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* CHAPTER VIII.

SECOND CLASS. — CHRONICLES. — ORIGIN. — ROYAL CHRONICLES. — GENERAL CHRONICLE BY ALFONSO THE TENTH. — ITS DIVISIONS AND SUBJECTS. — ITS MORE POETICAL PORTIONS. — ITS CHARACTER. — CHRONICLE OF THE CID. — ITS ORIGIN, SUBJECT, AND CHARACTER.

CHRONICLES. — Ballad poetry constituted, no doubt, originally, the amusement and solace of the whole mass of the Spanish people; for, during a long period of their early history, there was little division of the nation into strongly marked classes, little distinction in manners, little variety or progress in refinement. The wars going on with unappeased violence from century to century, though by their character not without an elevating and poetical influence upon all, yet oppressed and crushed all by the sufferings that followed in their train, and kept the tone and condition of the body of the Spanish nation more nearly at the same level than the national character was probably ever kept, for so long a period, in any other Christian country. But, as the great Moorish contest was transferred to the South, Leon, Castile, and indeed the whole North, became comparatively quiet and settled. Wealth began to be accumulated in the monasteries, and leisure followed. The castles, instead of being constantly in a state of anxious preparation against the common enemy, were converted into abodes of a crude, but free hospitality; and those distinctions of society that come from different degrees of power, wealth, and cultivation, grew more and more apparent. From this time, then, the ballads,

though not really neglected, began to subside into the lower portions of society, where for so long a period they remained; while the more advanced and educated sought, or created for themselves, forms of literature better * suited, in some respects, * 143 to their altered condition, and marking at once more leisure and knowledge, and a more settled system of social life.

The oldest of these forms was that of the Spanish prose chronicles, which, besides being called for by the changed condition of things, were the proper successors of the monkish Latin chronicles and legends, long before known in the country, and were of a nature to win favor with men who themselves were every day engaged in achievements such as these very stories celebrated, and who consequently looked on the whole class of works to which they belonged as the pledge and promise of their own future fame. The chronicles were, therefore, not only the natural offspring of the times, but were fostered and favored by the men who controlled the times.¹

I. *General Chronicles and Royal Chronicles.* — Under such circumstances, we might well anticipate that the proper style of the Spanish chronicle would first appear at the court, or in the neighborhood of the throne; because at court were to be found the spirit and the materials most likely to give it birth. But it is still to be considered remarkable that the first of the chronicles in the order of time, and the first in merit, comes directly from a royal hand. It is called in the

¹ In the code of the Partidas (circa A. D. 1260) good knights are directed to listen at their meals to the reading of "las hestorias de los grandes fechos de armas que los otros fecieran," etc. (Parte II. Título XXI. Ley 20.)

Few knights at that time could understand Latin, and the "hestorias" in Spanish must probably have been the Chronicle now to be mentioned, and the ballads or gestes on which it was, in part, founded.

printed copies "The Chronicle of Spain," or "The General Chronicle of Spain," and is, no doubt, the same work earlier cited in manuscript as "The History of Spain."² In its characteristic Prologue, after solemnly giving the reasons why such a work ought to be compiled, we are told: "And therefore we, Don Alfonso, . . . son of the very noble King Don Fernando, and of the Queen Doña Beatrice, have ordered to be collected as many books as we could have of histories that relate anything of the deeds done aforetime in Spain, and have taken the chronicle * 144 of the * Archbishop Don Rodrigo, . . . and of Master Lucas, Bishop of Tuy, . . . and composed this book"; words which give us the Declaration of Alfonso the Wise, that he himself composed this Chronicle,³ and which thus carry it back certainly

² It is the opinion of Mondejar that the original title of the "Crónica de España" was "Estoria de España." *Memorias de Alfonso el Sabio*, p. 464.

