

prose, and is said to have given the first example of a version of the Æneid into a modern language.<sup>18</sup>

He labored assiduously to introduce a more cultivated taste among his countrymen, and his little treatise on the *gaya sciencia*, as the divine art was then called, in which he gives an historical and critical view of the poetical Consistory of Barcelona, is the first approximation, however faint, to an Art of Poetry in the Castilian tongue.<sup>19</sup> The exclusiveness, with which he devoted himself to science, and especially astronomy, to the utter neglect of his temporal concerns, led the wits of that day to remark, that "he knew much of heaven, and nothing of earth." He paid the usual penalty of such indifference to worldly weal, by seeing himself eventually stripped of his lordly possessions, and reduced, at the close of life, to extreme poverty.<sup>20</sup> His secluded habits brought on him the appalling imputation of necromancy. A scene took place at his death, in 1434, which is sufficiently characteristic of the age, and may possibly have suggested a similar adventure to Cervantes. The king commissioned his son's preceptor, Brother Lope de Barrientos, afterwards bishop of Cuença, to examine the valuable library of the deceased;

Antonio had also fallen in supposing Villena's "Trabajos de Hercules," written in verse, has been subsequently corrected by his learned commentator Bayer. See Nicolás Antonio, *Bibliotheca Hispana Vetus*, (Matriti, 1788,) tom. ii. p. 222, nota.

<sup>18</sup> Velazquez, *Orígenes de la Poesía Castellana*, p. 45. — Bou-

terwek, *Literatura Española*, trad. de Cortina y Mollinedo, nota S.

<sup>19</sup> See an abstract of it in Mayans y Siscar, *Orígenes de la Lengua Española*, (Madrid, 1737,) tom. ii. pp. 321 et seq.

<sup>20</sup> Zurita, *Anales de la Corona de Aragon*, (Zaragoza, 1669,) tom. iii. p. 227. — Guzman, *Generaciones*, cap. 28.

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and the worthy ecclesiastic consigned more than a hundred volumes of it to the flames, as savouring too strongly of the black art. The Bachelor Cibdareal, the confidential physician of John the Second, in a lively letter on this occurrence to the poet John de Mena, remarks, that "some would fain get the reputation of saints, by making others necromancers;" and requests his friend "to allow him to solicit, in his behalf, some of the surviving volumes from the king, that in this way the soul of Brother Lope might be saved from further sin, and the spirit of the defunct marquis consoled by the consciousness, that his books no longer rested on the shelves of the man who had converted him into a conjuror."<sup>21</sup> John de Mena denounces this *auto da fe* of science in a similar, but graver tone of sarcasm, in his "Laberinto." These liberal sentiments in the Spanish writers of the fifteenth century may put to shame the more bigoted criticism of the seventeenth.<sup>22</sup>

Marquis of  
Santillana.

Another of the illustrious wits of this reign was Ñigo Lopez de Mendoza, marquis of Santillana, "the glory and delight of the Castilian nobility," whose celebrity was such, that foreigners, it was said, journeyed to Spain from distant parts of

<sup>21</sup> Centon Epistolario, epist. 66.— The bishop endeavoured to transfer the blame of the conflagration to the king. There can be little doubt, however, that the good father infused the suspicions of necromancy into his master's bosom. "The angels," he says in one of his works, "who guarded Paradise, presented a treatise on magic to one

of the posterity of Adam, from a copy of which Villena derived his science." (See Juan de Mena, Obras, fol. 139, glosa.) One would think that such an orthodox source might have justified Villena in the use of it.

<sup>22</sup> Comp. Juan de Mena, Obras, copl. 127, 128.; and Nic. Antonio, Bibliotheca Vetus, tom. ii. p. 220.

