

ishment at first sight; nor has all the ingenuity of the celebrated historian of Spanish literature been able to throw much light upon the causes of his failure. "That mass of intrigues, adventures, and prodigies," says he,* "of which the Spanish drama was chiefly composed, was altogether in opposition to the particular character of Cervantes' genius. His manner of thinking and of writing was too nervous and accurate to be accommodated to a species of composition, fantastic, destitute of any plain purpose, and of any durable interest. As a spectator, he enjoyed pieces, which, as a poet, he could not imitate; and he believed himself to be capable of imitating the Spanish dramatists, because he felt within himself the power and the capacity of doing better things." But when we reflect that the very best of Cervantes' followers and imitators in the field of comic romance, Le Sage, Fielding and Smollett, attempted, like him, the drama, and, like him, attempted it with indifferent success, we shall most probably be constrained to conclude, that the two kinds of composition, which we might at first sight imagine to require very much the same sort of talents, do in fact require talents of totally different kinds; and so, to attribute the ill success of Cervantes to causes much more general than are to be deduced from any examination of the particular system of the Spanish stage. Had Calderon, or Shakespeare, or Moliere, written admirable romances, it certainly would have been much more difficult to account for the dramatic failures of Cer-

* Bouterweck, Sect. II. Chap. I.

vantes; but even then it would not have followed that, because great dramatists could write excellent romances, great romance writers should also be able to write excellent dramas. In a word, there is no doubt that powers may be exhibited in a romance as high and as varied as ever adorned either a tragedy or a comedy; but it seems no less certain, that a man may possess all the talents requisite for giving interest and beauty to a romance—in the total absence of those faculties of concentrating interest and condensing expression, without a perfect command of which, neither in Spain nor any other country, has the Genius of the Drama ever achieved any of its wonders.

Cervantes himself informs us, that he wrote during this period of his life between twenty and thirty plays; but not more than a third part of these have ever been published, although, says Bouterweck, there might yet be some hope of recovering the whole, were the theatrical records of Spain sufficiently examined. Of those which have been given to the world, the *Numancia Vengada*, a tragedy in four acts, is universally esteemed the most favourable specimen. The mixture in the fable, and even in the dialogue, of such personages as the Genius of Spain, the God of the river Douro, &c., along with Roman soldiers and Spanish ladies, is a defect too gross and palpable either to admit excuse or to require commentary. But, even in spite of this and of other scarcely less glaring defects, the fine story of Numantian heroism and devotion is certainly told in this drama with a power quite worthy of the

genius of its author. The dark superstitions of heathenism are introduced with masterly and chastened skill; and the whole of the last act in particular is worked up with a sustained and fearless vigour both of imagination and of diction, such as no one can survey without saying to himself, *si sic omnia!*—The comic humour of Cervantes, again, rarely appears in his comedies, but shines out with infinite ease and effect in several of his little interludes and afterpieces—more than one of which have been of late years translated, and represented with much success upon the German stage. And here, by the way, is another coincidence that may be worth remarking; for Fielding, whose regular plays were all damned, still lives upon our own theatre as the author of *TOM THUMB*.

On the whole, imperfect as are even the best of Cervantes' theatrical pieces, there occur, nevertheless, in the very worst of them, continual indications of the fervid genius of the author. The circumstance which, in all probability, will be most immediately remarked, and most feelingly regretted by the reader who turns from *Don Quixote* to the comedies of Cervantes, is the absence of that joyous and easy vein which constitutes, throughout the whole of the first of romances, the principal charm of its composition. I have little doubt that Cervantes began to write for the stage in the hope of rivalling Lope de Vega; and that, after the first failure, he was continually depressed with the more and more forcible conviction of his own inferiority to that great and inexhaustible master of the dramatic art. He might

afterwards derive some consolation from reading Lope de Vega's two very ordinary romances, and his still more ordinary novels.