³ The distinction Alfonso makes between *ordering the materials* to be collected by others ("mandamos ayuntar") and *composing or compiling the Chronicle* himself ("composimos este libro") seems to show that he was its author or compiler, — certainly that he claimed to be such. But there are different opinions on this point. Florian de Ocampo, the historian, who, in 1541, published in folio, at Zamora, the first edition of the Chronicle, says, in notes, at the end of the Third and Fourth Parts, that some persons believe only the first three parts to have been written by Alfonso, and the fourth to have been compiled later; an opinion to which it is obvious that he himself inclines, though he says he will neither affirm nor deny anything about the matter. Others have gone further, and supposed the whole to have been compiled by several different persons. But to all this it may be replied: 1. That the Chronicle is more or less well ordered, and more or less well written, according to the materials used in its

composition; and that the objections made to the looseness and want of finish in the Fourth Part apply also, in a good degree, to the Third; thus proving more than Florian de Ocampo intends, since he declares it to be certain ("sabemos por cierto") that the first three parts were the work of Alfonso. 2. Alfonso declares, more than once in his Prólogo, whose genuineness has been made sure by Mondejar, from the four best manuscripts, that his History comes down to his own times ("fasta el nuestro tiempo"), — which we reach only at the end of the Fourth Part, — treating the whole, throughout the Prólogo, as his own work. 3. There is strong internal evidence that he himself wrote the last part of the work, relating to his father; as, for instance, the beautiful account of the relations between St. Ferdinand and his mother, Berenguela (ed. 1541, f. 404); the solemn account of St. Ferdinand's death, at the very end of the whole; and other passages between ff. 402 and 426. 4. His nephew Don John Manuel, who made an abridgment of the *Crónica de España*, speaks of his uncle Alfonso the Wise as if he were its acknowledged author.

to a period before the year 1284, in which he died. From internal evidence, however, it is probable that it was written in the early part of his reign, which began in 1252; and that he was assisted in its composition by persons familiar with Arabic literature, and with whatever there was of other refinement in the age.⁴

* It is divided, perhaps not by its author, into * 145 four parts: the first opening with the creation of the world, and giving a large space to Roman history, but hastening over everything else till it comes to the occupation of Spain by the Visigoths; the second comprehending the Gothic empire of the country and its conquest by the Moors; the third coming down to the reign of Ferdinand the Great, early in the eleventh century; and the fourth closing in 1252, with the death of Saint Ferdinand, the conqueror of Andalusia and father of Alfonso himself.

Its earliest portions are the least interesting. They contain such notions and accounts of antiquity, and especially of the Roman empire, as were current among the common writers of the Middle Ages, though occasionally, as in the case of Dido, — whose memory

Dozy, in his learned and acute "Recherches sur l'Histoire politique et littéraire de l'Espagne, pendant le moyen âge" (Leyde, 1849, 8vo, Tom. I. pp. 388, 389), expresses his full belief that all four of the Parts of the *Crónica de España* were the work of Alfonso X., and gives strong reasons for it.

It should be borne in mind, also, that Mondejar says the edition of Florian de Ocampo is very corrupt and imperfect, omitting whole reigns in one instance; and the passages he cites from the old manuscripts of the entire work prove what he says. (*Memorias*, Lib. VII. Capp. 15, 16.) The only other edition of the Chronicle, that of Valladolid (fol., 1604), is still worse. Indeed, it is, from the number of its gross

errors, one of the worst printed books I have ever used.

⁴ The statement referred to in the Chronicle, that it was written four hundred years after the time of Charlemagne, is, of course, a very loose one; for Alfonso was not born in 1210. But I think he would hardly have said, "It is now full four hundred years" (ed. 1541, fol. 228), if it had been full four hundred and fifty. From this it may be inferred that the Chronicle was composed before 1260. Other passages tend to the same conclusion. Conde, in his Preface to his "Árabes en España," notices the Arabic air of the Chronicle, which, however, seems to me to have been rather the air of its age throughout Europe.

