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* CHAPTER XX.

PROGRESS OF THE CASTILIAN LANGUAGE.—POETS OF THE TIME OF JOHN THE SECOND.—VILLASANDINO.—FRANCISCO IMPERIAL.—BAENA.—RODRIGUEZ DEL PADRON.—PROSE WRITERS.—CIBDAREAL AND FERNAN PEREZ DE GUZMAN.

IN one point of view, all the works of Juan de Mena are of consequence. They mark the progress of the Castilian language, which, in his hands, advanced more than it had for a long period before. From the time of Alfonso the Wise, nearly two centuries had elapsed, in which, though this fortunate dialect had almost completely asserted its supremacy over its rivals, and by the force of political circumstances had been spread through a large part of Spain, still, little had been done to enrich, and nothing to raise or purify it. The grave and stately tone of the "Partidas" and the "General Chronicle" had not again been reached; the lighter air of the "Conde Lucanor" had not been attempted. Indeed, such wild and troubled times as those of Peter the Cruel and the three monarchs who had followed him on the throne permitted men to think of little except their personal safety and their immediate well-being.

But now, in the reign of John the Second, though the affairs of the country were hardly more composed, they had taken the character rather of feuds between the great nobles than of wars with the throne; while, at the same time, knowledge and literary culture, from accidental circumstances, were not only held in honor,

but had become a courtly fashion. Style, therefore, began to be regarded as a matter of consequence, and the choice of words, as the first step towards elevating and improving it, was attempted by those who wished to enjoy the favor of the * highest class, * 352 that then gave its tone alike to letters and to manners. But a serious obstacle was at once found to such a choice of phraseology as was demanded. The language of Castile had, from the first, been dignified and picturesque, but it had never been rich. Juan de Mena, therefore, looked round to see how he could enlarge his poetical vocabulary; and if he had adopted means more discreet, or shown more judgment in the use of those to which he resorted, he might almost have modelled the Spanish into such forms as he chose.

As it was, he rendered it good service. He took boldly such words as he thought suitable to his purpose wherever he found them; chiefly from the Latin, but sometimes from other languages.¹ Unhappily, he exercised no proper skill in the selection. Some of the many he adopted were low and trivial, and his example failed to give them dignity; others were not better than

¹ Thus *ñ*, Valencian or Provençal for *hijo*, in the "Trescientas," Copla 37, and *trinquete* for *foresail*, in Copla 165, may serve as specimens. Lope de Vega (Obras Sueltas, Tom. IV. p. 474) complains of Juan de Mena's Latinisms, which are, indeed, very awkward and abundant, and cites the following line:—

El amor es ficto, vaniloco, pigro

I do not remember it; but it is as bad as some of the worst verses of the same sort for which Ronsard has been ridiculed. It should be observed, however, that, in the earliest periods of the Castilian language, there was a greater connection with the French than there was in the time of Juan de

Mena. Thus, in the "Poem of the Cid," we have *cuer* for *heart*, *tiesta* for *head*, etc.; in Berceo, we have *asemblar*, *to meet*; *sopcar*, *to sup*, etc. (See Don Quixote, ed. Clemencin, 1835, Tom. IV. p. 56.) If, therefore, we find a few French words in Juan de Mena that are no longer used, like *sage*, which he makes a dissyllable guttural to rhyme with *viage* in Copla 167, we may presume he found them already in the language, from which they have since been dropped. But Juan de Mena was, in all respects, too bold; and, as the learned Sarmiento says of him in a manuscript which I possess, "Many of his words are not at all Castilian, and were never used either before his time or after it."

those for which they were substituted, and so were not afterwards used; and yet others were quite too foreign in their structure and sound to strike root where they should never have been transplanted. Much, therefore, of what Juan de Mena did in this respect was unsuccessful. But there is no doubt that the language of Spanish poetry was strengthened and its versification ennobled by his efforts, and that the example he set, followed, as it was, by Lucena, Diego de San Pedro,

Garci Sanchez de Badajos, the Manriques, and * 353 others, laid the true foundations * for the greater and more judicious enlargement of the whole Castilian vocabulary in the age that followed.

Another poet, who, in the reign of John the Second, enjoyed a reputation which has faded away much more than that of Juan de Mena, is Alfonso Alvarez de Villasandino, sometimes called De Illescas. His earliest verses seem to have been written in the time of Henry II.; but others fall within the reigns of Henry the Third and John the Second. A few of them are addressed to this last monarch, and many more to his queen, to the Constable, to the Infante Don Ferdinand, afterwards King of Aragon, and to other distinguished personages of the time. From different parts of them, we learn that their author was a soldier and a courtier; that he was married twice, and repented heartily of his second match; and that he was generally poor, and often sent bold solicitations to everybody, from the king downwards, asking for places, for money, and even for clothes.

