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El Capitán Veneno The Hispanic Series

PEDRO ANTONIO DE ALARCÓN

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El Capitán Veneno The Hispanic Series

Pedro Antonio de Alarcón

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EL CAPITÁN VENENO

POR

PEDRO ANTONIO DE ALARCÓN

EDITED BY

PERCY BENTLEY BURNET, A.M.

FORMERLY DIRECTOR OF FOREIGN LANGUAGES
MANUAL TRAINING HIGH SCHOOL
KANSAS CITY, MO.

WITH ORIGINAL DRAWINGS BY

ÁNGEL CABRERA LATORRE

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PREFACE

I. EXPLANATION AND ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The charming and popular story of _El Capitán Veneno_, the fire-eater, has been well edited several times, but, after using the text in classes many times, the present editor believes that there is still room for personal preferences as to what should be emphasized.

The logical text to follow was the 10th Rivadeneyra edition of 1913. But the edition was very faulty, many passages apparently having never been proofread at all. So I have corrected manifest errors by earlier editions. These changes are pointed out in the notes. The text is given entire. The vocabulary does not try to be more delicate and dainty than the author's own words; and several words have been given literally enough to show the real basis for their use, e.g. _muleta_, _mocosilla_, _resoplido_, _ramillete de dulces_. The students always have to ask about such words in class anyway.

There are exercises for Spanish, in Spanish and in English, based on the text, and not meant to be very much easier than the text. There are many questions in the exercises that can be answered by _Sí_ and _No_. In these the student should, in his answer, involve the words of the question, or repeat the question rapidly. Speed is useful and encourages the learner with confidence and satisfaction, for he can see his own improvement and measure it by the ease he acquires in utterance. A sentence that comes hard for the tongue is just the one to practice on for speed. It is gymnastics for the tongue and for the mind.

In the notes, as to what to comment on, I have been guided largely by my experience with classes that read the story.

In the accent marks and the alphabetical order of _ll_ and _rr_ I have followed the 14th edition of the Academy's dictionary, 1914.

I owe thanks to several persons for various help and interest: Miss Helen Greer, a former student of mine, worked on the vocabulary; my colleague F. L. Phillips, a seasoned Spanish scholar, gave me several helpful ideas; Principal E. L. C. Morse, of Chicago, a long-standing lover of Spanish and traveler in Spanish countries, made several suggestions that were useful; Professor Frank La Motte, of Milwaukee, helped with intense interest; and Dr. Homero Serís, of the University of Illinois, worked on the Spanish exercises and the vocabulary.

II. PEDRO ANTONIO DE ALARCÓN (1833-1891)

Our author began at fifteen writing for publication, and as a young man was already well known and popular. His great ambition at first was to write plays, and he tried a dozen without making any worth while. So nowadays the plays have all disappeared and are no longer offered for sale among his works. But in the plays he learned to make dialogue, and the novels are well filled with that variety of narration. His poems had a fate like that of the plays.

Alarcón's style is largely colored by his newspaper training in his earlier years. He is rapid, clever, often slangy, often frivolous, quotes Latin badly several times, likes the sensational, forgets and contradicts previous statements sometimes (just as Cervantes did), has an eye out for funny things. He became a great story-teller, entertaining, amusing, and enlightening. He often takes too much pains to make fiction look like exact truth (_para tomar como cierto

lo fingido_) and history.

DATES AND WORKS

Alarcón's birth 1833

Wrote first _El Descubrimiento y Paso del Cabo de Buena Esperanza_ 1848

El Final de Norma 1850

Editor of _El Látigo_ 1853

First drama, _El Hijo Pródigo_ 1857

First great success, _El Diario de un Testigo de la Guerra de África_, 2 vols. 1851

