

CORNEILLE'S

Le Cid

WARREN



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EDITED WITH NOTES AND VOCABULARY

BY

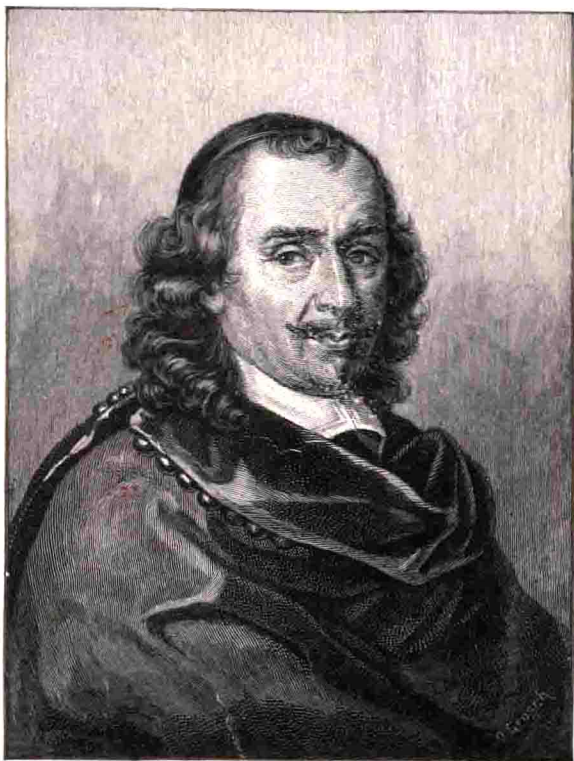
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PIERRE CORNEILLE.

P R E F A C E.

THIS edition of *Le Cid* aims especially at emphasizing its literary significance. For this reason it contains the articles written by Corneille in answer to his critics, and in which he judges his own work. The text follows that of the Marty-Laveaux edition (in the Hachette series of "Les Grands Écrivains de la France"), reproduced from Corneille's last revision of 1682. In volume iii. of this edition may be found the variants to the play, the lines of Castro's *Las Mocedades del Cid* which were more particularly imitated by Corneille, and an analysis of the Spanish drama.

The history of the French stage after 1550 and previous to 1630 is considered at length in E. Rigal's "Alexandre Hardy" (Paris, 1889). To understand the literary bearing of *Le Cid* and Corneille's dramatic ideas at the time, one should also consult the Spanish original (*Las Mocedades del Cid, primera parte*, edited by E. Mérimée, Toulouse, 1890). For historical data concerning the hero and his surroundings there is nothing more recent than R. Dozy's "Recherches sur l'histoire de l'Espagne" (third edition, Leyden, 1881). I can find no reliable account of the Cid's family.

In the preparation of its notes this edition owes much to the two American editions of Professors Joynes and Schele de Vere, and the French edition of Gustave Larroumet (Paris, Garnier Frères). The "Lexique" occasionally cited is the one compiled by Marty-Laveaux in volumes xi. and xii. of his edition. Many of the literary comments were suggested by the same scholar, by Scudéry's *Observations sur le Cid*, and by the Academy's *Sentiments* — both published in Marty-Laveaux' twelfth volume. References are also made to Voltaire's *Remarques sur le Cid*, included in his *Commentaires sur Corneille*, and to Sainte-Beuve's three articles on the play, in volume vii. of his "Nouveaux Lundis." The question of the unities of time and place in *Le Cid*, discussed in the Introduction, is argued more in detail in the *Modern Language Notes* for January, 1895, while for the rules of classical versification I am allowed to refer to Professor Eggert's Introduction to his edition of *Athalie* (D. C. Heath & Co.), recently published.

F. M. WARREN.

CLEVELAND, June 24, 1895.

INTRODUCTION.

I. LIFE OF CORNEILLE.

CORNEILLE's life, apart from the performance and publication of his works, is but imperfectly known, owing to the lack of contemporaneous records and allusions. He was born at Rouen, capital of the old province of Normandy, on June 6, 1606. At his christening on June 9 he received the name of Pierre, after his father and godfather. He was educated in the Jesuit college (academy) at Rouen, and obtained in 1620 a prize for excellence. Choosing his father's profession, he next studied law, and was admitted to the bar on June 18, 1624. The office of attorney-general in the department of waters and forests was purchased by him on Dec. 16, 1628. The year following, Mondory, who, with a company of actors, was probably playing in Rouen, persuaded him to deliver to his troupe a comedy he had already written, and the season of 1629-30 saw the play produced in Paris, at the newly established Marais Theatre.

