

how the woman, at the moment when her languor indicates a near defeat, revives all at once to escape her pursuer ; how she is pursued, and in her turn pursues him ; how the different emotions which they feel are expressed by their looks, their gestures, and their attitudes,—you cannot help observing, with a blush, that these scenes are to the engagements of Cytherea, what our military evolutions are in time of peace to the true display of the art of war.

There is in Spain a dance still more voluptuous if possible than the *fandango*, but it belongs rather to the provinces than the capital ; it is called the *voleo*. Andalusia is its native country : as it seems invented particularly for the Andalusians of both sexes ; a remnant of decency has banished it almost entirely from private balls, but it is danced still often enough on the stage*.

* A German traveller, (M. Fischer,) who has lately published a work on Spain, in which he modestly professes to have done nothing but glean after me, and wherein we find many pictures the colouring of which is very warm, but their likeness striking, describes the *voleo*, which he saw on the stage of Cadiz, in this manner :

“ When the play is over, the stage changes into a handsome
 “ saloon. The orchestra begins to play again: castanets are
 “ heard, and from each side of the stage a male and female
 “ dancer make their appearance, both dressed in the Andalu-
 “ sian costume, which belongs to the dance. They fly to a
 “ mutual rencontre as if they had been seeking one another.
 “ The man spreads his amorous arms to the woman, who is

A third dance belonging to the Spaniards, is that of the *seguidillas*. They are danced with eight, like our cotillons; at each corner the four couple describe, but only *en passant*, the principal traits of the *fandango*. It is here that a Spanish

“going to fly into them; but all at once she turns about and
 “escapes him. The man, half angry, revenges himself, and
 “flees in his turn. The orchestra makes a pause, the couple
 “stop as if undetermined; but the music soon puts them in
 “motion again.

“From henceforward the man expresses his desires with in-
 “creasing vivacity. The woman seems more inclined to
 “favour them. A more voluptuous languor is painted in her
 “eyes, her bosom beats with more violence, her arms extend
 “to the object who solicits her; but a new tormenting accident
 “robs him of her a second time:—a fresh pause reanimates
 “them again.

“The music of the orchestra rises and falls; it takes wings
 “to follow their steps. Full of desire, the man darts again
 “before his partner. The same sentiment actuates her. They
 “devour one another with their eyes; their lips begin to
 “open; but she is still feebly kept back by the small remains
 “of shame.

“The elevation of the music increases, and with it the vi-
 “vacity of their movements. A kind of vertigo, the intoxi-
 “cation of voluptuousness, seems to have subdued them both;
 “all their muscles demand and express pleasure; their sight
 “seems confused. All at once the music stops; the dancers
 “retire in soft languor; the curtain drops, and the spectators
 “awaken again.”

Such an animated description is rather an apology than a satire; it is, however, exact. Some years ago the *volero* was danced on the stage at Paris; but decency had softened the colours, and pleasure did not wish them more warm.

woman, dressed in her costume, accompanying the music with her castanets, and beating time with her heel with exact precision, becomes one of the most enchanting objects which love can employ to enlarge his empire.

Private balls are very general throughout Spain. They have a kind of president, who, under the name of *bastonero*, watches over good order in the midst of pleasure. He has the care of ordering the minuets, and of matching partners in such a manner as to render as many happy, and as few otherwise, as possible.

With respect to public balls and masquerades, they have been totally prohibited since the reign of Philip V. M. d'Aranda endeavoured to revive them at Madrid; but they did not survive his administration.

The people have some particular games, which relax their usual gravity a little. One is a feeble and dull representation of those wherein the strength and agility of the ancients were kept in continual exercise. It consists in throwing with a vigorous arm a bar of iron to a certain distance, and for that reason is called *el juego de la barra*.

Another game, much liked by the people, but still more insipid, is known as well in Italy as in Spain. Several men sitting in a circle hold up in their turn two, four, six or ten fingers, and rapidly call aloud the exact number held up.

The people called *bon ton* have recreations of

another kind. In the circles of idleness their principal relaxation, as elsewhere, is cards, particularly the game of *ombre*, which originally came from Spain, as its name denotes, but which they now call *trisillo*; chess, and a kind of billiards called *juego de trucos*.

