

of which, however, Bermudez was directly indebted to Ferreira.¹⁶

Three tragedies by Lupercio Leonardo de Argensola, the accomplished lyric poet, who will hereafter be amply noticed, produced a much more considerable sensation when they first appeared, though they * 68 were soon afterwards * as much neglected as their predecessors. He wrote them when he was hardly more than twenty years old, and they were acted about the year 1585. "Do you not remember," says the canon in *Don Quixote*, "that, a few years ago, there were represented in Spain three tragedies composed by a famous poet of these kingdoms, which were such that they delighted and astonished all who heard them; the ignorant as well as the judicious, the multitude as well as the few; and that these three alone brought more profit to the actors than the thirty best plays that have been written since?"—"No doubt," replied the manager of the theatre, with whom the canon was conversing,—"no doubt you mean the 'Isabela,' the 'Phillis,' and the 'Alexandra.'" ¹⁷

This statement of Cervantes is certainly extraordinary, and the more so from being put into the mouth of the wise canon of Toledo. But, notwithstanding the flush of immediate success which it implies, all trace of these plays was soon so completely lost that, for a long period, the name of the famous poet Cervantes had referred to was not known, and it was even suspected that he had intended to compliment himself. At last, between 1760 and 1770, two of them—the "Alexandra" and "Isabela"—were accidentally dis-

¹⁶ The "Castro" of Antonio Ferreira, one of the most pure and beautiful compositions in the Portuguese language, is found in his "Poemas" (Lisboa, 1771, 12mo, Tom. II. pp. 123, etc.). Its author died of the plague at Lisbon, in 1569, only forty-one years old.

¹⁷ *Don Quixote*, Parte I. c. 48.

covered, and all doubt ceased. They were found to be the work of Lupercio Leonardo de Argensola.¹⁸

But, unhappily, they quite failed to satisfy the expectations that had been excited by the good-natured praise of Cervantes. They are in various verse, fluent and pure; and were intended to be imitations of the Greek style of tragedy, called forth, perhaps, by the recent attempts of Bermudez. Each, however, is divided into three acts; and the choruses, originally prepared for them, are * omitted. The * 69 *Alexandra* is the worse of the two. Its scene is laid in Egypt; and the story, which is fictitious, is full of loathsome horrors. Every one of its personages, except perhaps a messenger, perishes in the course of the action; children's heads are cut off and thrown at their parents on the stage; and the false queen, after being invited to wash her hands in the blood of the person to whom she was unworthily attached, bites off her own tongue, and spits it at her monstrous husband. Treason and rebellion form the lights in a picture composed mainly of such atrocities.

The *Isabela* is better; but still is not to be praised. The story relates to one of the early Moorish Kings of Saragossa, who exiles the Christians from his kingdom in a vain attempt to obtain possession of *Isabela*, a Christian maiden with whom he is desperately in love, but who is herself already attached to a noble Moor whom she has converted, and with whom, at last, she

¹⁸ They first appeared in Sedano's "Parnaso Español," Tom. VI., 1772. All the needful explanations about them are in Sedano, Moratin, and Martinez de la Rosa. The "Phillis" has not been found. The MS. originals of the two published plays were, in 1772, in the Archives of the "Escuelas Pias" of the city of Balbastro, in Aragon, where they were deposited by the heir of L. Leonardo de Argensola. They are said to contain a better text than the MSS. used by Sedano, and ought, therefore, for the honor of the author, to be inquired after. Sebastian de Latre, *Ensayo sobre el Teatro Español*, folio, 1773, Prologo.

suffers a triumphant martyrdom. The incidents are numerous, and sometimes well imagined; but no dramatic skill is shown in their management and combination, and there is little easy or living dialogue to give them effect. Like the *Alexandra*, it is full of horrors. The nine most prominent personages it represents come to an untimely end, and the bodies, or at least the heads, of most of them are exhibited on the stage, though some reluctance is shown, at the conclusion, about committing a supernumerary suicide before the audience. Fame opens the piece with a prologue, in which complaints are made of the low state of the theatre; and the ghost of Isabela, who is hardly dead, comes back at the end with an epilogue very flat and quite needless.