As a poet, his merits are small. He speaks of Dante, but gives no proof of familiarity with Italian literature. In fact, his verses are rather in the Provençal forms, though their courtly tone and personal

claims predominate to such a degree as to prevent anything else from being distinctly heard. Puns, conceits, and quibbles, to please the taste of his great friends, are intruded everywhere; yet perhaps he gained his chief favor by his versification, which is sometimes uncommonly easy and flowing, and by his rhymes, which are singularly abundant, and almost uniformly exact.²

At any rate, he was much regarded by his contemporaries. The Marquis of Santillana speaks of him as one of the leading poets of his age, and says that he wrote a great number of songs and other short poems, or *decires*, * which were well liked * 354 and widely spread.³ It is not remarkable, therefore, when Baena, for the amusement of John the Second and his court, made the collection of poetry which now passes under his name, that he filled much of it with verses by Villasandino, who is declared by the courtly scribe to be "the light, and mirror, and crown, and monarch, of all the poets that, till that time, had lived in Spain." But the poems Baena admired are almost all of them so short and so personal, that they were soon forgotten, with the circumstances that gave them birth. Several are curious, because they were written to be used by persons of distinction in the state, such as the Adelantado Manrique, the Count de Buelna, and the Great Constable, all of whom were among Villasandino's admirers, and

² Accounts of Villasandino are found in Antonio, Bib. Vetus, ed. Bayer, Tom. II. p. 341; and Sanchez, Poesias Anteriores, Tom. I. pp. 200, etc. Some of his poems are in the Academy's edition of the Chronicles of Ayala, Tom. II. pp. 604, 615, 621, 626, 646; but the mass of his works is to be found in the Cancionero of Baena, 1851. Their

number is, I think, two hundred and forty-three. The best account of him is in the notes to that Cancionero (pp. 640, sqq.), where are added a few more of his poems; the limits within which all his known works were written being, according to the estimate there made, 1374 and 1423.

³ Sanchez, Tom. I. p. lx.

employed him to write verses which passed afterwards under their own names. Of one short poem, a Hymn to the Madonna, the author himself thought so well, that he often said it would surely clear him, in the other world, from the power of the Arch-enemy.⁴

Francisco Imperial, born in Genoa, but in fact a Spaniard, whose home was at Seville, is also among the poets who were favored at this period, and who belonged to the same artificial school with Villasandino. The principal of his longer poems is on the birth of King John, in 1405, and most of the others are on subjects connected, like this, with transient interests. One, however, from its tone and singular subject, is still interesting. It is on the fate of a lady, who, having been taken among the spoils of a great victory * 355 in the far East, by Tamerlane, * was sent by him as a present to Henry the Third of Castile; and it must be admitted that the Genoese touches the peculiar misfortune of her condition with poetical tenderness.⁵

⁴ The Hymn in question is in Castro, Tom. I. p. 269; but, as a specimen of Villasandino's easiest manner, I prefer the following verses, which he wrote for Count Pero Niño, to be given to the Lady Beatrice, of whom, as was noticed when speaking of his Chronicle, the Count was enamored:—

La que siempre obedecí
E obedezco todavía,
Mal pecado, solo un día
Non se le membra de mí.
Perdí
Meu tempo en servir
A la que me fas revir
Coidoso desde que la ví, etc

But, as the editor of the Chronicle says (Madrid, 1782, 4to, p. 223), "They are verses that might be attributed to any other gallant or any other lady, so that it seems as if Villasandino prepared such couplets to be given to the first person that should ask for them";— words cited here, because they apply to a great deal of the poetry of the time

of John II., which deals often in the coldest commonplaces, and some of which was used, no doubt, as this was.

⁵ The notices of Francisco Imperial are in Sanchez (Tom. I. pp. lx, 205, etc.); in Argote de Molina's "Nobleza del Andaluzia" (1588, ff. 244, 260); and in his Discourse prefixed to the "Vida del Gran Tamorlan" (Madrid, 1782, 4to, p. 3). His poems are in Castro, Tom. I. pp. 296, 301, etc., and in the Cancionero of Baena, 1851. He speaks of Dante, and gives other indications of his knowledge of Italian, such as might be expected from a native of Genoa; but not one of his poems is in the Italian manner, nor does he show any disposition to introduce that manner into Spanish poetry. His allegorical poem on the Seven Virtues (No. 250) is the nearest approach to it; but, though he refers to Dante in it, and even cites him, the manner—the form—is not Italian.

