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978-1-107-66789-1 - Lope De Vega: El Mejor Alcalde, El Rey

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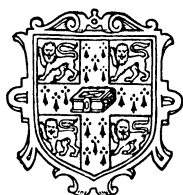
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NOTE

LOPE DE VEGA is known the world over both as a prodigy of dramatic productivity and as one of the giants who bestride the Golden Age of Spanish Literature. He was born in 1562, took part as a young man in the ill-fated expedition of the “Invincible” Armada, and settling, after many ups and downs, in Madrid, made his name in 1599 with a narrative poem on St Isidro the Ploughman, the patron of the capital in which he lived. He was, however, first and foremost, a playwright, and with him Spanish drama sprang into being and activity. A year after his death his friend and disciple Montalván asserted that he had written no less than eighteen hundred plays and four hundred *autos* and *entremeses*. Long before 1614, in which year he took Holy Orders—though never ceasing to write his dramas—he was the acknowledged literary leader of Spain. He died, after a life in which trouble and success were strangely mingled, in 1635.

The story of Sancho and Elvira, which Lope presents under the characteristic title of *El Mejor Alcalde, el Rey*, is one of his most typical heroic dramas. We have in Sancho the honest peasant, loyal but independent, coming from the same stock as Pedro Crespo in the *Alcalde de Zalamea*, of which Calderón’s version is well known in this country. Sancho’s rights are grossly violated by the unscrupulous Don Tello, and an appeal is

made to the King, whose reply is prompt and effective:

Yo he de ir a Galicia;
Que me importa hacer justicia.

The sequel to his visit is summary punishment and instant redress of the wrong.

Thus Lope is enabled in this one play to expound two of his favourite themes: the rights of the poor man and the effectiveness of an appeal for justice to the highest tribunal—that of royalty.

E. ALLISON PEERS.

June 1922