

* 334 * His "Domingo de Don Blas," one of the few among his works not found in the collection printed by himself, is a sketch of the character of a gentleman sunk into luxury and effeminacy by the possession of a large fortune suddenly won from the Moors in the time of Alfonso the Third of Leon; but who, at the call of duty, rouses himself again to his earlier energy, and shows the old Castilian character in all its loyalty and generosity. The scene where he refuses to risk his person in a bull-fight, merely to amuse the Infante, is full of humor, and is finely contrasted, first, with the scene where he runs all risks in defence of the same prince, and afterwards, still more finely, with that where he sacrifices the prince, because he had failed in loyalty to his father.

"How to gain Friends" gives us another exhibition of the principle of loyalty in the time of Peter the Cruel, who is here represented only as a severe, but just, administrator of the law in seasons of great trouble. His minister and favorite, Pedro de Luna, is one of the most noble characters offered to us in the whole range of the Spanish drama; — a character belonging to a class in which Alarcon has several times succeeded.

A better-known play than either, however, is the "Weaver of Segovia." It is in two parts. In the first, — which is not believed to be by Alarcon, and is of inferior merit, — its hero, Fernando Ramirez, is represented as suffering the most cruel injustice at the hands of his sovereign, who has put his father to death under a false imputation of treason, and reduced Ramirez himself to the misery of earning his subsistence,

the subject to which it relates. It where the date of Alarcon's death is gained the prize of 1842. See, also, given by Pellizer y Tobar. *Semanario Erudito*, Tom. XXXI. p. 57,

disguised as a weaver. Six years elapse, and in the second part he appears again, stung by new wrongs and associated with a band of robbers, at whose head, after spreading terror through the mountain range of the * Guadarrama, he renders such ser- * 335 vice to his ungrateful king, in the crisis of a battle against the Moors, and extorts such confessions of his own and his father's innocence from their dying enemy, that he is restored to favor, and becomes, in the Oriental style, the chief person in the kingdom he has rescued. He is, in fact, another Charles de Mohr, but has the advantage of being placed in a period of the world and a state of society where such a character is more possible than in the period assigned to it by Schiller, though it can never be one fitted for exhibition in a drama that claims to have a moral purpose.

"Truth itself Suspected" is, on the other hand, obviously written for such a purpose. It gives us the character of a young man, the son of a high-minded father, and himself otherwise amiable and interesting, who comes from the University of Salamanca to begin the world at Madrid, with an invincible habit of lying. The humor of the drama, which is really great, consists in the prodigious fluency with which he invents all sorts of fictions to suit his momentary purposes; the ingenuity with which he struggles against the true current of facts, although it runs every moment more and more strongly against him; and the final result, when, nobody believing him, he is reduced to the necessity of telling the truth, and — by a mistake which he now finds it impossible to persuade any one he has really committed — loses the lady he had won, and is overwhelmed with shame and disgrace.

Parts of this drama are full of spirit; such as the

description of a student's life at the University, and that of a brilliant festival given to a lady on the banks of the Manzanares; both tinged with the Gongorism becoming a fop of the period. These, with the exhortations of the young man's father, intended to cure him of his shameful fault, and not a little of the dialogue between the hero — if he may be so called — and his servant, are excellent. It is the piece from which Corneille took the materials for his "Menteur," and thus, in 1642, laid the foundations of classical French comedy in a play of Alarcon, as, six years before, he had laid the foundations for its classical * 336 tragedy * in the "Cid" of Guillen de Castro.

Alarcon, however, was then so little known, that Corneille honestly supposed himself to be using a play of Lope de Vega, and said so; though it should be remembered, that when, some years afterwards, he found out his mistake, he did Alarcon the justice to restore him to his rights, adding that he would gladly give the two best plays he had ever written to be the author of the one he had so freely used.