Of the remaining poets who were more or less valued in Spain, in the middle of the fifteenth century, it is not necessary to speak at all. Most of them are now known only to antiquarian curiosity. Of by far the greater part very little remains; and in most cases it is uncertain whether the persons whose names the poems bear were their real authors or not. Juan Alfonso de Baena, the editor of the collection in which most of them are found, wrote a good deal,⁶ and so did Ferrant Manuel de Lando,⁷ Juan Rodriguez del Padron,⁸ Pedro Velez de Guevara, and Gerena and Calavera.⁹ Probably, however, nothing remains of the inferior * authors more interesting than * 356 a Vision composed by Diego de Castillo, the chronicler, on the death of Alfonso the Fifth of Aragon,¹⁰ and a sketch of the life and character of Henry the Third of Castile, given in the person of the mon-

⁶ Castro, Tom. I. pp. 319–330, etc.

⁷ Ferrant Manuel de Lando is noted as a page of John II. in Argote de Molina's "Sucesion de los Manueles," prefixed to the "Conde Lucanor," 1575; and his poems are said to have been "agradables para aquel siglo." Thirty-one of them are in the Cancionero of Baena, 1851. When he died is uncertain, but he seems to have been an old man in 1414. Baena, p. 651.

⁸ That is, if the Juan Rodriguez del Padron, whose poems occur in Baena (Cancionero, p. 506), and in the manuscript Cancionero called Estuñiga's (f. 18), be the same, as he is commonly supposed to be, with the Juan Rodriguez del Padron of the "Cancionero General," 1573 (ff. 121–124 and elsewhere). But of this I entertain doubts. The Marquis Pidal, however, considers them to be one and the same person; and a pleasant mystification, first published by him in 1839, of the supposed love adventures of Rodriguez del Padron, then represented by him as an Aragonese nobleman, with the Queen of Henry IV., may be found in Note CCLIII. to the Cancionero of Baena. But he admits, in the same note, 1851,

that Rodriguez del Padron, or Rodriguez de la Camara, as he was often called, was not a nobleman of Aragon, attached to the court of Henry IV., but a Galician, attached to the person of Don Pedro de Cervantes, Cardinal Archbishop of Seville, in the time of John II., with no proof that he lived into the reign of Henry IV. The queen of Henry IV. referred to is the same of whom Mariana, with a true Castilian feeling, thinks it becoming to record (Lib. XXIII. c. 5) that, having danced with the French ambassador in 1463, on his arrival at court, that personage gallantly vowed he would never dance again. She was very attractive, and Mariana, a little further on (cap. 11), tells us bad a story of her as the one the Marquis Pidal invented.

⁹ Sanchez, Tom. I. pp. 199, 207, 208.

¹⁰ It is published by Ochoa, in the same volume with the inedited poems of the Marquis de Santillana, where it is followed by poems of Suerro de Ribera (who occurs also in Baena's Cancionero, and that of Estuñiga), Juan de Dueñas (who occurs in Estuñiga's), and one or two others of no value,—all of the age of John II.

arch himself, by Pero Ferrus;¹¹ — poems which remind us strongly of the similar sketches found in the old English "Mirror for Magistrates."

But, while verse was so much cultivated, prose, though less regarded and not coming properly into the fashionable literature of the age, made some progress. We turn, therefore, now to two writers who flourished in the reign of John the Second, and who seem to furnish, with the contemporary chronicles and other similar works already noticed, the true character of the better prose literature of their time.

The first of them is Fernan Gomez de Cibdareal, who, if there ever were such a person, was the king's physician, and, in some respects, his confidential and familiar friend. He was born, according to the Letters that pass under his name, about 1386,¹² and, though not of a distinguished family, had for his godfather Pedro Lopez de Ayala, the great chronicler and chancellor of Castile. When he was not yet four-and-twenty years old, John the Second being still a child, Cibdareal entered the royal service, and remained attached to the king's person till the death of his master, when we lose sight of him altogether. During this long period of above forty years, he maintained a correspondence, to which we have already alluded more than once, with many of the principal * 357 persons in the state: with the king * himself, with several of the archbishops and bishops,

¹¹ Castro, Tom. I. pp. 310-312.

