

* 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.

may be so called, is Mendo, the son of a poor charcoal-burner.³ He has married the only child of a respectable farmer, and is in an easy condition of life, with the road to advancement, at least in a gay course, open before him. But he prefers to remain where he is. He refuses the solicitations of a neighboring lawyer or clerk, engaged in public affairs, who would have the honest Mendo take upon himself the airs of an *hidalgo* and *caballero*. Especially upon what was then the great point in private life,—his relations with his pretty wife,—he shows his uniform good sense, while his more ambitious friend falls into serious embarrassments, and is obliged at last to come to him for counsel and help.

The doctrine of the piece is well explained in the following reply of Mendo to his friend, who had been urging him to lead a more showy life, and raise the external circumstances of his father.

He that was born to live in humble state
Makes but an awkward knight, do what you will.
My father means to die as he has lived,
The same plain collier that he always was ;
And I, too, must an honest ploughman die.
'T is but a single step, or up or down ;
For men there must be that will plough and dig,
And, when the vase has once been filled, be sure
'T will always savor of what first it held.⁴

The story is less important than it is in many of Lope's dramas ; but the sketches of common life are

³ Comedias, Tom. VI., Madrid, 1615, ff. 101, etc. It may be worth notice, that the character of Mendo is like that of Camacho in the Second Part of Don Quixote, which was first printed in the same year, 1615. The resemblance between the two, however, is not very strong, and perhaps is wholly accidental, although Lope was not careful to make acknowledgments.

⁴ El que nació para humilde
Mal puede ser cauallero.
Mi padre quiere morir,
Leonardo, como nació.
Carbonero me engendró ;
Labrador quiero morir.
Y al fin es un grado mas,
Aya quien are y quien caue.
Siempre el vaso al licor sabe.
Comedias, Tom. VI., Madrid, 1615, f. 117.

sometimes spirited, like the one in which Mendo describes his first sight of his future wife, busied in household work, and * the elaborate scene * 236 where his first child is christened.⁵ The characters, on the other hand, are better defined and drawn than is common with him ; and that of the plain, practically wise Mendo is sustained, from beginning to end, with consistency and skill, as well as with good dramatic effect.⁶

Another of these more domestic pieces is called "The Damsel Theodora," and shows how gladly and with what ingenuity Lope seized on the stories current in his time and turned them to dramatic account. The tale he now used, which bears the same title with the play, and is extremely simple in its structure, is claimed to have been written by an Aragonese, of whom we know only that his name was Alfonso.⁷ The damsel Theodora, in this original fiction, is a slave in Tunis, and belongs to a Hungarian merchant living

⁵ There is in these passages something of the euphuistical style then in favor, under the name of the *estilo culto*, with which Lope sometimes humored the more fashionable portions of his audience, though on other occasions he bore a decided testimony against it.

⁶ This play, I think, gave the hint to Calderon for his "Alcalde de Zalamea," in which the character of Pedro Crespo, the peasant, is drawn with more than his accustomed distinctness. It is the last piece in the common collection of Calderon's Comedias, and nearly all its characters are happily touched.

⁷ This is among the more curious of the old popular Spanish tales. N. Antonio (Bib. Nov., Tom. I. p. 9) assigns no age to its author, and no date to the published story. Denis, in his "Chroniques de l'Espagne," etc., (Paris, 1839, 8vo, Tom. I. p. 285.) gives no additional light, but, in one of his notes, treats its ideas on natural history as those of the *moyen âge*. It seems, however, from internal evidence, to have

been composed after the fall of Granada. Gayangos gives editions of the "Donzella Teodor" in 1537 and 1540, and mentions an Arabic version of it, which leads him to the conjecture that the Aragonese, Alfonso, to whom Antonio attributes the story, is no other than the converted Jew, Pedro Alfonso, who in the twelfth century wrote the "Disciplina Clericalis." (See *ante*, Vol. I. pp. 63, 64, note, and the Spanish translation of this History, Tom. II. pp. 353-357.) But I cannot think it is older than the time of Charles V. ; probably not older than the capture of Tunis, in 1535. The copy I use is of 1726, showing that it was in favor in the eighteenth century ; and I possess another printed for popular circulation about 1845. We find early allusions to the Donzella Teodor, as a well-known personage ; for example, in "The Modest Man at Court" of Tirso de Molina, where one of the characters, speaking of a lady he admires, cries out, "Que Donzella Teodor !" Cigarrales de Toledo, Madrid, 1624, 4to, p. 158.

