

**ANCIENT SPANISH  
BALLADS: HISTORICAL  
AND ROMANTIC**

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Ancient Spanish Ballads: Historical and Romantic by J. G. Lockhart

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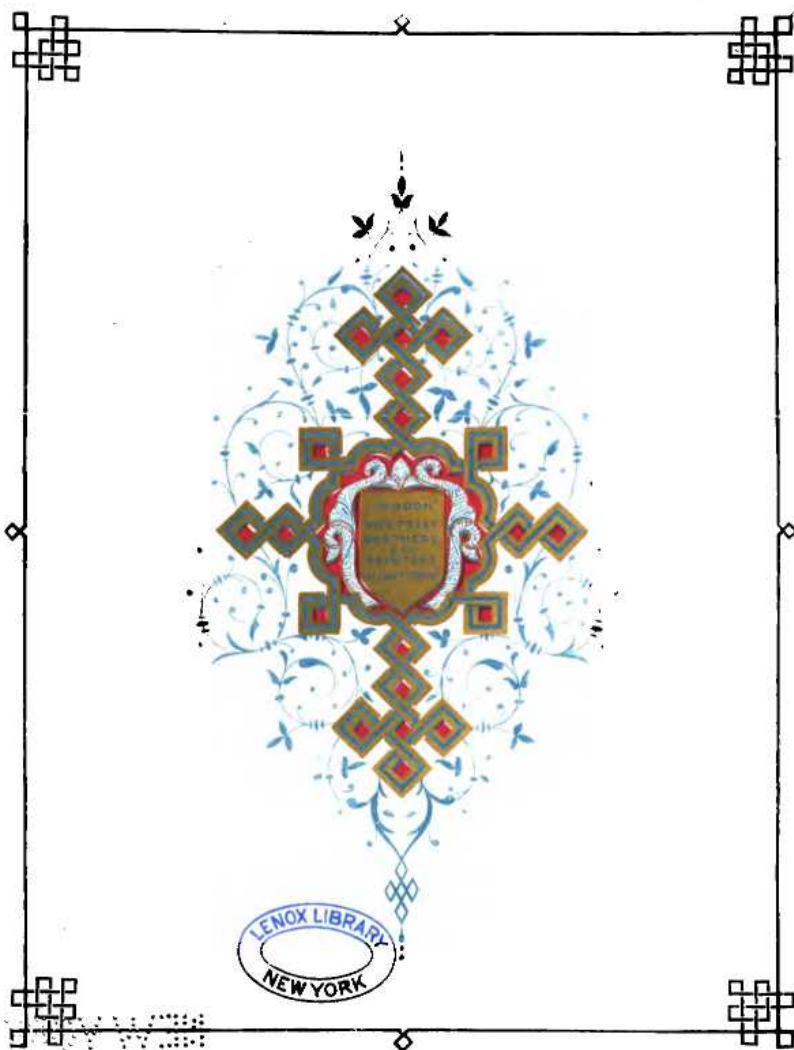
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## INTRODUCTION



THE intention of this Publication is to furnish the English reader with some notion of that old Spanish minstrelsy, which has been preserved in the different *Cancioneros* and *Romanceros* of the sixteenth century. That great mass of popular poetry has never yet received in its

own country the attention to which it is entitled. While hundreds of volumes have been written about authors who were, at the best, ingenious imitators of classical or Italian models, not one, of the least critical merit, has been bestowed upon those old and simpler poets who were contented with the native



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inspirations of Castilian pride. No Spanish Percy, or Ellis, or Ritson, has arisen to perform what no one but a Spaniard can entertain the smallest hope of achieving.

Mr. Bouterwek, in his excellent History of Spanish Literature (Book i., Sect. 1), complained that no attempt had ever been made even to arrange the old Spanish ballads in anything like chronological order. An ingenious countryman of his own, Mr. Depping, has since, in some measure, supplied this defect. He has arranged the historical ballads according to the chronology of the persons and events which they celebrate; for even this obvious matter had not been attended to by the original Spanish collectors; but he has modestly and judiciously refrained from attempting the chronological arrangement of them as *compositions*; feeling, of course, that no person can ever acquire such a delicate knowledge of a language not his own, as might enable him to distinguish, with accuracy, between the different shades of antiquity, — or even perhaps to draw, with certainty and precision, the broader line between that which is of genuine antiquity, and that which is mere modern imitation. By far the greater part of the following translations are from pieces which the reader will find in Mr. Depping's Collection, published at Leipsig in 1817.