In general, they seldom meet to eat together. The innocent and healthy pleasures of a country ramble are almost entirely unknown to them. Even the chase has few admirers, at least near the capital. The monarch and his family seem to have the exclusive privilege of it. A country life has no attractions with a Spaniard; and it would be very easy to count the number of their country-houses. Of the many opulent individuals in Madrid, there are scarcely ten who have any. As to castles and halls, so numerous in France, in England, and in Germany, which contribute so much to the embellishment of the environs of large cities, and where their owners pass at least the summer season, there are so few in the neighbourhood of Madrid, and in the rest of the peninsula, that many travellers have believed that from thence the expression came, *to build castles in Spain*,—as much as to say, *to live in the land of chimeras*. But this opinion is erroneous, because ancient castles, for the most part in ruins it is true, abound in almost all the provinces.

Therefore it is in the interior of the great cities that the rich citizens of the kingdom concentrate

their enjoyments. Music is one for which the Spaniards have most taste. This art is even cultivated amongst them with success, although their national music has not made much progress. If it possesses any peculiar characteristic, it is derived from the little airs which they call *tonadillas* and *seguidillas*; productions that are sometimes agreeable, but their modulation is so little varied, as to prove that the art of composition is with them still in its infancy. They, however, on the other hand, do brilliant justice to the master pieces of Germany and Italy, which are always highly welcomed in their frequent concerts. There are many amateurs, but few composers that deserve particular notice. A poet of Madrid, named *Don Thomas Yriarte*, who died a little while ago in the flower of his youth, composed about thirty years since a poem on music, where the dryness of the didactic is recompensed by some ingenious episodes and a brilliant imagination. The connoisseurs assert that the character of the Spanish music is there delineated by the hand of a master.

It is not only for the sake of dancing and music that the Spaniards meet. They have also, as inducements to assembling, their *tertulias* and their *refrescos*. The *tertulias* are like our assemblies, where perhaps there reigns more liberty, but where *ennui* is often a guest as well as in our circles. The women in general endeavour very little to be

social amongst one another ; each aspires to be at the head of a *tertulia* ; and no doubt it is these exclusive pretensions that still banish from Spanish societies what we call French gallantry. The women are there beloved, even adored, as well as elsewhere ; but when they do not inspire lively sentiments, they seldom receive that marked attention which our urbanity lavishes indistinctly on all the individuals of that amiable sex. This is not because the Spaniards have no gallantry. Their refined and high-flown traits are scattered with profusion in their romances and their plays ; but in the eyes of foreigners they appear exaggerated and full of grimace when carried into practice. They have not that easy manner, those elegant expressions, which even those who are envious of us agree in acknowledging in French gallantry. With us, a pretty woman with whom we are not in love is only an amiable creature, who expects but does not insist on homage, who receives it with a smile. In Spain, if she knows how to make herself respected, she is a divinity, whom you cannot as it were approach but on your knees. An ingenious verse of a ballad is sufficient for the first ; but the other requires the sublime accent and cadence of the ode.

The *refrescos*, invented by luxury and fastidious squeamishness, do not contribute in Spain, any more than the *tertulias*, to increase the intercourse of the sexes. In the course of the year,

they are nothing but some light collations, to which persons with whom you interchange visits are invited, and serve as a prelude to the *tertulias*. But on solemn occasions, such, for instance, as celebrating a marriage, a christening, or the birthday of the master of the house, the *refresco* is a very important and expensive affair. All their acquaintances are invited: as they arrive, the men separate from the women. These sit in a particular room, and etiquette requires that they remain together till all the company is assembled. The mistress of the house receives them on a sofa under a canopy, placed in a particular part of the room, which was in ancient time called the *estrado*, and above it is generally suspended the image of the Virgin. At the appearance of the *refresco*, the conversation becomes lively, and the two sexes join. In the first place large glasses with water are presented round, in which are dipped little square sweet cakes, of a spongy substance, called *azucar sponjado*, or *rosado*; after that comes chocolate, a favourite beverage with the Spaniards twice a day, and which they think so wholesome, or at least so innocent, that they give it to the dying. After that arrive in profuse abundance, sweetmeats, confectionary, and dainties, of all kinds and colours. These are not only eaten on the spot, but large papers, hats, and even handkerchiefs, are filled with them. The foreigner who is for the first time admitted to this species

of meal, where intoxicating liquors are avoided, expects to find a sober nation, but is mistaken.

Dancing or some game generally follows these *refrescos*; but it is very seldom that this entertainment is succeeded by a supper. This is a very frugal meal with the Spaniards, and for which they seldom assemble. Their cookery, such as they have received it from their forefathers, is liked by very few. Their palate requires high seasoning. Pepper, pimento, the juice of the *tomates*, or love apple, saffron, &c., colour or infect almost all their dishes. A single one has found favour with foreigners, which is called in Spain *olla podrida*, and is a kind of *pôt-pourri* of all sorts of meat boiled together. The Spanish cooking is seldom plain, but with obscure families who are attached to ancient customs. Almost every where it is connected with ours, and in many houses entirely supplanted by it.

