

*A Truthtelling Manual
and the
Art of Worldly Wisdom*

ORACULO
MANVAL, Y ARTE
DE PRVDENCIA.

SACADA DE LOS APO
rismos que se disciuen en las
obras de Lorenzo Gra-
cian.

PUBLICADA DON VI-
cencion, Juan de Lañanosa,
y de *Don Alonso de la Cruz*
Y la dedica.

AL EXCELENTISSIMO
Señor Don Luis Mendez
de Haro.

Con licencia, en Madrid, por
Maria de Quiñones,
año de 1613.

A Truthtelling Manual and the Art of Worldly Wisdom

*being a collection of the
aphorisms which appear in the works
of*

BALTASAR GRACIAN

*of the Company of Jesus, and Reader in
Holy Scripture in the College of Tarragona
immediately translated for the
understanding from a 1653 Spanish text*

by

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a second and revised version

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To the memory of

EDMUND MICHAEL BAEHR

***“for a reader is in no danger where
the man of discernment has discovered
a safe port. So it seems to me.”***

***from the seal of approval of Father Alonso Muñoz
of Otalora of the Lesser Clergy, censor of the
Supreme Tribunal of the Inquisition.***

To the Reader

To the just no laws, to the wise no counsel, yet none has known so much that it sufficed him. You need both to thank and to forgive me—that I entitle this epitome of life's rules an Oracle, for such it is in its judgments, and in its conciseness. There is here offered you in one happy volume all the twelve of Gracian, each so cherished that his MAN OF DISCERNMENT had hardly appeared in Spain, before it was issued in France, translated into her tongue, and printed at her court. May this volume serve as the menu card of reason at the feast of the intellectuals, and thus as a register of the choice morsels being served in all the other works, to the end that their genial wisdom may be enjoyed more widely.

D VINCENCIO IUAN DE LASTANOSA

Introduction

GRACIAN wings across some fifty odd years I
of history like the flight of a Mother
Carey's chicken. Out of a gray obscurity,
he flashes into the visible sky—black, swift,
unafraid, screaming his song. An international
book of knowledge has it that he appeared “to-
ward the end of the 16th century”; painful
German research debates 1601; the Spaniards
themselves, sure of what is of no importance
anyway, dogmatize on 1604. None seems to know
the month of his birth or the day, January eighth
being a moment derived by calculation.

Calatayud is given as his birthplace, though
Belmonte, a village near there, has become
official. At eighteen Gracian became a member
of the Society of Jesus and from that time on he
was what we might call today, a university man.
The humanities, scripture, theology and philoso-
phy are mentioned as the subjects of his teaching,
and, for most of his life, the Jesuit College in
Tarragona was the place of his labors. How well
he knew his subjects may be deduced from his
writings. A goodly number of them must have
adapted themselves to the times, his Government,
his Order and the Church, for they brought him
no trouble, no distinction and are forgotten.

Those that plagued him were some seven volumes which in the main were salvaged, edited and published by his friend Don Vincencio Juan de Lastanosa "without the permission of Gracian but not without his consent" as the commentators have it. Their titles are EL HEROE (THE MAN OF DISTINCTION), EL POLITICO DON FERNANDO EL CATOLICO (THE POLITIC FERNANDO), AGUDEZA Y ARTE DE INGENIO (WIT AND WAY), EL DISCRETO (THE MAN OF DISCERNMENT), and EL CRITICON (THE MONITOR). The first of these is said to have appeared in 1630, certainly not later than 1637. Gracian was then in his twenties or still early thirties. The rest filled up a succeeding score of years, THE MONITOR weaving through Gracian's last ten. This three-volume work (which might better perhaps be entitled THE CENSOR or A WOULD-BE CRITIC) is easily likened to Bunyan's PILGRIM'S PROGRESS which it antedates some thirty or forty years. Its first part (1650) is for "the spring of childhood and the summer of youth," and the second (1653) for "the autumn of adult manhood." The appearance of the latter is emphasized because it birthed Gracian's earthly difficulties. On its account he was warned not to write further. A third part, nevertheless, made the light of day in the same year "for the winter of

old age.” But vejez connotes also senility, peevishness and decay. At any rate, Mother Carey’s chicken—never known to fly inland—through wind and circumstance was driven there. He failed to continue as rector of his Jesuit College, the chair of Scripture was taken from him, and he was ordered into the provinces. The Provost General wrote to the Provincial in Aragon: “Watch him, keep him in sight, at unexpected moments look into his cell and his papers and allow him nothing under lock and key therein.” While in this state he died (December sixth, 1658) in the village of Tarazona in the province of Zaragoza, far from the place of his birth and still farther removed from the province of Tarragona and the place of his life’s labor.

THE MONITOR is an allegory, in which Critico and Andrenio wander over the earth in search of happiness. Up the hill of life, torn by conflicting desires, they encounter falsehood and justice, the vulgar and the princely, are enchanted by sham, get into France by use of a golden club, engage in discourse with all the philosophers of the world, seek virtue, encounter envy and, toward the end, disease and death. They discover immortality, but as to the rest, including happiness, the reader is left in doubt

unless he, too, is willing to travel the road of virtue and of courage.

