

REVIEWS OF BOOKS.

El Romancero Español, conferencias dadas en la Columbia University de New York, los días 5 y 7 de Abril de 1909, bajo los auspicios de The Hispanic Society of America, por Ramón Menéndez Pidal. The Hispanic Society of America, 1910. Large 8vo, pp. 131.

The title, as quoted above, practically tells the story of the origin of the work under examination. In the attractive form to which the Hispanic Society has accustomed us in its publications, the volume reproduces the lectures just as they were originally delivered. Those who were fortunate enough to hear them will rejoice that such is the case, for in reading them now they will be able to hear again the ringing voice of the lecturer as he swings through his sonorous periods.

The spirit of these lectures is admirable, the form slightly oratorical, as the circumstances required, but the content as accurate and scholarly as the strictest methodologist could wish. These are real works of scientific vulgarization and prove the groundlessness of the author's fear, expressed in the prefatory note, that he may not have been able to harmonize the scientific interest of the Hispanic Society with the more general and popular interest of its public. By these two lectures Professor Menéndez Pidal demonstrates that Spain has in turn produced her Friedrich Diez—her Gaston Paris: a thoroughly trained linguist with a fine sense of literary values—a philologist in the broadest meaning of that much abused word.

The first of these lectures bears the subtitle: *El Romancero: sus orígenes y carácter*. Its object is set forth in the following words (pp. 4-5):

Para orientar una lectura del romancero y guiar en la apreciación histórica y estética de sus bellezas, debemos examinar en qué tiempos tan diversos y con qué tendencias tan diferentes se fueron elaborando los varios géneros de romances.

After calling attention to the difference between the popular epic, as represented by the *Iliad*, the *Chanson de Roland*, the *Nibelungenlied*, and the *Poema del Cid*, and the learned epic, as represented by the *Aeneid*, the *Jerusalemme liberata*, the *Henriade*, and the *Araucana*, the author proceeds to the Germanic origin of most modern epics, and calls attention to the fact that, once transplanted, the epic took deep root and flourished, although intensely localized: in Spain, for example, being strictly limited to Old Castile. Consequently, although in spirit originally Germanic, the Spanish epic is in its concrete form originally Castilian, as are all its primitive heroes; and the poems that sang these heroes were originally composed in the tenth, eleventh and twelfth centuries, and later were renewed and worked over down to the fifteenth century. During this long period the heroic poetry of course had to follow the march of events and go beyond the confines of Castile. Hence it naturally began to sing other heroes who, while not Castilian, were of interest to all Spain, as witness

the last Visigothic king, Don Rodrigo; the Leonese Bernardo del Carpio; and Charlemagne with his twelve peers.

These *cantares de gesta* (of irregular meter, but with a preponderance of 14-syllable, and, still later, of 16-syllable verses) were originally composed for an aristocratic audience. In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, as a result of important changes in the social structure of Spain, the Castilian epic, which, as has been said, had already enlarged the field from which it drew its heroes, now enlarged the field of its listeners and addressed itself to a more numerous and heterogeneous public. The new element, not having the leisure nor the antecedents of the older element, could not endure the longer songs in which there was practically nothing but the great deeds of a military aristocracy. The bards, in order to hold the new audience, began to introduce novelistic and amorous adventures. It is due to this change that the epic bard in Spain was able to hold his audience long after his companion in France had ceased to attract any general interest.

This state of affairs and the consequent interruptions that were likely to occur when some particular incident had been especially pleasing and the audience desired its repetition, led directly and inevitably to the *romance* (p. 10):

Los oyentes de una larga recitación epica se encariñaban con algún episodio más feliz, haciéndolo repetir á fuerza de aplausos, y luego que el juglar acababa su largo canto, se dispersaban llevando en su memoria aquellos versos repetidos, que luego ellos propagaban por todas partes. Pues bien, esos breves fragmentos, desgajados de un antiguo Cantar de Gesta, y hechos así famosos y populares, son, ni más ni menos, los **romances mas viejos** que existieron.

These short selected passages were for years repeated to audiences that were perfectly familiar with the general setting. As in the course of time this naturally ceased to be the case, the bard, who still knew his originals, used to sketch in the scene dextrously and with fidelity to the original. But there are other cases where the bard, instead of taking one of these passages that attained popularity by their own merits, seems to have chosen at random an incident and then to have fitted it out with introduction and epilogue at his own caprice.

These oldest ballads inherited from the *Cantares de Gesta* not only their content and spirit but their verse structure; and on this point the author's statement is detailed and luminous (p. 17):

Por lo que á su forma se refiere, herederos tambien estos romances de la métrica de las Gestas, están compuestos en versos largos, de diez y seis sílabas, asonantados entre sí con un asonante uniforme, si el romance ofrece restos de una sola serie ó copla épica, que es lo más común; pero á veces conserva restos de dos, mas rara vez de tres series, y entonces las asonancias del romance son dos ó tres distintas. Los romances posteriores, de que hablaremos después, están versificados á imitación de los más viejos, asimismo en versos de diez y seis sílabas, con un asonante único y cuanto más tardías son estas composiciones, menos admiten el cambio de dos ó más asonantes.

