

# **LEGENDS, TALES AND POEMS**

BY

GUSTAVO ADOLFO BECQUER

EDITED

WITH INTRODUCTION, NOTES AND VOCABULARY

BY

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*Justus Stoffe Bergius*

[Illustration: After an etching by B. Maura]

TO  
**MY MOTHER**

## PREFACE

In preparing this collection of Becquer's legends, tales, and short poems, which is the only annotated edition of this author's works that has been published as yet for English-speaking students, the editor has aimed to give to our schools and colleges a book that may serve, not only as a reader for first or second year classes, but also as an introduction to Spanish literature, through the works of one of the most original and charming authors of the Spanish Romantic school.

Fondness for good literature should be stimulated from the very first, and the quaint tales and legends of old Spain contained in this edition, told, as they are, in a most fascinating style, are well adapted to captivate the student's interest and to lead him to investigate further the rich mine of Spanish literature. Becquer's poetry is no less pleasing than his prose, and not much more difficult to read. With the aid of the ample treatise on Spanish versification contained in the introduction, the student will be enabled to appreciate the harmony and rhythm of Becquer's verse, and in all subsequent reading of Spanish poetry he will find this treatise a convenient and valuable work of reference.

The Life of Becquer, though concise, is perhaps the most complete that has yet been published, for it embodies all the data given by previous biographers and a certain number of facts gathered by the writer at the time of his last visit to Spain (in 1905–1906), from friends of Becquer who were then living.

The vocabulary has been made sufficiently complete to free the notes from that too frequent translation of words or phrases which often encumbers them.

The notes have been printed in the only convenient place for them, at the bottom of each page, and will be found to be as complete and definite as possible on geographical, biographical, historical, or other points that may

not be familiar to the student or the teacher. All grammatical or syntactical matter, unless of a difficult or peculiar character, has been omitted, while the literary citations that abound will, it is hoped, stimulate the student to do further reading and to make literary comparisons of his own.

It remains for the editor to express his profound gratitude to the following gentlemen for their aid in collecting facts regarding Becquer and for their encouragement of this work: the Exc<sup>mo</sup> Sr. Conde de las Navas, the Exc<sup>mo</sup> Sr. Licenciado D. Jose Gestoso y Perez, and the Exc<sup>mo</sup> Sr. D. Francisco de Laiglesia. It is his pleasure also to convey his thanks to Professor George L. Burr of Cornell University for aid in certain of the historical notes, and most especially to gratefully acknowledge his indebtedness to the aid, or rather collaboration, of Mr. Arthur Gordon of Cornell University, and Mr. W. R. Price of the High School of Commerce, New York City.

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# **INTRODUCTION**

## LIFE OF BECQUER

"In Seville, along the Guadalquivir, and close to the bank that leads to the convent of San Jerónimo, may be found a kind of lagoon, which fertilizes a miniature valley formed by the natural slope of the bank, at that point very high and steep. Two or three leafy white poplars, intertwining their branches, protect the spot from the rays of the sun, which rarely succeeds in slipping through them. Their leaves produce a soft and pleasing murmur as the wind stirs them and causes them to appear now silver, now green, according to the point from which it blows. A willow bathes its roots in the current of the stream, toward which it leans as though bowed by an invisible weight, and all about are multitudes of reeds and yellow lilies, such as grow spontaneously at the edges of springs and streams.

"When I was a boy of fourteen or fifteen, and my soul was overflowing with numberless longings, with pure thoughts and with that infinite hope that is the most precious jewel of youth, when I deemed myself a poet, when my imagination was full of those pleasing tales of the classic world, and Rioja in his *silvas* to the flowers, Herrera in his tender elegies, and all my Seville singers, the Penates of my special literature, spoke to me continually of the majestic Bétis, the river of nymphs, naiads, and poets, which, crowned with belfries and laurels, flows to the sea from a crystal amphora, how often, absorbed in the contemplation of my childish dreams, I would go and sit upon its bank, and there, where the poplars protected me with their shadow, would give rein to my fancies, and conjure up one of those impossible dreams in which the very skeleton of death appeared before my eyes in splendid, fascinating garb! I used to dream then of a happy, independent life, like that of the bird, which is born to sing, and receives its food from God. I used to dream of that tranquil life of the poet, which glows with a soft light from generation to generation. I used to dream that the city that saw my birth would one day swell with pride at my name, adding it to the brilliant list of her illustrious sons, and, when death should



put an end to my existence, that they would lay me down to dream the golden dream of immortality on the banks of the Bétis, whose praises I should have sung in splendid odes, and in that very spot where I used to go so often to hear the sweet murmur of its waves. A white stone with a cross and my name should be my only monument.

