

CHAPTER XI

A CONTINUATION OF DON QUIXOTE'S CURIOUS DIS-
COURSE UPON ARMS AND LEARNING

"SINCE, speaking of the scholar, we began with his poverty, and its several parts," continued Don Quixote, "let us now observe whether the soldier be any richer than he; and we shall find that poverty itself is not poorer; for he depends on his miserable pay, which he receives but seldom, or perhaps never; or else in that he makes by marauding, with the hazard of his life, and trouble of his conscience. Such is sometimes his want of apparel, that a slashed buff-coat is all his holiday raiment and shirt; and in the depth of winter being in the open field, he has nothing to cherish him against the sharpness of the season, but the breath of his mouth, which issuing from an empty place, I am persuaded, is itself cold, though contrary to the rules of nature. But now see how he expects night to make amends for all these hardships in the bed prepared for him, which, unless it be his own fault, never proves too

narrow; for he may freely lay out as much of the ground as he pleases, and tumble to his content without danger of losing the sheets. But above all, when the day shall come, wherein he is to put in practice the exercise of his profession, and strive to gain some new degree, when the day of battle shall come; then, as a mark of honour, shall his head be dignified with a cap made of lint, to stop a hole made by a bullet, or be, perhaps, carried off maimed, at the expense of a leg or arm. And if this do not happen, but that merciful heaven preserve his life and limbs, it may fall out that he shall remain as poor as before, and must run through many encounters and battles, nay always come off victorious, to obtain some little preferment; and these miracles, too, are rare; but, I pray tell me, gentlemen, if ever you made it your observation, how few are those who obtain due rewards in war, in comparison of those numbers that perish? Doubtless you will answer, that there is no parity between them; that the dead cannot be reckoned up; whereas, those who live and are rewarded, may be numbered with three figures.* It is quite otherwise with scholars, not only those who follow the law, but others also, who all either by hook or by

* i.e., Do not exceed hundreds.

crook get a livelihood, so that though the soldier's sufferings be much greater, yet his reward is much less. To this it may be answered, that it is easier to reward two thousand scholars, than thirty thousand soldiers, because the former are recompensed at the expense of the public, by giving them employments, which of necessity must be allowed on those of their profession, but the latter cannot be gratified otherwise than at the cost of the master that employs them; yet this very difficulty makes good my argument. But let us lay this matter aside, as a point difficult to be decided, and let us return to the preference due to arms above learning, a subject as yet in debate, each party bringing strong reasons to make out their pretensions. Among others, learning urges, that without it warfare itself could not subsist; because war, as other things, has its laws, and is governed by them, and laws are the province of learning and scholars. To this objection the soldiers make answer, that without them the laws cannot be maintained, for it is by arms that commonwealths are defended, kingdoms supported, cities secured, the high-way made safe, and the sea delivered from pirates. In short, were it not for them, commonwealths, kingdoms, monarchies, cities, the

roads by land, and the waters of the sea, would be subject to the ravages and confusion that attend war while it lasts, and is at liberty to make use of its unbounded power and prerogative. Besides, it is past all controversy, that what costs dearest is, and ought to be, most valued. Now for a man to attain to an eminent degree of learning costs him time, watching, hunger, nakedness, dizziness in the head, weakness in the stomach, and other inconveniences, which are the consequences of these, of which I have already in part made mention. But the rising gradually to be a good soldier, is purchased at the whole expense of all that is required for learning, and that in so surpassing a degree, that there is no comparison betwixt them; because he is every moment in danger of his life. To what danger or distress can a scholar be reduced equal to that of a soldier, who, being besieged in some strong place, and at his post or upon guard in some ravelin or bastion, perceives the enemy carrying on a mine under him, and yet must upon no account remove from thence, or shun the danger which threatens him so near? All he can do is, to give notice to his commander, that he may countermine, but must himself stand still, fearing and expecting, when on a

sudden he shall soar to the clouds without wings, and be again cast down headlong against his will. If this danger seem inconsiderable, let us see whether that be not greater when two galleys shock one another with their prows in the midst of the spacious sea. When they have thus grappled, and are clinging together, the soldier is confined to the narrow beak, being a board not above two feet wide; and yet though he sees before him so many ministers of death threatening, as there are pieces of cannon on the other side pointing against him, and not half a pike's length from his body; and being sensible that the first slip of his feet sends him to the bottom of Neptune's dominions; still, for all this, inspired by honour, with an undaunted heart, he stands a mark to so much fire, and endeavours to make his way, by that narrow passage, into the enemy's vessel. But what is most to be admired is, that no sooner one falls, where he shall never rise till the end of the world, than another steps into the same place; and if he also drops into the sea, which lies in wait for him like an enemy, another, and after him another, still fills up the place, without suffering any interval of time to separate their deaths; a resolution and boldness scarce to be paralleled in any other trials of war.

Blessed be those happy ages that were strangers to the dreadful fury of these devilish instruments of artillery, whose inventor I am satisfied is now in hell, receiving the reward of his cursed invention, which is the cause that very often a cowardly base hand takes away the life of the bravest gentleman, and that in the midst of that vigour and resolution which animates and inflames the bold, a chance bullet (shot perhaps by one that fled, and was frightened at the very flash the mischievous piece gave, when it went off) coming, nobody knows how, or from whence, in a moment puts a period to the brave designs, and the life of one, that deserved to have survived many years. This considered, I could almost say, I am sorry at my heart for having taken upon me this profession of a knight-errant, in so detestable an age; for though no danger daunts me, yet it affects me to think, whether powder and lead may not deprive me of the opportunity of becoming famous, and making myself known throughout the world by the strength of my arm and dint of my sword. But let heaven order matters as it pleases; for if I compass my designs, I shall be so much the more honoured by how much the dangers I have exposed myself to, are greater than those

the knights-errants of former ages underwent."

All this long preamble Don Quixote made, whilst the company supped, never minding to eat a mouthful, though Sancho Panza had several times advised him to mind his meat, telling him there would be time enough afterwards to talk as he thought fit. Those who heard him were afresh moved with compassion, to see a man, who seemed, in all other respects, to have a sound judgment and clear understanding, so absolutely mad and distracted, when any mention was made of his cursed knight-errantry. The curate told him, he was much in the right, in all he had said for the honour of arms; and that he, though a scholar, and a graduate, was of the same opinion. Supper being ended and the cloth taken away; whilst the innkeeper, his wife, his daughter, and Maritornes, fitted up Don Quixote's loft for the ladies, that they might lie by themselves that night, Don Ferdinand entreated the slave to give them an account of his life; conscious the relation could not choose but be very delightful and surprising, as might be guessed by his coming with Zoraida. The slave answered, he would most willingly comply with their desires, and that he only feared the relation

would not give them all the satisfaction he could wish; but that however, rather than disobey, he would do it as well as he could. The curate and all the company thanked him, and made fresh instances to the same effect. Seeing himself courted by so many, "There is no need of entreaties," said he, "for what you may command; therefore," continued he, "give me your attention, and you shall hear a true relation, perhaps not to be paralleled by those fabulous stories which are composed with much art and study." This caused all the company to seat themselves, and observe a very strict silence; and then, with an agreeable and sedate voice, he began in this manner.