

than when we were passing up the principal stairway of the palace, on the evening in question. The steps and balustrade, of exquisite white marble, were made more brilliant by the crimson contrast of rich carpeting, and the muskets and halberds of the guard, who saluted us at the entrance and on every platform, had a festive glitter in the flood of softened light. A few moments of easy ascent carried us to the door of the superb ante-chamber, where the aids of the military personages in attendance and a number of officers of the household waited, in rich uniforms. In the adjoining apartment of the suite we found the principal members of the diplomatic body already assembled, and it was not long before we were ushered, with the usual ceremonial, into the presence-chamber. Upon the opposite side of the magnificent saloon to that from which we entered, stood the Queen, beside a table covered with crimson velvet. The king was on her left, and on the other side of the table stood Narvaez, with the Ministers of Finance and Grace and Justice. At the head of the chamber was the Minister of State, with the rest of his colleagues, and at the foot the Count of Sevilla la Nueva, the Introducer of Ambassadors. Behind their Majesties were some attendants of high rank. The chiefs of the different legations, in the due order of precedence, with the Pope's Nuncio at their head, arranged themselves in line opposite the royal persons. Behind each minister stood his secretary, and the other members of his diplomatic family. When the whole pageant was in right array, it was gorgeous in the extreme; for the apartment was lofty and superbly lighted, its architecture and furniture

were all that taste and luxury could devise, and the various splendor of the uniforms and court-dresses elicited the admiration of those who were most accustomed to such displays.

As soon as we had subsided into our places, the Nuncio produced a congratulatory address in Spanish, on the part of himself and his colleagues, which he read with great earnestness and deliberation, but with a provokingly Italian accent, which was almost too much for the gravity of more than one of the dignified assemblage. When he had finished, her Majesty, in a distinct tone, but very rapidly, read an expression of her thanks and "sweet hopes." She then proceeded towards the Nuncio, whom she saluted very graciously, and, after conversing with him for a few moments, passed down the line of the Ambassadors, saying a few words to each in his turn. The King followed her, but seemed to be in no great haste to finish his part of the performance, — so that her Majesty was compelled to wait some time for him, with the Introducer of Ambassadors, at the foot of the saloon. She obviously did not bear the delay very patiently, — as was quite natural, — and when the King finally joined her, she made her exit with him at once, by a door opposite to us. The curious in such matters may be edified by the information, that their Majesties retired facing the diplomatic body, — making three several bows as they moved across the apartment, and another at the door, as they were in the act of passing through it.

It was the first time that I had been near the King, for a sufficiently long time to observe him particularly. He is of short stature, exceedingly juvenile and effem-

inate in his appearance, with a "shrill treble" in his voice, and a downy incipient moustache. Whether he deserves one half the unamiable and disparaging things which are said of him may well be doubted by any one who knows the reckless license of court scandal; but there is no risk, I am sure, in saying that neither Lavater nor Spurzheim would hasten to select him, from outward signs, as the model of a ruler among men.

## XVIII.

SOCIAL CUSTOMS IN MADRID. — ENTERTAINMENTS. — SOCIETY AND ITS SPIRIT. — IMITATION OF THE FRENCH. — THE ACADEMY AND THE PRESS. — SOCIALISM. — ETIQUETTE. — SOCIAL FRANKNESS AND CORDIALITY.

IN all the capitals of Europe, the general tone of society among the higher classes is, of course, given by the court; but Madrid is so emphatically "*la Corte*," — the Court and nothing else, — that every movement at the Palace vibrates through the whole circumference of the social circle. The Queen, who is as generous as she is gay, had been in the habit of throwing open the royal saloons to her lieges without stint, and I found that traditions of her splendid balls and routs, during the preceding winters, were quite rife among the gossips of fashion. Indeed, I met with a party of young noblemen who had come from Belgium, all the way, in the praiseworthy expectation of realizing sundry wonderful accounts which had been given them by some of their luckier friends, who were in Madrid the year before. Unhappily, however, the events to which I have alluded disappointed the hopes

and calculations of the dancing world, during the season of my visit, and confined the entertainments at the palace to a few operatic performances. As a consequence, scarcely any one seemed disposed to open or carry on the usual festive campaign, and several of my acquaintance, who had promised me marvels when the season opened, were careful to tell me, when it was over, that they had never seen Madrid so little like itself. The few general entertainments which were given were probably a fair type of the many which would have kept them company under more favorable auspices; but as it is no part of my plan to chronicle a stranger's experience of private hospitality, I must leave the reader to imagine, that wealth and social cultivation have the same results in Madrid as all the world over.