This statement is of prime importance, for not only does it give a clear definition of the metrical form of the *romance*, but it also sets forth anew, and in convincing fashion, the historical development of this particular form of verse. This theory, although enounced by Grimm and supported, among others, by Diez, the Marqués de Pidal, Milá y Fontanals, and Menéndez y Pelayo, was sturdily opposed by such scholars as Durán and Wolf, the latter

of whom closed his analysis of the question with the following words (*Primavera y Flor de Romances, Introducción*, pp. xviii-xix of the reprint by Menéndez y Pelayo: *Antología de Poetas Líricos Castellanos, tomo VIII*):

La opinión de los últimos [those who favor the theory of the octosyllable ballad, with assonance in the even verses] está, en efecto, corroborada por la analogía de toda poesía popular, por la índole de la lengua castellana y por el carácter lírico-épico de los romances; al paso que la opinión contraria [that of the sixteen syllable ballad, with assonance in all verses] carece de tales argumentos, fundados en la naturaleza de las cosas; que le hacen falta á ella los documentos, y—lo que es bien de notar—que faltan ejemplos de versos de diez y seis sílabas no solo en la poesía popular, sino también en la artística castellana; pues los versos largos del poema y de la Crónica rimada del Cid no son más que imitaciones harto informes de muestras extranjeras (francesas), y los alexandrinos, tomados también de los franceses, son de catorce sílabas; y sobre todo con haberse admitido y probado: que la poesía castellana no tenía y no pudo tener poemas épicos populares, pierde esta opinión su principal argumento y su única razón suficiente; pues cesando la causa, cesa el efecto; no teniendo los castellanos tales poemas, no hubieron menester ni ocasión de producir versos épicos largos.

But it is precisely these poems, *that did not and could not exist in Castilian poetry*, that have since been shown to have had a very flourishing existence in this same Castilian poetry; and the scholar who proved it most effectively was the author of the work now under examination, in his epoch-making study of the *Leyenda de los Infantes de Lara*.

In this connection it is interesting to note that the author, despite his own definition and demonstration, and despite the theory and practice of Grimm, Milá y Fontanals, and Menéndez y Pelayo, prints all his *romances* in short lines, giving them thus the printed form they have generally had. This form led to the erroneous definition mentioned above: that the *romance* is a poem of intermediate length, composed of verses of eight syllables, with a single assonance in the even verses. It is true that the author calls attention to the method of printing, in a phrase on page 13; but it seems to me that he allowed to pass a fine opportunity to drive home the correct definition by exhibiting the verse in a form corresponding thereto. What should we gain, for instance, by printing in two lines the long verses of the Poem of the Cid or of Berceo's works, or of any other two-hemistich form of verse? Would such a practice not tend inevitably to produce confusion? In response to a private inquiry as to his reason for printing as he did, the author kindly replied at once, as follows:

Imprimí los romances en verso partido porque había deseado que el libro tuviese la forma alargada de los romances antiguos.

No obstante también en los romances artísticos de Lope, etc. creo debe conservarse la forma corta que le daban los autores. ¿A qué cambiarla?

In this there seems to me to be a slight confusion of terms. The authors of the old *romances* were the authors of the *cantares de gesta*, who composed their poems in long verses; and according to Professor Menéndez Pidal's own demonstration it is sections of these same poems in long verses that constituted our oldest *romances*. Therefore these oldest *romances*, despite the form in which they may happen first to have been set down in writing or in printing, should be reproduced by us in the form given to them by their authors: i. e. the long verse in its entirety.

Concerning the later artistic *romances*, I agree with Professor Menéndez Pidal. Their authors had long since ceased to recognize the real structure of the *romance*, and with the erroneous definition in mind they really meant to write the kind of verse-form they did write. These artistic *romances*, then, should be reproduced by us (as Professor Menéndez Pidal does reproduce them) in the form given them by their authors, i. e., the short lines.

A minor detail, but one not entirely devoid of importance, is that if modern scholars used these two forms for reproducing the earlier and later *romances*, they would thereby aid the uninitiated the more easily to distinguish, in the first instance, the two forms; and it is conceivable that some even of the initiated would find this aid welcome.

Throughout the rest of this first lecture we are led from an analysis of the juglaresque ballads, and the old ballads derived therefrom, especially those of the Carolingian cycle, to the frontier ballads and the new ideas and customs reflected therein; and then to the death of the heroic inspiration of the *Romancero*, which followed the definite formation of the nation, with the fall of Granada and the union of the kingdoms of Spain in the hands of Ferdinand and Isabella. The mission of Spain's heroico-popular poetry—whether in its first form, the epic, or in its second form, the ballad—had been to inspire the nation to the heroic enterprises it had so successfully carried out. That mission once fulfilled, the heroico-popular poetry in its second form ceased to inspire new songs. There at once arose, however, numberless imitations, semi-popular, learned, and artistic, and the great vogue that the *romance* in these forms enjoyed brought about the total ruin of the *genre*.

In the second lecture, which bears the sub-title: *El Romancero: su transmisión á la época moderna*, after a brief survey of the various *Romanceros* that have been made and the studies thereon, closing with the masterly work of that genial humanist Marcelino Menéndez y Pelayo, our author proceeds to examine what remains to us of the old *romances* outside the early collections, to wit in broadsides, chap-books, manuscripts and the drama. Then follows a study of the propagation of the *Romancero* in modern oral tradition among the Spanish Jews of Africa and Turkey; in Cataluña, Portugal, the Azores and Madeira, and America, North and South; in the rest of Spain, and in Castile itself. The present state and value of the oral tradition is then examined and we find that the modern oral tradition preserves by itself many old *romances*, hitherto unknown. The history of some of the most interesting of these is given, as for instance the finding of the *romance* of the *Muerte del Príncipe Don Juan* (1497), which was discovered in 1900 and first published in 1904 (in the proper long-verse form, together with the music) by Mrs. Menéndez Pidal.

The lecture closes with a plea for the restoration of the *Romancero* in all its esthetic, chronological and geographical value by a fusion of the riches of the old collections with those of the modern tradition, and a thorough working over of the whole material.

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