

* 224 * The *dénouement* naturally consists in the marriage, which is thus made a record of the king's perfect justice.

Columbus, as we have intimated, appears in this piece. He is introduced with little skill, but the dignity of his pretensions is not forgotten. In another drama, devoted to the discovery of America, and called "The New World of Columbus," his character is further and more truly developed. The play itself embraces the events of the great Admiral's life between his first vain effort to obtain countenance in Portugal and his triumphant presentation of the spoils of the New World to Ferdinand and Isabella at Barcelona, — a period amounting to about fourteen years.⁷ It is one of Lope's more wild and extravagant attempts, but it is not without marks of his peculiar talent, and it fully embodies the national feeling in regard to America, as a world rescued from heathenism. Some of its scenes are laid in Portugal; others on the plain of Granada, at the moment of its fall; others in the caravel of Columbus during the mutiny; and yet others in the West Indies, and before his sovereigns on his return home.

* 225 * Among the personages, besides such as might be reasonably anticipated from the course of the story, are Gonzalvo de Córdoba, sundry Moors, several American Indians, and several spiritual beings, such as Providence, Christianity, and Idolatry;

This passage is near the end of the piece, and leads to the *dénouement* by one of those flowing narratives, like an Italian *novella*, to which Lope frequently resorts, when the intriguing fable of the drama has been carried far enough to fill up the three customary acts. Arcila, referred to in the text with skill, was taken from the Moors the 24th of August, 1471.

⁷ Comedias, Tom. IV., Madrid, 1614; and also in the Appendix to Ochoa's "Teatro Escogido de Lope de Vega" (Paris, 1838, 8vo). Fernando de Zarate took some of the materials for his "Conquista de Mexico," (Comedias Escogidas, Tom. XXX., Madrid, 1668,) such as the opening of Jornada II., from this play of Lope de Vega.

the last of whom struggles with great vehemence, at the tribunal of Providence, against the introduction of the Spaniards and their religion into the New World, and in passages like the following seems in danger of having the best of the argument.

O Providence Divine, permit them not
To do me this most plain unrighteousness!
'T is but base avarice that spurs them on.
Religion is the color and the cloak;
But gold and silver, hid within the earth,
Are all they truly seek and strive to win.⁸

The greater part of the action and the best portions of it pass in the New World; but it is difficult to imagine anything more extravagant than the whole fable. Dramatic propriety is constantly set at naught. The Indians, before the appearance of Europeans among them, sing about Phœbus and Diana; and while, from the first, they talk nothing but Spanish, they frequently pretend, after the arrival of the Spaniards, to be unable to understand a word of their language. The scene in which Idolatry pleads its cause against Christianity before Divine Providence, the scenes with the Demon, and those touching the conversion of the heathen, might have been presented in the rudest of the old Moralities. Those, on the contrary, in which the natural feelings and jealousies of the simple and ignorant natives are brought out, and those in which Columbus appears, — always dignified and gentle, — are not without merit. Few, however, can be said to be truly good or poetical; and yet a poetical interest is kept up through the worst of them, and the story they involve is followed to the end with a living curiosity.

⁸ No permitas, Providencia,
Hacerme esta sinjusticia;
Pues los lleva la codicia
A hacer esta diligencia.

So color de religion,
Van á buscar plata y oro
Del encubierto tesoro.

El Nuevo Mundo, Jorn. I.

The common traditions are repeated, that * 226 Columbus * was born at Nervi, and that he received from a dying pilot at Madeira the charts that led him to his grand adventure; but it is singular, that, in contradiction to all this, Lope, in other parts of the play, should have hazarded the suggestion, that Columbus was moved by Divine inspiration. The friar, in the scene of the mutiny, declares it expressly; and Columbus himself, in his discourse with his brother Bartholomew, when their fortunes seemed all but desperate, plainly alludes to it, when he says:—

A hidden Deity still drives me on,
Bidding me trust the truth of what I feel,
And, if I watch, or if I sleep, impels
The strong will boldly to work out its way.
But what is this that thus possesses me?
What spirit is it drives me onward thus?
Where am I borne? What is the road I take?
What track of destiny is this I tread?
And what the impulse that I blindly follow?
Am I not poor, unknown, a broken man,
Depending on the pilot's anxious trade?
And shall I venture on the mighty task
To add a distant world to this we know?⁹

The conception of the character in this particular is good, and, being founded, as we know it was, on the personal convictions of Columbus himself, might have been followed out by further developments with poetical effect. But the opportunity is neglected, and, like many other occasions for success, is thrown away by Lope, through haste and carelessness.

