

national spirit, and finally overcome by it, and yet one that long exercised a considerable sway, and at last contributed something to the materials which, in the sixteenth century, went to build up and constitute the proper literature of the country.

* 343 * There lived, however, during the reign of John the Second, and in the midst of his court, another poet, whose general influence at the time was less felt than that of his patron, the Marquis de Santillana, but who has since been oftener mentioned and remembered, — Juan de Mena, sometimes, but inappropriately, called the *Ennius* of Spanish poetry. He was born in Córdoba, about the year 1411, the child of parents respected, but not noble.³⁸ He was early left an orphan, and, from the age of three-and-twenty, of his own free choice, devoted himself wholly to letters; going through a regular course of studies, first at Salamanca, and afterwards at Rome. On his return home he became a *Veintequatro* of Córdoba, or one of the twenty-four persons who constituted the government of the city; but we early find him at court on a footing of familiarity as a poet, and we know he was soon afterwards Latin secretary to John the Second, and historiographer of Castile.³⁹ This brought him into relations with the king and the Constable; relations important in themselves, and of which we have by accident a few singular intimations. The king, if we can trust the witness, was desirous to be well regarded in history; and, to make sure of it, directed his confidential physician to instruct his historiographer,

³⁸ The chief materials for the life of Juan de Mena are to be found in some poor verses by Francisco Romero, in his "Epicedio en la Muerte del Maestro Hernan Nuñez" (Salamanca, 1578, 12mo, pp. 485, etc.), at the end of the

"Refranes de Hernan Nuñez." Concerning the place of his birth there is no doubt. He alludes to it himself (Trescientas, Copla 124) in a way that does him honor.

³⁹ Cibdareal, Epist. XX., XXIII.

from time to time, how he ought to treat different parts of his subject. In one letter, for instance, he is told, with much gravity, "The king is very desirous of praise"; and then follows a statement of facts, as they ought to be represented, in a somewhat delicate case of the neglect of the Count de Castro to obey the royal commands.⁴⁰ In another letter he is told, "The king expects much glory from you"; a remark which is followed by another narrative of facts as they should be set forth.⁴¹ But, though Juan de Mena was employed on this important * work as late as * 344 1445, and apparently was favored in it both by the king and the Constable, still there is no reason to suppose that any part of what he did is preserved in the Chronicle of John the Second exactly as it came from his hands.

The chronicler, however, who seems to have been happy in possessing a temperament proper for courtly success, has left proofs enough of the means by which he reached it. He was a sort of poet-laureate without the title, writing verses on the battle of Olmedo in 1445, on the pacification between the king and his son in 1446, on the affair of Peñafiel in 1449, and on the slight wound the Constable received at Palencia in 1452; in all which, as well as in other and larger poems, he shows a great devotion to the reigning powers of the state.⁴²

He stood well, too, in Portugal. The Infante Don Pedro — a verse-writer of some name, who travelled much in different parts of the world — became personally acquainted with Juan de Mena in Spain, and, on

⁴⁰ Cibdareal, Epist. XLVII.

⁴¹ Ibid., Epist. XLIX.

⁴² For the first verses, see Liciniano Saez, Valor de las Monedas de Enrique

IV., Madrid, 4to, 1805, pp. 547-552; and for those on the Constable, see his Chronicle, Milano, 1546, fol. f. 60. b, Tit. 95.

his return to Lisbon, addressed a few verses to him, better than the answer they called forth; besides which, he imitated, with no mean skill, Mena's "Labyrinth," in a Spanish poem of a hundred and twenty-five stanzas.⁴³ With such connections and habits, with a wit that made him agreeable in personal intercourse,⁴⁴ and with an even good-humor which rendered him welcome to the opposite parties in the kingdom,⁴⁵ he seems to have led a contented life; and at his death, which happened suddenly in 1456, in consequence of a fall from his mule, the Marquis of Santillana, always his friend and patron, wrote his * 345 epitaph, and erected a * monument to his memory in Torrelaguna, both of which are still to be seen.⁴⁶

The works of Juan de Mena evidently enjoyed the sunshine of courtly favor from their first appearance. While still young, if we can trust the simple-hearted letters that pass under the name of the royal physician, they were already the subject of gossip at the palace;⁴⁷ and the collection of poetry by Baena, made for the amusement of the king and the court, about 1450, and the one that passes under the name of Estuñiga, contain abundant proofs that his favor was great during

⁴³ The verses inscribed "Do Infante Dom Pedro, Fylho del Rey Dom Joam, em Loor de Joam de Mena," with Juan de Mena's answer, a short rejoinder by the Infante, and a conclusion, are in the Cancioneiro de Resende (Lisboa, 1516, folio, f. 72. b.). See, also, Die Alten Liederbücher der Portugiesen, von C. F. Bellermann (Berlin, 1840, 4to, pp. 27, 64), and Mendez, Typographia (p. 137, note). This Infante Don Pedro is, I suppose, the one alluded to as a great traveller in Don Quixote (Part II., end of Chap. 23); but Pellicer and Clemencin give us no light on the matter.

