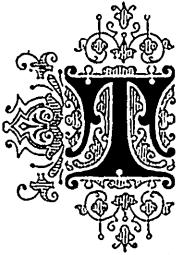


## THE SPANISH SHAKESPEARE.



THE period of excellence in the dramatic writings of Spain covers the greater part of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Cervantes, a great comic writer, dominates the first of these centuries; Lope de Vega connects the two; while Calderon, born in 1600, rules the mind of Spain from the first productions of his teens till his death at the age of eighty-one. The national drama of Spain is the romantic. Such dramas were produced in abundance by Lope de Vega before Calderon's time, but in the latter we find their culmination. Now since the death of Calderon Spain can boast of no great dramatists. Those who have appeared have copied from the French; so that the drama of modern Spain is but an imitation or at most a modification of that of France. Consequently, if we wish to form an idea of the Spanish people, their manners and modes of thought as presented to us in their dramatic productions we cannot be satisfied by the plays of their modern theatres. We will be obliged to go back two centuries, to the time when Spain proper was rolling in wealth, but when her foreign possessions, acquired by the genius of former navigators, were neglected by herself and preyed upon by other nations. At that time lived Calderon, the prince of romantic dramatists. He is called by some the Shakespeare of Spain. Both these writers are in fact the representative poets of their respective nations. But Shakespeare, while the mirror of his own nation, is also by his wonderful portrayal of human nature the poet of all peoples; while Calderon presents to us nothing else than the genuine Spanish nature.

Leaving aside for a time our northern feelings and prejudices let us enter and breathe the atmosphere of gayety and fancy which surrounds the people of sunny Spain. In this spirit only can we

duly appreciate the writings of Calderon. To study this writer we need not undertake the onerous task of translating his works, for the work is already done. Denis Florence McCarthy, an Irish Catholic, has given to English literature an invaluable work in the translation of Calderon's best dramas. His version gives proof of the poetic genius of its executor. It is faithful to the original; the ideas in both are identical and even verse may be compared to verse. The metre of Calderon is preserved throughout, so that on the whole we can get a fair idea of Calderon's style and manner from this brilliant translation. We therefore purpose to glance briefly at this Spanish poet as he is seen through the medium of our own language; before doing which we will recount the main facts of his life.

Madrid, the capital of Spain, has the honor of being the birthplace of Calderon. F. Schlegel tells us that dramatic poetry being the production of the city and society cannot flourish except in a great metropolis. The remark may appear novel on first hearing, but its aptitude is soon manifest, as London and Paris were the scenes of the dramatic development in England and France, so also was Madrid in Spain. Thus, Calderon, brought up midst the turmoil of the great Spanish capital, was in excellent position to study the manners of the people in whose portrayal his dramatic bent was afterwards to be satisfied.

He was the son of noble parents under whose wise guidance the stability of his character was moulded. His full name is Calderon de la Barca, but, presumably for the sake of brevity, he is universally known as Calderon. The future dramatist's early studies were made under the Jesuits and completed in the University of Salamanca. Before he was yet nineteen he had written for the stage. His successful efforts attracted the attention of the nobles of the