has always been defended by the more popular chroniclers and poets of Spain against the imputations of Virgil,⁵—we have a glimpse of feelings and opinions which may be considered more national. Such passages naturally become more frequent in the Second Part, which relates to the empire of the Visigoths in Spain; though here, as the ecclesiastical writers are almost the only authority that could be resorted to, their peculiar tone prevails too much. But the Third Part is quite free and original in its spirit, and truly Spanish; setting forth the rich old traditions of the country about the first outbreak of Pelayo from the mountains;⁶ the stories of Bernardo del Carpio,⁷ Fernan Gonzalez,⁸ and the Seven Lords of Lara;⁹ with spirited sketches of Charlemagne,¹⁰ and accounts of

miracles like those of the cross made by angels * 146 for Alfonso the Chaste,¹¹ * and of Santiago fighting against the infidels in the glorious battles of Clavijo and Hazinas.¹²

The last part, though less carefully compiled and elaborated, is in the same general tone. It opens with the well-known history of the Cid,¹³ to whom, as to the great hero of the popular admiration, a disproportionate space is assigned. After this, being already

⁵ The account of Dido is worth reading, especially by those who have occasion to see her story referred to in the Spanish poets, as it is by Ercilla and Lope de Vega, in a way quite unintelligible to those who know only the Roman version of it as given by Virgil. It is found in the *Crónica de España* (Parte I. c. 51–57), and ends with a very heroic epistle of the queen to Æneas;—the Spanish view taken of the whole matter being in substance that which is taken by Justin, very briefly, in his “*Universal History*,” Lib. XVIII. c. 4–6.

⁶ *Crónica de España*, Parte III. c. 1, 2.

⁷ *Ibid.*, Capp. 10 and 13.

⁸ *Ibid.*, Capp. 18, etc.

⁹ *Ibid.*, Cap. 20.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, Cap. 10.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, Cap. 10, with the ballad made out of it, beginning “*Reynando el Rey Alfonso*.”

¹² *Crónica de España*, Parte III. Capp. 11 and 19. A drama by Rodrigo de Herrera, entitled “*Voto de Santiago y Batalla de Clavijo*” (*Comedias Escogidas*, Tom. XXXIII., 1670, 4to), is founded on the first of these passages, but has not used its good material with much skill.

¹³ The separate history of the Cid begins with the beginning of Part Fourth, f. 279, and ends on f. 346, ed. 1541.

within a hundred and fifty years of the writer's own time, we, of course, approach the confines of more sober history, and finally, in the reign of his father, Saint Ferdinand, fairly settle upon its sure and solid foundations.

The striking characteristic of this remarkable Chronicle is that, especially in its Third Part, and in a portion of the Fourth, it is a translation, if we may so speak, of the old poetical fables and traditions of the country into a simple but rich prose, intended to be sober history. What were the sources of those purely national passages which we should be most curious to trace back and authenticate, we can never know. Sometimes, as in the case of Bernardo del Carpio and Charlemagne, the ballads and gestes of the olden time¹⁴ are distinctly appealed to. Sometimes, as in the case of the Infantes de Lara, an early Latin chronicle, or perhaps some poetical legend, of which all trace is now lost, may have constituted the foundations of the narrative.¹⁵ And once at least, if not * oftener, * 147 an entire and separate history, that of the Cid, is inserted without being well adapted to its place. Throughout all these portions, the poetical character predominates much oftener than it does in the rest; for while, in the earlier parts, what had been rescued

¹⁴ These *Cantares* and *Cantares de Gesta* are referred to in Parte III. c. 10 and 13. The Marques Pidal thinks (*Baena, Cancionero* 1851, pp. xiv–xv, note 4) that he finds fragments of these old poems occasionally in the Chronicle of the Cid.

¹⁵ I cannot help feeling, as I read it, that the beautiful story of the Infantes de Lara, as told in this Third Part of the *Crónica de España*, beginning f. 261 of the edition of 1541, is from a separate and older chronicle; probably from some old monkish Latin legend. But it can be traced no further back than to this passage in the *Crónica de*

España, on which rests everything relating to the Lords of Lara in Spanish poetry and romance.

