

with their foolscaps and baubles, into the gravest and most tragic scenes of plays like "Marriage in Death," we can only avow, that, though they were demanded by the taste of the age, nothing in any age can suffice for their justification.

\* 266 \* An important circumstance which should not be overlooked, when considering the means of Lope's great success, is his poetical style, the metres he adopted, and especially the use he made of the elder poetry of his country. In all these respects, he is to be praised; always excepting the occasions when, to obtain universal applause, he permitted himself the use of that obscure and affected style which the courtly part of his audience demanded, and which he himself elsewhere condemned and ridiculed.<sup>16</sup>

No doubt, indeed, much of his power over the mass of the people of his time is to be sought in the charm that belonged to his versification; not infrequently careless, but almost always fresh, flowing, and effective. Its variety, too, was remarkable. No metre of which the language was susceptible escaped him. The Italian octave stanzas are frequent; the *terza rima*, though more sparingly used, occurs often; and hardly a play is without one or more sonnets. All this was to please the more fashionable and cultivated among his audience, who had long been enamored of whatever was Italian; and though some of it was unhappy

<sup>16</sup> The specimens of his bad taste in this particular occur but too frequently; e. g. in "El Cuerdo en su Casa" (Comedias, Tom. VI., Madrid, 1615, ff. 105, etc.); in the "Niña de Plata" (Comedias, Tom. IX., Barcelona, 1618, ff. 125, etc.); in the "Cautivos de Argel" (Comedias, Tom. XXV., Zaragoza, 1647, p. 241); and in other places. But in opposition to all this, see his deliberate condemnation of such eu-

phistical follies in his *Obras Sueltas*, Tom. IV. pp. 459-482; and the jests at their expense in his "Amistad y Obligacion," and his "Melindres de Belisa" (Comedias, Tom. IX., Barcelona, 1618).

As a general remark, Lope's language is natural, pure, and idiomatic. Vargas y Ponce (Declamacion, p. 23) is too strong, when he says that it is *always* so.

enough, like sonnets with echoes,<sup>17</sup> it was all fluent and all successful.

Still, as far as his verse was concerned, — besides the *silvas*, or masses of irregular lines, the *quintillas*, or five-line stanzas, and the *liras*, or six-line, — he relied, above everything else, upon the old national ballad-measure; — both the proper *romance*, with *asonantes*, \* and the *redondilla*, with rhymes between \* 267 the first and fourth lines and between the second and third. In this he was unquestionably right. The earliest attempts at dramatic representation in Spain had been somewhat lyrical in their tone, and the more artificial forms of verse, therefore, especially those with short lines interposed at regular intervals, had been used by Juan de la Enzina, by Torres Naharro, and by others; though, latterly, in these, as in many respects, much confusion had been introduced into Spanish dramatic poetry. But Lope, making his drama more narrative than it had been before, settled it at once and finally on the true national narrative measure. He went further. He introduced into it much old ballad-poetry, and many separate ballads of his own composition. Thus, in "The Sun Delayed," the Master of Santiago, who has lost his way, stops and sings a ballad;<sup>18</sup> and in his "Poverty no Disgrace," he has inserted a beautiful one, beginning, —

<sup>17</sup> Sonnets seem to have been a sort of choice morsels thrown in to please the over-refined portion of the audience. In general, only one or two occur in a play; but in the "Discreta Venganza" (Comedias, Tom. XX., Madrid, 1629) there are five. In the "Palacios de Galiana" (Comedias, Tom. XXIII., Madrid, 1638, f. 256) there is a foolish sonnet with echoes, and another in the "Historia de Tobias" (Comedias, Tom. XV., Madrid, 1621, f. 244). The sonnet in ridicule of sonnets, in the "Niña

de Plata," (Comedias, Tom. IX., Barcelona, 1618, f. 124,) is witty, and has been imitated in French and in English." Figueroa, (Pasajero, 1617, f. 111), in ridicule of the practice, says you must not put more than seven sonnets into a play. But sonnets, as ornaments, are known in the drama of other countries. Shakespeare has them, e. g. in the heartbroken letter of Helen to her mother-in-law, "All's Well that Ends Well," Act III. sc. 4.

<sup>18</sup> "El Sol Parado," Comedias, Tom.