While Cervantes was occupied in this way, his residence seems to have been chiefly at Madrid, but occasionally at Esquivias, where the family of his wife were settled. He removed in 1588 to Seville, "having," as he himself expresses it, "found something better to do than writing comedies." What this *something* was we have no means of ascertaining; but we know that one of the principal branches of his own family had long been established at Seville in great mercantile opulence, and it is therefore highly probable that through their means he had procured some office or appointment which furnished him with means of subsistence less precarious than could be afforded by the feverish drudgery in which he had spent the last three or four years of his life. Not less than two of the Cervantes-Saavedras of Seville had written and published poems; so that we may easily imagine some interest to have been excited among this wealthy family in behalf of their poor cousin of Alcalá de Henares; and it is far from being unlikely that they entrusted to his management some subordinate department of their own mercantile concerns. In 1595, the Dominicans of Zaragoza proposed certain prizes for poems to be recited at the festival of St. Hyacinthus; and one of these was adjudged to "Miguel Cervantes Saavedra of Seville." In 1596, the Earl of Essex made the second of his famous descents upon the Spanish coast

and having surprised Cadiz, rifled the town and destroyed the shipping of the harbour, including the whole of a second armada, designed, like that of 1588, for the invasion of England. While the earl kept possession of Cadiz, the gentlemen of Seville hastened to take arms, and prepare themselves to assist in delivering that city from the English yoke; and, amidst other memorials of their zeal, there are preserved two short poetical effusions of Cervantes. In 1598, Philip the Second died at Seville; and Cervantes' name appears among the list of poets who wrote verses on occasion of the royal obsequies. A serious quarrel took place on the day of the funeral between the civil and ecclesiastical authorities of Seville, and Cervantes was exposed to some trouble for having ventured to hiss at some part, we know not what, of their proceedings. Such are all the traces that have been discovered of Cervantes' occupations and amusements during his residence at Seville, which extended from 1588 to 1603, or perhaps the beginning of 1604. The name of the branch of his family settled there being well known, it is not wonderful, that, after a residence of so many years, Cervantes should have been often talked of by his contemporaries as "one of the Saavedras of Seville."

"It cannot be doubted," says Bouterweck, "although no Spanish author has said so, that the death of Philip II. must have had a favourable effect on the genius of Cervantes. When the indolent Philip III. ascended the throne, the Spanish people began to breathe more freely. The nation recovered at least

the courage to sport with those chains which they could not break, and satire was winked at, provided only it were delicate." I know not how much foundation of truth there may be for this conjecture, but it is certainly not the less likely, because we find Cervantes so soon after the accession of the new king transferring his habitation to Valladolid—where, during the first years of his reign, Philip III. was chiefly accustomed to hold his court. We are almost entirely without information how Cervantes spent the two or three years immediately preceding his appearance at Valladolid; and this is the more to be regretted, because it is certain that the First Part of *Don Quixote* was written during this period. A vague tradition has always prevailed that Cervantes had been sent into La Mancha for the purpose of recovering some debts due to a mercantile house in Seville—that he was maltreated by the people of La Mancha, and on some pretence confined for several months in the jail of Argasamilla—and that during this imprisonment the First Part of *Don Quixote* was both planned and executed. We know from Cervantes himself,* that the First Part of *Don Quixote* was written in a *prison*; but have no means of ascertaining in how far the circumstances of Cervantes' confinement actually corresponded with those of the tradition.

It is, however, extremely probable that Cervantes employed a considerable part of the time during which his family were settled in Seville, in travelling,

* See the Prologue to *Don Quixote*.

for purposes of business, over various districts of Spain, which, in the earlier periods of his life, he could have had small opportunities of examining. The minute knowledge displayed in *Don Quixote*, not only of the soil, but of the provincial manners of La Mancha, can scarcely be supposed to have been gathered otherwise than from personal inspection, and that none of the most hasty. In his novels, most of which are generally supposed to have been composed about the same period, although they were not published for several years afterwards, a similar acquaintance is manifested with the manners of Cordova, Toledo, and many other cities and districts of Spain. Whatever the nature of Cervantes' occupation at Seville might have been, there is, therefore, every reason to believe that excursions of considerable extent formed a part either of his duty, or of his relaxation.