Another of the dramas of this class, "El Castigo sin Venganza," or "Punishment, not Revenge," is impor-

⁹ Una secreta deidad
A que lo intente me impele,
Diciéndome que es verdad,
Que en fin, que duerma ó que vele,
Persigue r'í voluntad.
Que es esto que ha entrado en mí?
Quien me lleva a muevo así?
Donde voy, donde camino?

Que derrota, que destino
Sigo, me conduce aquí?
Un hombre pobre, y aun roto,
Que así lo puedo decir,
Y que vive de piloto,
Quiere a este mundo añadir
Otro mundo tan remoto!

El Nuevo Mundo, Jorn. I.

tant from the mode in which its subject is treated, and interesting from the circumstance that its history can be more exactly traced than that of * any * 227 other of Lope's plays. It is founded on the dark and hideous story in the annals of Ferrara, during the fifteenth century, which Lord Byron found in Gibbon's "Antiquities of the House of Brunswick," and made the subject of his "Parisina,"¹⁰ but which Lope, following the old chronicles of the duchy, has presented in a somewhat different light, and thrown with no little skill into a dramatic form.

The Duke of Ferrara, in his tragedy, is a person of mark and spirit, — a commander of the Papal forces, and a prince of statesmanlike experience and virtues. He marries when already past the middle age of life, and sends his natural son, Frederic, to receive his beautiful bride, a daughter of the Duke of Mantua, and to conduct her to Ferrara. Before he reaches Mantua, however, Frederic meets her accidentally on the way; and his first interview with his step-mother is when he rescues her from drowning. From this moment they become gradually more and more attached to each other, until their attachment ends in guilt; partly through the strong impulses of their own natures, and partly from the coldness and faithlessness of the Duke to his young and passionate wife.

On his return home from a successful campaign, the Duke discovers the intrigue. A struggle ensues between his affection for his son and the stinging sense of his own dishonor. At last he determines to punish; but in such a manner as to hide the grounds of his

¹⁰ The story was well known, from its peculiar horrors, though the events occurred in 1405, — more than two centuries before the date of the play.

Lope, in the Preface to his version of it, says it was extant in Latin, French, German, Tuscan, and Castilian.

offence. To effect this, he confines his wife in a darkened room, and so conceals and secures her person, that she can neither move, nor speak, nor be seen. He then sends his offending son to her, under the pretence that beneath the pall that hides her is placed a traitor, whom the son is required to kill in order to protect his father's life; and when the desperate young man rushes from the room, ignorant who * 228 has been his victim, he is instantly cut * down by the bystanders, on his father's outcry, that he has just murdered his step-mother, with whose blood his hands are, in fact, visibly reeking.

Lope finished this play on the 1st of August, 1631, when he was nearly sixty-nine years old; and yet there are few of his dramas, in the class to which it belongs, that are more marked with poetical vigor, and in none is the versification more light and various.¹¹ The characters, especially those of the father and son, are better defined and better sustained than usual; and the whole was evidently written with care, for there are not infrequently large alterations, as well as many minute verbal corrections, in the original manuscript, which is still extant.

It was not licensed for representation till the 9th of May, 1632, — apparently from the known unwillingness of the court to have persons of rank, like the Duke of Ferrara, brought upon the stage in a light so odious. At any rate, when the tardy permission was granted, it was accompanied with a certificate that the Duke was treated with the decorum "due to his person"; though, even with this assurance, it was acted but once, notwithstanding it made a strong

¹¹ This play contains all the usual varieties of measure, — *redondillas*, *tercetas*, a sonnet, etc.; but especially, in the first act, a *silva* of beautiful fluency.

and distracting underplot, and is to be placed among the loftiest of his efforts. Not a few of its scenes are admirable; especially that in which the king urges the knight to kill his friend; that in which the lovely and innocent creature whom the knight is about to marry receives, in the midst of the frank and delightful expressions of her happiness, the dead body of her brother, who has been slain by her lover; and that in which the Alcaldes solemnly refuse to wrest the law in obedience to the royal commands. The conclusion is better than that in the tragedy of Corneille. The lady abandons the world and retires to a convent.