⁴⁴ See the Dialogue of Juan de Lu-

cena, "La Vita Beata," *passim*, in which Juan de Mena is one of the principal speakers.

⁴⁵ He stood well with the king and the Infantes, with the Constable, with the Marquis of Santillana, etc.

⁴⁶ Ant. Ponz, Viage de España, Madrid, 1787, 12mo, Tom. X. p. 38. Clemencin, note to Don Quixote, Parte II. c. 44, Tom. V. p. 379.

⁴⁷ Cibdareal, Epist. XX. No less than twelve of the hundred and five letters of the courtly leech are addressed to the poet, showing, if they are genuine, how much favor Juan de Mena enjoyed.

his life; for as many of his verses as could be found seem to have been put into each of them. But though this circumstance, and that of their appearance before the end of the century in two or three of the very earliest printed collections of poetry, leave no doubt that they enjoyed, from the first, a sort of fashionable success, still it can hardly be said they were at any time really popular. Two or three of his shorter effusions, indeed, like the verses addressed to his lady to show her how formidable she is in every way, and those on a vicious mule he had bought from a friar, have a spirit that would make them amusing anywhere.⁴⁸ But most of his minor poems, of which about twenty may be found scattered in rare books,⁴⁹ belong only to the style of the society in which he lived, and, from their affectation, conceits, and obscure allusions, can have had little value, even when they were first circulated, except for the persons to whom they were addressed, or for the narrow circle in which those persons moved.

* His poem on the Seven Deadly Sins, in * 346 nearly eight hundred short verses, divided into double *redondillas*, is a work of graver pretensions. But it is a dull allegory, full of pedantry and metaphysical fancies on the subject of a war between Reason and the Will of Man. Notwithstanding its length, however, it was left unfinished; and a certain knight, named Gerónimo de Olivares, added four hundred more verses to it, in order to bring the discussion

⁴⁸ The last, which is not without humor, is twice alluded to in Cibdareal, namely, Epist. XXXIII. and XXXVI., and should seem to have been liked at court and by the king.

⁴⁹ The minor poems of Juan de Mena are to be found chiefly in the old Cancioneros Generales; but some must be

sought in the old editions of his own works. For example, in the valuable folio one of 1534, — in which the "Trescientas" and the "Coronacion" form separate publications, with separate titles, pagings, and colophons, — each is followed by a few of the author's short poems.

to what he conceived a suitable conclusion. Both parts, however, are as tedious as the theology of the age could make them.⁵⁰

His "Coronation" is better, and fills about five hundred lines, arranged in double *quintillas*. Its name comes from its subject, which is an imaginary journey of Juan de Mena to Mount Parnassus, in order to witness the coronation of the Marquis of Santillana, both as a poet and a hero, by the Muses and the Virtues. It is, therefore, strictly a poem in honor of his great patron; and being such, it is somewhat singular that it should be written in a light and almost satirical vein. At the opening, as well as in other parts, it has the appearance of a parody on the "Divina Commedia"; for it begins with the wanderings of the author in an obscure wood, after which he passes through regions of misery, where he beholds the punishments of the dead; visits the abodes of the blessed, where he sees the great of former ages; and, at last, comes to Mount Parnassus, where he is present at a sort of apotheosis of the yet living object of his reverence and admiration. The versification of the poem is easy, and some passages in it are amusing; but, in general, it is rendered dull by unprofitable learning. The best portions are those merely descriptive.

But whether Juan de Mena, in his "Coronation," intended deliberately to be the parodist of Dante * 347 or not, it * is quite plain that in his principal

⁵⁰ The addition of Olivares is to be found in the edition of 1552, and in several other editions of Juan de Mena's works. Another addition, about three times longer and no better, by Gomez Manrique, is in the edition of 1566; and there is yet a third—very short—by a disciple, as he calls himself, of Juan de Mena and the Marquis of Santillana, — one Pedro

Guillen, — a considerable amount of whose poetry, in the fashion of the time, is still to be found in MS. at Seville, as I learn from a note to the Spanish translation of this work, Tom. I. pp. 551–553. This Pedro Guillen was father of Don Diego Guillen de Avila, who wrote the *Panegirico* on Queen Isabella, referred to in note 57, at the end of this chapter.

work, called "The Labyrinth," he became Dante's serious imitator. This long poem — which he seems to have begun very early, and which, though he occupied himself much with its composition, he left unfinished at the time of his sudden death — consists of about twenty-five hundred lines, divided into stanzas; each stanza being composed of two *redondillas* in those long lines which were then called "versos de arte mayor," or verses of higher art, because they were supposed to demand a greater degree of skill than the shorter verses used in the old national measures.^{50½} The poem itself is sometimes called "The Labyrinth," probably from the intricacy of its plan, and sometimes "The Three Hundred," because that was originally the number of its *coplas* or stanzas. Its purpose is nothing less than to teach, by vision and allegory, whatever relates to the duties or the destiny of man; and the rules by which its author was governed in its composition are evidently gathered from the example of Dante in his "Divina Commedia," and from Dante's precepts in his treatise "De Vulgari Eloquentiâ."