In telling the story of my former rambles in Spain, I took occasion to say something about the rarity of invitations to dinner, which some travellers complain of so bitterly. It is not the custom of the country to feed the hungry after that fashion,—and whether it be a fault or a virtue, Madrid, in that particular, is like the rest of the kingdom. Any one who makes up his mind to be a dweller in the capital must resign himself to the inevitable necessity, for the most part, of casting his own bread upon the waters, and finding it for himself when he can. With but few exceptions, the foreigners resident at Madrid are the only Amphitryons, and there are those of them, no doubt, who are consequently remembered in the same spirit which taught the weary pilgrims to

“drink, and pray  
For the kind soul of Sybil Grey.”

The prodigal abundance — which loads the tables and supports the medical faculty, regular and irregular, wherever Anglo-Saxondom, or its remotest offshoot, stretches — forms no part of Spanish social economy. The *tertulias*, or evening receptions — which are so natural, so pleasant, and so free, that no one can enjoy them long, without regarding them as one of the most charming fashions of social intercourse — are altogether without gastronomic embellishments. A little *orchata*, lemonade and cake, with perhaps a cup of tea where foreign tastes have been acquired, are all that a large company will desire, to help them, with music and conversation, through a long and agreeable evening. If cards are introduced, as they frequently are, it is not often that the game gets the better of prudence. In the more aristocratic saloons, where *écarté* is popular, the stakes are generally made up by the bystanders, — and the loser invariably resigns his seat to his neighbor, as soon as fate determines against him. The amusement of one is thus made the amusement of all, and there is a natural and constant diffusion of that social electricity, which we are too apt, in this country, to suppose can only be disseminated by the ponderous machinery of a supper.

Some ill-natured commentators upon Spanish customs have been disposed to attribute the fast-day character of these entertainments to the poverty of the people, or their economy, rather than their moderation. I have no idea that there is any foundation whatever for that impression. People would be called together less frequently, no doubt, if it were necessary to tempt them by costly preparations; and it is more than

probable, that the Spaniards, like all the rest of the children of men, would say Ha! ha! among the banquets, if there were any, as the war-horses are wont to, among the trumpets. Yet this last would only happen from the common weakness of all flesh and the superiority of temptation to human powers of resistance. I am quite persuaded, in spite of it, that the present system is the result of both taste and principle. The Spaniards are notoriously an abstemious people, in the very bosom of abundance; hence, to be moderate is to them natural. In the midst, too, of all their distinctions of rank and class, — their stars and crosses and uniforms, — they are, as I have frequently repeated, more practically observant of personal equality than any people I have seen. A social habit, therefore, which puts rich and poor upon a level, so far as they may intrinsically deserve to be, is entirely in accordance with their instincts. Fond, too, as they are of pleasant intercourse, it is but reasonable that they should adhere, with some pertinacity, to observances which remove the ban so often put by adverse fortune, elsewhere, on social talents or accomplishments. Halleck's "Fanny" could never have been a poem of Spanish life. The "dwelling of the proud and poor" would not have closed its doors or lost its visitors, because there was no longer a chandelier in the drawing-room. If the inmates had been worth cultivating, the world would have sought and found them, as usual, on the next pleasant evening after the notary had called to protest the bill. Not that, in Spain, adversity is altogether without the shadows which make its pathway cold and gloomy everywhere; but that social

pleasure is made to depend more upon the men and women who enjoy and give it, than on the adventitious circumstances which surround them, and these may consequently take to themselves wings, without carrying every thing along with them.