O noble Spanish cavalier,  
You hasten to the fight ;  
The trumpet rings upon your ear,  
And victory claims her right.<sup>19</sup>

Probably, however, he produced a still greater effect when he brought in passages, not of his own, but of old and well-known ballads, or allusions to them. Of these his plays are full. For instance, his "Sun Delayed," and his "Envy of Nobility," are all redolent of the Morisco ballads that were so much admired in his time ; the first taking those that relate to the loves of Gazul and Zayda,<sup>20</sup> and the last those from the "Civil Wars of Granada," about the wild feuds \* 268 of the Zegrís and the \* Abencerrages.<sup>21</sup> Hardly less marked is the use he makes of the old ballads on Roderic, in his "Last Goth" ;<sup>22</sup> of those concerning the Infantes of Lara, in his several plays relating to their tragical story ;<sup>23</sup> and of those about Bernardo del Carpio, in "Marriage and Death."<sup>24</sup> Occasionally, the effect of their introduction must have been very great. Thus, when, in his drama of "Santa Fé," crowded with the achievements of Hernando del

XVII., Madrid, 1621, pp. 218, 219. It reminds one of the much more beautiful *serrana* of the Marquis of Santillana, beginning "Moza tan formosa," ante, Vol. I. p. 336 and note. But it is too free.

<sup>19</sup> "Pobreza no es Vileza," Comedias, Tom. XX., Madrid, 1629, f. 61.

<sup>20</sup> He has even ventured to take the beautiful and familiar ballad, "Sale la Estrella de Venus," — which is in the Romancero General, the "Guerras de Granada," and many other places, — and work it up into a dialogue. "El Sol Parado," Comedias, Tom. XVII., Madrid, 1621, ff. 223, 224.

<sup>21</sup> In the same way he seizes upon the old ballad, "Reduan bien se te acuerda," and uses it in the "Embidia de la Nobleza," Comedias, Tom. XXIII., Madrid, 1638, f. 192.

<sup>22</sup> For example, the ballad in the Romancero of 1555, beginning "Despues que el Rey Rodrigo," at the end of Jornada II., in "El Ultimo Godo," Comedias, Tom. XXV., Zaragoza, 1647.

<sup>23</sup> Compare "El Bastardo Mudarra" (Comedias, Tom. XXIV., Zaragoza, 1641, ff. 75, 76) with the ballads "Ruy Velasquez de Lara," and "Llegados son los Infantes"; and, in the same play, the dialogue between Mudarra and his mother, (f. 83,) with the ballad, "Sentados á un ajedrez."

<sup>24</sup> "El Casamiento en la Muerte," (Comedias, Tom. I., Valladolid, 1604, ff. 198, etc.,) in which the following well-known old ballads are freely used, viz. : "O Belerma ! O Belerma !" "No tiene heredero alguno" ; "Al pie de un tímulo negro" ; "Bañando está las prisiones" ; and others.

Pulgar, Garcilasso de la Vega, and whatever was most glorious and imposing in the siege of Granada, one of his personages breaks out with a variation of the familiar and grand old ballad, —

Now Santa Fé is circled round  
With canvas walls so fair,  
And tents that cover all the ground  
With silks and velvets rare,<sup>25</sup> —

it must have stirred his audience as with the sound of a trumpet.

Indeed, in all respects, Lope well understood how to win the general favor, and how to build up and strengthen his fortunate position as the leading dramatic poet of \* his time. The ancient \* 269 foundations of the theatre, as far as they existed when he appeared, were little disturbed by him. He carried on the drama, he says, as he found it ; not venturing to observe the rules of art, because, if he had done so, the public never would have listened to him.<sup>26</sup> The elements that were floating about, crude and unsettled, he used freely ; but only so far as they suited his general purpose. The division into three acts, known so little, that he attributed it to Virues, though it was made much earlier ; the ballad-measure,

<sup>25</sup> It is in the last chapter of the "Guerras Civiles de Granada" ; but Lope has given it, with a slight change in the phraseology, as follows : —

Cercada está Sancta Fé  
Con mucho lienço encerado ;  
Y al reledor muchas tiendas  
De terciopelo y damasco.