Thus it is that we are universally imitated, even to the rendering us ridiculous. Our fashions, for instance, have been adopted in Spain as elsewhere. Our dresses are introduced under the Spanish cloak. The veil is only exclusively worn by women of the lower sort. For the others, it serves only to hide the disorder of the toilet when they go out on foot. With this exception, their coiffure and their whole dress submit to the power of French fashion. The Spanish manufacturers endeavour to seize and follow the reigning taste, in

all its rapid variation, without foreign aid; but they have not yet carried their point. The great cities, and even the court, acknowledge it in running directly to Paris and Lyons as the true sources of fashion. In this respect, as well as in many others, the Spaniards who affect the *bon ton* do justice to the superiority of some foreign nations, and take lessons of elegance from them in more than one respect. Their tables are served in the French fashion; their cooks and valets-de-chambre are French. Our milliners decorate their wives, and form schools of good taste for their daughters, who may hope one day to succeed their instructors. The heavy and antiquated equipages disappear from time to time, and make room for English and French carriages, which for some years past are made in Madrid and even in some other great cities. Sets of horses in elegant harnesses are a growing luxury, and they neglect no opportunity to invite our mechanics, manufacturers, and artists into their country.

This homage is not confined to objects of mere frivolity, but extends to almost all the branches of literature both French and English. The Spaniards translate most books of these nations, works on morals, on the arts, history, even romances, religious books particularly; in short, every thing which orthodoxy does not forbid.

To our poetry alone it is that they annex little merit. Their imagination, bold to extravagance,

finds our conceptions cold and tame. Accustomed to exaggeration and to redundancy, they cannot appreciate the merit of fitness and precision. The fine shades depicted in our ridicule and our manners escape their eyes, that are too much accustomed to caricatures; and with respect to our style, their ears, spoiled by the brilliant prosody of their cadenced phrases, cannot relish our peculiar expressions, which speak more to the soul than the senses; and the rounding of our elegant periods is lost upon them.

One of the principal causes that will prevent Spanish literature from being reformed, is, that the models which they still admire, and which they endeavour to imitate, are distinguished by the bad taste which at that time infected all Europe, and to which our early authors paid ample tribute, but on the ruins of which have been built the masterpieces of the reign of Louis XIV, that fixed our language in an irrevocable manner. If our literature had stood still in the times of Ronsart, Marot, Benserade, Voiture, Balzac, &c., their defects even would still serve for models. What might have happened to us, if a concurrence of circumstances had not improved our literature, has happened to the Spaniards. Since their *Calderon*, *Lope de Vega*, *Quevedo*, *Rebolledo*, &c. &c., full of a brilliant and creative imagination, but irregular, no author has appeared in Spain that was gifted with such shining qualities and sagacity.

Literature has been at a stand for more than a century. Those men of genius, often very fantastical in their conceptions, continue the standard of the beautiful; and their example, without producing any thing to be compared with what is with reason admired in them*, has served and still serves to excuse the errors of wit, and the gigantic expressions of a false eloquence. These reproaches are particularly applicable to the stage.

* We shall insert below some modification of these remarks, which have been found a little too severe.

(Note to the edition of 1806.)

CHAPTER XIII.

Of the Spanish stage. Ancient and modern comedies. Defence of the Spanish stage, and a critique on ours. Spanish versification. Actors. Modern farces. Majos and Gitanos.

IT would be unjust were we to appreciate the Spanish stage entirely from the critique of Boileau.

There are still, no doubt, some pieces in which the law of the three unities is outrageously violated; but in many of them not so much as to spoil all the interest. The Spaniards themselves blame most of their heroic plays, in which princes and princesses assemble from all parts of Europe without any motive or probability, and are every one in their turn either the agent or the sport of the most incredible adventures, and finish with unnecessarily spilling their blood without having even caused a tear to flow. Although many of these pieces oftentimes shine with original beauties; although they discover the rare talent of producing a complicated plot, and of finding the *denouement* even in the thread of their subject,—it is not on this account that the Spaniards praise their stage; but they have another reason

