

THE FRENCH DRAMA.

(Continued.)

"THE CID."

Don Rodrigue and Chimène, a brave youth and maiden of the court of Don Fernand, first King of Castile, love one another devotedly, as youths and maidens do, when a sudden blow comes upon them in the shape of a quarrel between Don Diègue and Don Gomès, their respective fathers, which, after many mutual recriminations, ends in an insulting blow given by the latter man of valour to the former. Don Diègue being then too old and feeble to face his enemy in person, called upon his son, Don Rodrigue, to challenge Don Gomès and revenge the intolerable insult which had been offered him. Don Rodrigue, at first plunged in the depths of despair, knows not what to do; he either must by death forever lose Chimène, or incur her never-dying animosity by slaying her father. He cannot hesitate as to fulfilling his father's command; he well knows that her contempt, if he tamely suffered the insult to his father to pass unpunished, would create as effectual a barrier between them as either of the other possible contingencies. He accordingly follows the dictates of his manly honour and challenges Don Gomès. Don Gomès, though a valiant soldier, falls by the hand of Don Rodrigue, and Chimène putting aside her love as a hateful snare, goes to the king to demand justice and punishment on the head of her father's murderer. Don Fernand unwilling to lose so young and valiant a warrior, more especially at a time when the hated Moors were invading his country, tries to pacify her, and finally dismisses her, promising that justice shall be done. Don Sanche, an adorer of Chimène, then appears upon the scene, and begs her to allow him to be her champion and put an end to Don Rodrigue; she refuses, trusting to the promise of the king, but tells him that should an opportunity for serving her arrive, she will call upon him. Don Rodrigue is advised to fly from the pursuing vengeance, but not caring for life if it separates him from Chimène, he seeks an interview with her, and giving her the sword with which he had slain her father, begs her then and there to plunge it in his breast. This she refuses to do in spite of all his entreaties, and, though professing a life-long enmity on account of his offence, lets him know of her still-abiding love for him; she tells him of her desire that he should die as expiation of his crime, but promises him, should she accomplish her end, that she will not survive him. In the next scene Don Diègue advises his son to show his prowess and gain the friendship of the king by putting himself at the head of brave men-at-arms of their family, and undertake, without the king's permission, the eradication of the dreaded Moors. This Rodrigue resolves to do. He goes to the war, carries all before him, displaying the utmost coolness and courage, and returns triumphant with the title of "Cid" bestowed upon him by the wondering Moors, to be loaded with unsought favours by the king. Chimène, however, no sooner hears of his return than she again flies to the king and demands justice. Don Fernand, vexed and puzzled to know what to say to her, first informs her that Don Rodrigue's life is too precious for him to allow it to be taken. Whereupon a discussion as to the justice of allowing an exception to be made in his case ensues, and again Don Sanche offers himself as Chimène's champion. The king, thus seeing a way out of the difficulty, asks Chimène if she will accept the offered championship, and she rather unwillingly agrees. Don Fernand, who understands her feelings, then declares that whichever of the two combatants lives, he shall have the hand of Chimène; Chimène remonstrates, but in vain. Don Rodrigue then seeks another interview with Chimène and bids her good-bye, telling her of his intention to bare his breast to his opponent and let himself be killed without resistance. She, finding that he means all he says, and that to him life without her is insupportable, begs him to do his best for her sake, and he goes happy to the conflict. Soon after, Don Sanche appears, and brings his sword to Chimène, at which she, imagining that he has killed Rodrigue, lets her feeling get altogether the better of her, calls him murderer, traitor, and assassin, and flying to the king tells him that Rodrigue is dead, that she has sacrificed her love to duty, and that now all that she asks for is to bury herself in the cloister. Don Sanche, who up to this time has not been able to say a word, now explains the true state of the case; how Rodrigue after disarming him had given him back his sword, declaring that he could not shed blood risked for Chimène, and had sent him to the king. Chimène is then in a state of mingled joy and confusion, and the last scene describes the just arrangement of the king by which Don Rodrigue is to leave Chimène for one year to mourn over her father, and then returning from punishing the Moors, to be united to her in marriage.

We can imagine the enthusiasm of the thinking public, so long indulged with rapid sentiment or unblushing vice, at the pure, elevated, and graceful design and tone of the entire piece. The idea of the whole is the sacrifice of passion to duty, and the plot is clothed in the most high-toned and beautiful language possible. Look at a few lines in the first interview between Chimène and Rodrigue (Act III., Scene IV.), where he, though expressing his sorrow for the occasion of it, justifies his action in her eyes:

Je fais ce que tu veux, mais sans quitter l'épée
De finir par tes mains ma déplorable vie;
Car enfin n'attends pas de mon affection
Un lâche repentir d'une bonne action.
L'irréparable effet d'une chaleur trop prompte
Deshonorerait mon père et me couvrirait de honte.
Tu sais comme un soufflet touche un homme de cœur,
J'avais part à l'effront, j'en ai cherché l'auteur.
Je l'ai vu, j'ai vengé mon honneur et mon père
Je le ferais encore si j'avais le faire!

The Cid was but the beginning of even greater things. In 1639 appeared "Horaco" and in the same year "Cinna," which by some critics is

held to be his greatest work, though others accord that honour to "Polyeucte," which appeared in 1640, in which is portrayed the sacrifice of life to the principles of a hero's faith. After this the genius of Corneille declines. "La Mort de Pompee" followed in 1641, and in 1642 "Le Menteur," Corneille's finest comedy, "Hernani" and "Rodogune" in 1646, and in 1659 and up to 1674 appeared various pieces of more or less merit. This great genius ended his days in want, which drew down upon his king much just and severe blame, Boileau offering to the great monarch to give up his own pension for Corneille's benefit. The two hundred coins sent by Louis XIV. to the dying poet came too late to afford him any comfort, and he died in almost abject poverty in 1681. A touching story is told of Corneille requiring a shoe mended, and going meekly to the shoemaker to wait while the work was done, possessing but the one pair of shoes. A beautiful poem has been written on the subject by Theophile Gautier (1811-1872) called "Le Soulier de Corneille."

ÆSMA.

(To be Continued.)

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" 8th—New Glasgow.
" 9th—Pictou.
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