With all this, however, a few passages of poetical eloquence, rather than of absolute poetry, are scattered through the long and tedious speeches of which the piece is principally composed; and once or twice there is a touch of passion truly tragic, as in the discussion between Isabela and her family on the threatened exile and ruin of their whole race, and in that between Adulce, her lover, and Aja, the king's *70 sister, who disinterestedly loves * Adulce, notwithstanding she knows his passion for her fair Christian rival. But still it seems incomprehensible how such a piece should have produced the popular dramatic effect attributed to it, unless we suppose that the Spaniards had from the first a passion for theatrical exhibitions, which, down to this period, had been so imperfectly gratified, that anything dramatic, produced under favorable circumstances, was run after and admired.¹⁹

¹⁹ There are several old ballads on the subject of this play. See Wolf, "Über eine Sammlung Spanischer Romanzen" (Wien, 1850, pp. 33, 34);

The dramas of Argensola, by their date, though not by their character and spirit, bring us at once within the period which opens with the great and prevalent names of Cervantes and Lope de Vega. They, therefore, mark the extreme limits of the history of the early Spanish theatre; and if we now look back and consider its condition and character during the long period we have just gone over, we shall easily come to three conclusions of some consequence.²⁰

The first is, that the attempts to form and develop a national drama in Spain have been few and rare. During the two centuries following the first notice of it, about 1250, we cannot learn distinctly that anything was undertaken but rude exhibitions in pantomime; though it is not unlikely dialogues may sometimes have been added, such as we find in the more imperfect religious pageants produced at the same period in England and France. During the next century, which brings us down to the time of Lope de Rueda, we have nothing better than "Mingo Revulgo," which is rather a spirited political satire than a drama, Enzina's and Vicente's dramatic eclogues, and Naharro's more dramatic "Propaladia," * with a *71 few translations from the ancients which were little noticed or known. And during the half-century which Lope de Rueda opened with an attempt to

but the historical tradition is in the "Cronica General," Parte III. c. 22, ed. 1604, ff. 83, 84.

²⁰ It seems probable that a considerable number of dramas belonging to the period between Lope de Rueda and Lope de Vega, or between 1560 and 1590, could even now be collected, whose names have not yet been given to the public; but it is not likely that they would add anything important to our knowledge of the real character or progress of the drama at that time.

Aribau, Biblioteca, Tom. II. pp. 163, 225, notes. The names of many such — part of them in Spanish, part in Latin, and part in both languages, but all akin to the old Mysteries and Autos — may be found in the Spanish translation of this History, Tom. II. pp. 543-550. A considerable number of them seem to have been represented in religious houses, where, as we know, a more secular drama afterwards intruded and found much favor.

create a popular drama, we have obtained only a few farces from himself and his followers, the little that was done at Seville and Valencia, and the countervailing tragedies of Bermudez and Argensola, who intended, no doubt, to follow what they considered the safer and more respectable traces of the ancient Greek masters. Three centuries and a half, therefore, or four centuries, furnished less dramatic literature to Spain than the last half-century of the same portion of time had furnished to France and Italy; and near the end of the whole period, or about 1585, it is apparent that the national genius was not so much turned towards the drama as it was at the same period in England, where Greene and Peele were just preparing the way for Marlowe and Shakespeare.

In the next place, the apparatus of the stage, including scenery and dresses, was very imperfect. During the greater part of the period we have gone over, dramatic exhibitions in Spain were either religious pantomimes shown off in the churches to the people, or private entertainments given at court and in the houses of the nobility. Lope de Rueda brought them out into the public squares, and adapted them to the comprehension, the taste, and the humors of the multitude. But he had no theatre anywhere, and his gay farces were represented on temporary scaffolds, by his own company of strolling players, who stayed but a few days at a time in even the largest cities, and were sought, when there, chiefly by the lower classes of the people.