It would not be difficult to find other dramas of Alarcon showing equal judgment and spirit. Such, in fact, is the one entitled "Walls have Ears," which, from its mode of exhibiting the ill consequences of slander and mischief-making, may be regarded as the counterpart to "Truth itself Suspected." And such, too, is the "Trial of Husbands," which has had the fortune to pass under the names of Lope de Vega and Montalvan, as well as of its true author, and would cast no discredit on either of them.¹⁶ But it is enough to add to what we have already said of Alarcon, that

¹⁶ It reminds me of that part of the Belmont, and I am not sure but its Merchant of Venice which passes at story goes back to a common source.

his style is excellent, — generally better than that of any but the very best of his contemporaries, — with less richness, indeed, than that of Tirso de Molina, and adhering more to the old ballad measure than that of Lope, but purer in versification than either of them, more simple and more natural; so that, on the whole, he is to be ranked with the very best Spanish dramatists during the best period of the national theatre.¹⁷

* Other writers who devoted themselves to * 337 the drama were, however, as well known at the time they lived as he was, if not always as much valued. Among them may be mentioned Luis de Belmonte, whose "Renegade of Valladolid" and "God the best Guardian" are singular mixtures of what is sacred with what is profane; Jacinto Cordero, whose "Victory through Love" was long a favorite on the stage; Andres Gil Enriquez, the author of a pleasant play called "The Net, the Scarf, and the Picture"; Diego Ximenez de Enciso, who wrote grave historical plays on the life of Charles the Fifth at Yuste, and on the death of Don Carlos; Gerónimo de Villaizan, whose

¹⁷ Repertorio Americano, Tom. III. p. 61, Tom. IV. p. 93; Denis, Chroniques de l'Espagne, Paris, 1839, 8vo, Tom. II. p. 231; Comedias Escogidas, Tom. XXVIII., 1667, p. 131. Corneille's opinion of the "Verdad Sospechosa," which is often misquoted, is to be found in his "Examen du Menteur." I will only add, in relation to Alarcon, that, in "Nunca mucho costó poco," he has given us the character of an imperious old nurse, which is well drawn, and made effective by the use of picturesque, but antiquated, words and phrases.

Since the first edition of this work was published, (1849,) all the plays attributed to Alarcon, including one to which he was only a contributor, and two whose genuineness is doubtful, have been collected and published, with much

care and taste, (Biblioteca de Autores Españoles, Tom. XX., 1852,) by D. Juan Eugenio de Hartzenbusch. Their number is twenty-seven, and among them is the *First Part* of the "Texedor de Segovia," which, as Alarcon published the *Second Part* in his *second* volume, without any allusion to a first one, we suppose, as Hartzenbusch does, there is good ground for believing not to be his. There is also internal evidence, I think, to the same effect.

There is a French translation of five of the plays of Alarcon and abstracts of the rest by Alphonse Royer, 1865. If anybody would like to see how a Spanish *comedia* can be spoiled, I commend him to Royer's version of the "Ganar Amigos." It is the only one in verse. The four others are in prose, and are better.

best play is "A Great Remedy for a Great Wrong"; and many others, such as Carlos Boil, Felipe Godinez, Miguel Sanchez, and Rodrigo de Herrera, who shared, in an inferior degree, the favor of the popular audiences at Madrid.¹⁸

Writers distinguished in other branches of literature were also tempted by the success of those devoted to the stage to adventure for the brilliant prizes it scattered on all sides. Salas Barbadillo, who wrote many pleasant tales and died in 1635, left behind him two dramas, of which one claims to be in the manner of Terence.¹⁹ Solorzano, who died ten years later, and was known in the same forms of elegant literature with Barbadillo, is the author of a spirited play, founded on the story of a lady, who, after having accepted a noble lover from interested motives, gives him up for the servant of that lover, put forward in disguise, as if he were possessor of the very estates for which she had accepted his master.²⁰