Madrid, however, is no very accurate or favorable type of the national character and customs, in the particulars of which I have been speaking. Socially, indeed, — it is strange, but it is true, — the capital is the most un-Spanish city in the kingdom. There is less of the national freedom and frankness there, more ostentation, more pretension, more servility in the imitation of foreign tastes and habits, than in all the rest of Spain put together. I have heard some of the Madrileños rebel sturdily against this conclusion; but it is just, nevertheless, and I, for one, certainly adopt it in no unfriendly spirit. The persons to whom I refer insisted that foreigners visit Spain merely to enjoy its peculiarities, — the points in which it differs from the more modernized countries of Europe. Looking at the people merely in the picturesque point of view, travellers, they said, are disappointed at finding that the French bonnet and hat have superseded the *mantilla* and *calañes* on the Prado, — that *boleros* and the *ole* are not danced in polite society, — and that well-bred men and women in Madrid are dressed and bear themselves like well-bred people in the other capitals of Europe. Hence it is, they said, that strangers pronounce Madrid un-Spanish. Going to the Peninsula as to a *bal de costume*, they are disappointed at not finding the maskers and mummers as fantastic as they had expected.



There would be a good deal of force in this, if it told the whole truth. No people are under an obligation to be stationary for the amusement of picturesque tourists. Intercourse with other nations would be of but little service, were we not at liberty to learn and willing to be taught any improvement on our national usages. Though, therefore, I consider it very barbarous taste to supplant the *mantilla* by any French or English contrivance whatever, I see no reason why those who think differently should not be allowed to indulge their notions accordingly. With far greater readiness, I admit both the wisdom and civilization of introducing the French system of cookery, to the fullest extent. Any one who prefers the *puchero* of his fathers ought of course to be tolerated in adhering to it himself, provided he gives to others the choice between it and something better. But, on the other hand, it is entirely in accordance with the most orthodox *Españolismo*, for a man to prefer what the culinary genius of the Palais Royal has done for humanity, to all the combinations of *garbanzos* and *tocino* that have come down from the days of King Roderick. Neither patriotism, nor prescription, nor "reverence," has any thing to do with so vital a matter.

But the customs of Madrid go very far beyond these reasonable limits. The dynasty and its associations have infused the French mind, as far as possible, into the national body, and the French raiment in which they have clothed the latter is consequently worth noticing as a type of the inward transformation. French habits have been introduced, — French tastes domesticated, — French ideas, and doctrines, and even preju-

dices, incorporated into the national stock, — not because they are better than the old, but because they are French. What foreigners admire most in the Spanish character and manners is that which is most characteristic. The Madrid theory seems to be, that to adhere to what is characteristic and national is to linger behind the age. In the most elevated circles — in the very palace itself — the French language is spoken, not merely as a matter of diplomatic necessity or convenience, but of choice; and Spanish is hardly tolerated there, even between Spaniards. The personal example of the Queen, who is especially fond of her native language, has failed to check this corruption of the public taste. It has gone so far, that not only the ephemeral productions of the press, but even the best-conducted journals, and the works of some of the most popular writers, are filled with glaring Gallicisms. The Dictionary of the Academy itself — the standard and test of purity in the Castilian — is naturalizing these interpolations so steadily and progressively, that a witty censor, not long back, insisted on having the last edition translated into Spanish! The discourse of a prominent Senator of the *Moderado* party, delivered while I was in Madrid on the occasion of his admission to the Academy, was amusingly and justly criticized in detail, by a writer in the *Clamor Publico*, for its palpable introduction of unauthorized French words and idioms. The thing was made too plain to be above even a foreigner's appreciation.

As has been heretofore observed, in speaking of the Madrid press, the newspapers have not only adopted the French form and arrangement, but are mostly printed,

as nearly all the best books are, from French type. The French political philosophy which may be current at the time furnishes, in like manner, to the journalists on both sides, the greater part of their maxims and logic. Sometimes the effect of this is very amusing. For example, if there be any thing on earth of which a Spaniard is, from his moral and physical constitution, incapable, that thing, it may be safely said, is socialism. Your genuine Iberian may do many things both strange and wild, in a political way, but his peculiarities must always have a practical turn. He will "pronounce," with his shouldered musket, in the *plaza*, — he will shoot a *Jefe Politico*, — hunt a broken-down minister to the very frontier, — turn *guerillero*, and go through five years of countermarching and starvation, to break down an existing dynasty or give the king of his choice "his own again," — but socialist, Fourierist, communist, or transcendentalist of any species, he cannot be. He has not the stuff in him of which these sorts of people are made. His romance, his human instalment of insanity, does not run in that direction. He has excellent common sense, in the first place, besides a keen perception of the ridiculous, and a contempt for metaphysics generally. "You are metaphysical," says Babiaca, the horse of the Cid, to Rozinante, in one of the sonnets prefixed to the first edition of *Don Quixote*. "'T is that I eat not!" is the Manchegan charger's reply. The Spaniard, everywhere, is of Rozinante's opinion, that too nice speculation is a windy business, furnishing small entertainment for man or horse.