"The white poplars, swaying night and day above my grave, should seem to utter prayers for my soul in the rustling of their green and silver leaves. In them the birds should come and nest, that they might sing at dawn a joyous hymn to the resurrection of the spirit to regions more serene. The willow, covering the spot with floating shadows, should lend to it its own vague sadness, as it bent and shed about its soft, wan leaves, as if to protect and to caress my mortal spoils. The river, too, which in flood tide might almost come and kiss the border of the slab o'ergrown with reeds, should lull my sleep with pleasant music. And when some time had passed, and patches of moss had begun to spread over the stone, a dense growth of wild morning-glories, of those blue morning-glories with a disk of carmine in the center, which I loved so much, should grow up by its side, twining through its crevices and clothing it with their broad transparent leaves, which, by I know not what mystery, have the form of hearts. Golden insects with wings of light, whose buzzing lulls to sleep on heated afternoons, should come and hover round their chalices, and one would be obliged to draw aside the leafy curtain to read my name, now blurred by time and moisture. But why should my name be read? Who would not know that I was sleeping there?"[1]

[Footnote 1: *Obras de Gustavo A. Becquer*, Madrid, 1898, vol. II, pp. 242–245. This edition will be understood hereafter in all references to the works of Becquer.]

So mused the poet Becquer[1] in the golden days of his youth, when his veins were swelling with health, when his heart was fired with ambition, and in his ears was ringing the joyous invitation of his muse.

[Footnote 1: The name is spelled indifferently with or without accent—*Bécquer* or *Becquer*. In the choice of the latter spelling, the authority of his principal biographer, Ramón Rodríguez Correa, has been followed.]

His knowledge of the world was confined to the enchanting city of his birth. Her gems of art and architecture had wrought themselves into the fabric of his dreams; he had mused in her palm-gardens, worshiped in her temples, and dreamed long afternoons on the shores of her historic river. He knew nothing of the cold, prosaic world of selfish interests. The time had not yet come when, in bitterness of spirit, and wrapping his mantle about him against the chill wind of indifference, he should say: "To-day my sole ambition is to be a supernumerary in the vast human comedy, and when my silent role is ended, to withdraw behind the scenes, neither hissed nor applauded, making my exit unnoticed." [1]

[Footnote 1: *Obras*, vol. II, p. 251.]

Indeed, in those later days of trial and hardship, he would often look out wearily upon Madrid, the city of his adoption, the scene of his crushing struggle with necessity, as it lay outspread before his windows,—"dirty, black, and ugly as a fleshless skeleton, shivering under its immense shroud of snow," [1] and in his mind he would conjure up the city of his youth, his ever cherished Seville, "with her *Giralda* of lacework, mirrored in the trembling Guadalquivir, with her narrow and tortuous Moorish streets, in which one fancies still he hears the strange cracking sound of the walk of the Justiciary King; Seville, with her barred windows and her love-songs, her iron door-screens and her night watchmen, her altar-pieces and her stories, her brawls and her music, her tranquil nights and her fiery afternoons, her rosy dawns and her blue twilights; Seville, with all the traditions that twenty centuries have heaped upon her brow, with all the pomp and splendor of her southern nature." [2] No words of praise seemed too glowing for her ardent lover.

[Footnote 1: *Ibid.*, vol. III, p. iii.]

[Footnote 2: *Obras*, vol. III, pp. 109–110.]

By some strange mystery, however, it had been decreed by fate that he should only meet with disappointment in every object of his love. The city of his birth was no exception to the rule: since Becquer's death it has

made but little effort to requite his deep devotion or satisfy his youthful dreams. You may search "the bank of the Guadalquivir that leads to the ruined convent of San Jerónimo," you may spy among the silvery poplars or the willows growing there, you may thrust aside the reeds and yellow lilies or the tangled growth of morning-glories, but all in vain—no "white stone with a cross" appears. You may wander through the city's many churches, but no tomb to the illustrious poet will you find, no monument in any square. His body sleeps well-nigh forgotten in the cemetery of San Nicolás in Madrid.

