

DON FRANCISCO DE QUEVEDO

**DRAMA EN CUATRO ACTOS
POR
EULOGIO FLORENTINO SANZ**

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PREFACE

The features of "Don Francisco de Quevedo" that led to its selection as a text for the use of students of the second or even first year are its historical background, its ease and purity of style, and the sustained interest of the plot. As regards the chief

character, Quevedo, he is in a large measure the embodiment of the whole literary spirit of the first half of the seventeenth century and at the same time the champion of political reform. The play is written in Castilian of such simplicity that it presents almost no syntactical difficulties, and at the same time embodies a useful vocabulary. The development of the plot, the struggle between Olivares and Quevedo, is thoroughly logical and is aided by scenes so intensely dramatic that they hold the interest of the reader at all times. Some of these scenes, so characteristic of even the best plays of the Romantic School, to-day seem to verge on the melodramatic. For this reason the student should be reminded that the heroic thunder of this kind of play was most acceptable to the theater-goers of the middle of the last century. A sense of humor, then, should temper any critical attitude on the part of those who may be inclined to take our play's shortcomings or exaggerations too seriously.

The fact that Florentino Sanz is comparatively unknown will justify the detailed Biographical Sketch.

The text is a careful reproduction of that of the first edition, Madrid, 1848, except, of course, for frequent corrections in punctuation. Only the important stage directions have been retained; others that in great profusion specify the facial expression and tone of voice of the actors have been rejected in many places as more cumbersome than useful.

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EULOGIO FLORENTINO SANZ

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

The name of Eulogio Florentino Sanz is little known outside of Spain, where for more than seventy years it has been closely

linked with his chief dramatic achievement, "Don Francisco de Quevedo," and with his translations from Heine. Now and then the plea that something be done toward bringing out an edition of his works has found expression but met with no response. To read his scattered verses it is necessary to search the pages of that wilderness of papers, dailies, weeklies, monthlies, and annuals, which appeared in Madrid between 1840 and 1870. Though we are told that he wrote much, it is none the less true that he published next to nothing. In 1848, at the age of twenty-seven he was freely spoken of as one of the most promising of his generation of poets and dramatists. Vanity and indolence at maturity prevented his fulfilling the promise.

His boyhood was spent in Arévalo in the province of Ávila, where he was born March 11, 1821. The village priest taught him Latin, and later he may have been a student at the University of Valladolid. Of the years that passed before he came to Madrid we know little besides a few anecdotes. According to one of these Sanz paid youthful court to the daughter of a glazier whose ruin was threatened by lack of business. The daughter told young Florentino of her father's difficulties in the course of an evening interview, whereupon the ambitious lover quickly organized a band of followers and broke all the windows in Arévalo.

Early in February of 1843 he was in Madrid, where he began to write for the newspapers. Two years later a few poems published in the *Semanario Pintoresco*, *El Heraldo*, and *La Risa* won him some recognition. He now identified himself with the group of romantic poets who held their meetings in the famous Café del Príncipe. His sonnet "La Discordia," published in the *Semanario Pintoresco*, February, 1843, furnishes indisputable evidence of his romantic tendencies. In it a waning

moon, fratricide, corpses, "infernally smiling," and an agonized mother provide all the thrills of romantic horror; but it may be wiser to pass over in silence such outbursts as this.

As a member of a circle which gathered in the Café del Recreo (1846) he lived in the very thick of romanticism. Its meetings are thus described:

At that time there existed in Madrid a club of literary fledglings. The majority of the young men who ten years later had won conspicuous places in the world of letters gathered there without knowing exactly why. The nucleus at the Café del Recreo had been formed by no one, nobody was formally presented, no one of our number had been a friend or schoolmate of any one of the others; the gathering was there *because it was there*, it existed *because it existed*. The company included besides Sanz himself the poets Mariano Cazorro, Antonio Trueba, Ventura Ruiz Aguilera, Antonio Hurtado, José Albuérne, Antonio Arnao, the journalist Eduardo Asquerino, the statesman Cánovas, and the dramatist Fernández y González.— José de Castro y Serrano, *Prólogo* (pp. ix-x) to "Obras de Francisco Zea," Madrid, 1858.