In spite of this, — which is as indisputably a trait of

the Spanish character as loyalty or constancy, or any of its virtues or vices, — there was not a conservative paper in all Madrid, that did not daily and principally enlarge upon the horrors of the socialist doctrines, and invoke the energies of the country and the powers of the government to check the progress of liberal politics, as involving socialism and its consequences, of necessity. M. Proudhon was the great bugbear. French democracy had run riot, and declared all property to be robbery; therefore there was no safety for any thing, in Spain, that savored of concession to the people. The reasoning was not very conclusive, but still it was generally adopted, and the preservation of “*el orden*” — “order” — seemed, by general consent, to be regarded by the whole conservative party as the only purpose for which government was instituted. The party of progress, on the other hand, did not fail, I must admit, to give some color to the pretensions of the enemy. The magnificent generalities of the French republican orators were too high-sounding in Castilian for journalist nature to resist, and phrases, which might perhaps have been potent, and consequently dangerous, at the Hôtel de Ville, were now and then let loose from the columns of a liberal newspaper. It needed great folly to suppose that such abstractions could be any thing more than simply ridiculous in Spain. Yet it was mortifying to see how frequently the political discussions, both in print and in the Cortes, were made to turn, almost exclusively, upon them. It will be worth while to observe the course which things of the sort will take, now that France has adopted the *coup d'état*, which is emphatically a Spanish (or Turkish) invention.

The etiquette of Madrid was, in most particulars, very rational. Strangers, on arriving in the city, were expected to leave cards for those persons on whose civility they had any claim. The promptness or delay with which the courtesy was acknowledged, furnished a pretty fair test of the cordiality with which a more particular acquaintance was likely to be encouraged. On New-Year's day, or from that to Twelfth-day, every one sent cards to all his acquaintance, and a neglect of that attention was construed, in the absence of explanation, to indicate a wish for the suspension of visiting intercourse. It was an easy civility, however, and few disregarded it. You had only to make out a list, and your servant did the rest. Persons about to enter upon the holy estate of matrimony announced the fact to all with whom they desired to continue their social relations, by sending round a card, in their joint names, giving the direction of their intended residence and an invitation to visit them. Formal visits were generally made between two and five in the afternoon, yet few persons received formally, and it was generally polite to send a card, always so to leave one in person, without asking to be admitted. Most families, of any social position, had stated evenings — once in a week or a fortnight — on which they expected visitors, as a matter of course, and it was regarded as unsocial, if not uncivil, for even an ordinary acquaintance to neglect presenting himself, occasionally, at these unpretending reunions.

In the more fashionable houses, the evening receptions did not begin before nine o'clock. They generally lasted until near midnight, about which hour, if

there was a ball elsewhere, the company would separate to meet again. Such hours, of course, were not likely to encourage early rising, and I have heard it said of some fair ladies, that, on their way home from the dance of Saturday night, they would now and then point the moral of earthly vanity, by hearing mass in their faded flowers! The gay and passionate, who had the vigor of youth as well as its hopes and promptings, no doubt found enjoyment in this, — at any rate for a while; but there were others on whom it must have imposed a melancholy servitude. Power was to be sought, as well as pleasure, in the saloons of Madrid, and many an intrigue to overturn a ministry or circumvent an opposition was planned and thwarted amid festal light and music. Politicians, diplomatists, and the higher order of *pretendientes*, were usually watchers, therefore, on such occasions. Many a weary and sad Major Pendennis went through a nightly tribulation, which all the honors and profits of the Court would have but ill repaid. I could not help thinking, sometimes, how natural it was that affairs should occasionally go wrong, when the brains on which their conduct depended were so often throbbing, at the dawn, with the fever of sleepless revelry. It was on account of such habits, most probably, that the ministerial bureaux were so rarely accessible, for any purposes of business, before the afternoon. No one who knows, from experience, how little of the working day is left when the morning is gone, can be surprised, after knowing this fact, at the delays and postponements in which the public offices of Spain so proverbially abound.