However all these things might be, it is certain that Cervantes was resident in Valladolid in the summer of 1604, and there is reason to think he had removed to that city at least a year earlier. *Don Quixote* was published at Madrid either in the end of 1604, or at latest in 1605. Some curious particulars of his mode of life, about the time of its appearance, have been gathered from the records of the magistracy of Valladolid—before whom he was brought in the month of June 1605, on suspicion of having been concerned in a nocturnal brawl and homicide, with which, in reality, he had no manner of concern. A

gentleman, by name Don Gaspar Garibay, was assassinated about midnight, close to the house where Cervantes lived. The alarm being given, Cervantes was the first to run out and offer every assistance to the wounded man. It is clear that the neighbourhood was none of the most respectable, for it was instantly suspected that the women of Cervantes' family were ladies of easy virtue, and that he himself having acted as their bully, had, in the course of some infamous scuffle, dealt the deadly blow with his own hand. He and all his household were forthwith arrested, and did not recover their liberty until they had undergone very strict and minute examinations. From the records of the court we gather that Cervantes professed himself to be resident at Valladolid, for purposes of *business*; that, on account of his literary reputation, he was in the custom of receiving frequent visits both from gentlemen of the court, and the learned men of the university; and, lastly, that he was living in a style of great penury;—for he, his wife, his two sisters (one of them a nun), and his niece, are represented as occupying a scanty lodging on the fourth floor of a mean-looking house, and as entertaining among them all no domestic but a single girl. Cervantes, in his declaration, states his own age at *upwards of fifty*, but he had, in fact, completed his fifty-seventh year before this transaction took place. With such obscurity were both the person and the character of Cervantes surrounded, according to some, immediately *before*, according to others, immediately *after*, the publication of the First Part

of *Don Quixote*. But from these very circumstances, I am inclined to agree with those who deny that *Don Quixote* appeared before the summer of 1605.

It was dedicated to Don Alonzo Lopez de Zuniga, seventh Duke of Bexar, a nobleman who much affected the character of a Mecænas, but who does not appear to have requited the homage of Cervantes by any very useful marks of his favour. The book, however, stood in no need of patronage, whatever might be the necessities of its author; it was read immediately in court and city, by young and old, learned and unlearned, with equal delight; or, as the Duchess in the Second Part expresses it, "went forth into the world with the universal applause of the nations." Four editions, published and sold within the year, furnish the best proof of its wide and instant popularity; and if any further proof be wanting, the well-known story (first told by Barrano Porreno, in his *Life and Deeds of Philip III.*.) may supply it. "The king standing one day," says this chronicler, "on the balcony of the palace of Madrid, observed a certain student, with a book in his hand, on the opposite banks of the Manzanares. He was reading, but every now and then he interrupted his reading, and gave himself violent blows upon the forehead, accompanied with innumerable motions of ecstasy and mirthfulness. That student, said the king, is either out of his wits or reading the history of *Don Quixote*." This must have happened in the

beginning of 1606, after the court had removed from Valladolid to the capital. Cervantes himself followed the court, and resided in Madrid almost all the rest of his life.

