

**THE MARQUIS DE  
MORANTE: HIS LIBRARY  
AND ITS CATALOGUE**

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The marquis de Morante: his library and its catalogue by Richard Copley Christie

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**RICHARD COPLEY CHRISTIE**

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BY RICHARD COPLEY CHRISTIE.

ON the thirteenth of June, 1868, there died at Madrid the most eminent bibliophile that Spain has produced—one of the very few Spaniards worthy of the name of a bibliophile—the collector of by far the most extensive private library that has ever been formed in the Peninsula, or that has anywhere been collected in the nineteenth century. The name of Don Joachim Gomez de la Cortina, Marques de Morante, is all but unknown on this side the Channel. The British Museum and the Bodleian indeed each possess the nine volumes of his catalogue, but I doubt whether any other complete copy, except my own, exists in England; and although the library has now been disposed of by auction, and many of the rarer volumes are included in the treasures of the British Museum, yet the sales neither had the pecuniary success nor attracted the attention which the collection certainly deserved. But a library of one hundred and twenty thousand volumes—the great majority in Latin (though with numerous books in Greek, Italian, French, and Spanish), which included many *Editiones Principes* of Greek and Latin classics, books printed on vellum, rare productions of the early Paris press, books in the richest

and most beautiful bindings, ancient and modern, and from the libraries of the most distinguished amateurs—may be thought not unworthy of attention at a time when the sales of the Sunderland and Beckford collections have been received with so much enthusiasm,\* and the books themselves have been so keenly contended for, and have fetched such enormous prices.

It was not until about the year 1840 that the eminent booksellers in Paris who particularly devoted themselves to the sale of fine and rare books, and to compiling the catalogues for the great sales by auction, Techener, Potier, Merlin, and others, began to learn, and to learn with no little surprise, that Africa no longer commenced at the Pyrenees, but that a book collector existed in Spain; and soon afterwards the Paris binders whose artistic productions have so enormously enhanced the value of the books to which they have devoted their labours and their talents, Capé, Thouvenin, Bauzonnet, and Duru, began to receive books to be richly bound for, and stamped with the arms and monograms of the same amateur. But it was not until the first volume of the Marquis de Morante's catalogue appeared in print, in 1854, that his name was known except to a few booksellers and binders, and it was an article in the *Bulletin du Bibliophile*, in 1862, by G. Brunet, on the completion of the eighth volume of the catalogue, that first introduced the marquis generally to the knowledge of the French collectors and men of letters; and as no bibliophile had been heard of in Spain since the death of Don Vincente Salva of Valencia, the existence of such a library as that of the Marquis de Morante caused no little interest.

"I remember," writes the bibliophile Jacob (Paul Lacroix),

\* Enthusiasm for the *books*, but contempt and disgust for the meanness or extravagance which has led the inheritors of great names to regard their ancestral treasures of art and literature merely as a means of acquiring money.

in the interesting note prefixed to the first sale catalogue of the collection, "that one day I met Motteley, the model bibliophile, coming out of the *atelier* of his fetish the binder Duru. He was pensive, full of care and anxiety. 'I have just seen,' he said, 'a collection of astonishing bindings on which the incomparable Duru is lavishing all his marvellous imagination and genius, but I have not yet been able to discover the name of their fortunate possessor. I admire while I execrate them, for they have caused our friend Duru to delay the execution of some of mine. There is only Monseigneur the Duc d'Aumale to whom Duru would sacrifice me in this way; and, indeed, if it were any one else, I should never forgive him. No one but a "past master" in book collecting would order such bindings, and it is only a prince who could pay for them.' The bindings were for the Marquis de Morante. When Motteley was informed of this he cried out: 'At length Spain possesses a bibliophile.'

Don Joachim Gomez de la Cortina was born in Mexico on the 6th of September, 1808. He was the third son of Don Vincente Gomez de la Cortina, a member of a noble Spanish family of the province of Santander, whither he returned, on the revolt of Mexico from the Spanish crown. In right of his wife, Don Vincente was Count de la Cortina. Don Joachim passed with distinction through the University of Alcala, and, after taking the degree of Doctor *utrius que juris*, received the appointment of Professor of Canon Law in that University; and on the transfer of the University of Alcala to Madrid, in 1840, though only thirty-two years of age, he was nominated Rector of that great institution, an office which he held at this time for only two years, the death of his father in 1842 having obliged him to proceed to Mexico in order to arrange his family affairs. On his return to Spain, in 1844, he was appointed Supernumerary Judge of the Court of Appeal of Madrid; in 1847 he

received the title of Marquis de Morante, and shortly afterwards the Grand Crosses of Charles the Third and Isabella the Catholic, and was made a Knight of the military Order of Santiago de Compostella. From 1851 to 1853 he held for the second time the office of Rector of the University of Madrid, which he vacated upon being made a member of the Supreme Tribunal of Justice. In 1859 he was raised to the dignity of Senator. Señor F. A. Barbieri—no less distinguished as a musical composer than as an enthusiastic bibliophile, from whose biographical notice of the Marquis de Morante, prefixed to the sale catalogue of 1872, the foregoing details are taken—informs us that the marquis always refused to receive the income attached to the various offices which he held, in some instances renouncing them in favour of the State, in others assigning them for the benefit of the poor.