It was not, of course, among the Polkas and Mazur-

kas — which are danced, all the world over, to the same music, well or ill played — that the characteristics of Spanish society were to be particularly sought, even so far as they were to be found, at all, in Madrid. The quiet *tertulia*, among quiet people, was more interesting to a stranger, on that account, than the rout which followed it. The one he could see almost anywhere, with perhaps some little variety in its accidents; the other he could, on the whole, find nowhere else. With respectable introductions, he could have access, on almost every night of the week, to *tertulias*, literary, political, or merely social, according to his taste. A fair acquaintance with the Spanish language would be necessary to his complete enjoyment and appreciation of them; for although he would seldom be without some one to speak with him in his own tongue, or, at all events, in French, yet the conversation — except, as I have said, in the more courtly circles — was, for the most part, carried on in Spanish, and its spirit and style were mainly national. The unreserve with which he would hear persons and things discussed, according to the predominating opinion of the company, would surprise him a little, at first; but he would soon find himself regarded as having undergone a sort of matriculation, which involved confidence as well as cordiality. Whatever he might find to be the degree of sensibility manifested by the Spaniards, as a people, to any impeachment of their national intelligence or dignity, he would soon learn, that, as individuals, they were as open as any to respectful and kindly interrogation or suggestion. If he should fail to understand them fully and appreciate them fairly, it would be his own fault; for, lack what

they might in other things, they would show him no want of frankness. If, in the midst of the very kindness which made him at home upon the briefest acquaintance, he should perceive an attentive politeness, approaching so near to formality as now and then to embarrass him, he would soon be brought to understand and admire it as the expression of habitual consideration for the feelings of others. He would value it the more, when he learned, from its universality, that what was elsewhere chiefly a thing of manners and education, was there a genial instinct developed into a social charity.



## XIX.

THEATRES AND DRAMATIC LITERATURE. — ACTORS AND THEIR STYLE. — ROMEA AND MATILDE DIAZ. — BRETON DE LOS HERREROS AND HIS PLAYS. — RUBÍ. — ISABELLA CATÓLICA. — HISTORICAL DRAMAS. — THEATRICAL POLICE. — LITERARY REWARDS. — COPYRIGHT. — COUNT OF SAN LUIS.

THE Teatro de Oriente, when I was in Madrid, being still as Ferdinand left it, there was no theatre or opera-house on a scale worthy of a capital. Indeed, with the exception of the private operas at the palace, it was admitted, on all hands, that the season was without musical attractions. The drama fared much better, — and although the minor theatres, with ballet and vaudeville, were more generally attended, the Teatro Español (known for nearly half a century as the Teatro del Príncipe, — the Prince's Theatre) was constantly presenting plays of the best character, in quite a high style of art. This theatre is the property of the *Ayuntamiento* of Madrid, at whose risk and for whose account it was conducted; but the worshipful fathers of the city, with a discretion not usually belonging to

their class, had placed its management in the hands of Don Julian Romea, a capital actor, — who was, besides, no mean poet, and said to be one of the best dramatic critics in Spain. Under his auspices and the very liberal encouragement of the Count of San Luis, then Minister of the Interior, the best poetical talent of the country was called into requisition, and the Español had become an excellent school of taste for both actors and authors. Its audience was generally made up of the most cultivated people, and evinced a discrimination in applause and censure, that bespoke the habit of hearing and seeing good models. The theatre itself — then the best in the city, though not the largest — was very comfortably arranged for the spectators, although so narrowly provided with accommodations behind the scenes, as to require the removal of the more cumbrous decorations to a distance, whenever the production of a novelty increased the usual supply. The machinery and the *mise en scène* were, nevertheless, quite modern and artistic, on the whole, so that little was left to be desired, in those particulars, by such as were content to enjoy the “legitimate” department.

