

THE VEIL.

("Qu'avez-vous, mes frères?")

[XI., September, 18288.]

"Have you prayed tonight, Desdemona?"

THE SISTER

What has happened, my brothers? Your spirit to-day

Some secret sorrow damps

There's a cloud on your brow. What has happened? Oh, say,

For your eyeballs glare out with a sinister ray

Like the light of funeral lamps.

And the blades of your poniards are half unsheathed

In your belt--and ye frown on me!

There's a woe untold, there's a pang unbreathed

In your bosom, my brothers three!

ELDEST BROTHER.

Gulnara, make answer! Hast thou, since the dawn,

To the eye of a stranger thy veil withdrawn?

THE SISTER.

As I came, oh, my brother! at noon--from the bath--

As I came--it was noon, my lords--

And your sister had then, as she constantly hath,

Drawn her veil close around her, aware that the path

Is beset by these foreign hordes.

But the weight of the noonday's sultry hour

Near the mosque was so oppressive

That--forgetting a moment the eye of the Giaour--

I yielded to th' heat excessive.

SECOND BROTHER.

Gulnara, make answer! Whom, then, hast thou seen,

In a turban of white and a caftan of green?

THE SISTER.

Nay, he might have been there; but I muffled me so,

He could scarcely have seen my figure.--

But why to your sister thus dark do you grow?

What words to yourselves do you mutter thus low,

Of "blood" and "an intriguer"?

Oh! ye cannot of murder bring down the red guilt

On your souls, my brothers, surely!

Though I fear--from the hands that are chafing the hilt,
And the hints you give obscurely.

THIRD BROTHER.

Gulnara, this evening when sank the red sun,
Didst thou mark how like blood in descending it shone?

THE SISTER.

Mercy! Allah! have pity! oh, spare!
See! I cling to your knees repenting!
Kind brothers, forgive me! for mercy, forbear!
Be appeased at the cry of a sister's despair,
For our mother's sake relenting.
O God! must I die? They are deaf to my cries!
Their sister's life-blood shedding;
They have stabbed me each one--I faint--o'er my eyes
A veil of Death is spreading!

THE BROTHERS.

Gulnara, farewell! take that veil; 'tis the gift
Of thy brothers--a veil thou wilt never lift!

"FATHER PROUT" (FRANK S. MAHONY).