; for at that period it was by no means rare to find men, especially in Spain, who had studied the art of reducing the invisible powers into obedience to their behests.

His curiosity having been excited by the result of his first researches, Don Jose turned from the books to the manuscripts. Several that he ran through appeared to contain nothing but unimportant general instructions relative to the transmutation of metals; but finally he found, enclosed in a leaden case, a roll of parchment, the first line of which caught his attention. There were magical directions for accomplishing certain wonders, such as rendering oneself invisible, changing oneself into any desired shape, and traversing the greatest distances in a moment of time. At last he came to a paragraph the title of which ran thus:—

'A method by which one may render his wish sovereign law, and cause it to be instantly fulfilled.'

The young doctor sprang from his seat, almost wild with rapture.

'To render one's wish sovereign law—is not that the very acme of human felicity? But let us see if it is possible to secure this high happiness without endangering one's soul.'

He perused the directions given in the manuscript, and found in them nothing contrary to faith. To obtain the promised gift it was all sufficient to recite, before sleeping, a certain prayer, and to drink the contents of a little flask at the bottom of the leaden case.

Jose sought out this flask, and uncorked it. It contained a few drops of a dark and pleasantly fragrant liquor. He hesitated a moment, not that he doubted the efficacy of the formula or of the philtre, as his opinions on that subject were those of his age; but he wished to be certain that he was not self-deceived. So he reperused the lines already deciphered on the parchment-roll, and read, besides, a postscript which he had not at first observed. That postscript contained only these few words:

'Our weakness is a barrier wisely interposed by Almighty God to the promptings of our folly.'

'Fine, very fine,' he murmured; 'the old doctor, like most of his race, loved to season everything with moral maxims of general application; but, for the present, I have no need of his fine maxims. I prefer to try the efficacy of his prescription.'

So saying, he carried the flask to his lips, and recited the prayer. He had scarcely finished it when his eyes closed, and he fell asleep.

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Don Jose knew not how long this sleep had lasted, when, as it seemed to him, day broke through his dormer window. Arousing himself with difficulty, he remained for some time in that half-lucid state which precedes a complete awakening. His ideas at length grew clear. The sight of the parchment-roll and the empty flask recalled to him the events of the night previous. But, as he perceived no change either in himself or in the things around him, he was inclined to the belief that the Moorish doctor's prescription had failed.

'Well, well,' he said, with a sigh, 'it was, after all, a delusion. I awake in my garret, with my solitary doublet and my empty purse. Nevertheless, God knows if I have not while asleep wished to find it replenished this morning!'

As he finished, his eyes wandered to the rafter upon which he had hung his clothes, and settled upon the leathern purse depending from the pocket of his trousers. It was filled to bursting with gold pieces.

He sprang up eagerly, rubbed his eyes, stretched out his hand to grasp the purse, and emptied it on the bed. They were indeed gold coins! more gold coins than he had ever possessed at any one time previously. The philtre had not failed; he had henceforth the power of realising all his desires.

Eager to make a second experiment, he wished that his garret might be changed into a sumptuous apartment, and his threadbare garments into an entire new suit of black velvet lined with satin. His wish was scarcely formed when it was accomplished. He

next demanded the breakfast of a viceroy, to be served by little negroes in red livery. The breakfast already stood on a table at his side, and the little negroes came in with wines and chocolate. For some time he continued thus to test his new power in all its phases. At length, having become satisfied that his wishes were indeed as sovereign law, he darted out of the inn in an intoxication of rapture impossible to be described.

It was true, then, that this roll of parchment had in a few hours rendered him, humanly speaking, richer than the richest, mightier than the mightiest! He could do whatever he wished! What an infinity of power was comprised in those words, and how, as he repeated them again and again, he felt himself augmenting in his own estimation. How were they to be compared to him—the kings and the emperors of the world. . . ? They were all restrained by established rules, by the laws of the possible; whilst as for *him*, his domain was the illimitable realm of his own fancy! How fortunate that the Moorish doctor's parchment had not fallen into the hands of an ignorant man—an avaricious man—a man subject to the sway of his evil passions, but into those of a *hidalgo* reasonable in his desires, master of his passions, and admitted Doctor of the University of Salamanca! Humanity could lay aside its fears. Don Jose Fuez d'Alcantra respected himself too much to abuse his unlimited power. In according that power to him, Providence had estimated him at his true worth, and he was firmly resolved to justify that estimate by the propriety of his conduct.

He determined to give a first proof of it by moderating his own ambition. Placed in his situation, any other person would have wished to be king, with a palace, with courtiers, and an army. But Don Jose despised greatness. He would content himself with purchasing the estates of Don Alonzo Mendos and with living there, like a sincere and modest philosopher, the happy possessor of some millions, the title of count, and the privileges of a grandee of Spain.

Having thus decided on his future aspirations, he set forward without delay towards the town of Argelles, where the sale of the castle was to be held.

The road he took led as well to Toro, and was thronged with peasants, muleteers, and merchants, journeying thither. Casting his eye about him as he trudged along, Don Jose made upon each of his fellow-travellers some trifling experiment of his wonderful faculty. To the young girl who tripped up to him with a smile and courteous salute, he wished a happy meeting with her sweetheart; to the old man tottering painfully over the weary road, a place in the passing coach; to the poor mendicant, a piece of gold suddenly turning up beneath his feet: and all was immediately accomplished. Encouraged by this success, Don Jose exchanged the part of guardian angel for that of the archangel. After having bestowed succour, he desired to dispense justice. And so he punished the swaggering soldier with a gust of wind which wafted his gaudy hat into the river; the muleteer lavish of his whip, by frightening his mules and dispersing them over the fields; the haughty official in his coach, who seemed to him to look too disdainfully on the dusty foot-passengers, by roughly shattering the wheel that upheld his arrogance. In all this, Don Jose, was obedient to the prompting of his first impressions, distributing rewards and punishments as the *appearance* of this or that happened to please or displease him, and dealing justice by inspiration, as it were.

At length he came in sight of the Castle de Mendos, the magnificent woodlands appertaining to which bordered the road. To avoid the sun, which was becoming uncomfortably warm, he entered a shady avenue with which he was acquainted, and by which the village could be reached as well as by the main road.

It was one of the loveliest days of summer. The hedgerows were covered with flowers, and the forest rang with the thousand songs of the birds. Some woodcutters, camped in their huts of green boughs, were chopping up a felled tree, and converting it into a variety of household utensils. Don Jose determined that, when the land should be his own, he would regulate the execution of this particular branch of