Góngora wrote one play, and parts of two others, still

¹⁸ The plays of these authors are found in the large collection entitled "Comedias Escogidas," Madrid, 1652-1704, 4to, with the exception of those of Sanchez and Villaizan, which I possess separate; of Sanchez one, of Villaizan two. Of Belmonte, who is the author of the "Sastre del Campillo," commonly attributed to Lope de Vega, (see Shack's Nachträge, 1854, p. 62.) there are eleven in the collection, and of Godinez, five. Those of Miguel Sanchez, who was very famous in his time, and obtained the addition to his name of *El Divino*, are nearly all lost; but his "Guarda Cuidadosa" may be found in the "Diferentes Comedias," Parte V., 1616, mentioned *ante*, p. 297, note 5. I observe from the "Noches de Plazer" of Castillo Solorzano, (1631, f. 5, b.) that Diego Ximenez de Enciso was a native of Seville and a *Veintequatro* of that city. Felipe Godinez (who is mentioned by Cervantes, but not, I

think, by Antonio, by Lope de Vega, or by the common historians of Seville, where he was born) wrote a considerable number of plays, to be found in the old collections. He was alive in 1644, and enjoyed a good reputation in his time.

¹⁹ The plays of Salas Barbadillo, viz. "Victoria de España y Francia" and "El Galan Tramposo y Pobre," are in his "Coronas del Parnaso," left for publication at his death, and published the same year, 1635, Madrid, 12mo. Other dramas by him are scattered through his other Works, — some of them called *comedias antiguas*, by which he means *entremeses*, because they were like the early dramas of Lope de Rueda and his school, which were used as *entremeses* in the time of Barbadillo.

²⁰ It is called "El Mayorazgo," and is found with its *lor* at the end of the author's "Alivios de Casandra," 1640. Several other dramas are found scattered through his tale.

preserved in the collection of his Works;²¹ and Quevedo, to please the great favorite, the Count Duke Olivares, assisted in the composition of at least a single drama, which is now lost, if it be not preserved, under another name, in the works of Antonio de Mendoza.²² But the circumstances of chief consequence in relation to all these writers are, that they belonged to the school of Lope de Vega, and that they bear witness to the vast popularity of his drama in their time, which could control men such as they were.

Indeed, so attractive was the theatre now become, that ecclesiastics and the higher nobility, who, from their position in society, did not wish to be known as dramatic authors, still wrote for the stage, sending their plays to the actors or to the press anonymously. Such persons generally announced their dramas as written by "A Wit of this Court," — *Un Ingenio de esta Corte*, — and a large collection of pieces could now be made, which are known only under this mask; a mask, it may be observed, often significant of the pretensions of those whom it claims partly to conceal. Even Philip the Fourth, who was a lover of the arts and of letters, is said to have sometimes used it; and there is a common tradition, but an erroneous one, that "Giving my Life for my Lady, or The Earl of Essex," was his. Possibly, however, one or two other plays were either from his hand, or indebted to his poetical talent and skill. But even this is not very probable.²³

²¹ These are, "Las Firmezas de Isabel," "El Doctor Carlino," and "La Comedia Venatoria," — the last two unfinished, and the very last allegorical.

²² The play written to please the Count Duke was by Quevedo and Antonio de Mendoza, and was entitled "Quien mas miente medra mas," — "He that lies most will rise most." (C. Pellicer, Origen del Teatro, Tom. I.

p. 177.) This play is lost, unless, as I suspect, it is the "Empeños del Mentir," that occurs in Mendoza's Works, 1690, pp. 254-296. There are also four *entremeses* of Quevedo in his Works, 1791, Vol. IX.

²³ Philip IV. was a lover of letters. Translations of Francesco Guicciardini's "Wars in Italy," and of the "Description of the Low Countries," by his