It occurs in many collections of ballads, and is founded on the fact, that a sort of village of rich tents was established near Granada, which, after an accidental conflagration, was turned into a town, that still exists, within whose walls were signed both the commission of Columbus to seek the New World,

and the capitulation of Granada. The imitation of this ballad by Lope is in his "Cerco de Santa Fé," Comedias, Tom. I., Valladolid, 1604, f. 69. For an account of Santa Fé, which was visited by Navagiero in 1526, see his Viaggio, 1563, f. 18. It is now much dilapidated. It took its name, Havemann says, from the belief that it was the only city in Spain where no Moslem prayer had ever been offered.

<sup>26</sup> He says this apparently as a kind of apology to foreigners, in the Preface to the "Peregrino en su Patria," 1603, where he gives a list of his plays to that date.

which had been timidly used by Tarrega and two or three others, but relied upon by nobody; the intriguing story and the amusing underplot, of which the slight traces that existed in Torres Naharro had been long forgotten, — all these he seized with the instinct of genius, and formed from them, and from the abundant and rich inventions of his own overflowing fancy, a drama which, as a whole, was unlike anything that had preceded it, and yet was so truly national, and rested so faithfully on tradition, that it was never afterwards disturbed, till the whole literature, of which it was so brilliant a part, was swept away with it.

Lope de Vega's immediate success, as we have seen, was in proportion to his great powers and favorable opportunities. For a long time, nobody else was willingly heard on the stage; and during the whole of the forty or fifty years that he wrote for it, he stood quite unapproached in general popularity. His unnumbered plays and farces, in all the forms that were demanded by the fashions of the age, or permitted by religious authority, filled the theatres both of the capital and the provinces; and so extraordinary was the impulse he gave to dramatic representations, that, though there were only two companies of strolling players at Madrid when he began, there were, about the period of his death, no less than forty, comprehending nearly a thousand persons.<sup>27</sup>

\* 270 \* Abroad, too, his fame was hardly less remarkable. In Rome, Naples, and Milan, his dramas were performed in their original language; in France and Italy, his name was announced in order to fill the theatres when no play of his was to be per-

<sup>27</sup> See the curious facts collected on this subject in Pellicer's note to Don Quixote, ed. 1798, Parte II., Tom. I. pp. 109-111.

formed;<sup>28</sup> and once even, and probably oftener, one of his dramas was represented in the seraglio at Constantinople.<sup>29</sup> But perhaps neither all this popularity, nor yet the crowds that followed him in the streets and gathered in the balconies to watch him as he passed along,<sup>30</sup> nor the name of Lope, that was given to whatever was esteemed singularly good in its kind,<sup>31</sup> is so striking a proof of his dramatic success as the fact, so often complained of by himself and his friends, that multitudes of his plays were fraudulently noted down as they were acted, and then printed for profit throughout Spain; and that multitudes of other plays appeared under his name, and were represented all over the provinces, that he had never even heard of till they were published or performed.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>28</sup> This is stated by the well-known Italian poet, Marini, in his Eulogy on Lope, Obras Sueltas, Tom. XXI. p. 19. His plays were often printed in Italy while he was living and after his death. I have a copy of a neat edition of his "Vellocino de Oro," published at Milan in 1649.

<sup>29</sup> Obras Sueltas, Tom. VIII. pp. 94-96, and Pellicer's note to Don Quixote, Parte I., Tom. III. p. 93. One of his plays was translated into German in 1652, by Grefflinger, a poor author of that period; but, in general, Spanish literature was little regarded in Germany in the seventeenth century. The Thirty Years' War made it distasteful.

<sup>30</sup> This is said in a discourse preached over his mortal remains in St. Sebastian's, at his funeral. Obras Sueltas, Tom. XIX. p. 329.

<sup>31</sup> "Frey Lope Felix de Vega, whose name has become universally a proverb for whatever is good," says Quevedo, in his Aprobacion to "Tomé de Burguillos." (Obras Sueltas de Lope, Tom. XIX. p. xix.) "It became a common proverb to praise a good thing by calling it a Lope; so that jewels, diamonds, pictures, etc., were raised into esteem by calling them his," says Montalvan.

(Obras Sueltas, Tom. XX. p. 53.) Cervantes intimates the same thing in his *entremes*, "La Guarda Cuidadosa."

