

LIFE OF CERVANTES

ALTHOUGH Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra was not only the brightest genius of his age and country, but a man of active life and open manners, and engaged personally in many interesting transactions of his time, there are, nevertheless, few distinguished men of letters who have left behind them more scanty materials of biography. His literary reputation was not of the highest order till *Don Quixote* made it so; and ere then he had outlived the friends and companions of his youthful adventures, and withdrawn into a life of comparative privacy and retirement. In the age immediately succeeding his own, abundant exertions were made to discover the scattered and faded traces of his career; but with what very indifferent success is well known to all acquainted with the literary history of Spain. More recently, the life of Cervantes has been elaborately written, both by the best of his commentators, Don Juan Pellicer, and by Don Vincente de los Rios, editor of the Spanish Academy's superb edition of *Don Quixote*; but neither of these has, after all, been able to add much to the original naked outline which guided their researches.

Cervantes was by birth a gentleman, being descended from an ancient family, originally of Galicia,

many branches of which were, at the beginning of the sixteenth century, honourably settled in Toledo, Seville, and Alcarria. Rodrigo de Cervantes, his father, seems to have resided, for the most part, at Alcala de Henares, where, thirty years before the birth of his son, the second University of Spain was founded by the munificent Cardinal Ximenes. His mother, Donna Leonora de Corteñas, was also a lady of gentle birth. The parish register shows that he was baptized on the 9th of October 1547.

His parents, whose circumstances were the reverse of affluent, designed their son for one of the learned professions; and being most probably of opinion that his education would proceed better were it conducted at some distance from their own residence, they sent him early to Madrid, where he spent several years under the direction of a philologer and theologian (famous in his day), by name Juan Lopez de Hoyos. This erudite person superintended, early in 1569, the publication of certain academical *Lectures*, on occasion of the death of the queen; and, among the rest, there appear an elegy and a ballad, both written, as the editor expresses it, by his "dear and beloved disciple Miguel de Cervantes." Doctor Lopez de Hoyos seems to have been in the custom of putting forth, now and then, little volumes of poetical miscellanies, chiefly composed by himself; and we have Cervantes' own authority* for the fact, that the Doctor's "dear disciple" contributed to these publications *Filena*, a

* In the *Viage de Parnasso*.

pastoral poem of some length, besides a great variety of sonnets, canzonets, ballads, and other juvenile essays of versification.

These attempts, in themselves sufficiently trifling, had probably excited some little attention—for Cervantes, in the summer of 1569, accompanied the Cardinal Julio Aquaviva from Madrid to Rome, where he resided for more than twelve months as chamberlain to his eminence. This situation which, according to the manners of those days, would have been coveted by persons much his superiors both in birth and in fortune, may in reality have been serviceable to the development of young Cervantes' genius, as affording him early and easy introduction to the company both of the polite and of the learned; for among the first of both of these classes the Cardinal Aquaviva lived. But the uniformity and stately repose of a great ecclesiastic's establishment was probably little suited to the inclinations of the young and ardent Spaniard, for he seems to have embraced without hesitation the first opportunity of quitting the cardinal's mansion for scenes of a more stirring character.

On the 29th of May 1571, there was signed at Rome the famous treaty between Philip II., the Papal See, and the Venetian Senate, in consequence of which the naval forces of those three powers were immediately combined into one fleet, for the purpose of checking the progress of the Turkish navies in the Mediterranean. Don Juan of Austria, natural son of Charles V. and brother to the reigning King of Spain,

was entrusted with the supreme command of the Christian armament, and the young gentlemen both of Spain and Italy flocked in multitudes to act as volunteers under his already famous standard. Cervantes quitted Rome amidst the first enthusiasm of the universal preparation; and having enlisted under Colonna, the general of the Papal galleys, joined with him the fleet of Don Juan ere it commenced the cruise which terminated in the battle of Lepanto. He was present on that eventful day; and, as he himself says (in the preface to the *Second Part of Don Quixote*), considered the loss of his left hand (which was struck off in the course of the action by a blow of a scymitar), as a "trifling price to pay for the honour of partaking in the first great action in which the naval supremacy of the Ottoman was successfully disputed by Christian arms." The season being far advanced, the victorious fleet withdrew immediately after this action to Messina, where Cervantes' wound compelled him to spend some weeks in the hospital. Although his hand had been cut off close by the wrist, the whole of that arm remained ever after quite stiff and useless—partly, it is most probable, in consequence of the unskilfulness of the surgeons who attended on him.