In the midst of general approbation, the author of *Don Quixote* was assailed, on his arrival in the capital, by all the unwearied arts of individual spleen, envy and detraction. He had irritated, by his inimitable satire, a great number of contemporary authors, some of them men of high rank, whose fame depended on books of the very species which he had for ever destroyed. Another numerous and active class, the writers for the theatre, were not less seriously offended by the freedom with which Cervantes had criticised, in the person of the Canon of Toledo, many of the most popular pieces which had at that time possession of the Spanish stage. Among the rest, it is said, and probably not without some foundation, that the great Lope de Vega himself was excessively displeased with the terms in which his plays were talked of—and a sonnet against Cervantes and his book, still extant, is generally attributed to his pen. Cervantes endured all this very calmly; and with that noble retention of the thirst for fame, which he had already so well exemplified, shut himself up in his study to compose works worthy of himself, instead of hastening to take the more vulgar revenge he might so easily have obtained against his adversaries. The two brothers, Lupercio and Bartholomeo D'Argensola, after himself and Lope de Vega, the first men of letters in Spain, lived with him on

terms of intimacy, which might easily console him under the assaults of his inferiors; and through them he was introduced to the Conde de Lemos, and the Cardinal of Toledo, two enlightened and high-spirited noblemen, who, throughout all the rest of his life, never failed to afford him their protection and support. Count Lemos being appointed Viceroy of Naples shortly after, Cervantes solicited and expected some appointment in his suite; but it is painful to add, that he seems to have been disappointed in this particular, in consequence of the coldness, or perhaps the jealousy, of the very friends by whom he had been first introduced to that nobleman's notice. He resented, it is certain, the behaviour of the Argensolas, but the dedications of almost all the works he subsequently put forth, attest that he acquitted Lemos himself of any unkindness to his person, or coldness to his interests.

The remains of his patrimony, with the profits of *Don Quixote*, and it is probable some allowances from Lemos and the Cardinal, were sufficient to support Cervantes in the humble style of life to which his habits were formed; for he allowed nearly ten years to elapse before he sent any new work to the press. In 1613 he published his *Novelas Exemplares*, most of which had been written many years before, and of which he had already given a specimen in the story of *The Curious Impertinent*, introduced in *Don Quixote*. These tales were received with great and deserved applause, although they have never been placed on a level with the great work

which had preceded them. They have been translated into English, and are well known to most readers, so that it were needless to enlarge upon their character and merits. They are, for the most part, felicitous imitations of the manner of Boccaccio, whose Italian popularity, as a writer of short romances and anecdotes, it was no doubt Cervantes' ambition to rival in his own country. They are written in a style of manly ease and simplicity, and when compared with the *Galatea* (for, as I have already said, they were chiefly written before *Don Quixote*), afford abundant evidence of the progressive enlargement of the author's powers and improvement of his taste. Their morality is uniformly pure, and many of them are full of interest; so that it is no wonder the novels of Cervantes should to this hour keep their place among the favourite reading of the Spanish youth. In 1614, Cervantes published another work highly creditable to his genius; but of a very different description. This is the *Viage de Parnasso*, his celebrated poetical picture of the state of Spanish literature in his time; and, without question, the most original and energetic of his own poetical performances. It is, as might be expected, full of satire; but the satire of Cervantes was always gentle and playful; and among the men of true genius, then alive in Spain, there was not one (not even of those that had shown personal hostility to Cervantes) who had the smallest reason to complain of his treatment. Cervantes introduces himself as "the oldest and the poorest" of all the brotherhood—"the naked

Adam of Spanish poets;" but he describes his poverty, without complaining of it; and, indeed, throughout the whole work, never for a moment loses sight of that high feeling of self-respect which became him both as an author and as a gentleman. The vessel, in which the imaginary voyage of Parnassus is performed, is described in a strain worthy of Cervantes. "From the keel to the topmast," says he, "it was all of verse; there was not a single foot of prose in it. The deck was all fenced with an airy railwork of double-rhymes. The rowing benches were chiefly occupied by Ballads, an impudent but necessary race; for there is nothing to which they cannot be turned. The poop was grand and gay, but a little outlandish in its style, being stuck all over with sonnets of the richest workmanship. Two vigorous Triplets had the stroke-oars on either side, and regulated the motion of the vessel in a manner at once easy and powerful. The gangway appeared to be one long and most melancholy elegy, from which tears were continually distilling," &c.