to be proud of it, and this even foreigners acknowledge, I mean their *pièces de caractères*:—these, without having the same regularity as our master pieces, or the same choiceness of thought and expression, are for the most part touching to the heart, and faithful in their pictures; and show a richness of imagination in the writers. The pieces called *de capa y espada* in particular give such an exact description of their ancient manners, that they may be studied to advantage in them. That generosity which still characterizes them, is there represented in the most lively colours; those flashes of patriotism and religious zeal which formerly made them equal to any enterprise; those sallies of national pride, the noble expression of which makes them be forgiven and almost admired; that irritability on the ticklish subjects of love and honour, which of old multiplied duels in Spain; the earnestness and devotion of hoping love; the anguish of unhappy love; the plots of thwarted love: such are the plays which the Spaniards still admire as much as when they first appeared. Their authors, amongst whom the most distinguished are *Lope de Vega*, *Roxas*, *Solis*, *Moreto*, *Arellano*, and particularly the immortal *Calderon de la Barca*, have established this taste so much by their success, that modern authors, such as *Zamora* and *Cañizares*, who wrote in the beginning of this century, dared not to stray from this walk.

The Spanish stage, however, experienced some happy changes more than twenty years ago. True tragedy without any unworthy admixture had long been a stranger; but lately they have represented some of our pieces translated more or less literally: some of our dramas, such as *Eugénie*, the *Déserteur* of Mercier, &c., have been translated quite literally; as also some of our best tragedies, such as *Andromaque*, *Zaïre*, *Mitbridate*, &c.; some translated or imitated from the Italian, as *Kouli-Kan* and *Pamela* of Goldoni. A few modern authors have even produced original tragedies, and worthy of that title; that is to say, regular, and without any of those buffooneries which characterize the ancient, even the most affecting, Spanish pieces.

So long ago as 1750, one of the first members of the Academy of Language, *Don Augustin Montiano*, attempted a reform in the taste of the nation, by writing two tragedies conformable to the rules of the three unities, *Virginia*, and *Ataulfo*. They are written with purity; but whether they had only this merit, or whether the Spaniards were not ripe enough for such a reform, they have been laid aside. Some later attempts have been more successful. The elder Moratin wrote a tragedy, entitled *Hormesinda*; but the interest of the piece did not answer to the force and elegance of its style, and its success was not lasting. *Guzman el Bueno*, another tragedy of this author, the subject

of which should interest all Spaniards, as it retraces an heroic circumstance of their history, with the same merit and the same fault, has had the same fate. The *Destruction of Numantia*, by Professor Ayala, another subject fit to elevate the mind of the Spaniards, has not disappointed the hopes of its author. This tragedy recalls the most flattering recollections of national pride, and breathes patriotism in all its fervour. It still excites a lively enthusiasm on the stage. Another modern tragedy, the *Raquel* of the academician La Thuerta, a distinguished poet, who died but a few years ago, would have enjoyed the same triumph, if certain political reasons had not excluded this piece from the stage. It is well conceived, ably written, full of brilliant passages, and entirely conformable to the rules of art. Except that the winding up is bad, it would be esteemed in every country a work of the first order.

Two more modern authors, Cienfuegos, at present at the head of the foreign department, and M. Quintano, one of the principal men employed in the commercial council, have written with more or less success, the first three regular tragedies; *Idomenée*, the *Condesa de Castilla*, and *Zoráido*; the other, two, *El Duque de Visco*, and *Pelayo*. Both have decided talents for poetry, as the collection of their works proves* ; but they are thought

* MM. Cienfuegos and Quintano are not the only writers who do honour to the Spanish Muses as poets. Besides the dra-

to excel more in lyrics than in the difficult art of writing tragedies. We shall pass over in silence some other less fortunate attempts, which all concur to prove the tendency of Spanish genius to form itself on good models.

The same revolution has happened in the department of Thalia. That which we call the *comédie noble* has been attempted on the Spanish stage. *Le Misanthrope*, for example, appeared there, and was well received. Some of their own authors have even ventured on comedies, in which spirit and good taste are united with beauty of style. Don Thomas Yriarte, known already by his literary fables, and his poem on music, though he has not excited a very lively interest, has made us smile at the representation of his two pretty comedies, *El Senorito mimado*, The Spoilt Child, and *La Senorita mal criada*, The Girl ill brought up. M. Moratin the younger, son to the tragic writer, a poet of true talents, and whose travels to the principal cities of Europe have extended his knowledge and improved his taste, has written, in the first place, a comedy full of Attic salt, entitled *The Coffee-house*, in which he successfully ridicules the pieces now

matic authors here mentioned, we may rank with them some poets who write in other departments. Such are Don Juan Melendez, Don Juan Baptista de Ariaza, M. de Norona, &c. The reader who wishes to acquire more particulars on the subject of Spanish literature may consult the *Archives Littéraires*, Nos. XIX and following.