Of the great number of Lope's heroic dramas on national subjects, a few may be noticed, in order to indicate the direction he gave to this division of his theatre. One, for instance, is on the story of Bamba, taken from the plough to be made king of Spain;¹⁶ and another, "The Last Goth," is on the popular traditions of the loss of Spain by Roderic;¹⁷ — the first being among the earliest of his published plays,¹⁸ and the last not published till twelve years after his death, but both * written in one spirit and upon * 231 the same system. On the attractive subject of Bernardo del Carpio he has several dramas. One is called "The Youthful Adventures of Bernardo," and relates his exploits down to the time when he discovered the secret of his birth. Another, called "Achievements of Bernardo del Carpio," I have never seen, but it is among the plays Lord Holland had read. And a third, "Marriage in Death," involves the misconduct of

¹⁶ *Comedias*, Tom. I., Valladolid, 1604, ff. 91, etc., in which Lope has wisely followed the old monkish traditions, rather than either the "Crónica General," (Parte II. c. 51,) or the yet more sobered account of Mariana (*Hist.*, Lib. VI. c. 12).

¹⁷ *Comedias*, Tom. XXV., Caragoça, 1647, ff. 369, etc. It is called "Tragicomedia."

¹⁸ The first edition of the first volume of Lope's plays is that of Valladolid, 1604. See Brunet, etc.

King Alfonso, and the heart-rending scene in which the dead body of Bernardo's father is delivered to the hero, who has sacrificed everything to filial piety, and now finds himself crushed and ruined by it.¹⁹ The seven Infantes of Lara are not passed over, as we see both in the play that bears their name, and in the more striking one on the story of Mudarra, "El Bastardo Mudarra."²⁰ Indeed, it seems as if no available point in the national annals were missed by Lope;²¹ and that, after bringing on the stage the great events in Spanish history and tradition consecutively down to his own times, he looks round on all sides for subjects, at home and abroad, taking one from the usurpation of Boris Gudunow at Moscow, in 1606,²² another from the conquest of Arauco, in 1560,²³ and another from the great league that ended with the battle of Lepanto in 1571; in which last, to avoid the awkwardness of a sea-fight on the stage, he is guilty of introducing * 232 the greater awkwardness of an allegorical * figure of Spain describing the battle to the audience in Madrid, at the very moment when it is supposed to be going on near the shores of Greece.²⁴

¹⁹ The first two of these plays, which are not to be found in the collected dramatic works of Lope, have often been printed separately; but the last occurs, I believe, only in the first volume of the Comedias, (Valladolid, 1604, f. 98.) and in the reprints of it. It makes free use of the old ballads of Durandarte and Belerma.

²⁰ The "Siete Infantes de Lara" is in the Comedias, Tom. V., Madrid, 1615, and the "Bastardo Mudarra" is in Tom. XXIV., Zaragoza, 1641.

²¹ Thus, the attractive story of "El Mejor Alcalde el Rey" is, as he himself tells us at the conclusion, taken from the fourth part of the "Crónica General."

²² "El Gran Duque de Muscovia," Comedias, Tom. VII., Madrid, 1617.

²³ "Arauco Domado," Comedias, Tom. XX., Madrid, 1629. The scene

is laid about 1560; but the play is intended as a compliment to the living son of the conqueror. In the Dedication to him, Lope asserts it to be a true history; but there is, of course, much invention mingled with it, especially in the parts that do honor to the Spaniards. Among its personages is the author of the "Araucana," Alonso de Ercilla, who comes upon the stage beating a drum! Another and earlier play of Lope may be compared with the "Arauco"; I mean "Los Guanches de Tenerife" (Comedias, Tom. X., Madrid, 1620, f. 128). It is on the similar subject of the conquest of the Canary Islands, in the time of Ferdinand and Isabella, and, as in the "Arauco Domado," the natives occupy much of the canvas.

²⁴ "La Santa Liga," Comedias, Tom. XV., Madrid, 1621.

The whole class of these heroic and historical dramas, it should be remembered, makes little claim to historical accuracy. A love story, filled as usual with hairbreadth escapes, jealous quarrels, and questions of honor, runs through nearly every one of them; and though, in some cases, we may trust to the facts set before us, as we must in "The Valiant Céspedes," where the poet gravely declares that all except the love adventures are strictly true,²⁵ still in no case can it be pretended, that the manners of an earlier age, or of foreign nations, are respected, or that the general coloring of the representation is to be regarded as faithful. Thus, in one play, we see Nero hurrying about the streets of Rome, like a Spanish gallant, with a guitar on his arm, and making love to his mistress at her grated window.²⁶ In another, Belisarius, in the days of his glory, is selected to act the part of Pyramus in an interlude before the Emperor Justinian, much as if he belonged to Nick Bottom's company, and afterwards has his eyes put out, on a charge of making love to the Empress.²⁷ And in yet a third, Cyrus the Great, after he is seated on his throne, marries

²⁵ "El Valiente Céspedes," Comedias, Tom. XX., Madrid, 1629. This notice is specially given to the reader by Lope, out of tenderness to the reputation of Doña María de Céspedes, who does not appear in the play with all the dignity which those who, in Lope's time, claimed to be descended from her might exact at his hands.