there, who has lost his whole fortune. At her suggestion, she is offered by her master to the king of Tunis, who is so much struck with her beauty and with the amount of her knowledge, that he purchases her at a price which re-establishes her master's condition. The point of the whole consists in the exhibition of this knowledge through discussions with * 237 * learned men; but the subjects are most of them of the commonest kind, and the merit of the story is quite inconsiderable, — less, for instance, than that of "Friar Bacon," in English, to which, in several respects, it may be compared.⁸

But Lope knew his audiences, and succeeded in adapting this old tale to their taste. The damsel Theodora, as he arranges her character for the stage, is the daughter of a professor at Toledo, and is educated in all the learning of her father's schools. She, however, is not raised by it above the influences of the tender passion, and, running away with her lover, is captured by a vessel from the coast of Barbary, and carried as a slave successively to Oran, to Constantinople, and finally to Persia, where she is sold to the Sultan for an immense sum on account of her rare knowledge, displayed in the last act of the play much as it is in the original tale of Alfonso, and sometimes in the same words. But the love intrigue, with a multitude of jealous troubles and adventures, runs through the whole; and as the Sultan is made to understand at last the relations of all the parties, who are strangely assembled before him, he gives the price

⁸ The popular English story of "Friar Bacon" hardly goes back further than to the end of the sixteenth century, though some of its materials may be traced to the "Gesta Romanorum." Robert Greene's play on it was printed in 1594. Both may be considered as running parallel with the story and play of the "Donzella Teodor," so as to be read with advantage when comparing the Spanish drama with the English.

of the damsel as her dower, and marries her to the lover with whom she originally fled from Toledo. The principal jest, both in the drama and the story, is, that a learned doctor, who is defeated by Theodora in a public trial of wits, is bound by the terms of the contest to be stripped naked, and buys off his ignominy with a sum which goes still further to increase the lady's fortune and the content of her husband.⁹

The last of Lope's plays to be noticed among those whose subjects are drawn from common life is a more direct appeal, perhaps, than any other of its class to the popular feeling. It is his "Captives in Algiers,"¹⁰ and has been already alluded to as partly borrowed or pilfered * 238 * from a play of Cervantes. In its first scenes, a Morisco of Valencia leaves the land where his race had suffered so cruelly, and, after establishing himself among those of his own faith in Algiers, returns by night as a corsair, and, from his familiar knowledge of the Spanish coast, where he was born, easily succeeds in carrying off a number of Christian captives. The fate of these victims, and that of others whom they find in Algiers, including a lover and his mistress, form the subject of the drama. In the course of it, we have scenes in which Christian Spaniards are publicly sold in the slave-market; Christian children torn from their parents and cajoled out of their faith;¹¹ and a Christian gentleman made to suffer the most dreadful forms of martyrdom for his religion; — in short, we have set before us whatever could most painfully and powerfully excite the interest and sympathy of an audience in Spain at a moment when such multi-

⁹ Comedias, Tom. IX., Barcelona, 1618, ff. 27, etc.

¹⁰ Comedias, Tom. XXV., Çaragoça, 1647, ff. 231, etc.

¹¹ These passages are much indebted to the "Trato de Argel" of Cervantes.

tudes of Spanish families were mourning the captivity of their children and friends.¹² It ends with an account of a play to be acted by the Christian slaves in one of their vast prison-houses, to celebrate the recent marriage of Philip the Third; from which, as well as from a reference to the magnificent festivities that followed it at Denia, in which Lope, as we know, took part, we may be sure that the "Cautivos de Argel" was written as late as 1598, and probably not much later.¹³

A love-story unites its rather incongruous materials into something like a connected whole; but the part we read with the most interest is that assigned to Cervantes, who appears under his family name * 239 of Saavedra, without * disguise, though without any mark of respect.¹⁴ Considering that Lope took from him some of the best materials for this very piece, and that the sufferings and heroism of Cervantes at Algiers must necessarily have been present to his thoughts when he composed it, we can hardly do the popular poet any injustice by adding, that he ought either to have given Cervantes a more dignified part, and alluded to him with tenderness and consideration, or else have refrained from introducing him at all.

¹² See, *passim*, Haedo, "Historia de Argel" (Madrid, 1612, folio). He reckons the number of Christian captives, chiefly Spaniards, in Algiers, at twenty-five thousand.