The success of this comedy, *Mélite*, confirmed Corneille in his purpose of writing for the stage, and led him to study the principles of dramatic art. While he continued to discharge his legal duties at Rouen, he frequently visited Paris to offer to Mondory some new play, or to mingle in the literary society of the capital. Occasional poetry in French and Latin bore witness to the beginning and progress of his reputation; and the great minister, Richelieu, employed him as collaborator in one of his dramatic enterprises, *La Comédie des Tuileries*, in 1635.

The divided life he thus lived before the production of *Le Cid*, at the end of 1636, seems to have almost ceased during the few years following that play, for he evidently remained at Rouen, busying himself with the defence of his drama, occupied with lawsuits, and saddened by family afflictions. Still, he must have been considering new theatrical ventures all this time, for in 1639 he read to a few friends at Paris his tragedy of *Horace*, and had it performed the next February. This piece was followed by several others in quick succession, all of which confirmed the success of *Le Cid*, and united in placing their author at the head of the playwrights of France.

In the spring of 1641 Corneille married Marie de Lamperrière, daughter of a Norman official. A Latin poem by Ménage tells us that the very night of his wedding he came near dying of pneumonia. On Jan. 22, 1647, he was elected to the French Academy. Now the Fronde intervened and closed the theatres of Paris, thus giving Corneille the opportunity of winding up his affairs at Rouen. On March 18, 1650, he sold his office at the provincial court, but almost at the same time received another from the king, which occupied him until the winter following. From the beginning of 1651, however, he was entirely free from official cares. The effects of this leisure were seen in the appearance of new tragedies, in the publication of poems, and notably in the translation into verse of Thomas a Kempis' *Imitation of Jesus Christ*. This was a devout undertaking, long meditated, and finally occasioned by the failure of Corneille's tragedy, *Pertharite* (1652). For the next four years this translation filled up the greater part of his time. He remained at Rouen, and there acted as treasurer of his home parish.

But the arrival of Molière's company at Rouen in the summer of 1658, and the charms of the actress, Mme du Parc, called Corneille again to the delights of theatrical composition. *Œdipe*, acted in 1659, began a new series of tragedies, which ended with the failure of *Attila* (1667). In the meantime he

had published (in 1660) an edition of his plays in three volumes, together with criticisms of each play (the "Examens") and three essays on the laws and theories of dramatic art. He had been granted a royal pension in 1662, and in 1665 he had published a translation of poems written in honor of the Virgin. Possibly this same year he moved definitely to Paris.

A few years later Corneille appeared once more as a dramatist. At the command of Madame (Henrietta of England), he composed a play on the love of Titus and Berenice. Racine had received a like order, and each author worked unknown to the other. Though at the public performance of the two pieces, in 1670, the younger poet won all the applause, Corneille continued to write for the stage for four years longer, until the downfall of *Suréna* (1674) brought his theatrical career to a final close. Domestic bereavement and financial distresses contributed in embittering the last ten years of his eventful life, and only a few laudatory and supplicating poems, addressed to the king, reminded the public of its former favorite. In 1682 he published the final revision of his works, and in the night of Sept. 30 — Oct. 1, 1684, he died at his house in rue d'Argenteuil, at Paris. He was buried at St. Roch the day following.

The personal appearance of the poet has often been noted, while a portrait by Charles Le Brun, painted in 1647, furnishes his most reliable likeness. His contemporaries complained of his decidedly ordinary presence and the neglect of his person. He was timid, though easily offended; his conversation was wearisome, and he always fell far below his actors in reciting his own works. It is a singular fact that he is reported never to have been able to speak French correctly. He was somewhat self-sufficient, though no more so, perhaps, than his genius warranted. He was avaricious, eager to make money, and yet he never succeeded in saving any. Of his six children four survived him. From his eldest, Marie, descended Charlotte Corday in the fourth generation.