<sup>32</sup> His complaints on the subject begin as early as 1603, before he had published any of his plays himself, (Obras Sueltas, Tom. V. p. xvii,) and are renewed in the "Egloga á Claudio," (Ibid., Tom. IX. p. 369,) printed after his death; besides which they occur in the Prefaces to his Comedias, (Tom. IX., XI., XIII., XV., XXI., and elsewhere,) as a matter that seems to have been always troubling him. I have one of these spurious publications. It is entitled "Las Comedias del Famoso Poeta, Lope de Vega Carpio, recopiladas por Bernardo Grassa, ec., Año 1626, Çaragoça, 4to, ff. 289. Eleven Loas open this curious volume, nearly all of them ending with an earnest request for silence; and it contains twelve plays, being, in fact, an imperfect and irregular reprint of the first volume of the "Comedias."

An amusing story is told by Figueroa (Plaza Universal, 1615, f. 237, a) of the way in which plays were sometimes stolen. He says that there was a gentleman by the name of Luis Ramirez de Arellano, (the same person, I suppose, who was one of the secre-

A large income naturally followed such popularity, for his plays were liberally paid for by the actors;<sup>33</sup> and he had patrons of a munificence unknown in our days, and always undesirable.<sup>34</sup> But he was thriftless and wasteful, exceedingly charitable, and, in hospitality to his friends, prodigal. He was, therefore, almost always embarrassed. At the end of his "Jerusalem," printed as early as 1609, he complains of the pressure of his domestic affairs;<sup>35</sup> and in his old age he addressed some verses, in the nature of a petition, to the still more thriftless Philip the Fourth, asking the means of living for himself and his daughter.<sup>33</sup> After his death, his poverty was fully admitted by his executor; and yet, considering the relative value of money, no poet, perhaps, ever received so large a compensation for his works.

aries to the Count de Lemos,) who could carry off a whole play after hearing it three times, and actually did it in the cases of the "Dama Boba" and the "Principe Perfeto," well-known dramas of Lope de Vega. This, of course, was very annoying. On one occasion, therefore, when the "Galan de la Membri la" — which is in the tenth volume of Lope's plays, with a sharp, satirical preface — was representing, Sanchez, a well-known actor and actor of the time, so mutilated his part that the offended audience cried out upon him to know the reason of his conduct, to which he replied that there was a person present, pointing him out, who would carry off the whole play in his memory, if it were not altered. The consequence was that, after some uproar, Luis de Arellano was compelled to leave the theatre. Figueroa says that he was present and witnessed this strange scene. Lope de Vega, alluding to this mode of stealing plays, says there were two persons especially skilful in it, one of whom was called by the populace (el vulgo) "Memorilla," and the other "Gran Memoria." "A esto se añade el hurtar las comedias estos que llaman el vulgo al año *Memorilla* y al otro *Gran Memoria* los quales con algunos versos que apren-

den mezclan infinitos suyos barbaros, con que ganan la vida, vendiendolas," etc. Comedias, Parte XIII., Madrid, 1620, Prologo.

<sup>33</sup> Montalvan sets the price of each play at five hundred reales, and says that in this way Lope received, during his life, eighty thousand ducats. Obras, Tom. XX. p. 47.

<sup>34</sup> The Duke of Sessa alone, besides many other benefactions, gave Lope, at different times, twenty-four thousand ducats, and a sinecure of three hundred more per annum. *Ut supra.*

<sup>35</sup> Libro XX., last three stanzas. Again in 1620, dedicating his "Verdadero Amante" to his son Lope, who showed poetical aspirations, he alleges his own example to warn his child never to indulge his taste for verse, adding, "I have, as you know, a poor house, and my bed and board are no better."

<sup>36</sup> "I have a daughter, and am old," he says. "The Muses give me honor, but not income," etc. (Obras, Tom. XVII. p. 401.) From his will it appears that Philip IV. promised an office to the person who should marry this daughter, and failed to keep his word. See note at the end of Chap. XIV., ante, where in Lope's will is a notice of this claim on the king.