This very serious misfortune did not, however, extinguish his military ardour, for he sailed with the same fleet in the following summer, and was present at several descents on the coast of the Morea—one of which he has described in *Don Quixote* in the person of the Captain De Viedma. At the end of 1572,

when the great naval armament in which he had hitherto served was dissolved, he passed into the regular service of his own sovereign. The company he joined was stationed at Naples, and there he remained with it for three years—without rising, or perhaps hoping to rise, above the condition of a private soldier. It must be had in mind, however, that this rank was in those days so far from being held dishonourable or degrading, that men of the very highest birth and fortune were, almost without exception, accustomed to spend some time in it ere they presumed to expect any situation of authority. Thus, for example, the Anne de Montmorencies, the Lantrecs, the Tremouilles, and the Chabannes, had all distinguished themselves as simple men-at-arms ere they rose to any office of command in the army of France; and in that of Spain, it is well known that the wise policy of Charles V. had, long before Cervantes' time, elevated the halberdeer and musqueteer to be nearly on the same footing with the mounted soldier. It is, therefore, a matter of no great importance that we are left altogether ignorant whether Cervantes served in the infantry or the cavalry during his residence at Naples.

In the autumn of 1575, he was on his way from Italy to Spain—it is not known what was the motive of his journey—when the galley in which he sailed was surrounded by some Moorish corsairs, and he, with all the rest of the Christian crew, had the misfortune to be carried immediately to Algiers. He fell

to the share of the corsair captain who had taken him, an Albanian or Arnaut renegade, known by the name of *Dali Mami the lame*; a mean and cruel creature, who seems to have used Cervantes with the utmost possible harshness. Having a great number of slaves in his possession, he employed the most of them in his galleys, but kept always on shore such as were likely to be ransomed by their friends in Europe—confining them within the walls of his baths,* and occasionally compelling them to labour in his gardens. Cervantes, whose birth and condition gave hopes of a considerable ransom, spent the greater part of five years of servitude among this latter class of the slaves of Mami—undergoing, however, as he himself intimates, even greater hardships than fell to the lot of his companions, on account of the pertinacity and skill with which he was continually forming schemes of evasion. The last of these, at once the boldest and most deliberate of them all, was deficient of complete success, only because Cervantes had admitted a traitor to his counsels.

Dali Mami, the Arnaut, had for his friend a brother renegade, by birth a Venetian, who had risen high in the favour of the king, and was now a man of considerable importance in the government of Algiers—the same Hassan Aga, of whose ferocious character a full picture is drawn in *Don Quixote* by the Captain

* In the notes to this edition of *Don Quixote* may be found some curious particulars concerning these *Baths*, and the manner in which the Christian captives of Cervantes' age were treated at Algiers and Tunis. See the Notes on the story of Viedma.

de Viedma. Mami sometimes made Cervantes the bearer of messages to this man's villa, which was situated on the sea-shore, about three miles from Algiers. The gardens of this villa were under the management of one of Hassan's Christian slaves, a native of Navarre, with whom Cervantes speedily formed acquaintance, and whom he ere long persuaded to undertake the formation of a secret cave beneath the garden capable of sheltering himself and as many as fifteen of his brother captives, on whose patience and resolution he had every reason to place perfect reliance. The excavation being completed in the utmost secrecy, Cervantes and his associates made their escape by night from Algiers, and took possession of their retreat, where, being supplied with provisions by the gardener and another Christian slave of Hassan Aga, named or nick-named *El Dorador*, they remained for several months undiscovered, in spite of the most minute and anxious researches both on the part of their own masters and of the celebrated Ochali, then tyrant of Algiers.

They had in the meantime used all their exertions to procure a sum of money sufficient for purchasing the freedom of one of their companions, who had stayed behind them in the city—a gentleman of Minorca, by name Viana. This gentleman at length obtained his liberty in the month of September 1577, and embarked for his native island, from whence, according to the plan concerted, he was to return immediately with a Spanish brigantine, and so coming close under shore,

at a certain hour of a certain night, furnish Cervantes and his friends (including the gardener and *El Dorador*) with the means of completing their escape. Viana reached Minorca in safety, procured without difficulty a sufficient vessel from the Spanish viceroy, and came off the coast of Barbary, according to his agreement; but ere he could effect his landing, the alarm was given by a Moorish sentinel, and he wisely put out to sea again, being afraid of attracting any more particular attention to the place of Cervantes' concealment. He and the unfortunate gentlemen, his companions, were aware of Viana's attempt, and of the cause of its failure; but they knew Viana would not be altogether discouraged by one such accident, and had good hope of ere long seeing his brigantine again under more happy auspices. But Hassan's slave, *El Dorador*, who had hitherto been, next to the gardener, the most effectual instrument of their safety, happened just at this juncture to think proper to renounce his Christianity; and it not unnaturally occurred to him that he could not better commence the career of a renegade than by betraying the retreat of Cervantes and his companions. Hassan Aga consequently surrounded the entrance to their cave with such a force as put all resistance out of the question, and the whole fifteen were conducted in fetters to Algiers. The others were immediately delivered into the possession of their former masters, but Cervantes, whose previous attempts at once fixed on him the suspicion of having headed the whole enterprise, was retained by the king in the hope of extract-