II. LE CID.

THE thirtieth year of his age found Corneille already the leading playwright of the French capital. He had created by his own common-sense, dramatic instinct and the examples of Plautus and Terence, modern French comedy in verse, had tried his hand at bombastic tragi-comedy, and exercised his talent on tragedy, after the models of Seneca and the Greeks. Of all the kinds of theatrical composition in vogue in his day he had neglected only the pastoral, which was becoming antiquated, and the farce, which was too vulgar for his notice. He had demonstrated not only his capability as a constructor of plays, but had also proved his originality by the invention of new and simple plots. His vocabulary and versification were far superior to the times in refinement and harmony. They clearly showed the influence of Malherbe's criticism and the taste of a Conrart or Chapelain. Alexandre Hardy, who had grafted on the old national stage of France the new conceptions of the Pleiade drama, had always remained a writer of the sixteenth century. After thirty years of labor at the Hôtel de Bourgogne he had passed away, just as Corneille was beginning at the Marais. But he had left as a permanent legacy the public he had formed and the scenery he had adapted.

Corneille had attained unquestioned success in comedy, but had failed in tragedy. His *Médée*, patterned too closely on the conceptions of Latin and Greek antiquity, had satisfied neither the public nor its author. Profiting by this check, he resolved to abandon the imitation of the ancients, and seek a subject among the national theatres of contemporaneous peoples. The Spanish stage, under the leadership of Lope de Vega, was then pre-eminent on the Continent. So Corneille learned Spanish, read many of the plays which had already been edited in Spain, and selected from among them that one which especially extolled the nation's hero. With the story of

the love and deeds of the Cid he aspired to open a new era in the history of French drama.

In the last weeks of 1636 Corneille's *Cid* appeared on the boards of the Marais. Its author had taken some time for its preparation — possibly a year and a half — and Mondory, with his comedians, surpassed themselves in the magnificence of their costumes and the excellence of their acting. Corneille's rivals assert even that it was to their efforts the play owed its success. For it was a success beyond anything before known in France, a success instantaneous and universal. Day after day the theatre was crowded with the best people of the court and city. As Mondory wrote to the great Balzac, under date of Jan. 18, 1637: “Il (*le Cid*) est si beau qu'il a donné de l'amour aux dames les plus continentes, dont la passion a même plusieurs fois éclaté au théâtre public.” Chapelain, and Corneille himself, both bear out Mondory in his statements, while Mairet claims that the play gained for Corneille's family their letters of nobility. An anonymous disputant in the quarrel which followed this success says that the receipts of *Le Cid* were greater than of ten of the best pieces of the other dramatists, while Pellisson, in his “History of the Academy,” published sixteen years later, writes: “Il est malaisé de s'imaginer avec quelle approbation cette pièce fut reçue de la cour et du public. On ne se pouvait lasser de la voir, on n'entendait autre chose dans les compagnies, chacun en savait quelque partie par cœur, on la faisait apprendre aux enfants, et en plusieurs endroits de la France il était passé en proverbe de dire: ‘Cela est beau comme *le Cid*.’”

III. QUARREL OF LE CID.

SUCH popularity and renown were enough of themselves to excite the jealousy of the dramatists, who, before the appearance of *Le Cid*, had shared with Corneille the honors of the stage, but who were now left far behind on the road to fame. The prime minister also took umbrage at its astonishing success,

whether from literary envy, as has been charged, or from resentment at the independence Corneille had always manifested, or from a feeling that the great reputation earned by *Le Cid* for its author, together with its expressions of feudal rights and mediæval justice, had injured for the time his paramount influence in the state, and antagonized his work of political centralization. The edicts against duelling had just been promulgated, and here duelling was publicly eulogized.

Yet all these individual envies and distrusting might have remained smouldering had not Corneille, emboldened by the general applause, taken occasion to turn upon his old-time critics, and proclaim in his poem, *Excuse à Ariste*, both his disdain for them and his own originality. This production, which its author avers was written long before *Le Cid*, seems to have performed the office of a safety-valve to his long-repressed emotions. The culmination of his resentment for past indignities, whether inflicted by the court or by literary rivals, is seen in these lines: —

Mon travail sans appui monte sur le théâtre :
 Chacun en liberté l'y blâme ou l'idolâtre ;
 Là, sans que mes amis prêchent leurs sentiments,
 J'arrache quelquefois trop d'applaudissements ;
 Là, content du succès que le mérite donne,
 Par d'illustres avis je n'éblouis personne :
 Je satisfais ensemble et peuple et courtisans,
 Et mes vers en tous lieux sont mes seuls partisans ;
 Par leur seule beauté ma plume est estimée :
 Je ne dois qu'à moi seul toute ma renommée,
 Et pense toutefois n'avoir point de rival
 A qui je fasse tort en le traitant d'égal.