There are frequent intimations in Spanish plays of the return of renegadoes from Barbary to such portions of the coasts of their native land as were most familiar to them, for the purpose of carrying Christians into captivity; and Lope de Vega, in his "Peregrino en su Patria," Libro II., describes a particular spot on the shores of Valencia, where such violences had often occurred. No doubt they were common. See further the account, *post*, in Chapter XXV., of the "Redentor Cautivo" of

Matos Fragoso, and, in a note, that of the "Azote de su Patria," by Moreto. Cervantes, speaking as the captive in Don Quixote, says that these renegadoes could run over from Tetuan in the night, and, after a successful foray, return so as to sleep at home.

¹³ Lope, Obras Sueltas, Tom. III. p. 377. I am much disposed to think the play referred to as acted in the prisons of Algiers is Lope's own moral play of the "Marriage of the Soul to Divine Love," in the second book of the "Peregrino en su Patria."

¹⁴ The passages in which Cervantes occurs are on ff. 245, 251, and especially 262 and 277, Comedias, Tom. XXV.

The three forms of Lope's drama which have thus far been considered, and which are nearly akin to each other,¹⁵ were, no doubt, the spontaneous productions of his own genius; modified, indeed, by what he found already existing, and by the taste and will of the audiences for which he wrote, but still essentially his own. Probably, if he had been left to himself and to the mere influences of the theatre, he would have preferred to write no other dramas than such as would naturally come under one of these divisions. But neither he nor his audiences were permitted to settle the whole of this question. The Church, always powerful in Spain, but never so powerful as during the latter part of the reign of Philip the Second, when Lope was just rising into notice, was offended with the dramas then so much in favor, and not without reason. Their free love-stories, their duels, and, indeed, their ideas generally upon domestic life and personal character, have, unquestionably, anything but a Christian tone.¹⁶ A contro-

¹⁵ The fusion of the three classes may be seen at a glance in Lope's fine play, "El Mejor Alcalde el Rey," (Comedias, Tom. XXI., Madrid, 1635,) founded on a passage in the fourth part of the "General Chronicle" (ed. 1604, f. 327). The hero and heroine belong to the condition of peasants; the person who makes the mischief is their liege lord; and, from the end of the second act, the king and one or two of the principal persons about the court play leading parts. On the whole, it ranks technically with the *comedias heróicas* or *historiales*; and yet the best and most important scenes are those relating to common life, while others of no little consequence belong to the class of *capa y espada*.

¹⁶ How the Spanish theatre, as it existed in the time of Philip IV., ought to have been regarded, may be judged by the following remarks on such of its plays as continued to be represented at the end of the eighteenth century, read in 1796 to the Spanish Academy of

History, by Jovellanos, — a personage who will be noticed when we reach the period during which he lived.

"As for myself," says that wise and faithful magistrate, "I am persuaded there can be found no proof so decisive of the degradation of our taste as the cool indifference with which we tolerate the representation of dramas, in which modesty, the gentler affections, good faith, decency, and all the virtues and principles belonging to a sound morality, are openly trampled under foot. Do men believe that the innocence of childhood and the fervor of youth, that an idle and dainty nobility and an ignorant populace, can witness without injury such examples of effrontery and grossness, of an insolent and absurd affectation of honor, of contempt of justice and the laws, and of public and private duty, represented on the stage in the most lively colors, and rendered attractive by the enchantment of scenic illusions and the graces of music and verse? Let us, then, honestly confess

*240 versy, therefore, *naturally arose concerning their lawfulness, and this controversy was continued till 1598, when, by a royal decree, the representation of secular plays in Madrid was entirely forbidden, and the common theatres were closed for nearly two years.¹⁷

Lope was compelled to accommodate himself to this new state of things, and seems to have done it easily and with his accustomed address. He had, as we have seen, early written *religious plays*, like the old Mysteries and Moralities; and he now undertook to infuse their spirit into the more attractive forms of his

*241 *secular drama, and thus produce an entertainment which, while it might satisfy the popular

the truth. Such a theatre is a public nuisance, and the government has no just alternative but to reform it or suppress it altogether." *Memorias de la Acad.*, Tom. V. p. 397.

Elsewhere, in the same excellent discourse, its author shows that he was by no means insensible to the poetical merits of the old theatre, whose moral influences he deprecated.