ing information, and perhaps of discovering some accomplices among the wealthier renegades. It is probable that Cervantes had no such information to give, but at all events he was one of the last men in the world to give it had he had it in his power. He underwent various examinations, declared himself on every occasion the sole author and contriver of the discovered plot, and at last effectually exhausted the patience of Ochali by the firmness of his behaviour. The savage Hassan Aga, himself one of the most extensive slave proprietors in Barbary, exerted all his influence to have Cervantes strangled *in terrorem*; but although Ochali was not without some inclination to gratify Hassan in this particular, the representations of Dali Mami concerning the value of his private property could not be altogether disregarded; and the future author of *Don Quixote* escaped the bow-string because an Arnaut renegade told an Algerine pirate that he considered him to be worth something better than two hundred crowns. The whole of these particulars, let it be observed, are not gathered from Cervantes himself,* but from the contemporary author of a history of Barbary, Father Haedo. The words in which this ecclesiastic concludes his narrative are worthy of being given as they

* It has been very commonly supposed that Cervantes tells his own Algerine history in the person of the captive in *Don Quixote*. But the reader will find in the notes to this edition sufficient reasons for discrediting this notion, in itself a very natural one. There can be no doubt, however, that Cervantes' own experience furnished him with all that knowledge of Algerine affairs and manners which he has displayed in the story of the captive, as well as in his less known pieces, the *Trato de Argel*, and the *Española Inglesa*.

stand. "Most marvellous thing," says he, "that some of these gentlemen remained shut up in the cave for five, six, even for seven months, without even so much as beholding the light of day, sustained all that time by Miguel de Cervantes, and this at the great and continual risk of his own life, for no less than four times did he incur the nearest peril of being strangled, impaled, or burnt alive, by reason of the bold things on which he adventured in the hope of bestowing liberty upon many. Had fortune been correspondent to his spirit, industry, and skill, at this day Algiers would have been in the safe possession of the Christians, for to no less lofty consummation did his designs aspire. In the end, the whole was treasonously discovered, and the gardener, after being tortured and picketed, perished miserably. But, indeed, of the things which happened in that cave during the seven months that it was inhabited by these Christians, and altogether of the captivity and various enterprises of Miguel de Cervantes, a particular history might easily be formed. Hassan Aga was accustomed to say that he should consider captives, and barks, and the whole city of Algiers in perfect safety, *could he but be sure of that handless Spaniard.*"

In effect it appears that the King of Algiers did not consider it possible to make sure of Cervantes so long as he remained in the possession of a private individual, for shortly after he purchased him from Dali Mami, and kept him shut up with the utmost severity in the dungeon of his own palace. The hardships

thus inflicted on Cervantes were, however, in all probability, the means of restoring to him his liberty much sooner than he would otherwise have obtained it. The noble exertions he had made, and the brilliant talents he had exhibited, had excited the strongest interest in his favour; and the knowledge of his harsh treatment in the Harem, determined the public functionary for the redemption of Spanish captives, then resident at Algiers, to make an extraordinary effort in his behalf. In fine, this person, by name Father Juan Gil, declared his willingness to advance whatever might be necessary, along with the contributions already received from his family in Spain, to procure the liberty of Cervantes; and although the king forthwith raised his demand to five hundred crowns, the ransom was paid, and Cervantes recovered his freedom. The records of the Redeeming Commission show that Cervantes' mother (now a widow) contributed two hundred and fifty crowns, his sister (married to a Florentine gentleman, Ambrosio) fifty, and a friend of the family, one Francisco Caramambel, a similar sum. It was thus Cervantes at length returned to Spain in the spring of 1581.

He returned at the age of thirty-four, after having spent more than ten years of manhood amidst such varieties of travel, adventure, enterprise, and suffering, as must have sufficed to sober very considerably the lively temperament, and at the same time to mature, enlarge, and strengthen the powerful understanding with which he had been gifted by nature.