Here we may find a considerable dose of vainglory, and no small amount of anger for the neglect shown him by the court ; in all more than enough to unite the despised dramatists and the suspicious premier together in a common assault on the presumptuous author of this rhymed satire.

Evidently an alliance between the offended parties was quickly formed after the publication of the *Excuse*, because the poets who were high in the Cardinal's favor led off in anonymous attacks. The first came from Mairet, then residing at Le Mans, and was circulated in manuscript at Paris by his friend Claveret. This libel was a pretended demand from the Spanish poet on Corneille for the property stolen from him in *Le Cid*. Corneille answered in an indignant rondeau, which met with a reply signed openly by Mairet.

The assailants were now re-enforced from another quarter. Scudéry, who had been on good terms with Corneille hitherto, but who was a creature of Richelieu's, came forward with his alleged impartial and scholarly *Observations sur le Cid*, the original title of which, *Les Fautes remarquées en la tragédie du Cid*, explains the nature of the contents. They were entirely condemnatory, antagonistic to the highest degree. The pamphlet must have had a large circulation, for it went through three editions in the year 1637. After alluding to Corneille's arrogance in the *Excuse à Ariste*, Scudéry disclaims any personal enmity, but says he will combat *Le Cid* only. And he states his captions: "Je prétends donc prouver contre cette pièce du *Cid* :—

Que le sujet ne vaut rien du tout ;
Qu'il choque les principales règles du poème dramatique ;
Qu'il manque de jugement en sa conduite ;
Qu'il a beaucoup de méchants vers ;
Que presque tout ce qu'il a de beautés sont dérobées ;
Et qu'ainsi l'estime qu'on en fait est injuste."

The substance of Scudéry's remarks is that the subject of *Le Cid* lacks probability and dignity, that it is against good breeding and family feeling, that the action is too hurried to be natural, and that it contains digressive episodes. He admits, however, that the versification of *Le Cid* is the best Corneille had written, though hardly perfect enough to justify the lines of the *Excuse à Ariste*.

Corneille returns Scudéry's diatribe with a most sarcastic defence, implying that his opponent's wrath was excited by an anonymous criticism, which he had erroneously attributed to Corneille. Other answers to *Les Fautes* were printed by admirers of *Le Cid*, while its enemies gained an ally in the person of Claveret. To circulate all these pamphlets the colporters of the official *Gazette* were pressed into service, and they hawked the literary war about the streets and bridges of Paris, until no educated man in the capital could have been ignorant of its virulence.

All these measures, however, in no way affected the favor with which *Le Cid* was still received, and Scudéry, covertly supported by Richelieu, was forced to demand of the newly formed Academy an authoritative opinion on the matter. This body naturally demurred, but Richelieu's will was law, and after some negotiations with Corneille a committee of three was appointed to consider *Le Cid* as a whole (June 16, 1637). Its verse would be passed upon by all the members acting together. After some delay a report, based on Scudéry's *Observations*, was drawn up by Chapelain and submitted to Richelieu, who favored it with comments in his own handwriting. The manuscript then underwent several revisions, was finally sent to press, and the proof-sheets submitted to the Cardinal. The latter objected to so favorable a showing for Corneille, and the work was done over. At last, on Nov. 23, 1637, the new manuscript was given to the printer, and it appeared early in 1638, under the title of *Sentiments de l'Académie française sur le Cid*. But by this time the quarrel had spent itself. The impartial citizens of the town had had their say, and Mairet, who alone tried to continue the struggle, had been silenced by a command from Richelieu, delivered on Oct. 6, 1637. So when the Academy's *Sentiments* were ready for the public, the public had lost interest in their contents.

And, indeed, they added nothing new to the question, while their manifest intention to please both sides robbed them of

any weight. Corneille derived some benefit from them in the matter of language and versification, and lost also in the same directions. They dwell at length on the precepts of Aristotle and the standards established by the theatre of the Greeks, and ascribe to the philosopher the following rule on the duration of the time of the action: "A la vérité, Aristote a prescrit le temps des pièces de théâtre, et n'a donné aux actions qui en font le sujet que l'espace compris entre le lever et le coucher du soleil." They conclude as follows: "Enfin nous concluons qu'encore que le sujet du *Cid* ne soit pas bon, qu'il pèche dans son dénouement, qu'il soit chargé d'épisodes inutiles, que la bienséance y manque en beaucoup de lieux, aussi bien que la bonne disposition du théâtre, et qu'il y ait beaucoup de vers bas et de façons de parler impures, néanmoins la naïveté et la véhémence de ses passions, la force et la délicatesse de plusieurs de ses pensées, et cet agrément inexplicable qui se mêle dans tous ses défauts, lui ont acquis un rang considérable entre les poèmes français de ce genre qui ont le plus donné de satisfaction." From all these phrases, which are more or less sincere, there stands out one, "et cet agrément inexplicable qui se mêle dans tous ses défauts," which best conveys to the mind of the reader of to-day the charm that the romantic verses of *Le Cid* exercised over the Parisians of the year 1637.

