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COLLECTION
of
GERMAN AUTHORS.

VOL. 42.

SPINOZA BY BERTHOLD AUERBACH.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

"All high things are as difficult of attainment, as rare."

SPINOZA.

S P I N O Z A.

A NOVEL.

BY

BERTHOLD AUERBACH,
AUTHOR OF "ON THE HEIGHTS," ETC.

FROM THE GERMAN BY

E. NICHOLSON.

Authorized Edition.

IN TWO VOLUMES.—VOL. I.

LEIPZIG 1882

BERNHARD TAUCHNITZ.

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S P I N O Z A.

CHAPTER I.

ACOSTA.

ON a Friday afternoon at the end of April, 1647, in an obscure corner of the Jewish cemetery at Oudekerk, near Amsterdam, men were shovelling quickly to cover a sunken coffin with earth.

No mourners stood by. The people present stood in groups, and conversed on the events of the day or of the life and death of him now given to the earth; while the gravediggers hurried over their work in silence and indifference; for already, the sun sinking in the west, showed that it would soon be time "to greet the face of the Sabbath."

At the head of the grave stood a pale youth, who watched the brown clods fall into the hole with

thoughtful looks. With his left hand he unconsciously plucked the buds from the well cut beech hedge.

"Young friend," said a stranger to the youth in Spanish, "are you the only kinsman here of him who rests beneath? I perceive that you knew him well, and could tell me who he is, that he should be shovelled over like one plague-stricken without a sigh or word of mourning or lamentation. I am a stranger—"

"I am no more related to him than you," said the youth with some hesitation, "in so far as you, I presume, are of the race of Israel. You must indeed be a stranger, and come from distant lands, not to have heard of the fate of this unhappy god-forsaken man. Oh! he was great and glorious, and how is he fallen into the depths!"

"Pray," interrupted the stranger, "do not do as the others did whom I asked on turning in here from the street; tell me—"

"Do you know the family of da Costa from Oporto?" asked the youth.

"Who has lived in Spain, and has not been im-

pressed with the renown of that name? The most distinguished of knights bore it.—Miguel da Costa, after whose death the family disappeared from Oporto, was one of the stateliest of the cavaliers, whom I saw at the tournament of Lisbon; he was once a zealous member of our secret community.”

“He, who there finds rest at last,” began the youth, “was his son, and, as my father often said, in figure and bearing the image of his sire. Gabriel, as he was named, was practised in all knightly exercises, deeply learned, especially in the law. Though so early tortured by religious doubts, he accepted, in his twenty-fifth year, the office of treasurer to the cathedral charities. Then a desire awoke in him for the religion of his forefathers, and with his mother and brothers he left the land where rest the bones of so many slain for our faith, where Jews without number kneel, and kiss the pictures, which they—” Here the youth suddenly stopped, and listened to the conversation of the diggers at the grave.

“God forgive my sins,” said one, “but I maintain this knave did not deserve to be buried on a Friday

evening; because the Sabbath is coming in he is freed from the first torments of corruption. If his soul gets safe over, he will come to a spread table, and have no need to wander in Gehinom (Hell), for on the Sabbath all sinners rest from their torments; I told them they should have let him lie till Sunday morning; it was time enough for the fate that awaited him; and at least his death need not have led us to make a hole in the Sabbath. Make haste that we may finish."

"Ay, ay," responded the other, "he'll wonder when he gets over, and the destroying angel whips him with fiery rods; he'll believe then that there is another world that he did not see while living. Think you not so?"

"Pray tell me more," said the stranger.

"You have heard what they said," answered the youth, "and the little man there with a hump on his back, who scoffs at him now, enjoyed much of his bounty; for his generosity was boundless. Gabriel came to Amsterdam, submitted to every precept, and entered our faith. Henceforth he bore the name of Uriel Acosta. He followed zealously what