He returned, however, under circumstances of but little promise, so far as his personal fortune and advancement were concerned. His wound had disabled him as a soldier, and, besides, the long period of his captivity had thrown him out in the course of his military profession. With all his variety of accomplishments, and all his brilliancy of talents, there was no other profession for the exercise of which he felt himself prepared. His family was poor, his friends few and powerless; and, after some months spent in fruitless solicitation, Cervantes seems to have made up his mind that no path remained open for him but that of literature; in one point of view, indeed, the path most worthy of his genius, and therefore the best he could have selected had greater choice been afforded, but one which, according to the then manners and customs of Spain, was not likely to prove in any remarkable degree conducive to the improvement of his worldly fortunes. He shut himself up, however, and proceeded to labour in his new vocation at once with all the natural fervour of his disposition, and with all the seriousness of a man sensible how much the whole career of life is often affected by the good or ill success of a first effort. As such, he, without doubt, regarded the work in which he had now engaged himself, for he could not, after the lapse of so many years, attach any importance to the juvenile and by this time forgotten productions, which had gone forth under his name ere he quitted Spain in the suite of Cardinal Acquaviva. The reader, who has

compared the different Lives of Cervantes written by Spanish authors will, from what I have now said, perceive that I am inclined to follow the opinion of those who think the pastoral romance of *Galatea* was the first work published by him after his return from captivity. The authority of Pellicer, indeed, favours the contrary opinion; but although he says that Cervantes *immediately* commenced writing for the stage, I can find no authentic record of any dramatic effort of his until some time after the appearance of the *Galatea*, or indeed until after his marriage, which took place in 1584.

The *Galatea*, like all the lesser works of Cervantes, has been thrown into the shade by the pre-eminent merit and success of his *Don Quixote*. Yet there can be no question, that, had Cervantes never written any thing but the *Galatea*, it must have sufficed to give him a high and a permanent place in the literary history of Spain. The grace and beauty of its composition entitle the romance to be talked of in this manner; but it must be confessed, that it exhibits very few traces of that originality of invention, and none at all of that felicitous exposition of human character, in which the genius of Cervantes afterwards shone forth with its brightest and most peculiar lustre. It is, at the best, a happy imitation of the *Diana* of Montemayor, and of the continuation of that performance by Gil Polo. Like these works, it is deficient in fable (but indeed the fable of *Galatea*, such as it is, was never completed); like them, it abounds in beautiful description and graceful declamation;

and like them, it is continually diversified with the introduction of lyrical pieces, sonnets, canzonets, and ballads, some of these exquisite in merit. The metrical effusions of the *Galatea* are, indeed, so numerous, that Bouterweck* says he has little doubt Cervantes wrote the prose narrative expressly for the purpose of embodying the miscellaneous contents of a poetical common-place book, to whose stores he had probably been making continual additions throughout the whole period of his absence from Spain; and, above all, during the many weary and idle hours of his captivity. It is certain that many of the poems introduced in the *Galatea* have little apparent relation to the story of the romance; and, therefore, there may be some foundation for Bouterweck's conjecture. But on the other hand, it cannot be denied, that the finest strains in the book are filled with allusions, which imply their having been composed subsequent to the termination of the author's residence in Barbary.—On the whole, the *Galatea* exhibited abundantly the defects of the false and unnatural species of composition to which it belongs; but it displayed, at the same time, a masterly command of Spanish style, and in general a richness and energy both of thought and of language, enough at the least to excite the highest expectations in regard to the future literary career of Cervantes. It might have been fortunate had he gone on to exert himself in the walk of fiction, in which this first, and, on the whole, successful effort had been made, and by returning to

* Geschichte der Spanisches Literatur, B. II.

which long afterwards he secured his literary immortality, instead of betaking himself, as he soon did, to the dramatic field, in which he had to contend with the most formidable competitors, and for which the event has shewn his own talents were less splendidly adapted.

Very shortly after the *Galatea* was published, Cervantes married a young lady, whose charms were supposed to have furnished the chief inspiration of its numerous amatory effusions—Donna Catalina de Palacios y Salazar y Vozmediano. This lady's dowry was not indeed quite so ample as might be augured from the magnificence of her style; but she brought Cervantes enough to furnish him with the means of subsistence, and it is probable of idleness, for a considerable number of months. After the lady's portion was exhausted, he seems to have plunged himself at once into the full career of dramatic composition. In this he laboured incessantly, but with little success, for about three years. His plays, as was the fashion of the day, he sold as fast as they were written to the managers of different theatres in Madrid and elsewhere, receiving, it is probable, but very trifling and inadequate remuneration. For Lope de Vega received at the highest about eighty reals for a comedy; and we may be sure his unsuccessful rival was obliged to be content with very inferior payment.

That the author of Don Quixote should have been unsuccessful in writing for the stage, is a circumstance which cannot but excite considerable aston-