It is easy to imagine that Gracian was simply too sharp for his time, or for succeeding times, as Aristophanes or Doctor Swift or Voltaire, and in the same fashion. A thinker, a wit, a pen like a rapier—and the combination could not mean less than a world in arms against it. The Provincial and the General of the Order were, after all, only Gracian's employers and did they not, as school superintendents, or holier men, have to meet a protesting public? Just what should a good Christian do about a brother who in the same breath advises youth to devote its study to Plato and the Scriptures, and who makes Latin philosophers and saints to wander in the same garden? What can be the vote of a surging democracy which an adversary pictures as bulls, wolves, foxes and serpents? What must the politician think of Fortune whose arms are not her own but those of the Church and the State? What have the censors of books to say when themselves brought upon the carpet; and what becomes of Christian doctrine when great men—and by indirection no others—are alone found to be immortal?

The ORACULO MANUAL Y ARTE DE PRUDENCIA that is here translated is not designated as the

eighth of Gracian's volumes because it was created out of the rest. More, however, appears in the ORACULO than can be traced back to the enumerated works of the master. New paragraphs and new ideas evolve. Credit for them must perhaps be given to Lastanosa who, while again appearing as Gracian's publisher, may well have been in this volume as in the earlier, much of a Boswell also. His address to the reader seems to prove this, for its brevity, its form and its total spirit are either tintured by Gracian—or else much of Gracian must have been tintured by him. In this paragraph Lastanosa counts the works of his friend as twelve; what became of the missing five is lost in the clouds of history. If, perchance, they existed as manuscripts, nothing is left of them now, for not even their titles, except in two instances, have come down to us.

There is another volume by Gracian—his last (1655), and written apparently in the dark year preceding his banishment into the provinces—which in content bears no relation to the already cited texts. It is his EL COMULGADOR (THE COMMUNION RAIL), a collection of "divers meditations for those about to take Holy Communion, to enable them to prepare themselves to receive it and to obtain grace." It is from the pen of the

Father Baltasar Gracian while all the rest are credited to one Lorenzo Gracian, for whom there is no birth record. Baltasar is, therefore, the true praenomen of our Gracian, the other being a cloak. The key to the mystery is contained in the dedicatory and introductory notes to the Meditations. The volume is inscribed to Elvira Ponce de Leon, the Marquesa de Valdueza, to whom the author refers for her previous interest in his EL HEROE, his EL DISCRETO and the ORACULO; while in the note to the reader appear these significant words: "Of the various books of which I have been made the father, this alone do I recognize as mine and call legitimate, issuing this time from my heart more than from my mind."

The estimates of Gracian as man or philosopher or writer run from the extremes of praise to the extremes of condemnation. His prose is the worst or the best in Spanish; his philosophy is commonplace or the renascence of pessimism; he was a shallow man of his times or an earnest student of the ways of getting heaven tied to earth. Himself, he praises the golden mean and that perhaps best characterizes him. The ORACULO is not food for babes and perhaps not philosophy for sages. But it is good spice—even though coca leaves may not be eaten for lettuce nor spirit be drunk raw.

Of the complete “works” of Gracian that have **II**
come down to us, the *ORACULO MANUAL Y ARTE DE PRUDENCIA* is that collection of three hundred paragraphs excerpted therefrom which his friend and editor Don Vincencio Juan de Lastanosa published for him. Issued late in the life of Gracian they represent the very heart of the man and, polished as they must have been by time and labor, the jewels of his soul. The *ORACULO* has been translated so often and into so many different languages that its reissue in English might seem to demand apology. And yet this is hardly so, for, frankly stated, all the translations (with the exception of Schopenhauer’s into German) are so far removed from the Spanish original that simple justice to a man who was, would prove excuse enough for any new trial. Almost every translation of Gracian is but a translation from another translation—a matter carried to such ridiculous lengths that one of the German texts is translated from the Italian, itself translated from a French text which, corrupted in the extreme, derives from the Spanish; or else the translation comes out so distorted through the omissions, the emendations or the freightings of theological and scho-

lastic bias that every semblance to the original picture is lost.

The pages that follow are a straightforward attempt to express in English the thoughts of the ORACULO. In the original, its three hundred paragraphs are not numbered, not emphasized in their first phrases and carry no notes. Numbers and italics appear in the first (French) translations and have been carried over into nearly all the rest. Only the numbers are continued in this. The notes appear early in the body of the translated texts or as ever-growing appendices to every page. They do nothing but mar the sequence of Gracian's own mental flow. They have, therefore, been omitted, thus to make it easier for the reader to discover for himself what was the merit of Gracian. The punctuation follows the original which though differing from that of the modern grammarian is perfectly clear. I have made every effort to hold to the word, to that style of Gracian which made famous a whole epoch of Spanish literature, and to the spirit of this thinker, thus attempting that impossible of the French wit who believes that translations are, like women, if true, rarely beautiful, and if beautiful, rarely true.

The apostrophes of Gracian are clipped, almost stenographic. They will not as such make

appeal to a swift-reading public. But even by the slower-minded, the volume though small, cannot be read through at a sitting. And his words are barbed—at once to goad or to punish.

A Truthtelling Manual