After the dedication of the Labyrinth to John the Second and some other preparatory and formal parts, the poem opens with the author's wanderings in a wood, like Dante, exposed to beasts of prey. While there, he is met by Providence, who comes to him in the form of a beautiful woman, and offers to lead him, by a sure path, through the dangers that beset him, and to explain, "as far as they are palpable to human understanding," the dark mysteries of life that oppress

^{50½} See Renjifo, *Arte Poetica*, ed. 1727, p. 82. The *versos de arte mayor* were regularly of twelve syllables, as those of *arte menor* were of eight. The eleven-syllable lines, or, as Cueva calls this form of verse, "el grande

endecasílabo," which was used by the Marquis of Santillana in his sonnets, was subsequently much favored. Vargas y Ponce, *Declamacion*, 1793, pp. 62, sqq.

his spirit. This promise she fulfils by carrying him to what she calls the spherical centre of the five zones; or, in other words, to a point where the poet is supposed to see at once all the countries and nations of the earth. There she shows him three vast mystical wheels, — the wheels of Destiny, — two representing the past and the future, in constant rest, and the third representing the present, in constant motion. Each contains its appropriate portion of the human race, and through each are extended the seven circles * 348 of the seven planetary influences that * govern the fates of mortal men; the characters of the most distinguished of whom are explained to the poet by his divine guide, as their shadows rise before him in these mysterious circles.

From this point, therefore, the poem becomes a confused gallery of mythological and historical portraits, arranged, as in the "Paradiso" of Dante, according to the order of the seven planets.⁵¹ They have generally little merit, and are often shadowed forth very indistinctly. The best sketches are those of personages who lived in the poet's own time or country; some drawn with courtly flattery, like the king's and the Constable's; others with more truth, as well as more skill, like those of Don Enrique de Villena, Juan de Merlo, and the young Dávalos, whose premature fate is recorded in a few lines of unwonted power and tenderness.⁵²

⁵¹ The author of the "Diálogo de las Lenguas" (Mayans y Siscar, Orígenes, Tom. II. p. 148) complained of the frequent obscurities in Juan de Mena's poetry, three centuries ago, — a fault made abundantly apparent in the elaborate explanations of his dark passages by the two oldest and most learned of his commentators.

⁵² Juan de Mena has always stood well with his countrymen, if he has not been absolutely popular. Verses by him appeared, during his lifetime, in the Cancionero of Baena, and immediately afterwards in the Chronicle of the Constable. Others are in the collection of poems already noticed, printed at Saragossa in 1492, and in another

The story told most in detail is that of the Count de Niebla, who, in 1436, at the siege of Gibraltar, sacrificed his own life in a noble attempt to save that of one of his dependants; the boat in which the Count might have been rescued being too small to save the whole of the party, who thus all perished together in a flood-tide. This disastrous event, and especially the self-devotion of Niebla, who was one of the principal nobles of the kingdom, and at that moment employed on a daring expedition against the Moors, are recorded in the * chronicles of the age, and * 349 introduced by Juan de Mena in the following characteristic stanzas: ⁵³ —

And he who seems to sit upon that bark,
Invested by the cruel waves, that wait
And welter round him to prepare his fate, —
His and his bold companions', in their dark
And watery abyss; — that stately form
Is Count Niebla's, he whose honored name,
More brave than fortunate, has given to fame
The very tide that drank his life-blood warm.

And they that eagerly around him press,
Though men of noble mark and bold emprise,
Grow pale and dim as his full glories rise,
Showing their own peculiar honors less.

collection of the same period, but without date. They are in all the old Cancioneros Generales, and in a succession of separate editions, from 1496 to our own times. And, besides all this, the learned Hernan Nuñez de Guzman printed such a commentary on them in 1499 as could hardly have been expected from a laborer on the Complutensian Polyglott, and the still more learned Francisco Sanchez de las Brozas, commonly called El Brocense, printed another shorter and better, in a very neat and small volume, in 1582; one or the other of which accompanies the poems for their elucidation in nearly every edition since.

⁵³ Crónica de D. Juan el Segundo,

Año 1436, c. 3. Mena, Trescientas, Cop. 160-162.