It should, however, be remembered, that no other poet ever wrote so much with popular effect. For, if we begin with his dramatic compositions, which are the best of his efforts, and go down to his epics, which, on the whole, are the worst,<sup>37</sup> we shall find the amount of what was received with favor, as it came from the press, quite unparalleled. And when to this we are compelled to add his own assurance, just before his death, that the greater part of his works still remained in manuscript,<sup>38</sup> we pause in astonishment, and, before we are able to believe the account, demand some explanation that shall make it credible; — an explanation which is the more important, because it is the key to much of his personal character, as well as of his poetical success. And it is this. No poet of any considerable reputation ever had a genius so nearly related to that of an improvisator, or ever indulged his genius so freely in the spirit of improvisation. This talent has always existed in the southern countries of Europe; and in Spain has, from the first, produced, in different ways, the most extraordinary results. We owe to it the invention and perfection of the old ballads, which were originally improvisated and then preserved by tradition; and we owe to it the *seguidillas*, the *boleros*, and all the other forms of popular poetry

<sup>37</sup> Like some other distinguished authors, however, he was inclined to undervalue what he did most happily, and to prefer what is least worthy of preference. Thus, in the Preface to his Comedias, (Vol. XV., Madrid, 1621,) he shows that he preferred his longer poems to his plays, which he says he holds but "as the wild-flowers of his field, that grow up without care or culture."

<sup>38</sup> This might be inferred from the account in Montalvan's "Fama Póstuma"; but Lope himself declares it distinctly in the "Egloga á Claudio,"

where he says, "The printed part of my writings, though too much, is small, compared with what remains unpublished." (Obras Sueltas, Tom. IX. p. 369.) Indeed, we know we have hardly a fourth part of his full-length plays; only about thirty *autos* out of four hundred; only twenty or thirty *entremeses* out of the "infinite number" ascribed to him. Pacheco, in his notice of Lope, printed in 1609, says that his works would give an average of three sheets [tres pliegos] for every day of his life to that time. Obras Sueltas, Tom. XIV. p. xxxi.

that still exist in Spain, and are daily poured forth by the fervent imaginations of the uncultivated classes of the people, and sung to the national music, that sometimes seems to fill the air by night as the light of the sun does by day.

In the time of Lope de Vega, the passion for such improvisation had risen higher than it ever rose before, if it had not spread out more widely. Actors were expected sometimes to improvise on themes given to them by the audience.<sup>39</sup> Extemporaneous dramas, with all the varieties of verse demanded by a taste formed in the theatres, were not of rare occurrence. Philip the Fourth, Lope's patron, had such performed in his presence, and bore a part in them himself.<sup>40</sup> And the famous Count de Lemos, the viceroy of Naples, to whom Cervantes was indebted for so much kindness, kept, as an *apanage* to his viceroyalty, a poetical court, of which the two Argensolas were the chief ornaments, and in which extemporaneous plays were acted with brilliant success.<sup>41</sup>

\* 273 \* Lope de Vega's talent was undoubtedly of near kindred to this genius of improvisation, and produced its extraordinary results by a similar process, and in the same spirit. He dictated verse, we are told, with ease, more rapidly than an amanuensis could take it down;<sup>42</sup> and wrote out an entire play in two days, which could with difficulty be transcribed by a copyist in the same time. He was not absolutely

<sup>39</sup> Bisbe y Vidal, "Tratado de Comedias," (1618, f. 102,) speaks of the "glosses which the actors make extempore upon lines given to them on the stage."

<sup>40</sup> Viardot, *Études sur la Littérature en Espagne*, Paris, 1835, 8vo, p. 339.

<sup>41</sup> Pellicer, *Biblioteca de Traductores Españoles*, (Madrid, 1778, 4to, Tom. I. pp. 89-91,) in which there is a curious

narrative by Diego, Duke of Estrada, giving an account of one of these entertainments, (a burlesque play on the story of Orpheus and Eurydice,) performed before the viceroy and his court. The Count de Lemos, a very accomplished statesman, died in 1622, and there is an agreeable life of him in *Barra*, *ad verb.*

<sup>42</sup> *Obras Sueltas*, Tom. XX. pp. 51, 52.

an improvisator, for his education and position naturally led him to devote himself to written composition, but he was continually on the borders of whatever belongs to an improvisator's peculiar province; he was continually showing, in his merits and defects, in his ease, grace, and sudden resource, in his wildness and extravagance, in the happiness of his versification and the prodigal abundance of his imagery, that a very little more freedom, a very little more indulgence given to his feelings and his fancy, would have made him at once and entirely, not only an improvisator, but the most remarkable one that ever lived.