LE CID

CORNEILLE

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Edited with Introduction and Notes

by

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PREFACE.

Le Cid is scarcely well enough known in English schools. Its atmosphere of chivalry, and its freshness, as written before the form and language of the French drama was stereotyped, serve to make it more attractive to young people than most of the classical plays.

To the notes of the edition in the *Grands Ecrivains* series, published under the auspices of MM. Marty-Laveaux and A. Régnier, and to those of M. Félix Hémon (which I have used most freely) and E. Géruzez I am much indebted, and also to the German school editions of Professors W. Mangold and R. Müller. For the Introduction I have consulted first and foremost two articles of Ste-Beuve (*Portraits Littéraires* vol. 1 and *Nouveaux Lundis* vol. 7), also M. Jules Lemaître's *Corneille et la Poétique d'Aristote*, M. A. Liéby's *Corneille* in *Etudes sur le Théâtre classique* (which contains a useful bibliography) and M. Gidel's *Histoire de la Littérature française*. I am under great obligations to the valuable suggestions of my friend Dr Henry Jackson, Regius Professor of Greek in the University of Cambridge, who has kindly read the proofs.

H. W. EVE.

LONDON, *October* 1906.

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INTRODUCTION.

LIFE OF CORNEILLE.

PIERRE CORNEILLE was born at Rouen in 1606, and educated in the Jesuit college in that city, the curriculum of which was of course mainly classical. He then studied law, and held for some time (till 1650) a public legal appointment in the department of Woods and Forests, to which his father was attached. At the time when he was first capable of interesting himself in literature, the chief names in the literary world were Ronsard (died 1585), the head of the *Pléïade* and the most famous poet of the 16th century; Malherbe, who was still living, the severe critic and reformer of the language; Théophile de Viau, a much younger man, who rebelled against the strictness of Malherbe; and Alexandre Hardy, the dramatist *par excellence* of the period, who was constantly writing, as occasion required, for a company of players with which he was associated. Probably Corneille's early knowledge of recent literature went no further. It is said that he owed his first stimulus to original composition to a boyish attachment to a lady of Rouen, an attachment doomed to disappointment. He sent his first comedy, *Mélite*, to Hardy who thought it *une assez jolie farce*, and produced it in Paris in 1629. The performance brought the author to the capital, where he made friends among the young men of letters of the day. Among them were Mairet, author of *Sophonisbe*, and one of the first to proclaim the doctrine of the "Unities"; Scudéry, brother of the famous *précieuse* novelist; and Rotrou.

The two former eventually became his jealous rivals and unscrupulous critics; Rotrou remained his devoted friend, and had much in common with him in the spirit which inspired his dramas. The Hôtel de Rambouillet, the most famous of literary *salons*, was then in its prime. Cardinal Richelieu was doing his best to reform the theatre: and the Academy, though not yet formed, was already in men's minds. One of the current topics in literary circles was the set of rules known as "the three Unities" (see below). Between 1629 and 1636 Corneille lived chiefly in Paris and produced some half-dozen plays. He attracted the notice of Richelieu who selected him as one of the "Five Authors" to be employed in working up his dramatic sketches; but the poet had too much initiative for such work. During one of his visits to Rouen he conversed with an old courtier, M. de Châlons, who introduced him to Spanish literature. The result was *Le Cid* which appeared in 1636. It was received by the public with extraordinary enthusiasm, but the jealousy of the poet's rivals, including possibly Richelieu himself, was soon aroused. The famous "Querelle du Cid" agitated the literary world for more than a year, and was only concluded by the publication of the *Sentiments de l'Académie*. Keenly as Corneille felt the criticisms of his opponents, he was led by them to study more thoroughly the principles of his art. He retired to Rouen, and in 1639 reappeared in Paris with *Horace* (an episode of the story of the Horatii and Curiatii) and *Cinna* (or the clemency of Augustus). Next came *Polyeucte* (1640) in which earthly and heavenly love are brought into collision, *Pompée* (based on Lucan's *Pharsalia*), and *Le Menteur* (1643), a comedy excelling in intrigue. Several of his subsequent plays, especially *Pertharite* (1653), were less successful, and about that time he gave up writing for the stage and devoted himself to a translation of Thomas à Kempis's *De Imitatione Christi*. Six or seven years later he was induced to return to the theatre by Fouquet, the unfortunate minister of Louis XIV, who attempted to rival his master in magnificence, and who fell in consequence. Corneille's latest group of plays, of which the best known is *Sertorius*, met with but little success. The star of Racine was now in the ascendant. In one case the two poets came into direct competition: both, at

the instance of a member of the royal family, took the story of Titus and Berenice for a subject. Corneille's *Tite et Bérénice* was a failure, while Racine's *Bérénice*, by no means one of his best plays, had a brilliant success. During the second half of his life Corneille published several pamphlets on the principles of the drama. He died in 1684, saddened by the loss of two of his children, as well as by disappointment and comparative poverty. Just before his death his pension was withdrawn, and it was only thanks to the generous conduct of Boileau, who went to the king and offered to resign his own in his favour, that he was saved by the royal bounty from absolute distress.