Aquel que en la barca parece sentado,
Vestido, en engaño de las bravas ondas,
En aguas crueles, ya mas que no hondas,
Con mucha gran gente en la mar anegado,
Es el valiente, no bien fortunado,
Muy virtuoso, perinclito Conde
De Niebla, que todos sabeis bien adonde
Dió fin al día del curso hadado.

Y los que lo cercan por el derredor,
Puesto que fuesen magníficos hombres,
Los títulos todos de todos sus nombres,
El nombre les cubre de aquel su señor;
Que todos los hechos que son de valor
Para se mostrar por sí cada uno,
Quando se juntan y van de consuno,
Pierden el nombre delante el mayor.

Arlanza, Pisnerga, y aun Carrion,
Gozan de nombre de rios; empero
Después de juntados llamamos los Duero;
Hacemos de muchos una relacion.

Thus Carrion or Arlanza, sole and free,
Bears, like Pisuerga, each its several name,
And triumphs in its undivided fame,
As a fair, graceful stream. But when the three

Are joined in one, each yields its separate right,
And their accumulated headlong course
We call Duero. Thus might these enforce
Each his own claim to stand the noblest knight,
If brave Niebla came not with his blaze
Of glory to eclipse their humbler praise.

Too much honor is not to be claimed for such poetry; but there is little in Juan de Mena's works equal to this specimen, which has at least the merit of being free from the pedantry and conceits that disfigure most of his writings.

Such as it was, however, the Labyrinth received great admiration from the court of John the Second, and, above all, from the king himself, whose * 350 physician, we are told, * wrote to the poet:

"Your polished and erudite work, called 'The Second Order of Mercury,' hath much pleased his Majesty, who carries it with him when he journeys about, or goes a-hunting."⁵⁴ And again: "The end of the 'third circle' pleased the king much. I read it to his Majesty, who keeps it on his table with his prayer-book, and takes it up often."⁵⁵ Indeed, the whole poem was, it seems, submitted to the king, piece by piece, as it was composed; and we are told that, in one instance, at least, it received a royal correction, which still stands unaltered.⁵⁶ His Majesty even advised that it should be extended from three hundred stanzas to three hundred and sixty-five, though for no better reason than to make their number correspond exactly with that of the days in the year; and the

⁵⁴ Cibdareal, Epist. XX.
⁵⁵ Ibid., Epist. XLIX.

⁵⁶ Ibid., Epist. XX.

twenty-four stanzas commonly printed at the end of it are supposed to have been an attempt to fulfil the monarch's command. But, whether this be so or not, nobody now wishes the poem to be longer than it is.⁵⁷

⁵⁷ They first appeared in 1517, and are printed separately in the Cancionero General of 1573; but do not appear at all in the edition of the Works of the poet in 1566, and were not commented upon by Hernan Nuñez. It is, indeed, doubtful whether they were really written by Juan de Mena. If they were, they must probably have been produced after the king's death, for they are far from being flattering to him. On this account I am disposed to think they are not genuine; for the poet seems to have permitted his great eulogies of the king and of the Constable to stand after the death of both of them.

Juan de Mena also translated into affected prose, full of Latinisms, a paraphrase, by Ausonius, of the fourth century, of a part of the Iliad, which was published in 4to, at Valladolid, 1519, in about ff. 47. Gayangos, Spanish translation of this History, Tom. I. p. 547.

As Don Pascual de Gayangos has well observed, in the translation just referred to (Tom. II. p. 458), traces of the school of Juan de Mena can be found as low as the sixteenth century. Some of these I shall notice hereafter, such as the second and third parts of

Lebrixa's "Triaca del Alma," 1515; Juan de Padilla's "Retablo and Triunfos," 1518, and, the most extravagant of them all, Tanco de Frexenal's poems on Charles V. in 1547. But two or three, suggested by Don Pascual, rather belong here. They are (1) Hernan Vazquez de Tapia, who, in 1497, published, in a hundred and fifty-two coplas, like Juan de Mena's, an account of the *Fiestas* that were held at Santander and elsewhere, on the arrival of Margaret of Flanders, daughter of the Emperor Maximilian. (2.) Diego Guillen de Avila, whose *Panegirico* of Queen Isabella, and a somewhat similar poem on the well-known Alonso Carillo, Archbishop of Toledo, were published at Rome, in 1500, where their author lived. And (3) Alfonso Fernandez, who wrote a long chronicle poem in honor of Gonzalvo of Cordova, and the conquest of Naples, entitled *Partenopea*, published at Rome in 1516, after the death of its author, who spent there the last years of his life. But neither of these poems has any value, I think, except to mark the struggle that was going on to maintain the old style of poetry in *coplas de arte mayor* after the manner of Juan de Mena.