What has been said in regard to the oratory of the Spaniards, applies with equal force to the elocution of their stage. There is, among the best of their tragic artists, what strikes as exaggeration one who is accustomed to our standards. It is not the depth of their passion, nor indeed its violence, but rather its vivacity, that produces this impression. They have a quickness and restlessness of manner which seems at war with dignity. There is too much gesticulation, — too little repose, — an incessant twinkle, which takes

the place of both blaze and heat. As the kings at some of our theatres insist upon wearing their crowns and robes of state, in the street and on the battle-field as well as in their bed-chambers, lest they be mistaken for common people, — so the Spanish tragedians seem to think that a hero or heroine must say and do every thing after a peculiar fashion, — if not an heroic one. Instead of holding the mirror up to nature, they are constantly and majestically watching their own looking-glasses. This criticism, I am aware, may possibly be open to the reply which I have admitted may be made to my observations on the kindred subject. Yet I do not think it is fairly so. I am the better satisfied that it is not the result of prejudice, or of my habituation to a different style, from the fact that I do not think it possible for a Spaniard to have enjoyed, with a keener relish than I did, the excellent comic acting, and the admirable representations of daily life, which were so frequent upon the Madrid stage.

Romea, who generally filled the best tragic parts, is less obnoxious to the remarks just made, than any actor of his nation that I have seen. If, on the contrary, he has a leading defect, it is that he is too cold, — that he has chastened his style into tameness. The features of the tragic mask will not bear too much rounding, and from forgetting this he has made them sometimes inexpressive, when seen from a spectator's distance. It is a fault, however, which springs, in him, from the tastes and scruples of a scholar, and is in a great degree relieved by a thorough comprehension of his parts, and a nice and graceful observance of all the proprieties and probabilities of his art. He has a good voice

and great command of it, an admirable articulation, and exceeding skill in the appropriate adornment of a striking person.

The wife of Romea, better known as Matilde Diaz, is regarded as the best tragic actress in the kingdom, and has unbounded popularity in Madrid. An unfortunate tendency to *embonpoint* has made her figure emphatically what Byron hated, and has of course greatly impaired the spirituality which first gave reputation to her acting. She redeems this misfortune, however, by a sweet, expressive face, a melodious voice, and a great deal of tragic feeling and poetical appreciation. Her recitation of her noble, native language is, at times, the perfection of spoken music, and her tender passages would indeed be perfect, altogether, were it not that, with Rosalind, she sometimes "will weep for nothing, like Diana in the fountain." Whether Matilde has made this excess of sweet sorrow the fashion, I do not know; but it is the fashion, — and her rival, Lamadrid, who likewise has a good deal of tragic power, carries it to the extreme of the pocket-handkerchief style, which makes the griefs of Mrs. Haller so affecting.

Breton de los Herreros is the most popular dramatic author of the day in Spain, — perhaps the only writer in the annals of the drama, anywhere, who has ever received the enthusiastic compliment of having a whole play encored. Though his fertility is quite equal to his skill, there was nothing new from him during my visit. His latest comedy then, called *Quien es Ella?* "Who is she?" — had appeared in 1849, and was occasionally performed, though without producing any great

sensation. It was an attempt to introduce upon the stage the celebrated writer, Don Francisco de Quevedo y Villegas, one of the first names in Spanish literature. To make an effective character, in a work of fiction, out of a literary man, is for obvious reasons no very easy task under any circumstances; and although Quevedo's connection with public affairs gives some interest of a dramatic nature to his history, it is as a wit, an epigrammatist, a satirist, a poet of a bold and lofty genius, that he dwells chiefly in the remembrance of his countrymen. With the exception of Cervantes, there is probably no writer whose sayings are as frequently upon the lips of the people, and not even Cervantes has ascribed to him one tithe of the unwritten sayings which are handed down by tradition as Quevedo's. Like Swift, whom he resembles in some particulars, — and those not always the most creditable to either, — he is as thoroughly individualized by these sayings as man can be. While, therefore, it was easy enough for so facile a poet and clever an artist as Breton to catch the salient points of so striking a character and mind and manner, it was not so easy to fill the public idea of so renowned a man, — to make that out of him which every one knew him to have been, and desired to see reproduced. With a great deal of merit, therefore, *Quien es Ella?* fell short of its purpose, and took but little hold of the public mind as a play, — though it very deservedly added to its author's reputation as a poet and scholar. If Breton had taken the same view of his own capacity which the critics seem to have adopted, he would probably not have undertaken a work of the sort. His plays are considered

attractive, more from the grace and sprightliness of the dialogue, and their abounding wit, than from their delineation of character or interest of plot. Indeed, his pieces in one act are, I believe, the most popular; and that he is called the Scribe of Spain is some proof of the general opinion, that the loftier walks of the drama are not those which he treads most successfully. That he has published some sixty plays, entitles him, however, to a little consideration for the faults

“ Quas aut incuria fudit,

Aut humana parum cavit natura.”

