

### *Spanish Poetry*

PÈRE BOUHOURS observes, that the Spanish poets display an extravagant imagination, which is by no means destitute of *esprit*—shall we say *wit*? but which evinces little taste or judgment.

Their verses are much in the style of our Cowley—trivial points, monstrous metaphors, and quaint conceits. It is evident that the Spanish poets imported this taste from the time of Marino in Italy; but the warmth of the Spanish climate appears to have redoubled it, and to have blown the kindled sparks of chimerical fancy to the heat of a Vulcanian forge.

Lopes de Vega, in describing an afflicted shepherdess, in one of his pastorals, who is represented weeping near the sea-side, says, “That the sea joyfully advances to gather her tears; and that, having enclosed them in shells, it converts them into pearls.”

“Y el mar como imbidioso  
A tierra por las lagrimas salia,  
Y alegre de cogerlas  
Las guarda en conchas, y convierte en perlas.”

Villegas addresses a stream—“Thou who runnest over sands of gold, with feet of silver,” more elegant than our Shakespeare’s “Thy silver skin laced with thy golden blood.” Villegas monstrously exclaims, “Touch my

ISAAC D’ISRAELI

breast, if you doubt the power of Lydia’s eyes—you will find it turned to ashes.” Again—“Thou art so great that thou canst only imitate thyself with thy own greatness;” much like our “None but himself can be his parallel.”

Gongora, whom the Spaniards once greatly admired, and distinguished by the epithet of *The wonderful*, is full of these points and conceits.

He imagines that a nightingale, who enchantingly varied her notes, and sang in different manners, had a hundred thousand other nightingales in her breast, which alternately sang through her throat—

“Con diferancia tal, con gracia tanta,  
A quel ruysenor llora, que sospecho  
Que tiene otros cien mil dentro del pecho  
Que alterna su dolor por su garganta,”

Of a young and beautiful lady he says, that she has but a few *years* of life, but many *ages* of beauty.

Muchos siglos de hermosura,  
En pocos anos de edad.

Many ages of beauty is a false thought, for beauty becomes not more beautiful from its age; it would be only a superannuated beauty. A face of two or three ages old could have but few charms.

CURIOSITIES OF LITERATURE

In one of his odes he addresses the River of Madrid by the title of the *Duke of Streams* and the *Viscount of Rivers*—

“Mançanares, Mançanares,  
Os que en todo el aguatismo,  
Estois *Duque* de Arroyos,  
Y *Visconde* de los Rios.”

He did not venture to call it a *Spanish grandee*, for, in fact, it is but a shallow and dirty stream; and as Quevedo wittily informs us, “Mançanares is reduced, during the summer season, to the melancholy condition of the wicked rich man, who asks for water in the depths of hell.”

Concerning this river a pleasant witticism is I recorded. Though so small, this stream in the time of a flood can spread itself over the neighbouring fields; for this reason Philip the Second built a bridge eleven hundred feet long!—A Spaniard passing it one day, when it was perfectly dry, observing this superb bridge, archly remarked, “That it would be proper that the bridge should be sold to purchase water.”—*Es menester, vender la puente, por comprar agua.*

The following elegant translation of a Spanish madrigal of the kind here criticised I found in a newspaper, but it is evidently by a master-hand.

ISAAC D'ISRAELI

On the green margin of the land,  
Where Guadalhorce winds his way,  
My lady lay:  
With golden key, Sleep's gentle hand  
Had closed her eyes so bright  
Her eyes, two suns of light—  
And bade his balmy dews  
Her rosy cheeks suffuse.  
The River God in slumber saw her laid:  
He raised his dripping head,  
With weeds o'erspread,  
Clad in his wat'ry robes approach'd the maid,  
And with cold kiss, like death,  
Drank the rich perfume of the maiden's breath.  
The maiden felt that icy kiss,  
*Her suns unclosed, their flame*  
Full and unclouded on th' intruder came.  
Amazed th' intruder felt  
*His frothy body melt,*  
And heard the radiance on his bosom hiss;  
And, forced in blind confusion to retire,  
*Leapt in the water to escape the fire.*

CURIOSITIES OF LITERATURE