If you will turn your steps, however, to the *barrio* of Seville in which the celebrated D. Miguel de Mañara, the original type of *Juan Tenorio* and the *Estudiante de Salamanca*, felt the mysterious blow and saw his own funeral train file by, and will enter the little street of the Conde de Barajas, you will find on the facade of the house No. 26 a modest but tasteful tablet bearing the words

EN ESTA CASA NACIÓ  
GUSTAVO ADOLFO  
BECQUER  
XVII FEBRERO MDCCCXXXVI.[1]

[Footnote 1: This memorial, which was uncovered on January 10th, 1886, is due to a little group of Becquer's admirers, and especially to the inspiration of a young Argentine poet, Román García Pereira (whose *Canto á Becquer*, published in *La Ilustración Artística*, Barcelona, December 27, 1886, is a tribute worthy of the poet who inspired it), and to the personal efforts of the illustrious Seville scholar, Don José Gestoso y Pérez. It is only fair to add here that there is also an inferior street in Seville named for Becquer.]

Here Gustavo Adolfo Dominguez Becquer opened his eyes upon this inhospitable world. Eight days later he was baptized in the church of San Lorenzo.[1] He was one of a family of eight sons, Eduardo, Estanislao, Valeriano, Gustavo Adolfo, Alfredo, Ricardo, Jorge, and Jose. His father, Don Jose Dominguez Becquer, was a well-known Seville genre painter. He died when Gustavo was but a child of five, too young to be taught the principles of his art; but he nevertheless bequeathed to him the artistic temperament that was so dominant a trait in the poet's genius. Becquer's

mother, Doña Joaquina, survived his father but a short time, and left her children orphaned while they were yet very young. Gustavo was but nine and a half years old at the time of his mother's death. Fortunately an old and childless uncle, D. Juan Vargas, took charge of the motherless boys until they could find homes or employment.

[Footnote 1: The following is a copy of his baptismal record:

"En jueves 25 de Febrero de 1836 años D. Antonio Rodriguez Arenas Pbro. con licencia del infrascrito Cura de la Parroquial de Sn. Lorenzo de Sevilla: bautizó solemnemente á Gustavo Adolfo que nació en 17 de dicho mes y año hijo de José Dominguez Vequer (*sic*) y Doña Juaquina (*sic*) Bastida su legitima mujer. Fué su madrina Doña Manuela Monchay vecina de la collación de Sn. Miguel á la que se advirtió el parentesco espiritual y obligaciones y para verdad lo firmé.—Antonio Lucena Cura." See *La Ilustración Artística*, Barcelona, December 27, 1886, pp. 363–366. Citations from this periodical will hereafter refer to the issue of this date.]

Gustavo Adolfo received his first instruction at the College of San Antonio Abad. After the loss of his mother his uncle procured for him admission to the College of San Telmo, a training school for navigators, situated on the banks of the Guadalquivir in the edifice that later became the palace of the Dukes of Montpensier. This establishment had been founded in 1681 in the ancient suburb of Marruecos as a reorganization of the famous *Escuela de Mareantes* (navigators) of Triana. The Government bore the cost of maintenance and instruction of the pupils of this school, to which were admitted only poor and orphaned boys of noble extraction. Gustavo fulfilled all these requirements. Indeed, his family, which had come to Seville at the close of the sixteenth century or at the beginning of the seventeenth century, from Flanders, was one of the most distinguished of the town. It had even counted among its illustrious members a Seville Veinticuatro, and no one who was unable to present proof of noble lineage could aspire to that distinction.[1]

[Footnote 1: "Don Martín Becquer, *mayorazgo* and *Veinticuatro*, of Seville, native of Flanders, married Doña Úrsula Díez de Tejada. Born to them were Don Juan and Doña Mencía Becquer. The latter married Don Julián Dominguez, by whom she had a son Don Antonio Dominguez y Becquer, who in turn contracted marriage with Doña Maria Antonia Insausti y Bausa. Their son was Don Jose Dominguez Insausti y Bausa, husband of Doña Joaquina Bastida y Vargas, and father of the poet Becquer." The arms of the family "were

a shield of azure with a chevron of gold, charged with five stars of azure, two leaves of clover in gold in the upper corners of the shield, and in the point a crown of gold." The language of the original is not technical, and I have translated literally. See *Carta á M. Achille Fouquier*, by D. Jose Gestoso y Pérez, in *La Ilustración Artística*, pp. 363–366.]

Among the students of San Telmo there was one, Narciso Campillo, for whom Gustavo felt a special friendship,—a lad whose literary tastes, like his own, had developed early, and who was destined, later on, to occupy no mean position in the field of letters. Writing of those days of his youth, Señor Campillo says: "Our childhood friendship was strengthened by our life in common, wearing as we did the same uniform, eating at the same table, and sleeping in an immense hall, whose arches, columns, and melancholy lamps, suspended at intervals, I can see before me still.