in fashion, and their authors. Soon after another comedy of his appeared of the higher cast, which approaches nearer the drama; this was *El viejo y la niña*, The Old Man and the Girl. Although the invention did not keep pace with the style, it met with success: but M. Comella, another young dramatic poet, believing himself to be the object of one of the characters in M. Moratin's first play, revenged himself by parodying his second in a pretty gay comedy, called *El abuelo y la nieta*, The Grandfather and Grand-daughter: this drew the laugh of the day on his side; and the Spanish public for some time was amused by these petty literary rivalries, but did not fail to do justice to the superiority of M. Moratin, who has since enjoyed new dramatic successes, amongst others in a charming piece, which would be applauded everywhere, *La Mogigata*, The female Hypocrite. M. Comella, on his part, although with inferior talents, has gathered some laurels on the Spanish stage. His *Hombre agradecido*, The grateful Man, was crowned with applause in 1804. What we have here seen is sufficient to show that the modern Spaniards are attentive to the improvement of their stage, which has long been fruitful in works of genius, but defective in taste; that some of her authors have studied with success the best models, and that the public is become more capable of appreciating them. All their dramatic writers, however, do not equally concur in forwarding this

reform. For some years past, M. Valadarez has been too well satisfied with the easy success he acquires in flattering the taste of the most numerous part of his audience by pieces full of brilliant machinery and show, where noise and stage-trick make up all the interest; and which are more fit for a nation of children than for an enlightened one.

What will further contribute to retard this reform is, that even several of the learned of modern Spain are of opinion that it is by no means necessary, and defend with warmth the old Spanish stage; and, proud of the applause they received formerly from nations who were at that time in an age of darkness and bad taste, assert that it may still serve as an example; and even some of them repay with usury those nations, and particularly the French, the reproaches which the rest of Europe has a right to cast on them.

In 1749, Don Blas Nasure, librarian to the king of Spain, having printed the comedies of Cervantes, expressed himself in his preface to the collection in the following manner: "We
" may affirm, without fear of falling into the
" error our nation is reproached with, that of
" estimating itself too highly, and despising others,
" that we have a greater number of comedies,
" perfect and conformable to the rules of art,
" than the French, the English, or the Italians
" put together."

Much more recently, in 1791, Don Pascal Rodriguez de Arellano proposed for subscription a work entitled *Theatro antiguo Espanol arreglado à los mas principales preceptos de arte dramatica*; in which he promised several plays or comedies of Calderon, of Lope de Vega, Solis, Moreto, Rozas, Hoz, and Tyrso, where the three unities are observed, that should be purged of the inflated and hyperbolical style, of vain subtleties, of a mixture of heroic and noble with vulgar and ridiculous personages, of inequality of character, of some episodes not very decent, and of some puns. He flattered himself that he could thus make the most solid apology for his nation in this branch of literature, and preserve in these works, notwithstanding so many suppressions and corrections, their force, their grace, and their original style. It belongs to the Spanish critics to judge whether he has kept his word.

But what will surprise a little more, at least a French reader, is, that a Spanish poet, otherwise much distinguished, a member of the Academy of Language, author of the tragedy of *Raquel*, of which we have spoken before, Don Vicente de la Huerta, who has been dead twelve or fifteen years, should express himself in the following manner of the master-pieces of French literature, in his preliminary discourse to his *Theatro Espanol*, which he published in 1785:—

“A single spark of fire that shines,” he says,

“ in this divine poem, *Pharsale*, would be suffi-
 “ cient to warm and enliven all the *debilitated* and
 “ *wretched Muses* of France; without excepting
 “ the Limosines, who being nearer Spain have
 “ for that reason perhaps felt, in some degree,
 “ the influence of the enthusiasm and true poetic
 “ spirit which characterize our nation.

“ How is it possible,” continues he, “ that
 “ this divine fire could animate the souls of men
 “ born and brought up in a marshy country, with-
 “ out sulphur, without salt, or fertility, and so
 “ little favoured by heat that their fruits would
 “ scarcely ripen did they not carefully place them
 “ in situations exposed to the full rays of the sun?
 “ This is the natural cause why so much medio-
 “ crity is observed in their works. The French,
 “ in poetry and eloquence, will never pass the mea-
 “ sure and standard of minds feeble and without
 “ vigour. From this also results their astonish-
 “ ment at the *great sublimity* of Spanish produc-
 “ tions, the faults of which, *if there be any*, are
 “ very easily corrected.