De Madrid a Nápoles, 2 vols. 1869

Alarcón was in politics 1863 to 1874

Appointed minister plenipotentiary to Norway and Sweden 1868

Short stories and novels appeared all through this period from 1864 to 1874

Poems 1870

La Alpujarra 1874

El Sombrero de Tres Picos 1874

El Escándalo 1875

Admitted to the Academy 1877

El Niño de la Bola	1880
La Pródiga	1881
El Capitán Veneno	1881
Alarcón's death	1891

III. EL CAPITÁN VENENO

The story here presented (_El Capitán Veneno_) and _El Sombrero de Tres Picos_ are now the most read of all of Alarcón's works. _El Diario de un Testigo de la Guerra de África_ brought the most fame and money, for at that time the excitement of the country over the war, and the patriotism of the nation, combined for Alarcón's good fortune.

Several of the scenes and characters had their prototypes in the _Diario_. General O'Donnell, Duke of Tetuán, was the original of the brusk, impulsive, but genuine captain. For Alarcón says of General O'Donnell: "The man, prosaic and cold, distrustful of lively imaginations, insensible to every art except the art of war, hostile to beautiful phrases... today spoke with the certain emphasis of the best taste; in the style of the old-time general, like Napoleon at the pyramids". Talking to the Moors through an interpreter, his words were "animated by his attitude, his gestures, his looks.... He questioned them with energy; orated and declaimed with eloquence; now he would rail at them, now flatter them. The Moors read in his face the sentiments that animated him, and the degree of truth, of shrewdness, of calculation, or of passion, that each phrase held".

Alarcón tells us that he wrote _El Capitán Veneno_ in eight days, no

more or less. There are several places in _Guzmán el Bueno_ that Alarcón must have had in mind, almost to the words: the hand on the heart; the pretended fury of the traitor infante Don Juan; the dying of joy; Guzmán's weeping as he embraces María; when the messenger hesitates, María cries out "_Murió_"; jewels as a ransom; the appeal "_salvad, amparad_"; and the "_ven, ven, ¿no es verdad que vendrás?_"

Alarcón seems to have cherished a rather contemptuous attitude towards the Jews and the poor. In many places in his stories he drops a mean word about the Jews and the Moors. The kindly story of the Moor in the Alhambra, Alarcón tells us himself was pure fiction, from beginning to end.

He tells us that his great models in writing were the great novelists of England and France. He was not unconscious of his fame and high standing; and even as a young man he often called himself "poet", "philosopher", "artist", and a "traveler".

IV. THE TIME OF THE STORY

The story is set in 1848, and the scene is in Madrid. At that period there was a revival of democratic impulses in the world, on account of what was going on in France. But the unorganized many-headed masses could make only a poor showing against the organized powers of even a contemptible government.

The hero and heroine of the story are of two hostile parties, a thing that often occurs in life as well as in literature.

War conditions are still (1920) so present to our minds that we can

easily imagine the situations called for in the story.

P. B. BURNET

KANSAS CITY, MO. June 24, 1920

EL CAPITÁN VENENO

AL SEÑOR D. MANUEL TAMAYO Y BAUS, secretario perpetuo de LA REAL ACADEMIA ESPAÑOLA.[1]

Mi muy querido Manuel:

Hace algunas semanas que, entreteniendo nuestros ocios caniculares en esta sosegada villa de Valdemoro, de donde ya vamos a regresar a la vecina corte,[2] hube de referirte la historia de EL CAPITÁN VENENO, tal y como vivía inédita en el archivo de mi imaginación; y recordarás que, muy prendado del asunto, me excitaste con vivas instancias[3] a que la escribiese, en la seguridad (fueron tus bondadosas palabras) de que me daría materia para una interesante obra. Ya está la obra escrita, y hasta impresa; y ahí te la envío.--Celebraré no haber defraudado tus esperanzas; y, por sí o por no, te la dedico estratégicamente, poniendo bajo el amparo de tu glorioso nombre, ya que no la forma literaria, el fondo, que tan bueno te pareció, de la historia de mi CAPITÁN VENENO.

Adiós, generoso hermano. Sabes cuánto te quiere y te admira tu afectísimo hermano menor,

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