The movements and activities of Sanz in the literary world began to be chronicled in such papers as the *Fandango*, published by Wencelao Ayguals de Izco and Francisco Villegas. They speak of him as "our friend and collaborator." From them we learn that he was occupied in writing *semblanzas*, or portraits, of the most conspicuous literary lights of the hour. Though these *semblanzas* seem to have circulated in manuscript, they never were printed. Eduardo de Lustoñó declared^[1] that Sanz was always a presumptuous person and particularly so in 1845. Lustoñó wrote a squib, stupid enough to be sure, in which

he implied that the purpose of the *semblanzas* was to ridicule the pedants. Lustoñó enrolled him as private soldier in what he called his "Regiment of Men of Letters," but it was an unconscious tribute to the ability of Sanz to admit him even as a private in a regiment whose officers were: Colonel, Quintana; Majors, Hartzenbusch, Tassara; Captains, Bretón, Rivas; Lieutenants, Campoamor, Mesonero Romanos, and Frías,—all of whom have won enduring fame.

On the night of February 1, 1848, "Don Francisco de Quevedo" was presented in the Teatro del Príncipe. The distinguished actor and poet Don Julian Romea chose the occasion for a benefit performance. The play was an instant success. The number of the *Semanario Pintoresco* which followed the first performance printed a flattering review:

The drama "Don Francisco de Quevedo," presented at the Príncipe for the benefit of Don Julian Romea, has won for its author, Don Eulogio Florentino Sanz, a place of distinction among our dramatists. Success in portraying the personage from whom the piece takes its name, resourceful stagecraft, daring situations, and a versification now serious, now gay, frolicsome or sorrowful, but always agreeable, facile, and correct, these are the distinguishing features of the play with which Señor Sanz has made himself known to the theater-going public. Don Julian Romea gave an able interpretation of the part of Don Francisco de Quevedo, Señora Díaz was excellent as the Infanta Margarita. The rest of the cast contributed ably to the success of the drama.

This notice conveys some idea of the striking enthusiasm with which the piece was received.

In keeping with his literary predilections Sanz had already identified himself politically with the progressive liberal party.

In the years immediately preceding the overthrow of the Conservatives (1845) Sanz gave his services to the progressive liberal cause. In 1849 he was editor of *La Patria*, whose first number appeared on January 2. It announced a policy of political moderation, but its real purpose was the most strenuous opposition to the government of the reactionary conservatives. Sanz was generally believed to be editor-in-chief. Suddenly on the fourth of January he resigned^[2] with no explanation whatsoever to the subscribers. A little later he appeared on the staff of *La Víbora, periódico venenoso redactado por los peores literatos de España, bajo la dirección de nadie* ("The Viper, a venomous paper, edited by the worst scribblers in Spain, under the management of nobody"). The censorship was as crushing as in the days of Larra. Later, in September, *La Patria* announced another periodical, *La Sátira*, adding that it was to be under the direction of the editors of the short-lived *Víbora*. This second attempt also met with disaster. Again in June of 1851 Sanz resigned from another paper, *El Mundo Nuevo*.

In 1854 the tide turned. The revolution of July found him writing his second play, "Los Achaques de la Vejez."^[3] The conclusion of the last act had to be postponed while Sanz was taking part in the popular rising which he had so earnestly sought. While he was waiting for his share of the rewards of victory the play was produced at the Príncipe on the evening of October 13. On the fourteenth there appeared in *La Iberia* the following notice, written probably by his devoted friend Pedro Calvo Asensio:

Los Achaques de la Vejez. This notable comedy by the gifted and well-known author Don Eulogio Florentino Sanz was played last night with brilliant success. At the end of the second act the author was called upon the stage, and at the end of the play the enthusiasm of the audience grew to such extraordinary proportions that Sr. Sanz was again called upon to appear. However, we were denied the satisfaction of seeing him, as he had left the theater. The actors also were called before the curtain amidst tumultuous applause as a just reward for their signal success in the presentation of the play. The audience was as we had expected, large and select. Our conviction that the management may look forward to well-filled houses gives us great satisfaction.

