

* 259 any rate, all Lope's compositions of * this kind show how gladly and freely his genius overflowed into the remotest of the many forms of the drama that were either popular or permitted in his time.

known eclogue which Lope dedicated to Antonio Duke of Alva, (Obras, IV. p. 295,) that to Amaryllis, which was the longest he ever wrote, (Tom. X. p. 147,) that for the Prince of Esquilache, (Tom. I. p. 352,) and most of those in the "Arcadia," (Tom. VI.,) were acted, and written in order to be acted. Why the poem to his friend Claudio, (Tom. IX. p. 355,) which is in fact an account of some passages in his own life, with nothing pastoral in its tone or form, is called "an eclogue," I do not know, unless he went to the Greek *ἐκλογή*;

nor will I undertake to assign to any particular class the "Military Dialogue in Honor of the Marquis of Espinola," (Tom. X. p. 337,) though I think it is dramatic in its structure, and was probably represented, on some show occasion, before the Marquis himself. Such representations occurred in other countries about the same period, but rarely, I think, of a bucolic nature. One, however, is mentioned by that prince of gossips, Tallemant des Réaux, in his notice of "La Presidente Perrot," as performed in Paris, in a private house.

* CHAPTER XVIII.

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LOPE DE VEGA, CONTINUED.—HIS CHARACTERISTICS AS A DRAMATIC WRITER.—HIS STORIES, CHARACTERS, AND DIALOGUE.—HIS DISREGARD OF RULES, OF HISTORICAL TRUTH, AND MORAL PROPRIETY.—HIS COMIC UNDERPLOT AND GRACIOSO.—HIS POETICAL STYLE AND MANNER.—HIS FITNESS TO WIN GENERAL FAVOR.—HIS SUCCESS.—HIS FORTUNE, AND THE VAST AMOUNT OF HIS WORKS.

THE extraordinary variety in the character of Lope's dramas is as remarkable as their number, and contributed not a little to render him the monarch of the stage while he lived, and the great master of the national theatre ever since. But though this vast variety and inexhaustible fertility constitute, as it were, the two great corner-stones on which his success rested, still there were other circumstances attending it that should by no means be overlooked, when we are examining, not only the surprising results themselves, but the means by which they were obtained.

The first of these is the principle which may be considered as running through the whole of his full-length plays,—that of making all other interests subordinate to the interest of the story. Thus, the characters are a matter evidently of inferior moment with him; so that the idea of exhibiting a single passion giving a consistent direction to all the energies of a strong will, as in the case of Richard the Third, or, as in the case of Macbeth, distracting them all no less consistently, does not occur in the whole range of his dramas. Sometimes, it is true, though rarely, as in Sancho Ortiz, he develops a marked and generous spirit, with

distinctive lineaments; but in no case is this * 261 the * main object, and in no case is it done with the appearance of an artist-like skill or a deliberate purpose. On the contrary a great majority of his characters are almost as much standing masks as Pantalone is on the Venetian stage, or Scapin on the French. The *primer galan*, or hero, all love, honor, and jealousy; the *dama*, or heroine, no less loving and jealous, but yet more rash and heedless; and the brother, or if not the brother, then the *barba*, or old man and father, ready to cover the stage with blood, if the lover has even been seen in the house of the heroine, — these recur continually, and serve, not only in the secular, but often in the religious pieces, as the fixed points round which the different actions, with their different incidents, are made to revolve.

In the same way, the dialogue is used chiefly to bring out the plot, and hardly at all to bring out the characters. This is obvious in the long speeches, sometimes consisting of two or three hundred verses, which are as purely narrative as an Italian *novella*, and often much like one; and it is seen, too, in the crowd of incidents that compose the action, which not infrequently fails to find space sufficient to spread out all its ingenious involutions, and make them easily intelligible; a difficulty of which Lope once gives his audience fair warning, telling them at the outset of the piece, that they must not lose a syllable of the first explanation, or they will certainly fail to understand the curious plot that follows.

Obeying the same principle, he sacrifices regularity and congruity in his stories, if he can but make them interesting. His longer plays, indeed, are regularly divided into three *jornadas*, or acts; but this, though

he claims it as a merit, is not an arrangement of his own invention, and is, moreover, merely an arbitrary mode of producing the pauses necessary to the convenience of the actors and spectators; pauses which, in Lope's theatre, have too often nothing to do with the structure and proportions of the piece itself.¹ As for the six plays which, * as he inti- * 262 mates, were written according to the rules, Spanish criticism has sought for them in vain;² nor do any of them, probably, exist now, if any ever existed, unless "La Melindrosa" — The Prude — may have been one of them. But he avows very honestly that he regards rules of all kinds only as obstacles to his success. "When I am going to write a play," he says, "I lock up all precepts, and cast Terence and Plautus out of my study, lest they should cry out against me, as truth is wont to do even from such dumb volumes; for I write according to the art invented by those who sought the applause of the multitude, whom it is but just to humor in their folly, since it is they who pay for it."³

The extent to which, following this principle, Lope sacrificed dramatic probabilities and possibilities, geog-

¹ This division can be traced back to a play of Francisco de Avendaño, 1553. L. F. Moratin, *Obras*, 1830, Tom. I. Parte I. p. 182.

