

Robert Southey (1774-1843)

13 *Queen Orraca, and the Five Martyrs of Morocco*

This Legend is related in the Chronicle of Affonso II.,
and in the Historia Serafica of Fr. Manoel da Esperança.

1.

The Friars five have girt their loins,
And taken staff in hand;
And never shall those Friars again
Hear mass in Christian land.

They went to Queen Orraca, 5
To thank her and bless her then;
And Queen Orraca in tears
Knelt to the holy men.

“Three things, Queen Orraca, 10
We prophesy to you:
Hear us, in the name of God!
For time will prove them true.

“In Morocco we must martyr’d be;
Christ hath vouchsafed it thus:
We shall shed our blood for Him 15
Who shed his blood for us.

“To Coimbra shall our bodies be brought,
Such being the will divine;
That Christians may behold and feel
Blessings at our shrine. 20

“And when unto that place of rest
Our bodies shall draw nigh,
Who sees us first, the King or you,
That one that night must die.

“Fare thee well, Queen Orraca! 25
For thy soul a mass we will say,

Every day as long as we live,
And on thy dying day.”

The Friars they blest her, one by one,
Where she knelt on her knee, 30
And they departed to the land
Of the Moors beyond the sea.

2.

“What news, O King Affonso,
What news of the Friars five?
Have they preach’d to the Miramamolin; 35
And are they still alive?”

“They have fought the fight, O Queen!
They have run the race;
In robes of white they hold the palm
Before the throne of Grace. 40

“All naked in the sun and air
Their mangled bodies lie;
What Christian dared to bury them,
By the bloody Moors would die.”

3.

“What news, O King Affonso, 45
Of the Martyrs five what news?
Doth the bloody Miramamolin
Their burial still refuse?”

“That on a dunghill they should rot,
The bloody Moor decreed; 50
That their dishonour’d bodies should
The dogs and vultures feed.

“But the thunder of God roll’d over them,
And the lightning of God flash’d round;
Nor thing impure, nor man impure, 55
Could approach the holy ground.

“A thousand miracles appall’d

The cruel Pagan's mind;
Our brother Pedro brings them here,
In Coimbra to be shrined." 60

4.

Every altar in Coimbra
Is drest for the festival day;
All the people in Coimbra
Are dight in their richest array;

Every bell in Coimbra 65
Doth merrily, merrily, ring;
The Clergy and the Knights await,
To go forth with the Queen and the King.

"Come forth, come forth, Queen Orraca!
We make the procession stay." 70
"I beseech thee, King Affonso,
Go you alone to-day.

"I have pain in my head this morning,
I am ill at heart also:
Go without me, King Affonso, 75
For I am too faint to go."

"The relics of the Martyrs five
All maladies can cure;
They will requite the charity
You shew'd them once, be sure: 80

"Come forth then, Queen Orraca
You make the procession stay:
It were a scandal and a sin
To abide at home to-day."

Upon her palfrey she is set, 85
And forward then they go;
And over the long bridge they pass,
And up the long hill wind slow.

"Prick forward, King Affonso,

And do not wait for me; 90
To meet them close by Coimbra,
It were discourtesy;

“A little while I needs must wait,
Till this sore pain be gone; . . .
I will proceed the best I can, 95
But do you and your Knights prick on.”

The King and his Knights prick'd up the hill
Faster than before;
The King and his Knights have topt the hill,
And now they are seen no more. 100

As the King and his Knights went down the hill
A wild boar crost the way;
“Follow him! follow him!” cried the King;
“We have time by the Queen's delay!”

A-hunting of the boar astray 105
Is King Affonso gone:
Slowly, slowly, but straight the while,
Queen Orraca is coming on.

And winding now the train appears
Between the olive-trees: 110
Queen Orraca alighted then,
And fell upon her knees.

The Friars of Alanquer came first,
And next the relics past; . . .
Queen Orraca look'd to see 115
The King and his Knights come last.

She heard the horses tramp behind;
At that she turn'd her face:
King Affonso and his Knights came up
All panting from the chase. 120

“Have pity upon my poor soul,
Holy Martyrs five!” cried she:

“Holy Mary, Mother of God,
Virgin, pray for me!”

5.

That day in Coimbra 125
Many a heart was gay;
But the heaviest heart in Coimbra,
Was that poor Queen’s that day.

The festival is over,
The sun hath sunk in the west; 130
All the people in Coimbra
Have betaken themselves to rest.

Queen Orraca’s Father Confessor
At midnight is awake;
Kneeling at the Martyrs’ shrine, 135
And praying for her sake.

Just at the midnight hour, when all
Was still as still could be,
Into the Church of Santa Cruz,
Came a saintly company: 140

All in robes of russet grey,
Poorly were they dight;
Each one girdled with a cord,
Like a Friar Minorite.

But from those robes of russet grey, 145
There flow’d a heavenly light;
For each one was the blessed soul
Of a Friar Minorite.

Brighter than their brethren,
Among the beautiful band; 150
Five were there who each did bear
A palm branch in his hand.

He who led the brethren,
A living man was he;

And yet he shone the brightest
Of all the company. 155

Before the steps of the altar,
Each one bow'd his head;
And then with solemn voice they sung
The Service of the Dead. 160

“And who are ye, ye blessed Saints?”
The Father Confessor said;
“And for what happy soul sing ye
The Service of the Dead?”

“These are the souls of our brethren in bliss,
The Martyrs five are we:
And this is our father Francisco,
Among us bodily. 165

“We are come hither to perform
Our promise to the Queen; 170
Go thou to King Affonso,
And say what thou hast seen.”

There was loud knocking at the door,
As the heavenly vision fled;
And the porter called to the Confessor, 175
To tell him the Queen was dead.

1803

(From *The Poetical Works of Robert Southey*. Vol. 6.
Collected by Himself. 10 vols. London, 1838)