

which last is on the story of Macias el Enamorado, always a favorite with the old Spanish and Provençal poets; and the "Bizarrias de Belisa," a gay comedy, which is interesting from the circumstance that it was finished in 1634, when he was nearly seventy-two years old. But it is neither needful nor possible to go further. Enough has been said to show the general character of their class, and we therefore now turn to another.⁵¹

⁵¹ From the Spanish translation of this History, (Tom. II. p. 551,) I collect the following dates of a few plays of Lope on the authority of his own autographs:—

Prueba de los Amigos, 12th September, 1604.

Carlos V. en Francia, 20th November, 1604.

Batalla del Honor, 18th April, 1608.
Encomienda mal guardada, 19th April, 1610.

Lo que ha de ser, 2d September, 1624.

Competencia en los Nobles, 16th November, 1625.

Sin Secreto no hay Amor, 18th July, 1626.

Bizarrias de Belisa, 24th May, 1634.

I can add to these from my own collection:—

Castigo sin Venganza, 1st August, 1631.

See, also, Salva y Baranda, Documentos Ineditos, Tom. I., and Chorley's Catalogue, already referred to.

* CHAPTER XVI.

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LOPE DE VEGA, CONTINUED.— HIS HEROIC DRAMA, AND ITS CHARACTERISTICS.— GREAT NUMBER ON SUBJECTS FROM SPANISH HISTORY, AND SOME ON CONTEMPORARY EVENTS.

THE dramas of Lope de Vega that belong to the next class were called "Comedias Heróicas," or "Comedias Historiales,"— Heroic or Historical Dramas. The chief differences between these and the last are, that they bring on the stage personages in a higher rank of life, such as kings and princes; that they generally have an historical foundation, or at least use historical names, as if claiming it; and that their prevailing tone is grave, imposing, and even tragical. They have, however, in general, the same involved, intriguing stories and underplots, the same play of jealousy and an over-sensitive honor, and the same low, comic caricatures to relieve their serious parts, that are found in the dramas of "the Cloak and Sword." Philip the Second disapproved of this class of plays, thinking they tended to diminish the royal dignity,— a circumstance which shows at once the state of manners at the time, and the influence attributed to the theatre.¹

Lope wrote a very large number of plays in the forms of the heroic drama, which he substantially invented,— perhaps as many as he wrote in any other class. Everything historical seemed, indeed, to furnish him with a subject, from the earliest annals of the

¹ Lope de Vega, Obras Sueltas, Tom. IV. p. 410. Such plays were also sometimes called tragedies. "Aquella donde se introduce Rey o Señor soberano es Tragedia." See Lagrimas Panegiricas de Montalvan, 1639, f. 150, b.

world down to the events of his own time; * 219 but his favorite materials * were sought in Greek and Roman records, and especially in the chronicles and ballads of Spain itself.

Of the manner in which he dealt with ancient history, his "Roma Abrasada," or Rome in Ashes, may be taken as a specimen, though certainly one of the least favorable specimens of the class to which it belongs.² The facts on which it is founded are gathered from the commonest sources open to its author,—chiefly from the "General Chronicle of Spain"; but they are not formed into a well-constructed or even ingenious plot,³ and they relate to the whole twenty years that elapsed between the death of Messalina, the reign of Claudius, and the death of Nero himself, who is not only the hero, but sometimes the *gracioso*, or droll, of the piece.

The first act, which comes down to the murder of Claudius by Nero and Agrippina, contains the old jest of the Emperor asking why his wife does not come to dinner, after he had put her to death, and adds, for equally popular effect, abundant praises of Spain and of Lucan and Seneca, claiming both of them to be Spaniards, and making the latter an astrologer, as well as a moralist. The second act shows Nero beginning his reign with great gentleness, and follows Suetonius and the old Chronicle in making him grieve that he knew how to write, since otherwise he could not have been required to sign an order for a just judicial execution. The subsequent violent change in his con-

² Comedias, Tom. XX., Madrid, 1629, ff. 177, etc. It is entitled "*Tragedia Famosa*."

³ It is worth while to compare Suetonius, (Books V. and VI.,) and the "Crónica General," (Parte I. c. 110 and

111,) with the corresponding passages in the "Roma Abrasada." In one passage of Act III., Lope uses a ballad, the first lines of which occur in the first act of the "Celestina."

duct is not, however, in any way explained or accounted for. It is simply set before the spectators as a fact, and from this moment begins the headlong career of his guilt.

A curious scene, purely Spanish, is one of the early intimations of this change of character. Nero falls in love with Eta; but not at all in the Roman fashion. He visits her by night at her window, sings a sonnet to her, is interrupted by four men in disguise, kills one of them, and escapes from the pursuit of his own officers of justice * with difficulty; all, as * 220 if he were a wandering knight so fair of the time of Philip the Third.⁴ The more historical love for Poppæa follows, with a shocking interview between Nero and his mother, in consequence of which he orders her to be at once put to death. The execution of this order, with the horrid exposure of her person afterwards, ends the act, which, gross as it is, does not sink to the revolting atrocities of the old Chronicle from which it is chiefly taken.

