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**EL  
SOMBRERO DE TRES PICOS**

HISTORIA VERDADERA DE UN SUCEDIDO QUE ANDA  
EN  
ROMANCES ESCRITA AHORA TAL Y COMO PASÓ  
POR

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**D. PEDRO A. DE ALARCÓN**

Bachiller en Filosofía y Teología, etc, etc

*EDITED WITH INTRODUCTION, NOTES, AND VOCABULARY*

BY

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## PREFACE

The present edition of *El Sombrero de tres picos* is designed to make the book accessible as a text for use in college classes as early as the second or third semester of Spanish study. The plan of the edition needs no special comment. The editor has made the effort to include in the notes and the vocabulary explanation sufficient to cover all difficulties reasonably to be attributed to students who have done careful work in the elements of Spanish grammar, and the usual elementary reading. The numerous references in the notes are addressed more particularly to the teachers.

In the use of the vocabulary, it should be borne in mind that the latter is designed for this text alone, and is in no sense a dictionary. It may be said also that an effort has been made to exclude from the notes all puerilities, and the explanation of commonplaces, whether of history, grammar, or mythology.

Grateful acknowledgment is made here to the friends who have helped the editor in whatever way in the preparation of this book, and in especial to Professor De Haan of Bryn Mawr College; to Professor Caroline B. Bourland of Smith College, the editor's sister; to iv Professor William D. Briggs, of the Leland Stanford, Jr. University; to Professor Christian Gauss, of Princeton University; to the Rev. Gilbert P. Jennings, Rector of St. Agnes' Church in Cleveland, and to Don Adolfo Bonilla y San Martín, of Madrid; and lastly, and most of all, to the editor's friend and pupil, Mr. Gustav G. Laubscher, of Adelbert College, whose work on the vocabulary was more nearly collaboration than assistance.

B. P. B.

CLEVELAND, December, 1906.

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## INTRODUCTION

### I. Alarcón's Life

Pedro Antonio de Alarcón was born at Guadix in the province of Granada, the 10th of March 1833, the fourth of ten children of an old and noble family, whose wealth had been lost in the wars of the Napoleonic period and the

disorders that had followed. His father destined him for the bar, and after reaching the baccalaureate at the age of fourteen, at the *seminario* of Guadix, he went to Granada to begin his professional studies, only to be recalled by the *res angusta domi* to his home, where perforce he exchanged jurisprudence for theology, and began preparation for the priesthood.

The boy's heart was not in his professional studies, and his best efforts were given to other matters; he taught himself French and Italian, began to write, and formed the project of going to Madrid, to set up as a man of letters. His parents declined to support him in this ambition, but Alarcón persisted. Through Torcuato Tárrago, a young writer at that time living in Guadix, he was introduced to a Cadiz publisher, who undertook the issuing of a weekly journal, *El Eco de Occidente*, which was to appear at Cadiz and Granada, and whose literary redaction was to be entrusted to the two young men. The venture vi was successful. After three years' work the savings seemed sufficient, and on the 18th of January, 1853, Alarcón left home.

He went first to Cadiz, where he gave his attention to matters concerning the journal, and a month later he reached Madrid,—without introduction or friends, but with some little money and with a goodly sheaf of verses, notably an ambitious continuation of Espronceda's *Diablo Mundo*, all of which he burned, after much interviewing of publishers. In short, he did not get along at all at the capital, and when his money was gone and the husks were sour, he made his own the immemorial custom of the

prodigal, and went back to his father's house. A complete reconciliation followed his return. He had been drawn from military service: his father purchased his release, and gave him permission to live in Granada, where he renewed his connection with the *Eco de Occidente*. In Granada also he found agreeable literary society, and the year spent there was one of profit to himself and of success for his journal, in whose management he had an increasing influence and part.

