

JOSE MARIA, THE GREAT SPANISH ROBBER.

The model of Spanish robbers, the Robin Hood of our time, is the famous Jose Maria, surnamed *El Tempranico*; this is the man that is everywhere talked of from Madrid to Seville, and from Seville to Malaga. Handsome, brave and courteous as a robber can be, such is Jose Maria. If he stops a diligence, he gives his hand to the lady to descend, and takes care that they are conveniently seated in the shade, for it is by day that most of his exploits are performed. Never an oath, never a coarse expression; on the contrary, a quite respectful deference, and a natural politeness which never fails. Does he remove a ring from a lady's finger—"Ah, madam," he exclaims, "so beautiful a hand has no need of ornaments." And while slipping the ring from the finger, he kisses the hand with an air that would make one believe, to quote the words of a Spanish lady, that the kiss was worth more than the ring. I have been assured that he always leaves travellers enough of money to arrive at the nearest town, and that he has never refused any one permission to retain a *bijou* which associations render precious.

Jose Maria has been described to me as a tall young man of twenty years, well made, with a frank and smiling physiognomy, teeth white as pearls, and remarkably expressive eyes. He generally wears a very rich costume. His linen is always of a brilliant whiteness, and his hands would do honor to a Paris or London beau. He was destined by his parents for the church, and studied theology at the University of Granada; but this profession was not great enough for him. An affair of love obliged him to take his flight, and to exile himself to Gibraltar; there, when money became scarce, he bargained with an English merchant to smuggle in a large quantity of prohibited merchandise. He was betrayed by a man whom he had made a participator in the enterprise. The custom-house officers knew the route which he was to take, and lay in ambush by the way; all the mules which he had conducted were taken, but he did not abandon them until after a hard fight, in which he killed or wounded several officers. From that moment he had no other resource than to lay travellers under tribute.

A constant good fortune has accompanied him, even to this day. A price is fixed upon his head; a description of his person is attached to the gate of all the towns, with the promise of eight thousand reals to him who will deliver him up, dead or alive. Nevertheless, Jose Maria continues his dangerous occupation with impunity, and the scene of his operations extend from the frontier of Portugal to the realm of Mercia. His band is not numerous, but is composed of men whose fidelity and resolution have been long proved. One day, at the head of a dozen picked men, he surprised, at the Venta de Gazin, seventy royalist volunteers who had been sent in his pursuit. He was then slowly returning to the mountains, driving before him two mules loaded with the seventy carbines which he had taken off as a trophy.

Wonders are related of his skill at firearms. On a horse, at a full gallop, he pierces the trunk of an olive tree at a hundred paces. The following narrative will make known his skill and generosity:—

A Captain Castro, an officer full of courage and activity, who pursued the robbers, it is said, as much to satisfy a personal vengeance as to perform his military duty, learned by one of his spies that Jose Maria might be found at a certain day in a remote aldea. Castro, on the day indicated, mounts his horse, and to avoid suspicion in taking too many over the country, orders to follow him only four lancers. Notwithstanding the precautions, however, which he used to conceal his expedition, he could not prevent it from reaching the ear of Jose Maria. At the moment when Castro, having passed the deep gorge, entered the valley where the aldea of the enemy was situated, twelve well-mounted cavalry appeared at once on his flank, and intercepted his only retreat, which was by the gorge. The lancers thought themselves lost. A man, mounted on a bay horse, advanced on gallop from the troop of

robbers, and stops his horse short at a hundred paces from Castro.

"Jose Maria is never surprised," cried he, "Captain Castro, what have I done that you wish to give me up to justice? I could slay you, but men of courage have become scarce, and I grant you your life. Here is a souvenir which will teach you to avoid me. At your cap!"

So saying he takes aim at him, and a ball passes through the top of the Captain's cap; then turned and departed with his men.

Here is another example of his courtesy—wedding was being celebrated on a farm near Andujar. The married pair had already received the compliments of their friends, and were about sitting down to table under a large tree before the door of the house; the performances of jessamine and orange flowers mingled agreeably with the more substantial odors which exalted from the several dishes that caused the table to bend beneath their weight. All at once a man appeared on horseback, coming from a thicket at pistol shot from the house. The unknown leaped to the ground, saluted the guests with his hand, and led his horse to the stable. He came unexpectedly, but in Spain every passer-by is welcome to the feast; besides the stranger, by his habiliments, seemed to be a man of importance. The husband immediately followed him to invite him to the repast. While every one was asking in a low tone who the stranger was, the notary of Andujar, who assisted at the celebration, became as pale as death. He tried to rise from the seat he occupied by the side of his bride, but his legs refused to support him. One of the guests who had been for some time suspected of engaging in smuggling, approached the bride.

"It is Jose Maria!" said he. "I am much deceived, or he comes here to do some mischief. It is the notary he will aim at. What shall we do? How shall he escape?"