It seems, therefore, in the present state of things, impossible to determine to what period the composition of the oldest Spanish ballads now extant ought to be referred. The first *Can-*

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*cionero*, that of Ferdinand de Castillo, was published so early as 1510. In it, a considerable number, both of the historical and of the romantic class of ballads, are included: and, as the title of the book itself bears "Obras de todos o de los mas principales *Trobadores* de España, *assi antiguos como modernos*," it is clear that at least a certain number of these pieces were considered as entitled to the appellation of "ancient," in the year 1510.

The *Cancionero de Romances*, published at Antwerp in 1555, and afterwards often reprinted under the name of *Romancero*, was the earliest collection that admitted nothing but ballads. The *Romancero Historiado* of Lucas Rodriguez, appeared at Alcala, in 1579; the Collection of Lorenzo de Sepulveda, at Antwerp, in 1566. The ballads of the *Cid* were first published in a collected form in 1615, by Escobar.

But there are not wanting circumstances which would seem to establish, for many of the Spanish ballads, a claim to antiquity much higher than is to be inferred from any of these dates. In the oldest edition of the *Cancionero General*, for example, there are several pieces which bear the name of *Don Juan Manuel*. If they were composed by the celebrated author of Count Lucanor (and it appears very unlikely that any person of less distinguished rank should have assumed that style without some addition or distinction), we must carry them back at least as far as the year 1362, when the Prince Don Juan Manuel



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died. But this is not all. The ballads bearing the name of that illustrious author are so far from appearing to be among the most ancient in the *Cancionero*, that even a very slight examination must be sufficient to establish exactly the reverse. The regularity and completeness of their rhymes alone are, in fact, quite enough to satisfy any one who is acquainted with the usual style of the *redondillas*, that the ballads of Don Juan Manuel are among the most modern in the whole collection.\*

But, indeed, whatever may be the age of the ballads now extant, that the Spaniards *had* ballads of the same general character, and on the same subjects, at a very early period of their national history, is quite certain. In the General Chronicle of Spain, which was compiled in the thirteenth century, at

\* A single stanza of one of them will be enough:—

“Gritando va el caballero publicando su gran mal,  
Vestidas ropas de luto, aforradas en sayal;  
Por los montes sin camino con dolor y suspirar,  
Llorando a pie descalço, jurando de no tornar.”

Compare this with such a ballad as—

“No te espantes, caballero, ni tengas *tamaña* grima;  
Hija soy del buen Rey y de la Reyna de Castilla.”

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the command of Alphonso the Wise, allusions are perpetually made to the popular songs of the Minstrels, or *Joglars*. Now, it is evident that the phraseology of compositions handed down orally from one generation to another, must have undergone, in the course of time, a great many alterations; yet, in point of fact, the language of by far the greater part of the Historical Ballads in the *Romancero*, does appear to carry the stamp of an antiquity quite as remote as that used by the compilers of the General Chronicle themselves. Nay, some of those very expressions from which Mr. Southey would seem to infer that the CHRONICLE OF THE Cid is a more ancient composition than the GENERAL CHRONICLE OF SPAIN (which last was written before 1384), are quite of common occurrence in these same ballads, which Mr. Southey considers as of comparatively modern origin.\*

All this, however, is a controversy in which few English readers can be expected to take much interest. And, besides, even granting that the Spanish ballads were composed but a short time before the first *Cancioneros* were published, it would still be certain that they form by far the oldest, as well as largest, collection of popular poetry, properly so called, that is to be found in the literature of any European nation what-

\* See the Introduction to Mr. Southey's Chronicle of the Cid, p. v.—(Note.)

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ever. Had there been published at London, in the reign of our Henry VIII., a vast collection of English ballads about the wars of the Plantagenets, what illustration and annotation would not that collection have received long ere now!

How the old Spaniards should have come to be so much more wealthy in this sort of possession than any of their neighbours, it is not very easy to say. They had their taste for warlike song in common with all the other members of the great Gothic family; and they had a fine climate, affording, of course, more leisure for amusement than could have been enjoyed beneath the rougher sky of the north. The flexibility of their beautiful language, and the extreme simplicity of the versification adopted in their ballads, must, no doubt, have lightened the labour, and may have consequently increased the number of their professional minstrels.

To tell some well-known story of love or heroism, in stanzas of four octosyllabic lines, the second and the fourth terminating in the same rhyme, or in what the musical accompaniment could make to have *some appearance of being the same*,—this was all the art of the Spanish *coplero*, in its most perfect state, ever aspired to. But a line of seven or of six syllables was admitted whenever that suited the *maker* better than one of eight: the stanza itself varied from four to six lines, with equal ease; and, as for the matter of rhyme, it was quite sufficient that the two corresponding syllables contained the same