The triumph of the season was the drama of *Isabela Católica*, whose author, Don Tomas Rodriguez Rubí, a young poet from Malaga, had already won for himself a brilliant reputation. It was received with enthusiasm, night after night, by crowded houses, although the length of the performance, which lasted nearly five hours, might well have excused a more temperate display of admiration. The author was called out, as is the Spanish custom, to receive wreaths and bravos, and even the Queen did him the honor to make one of his audience. The play, as its title indicates, is founded on the eventful history of the Catholic Sovereigns, — a theme which the learning and genius of Prescott give us a right to be proud of, as in some degree our own. It seems to have been the object of Rubí, to present a succession of striking historical pictures, rather than to construct a regular drama. The plot — if indeed there be a definite, pervading thread to the story — is at the best a rambling one, and the incidents are, certainly, quite treasonable to historic truth. Ferdinand, bad and morose, is thrown entirely into the shade, as king if not

as husband, and Isabella is made the magnanimous victim of a tender and reciprocated, though innocent, passion for the Great Captain, Gonzalo de Cordova. Gonzalo is painted as a showy and sentimental hero of romance, and Columbus, who of course appears, is made to say and do many things, philosophical and geographical as well as personal, which would have astonished him quite as much as his predictions mystified the doctors of theology.

There is, of course, no particular reason why a dramatist should be held to strict account for the accuracy of all the situations in which it may please him to depict historical personages; nor do I conceive that he is under any obligation, as a matter of conscience, to cling to the authentic chronicles, as Mr. Bisset has stuck to the Annual Register. There are certain limits, however, beyond which a popular writer cannot go, without doing some harm, — certain landmarks which ought, by all means, to be left standing. It might be proved, at this day, beyond the peradventure of Archbishop Whately's most impregnable logic, that Richard the Third of England was as erect in stature as the herald Mercury, and as good a king as Hamlet's father. Yet all the historical societies in Christendom could not make him otherwise than crook-back and tyrant, as long as Shakspeare should continue to be read and listened to. Many good people, I am sure, have died, entertaining impressions, as matters of faith, which they supposed they had derived from the Scriptures, and so would have fought for, but which had no better (and happily no worse) origin than Milton's *Paradise Lost*. Where a play, or any work of fiction,

is sufficiently meritorious to become a permanent part of the national literature, and is founded on an interesting and important passage of the national life, it is the better rule, certainly, to take as few liberties as may be with the main historical fabric, and at all events not to turn the whole matter upside down. The history of which posterity has the luck to get possession is, at the best, but a skeleton, and a poet has quite scope enough for his fancy and imagination, in clothing it with flesh and raiment and giving it the speech and motion of a living creature. There are so many things, of which the story has been left untold, and may, therefore, be told as one pleases, that it is hardly worth while to pervert the few which have been faithfully handed\* down. If a man wishes to make his characters pure fictions, there is no need of his giving them historical names. If, on the other hand, he professes to write an historical drama, he ought to have something of history in it, besides the names and the pictures. It was a very classical thing in Canova, no doubt, to model a statue of Napoleon, naked, with a globe and Victory in his right hand, — for Napoleon was a man and a conqueror, and the Romans commemorated such after that fashion. But it was a poor invention indeed, and a scanty genius, (with deference be it said,) which could make nothing newer or better than a disrobed Roman Emperor out of Bonaparte and the epics of which he was the hero! Why call the marble by the Corsican's name, when, but for the face, it might have answered as well for Titus or Augustus? The angels, in periwigs, at the *Caridad* of Seville, may be in worse taste, but are not a whit less characteristic or significant.