"Impossible! Jose Maria would soon overtake him!"

"Arrest the robber."

"But his band is doubtless in the neighborhood; besides, he carries pistols in his girdle, and his dagger never leaves him."

"But, Mr. Notary, what, then, have you done?"

Some one murmured, in a low tone, that the notary had said to his farmer, two months before, that if ever Jose Maria came to ask a drink of him, he should put a dram of arsenic in his wine.

They were still deliberating, when the unknown appeared, followed by the husband. Beyond a doubt that it was Jose Maria. As he passed he cast a tiger's glance at the notary, who began to tremble as if he had been seized with an ague fit; then he gracefully saluted the bride, and asked permission to dance with her at her wedding. She took care not to refuse him, or put on an unpleasant air. Jose Maria then took a small stool, drew near to the table, and familiarly seated himself beside the bride, between her and the notary, who seemed every moment to be on the point of fainting. The feast began. Jose Maria was full of attentions to his neighbor. When the extra wine was served, the bride, taking a glass of Montilla (which, in my opinion, is much better than the Xeres), touched to her lips, and then presented it to the robber. This is a courtesy which one is accustomed to show to those whom he esteems. It is called *una fineza*; unfortunately this usage is unknown in good society, which endeavors here, as elsewhere, to remove itself from all natural customs. Jose Maria took the glass, thanked her with great gallantry, and declared to the bride that he besought her to regard him as her servant, and that he would joyfully do whatever she felt inclined to command. Then the lady, trembling and timidly bending over to the ear of her terrible neighbor, whispered:

"Grant me a favor?"

"A thousand!" exclaimed Jose Maria. "Forget, I conjure you, the evil feelings which you have probably brought hither. Promise me that, for the love of me, you will pardon your enemies, and that nothing unpleasant shall be connected with my marriage feast."

"Notary," said Jose Maria, turning to the noted man of law, "thank madame. Had it not been for her I would have

slain you before you could have digested your dinner. Fear no more. I will do you no harm." And holding towards him a glass of wine he added, with a somewhat wicked smile, "come notary, to my health! This wine is good and is not poisoned!"

The poor notary felt as if he were swallowing a hundred pins.

"Come, friends, said the robber, 'now for some sport! Long live the bride!'—And rising quickly he ran to seek the bride, and began to improvise a couplet in honor of the newly-married couple.

In a word, during the rest of the dinner and the ball which followed, he showed himself so amiable, that the women had tears in their eyes when they thought that so charming a gallant might end his days on the gallows. He danced, he sang, he contributed to the merriment in every way. Towards midnight a little girl of twelve years, half covered with rags, approached Jose Maria, and said some words to him in the patois of the gypsies. The robber started up; he ran to the stable, from which he soon returned, leading his horse. Then, advancing to the bride, with the rein hanging on his arm, he said:—

"Adieu, child of my heart. Never shall I forget the moments which I have passed with you. They are the happiest I have seen for many years. Be kind enough to accept this trifle from a poor outlaw, who wishes he had a mine to offer you."

"Jose Maria," said the bride, "as long as there is bread in this house, you shall have a share of it."

The robber shook hands with all the guests, even with the notary, and embraced the ladies, then nimbly leaping to the saddle, returned to the mountain.—Not before did the notary breathe freely. An hour afterwards a detachment of miguelets (special guard) arrived, but no one had seen the man of whom they were in search.

The Spanish people, who know by heart the romance of Renaud de Montauban, must necessarily feel much interested in the only man who, in an age as prosaic as ours, revives the virtues of chivalric braves. Another motive contributes besides to increase the popularity of Jose Maria—he is extremely generous. Money it costs him very little to obtain, and he shares it liberally with the unfortunate. Never, it is said, does a man address himself to him without receiving abundant alms. A muleteer told me that having lost a mule, which constituted his whole fortune, he was on the point of casting himself headlong into the Guadalquivir, when a box containing six ounces of gold was remitted to his wife from an unknown source. He doubted not that it was a present from Jose Maria, to whom he had pointed out a ford one day when he was closely pursued by the miguelets.

A witty fellow, at a little ale house one day, called for a glass of the refreshing beverage. After drinking it, he said to the landlady, with the air of one who has some great secret to communicate, "Misses, I'll tell you how you can sell a great deal more than you do." "How is that?" she asked. "Don't sell so much froth," was the reply.

"Talkin' of law," says Pompey, "make me tink of what de mortal Cato, who lib most a thousand year ago, once said: 'De law is like a groun' glass winder, dat give light enuff to light us poor mortals in de dark passage of life, but it would puzzle de debble himself to see troo it.'"

A person complained to Dr. Franklin of having been insulted by one who called him a scoundrel. "Ah," replied the doctor; "and what did you call him?" "Why," said he, "I called him a scoundrel, too." "Well," resumed Franklin, "I presume you both spoke the truth."

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