“ The great Corneille was not esteemed by his
 “ countrymen till he had *ill imitated* a composi-
 “ tion, even below mediocrity, of one of our poor-
 “ est poets.” (This is all the merit that M. de la
 Huerta allows the *Cid*.)

“ The *Athalie* of Racine is reckoned his best
 “ piece; but is the greatest proof of the weak-
 “ ness” (I have the forbearance not to translate

the Spanish word *imbecilidad* by imbecility) “ of
 “ the genius of the author ; because, without
 “ mentioning the extraordinary number of actors,
 “ buffoons, and the whole troop of performers, a
 “ very common resource of those who are not ca-
 “ pable of sustaining the plot and the movement
 “ of an action without wounding probability, the
 “ affected regularity, and *bellenism* even, by which
 “ he contrives to supply *the want of genius*, prove
 “ that the piece *should not have left the school to*
 “ *which it belonged.*

“ After this, can it be thought strange that this
 “ hero of French poetry, after having been em-
 “ ployed for three years in composing his Phæ-
 “ dra, should have finished by spoiling the charac-
 “ ter of Hippolytus ? This whole tragedy shows
 “ very considerable defects ; and the least of these
 “ is not the choice of an action so abominable
 “ in the eyes of the least scrupulous and deli-
 “ cate. I had formed, only by the reading, a
 “ *very low idea* of the Phædra ; but after having
 “ seen the piece acted at Paris, where Made-
 “ moiselle Dumesnil, a very celebrated actress,
 “ played the part of Phædra, I was so shocked at
 “ seeing decency and probability so outrageously
 “ sacrificed in her declamation, *that I determined*
 “ *never to see it again.*” —What a punishment for
 the author and the actress !

Don Juan Cadahalso (otherwise a very enlight-
 ened Spaniard, whom I knew in my first journey)

had already, before M. de la Huerta, treated with as much severity the style of the Phædra, when, speaking of the famous speech of Theramenes, he expressed himself as follows:—"There is in this Phædra a pompous and inflated diction, of the same nature as we find fault with in our poor authors of the last century." To maintain this assertion, he translates this speech literally, "in order to show," says he, "the admirers of the French stage, that when their authors attempt to imitate our sublime, they should either translate us, or remain in a ridiculous dishonourable inferiority unknown only to themselves. Such is the sublimity of Racine, a genius superior to all the Spanish dramatic writers, in the opinion of the French, &c."

La Huerta, in these critiques dictated by caprice, does not spare Moliere any more than our two great tragic writers. In a note which precedes *El castigo de la miseria*, one of the pretended master-pieces of Spain which he reprinted, he sets himself up against those who assert that this piece finishes at the second act, and adds, "It is very extraordinary that those who find fault with this, tolerate and admire the famous comedy of *Tartuffe*, of which almost the whole of the first and second acts might be cut off, and the fifth entirely. This celebrated comedy, moreover, finishes like one of our interludes, and resembles

“ them very much, with the exception of the indecencies it contains.” We shall see below what these interludes are, and whether this comparison does much honour to the sagacity of M. de la Huerta:

It must, however, be left to foreigners who are judges of the Spanish stage to decide, whether blindness or malignity has dictated the judgement of this un pitying censor. But, without repaying injury with injury, we shall confine ourselves to the assertion, that those who have the least pretensions to taste, as well in Spain as elsewhere, agree that all the Spanish pieces, with the exception of a few modern, are full of the most shocking defects. The incidents are without probability, and they are full of impertinence; all kinds are confounded. They join the most miserable parade to affecting and sometimes terrible pictures; and a buffoon, under the name of *gracioso*, who is sometimes diverting, and often insipid, distracts the attention by his vulgar wit. The lovers are talking gossips. They try to purchase the smile of sensibility and delicacy by cold and tedious metaphysical dissertations on love. There is hardly one of these plays that does not contain speeches, or *relaciones*, similar, if you can agree with M. de la Huerta, to that of Theramenes, because, as he says, they are long and misplaced, but are particularly shocking by their digressions, gigantic comparisons, and by the most

absurd abuse of wit. On the other hand the plot is so intricate, that there is hardly a Spanish play to which these verses of Boilcau are not applicable :

Et qui, débrouillant mal une pénible intrigue,
D'un divertissement ne fait qu'une fatigue.