The third act is so arranged as partly to gratify the national vanity and partly to conciliate the influence of the Church, of which Lope, like his contemporaries, always stood in awe. Several devout Christians, therefore, are now introduced, and we have an edifying confession of faith, embracing the history of the world from the creation to the crucifixion, with an account of what the Spanish historians regard as the first of the twelve persecutions. The deaths of Seneca and Lucan follow; and then the conflagration of Rome, which, as it constitutes the show part of the play, and is relied on for the stage effect it would produce, is

⁴ This scene is in the second act, and forms that part of the play where Nero enacts the *gracioso*.

brought in near the end, out of the proper order of the story, and after the building of Nero's luxurious palace, the "aurea domus," which was really constructed in the desert the fire had left. The audience, meantime, have been put in good-humor by a scene in Spain, where a conspiracy is on foot to overthrow the Emperor's power; and the drama concludes with the death of Poppæa, — again less gross than the account of it in the Chronicle, — with Nero's own death, and with the proclamation of Galba as his successor; all crowded into a space disproportionately small for incidents so important.

But it was not often that Lope wrote so ill or so grossly. On modern, and especially on national subjects, he is almost always more fortunate, and sometimes becomes powerful and imposing. Among these, as a characteristic, though not as a remarkably favorable, specimen of his success, is to be placed the * 221 "Principe Perfeto,"⁵ * in which he intends to give his idea of a perfect prince under the character of Don John of Portugal, son of Alfonso the Fifth and contemporary with Ferdinand and Isabella, a full-length portrait of whom, by his friend and confidant, is drawn in the opening of the second act, with a minuteness of detail that leaves no doubt as to the qualities for which princes were valued in the age of the Philips, if not those for which they would be valued now.

Elsewhere in the piece, Don John is represented to have fought bravely in the disastrous battle of Toro, and to have voluntarily restored the throne to his father, who had once abdicated in his favor and had afterwards reclaimed the supreme power. Personal

⁵ Comedias, Tom. XI., Barcelona, 1618, ff. 121, etc.

courage and strict justice, however, are the attributes most relied on to exhibit him as a perfect prince. Of the former he gives proof by killing a man in self-defence, and entering into a bull-fight under the most perilous circumstances. Of the latter — his love of justice — many instances are brought on the stage, and, among the rest, his protection of Columbus, after the return of that great navigator from America, though aware how much his discoveries had redounded to the honor of a rival country, and how great had been his own error in not obtaining the benefit of them for Portugal. But the most prominent of these instances of justice relates to a private and personal history, and forms the main subject of the drama. It is as follows.

Don Juan de Sosa, the king's favorite, is twice sent by him to Spain on embassies of consequence, and, while residing there, lives in the family of a gentleman connected with him by blood, to whose daughter, Leonora, he makes love, and wins her affections. Each time when Don Juan returns to Portugal, he forgets his plighted faith and leaves the lady to languish. At last, she comes with her father to Lisbon in the train of the Spanish princess, Isabella, now married to the king's son. But even there the false knight refuses to recognize his * obligations. In her * 222 despair, she presents herself to the king, and explains her position in the following conversation, which is a favorable specimen of the easy narrative in which resides so much of the charm of Lope's drama. As Leonora enters, she exclaims: —

Prince, whom in peace and war men perfect call,
Listen a woman's cry!

King. Begin; — I hear
Leonora. Fadrique — he of ancient Lara's house,

And governor of Seville—is my sire.

King. Pause there, and pardon first the courtesy
That owes a debt to thy name and to his,
Which ignorance alone could fail to pay.

Leonora. Such condescending gentleness, my lord,
Is worthy of the wisdom and the wit
Which through the world are blazoned and admired.—
But to my tale. Twice came there to Castile
A knight from this thy land, whose name I hide
Till all his frauds are manifest. For thou,
My lord, dost love him in such wise, that wert
Thou other than thou art, my true complaints
Would fear to seek a justice they in vain
Would strive to find. Each time within our house
He dwelt a guest, and from the very first
He sought my love.

King. Speak on, and let not shame
Oppress thy words; for to the judge and priest
Alike confession's voice should boldly come.