* 339 * One of the most remarkable of these "Comedias de un Ingenio" is that called "The Devil turned Preacher." Its scene is laid in Lucca, and its original purpose seems to have been to glorify Saint Francis, and to strengthen the influence of his followers. At any rate, in the long introductory speech of Lucifer, that potentate represents himself as most happy at having so far triumphed over these his great enemies, that a poor community of Franciscans, established in Lucca, is likely to be starved out of the city by the universal ill-will he has excited against them. But his triumph is short. Saint Michael descends with the infant Saviour in his arms, and requires Satan himself immediately to reconvert the same inhabitants whose hearts he had hardened; to build up the very convent of the holy brotherhood which he had so nearly overthrown; and to place the poor friars, who

nephew, Luigi Guicciardini, made by Philip, and preceded by a well-written Prólogo, are said to be in the National Library at Madrid. (C. Pellicer, *Origen*, Tom. I. p. 162; Huerta, *Teatro Español*, Madrid, 1785, 12mo, Parte I., Tom. III. p. 159; and Ochoa, *Teatro*, Paris, 1838, 8vo, Tom. V. p. 98.) "King Henry the Feeble" is also among the plays sometimes ascribed to Philip IV., who is said to have often joined in improvisating dramas, — an amusement well known at the court of Madrid, and at the hardly less splendid court of the Count de Lemos at Naples. C. Pellicer, *Teatro*, Tom. I. p. 163, and J. A. Pellicer, *Bib. de Traductores*, Tom. I. pp. 90–92, where a curious account, already referred to, is given of one of these Neapolitan exhibitions, by Estrada, who witnessed it. But I have great doubts concerning all these suggestions. That Philip IV. did not write the "Conde de Sex," which I possess in Vol. XXXI. of the *Diferentes Comedias*, 1636, is settled by Schack, (*Nachträge*, 1854, p. 102,) who found the original in the autograph of Coello, a known dramatist who died in 1652. It may be well to add, however, when

speaking of this play, that there is a very acute and extended examination of it by Lessing, who, with Wieland, gave the first impulse to that love for Spanish literature in Germany which the Schlegels, Bouterwek, and Schack have since so well sustained. (See *Hamburgische Dramaturgie*, Berlin, 1805, Tom. II. pp. 58–126.) But as to Philip IV., to whom poems are attributed in the *Biblioteca de Rivadeneira*, (Tom. XLII., 1857, pp. 151, 152,) and in the Spanish translation of this History, (Tom. II. p. 563,) I doubt the genuineness of all of them. Philip IV. was a sensualist, — not, indeed, without a taste for letters and the arts, — but not an author in any proper sense of the word. And yet one of the court flatterers of the time could say of him: "Es de los mas perfectos musicos y mas felices poetas que oy se conocen, sin que para esta verdad sea menester de valernos de la lisonja." Pellicer de Salas, *Lecciones solennes de Gongora*, 1630, col. 696, 697. The two sonnets attributed to Don Carlos of Austria, brother of Philip IV., are probably his, and are not bad for a prince. *Rivadeneira*, l. c. p. 153.

were now pelted by the boys in the streets, upon a foundation of respectability safer than that from which he had driven them. The humor of the piece consists in his conduct while executing the unwelcome task thus imposed upon him. To do it, he takes, at once, the habit of the monks he detests; he goes round to beg for them; * he superintends the * 340 erection of an ampler edifice for their accommodation; he preaches; he prays; he works miracles; — and all with the greatest earnestness and unctiousness, in order the sooner to be rid of a business so thoroughly disagreeable to him, and of which he is constantly complaining in equivocal phrases and bitter side-speeches, that give him the comfort of expressing a vexation he cannot entirely control, but dares not openly make known. At last he succeeds. The hateful work is done. But the agent is not dismissed with honor. On the contrary, he is obliged, in the closing scene, to confess who he is, and to avow that nothing, after all, awaits him but the flames of perdition, into which he visibly sinks, like another Don Juan, before the edified audience.

The action occupies above five months. It has an intriguing underplot, which hardly disturbs the course of the main story, and one of whose personages — the heroine herself — is gentle and attractive. The character of the Father Guardian of the Franciscan monks, full of simplicity, humble, trustful, and submissive, is also finely drawn; and so is the opposite one, — the *gracioso* of the piece, — a liar, a coward, and a glutton; ignorant and cunning; whom Lucifer amuses himself with teasing, in every possible way, whenever he has a moment to spare from the disagreeable work he is so anxious to finish.