His first mingling in politics was in 1854, when he took open and active part in the rebellion that culminated in the mutiny of Vicálvaro (the 30th of June), distinguishing himself by his noisy and militant radicalism, and gaining the ill-will of many of the elements whose favor, in his later life, he found it wise to win—the clergy, the army, the national militia. Before the end of the year he was in Madrid, where he became the editor of *El Látigo*, the most extreme of the anti-royalist periodicals. This connection vii was ended by a duel, and Alarcón gave up politics for the time, and retired to Segovia, to restore health broken by irregular living, and to write. *El Final de Norma* was the most ambitious work that dates from this time, with a very great number of short stories and miscellaneous articles published in various journals, all of which brought him a considerable reputation throughout Spain. In 1856 he visited Paris and "wrote up" the exposition of that year for the Spanish press. Towards the end of 1857 he made his appearance at the theatre of the Circo at Madrid, with his one play, *El Hijo Pródigo*. The *première* was riotously successful, but the critics were against the author, whose

personality seems to have been a large factor in the matter, and the piece was soon withdrawn. In 1859 Alarcón volunteered for the campaign in Morocco, and after doing excellent service, was honorably discharged in April, 1860, when he returned to Spain. The fruit of this military experience was the *Diario de un testigo de la Guerra de África*, which is of his best work. The book was exceedingly successful commercially, and the author's profits permitted him the journeying in France, Switzerland, and Italy, whose story is told in *De Madrid a Nápoles*, two volumes of fairly acute observation and superior literary worth. (August, 1860—February, 1861).

From this time until 1873 Alarcón was devoted to an active political life, into whose details we need not follow him. He was deputy from Guadix much of the time, and was prominent as a writer for the *Época*, then as now the first conservative newspaper of Spain, and later as one of the founders and editors of *La Política*. He had much viii success, and we are told that only feelings of personal delicacy stood between him and the holding of at least one ministerial portfolio. In 1866 he was one of the signers of a celebrated protest of the unionist deputies, and was dignified by being sent into exile for a time, and afterwards being forbidden to live in Madrid. In 1863 his father died, and in 1866 he was married in Granada to Doña Paulina Contreras y Reyes.

From 1873 until his death, July 18, 1891, he lived principally in Madrid, until 1888 taking a large part in literary life, and not without some mingling in matters public. In 1875, as one of the early supporters of the

Alfonsine restoration, he was made Councillor of State; and on December 15th of the same year he was elected to the Spanish Academy, in which he took his seat about a year later. His pen was very active. *El Sombrero de tres picos*, *El Escándalo*, *El Niño de la Bola*, *La Pródiga*, *El Capitán Veneno*, are from this final period, which was opened with *La Alpujarra*. He gave much time also to revising, selecting, and destroying, to which process we owe the definitive collection of works noticed below. In 1887 his powers began noticeably to fail. In 1888 there was a first hemiplegia—then other attacks followed in December 1889, and February, 1890, and the final one in July, 1891.

## II. Alarcón's Works

Alarcón's writings have been brought together in nineteen volumes, sixteen of which are of the well known *Colección de Escritores Castellanos*. There are three volumes of short stories, the *Novelas Cortas*; four longer novels, ix

*El Escándalo*, *La Pródiga*, *El Final de Norma*, *El Niño de la Bola*; two stories that are neither long nor short, *El Capitán Veneno* and *El Sombrero de tres picos*; one volume of popular sketches, *Cosas que fueron*; three volumes of travels, *Viajes por España*, one volume, and *De Madrid a Nápoles*, two; an historic-geographical study, *La Alpujarra*; one volume of essays, *Juicios Literarios*; and one volume of verse. The three volumes outside the collection contain the celebrated *Diario de un testigo de la Guerra de África*.

Of all this mass, only two works are really first-rate: *El Sombrero de tres picos* and *El Capitán Veneno*; of the

special merits of these we shall speak again presently. The diary of the African war has won praise, and so have the books of travel; an occasional short story is good; the longer novels have no permanent worth, the verse is insignificant.