² "Except six," says Lope, at the end of his "Arte Nuevo," "all my four hundred and eighty-three plays have offended gravely against the rules [el arte]." See Montiano y Luyando, "Discurso sobre las Tragedias Españolas," (Madrid, 1750, 12mo, p. 47,) and Huerta, in the Preface to his "Teatro Español," for the difficulty of finding even these six. In his *Dorotea* (Act III. sc. 4) Lope goes out of his way to ridicule the precepts of art, as he calls them; but Figueroa (*Plaza Universal*, 1615, f. 322, b) rebukes him for thus

yielding to vulgar taste and popular ignorance.

³ *Arte Nuevo de Hacer Comedias*, *Obras*, Tom. IV. p. 406. And in the Dedication of "Lo Cierto por lo Dudosos," speaking of dramas, he says: "En España no tienen preceptos." When, however, he published the twelfth volume of his *Comedias*, 1619, he seemed to fancy that he was writing more carefully, for he says, he wrote them not for the multitude, but for fourteen or fifteen people "que tuvo en su imaginacion." It would be difficult, however, to tell how he would apply this remark to "El Marques de Mantua," which is the seventh in the volume, or the "Fuente Ovejuna," which is the last.

raphy, history, and a decent morality, can be properly understood only by reading a large number of his plays. But a few instances will partially illustrate it. In his "First King of Castile," the events fill thirty-six years in the middle of the eleventh century, and a Gypsy is introduced four hundred years before Gypsies were known in Europe.⁴ The whole romantic story of the Seven Infantes of Lara is put into the play of "Mudarra."⁵ In "Spotless Purity," Job, David, Jeremiah, Saint John the Baptist, and the University of Salamanca figure together;⁶ and in "The Birth of Christ" we have, for the two extremes, the creation of the world and the Nativity.⁷ So much for *263 history. Geography is treated *no better, when Constantinople is declared to be four thousand leagues from Madrid,⁸ and Spaniards are made to disembark from a ship in Hungary.⁹ And as to morals, it is not easy to tell how Lope reconciled his opinions to his practice. In the Preface to the twentieth volume of his Theatre, he declares, in reference to his own "Wise Vengeance," that its title is absurd, because all revenge is unwise and unlawful; and yet it seems as if one half of his plays go to justify it. It is made a merit in San Isidro, that he stole his master's grain to give it to the starving birds.¹⁰

⁴ "El Primer Rey de Castilla," Comedias, Tom. XVII., Madrid, 1621, ff. 114, etc.

⁵ "El Bastardo Mudarra," Comedias, Tom. XXIV., Zaragoza, 1641.

⁶ "La Limpieza no Manchada," Comedias, Tom. XIX., Madrid, 1623.

⁷ "El Nacimiento de Christo," Comedias, Tom. XXIV., *ut supra*.

⁸ It is the learned Theodora, a person represented as capable of confounding the knowing professors brought to try her, who declares Constantinople to be four thousand leagues from Madrid. La Donzella Teodor, end of Act II.

⁹ This extraordinary disembarkation

takes place in the "Animal de Ungria" (Comedias, Tom. IX., Barcelona, 1618, ff. 137, 138). One is naturally reminded of Shakespeare's "Winter's Tale"; but it is curious that the Duke de Luynes, a favorite minister of state to Louis XIII., made precisely the same mistake, at about the same time, to Lord Herbert of Cherbury, then (1619-1621) ambassador in France. But Lope certainly knew better, and I doubt not Shakespeare did, however ignorant the French statesman may have been. Herbert's Life, by himself, London, 1809, 8vo, p. 217.

¹⁰ See "San Isidro Labrador," in Co-

The prayers of Nicolas de Tolentino are accounted sufficient for the salvation of a kinsman who, after a dissolute life, had died in an act of mortal sin;¹¹ and the cruel and atrocious conquest of Arauco is claimed as an honor to a noble family and a grace to the national escutcheon.¹²

But all these violations of the truth of fact and of the commonest rules of Christian morals, of which nobody was more aware than their perpetrator, were overlooked by Lope himself, and by his audiences, in the general interest of the plot. A dramatized novel was the form he chose to give to his plays, and he succeeded in settling it as the main principle of the Spanish stage. "Tales," he declares, "have the same rules with dramas, the purpose of whose authors is to content and please the public, *though *264 the rules of art may be strangled by it."¹³ And elsewhere, when defending his opinions, he says: "Keep the explanation of the story doubtful till the last scene; for, as soon as the public know how it will end, they turn their faces to the door, and their backs to the stage."¹⁴ This had never been said before; and though some traces of intriguing plots are to be found from the time of Torres de Naharro, yet nobody ever thought of relying upon them, in this way, for success,

medias Escogidas, Tom. XXVIII., Madrid, 1667, f. 66.