The first notice, therefore, we have of anything approaching to a regular establishment—and this is far removed from what that phrase generally implies—is in 1568, when an arrangement or compromise between

the Church and the theatre was begun, traces of which have subsisted at Madrid and elsewhere down to our own times. Recollecting, no doubt, the origin of dramatic representations in Spain for religious edification, the government ordered, in form, that no actors should make an * exhibition in Madrid, except * 72 in some place to be appointed by two religious brotherhoods designated in the decree, and for a rent to be paid to them;—an order in which, after 1583, the general hospital of the city was included.²¹ Under this order, as it was originally made, we find plays acted from 1568; but only in the open area of a courtyard, *corral*, without roof, seats, or other apparatus, except such as is humorously described by Cervantes to have been packed, with all the dresses of the company, in a few large sacks.

In this state things continued several years. None but strolling companies of actors were known, and they remained but a few days at a time even in Madrid. No fixed place was prepared for their reception; but sometimes they were sent by the pious brotherhoods to one court-yard, and sometimes to another. They acted in the daytime, on Sundays and other holidays, and then only if the weather permitted a performance in the open air;—the women separated from the men,²² and the entire audience so small, that the profit yielded by the exhibitions to the religious societies and the hospital rose only to eight or ten dollars each time.²³ At last, in 1579 and 1583, two court-yards were permanently fitted up for them, belonging to

²¹ The two brotherhoods were the *Cofradía de la Sagrada Pasion*, established 1565, and the *Cofradía de la Soledad*, established 1567. The accounts of the early beginnings of the theatre at Madrid are awkwardly enough given

by C. Pellicer in his "*Origen de la Comedia en España*." But they can be found so well nowhere else. See Tom. I. pp. 43-77.

²² C. Pellicer, *Origen*, Tom. I. p. 83.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 56.

houses in the streets of the "Príncipe" and "Cruz." But, though a rude stage and benches were provided in each, a roof was still wanting; the spectators all sat in the open air, or at the windows of the house whose court-yard was used for the representation; and the actors performed under a slight and poor awning, without anything that deserved to be called scenery. The theatres, therefore, at Madrid, as late as 1586, could not be said to be in a condition materially to further any efforts that might be made to produce a respectable national drama.

In the last place, the pieces that had been written had not the decided, common character * 73 on which a national * drama could be fairly founded, even if their number had been greater. Juan de la Enzina's *eclogues*, which were the first dramatic compositions represented in Spain by actors who were neither priests nor cavaliers, were really what they were called, though somewhat modified in their bucolic character by religious and political feelings and events; — two or three of Naharro's plays, and several of those of Cueva, give more absolute intimations of the intriguing and historical character of the stage, though the effect of the first at home was delayed, from their being for a long time published only in Italy; — the translations from the ancients by Villalobos, Oliva, Abril, and others, seem hardly to have been intended for representation, and certainly not for popular effect; — and Bermudez, with one of his pieces stolen from the Portuguese and the other full of horrors of his own, was, it is plain, little thought of at his first appearance, and soon quite neglected.

There were, therefore, before 1586, only two persons

to whom it was possible to look for the establishment of a popular and permanent drama. The first of them was *Argensola*, whose three tragedies enjoyed a degree of success before unknown; but they were so little in the national spirit, that they were early overlooked, and soon completely forgotten. The other was Lope de Rueda, who, himself an actor, wrote such farces as he found would amuse the common audiences he served, and thus created a school in which other actors, like Alonso de la Vega and Cisneros, wrote the same kind of farces, chiefly in prose, and intended so completely for temporary effect, that hardly one of them has come down to our own times. Of course, the few and rare efforts made before 1586 to produce a drama in Spain had been made upon such various or contradictory principles, that they could not be combined so as to constitute the safe foundation for a national theatre.