The most ambitious of the novels, *El Escándalo*, was published in 1875. Its author, in his *Historia de mis libros*, included in the collected works in the volume with *El Capitán Veneno*, makes a defence of this book that is most illuminating as to the principles of criticism practiced by the Spanish critics of the day, and that gives us a clear sight of the literary conditions of the time. The artistic question does not seem to have been raised: the one asked is simply as to the author's attitude toward certain other matters, chiefly of religion; and it is on the correctness of these views that the book is to stand or fall. Alarcón in his defence, accepts the situation, and joins issue: and he does this with a willingness that lets us see x that his own mind could discover no impropriety in treating literature in that way.<sup>[1]</sup> Herein lies the explanation of many weaknesses in Alarcón's work, which, given his many good qualities, might else cause us to wonder.

Alarcón's best points are a very keen eye for a situation, thorough control of a language adequate to his matter, an excellent idea of the exigencies of style offered by his situations, and a keen sense of humor, which, however, occasionally goes to sleep or deserts. His weakness lies in the faulty idea of his task already pointed out, in a certain immaturity, a childish petulance that stays with him to the last, and in an utter inability to develop a character. He can picture one admirably, but he cannot make one grow;



and in general, he does not try it. The one place in which he has some measure of success in this not easy task is in Don Jorge of the *Capitán Veneno*, whose struggle is very prettily exhibited; but the great, the serious effort, Fabián Conde in *El Escándalo*, falls flat. His is a metempsychosis, not a development.

The Spanish language does not lend itself with much grace to the needs of the modern short story. Its leisurely diffuseness is a fair reflex of the mode of thought it represents; so Alarcón cannot, except within the four seas of Spain, be held a really good writer in this *genre*.<sup>[2]</sup> It is in the happy borderland between the long and the very xi short, that he has done his best. Finding himself for once—or for twice—with a literary task (quite unconsciously to himself, it is true) exactly fitted to his abilities, he has arrived, and succeeded. *El Capitán Veneno* and *El Sombrero de tres picos* are real works of art, for their author in them has shaken himself free of self-consciousness, forgotten to preach or to moralize, let ethics and politics alone and written without outward haste or inward restraint.

Alarcón's work in pure literature was beyond question much hampered by his political life, and by the false notions of the aims and ends of belles-lettres into which, as he grew older, the life of the times and his own disposition caused him to fall. The history of Spain of his lifetime is a nightmare. Whether, if he had lived in happier days, he would have done better work, is one of those literary questions that are good and pleasant to think and talk over, but unprofitable to write about. Still, the constructive psychologist should have great joy in Alarcón, should he

have the patience to read all his works, for the man reveals himself naked as do few; and it is most edifying to see the conservative academician of *El Escándalo* and *La Época* making his peace with the world and with heaven for the sins of the editor of *El Látigo*. Truly he seems to wish that we should know that he felt indeed that he had sinned much, and need make great haste.

### III. El Sombrero de Tres Picos

*El Sombrero de tres picos* was written and published in 1874. It made its first appearance on August 2, 9, 16th xii of that year, in numbers 23, 24, 25, of the *Revista Europea*, was issued in book form immediately, and has passed through thirteen editions. Alarcón has given two accounts of its genesis—one in the original form of the preface to the book, and the other in his *Historia de mis libros*. They are not mutually exclusive, though the second mentioned, which the author has allowed to stand, forgets much that is confided in the first.<sup>[3]</sup>

The success of the story was immediate and deserved. The pseudo-modest praise, "the least bad of my books," applied by Alarcón to *El Escándalo*, might be transferred and made positive here. The skill of construction, the exact sense of propriety that preserves every decency while yielding no shred of the interest, the really admirable dialogue, and the beautifully Spanish atmosphere of it all, make us wish that the author's judgment had led him oftener into these ways, where alone his desire fails to outrun xiii his performance. Alarcón has written sensational sermons—witness *El Escándalo*; psychological romance, with the

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