Europe to see him. Although passionately devoted to letters, he did not, like his friend the marquis of Villena, neglect his public or domestic duties for them. On the contrary, he discharged the most important civil and military functions. He made his house an academy, in which the young cavaliers of the court might practise the martial exercises of the age; and he assembled around him at the same time men eminent for genius and science, whom he munificently recompensed, and encouraged by his example.<sup>23</sup> His own taste led him to poetry, of which he has left some elaborate specimens. They are chiefly of a moral and preceptive character; but, although replete with noble sentiment, and finished in a style of literary excellence far more correct than that of the preceding age, they are too much infected with mythology and metaphorical affectations, to suit the palate of the present day. He possessed, however, the soul of a poet; and when he abandons himself to his native *redondillas*, delivers his sentiments with a sweetness and grace inimitable. To him is to be ascribed the glory, such as it is, of having naturalized the Italian sonnet in Castile, which Boscan, many years later, claimed for himself with no small degree of self-congratulation.<sup>24</sup> His epistle on the

<sup>23</sup> Pulgar, *Claros Varones de Castilla, y Letras*, (Madrid, 1755,) tit. 4. — Nic. Antonio, *Bibliotheca Vetus*, lib. 10, cap. 9. — *Quincuagenas de Gonzalo de Oviedo*, MS., batalla 1, quinc. 1, dial. 8.

<sup>24</sup> Garcilasso de la Vega, *Obras*, ed. de Herrera, (1580,) pp. 75, 76.

— Sanchez, *Poesías Castellanas*, tom. i. p. 21. — Boscan, *Obras*, (1543,) fol. 19. — It must be admitted, however, that the attempt was premature, and that it required a riper stage of the language to give a permanent character to the innovation.

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primitive history of Spanish verse, although containing notices sufficiently curious from the age and the source whence they proceed, has perhaps done more service to letters by the valuable illustrations it has called forth from its learned editor.<sup>25</sup>

This great man, who found so much leisure for the cultivation of letters amidst the busy strife of politics, closed his career at the age of sixty, in 1458. Though a conspicuous actor in the revolutionary scenes of the period, he maintained a character for honor and purity of motive, unimpeached even by his enemies. The king, notwithstanding his devotion to the faction of his son Henry, conferred on him the dignities of count of Real de Manzanares and marquis of Santillana; this being the oldest creation of a marquis in Castile, with the exception of Villena.<sup>26</sup> His eldest son was subsequently made duke of Infantado, by which title his descendants have continued to be distinguished to the present day.

John de Mena.

But the most conspicuous, for his poetical talents, of the brilliant circle which graced the court of John the Second, was John de Mena, a native of fair Cordova, "the flower of science and of chival-

<sup>25</sup> See Sanchez, *Poesías Castellanas*, tom. i. pp. 1-119. — A copious catalogue of the marquis de Santillana's writings is given in the same volume, (pp. 33 et seq.) Several of his poetical pieces are collected in the *Cancionero General*, (Anvers, 1573,) fol. 34 et seq.

<sup>26</sup> Pulgar, *Claros Varones*, tit. 4. — Salazar de Mendoza, *Monarquía*,

tom. i. p. 218. — *Idem*, *Origen de las Dignidades Seglares de Castilla y Leon*, (Madrid, 1794,) p. 285. — Oviedo makes the marquis much older, seventy-five years of age, when he died. He left, besides daughters, six sons, who all became the founders of noble and powerful houses. See the whole genealogy, in Oviedo, *Quincuagenas*, MS., bat. 1, quinc. 1, dial. 8.

ry,"<sup>27</sup> as he fondly styles her. Although born in a middling condition of life, with humble prospects, he was early smitten with a love of letters; and, after passing through the usual course of discipline at Salamanca, he repaired to Rome, where in the study of those immortal masters, whose writings had but recently revealed the full capacities of a modern idiom, he imbibed principles of taste, which gave a direction to his own genius, and, in some degree, to that of his countrymen. On his return to Spain, his literary merit soon attracted general admiration, and introduced him to the patronage of the great, and above all to the friendship of the marquis of Santillana.<sup>28</sup> He was admitted into the private circle of the monarch, who, as his gossiping physician informs us, "used to have Mena's verses lying on his table, as constantly as his prayer-book." The poet repaid the debt of gratitude by administering a due quantity of honeyed rhyme, for which the royal palate seems to have possessed a more than ordinary relish.<sup>29</sup> He continued faithful to his master amidst all the fluctuations of faction, and survived him less than two years. He died in 1456; and his friend, the marquis of Santillana, raised a sumptuous monument over his remains, in commemoration of his virtues and of their mutual affection.