Leonora. I was deceived. He went and left me sad
To mourn his absence; for of them he is
Who leave behind their knightly, nobler parts,
When they themselves are long since fled and gone.
Again he came, his voice more sweetly tuned,
More siren-like, than ever. I heard the voice,
Nor knew its hidden fraud. O, would that Heaven
Had made us, in its highest justice, deaf,
Since tongues so false it gave to men! He lured,
He lured me as the fowler lures the bird
In snares and meshes hid beneath the grass.
I struggled, but in vain; for Love, heaven's child,
Has power the mightiest fortress to subdue.
He pledged his knightly word,—in writing pledged it,
Trusting that afterwards, in Portugal,
The debt and all might safely be denied;—
As if the heavens were narrower than the earth,
And justice not supreme. In short, my lord,
He went; and, proud and vain, the banners bore

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*That my submission marked, not my defeat;
For where love is, there comes no victory.
His spoils he carried to his native land,
As if they had been torn in heathen war
From Africa; such as in Arcila,
In earliest youth, thyself with glory won;
Or such as now, from shores remote, thy ships
Bring home,—dark slaves, to darker slavery.
No written word of his came back to me.
My honor wept its obsequies, and built its tomb
With Love's extinguished torches. Soon, the prince,

Thy son, was wed with our Infanta fair,—
God grant it for a blessing to both realms!—
And with her, as ambassador, my sire
To Lisbon came, and I with him. But here—
Even here—his promises that knight denies,
And so disheartens and despises me,
That, if your Grace no remedy can find,
The end of all must be the end of life,—
So heavy is my misery.

King. That scroll?

Thou hast it?

Leonora. Surely. It were an error

Not to be repaired, if I had lost it.

King. It cannot be but I should know the hand,
If he who wrote it in my household serve.

Leonora. This is the scroll, my lord.

King. And John de Sosa's is

The signature! But yet, unless mine eyes

Had seen and recognized his very hand,

I never had believed the tale thou bring'st;—

So highly deem I of his faithfulness.⁶

D. Leo. Principe, qu' en paz, y en guerra,
Te llama perfeto el mundo,
Oye una muger! *Rey.* Comiença.

D. Leo. Del gobernador Fadrique
De Lara soy hija. *Rey.* Espera.
Perdona al no conocerte
La cortesía, que es deuda
Digna á tu padre y á ti.

D. Leo. Essa es gala y gentileza
Digna de tu ingenio claro,
Que el mundo admira y celebra.—
Por dos vezes á Castilla
Fue un fidalgo desta tierra,—
Que quiero encubrir el nombre,
Hasta que su engaño sepas;
Porque le quieres de modo,
Que temiera que mis quejas
No hallaran justicia en ti,
Si otro que tu mismo fueras.
Poso entrambas en mi casa;
Solicito la primera
Mi voluntad. *Rey.* Di adelante,
Y no te oprima verguença,
Que tambien con los jueces
Las personas se confiesan.

D. Leo. Agradece sus engaños.
Partiose; lloro su ausencia;
Que las partes deste hidalgo,
Quando el se parte, ellas quedan.
Boltio otra vez, y boltio
Mas dulcemente Sirena
Con la voz no vi el engaño.
Ay, Dios! Señor, si nacieran
Las mugeres sin oydos,
Ya que los hombres con lenguas.
Llamome al fin, como suele
A la perdid de mi casa
Del caçador engañoso,
Las redes entre la yerua.
Resistime; mas que importa,
Si la mayor fortaleza
No contradize el amor,
Que es hijo de las estrellas?
Una cedula me hizo
De ser mi marido, y esta

Deulo de ser con intento
De no conocer la deuda,
En estando en Portugal,
Como si el cielo no fuera
Cielo sobre todo el mundo,
Y su justicia suprema.
Al fin, Señor, el se fue,
Ufano con las banderas
De una muger ya rendida;
Que donde hay amor, no hay fuerça.
Despojos traxo á su patria,
Como si de Africa fueran,
De los Moros, que en Arcila
Venciste en tu edad primera,
O de los remotos mares,
De cuyas blancas arenas
Te traen negros esclavos
Tus armadas Portuguesas.
Nunca mas vi letra suya.
Lloro mi amor sus obsequias,
Hize el tumulto del llanto,
Y de amor las hachas muertas.
Caso el Principe tu hijo
Con nuestra Infanta, que sea
Para bien de entrambos reynos.
Vino mi padre con ella.
Vine con el á Lisboa,
Donde este fidalgo niega
Tan justas obligaciones,
Y de suerte me desprecia,
Que me ha de quitar la vida,
Si tu Alteza no remedia
De una muger la desdicha.

Rey. Viue la cedula? *D. Leo.* Fuera
Error no aueria guardado.

Rey. Yo conocere la letra,
Si es criado de mi casa.

D. Leo. Señor, la cedula es esta.
Rey. La firma dize, Don Juan
De Sosa! No lo creyera,
A no conocer la firma,
De su virtud y prudencia.

Comedias de Lope de Vega, Tom. XI,
Barcelona, 1618, ff. 143, 144.