APPRECIATION OF CORNEILLE.

"Corneille," says Victor Cousin, "always moves in the highest regions. He is alternately Roman and Christian. He is the interpreter of heroes, the singer of virtue, the poet of warriors and statesmen. As long as the human soul is fired in response to the great ideas of duty, honour, and patriotism, he will find an echo in the hearts of the young." "I have often thought," says Ste-Beuve, "that it required a young man rather than an old critic to explain *Le Cid*; he should read it aloud and note down the feelings it arouses." In discussing the poet we have to take into account three elements; first and foremost, the heroic impetuosity of a new century, the century that produced Turenne, Condé, Descartes, and Pascal; next the struggle of a free vigorous genius to discipline itself to the observance of somewhat pedantic rules; and lastly, the influence of a cultivated society still clinging to traditional conceptions of gallantry, an influence distinctly traceable in *Le Cid*, and more pronounced in the later plays. His heroes are all of a piece, with no weaknesses to mar their uniform nobility of character; they have often on their lips the lofty maxims which guide their lives. It is much the same with his heroines, *adorables furies*, as they have been called, a title illustrated by Emilie in *Cinna*, and to a considerable extent by Chimène in *Le Cid*. La Bruyère's criticism is well known: Racine painted men and women as they are, Corneille as they ought to be. His style is far from

the symmetrical, highly disciplined form of the later 17th and of the 18th century. In his free use of the resources of the language, independently of pedantic restrictions, he was a prototype of Victor Hugo, who often appeals to him in support of his own disregard of convention.

THE CID IN HISTORY AND LEGEND.

The real Cid was a soldier of fortune, named Rodrigo Diaz de Bivar, and called *Campeador* because of his prowess in single combats. We first find him in the service of Sancho, the Christian king of Castile, who was at war with his brother Alphonso, king of Leon and the Asturias. By a discreditable ruse he secured the victory and the kingdom of Leon for his master, who was subsequently murdered. Rodrigo then passed into the service of Alphonso, who, by his brother's death, became sovereign of the two principalities. After fighting for a Moorish ally of Alphonso against the King of Granada, Rodrigo was driven into exile by false accusations, and then commenced his career as a condottiere, fighting indifferently for Christians and Mussulmans. Finally he secured for himself the sovereignty of Valencia, and is supposed to have conceived the design of conquering all the Moorish possessions in Spain, a design only realized at a much later period. When he once became a national hero, a record of his youth was wanted; legend easily supplied it. A rhymed chronicle of the 12th century tells how the Count of Gormas slew the herdsmen and lifted the cattle of Don Diego Laynez, and how Diego retaliated in kind, carrying off not only his enemy's cattle, but also some of his vassals, and even the washerwomen at work by the river. A combat of 100 champions on each side was arranged; in this combat Diego's son Rodrigo, who was not yet thirteen years of age, took part and slew the Count, whose youngest daughter Ximena (Chimène), thus deprived of her natural protector, begged the King to marry her to the only man able to defend her, who was none other than the slayer of her father. Rodrigo consented, treating the King in a most defiant manner, and vowing that he would not live with his wife till he had won five victories in fair fight.

The legend did not remain in this form; a *chanson de geste* of somewhat later date represents the Cid as a model of Christian chivalry[1]. Still later grew up a number of popular poems about him, which were collected under the title of the *Romancero*. About 1618 a Valencian poet, Guillen de Castro, embodied the story in a long-winded play, divided into three days and eight tableaux, called *Los Mocedados del Cid* (youthful prowess of the Cid). It was from this play that Corneille borrowed the materials for *Le Cid*, reducing its length, and putting it into the form of a regular French drama.

THE PLOT OF *LE CID*.