John de Mena is affirmed by some of the national critics to have given a new aspect to Castilian

His influence.

<sup>27</sup> "Flor de saber y cabellería." El Laberinto, copla 114.

<sup>29</sup> Cibdareal, Centon Epistolario, epist. 47, 49.

<sup>28</sup> Nic. Antonio, Bibliotheca Vetus, tom. ii. pp. 265 et seq.

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poetry.<sup>30</sup> His great work was his "Laberinto," the outlines of whose plan may faintly remind us of that portion of the "Divina Commedia," where Dante resigns himself to the guidance of Beatrice. In like manner the Spanish poet, under the escort of a beautiful personification of Providence, witnesses the apparition of the most eminent individuals, whether of history or fable; and, as they revolve on the wheel of destiny, they give occasion to some animated portraiture, and much dull, pedantic disquisition. In these delineations we now and then meet with a touch of his pencil, which, from its simplicity and vigor, may be called truly *Dantesque*. Indeed the Castilian Muse never before ventured on so bold a flight; and, notwithstanding the deformity of the general plan, the obsolete barbarisms of the phraseology, its quaintness and pedantry, notwithstanding the cantering dactylic measure in which it is composed, and which to the ear of a foreigner can scarcely be made tolerable, the work abounds in conceptions, nay in whole episodes, of such mingled energy and beauty, as indicate genius of the highest order. In some of his smaller pieces his style assumes a graceful flexibility, too generally denied to his more strained and elaborate efforts.<sup>31</sup>

Baena's cancionero.

It will not be necessary to bring under review the minor luminaries of this period. Alfonso de Baena, a converted Jew, secretary of John the

<sup>30</sup> See Velazquez, *Poesía Castellana*, p. 49.

<sup>31</sup> A collection of them is incor-

porated in the *Cancionero General*, fol. 41 et seq.

Second, compiled the fugitive pieces of more than fifty of these ancient troubadours into a *cancionero*, "for the disport and divertisement of his highness the king, when he should find himself too sorely oppressed with cares of state," a case we may imagine of no rare occurrence. The original manuscript of Baena, transcribed in beautiful characters of the fifteenth century, lies, or did lie until very lately, unheeded in the cemetery of the Escorial, with the dust of many a better worthy.<sup>32</sup> The extracts selected from it by Castro, although occasionally exhibiting some fluent graces with considerable variety of versification, convey, on the whole, no very high idea of taste or poetic talent.<sup>33</sup>

Indeed this epoch, as before remarked, was not so much distinguished by uncommon displays of genius, as by its general intellectual movement, and the enthusiasm kindled for liberal studies. Thus we find the corporation of Seville granting a hundred *doblas* of gold as the guerdon of a poet, who had celebrated in some score of verses the glories of their native city; and appropriating the

<sup>32</sup> Castro, Biblioteca Española, (Madrid, 1781,) tom. i. pp. 266, 267. — This interesting document, the most primitive of all the Spanish *cancioneros*, notwithstanding its local position in the library is specified by Castro with great precision, eluded the search of the industrious translators of Bouterwek, who think it may have disappeared during the French invasion. *Literatura Española*, trad. de Cortina y Mollinedo, p. 205, nota Hh.

<sup>33</sup> See these collected in Castro, Biblioteca Española, tom. ii. p. 265

et seq. — The veneration entertained for the poetic art in that day may be conceived from Baena's whimsical prologue. "Poetry," he says, "or the gay science, is a very subtle and delightful composition. It demands in him, who would hope to excel in it, a curious invention, a sane judgment, a various scholarship, familiarity with courts and public affairs, high birth and breeding, a temperate, courteous, and liberal disposition, and, in fine, honey, sugar, salt, freedom, and hilarity in his discourse." p. 268.