Some time before his death he resigned all his offices, in order to give himself up exclusively to his library and his studies. From a very early age he had devoted himself with ardour to the collection of books, and when a student at the University of Alcala, had laid the foundations of his great library, and had employed all that he could spare from his allowance in the purchase of books. His income for many years before his death was about £5,000 per annum, two-thirds of which he spent on his library.

Although the Marquis de Morante filled from time to time so many important posts, his affections were wholly with his books, and he never willingly left his library; business and duty alone took him beyond its walls. He never travelled except from necessity; twice only he visited Paris, once on his way to Mexico in 1842, and again in 1848. London he merely passed through once on his Mexican journey, and from the time that he resigned his public offices it was only on very rare occasions that he went out of his house. His



library was placed in three magnificent halls, paved with marble, which he had built for the purpose. There from morning till night the marquis might be found, wearing a short jacket of coarse ticking, with a pair of old slippers on his feet. This dress he found the most convenient, and it was never changed. Visitors would generally find him at the top of a lofty ladder, like Dominic Sampson, partly arranging, partly reading his books, for it must not be supposed that the marquis was a mere collector; he was an excellent Latin scholar, and his main aim and object was to collect all the editions of the Latin classics and all books bearing upon Latin philology and criticism. Latin was the language which he always desired to speak; and his chief amusement, and indeed the only one in which he indulged in the later years of his life, was to entertain in the evening a few friends for the purpose of discussing in Latin philological and literary subjects. Yet these discussions, we may suppose, would be more entertaining to him than to his friends. Accustomed in all that part of his life which was not passed in his library to act either as a professor or as a judge, believing thoroughly in his own infallibility and in his own good fortune, he could not bear the slightest opposition, and a contradiction persisted in, involved the disgrace of the contradictor. He was so tenacious in his opinions that on several occasions, Señor Barbieri tells us, having cited as an authority a text, which on being referred to turned out exactly the contrary of what he had stated, he preferred to alter it as an error, rather than to admit that he was wrong. He never asked advice, and when it was offered never took it. Punctually as the clock struck nine, however interesting might be the conversation it sharply closed, and the guests hastened to take their leave.

Yet notwithstanding all this he was a man of solid learning if not of much judgment, and his *Etymological Dictionary of the Latin and Spanish Languages*, whatever may be its abso-

lute merits, certainly must take a high place amongst the books of Latin scholarship which the Peninsula has produced. Besides this book, his only literary productions, with the exception of his catalogue and its numerous dissertations, were a few unimportant philological and literary tracts.

His habits, as may be supposed, were of the simplest. Caring for money only for the purpose of buying books or of relieving the poor (for of the third of his income which he devoted to his personal wants a large portion went in charity), he was yet most methodical in his accounts, and finding on one occasion that his laundress had made a mistake of an *ochavo* (rather less than a farthing), he apostrophized her in most severe and harsh terms on the subject of the error, but presented her at the same time with a twenty-franc piece, to show his approval of her skilful laundry work. His servants were numerous, and he was a most kind master, leaving pensions by his will to each of his domestics, and to his cook the handsome income of eight francs per day. Yet her labours cannot have been very arduous, for the marquis ate the simplest food, drank with it a very little wine, never taking tea, coffee, or spirits, and neither smoking nor taking snuff. He seems to have been a good deal bored by his official duties as a judge, for whenever he sat in Court a volume of Horace or Virgil would be seen peeping from his pocket ready to be taken out at any moment of leisure, or possibly during the too long speech of a tedious advocate. Theatres and public amusements were entire strangers to him; sometimes he indulged in a game at cards with a few intimates, and he possessed no mean skill at *tresillo* and *revesino*. But at cards, as in discussion, he could not bear to lose, being unable to understand either that his skill could be surpassed or that his good fortune could fail.

During the latter part of his life he was deaf, irritable, and with a perpetual cold in the head, caused by passing his

whole time in the cold galleries of his library. He amused himself, according as any of his friends pleased or displeased him, by making fresh codicils to his will, adding or omitting their respective names. Yet he was by no means ungenial, and took pleasure in relating to his friends various incidents in his life, but absolutely refusing to assign dates or to give any information which would allow of the possibility of his life being written. Nor would he ever allow his portrait to be taken. He was very little, very thin, with prominent cheek bones, a dark complexion, and very bright eyes. The Marquis de Morante died from the effects of a fall from a ladder in his library. His body was embalmed, and then, placed in a magnificent bronze sarcophagus which he had himself caused to be prepared for its reception, was buried in the church of which his father had been the founder, at Salazar, in the province of Santander.

The library of the Marquis de Morante consisted at the time of his death of 21,021 articles, comprising, according to M. Paul Lacroix, more than 120,000 volumes. First and foremost came the editions of the classics, and specially of the Latin classics. There were *Editiones Principes*, among them those of Cicero de Oratore, of Quintus Curtius (now in my possession), Valerius Maximus, Claudian, Orosius; other still rarer editions, the Livy of Udalric Gallus of 1469, the Martial of 1473; many other *incunabula*, including a large paper copy of the *Bible* printed at Naples by Moravus in 1476. Of editions and translations of, and dissertations on Horace, we find no less than 545; there are 117 editions of Sallust, 169 of Virgil, 93 of Terence, 89 of Ovid, 76 of Tacitus, 73 of Quintus Curtius. These figures will give some idea of the extent of the collection of Latin classics. The commentators and the critics are even more numerous. I know of no library except the Sunderland which is so rich in those of the sixteenth century. After