The writing of this play was in a measure Sanz's answer to the challenge of his enemies and detractors to repeat the success of "Don Francisco de Quevedo." By this second triumph his fame and reputation were firmly established. This time the theme is a domestic one developed with even greater skill than that displayed in the earlier play. As might be expected, Act I, scene iv, contains a pessimistic and cynical allusion to the tangled politics that preceded the revolution.

By a royal order of November 11 Sanz was appointed secretary of the first class to the Spanish legation in Berlin.^[4] This appointment he probably owed to the good offices of his friend Nicomedes Pastor Díaz. Sanz took possession of his new post on the ninth of January, 1855, after having made the journey from Madrid in the company of Gregorio Cruzada Villamil. In June he was granted four months' leave of absence on account of ill health due to the severity of the climate. In August he was made Commander of the Order of Charles III in recognition of

his distinguished service. His final resignation from the post was received in November of 1856. He left Berlin for Madrid on February 1, 1857.

His only poem surely written in Berlin is the "Epístola a Pedro."^[5] It is a tender tribute to the memory of the poet Enrique Gil, who had died in Berlin ten years before. Its verses are among the most delicately beautiful that Sanz ever wrote. The poem opens with an expression of the longing which Sanz feels for his beloved Spain, and above all for Madrid:

Pues recuerda la patria, a los reflejos
de su distante sol, el desterrado
como recuerdan su niñez los viejos.

He stands before the grave of Enrique Gil and mourns for the poet who died unwept in a foreign land. In deep sincerity of feeling no other poem of Sanz approaches the "Epístola." Fortunately it has been given to the public both in Menéndez y Pelayo's "Cien Mejores Poesías" and in "The Oxford Book of Spanish Verse."

These two years of residence in Berlin had a profound effect upon the temper of Sanz's later verse. It was only natural that his removal from the turmoil of life in Madrid, with its petty jealousies and quarrels, literary and political, should exercise a broadening and sobering influence upon his muse. After this date the flow of idle humorous verse ceased. Inspired chiefly by the exquisite delicacy of Heine's lyrics, he set himself to imitation and translation of his German model. It is not too much to say that all his published verse after this was deeply tinged with this side of Heine.

In the spring of 1857 he was in Madrid again, enjoying his prestige as a poet, diplomat, and political writer. His presence at a gathering of literary men in May to do honor to the memory of the great Quintana was an event.^[6] A week earlier his translation of fifteen of Heine's lyrics had appeared in the *Museo Universal* under the caption "Poesía Alemana, Canciones de Enrique Heine." What a grateful contrast they furnish to the undisciplined bursts of romantic thunder that he was writing only a few years before! Sanz had been completely won over to the intense refinement of emotion and diction of Heine. From this time on, the expression of gentle melancholy and spiritual sensitiveness dominated the few poems that he published.

The brief taste of diplomatic life which he had had seems to have put an end to any really creative activity. A tribute to the memory of the young poet Francisco Zea, written in May, 1858,^[7] contains what is really his farewell to a life of letters. Therein, after discussing the pessimistic statement of Larra that in Spain "No se lee porque no se escribe, y no se escribe porque no se lee," he declares that people in Spain are writing, but that no one is reading. It is not the fault of those who write, he continues, and waste the treasures of their youth in a fruitless struggle. In Spain one must write for pure love of letters, and unfortunately this is the most platonic of loves. There are few readers of literature in general, and of lyric poetry almost none. Here is the intrusion of the latter into the drama, where it is heard with pleasure by people, comfortably seated in stalls, who in the morning could not endure Fray Luis de León or Francisco de la Torre. His small stock of patience exhausted, Sanz turned to diplomatic life.

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