Fauriel (*Histoire de la Poésie Provençale*, 1846, Tom. III. p. 465) says that the Provençal tale of “*Karles le mainet*,” or Charles the Small, is used in the *Crónica de España*. He refers, I suppose, to the story of Galiana, Parte III. cap. 5, ed. 1604, ff. 21, sqq.; but, perhaps, the reverse of his conjecture is true, and the tale of Karles, which has strong internal evidence of a Spanish origin, and relates to Spanish history, was taken from the *Crónica de España*, or from some Spanish source open to both.

of ancient history is given with a grave sort of exactness, that renders it dry and uninteresting, we have in the concluding portion a simple narrative, where, as in the account of the death of Saint Ferdinand, we feel persuaded that we read touching details sketched by a faithful and affectionate eye-witness.

Among the more poetical passages are two, at the end of the Second Part, which are introduced, as contrasts to each other, with a degree of art and skill rare in these simple-hearted old chronicles. They relate to what was long called "the Ruin of Spain,"¹⁶ or its conquest by the Moors, and consist of two striking presentments of its condition before and after that event, which the Spaniards long seemed to regard as dividing the history of the world into its two great constituent portions. In the first of these passages, entitled "Of the Good Things of Spain,"¹⁷ after a few general remarks, the fervent old chronicler goes on: "For this Spain, whereof we have spoken, is like the very Paradise of God; for it is watered by five noble rivers, which are the Duero, and the Ebro, and the Tagus, and the Guadalquivir, and the Guadiana; and each of these hath, between itself and the others, lofty mountains and sierras;¹⁸ and their valleys and plains are great and broad; and, through the richness of the soil and the watering of the rivers, they bear many fruits and are full of abundance. And Spain, above all other things, is skilled in war, feared and very bold in battle; light of heart, loyal to her lord, diligent in

¹⁶ "La Pérdida de España" is the common name, in the older writers, for the Moorish conquest.

¹⁷ "Los Bienes que tiene España" (ed. 1541, f. 202),—and, on the other side of the leaf, the passage that follows, called "El Llanto de España."

¹⁸ The original, in both the printed editions, is *tierras*, though it should plainly be *sierras*, from the context; but this is noticed as only one of the thousand gross typographical errors with which these editions are deformed.

learning, courtly in speech, accomplished in all * good things. Nor is there land in the world * 148 that may be accounted like her in abundance, nor may any equal her in strength, and few there be in the world so great. And above all doth Spain abound in magnificence, and more than all is she famous for her loyalty. O Spain! there is no man can tell of all thy worthiness!"

But now reverse the medal, and look on the other picture, entitled "The Mourning of Spain," when, as the Chronicle tells us, after the victory of the Moors, "all the land remained empty of people, bathed in tears, a byword, nourishing strangers, deceived of her own people, widowed and deserted of her sons, confounded among barbarians, worn out with weeping and wounds, decayed in strength, weakened, un comforted, abandoned of all her own. . . . Forgotten are her songs, and her very language is become foreign, and her words strange."

The more attractive passages of the Chronicle, however, are its long narratives. They are also the most poetical;—so poetical, indeed, that large portions of them, with little change in their phraseology, have since been converted into popular ballads;¹⁹ while other portions, hardly less considerable, are probably

¹⁹ This remark will apply to many passages in the Third Part of the Chronicle of Spain, but to none, perhaps, so strikingly as to the stories of Bernardo del Carpio and the Infantes de Lara, large portions of which may be found almost verbatim in the ballads. I will now refer only to the following: 1. On Bernardo del Carpio, the ballads beginning "El Conde Don Sancho Diaz," "En corte del Casto Alfonso," "Estando en paz y sosiego," "Andados treinta y seis años," and "En gran pesar y tristeza." 2. On the Infantes de Lara, the ballads beginning "A Cala-

trava la Vieja," which was evidently arranged for singing at a puppet-show or some such exhibition, "Llegados son los Infantes," "Quien es aquel caballero," and "Ruy Velasquez el de Lara." All these are found in the older collections of ballads; those, I mean, printed before 1560; and it is worthy of particular notice that this same General Chronicle makes especial mention of *Cantares de Gesta* about Bernardo del Carpio that were known and popular when it was itself compiled, in the thirteenth century.