²⁶ In "Roma Abrasada," Acto II. f. 89, already noticed, *ante*, p. 219.

²⁷ Jornada II. of "Exemplo Mayor de la Desdicha, y Capitan Belisario"; not in the collection of Lope's plays, and though often printed separately as his, and inserted as such on Lord Holland's list, it is published in the old and curious collection entitled "Comedias de Diferentes Autores," (4to, Tom. XXV., Zaragoza, 1633,) as the work of

Montalvan, both he and Lope being then alive. And, after all, it turns out to belong to neither of them, for Von Schack found, in the Duke of Ossuna's admirable collection at Madrid, this very play in the handwriting of Mira de Mescua, and signed by him as its author. What renders the affair more odd is, that there is, with the autograph play, the autograph *aprovacion* of Lope, containing a graceful compliment to Mira de Mescua as the author, and dated July, 1625. (Nachträge, 1854, 8vo, p. 57.) I leave both text and note, published several years before the date of this discovery, as they were originally printed, because they afford such amusing proof of a recklessness not uncommon among the publishers of Spanish dramas in the seventeenth century.

* 233 a shepherdess.²⁸ But there * is no end to such absurdities in Lope's plays; and the explanation of them all is, that they were not felt to be such at the time. Truth and faithfulness in regard to the facts, manners, and costume of a drama were not supposed to be more important, in the age of Lope, than an observation of the unities;—not more important than they were supposed to be a century later, in France, in the unending romances of Calprenède and Scudéry;—not more important than they are deemed in an Italian opera now:—so profound is the thought of the greatest of all the masters of the historical drama, that “the best in this kind are but shadows, and the worst are no worse, if imagination amend them.”

²⁸ “Contra Valor no hay Desdicha.” in consequence of his grandfather's dream, and ends with a battle and his victory over Astyages and all his enemies. Like the last, it has been often reprinted. It begins with the romantic account of Cyrus's exposure to death,

* CHAPTER XVII.

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LOPE DE VEGA, CONTINUED.—DRAMAS THAT ARE FOUNDED ON THE MANNERS OF COMMON LIFE.—THE WISE MAN AT HOME.—THE DAMSEL THEODORA.—CAPTIVES IN ALGIERS.—INFLUENCE OF THE CHURCH ON THE DRAMA.—LOPE'S PLAYS FROM SCRIPTURE.—THE BIRTH OF CHRIST.—THE CREATION OF THE WORLD.—LOPE'S PLAYS ON THE LIVES OF SAINTS.—SAINT ISIDORE OF MADRID.—LOPE'S SACRAMENTAL AUTOS FOR THE FESTIVAL OF THE CORPUS CHRISTI.—THEIR PROLOGUES.—THEIR INTERLUDES.—THE AUTOS THEMSELVES.

THE historical drama of Lope was but a deviation from the more truly national type of the “Comedia de Capa y Espada,” made by the introduction of historical names for its leading personages, instead of those that belong to fashionable and knightly life. This, however, was not the only deviation he made.¹ He went sometimes quite as far on the other side, and created a variety or subdivision of the theatre, founded on *common life*, in which the chief personages, like those of “The Watermaid,” and “The Slave of her Lover,” belong to the lower classes of society.² Of such dramas, he has left only a few, but these few are interesting.

* Perhaps the best specimen of them is “The * 235 Wise Man at Home,” in which the hero, if he

¹ We occasionally meet with the phrase *comedias de ruido*; but it does not mean a class of plays separated from the others by different rules of composition. It refers to the machinery used in their exhibition; so that *comedias de capa y espada*, and especially *comedias de santos*, which often demanded a large apparatus, were not unfrequently *comedias de ruido*, otherwise called *comedias de caso* or *comedias de fabrica*. In the same way *comedias de apariencias* were plays demanding much scenery and scene-shifting.

² “La Moza de Cantaro” and “La Esclava de su Galan” have continued to be favorites down to our own times. The first was printed at London, not many years ago, and the last at Paris, in Ochoa's collection, 1838, 8vo, and at Bielefeld, in that of Schütz, 1840, 8vo. Lope sometimes went very low down, among courtesans and rogues, for the subjects of his plays; as in the “Anzuelo de Fenisa,” (the story of which, I suppose, he took from the Decameron, VIIIth day, 10th tale,) “El Rufian Dichoso,” and some others.