Chimène (Ximena), daughter of the Count of Gormas, the most valiant captain of the King of Castile, is beloved by Rodrigo, son of Don Diego, once as famous a warrior, but now growing old, and she reciprocates Rodrigo's affection. Both have rivals who play only a subordinate part in the action. The Infanta, the king's daughter, is in love with Rodrigo; but, at first, feeling that none but a royal marriage is worthy of her, she does her best to promote his alliance with Chimène. For the hand of Chimène there is a second aspirant in the person of Don Sancho, a young nobleman of the court. At the opening of the play, all seems to be happily arranged for the marriage of Rodrigo and Chimène, when a quarrel takes place between their fathers. Don Diego has just been selected by the King to be the governor of the Infant, his eldest son. The Count, who had aspired to the post, taunts his rival with his declining powers, drives him to a bitter repartee, and finally strikes him. Don Diego, unable to avenge himself, puts his cause in the hands of his son Rodrigo, a youth who has not yet encountered an enemy in fight. A fierce struggle ensues in Rodrigo's mind between his love for Chimène, and his duty as vindicator of his father's

[1] One incident of this version of his life is hardly to his credit. Being in want of money, he had two chests filled with sand, covered with red leather, and studded with gilt nails. These he deposited with the Jews as security for a loan. Mme Humbert and her creditors thus find themselves in good company.

honour. On hearing of the insult, the King sends a courtier to induce the Count to apologise, but in vain. An effort, not entirely disinterested, on the part of the Infanta to detain Rodrigo is equally unsuccessful. Rodrigo challenges the Count and kills him. The psychological interest now centres in Chimène, whose sense of her duty to avenge her father's death is brought into collision with her love for Rodrigo. She appeals to the King to punish the murderer, and Don Diego pleads in defence of his son. Presently Rodrigo finds his way to Chimène, and, in the course of a long and pathetic interview, appeals to her to accept his sword and execute her vengeance on him. She refuses and declares her intention of continuing to prosecute her suit for vengeance before the King, and having secured her lover's punishment, of following him to the grave. Rodrigo, leaving her house in despair, meets his father, who tells him of the expected incursion of the Moors and urges him to put himself at the head of the friends and retainers whom the news of the quarrel has brought to his house, and to lead them to the attack. Rodrigo gains a splendid victory, and is saluted as *Cid* by two kings whom he has captured. No sooner has he given his account of the engagement to the King, than Chimène reappears to press her suit. The King will only grant her a champion to fight with Rodrigo, and that on condition of her marrying the conqueror. Don Sancho volunteers to be her champion. Rodrigo now has a second interview with Chimène, and declares that he will not defend himself in the combat. Some words dropped by Chimène revive his energy; he disarms Don Sancho, and sends him to present his sword to Chimène. Chimène, believing that Rodrigo is slain, does not allow his messenger time to explain, but gives way to a violent outburst of grief. The mystery is cleared up before the King; but Chimène, though admitting her love for Rodrigo, still refuses to marry her father's murderer. The King insists on the fulfilment of the contract, but allows a postponement to enable Chimène to come to a better mind, and Rodrigo to cover himself with fresh glory by fighting against the Moors. The play thus has no tragic ending; it was classed as a tragi-comedy, till that term lost its original meaning.

THE THREE UNITIES.

The famous doctrine of the three unities, of action, time, and place, is based on the practice of the Greek tragedians, and has been wrongly ascribed to Aristotle. It was first proclaimed in France by Chapelain, a contemporary of Corneille. It had been observed by the Italian dramatists of the 16th century; the first French play in which it was formally recognised was the *Sophonisbe* of Mairet (1633). It should be remarked that the doctrine was not simply an invention of learned writers; it was simply the formal extension of a tendency to regularity and realism already in the minds of authors and of their public.

Unity of action is by far the most difficult of the three to define. Corneille himself made several attempts. It seems to mean little more than an injunction to the dramatist to keep the development of the main plot consistently in view throughout, each step in the action following naturally on those which precede it, or on his conception of the characters engaged. It does not exclude subordinate plots, but requires them to be accessory to the main interest, or, at any rate, not to interfere with it.

Unity of time has been pedantically supposed to require the action of the whole play to be limited to a space of 24 hours. Shakespeare's plays furnish innumerable examples of independence of such a rule. In *The Winter's Tale*, for example, there is an interval of many years between Acts III. and IV. In the construction of *Le Cid* Corneille's efforts to observe this rule play an important part. On the one hand it is to those efforts that the condensation of Guillen de Castro's play is largely due. On the other hand they are responsible for a certain amount of pedantry in the *Examen*, and even in the course of the play itself (e.g. l. 1449), so that it has been said that the characters have always their eyes on the clock. Even the story is modified to secure the observance of the rule. The scene is transferred from Burgos to Seville, which only at a much later date was included in Castile, in order to enable the Moors to make a sudden incursion by water. They arrive just in the nick of time to be beaten, and no reason is given for their appearance. The King is made seriously to neglect his duty in taking next to no

precautions against the attack. In Guillen de Castro, Rodrigo goes to fight the Moors on the frontier, which would have been a matter of some weeks at least instead of occupying only a single night. To sum up, we find within the space of 24 hours, two duels, a night attack, two important interviews of the lovers, two semi-judicial audiences on the part of the King, besides other details. It would be impossible to find a better illustration of the observance of the rule, or a more convincing proof of its absurdity.