But, though the proper foundation was not yet laid, all was tending to it and preparing for it. The stage, rude as it was, had still the great advantage of being confined to two spots, which, it is worth notice, have * continued to be the sites of the two * 74 principal theatres of Madrid ever since. The number of authors, though small, was yet sufficient to create so general a taste for theatrical representations that Lopez Pinciano, a learned man, and one of a temper little likely to be pleased with a rude drama, said, "When I see that Cisneros or Galvez is going to act, I run all risks to hear him; and, when I am in the theatre, winter does not freeze me, nor summer make me hot." ²⁴ And finally, the public, who resorted to the

²⁴ *Philosophia Antigua Poetica* de A. Cabrera, Felipe II., Madrid, 1619, folio, p. 470. This quarrel is a part of the drama of Pedro Ximenez de Anciso (sic), entitled *El Príncipe Don Carlos*, where it is set forth in *Jornada* II. L. Pinciano, Madrid, 1596, 4to, p. 128. Cisneros was a famous actor of the time of Philip II., about whom Don Carlos had a quarrel with Cardinal Espinosa.

imperfect entertainments offered them, if they had not determined what kind of drama should become national, had yet decided that a national drama should be formed, and that it should be founded on the national character and manners.

(Parte XXVIII. de Comedias de varios autores, Huesca, 1634, f. 183, a). Cisneros flourished 1579-1586. C. Pellicer, Origen, Tom. I. pp. 60, 61. Lope de Vega speaks of him with great admiration, as an actor "beyond compare since plays were known." Peregrino en su Patria, ed. 1604, f. 263.

During the period just gone over — that between the death of Lope de Rueda and the success of Lope de Vega — the traces of whatever regards the theatre are to be best found in Moratin's "Catálogo" (Obras, 1830, Tom. I. pp. 192-300). But there were many more rude efforts made than he has chronicled, though none of consequence. Gayangos, in the Spanish translation of this History, (see note 20 of this chap.,) has collected the titles of a

good many, and could, no doubt, easily have collected more, if they had been worth the trouble. Some of those he records have been printed, but more are in manuscript; some are in Latin, some in Spanish, and some in both languages; some are religious, and some secular. Many of them were probably represented in religious houses, in the colleges of the Jesuits, and in convents, on occasions of ceremony, like the election of a Bishop, or the canonization of a Saint. Of others no account can be given. But all of them taken together give no intimation of a different state of the drama from that already sufficiently described. We see, indeed, from them very plainly that it was a period of change; but we see nothing else, except that the change was very slow.

* CHAPTER IX.

* 75

LUIS DE LEON. — EARLY LIFE. — PERSECUTIONS. — TRANSLATION OF THE CANTICLES. — NAMES OF CHRIST. — PERFECT WIFE AND OTHER PROSE WORKS. — HIS DEATH. — HIS POEMS. — HIS CHARACTER.

It should not be forgotten that, while we have gone over the beginnings of the Italian school and of the existing theatre, we have had little occasion to notice one distinctive element of the Spanish character, which is yet almost constantly present in the great mass of the national literature: I mean the religious element. A reverence for the Church, or, more properly, for the religion of the Church, and a deep sentiment of devotion, however mistaken in the forms it wore, or in the direction it took, had been developed in the old Castilian character by the wars against Islamism, as much as the spirit of loyalty and knight-hood, and had, from the first, found no less fitting poetical forms of expression. That no change took place in this respect in the sixteenth century, we find striking proof in the character of a distinguished Spaniard, who lived about twenty years later than Diego de Mendoza, but one whose gentler and graver genius easily took the direction which that of the elder cavalier so decidedly refused.

I refer, of course, to Luis Ponce de Leon, called, from his early and unbroken connection with the Church, "Brother Luis de Leon," — Fray Luis de Leon. He was born in Belmonte, in 1528, and lived there until he was five or six years old, when his father, who