IV. THE UNITIES IN LE CID.

How far Corneille was affected in his future dramatic work by the public attacks of Scudéry and Mairet, and the pedantic judgment of the Academy, does not clearly appear from the evidence available. It has been assumed by the great critics of all subsequent literary schools, Guizot, Sainte-Beuve, Nisard, and the rest, that his enemies succeeded in turning him away from his chosen road of subject and construction, and drove him into the narrow path he afterwards followed. Yet so far as his own words show this does not seem to have been

the case. The prefaces he published during the time of the quarrel, and his letters to Boisrobert on the proposed judgment of the Academy, proceed rather from a resentful than a submissive spirit. He thinks that the public will not be of the same mind as the Academy, and sums up his view of the play with this sentence: "*Le Cid* sera toujours beau, et gardera sa réputation d'être la plus belle pièce qui ait paru sur le théâtre, jusques à ce qu'il en vienne une autre qui ne lasse point les spectateurs à la trentième fois."

The main fault found with *Le Cid* by these self-appointed critics lay in the nature of its subject, which was too romantic to be confined within the limits allowed by the rules of the classical stage. De Castro had placed an interval of perhaps a year and a half between the death of the count and the betrothal (and immediate wedding) of the lovers. Corneille reduced it to the period of twenty-four hours, and thus earned for his drama the epithets of "inhuman" and "improbable." It was his anxiety to observe the rules which had led him to this pass.

So in regard to the unity of place, the Spanish drama moved freely over a good share of northern Spain. Corneille compels his to remain within the walls of a single city. But the variety of his episodes does not admit of a strict unity of place, and so, in his desire to make concessions to the classicists, he invents a compromise by means of the fixed scenery in vogue at the time. He would have his characters come out of their respective abodes (indicated by the fixed, multiplex scenery) and stand in the centre of the stage. The audience was asked to consider them as still in their own apartments, or in the central space, according to the real locality of the events presented. Such a notion gave an excuse to Scudéry to complain of the indefiniteness of the setting, and compelled the Academy to admit that "*la bonne disposition du théâtre*" was somewhat impaired. Besides, the admission of the nobility to seats on the stage, as we learn from Mondory's letter to Balzac, must

have hindered the movements of the actors and restricted them to practically one spot. All these points of construction are discussed by Corneille in his "Examen" to the play. He admits the justice of the criticisms, while at the same time defending his theory. But it resulted in his renouncing his invention for unity of place, as he had renounced his compromise for unity of time — a day for each act (see *La Veuve* and *La Galerie du Palais*). His later plays transgressed but slightly the assumed rules of Aristotle.

Unity of action in *Le Cid* is broken in upon only by the Infanta's part, which is a survival of a more extended rôle in the Spanish original.

While, then, so far as the unities are concerned, it may be doubted whether the hostility of the critics influenced Corneille in his steady progress towards the full adoption of all three, it must be considered probable that in his choice of subjects he was seriously affected by their ill-will. The purpose he formed in writing *Le Cid* was evidently to put on the stage the representation of life in its wider relations, and picture the varied emotions of pride, honor, love, duty, which actuate man in his daily existence. To this end he would invent a stage where theatrical fiction would allow everything to happen. In other words he desired to confine a romantic theme having manifold bearings, both ideal and realistic in their nature, within the limits of a classical construction which has to deal with but one event and one emotion. The scheme was bound to break down in the long run, whatever the reception it might have been accorded in exceptional instances. An untrammelled theatre was necessary to so broad a design. Twenty-four hours are too short for more than one great crisis, while a single locality, however indefinite and conventional, cannot suffice for many and varied episodes. So Corneille yielded to the inevitable, since he could not bring himself to antagonize his environment nor belie his previous record, and gave up for good the employment of general subjects. This much may