Unity of place limits the action of the play to a single place, and forbids the frequent changes of scene conspicuous in Shakespeare, and in Goethe's *Faust*. Such a limitation has obvious inconveniences; it is hardly likely, for example, that conspirators would confer in the house of the object of their attack. Corneille claims to have observed the rule by confining the action to Seville, but the spectator must think of several distinct places in Seville if it is to seem probable.

NOTES ON THE CHARACTERS.

Rodrigo is by no means a subtle character. He is a regular hero of romance, invincible in fight, loyal alike to the dictates of honour and to the code of true love, not only in its spirit, but even under the conventional forms then popular in literary society. His answer to his Father's question "Rodrigue, as-tu du cœur?" (I. 5) reveals at once the qualities inherited from Don Diego and developed by his training. The lyrical monologue which follows (I. 6) shows that he has a heart. No doubt the poet has, after the fashion of the time, adorned this soliloquy with antitheses and brilliant phrases, but it represents a real conflict between love on the one hand and honour and duty on the other, and has been called a drama in itself. There is no indication that in Rodrigo, as in Hamlet,

> The native hue of resolution
> Is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought.

His interview with the Count (II. 2) shows the man of action, and the Count himself recognises his nobility. No sooner is the duel over, than love reasserts itself. He does not regret his

action; but his mood is now the melancholy resignation befitting a true lover who has mortally offended his mistress, and is exhibited both in his conversation with his Father and in the passionate interview in which he places his life at the disposal of Chimène. For a time the call of honour and of duty to his country revives his energy. He thinks no more of a glorious death but only of victory, and cannot forbear the hope that victory may regain the favour of his mistress. It is only on the strength of a few words of encouragement from her that he undertakes his last conflict, that with Don Sancho, to whom he shows himself an invincible but generous antagonist. Far from availing himself of the King's award of the hand of Chimène to the victor, he once more places his life at her disposal. The consistency he shows both in facing danger and in doing, not only in the spirit of true love, but in accordance with the recognised canons of gallantry, his duty to his mistress explain the enthusiasm with which the play has always been received by the younger generation. In a word, his reply to his Father, who says:

Nous n'avons qu'un honneur, il est tant de maîtresses (III. 6),

in the famous words:

L'infamie est pareille, et suit également
Le guerrier sans courage et le perfide amant,

shows the very perfect gentle knight as well as the adept in the traditions of gallantry.

With Chimène, the conflict between love and duty, the duty being that of avenging her father, continues throughout the play, constantly sustaining the feelings of pity and admiration in the spectators. From time to time a few incidental words betray her love, but her actions and her calmer speeches show the firmness of her resolution. She and Rodrigo are kindred spirits, as she herself recognizes:

Je ne te puis blâmer d'avoir fui l'infamie (III. 4).

Don Diego is a conspicuous example of a man with whom honour is the first consideration, and that not merely his own but the honour of his race. In his encounter of words with the Count (I. 4) he is conciliatory till driven to impatience by insult.

His readiness to confront the untried Rodrigo with such a formidable adversary may seem at first sight inconsistent with paternal affection. It is rather the affection which sees in his son the family personified, and which insists on his acting as he himself had acted and would have continued to act but for his age. Then, once having found reason to be proud of him, he does not hesitate to encourage him to face fresh dangers and to win fresh glory; he suggests his expedition to repel the incursion of the Moors, and is even anxious for him to meet an unlimited series of champions of Chimène.

The part of the Infanta bears but little on the main action. The play was once performed before Napoleon with that part omitted. He regretted the omission, pointing out that Rodrigo's merit was enhanced by the affection he inspired in a royal princess. The Infanta is a very human character in her inconsistencies; she is really devoted to Chimène, but would have no objection to supplant her (II. 5). Her constant harping on her own passion for Rodrigo and her assumed generosity in handing him over to her rival produce an effect verging on the ludicrous, in keeping with the designation of "tragi-comedy."

Don Sancho, who has the thankless part of an unsuccessful lover, is by no means a contemptible character. He does not hesitate to take the part of the slain count before the offended King (II. 6); he chivalrously offers himself as Chimène's champion against an almost invincible rival; and he accepts his defeat with a good grace, some say with too good a grace.

The character of the King is discussed in the Examen.

N.B. It should be noticed that the old spelling of words like *alloit* (*allait*), *connoître* (*connaître*), *foible* (*faible*) is retained as in the French edition in "*Les Grands Ecrivains*."