During the same year, while Cervantes was preparing for the press the Second Part of *Don Quixote*, there was published at Tarragona a continuation of the same story, written chiefly for the purpose of abusing Cervantes, by a person who assumed the name of Avellenada, and who appears to have been successful in keeping his true name entirely concealed. The greater part of this Continuation is made up of very humble imitation—or rather of very

open plagiarism from the First Part of *Don Quixote*; and towards its conclusion, it contains some incidents which leave little doubt but that its writer must have found access to the MS. of Cervantes' Second Part. In the Notes to this edition (vol. iii. p. 332) the reader will find such further particulars as have appeared worthy of being preserved. Cervantes, whose own Continuation had already in all probability begun to be printed, took his revenge by interweaving in the thread of his story a variety of the most bitter sarcasms upon the vulgarity, obscenity, and coarseness of his anonymous enemy—a revenge, but for which, in all likelihood, the memory of Avellenada's performance would not have survived the year in which it was published. The Second Part of *Don Quixote* made its appearance in the beginning of 1615, and is inscribed to the Conde de Lemos, in a strain well worthy of the imitation of all future dedicators. It was received with applause, not inferior to that with which the First Part had been greeted ten years before; and no doubt lightened the pecuniary circumstances of the author during the few remaining months of his life. His fame was now established far above the reach of all calumny and detraction. Lope de Vega was dead, and there was no one to divide with Cervantes the literary empire of his country. He was caressed by the great; strangers who came to Madrid made the author of *Don Quixote* the first object of their researches; he enjoyed all his honours in the midst of his family; and was continually exercising his mind

in labours worthy of himself. In short, Cervantes had at last obtained all the objects of his honourable ambition, when his health began to fail, and he felt within himself the daily strengthening conviction that his career drew near its close.

In the beginning of the year 1616, he superintended the publication of eight of his comedies, and as many of his interludes, and prefixed to them a dissertation, which is extremely valuable and curious, as containing the only authentic account of the early history of the Spanish drama. He also finished and prepared for the press his romance of *Persiles and Sigismunda*. This performance is an elegant and elaborate imitation of the style and manner of Heliodorus. It displays felicity of invention and power of description, and has always been considered as one of the purest specimens of Castilian writing; nevertheless, it has not preserved any very distinguished popularity, nor been classed (except in regard to style) by any intelligent critic of more recent times with the best of Cervantes' works.

The prologue and dedication of the *Persiles* must always be read with attention, on account of the interesting circumstances under which they were composed, and of which they themselves furnish some account.

Cervantes, after concluding his romance, had gone for a few days to Esquivias for the benefit of country air. He tells us that as he was riding back to Madrid, in company with two of his friends, they

were overtaken by a young student on horseback, who came on pricking violently, and complaining that they went at such a pace as gave him little chance of keeping up with them. One of the party made answer that the blame lay with the horse of Señor Miguel de Cervantes, whose trot was of the speediest. He had scarcely pronounced the name, when the student dismounted, and touching the hem of Cervantes' left sleeve, said,—“Yes, yes, it is indeed the maimed perfection, the all-famous, the delightful writer, the joy and darling of the Muses.” Cervantes returned the young man's academic salutation with his natural modesty, and they performed the rest of the journey in company with the student. “We drew up a little,” says he, “and rode on at a measured pace; and as we rode, there was much talk about my illness. The good student knocked away all my hopes, by telling me my disease was the dropsy, and that I could not cure it by drinking all the water of the ocean. ‘Be chary of drinking, Señor Cervantes,’ said he; ‘but eat, and eat plentifully, for that is the only medicine that will do you any good.’ I replied, that many had told me the same story; but that, as for giving over drinking, they might as well desire a man to give up the sole purpose of his being. My pulse, I said, was becoming daily more and more feeble, and that if it continued to decline as it had been doing, I scarcely expected to outlive next Sunday; so that I feared there was but little chance of my being able to profit much further by the acquaintance that had so fortunately