"I enjoy recalling this epoch of our first literary utterance (*vagido*), and I say *our*, for when he was but ten years old and I eleven, we composed and presented in the aforesaid school (San Telmo) a fearful and extravagant drama, which, if my memory serves me right, was entitled *Los Conjurados* ('The Conspirators'). We likewise began a novel. I wonder at the confidence with which these two children, so ignorant in all respects, launched forth upon the two literary lines that require most knowledge of man, society, and life. The time was yet to come when by dint of painful struggles and hard trials they should possess that knowledge, as difficult to gain as it is bitter!"[1]

[Footnote 1: Article on Gustavo Adolfo Becquer, by Narciso Campillo, in *La Ilustración Artística*, pp. 358–360]

Shortly after the matriculation of young Becquer, the College of San Telmo was suppressed by royal orders, and the lad found himself in the streets. He was then received into the home of his godmother, Doña Manuela Monchay, who was a woman of kind heart and much intelligence. She possessed a fair library, which was put at the disposal of the boy; and here he gratified his love for reading, and perfected his literary taste. Two works that had considerable influence upon him at this time were the *Odes of Horace*, translated by P. Urbano Campos, and the poems of Zorrilla. He began to write verses of his own, but these he later burned.

"In 1849," says Señor Campillo, "there were two noteworthy painters in Seville, whose studios were open to and frequented by numerous students, future rivals, each in his own imagination, of the glories of Velasquez and Murillo. One of these studios, situated in the same building as the Museo de Pinturas, was that of D. Antonio Cabral Bejarano, a man not to be forgotten for his talent, and perhaps also for his wit, the delight of those who knew him. The other, situated in an upper room of the Moorish *alcázar de Abdelasis*, near the patio *de Banderas*, was directed by D. Joaquin Dominguez Becquer, a brother and disciple of D. Jose, Gustavo's father." [1]

[Footnote 1: Narciso Campillo, *loc. cit.*]

In spite of this relationship, Gustavo Adolfo, at the age of fourteen, entered the studio of Bejarano. There he remained for two years, practicing the art of drawing, for which he had a natural talent. He then came under the instruction of his uncle, who, judging that his nephew was even better qualified for a literary than for an artistic career, advised him to follow the former, and procured for him a few Latin lessons. Meanwhile Gustavo continued to enlarge his poetical horizon by reading from the great poets and by the contemplation of the beauties of nature. With his friend Campillo he composed the first three cantos of a poem entitled *La Conquista de Sevilla*, and with him he wandered about the beautiful city of his birth and dreamed such dreams as the one with which this Introduction begins.

Gustavo's godmother, who was a woman in easy circumstances and without children or near relatives, would doubtless have bequeathed to him her property had he fulfilled her wishes and settled down to an honorable mercantile life. But the child, who had learned to draw and to compose almost before he could write, and who had always paled before the simplest problem of arithmetic, could not reconcile himself to such a life. The artist within him rebelled, and at the age of seventeen and a half, feeling the attraction of the capital strong upon him, he bade farewell to the friends of his youth and set out to seek for fame and fortune. It was in

the autumn of 1854 that Becquer arrived in Madrid, "with empty pockets, but with a head full of treasures that were not, alas, to enrich him." Here he encountered an indifference that he had not dreamed of; and here he remained in the shadow of oblivion, eking out a miserable existence of physical as well as mental suffering, in utter loneliness of spirit, until he was joined in 1856 by one who came to be his lifelong friend and first biographer—Ramón Rodríguez Correa, who had come to the capital with the same aims as Becquer, and whose robust health and jovial temperament appealed singularly to the sad and ailing dreamer. The new-found friend proved indeed a godsend, for when, in 1857, Gustavo was suffering from a terrible illness, Correa, while attending him, chanced to fall upon a writing entitled *El caudillo de las manos rojas, tradición india*. Charmed by its originality in form and conception, he urged his friend to publish it. Becquer acquiesced, and the story was accepted and published by *La Crónica*. The joy of this first success, and perhaps the material aid that resulted, must have had a great deal to do with Gustavo's speedy recovery.

A short time after this he entered with his friend Correa the office of the *Dirección de Bienes Nacionales* as copyist, at the munificent salary of some \$150 a year. The employment was decidedly contrary to his taste, and to amuse his tedium he used often to sketch or read from his favorite poets. One day, as he was busy sketching, the Director entered, and, seeing a group about Gustavo's chair,—for the young artist's sketches were eagerly awaited and claimed by his admiring associates,—stole up from behind and asked, "What is this?" Gustavo, suspecting nothing, went on with his sketch, and answered in a natural tone, "This is Ophelia, plucking the leaves from her garland. That old codger is a grave-digger. Over there..." At this, noticing that every one had risen, and that universal silence reigned, Becquer slowly turned his head. "Here is one too many," said the Director, and the artist was dismissed that very day.