This fatigue, however, does not seem to be felt by the Spanish auditors, those especially whose minds are least cultivated. Whether they owe to nature this readiness to follow the thread of the most intricate plot, or whether it is with them the result of habit, certain it is that they have in this respect a remarkable advantage over other nations, particularly over the French. It would, upon this account, require much art to naturalize on our stage the Spanish comedies, of which a great number indeed are worthy of adoption. This applause has been rendered them already by our forefathers. It is well known how much Moliere and Corneille have taken from the Spanish stage; that the latter drew from Guillen de Castro, and from Calderon, the subject and even the principal beauties of the *Cid* and of *Heraclius*; that the Spaniard furnished him with the subject of the *Menteur*, as well as Moliere with that of the *Festin de Pierre*: but all the talents of these men were not able to adapt to our stage with success the original extravagance that served them for a model; for none of these Spanish pieces could be represented in our the-

atres without alteration, so much are the best of them filled with incidents repugnant to French taste and manners. An actor of one of our small theatres in the capital has made some happy trials of this kind. But *Ruse contre ruse*, and *La Nuit aux aventures*, are less translations than faithful imitations of two Spanish comedies. An exact translation of these dramatic productions would indeed be nearly impossible. Dupéron de Castera published, in 1738, *Extracts from several Spanish theatrical pieces, with observations, and a translation of the most remarkable passages.* Linguet more recently attempted to make the French public acquainted with some of these tragedies; but besides that he made a very bad choice, he understood the Spanish language too little to accomplish the task. These two authors, instead of a translation, have given us outlines or sketches of plays, of which what they disdained to give in French was not what they did not like, but did not understand; and I believe there is not a single Spanish piece correctly translated into our language. A great obstacle to the fidelity of these translations would arise from the number of puns with which the Spaniards have filled their drama, as well as all other works of imagination; and as their very subtle genius, ready to seize the slightest report, knows instantly how to make allusions to localities, to customs, and to the anecdotes of the times, these works are very difficult to be perfectly un-

derstood even by the natives, and nearly impossible by foreigners: their translations therefore would be hardly intelligible, unless by the help of a commentary.

The Spaniards, moreover, have ever had and still have a great readiness for poetry. Their talent for extempore, or *improviser*, although it perhaps deserves to be as much so, is less celebrated than that of the Italians. I have been several times witness of the surprising success with which this has been employed: and I have seen versificators, who were on other accounts little known, maintain poetical disputes which would have dismayed the most fertile and ingenious of our country. I have seen stanzas of ten verses composed in the twinkling of an eye, and all formed on the same rhyme; these are known in Spain by the name of *decimas*. One of the company present gives as a subject the last of these ten verses, which he invents at random, and which is called *échar pié*. The *improvisatore* instantly delivers nine others, to which the verse first composed shall make a proper finish; and often neither the rapidity of these extempore compositions nor the twofold shackles which confined their author are able to spoil them. They are mostly little pieces of burlesque, the emphatical delivery of which moves the gravest faces; and if good sense is sometimes sacrificed, the rules of versification are rigorously observed.

The forms of the poetry in Spain are varied to a singular degree. Their language, which is very easy of inversion, is capable of all sorts of verses* fit for the modern languages, but they have one which I believe is exclusively their own. Their rhyming verses are easily known as well by the eye as the ear; they are called *consonantes*. But those which they call *asonantes* would never be dreamt of but by those who had heard of them; and in this verse almost all their old plays are written from beginning to end, and most of the modern.

They commonly begin by a series of true verses (*consonantes*), either in common rhyme and with equal feet, or alternate rhyme and unequal measure. After a scene or two, sometimes only a speech or two, comes the turn of the *asonantes*, which generally last to the end of the piece, unless in some part the *consonantes* reappear for a little time. These *asonantes* are a string, often very long, of cadenced phrases subject to a certain

* They reckon three as distinct, though only with respect to their termination. They have *blank* verse; that is without any kind of rhyme, and which differs like the Latin from prose only in the number of the feet, and the orderly interchange of the long and short syllables. They have also verse with perfect rhyme, like that of the Italians, French, and other nations, which they call *consonantes*; and lastly they have that third sort of verse called *asonantes* mentioned in the text. I do not speak of the rhyme of these different sorts of verses; it varies *ad infinitum*, from the shortest measure to eleven syllables, which are the longest.