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same sum as an annual premium for a similar performance.<sup>34</sup> It is not often that the productions of a poet laureate have been more liberally recompensed even by royal bounty. But the gifted spirits of that day mistook the road to immortality. Disdaining the untutored simplicity of their predecessors, they sought to rise above them by an ostentation of learning, as well as by a more classical idiom. In the latter particular they succeeded. They much improved the external forms of poetry, and their compositions exhibit a high degree of literary finish, compared with all that preceded them. But their happiest sentiments are frequently involved in such a cloud of metaphor, as to become nearly unintelligible; while they invoke the pagan deities with a shameless prodigality, that would scandalize even a French lyric. This cheap display of school-boy erudition, however it may have appalled their own age, has been a principal cause of their comparative oblivion with posterity. How far superior is one touch of nature, as the "Finojosa" or "Querella de Amor," for example, of the marquis of Santillana, to all this farrago of metaphor and mythology!

Castilian  
literature  
under John  
II.

The impulse, given to Castilian poetry, extended to other departments of elegant literature.

Epistolary and historical composition were cultivated with considerable success. The latter, especially, might admit of advantageous comparison with that of any other country in Europe at the

<sup>34</sup> Castro, Biblioteca Española, tom. i. p. 273.



same period ;<sup>35</sup> and it is remarkable, that, after such early promise, the modern Spaniards have not been more successful in perfecting a classical prose style.

Enough has been said to give an idea of the state of mental improvement in Castile under John the Second. The Muses, who had found a shelter in his court from the anarchy which reigned abroad, soon fled from its polluted precincts under the reign of his successor Henry the Fourth, whose sordid appetites were incapable of being elevated above the objects of the senses. If we have dwelt somewhat long on a more pleasing picture, it is because our road is now to lead us across a dreary waste exhibiting scarcely a vestige of civilization.

While a small portion of the higher orders of the nation was thus endeavouring to forget the public calamities in the tranquillizing pursuit of letters, and a much larger portion in the indulgence of pleasure,<sup>36</sup> the popular aversion for the minister

Decline of  
Alvaro de  
Luna.

<sup>35</sup> Perhaps the most conspicuous of these historical compositions for mere literary execution is the Chronicle of Alvaro de Luna, to which I have had occasion to refer, edited in 1784, by Flores, the diligent secretary of the Royal Academy of History. He justly commends it for the purity and harmony of its diction. The loyalty of the chronicler seduces him sometimes into a swell of panegyric, which may be thought to savour too strongly of the current defect of Castilian prose ; but it more frequently imparts to his narrative a generous glow of sentiment, raising it far above the lifeless details of ordinary history, and occasionally even to positive eloquence. Nic. Antonio, in the tenth book

of his great repository, has assembled the biographical and bibliographical notices of the various Spanish authors of the fifteenth century, whose labors diffused a glimmering of light over their own age, which has become faint in the superior illumination of the succeeding.

<sup>36</sup> Sempere in his *Historia del Luxo*, (tom. i. p. 177,) has published an extract from an unprinted manuscript of the celebrated marquis of Villena, entitled *Triunfo de las Doñas*, in which, adverting to the *petits-maitres* of his time, he recapitulates the fashionable arts employed by them for the embellishment of the person, with a degree of minuteness, which might edify a modern *dandy*.

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I

Luna had been gradually infusing itself into the royal bosom. His too obvious assumption of superiority, even over the monarch who had raised him from the dust, was probably the real though secret cause of this disgust. But the habitual ascendancy of the favorite over his master, prevented the latter from disclosing this feeling until it was heightened by an occurrence, which sets in a strong light the imbecility of the one and the presumption of the other. John, on the death of his wife, Maria of Aragon, had formed the design of connecting himself with a daughter of the king of France. But the constable, in the mean time, without even the privity of his master, entered into negotiations for his marriage with the princess Isabella, granddaughter of John the First of Portugal; and the monarch, with an unprecedented degree of complaisance, acquiesced in an arrangement professedly repugnant to his own inclinations.<sup>37</sup> By one of those dispensations of Providence, however, which often confound the plans of the wisest, as of the weakest, the column, which the minister had so artfully raised for his support, served only to crush him.

His fall.

The new queen, disgusted with his haughty bearing, and probably not much gratified with the subordinate situation to which he had reduced her husband, entered heartily into the feelings of the latter, and indeed contrived to extinguish whatever

<sup>37</sup> Crónica de Juan II., p. 499. guesa, (1679,) tom. ii. pp. 335,  
— Faria y Sousa, Europa Portu- 372.