¹¹ "San Nicolas de Tolentino," Comedias, Tom. XXIV., Zaragoza, 1641, f. 171.

¹² "Arauco Domado," Comedias, Tom. XX., Madrid, 1629. After reading such absurdities, we wonder less that Cervantes, even though he committed not a few like them himself, should make the puppet-showman exclaim, "Are not a thousand plays represented nowadays, full of a thousand improprieties and absurdities, which yet run their course successfully, and

are heard, not only with applause, but with admiration?" D. Quixote, Parte II. c. 26.

¹³ "Tienen las novelas los mismos preceptos que las comedias, cuyo fin es haber dado su autor contento y gusto al pueblo, aunque se ahorque el arte." Obras Seltas, Tom. VIII. p. 70.

¹⁴ Arte Nuevo, Obras, Tom. IV. p. 412. From an autograph MS. of Lope, still extant, it appears that he sometimes wrote out his plays first in the form of *pequeñas novelas*. Semanario Pintoresco, 1839, p. 19.

till Lope had set the example, which his school have so faithfully followed.

Another element which he established in the Spanish Drama was the comic underplot. Nearly all his plays, "The Star of Seville" being the only brilliant exception, have it;—sometimes in a pastoral form, but generally as a simple admixture of farce. The characters contained in this portion of each of his dramas are as much standing masks as those in the graver portion, and were perfectly well known under the name of the *graciosos* and *graciosas*, or drolls, to which was afterwards added the *vegete*,¹⁴ or a little, old, testy esquire, who is always boasting of his descent, and is often employed in teasing the *gracioso*. In most cases they constitute a parody on the dialogue and adventures of the hero and heroine, as Sancho is partly a parody of Don Quixote, and in most cases they are the servants of the respective parties;—the men being good-humored cowards and gluttons, the women mischievous and coquettish, and both full of wit, malice, and an affected simplicity. Slight traces of such characters are to be found on the Spanish stage as far back as the servants in the "Serafina" of Torres Naharro; and in the middle of that century, the *bobo*, or fool, figures freely in the farces of Lope de Rueda, as the *simplé* had done before in those of Enzina. But the variously witty *gracioso*, the full-blown parody of the heroic characters of the play, the dramatic *pícaro*, is the work of Lope de Vega. He first introduced * 265 * it into the "Francesilla," where the oldest of the tribe, under the name of Tristan, was represented by Rios, a famous actor of his time,

¹⁴ Figueroa (Pasagero, 1617, f. 111) calls the *vegete* "natural enemigo del lacayo."

and produced a great effect;¹⁵—an event which, Lope tells us, in the Dedication of the drama itself, in 1620, to his friend Montalvan, occurred before that friend was born, and therefore before the year 1602.

From this time the *gracioso* is found in nearly all of his plays, and in nearly every other play produced on the Spanish stage, from which it passed, first to the French, and then to all the other theatres of modern times. Excellent specimens of it may be noted in the sacristan of the "Captives of Algiers," in the servants of the "Saint John's Eve," and in the servants of the "Ugly Beauty"; in all which, as well as in many more, the *gracioso* is skilfully turned to account, by being made partly to ridicule the heroic extravagances and rhodomontade of the leading personages, and partly to shield the author himself from rebuke by good-humoredly confessing for him that he was quite aware he deserved it. Of such we may say, as Don Quixote did, when speaking of the whole class to the Bachelor Samson Carrasco, that they are the shrewdest fellows in their respective plays. But of others, whose ill-advised wit is inopportunately thrust,

¹⁵ See the Dedication of the "Francesilla" to Juan Perez de Montalvan, in Comedias, Tom. XIII., Madrid, 1620, where we have the following words: "And note in passing that this is the first play in which was introduced the character of the jester, which has been so often repeated since. Rios, unique in all parts, played it, and is worthy of this record. I pray you to read it as a new thing; for when I wrote it you were not born." The *gracioso* was generally distinguished by his name on the Spanish stage, as he was afterwards on the French stage. Thus, Calderon often calls his *gracioso* Clarin, or Trumpet; as Molière called his Sganarelle. The *simplé*, who, as I have said, can be traced back to Enzina, and who was, no doubt, the same with the *bobo*, is mentioned as very successful, in 1596,

by Lopez Pinciano, who, in his "Filosofía Antigua Poética," (1596, p. 402,) says, "They are characters that commonly amuse more than any others that appear in the plays." The *gracioso* of Lope was, like the rest of his theatre, founded on what existed before his time; only the character itself was further developed, and received a new name. D. Quixote, Clemencin, Parte II. cap. 3, note.

But he was eminently in the national taste, and rose, at once, in Lope's hands, to be an important personage. When the *Persiles* and *Sigismundo* was written, this personage was considered altogether indispensable, as we can see from the humorous troubles occasioned by the absolute necessity of introducing one into a play in which such a figure could find no proper place. Lib. III. c. 2.