(Note to the edition of 1806.)

measure. Each of them is a verse, but the *as-sonante* returns only every other line, and makes no rhyme. It is sufficient that the two last vowels of each are the same. An example will make this explanation more clear. I will take it from a short copy of verses by Don Juan Melendez. It will serve at the same time to give a slight instance of the manner of this amiable poet, who in the tender style maintains, even by the acknowledgement of his rivals, the first rank on modern Spanish Parnassus.

On wine.*

1. Todo à Baco, Dorila,
2. Todo officioso sirve.
3. La tierra generosa
4. Le sustenta las vides :
5. El agua se las riega
6. Con sus linfas sutiles :
7. Y el Cefiro templado
8. Se las brulla apa ci ble.
9. Luego el grano el sol cuece,
10. De do el licor felice
11. Viene que le pecho limpia
12. De mildesvelos tristes.
13. Porque pues porque bebo
14. Enojosa me riñes !
15. Si el mismo amor sus armas
16. Riendo de èl recibe.

Translation.

* All, all, my Dorila, are eager to serve Bacchus. The fruitful earth supports his branches. The water refreshes them

At first sight it does not appear that there is any rhyme in these sixteen verses; nor indeed are there any throughout; and according to the rules of Spanish versification they should be without rhyme; though lines 2, 4, 6, 8, 10, 12, 14 and 16, have something of the kind, which consists in their having the same last vowels, *i* and *e*; and these are the *asonantes*, *sirve*, *vides*, *subiles*, &c. In this manner most of the theatrical pieces are written, except some modern tragedies in true rhyme. I open the first play of Canizares which comes to hand,—it is *Domine Lucas*, a comedy somewhat in the manner of Pourceaugnac, which the Spaniards call *Comedias de Figaron*. This is the beginning:

DON ANTONIO.

Vive Christo, Don Henrique,
que, si dais en ese tema
me he ahorcar de une encina.

DON HENRIQUE.

Don Antonio, yo qui si era
Saber de vos como se ama
sinque el corazon lo sepa.

TALAVERON.

Amando por diversion
que el que es (aunque hombre tan bestia. etc.

with a gentle tribute. The zephyr softly balances them. The sun ripens the berries from which is exprest the delightful liquor that banishes from our heart all baneful care. Even love itself, smiling at Bacchus, owes often to him the arms which it uses. Why then scold me when I drink a little?

It is not necessary to go so far as the eighth verse to see that the *asonante* which prevails is *e, a*; and you may be certain that every other line through several scenes will finish with an *e* and an *a*. In fact, in *Domine Lucas*, this *asonante e, a*, continues beyond the middle of the first act. After that follows the *asonante a, a*, that is to say, a series of words of this kind,—*raras, casa, plantas, probanza, &c.* which last to the end of the act.

Without being acquainted with this beforehand*, a foreigner might frequent the Spanish theatre for ten years without perceiving the existence or effect of the *asonantes*; and though he be put into the way, he will often have much trouble to trace them when he hears them on the stage. But what is so difficult for him to catch at, does not escape a Spaniard for an instant, however unlearned he may be. After the second verse of a long string of *asonantes*, he discovers the final vowels which govern; he listens at the proper places, and an actor would not with impunity disappoint him: this is a rare faculty, owing to the delicate organization of the people of the south, and to the habit of declamation which the most obscure and vulgar acquire. Persons of this sort act a considerable part in the Spanish theatre. Their number and assiduity,

* I have been a little particular on this singularity of the Spanish prosody, because I think it is little known out of Spain.

(Note to the edition of 1806.)

indeed, are circumstances that render its reform difficult.

The play-houses in Spain have had as feeble beginnings as ours, and in some places still preserve their primitive form. Two parallel curtains facing the spectators composed all the scenery of the stage, and there are still some in this way. You see the prompter behind the second curtain with a candle in one hand and the book in the other, running across the stage, to give his assistance to any of the actors that want it. But in the present theatres of Madrid, and other large cities, the scenes, the change of decorations, and the place of the prompter, remind you nearly of ours. At first one is much offended with hearing the prompter, who repeats the parts almost as loud as the actors; but a little time makes this habitual, and in a few years you hardly take any notice of it.

The theatres are now divided into five parts. The *luneta*, which is the same as our *parquet*, and is fitted up in the same manner; the *apostas*, which are the two rows of boxes at the top of the house; the *casuela*, a kind of gallery at the back, where no others are admitted but the wives of the people covered by their veils (which are for the most part white); but, under the auspices of Love, a fair intruder sometimes gets in, who wants to deceive the vigilance of a jealous husband; or some lazy dame of high-life who wants to save