¹² The best life of Cibdareal is prefixed to his Letters (Madrid, ed. 1775, 4to). But his birth is there placed about 1388, though he himself (Ep. 105) says he was sixty-eight years old in 1454, which gives 1386 as the true date. But we know absolutely nothing

of him beyond what we find in the letters that pass under his name. The Noticia prefixed to the edition referred to was — as we are told in the Preface to the Chronicle of Alvaro de Luna (Madrid, 1784, 4to) — prepared by Llaguno Amirola.

and with a considerable number of noblemen and men of letters, among the last of whom were Alfonso de Cartagena and Juan de Mena. A part of this correspondence, amounting to one hundred and five letters, written between 1425 and 1454, has been published, in two editions; the first claiming to be of 1499, and the last prepared in 1775, with some care, by Amirola, the Secretary of the Spanish Academy of History. Most of the subjects discussed by the honest physician and courtier in these letters are still interesting; and some of them, like the death of the Constable, which he describes minutely to the Archbishop of Toledo, are important, if they can be trusted as genuine. In almost all he wrote, he shows the good-nature and good sense which preserved for him the favor of leading persons in the opposite factions of the time, and which, though he belonged to the party of the Constable, yet prevented him from being blind to that great man's faults, or becoming involved in his fate. The tone of the correspondence is simple and natural, always quite Castilian, and sometimes very amusing; as, for instance, when he is repeating court gossip to the Grand Justiciary of Castile, or telling stories to Juan de Mena. But a very interesting letter to the Bishop of Orense, containing an account of John the Second's death, will perhaps give a better idea of its author's general spirit and manner, and, at the same time, exhibit somewhat of his personal character.

"I foresee very plainly," he says to the Bishop, "that you will read with tears this letter, which I write to you in anguish. We are both become orphans; and so has all Spain. For the good and noble and just King John, our sovereign lord, is dead. And I, miserable man that I am, — who was not yet

twenty-four years old when I entered his service with the Bachelor Arrevalo, and have, till I am now sixty-eight, lived in his palace, or, I might almost say, in his bedchamber and next his bed, always in his confidence, and yet never thinking of myself,—I should now have but a poor pension of thirty thousand * 358 maravedís for my long * service, if, just at his death, he had not ordered the government of Cibdareal to be given to my son, who I pray may be happier than his father has been. But, in truth, I had always thought to die before his Highness; whereas he died in my presence, on the eve of Saint Mary Magdalen, a blessed saint, whom he greatly resembled in sorrowing over his sins. It was a sharp fever that destroyed him. He was much wearied with travelling about hither and thither; and he had always the death of Don Alvaro de Luna before him, grieving about it secretly, and seeing that the nobles were never the more quiet for it, but, on the contrary, that the King of Navarre had persuaded the King of Portugal to think he had grounds of complaint concerning the wars in Barbary, and that the king had answered him with a crafty letter. All this wore his heart out. And so, travelling along from Avila to Medina, a paroxysm came upon him with a sharp fever, that seemed at first as if it would kill him straightway. And the Prior of Guadalupe sent directly for Prince Henry; for he was afraid some of the nobles would gather for the Infante Don Alfonso; but it pleased God that the king recovered his faculties by means of a medicine I gave him. And so he went on to Valladolid; but, as soon as he entered the city, he was struck with death, as I said before the Bachelor Frias, who held it to be a small matter, and before the

Bachelor Beteta, who held what I said to be an idle tale. . . . The consolation that remains to me is that he died like a Christian king, faithful and loyal to his Maker. Three hours before he gave up the ghost, he said to me: ‘Bachelor Cibdareal, I ought to have been born the son of a tradesman, and then I should have been a friar of Abrojo, and not a King of Castile.’ And then he asked pardon of all about him, if he had done them any wrong; and bade me ask it for him of those of whom he could not ask it himself. I followed him to his grave in Saint Paul’s, and then came to this lonely room in the suburbs; for I am now so weary of life that I do not think it will be a difficult matter to loosen me from it, much as men commonly fear death. Two days ago I went to see the queen; but I * found the palace from the top to the * 359 bottom so empty, that the house of the Admiral and that of Count Benevente are better served. King Henry keeps all King John’s servants; but I am too old to begin to follow another master about, and, if God so pleases, I shall go to Cibdareal with my son, where I hope the king will give me enough to die upon.” This is the last we hear of the sorrowing old man, who probably died soon after the date of this letter, which seems to have been written in July, 1454.¹³

The other person who was most successful as a prose writer in the age of John the Second was Fernan Perez de Guzman,—like many distinguished Spaniards, a soldier and a man of letters, belonging to the high aristocracy of the country, and occupied in its affairs. His mother was sister to the great Chancellor Ayala, and his father was a brother of the Marquis of San-

¹³ It is the last letter in the collection. See Appendix (C), on the genuineness of the whole.

His Mother ayala's sig.
Father Santhomas' mother

Santhomas de la reza
a descend