It cannot be said that he received the news of his dismissal regretfully, for he had accepted the position largely to please a sympathetic friend. Slight

as was the remuneration, however, it had aided him to live; and when this resource was removed, Gustavo was again obliged to depend upon his wits. His skill with the brush served him in good stead at this time, and he earned a little money by aiding a painter who had been employed by the Marquis of Remisa to decorate his palace, but who could not do the figures in the fresco.

In 1857, together with other *littérateurs*, Becquer undertook the preparation and direction of a work entitled *Historia de los Templos de España*.<sup>[1]</sup> Like so many of the author's plans, this work remained unfinished; but from the single volume that appeared can be seen how vast was the scope of the work, and how scholarly its execution. Gustavo is himself the author of some of the best pages contained in the volume, as, for example, those of the Introduction and of the chapters on *San Juan de los Reyes*. He is likewise the author of many of the excellent sketches that adorn the work, notably that of the *portada*. These sketches, as well as others published elsewhere, show how eminent his work as artist would have been, had he decided to cultivate that field instead of literature.

*[Footnote 1: The complete title of the work is Historia de los Templos de España, publicada bajo la protección de SS. MM. AA. y muy reverendos señores arzobispos y obispos—dirigida por D. Juan de la Puerta Vizcaino y D. Gustavo Adolfo Becquer. Tomo I, Madrid, 1857. Imprenta y Estereotipia Española de los Señores Nieto y Compañía.]*

Essentially an artist in temperament, he viewed all things from the artist's standpoint. His distaste for politics was strong, and his lack of interest in political intrigues was profound. "His artistic soul, nurtured in the illustrious literary school of Seville," says Correa, "and developed amidst Gothic Cathedrals, lacy Moorish and stained-glass windows, was at ease only in the field of tradition. He felt at home in a complete civilization, like that of the Middle Ages, and his artisticopolitical ideas and his fear of the ignorant crowd made him regard with marked predilection all that was aristocratic and historic, without however refusing, in his quick intelligence, to recognize the wonderful character of the epoch in which he lived. Indolent, moreover, in small things,—and for him political parties were small things,—he was always to be found in the one in which were most of his



friends, and in which they talked most of pictures, poetry, cathedrals, kings, and nobles. Incapable of hatred, he never placed his remarkable talent as a writer at the service of political animosities, however certain might have been his gains." [1]

[Footnote 1: Ramón Rodríguez Correa, *Prólogo*, in *Obras de Becquer*, vol. I, xvi.]

Early in his life in Madrid, Gustavo came under the influence of a charming young woman, Julia Espín y Guillén.[1] Her father was director of the orchestra in the Teatro Real, and his home was a rendezvous of young musicians, artists, and *littérateurs*. There Gustavo, with Correa, Manuel del Palacio, Augusto Ferrán, and other friends, used to gather for musical and literary evenings, and there Gustavo used to read his verses. These he would bring written on odd scraps of paper, and often upon calling cards, in his usual careless fashion.

[Footnote 1: She later married Don Benigno Quiroga Ballesteros, an illustrious engineer, congressman, minister of state, and man of public life, who is still living. She died in January, 1907.]

His friends were not slow in discovering that the tall, dark, and beautiful Julia was the object of his adoration, and they advised him to declare his love openly. But his timid and retiring nature imposed silence upon his lips, and he never spoke a word of love to her. It cannot be said, moreover, that the impression created upon the young lady by the brilliant youth was such as to inspire a return of his mute devotion. Becquer was negligent in his dress and indifferent to his personal appearance, and when Julia's friends upbraided her for her hardness of heart she would reply with some such curt and cruel epigram as this: "Perhaps he would move my heart more if he affected my stomach less." [1]

[Footnote 1: Facts learned from conversation with Don Manuel del Palacio, since deceased.

The editor of this sketch is indebted to the courtesy of the Exc<sup>mo</sup>. Sr. D. Benigno Quiroga Ballesteros and to his lately deceased wife, Doña Julia, the muse of at least some of Becquer's *Rimas*, for an opportunity to examine a couple of albums containing some of the poet's verse and a most interesting collection of pencil sketches, which but confirm his admiration for Becquer's artistic talent. Here is a list of the sketches:

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