"I shall always be the first," he says, "to confess its inimitable beauties; the freshness of its inventions, the charm of its style, the flowing naturalness of its dialogue, the marvellous ingenuity of its plots, the ease with which everything is at last explained and adjusted; the brilliant interest, the humor, the wit, that mark every step as we advance;—but what matters all this, if this same drama, regarded in the light of truth and wisdom, is infected with vices and corruptions that can be tolerated neither by a sound state of morals nor by a wise public policy?" *Ibid.*, p. 413.

¹⁷ C. Pellicer, *Origen del Teatro*, Madrid, 1804, 12mo, Tom. I. pp. 142–148. Plays were prohibited in Barcelona in 1591 by the bishop; but the prohibition was not long respected, and in 1597 was renewed with increased earnestness. Bisbe y Vidal, *Tratado de las Comedias*, Barcelona, 1618, 12mo, f. 94;—a curious book, attacking the

Spanish theatre with more discretion than any other old treatise against it that I have read, but not with much effect. Its author would have all plays carefully examined and expurgated before they were licensed, and then would permit them to be performed, not by professional actors, but by persons belonging to the place where the representation was to occur, and known as respectable men and decent youths; for, he adds, "when this was done for hundreds of years, none of those strange vices were committed that are the consequence of our present modes." (f. 106.) Bisbe y Vidal is a pseudonyme for Juan Ferrer, the head of a large congregation of devout men at Barcelona, and a person who was so much scandalized at the state of the theatre in his time, that he published this attack on it for the benefit of the brotherhood whose spiritual leader he was. (Torres y Amat, *Biblioteca*, Art. *Ferrer*.) It is encumbered with theological learning; but less so than other similar works of the time, and runs into absurdities worthy the bigotry of the age and the ignorance of the people; as, for instance, when it attributes to the drama the introduction of heresy—*el mayor mal que a una republica o reyno le puede venir*—and the success of Luther's doctrines in Germany. Chap. XI. Ferrer was a Jesuit.

audiences of the capital, would avoid the rebukes of the Church. His success was as marked as it had been before; and the new varieties of form in which his genius now disported itself were scarcely less striking.

His most obvious resource was the Scriptures, to which, as they had been used more than four centuries for dramatic purposes, on the greater religious festivals of the Spanish Church, the ecclesiastical powers could hardly, with a good grace, now make objection. Lope, therefore, resorted to them freely; sometimes constructing dramas out of them which might be mistaken for the old Mysteries, were it not for their more poetical character, and their sometimes approaching so near to his own intriguing comedies, that, but for the religious parts, they might seem to belong to the merely secular and fashionable theatre that had just been interdicted.

Of the first, or more religious sort, his "Birth of Christ" may be taken as a specimen.¹⁸ It is divided

¹⁸ *Comedias*, Tom. XXIV., Zaragoza, 1641, ff. 110, etc. Such plays were often acted at Christmas, and went under the name of *Nacimientos*;—a relique of the old dramas mentioned in the "Partidas," and written in various forms after the time of Juan de la Enzina and Gil Vicente. They seem, from hints in the "Viage" of Roxas, 1602, and elsewhere, to have been acted in private houses, in the churches, on the public stage, and in the streets, as they happened to be asked for. They were not exactly *autos*, but very like them, as may be seen from the "Nacimiento de Christo" by Lope de Vega, (in a curious volume entitled "Navidad y Corpus Christi Festejados," Madrid, 1664, 4to, f. 346),—a drama quite different from this one, though bearing the same name; and quite different from another *Nacimiento de Christo*, in the same volume, (f. 93,) attributed to Lope, and called "*Auto del Nacimiento de Chris-*

to Nuestro Señor." There are besides, in this volume, *Nacimientos* attributed to Cubillo (f. 375) and Valdivielso (f. 369).

"Nacimientos" continued to be represented chiefly in pantomime and in private houses through the eighteenth century, and into the nineteenth. I have a poetical tract, entitled "Disseño metrico en que se manifiesta un Nacimiento con las figuras correspondientes segun el estilo que se practica en las casas particulares de este corte, ec., por D. Antonio Manuel de Cardenas, Conde del Sacro Palacio," Madrid, 1766, 18mo. It is in the ballad style, and describes minutely how they borrowed the Madonna and child from a convent, the ox from a neighboring village, etc. Another similar description, but in *quintillas*, is entitled "Liras a la Representacion del Drama, El Nacimiento, Pieza inedita de D. J. B. Colomés," Valencia, 1807, 18mo.