

lyric, and the dramatic poet, and to run through all the parts of poetry and rhetoric; for epics may be as well writ in prose\* as in verse."

\* The adventures of Telemachus is a proof of this.

## CHAPTER XXI

CONTAINING A CONTINUATION OF THE CANON'S DISCOURSE UPON BOOKS OF KNIGHT-ERRANTRY, AND OTHER CURIOUS MATTER

"You are much in the right, sir," replied the curate; "and therefore those who have hitherto published books of that kind, are the more to be blamed, for having had no regard to good sense, art, or rules, by the observation of which they might have made themselves as famous in prose, as the two princes of Greek and Latin poetry are in verse."—"I must confess," said the canon, "I was once tempted to write a book of knight-errantry myself, observing all those rules; and to speak the truth, I writ above one hundred pages, which for the better trial, whether they answered my expectation, I communicated to some learned and judicious men fond of those subjects, as well as to some of those ignorant persons, who only are delighted with extravagancies; and they all gave me a satisfactory approbation. And yet I made no farther progress, as well in regard I look upon it to be a thing noway agreeable with



my profession, as because I am sensible the illiterate are much more numerous than the learned; and though it were of more weight to be commended by the small number of the wise, than scorned by the ignorant multitude, yet I would not expose myself to the confused judgment of the giddy vulgar, who principally are those who read such books. But the greatest motive I had to lay aside, and think no more of finishing it, was the argument I formed to myself deduced from the plays now usually acted:<sup>1</sup> for thought I, if plays now in use, as well those which are altogether of the poet's invention, as those that are grounded upon history, be all of them, or, however, the greatest part, made up of most absurd extravagancies and incoherencies; things that have neither head nor foot, side nor bottom; and yet the multitude sees them with satisfaction, esteems and approves them, though they are so far from being good; and if the poets who write, and the players who act them, say they must be so contrived and no otherwise, because they please the generality of the audience; and if those which are regular and according to art, serve only to please half a score judicious persons who understand

<sup>1</sup> See Appendix Note 1, Chapter XXI., Book IV.

them, whilst the rest of the company cannot reach the contrivance, nor know anything of the matter; and therefore the poets and actors say, they had rather get their bread by the greater number, than the applause of the less: Then may I conclude the same will be the success of this book; so that when I have racked my brains to observe the rules, I shall reap no other advantage, than to be laughed at for my pains. I have sometimes endeavoured to convince the actors that they are deceived in their opinion, and that they will draw more company and get more credit by regular plays, than by those preposterous representations now in use; but they are so positive in their humour, that no strength of reason, nor even demonstration, can beat this opinion into their heads. I remember I once was talking to one of those obstinate fellows; 'Do you not remember,' said I, 'that within these few years, three tragedies were acted in Spain, written by a famous poet of ours, which were so excellent, that they surprised, delighted, and raised the admiration of all that saw them, as well the ignorant and ordinary people, as the judicious and men of quality; and the actors got more by those three, than by thirty of the best that have been writ since?'—'Doubtless, sir,' said the actor, 'you



mean the tragedies of Isabella, Phillis, and Alexandria.'—'The very same,' I replied, 'and do you judge whether they observed the rules of the drama; and whether by so doing, they lost anything of their esteem, or failed of pleasing all sorts of people. So that the fault lies not in the audience's desiring absurdities, but in those who know not how to give them anything else. Nor was there anything preposterous in several other plays; as for example, Ingratitude Revenged, Numancia, the Amorous Merchant, and the favourable She-enemy; nor in some others, composed by judicious poets to their honour and credit, and to the advantage of those that acted them.' Much more I added, which did indeed somewhat confound him, but no way satisfied or convinced him, so as to make him change his erroneous opinion."—

"You have hit upon a subject, sir," said the curate, "which has stirred up in me an old aversion I have for the plays now in use, which is not inferior to that I bear to books of knight-errantry. For whereas plays, according to the opinion of Cicero, ought to be mirrors of human life, patterns of good manners, and the very representatives of truth; those now acted are mirrors of absurdities, patterns of follies, and images of ribaldry. For instance, what can be

more absurd, than for the same person to be brought on the stage a child in swaddling-bands, in the first scene of the first act; and to appear in the second grown a man? What can be more ridiculous than to represent to us a fighting old fellow, a cowardly youth, a rhetorical footman, a politic page, a churlish king, and an unpolished princess? what shall I say of their regard to the time in which those actions they represent, either might or ought to have happened; for I have seen a play, in which the first act began in Europe, the second was in Asia, and the third ended in Africa?\* probably, if there had been another act, they would have carried it into America; and thus it would have been acted in the four parts of the world. But if imitation is to be a principal part of the drama, how can any tolerable judgment be pleased, when representing an action that happened in the time of King Pepin or Charlemagne, they shall attribute it to the Emperor Heraclius, and bring him in carrying the cross into Jerusalem, and recovering the Holy Sepulchre, like Godfrey of Boulogne, there being a vast distance of time betwixt these actions? Thus they will clap together pieces

\* It is to be observed that the Spanish plays have only three jornadas, or acts.



of true history in a play of their own framing, and grounded upon fiction, mixing in it relations of things that have happened to different people, and in several ages. This they do without any contrivance that might make it appear probable, and with such visible mistakes as are altogether inexcusable; but the worst of it is, that there are idiots who look upon this as perfection, and think everything else to be mere pedantry. But if we look into the pious plays, what a multitude of false miracles shall we find in them? how many errors and contradictions, how often the miracles wrought by one saint attributed to another? nay, even in the profane plays, they presume to work miracles upon the bare imagination and conceit that such a supernatural work, or a machine, as they call it, will be ornamental, and draw the common sort to see the play. These things are a reflection upon truth itself, a lessening and depreciating of history, and a reproach to all Spanish wits; because strangers, who are very exact in observing the rules of the drama, look upon us as an ignorant and barbarous people, when they see the absurdities and extravagancies of our plays. Nor would it be any excuse to allege, that the principal design of all good governments, in permitting plays to

be publicly acted, is to amuse the commonalty with some lawful recreation, and so to divert those ill humours which idleness is apt to breed: and that since this end is attained by any sort of plays, whether good or bad, it is needless to prescribe laws to them, or oblige the poets or actors to compose and represent such as are strictly conformable to the rules. To this I would answer, that this end would be infinitely better attained by good plays, than by bad ones. He who sees a play that is regular and answerable to the rules of poetry, is pleased with the comic part, informed by the serious, surprised at the variety of accidents, improved by the language, warned by the frauds, instructed by examples, incensed against vice, and enamoured with virtue; for a good play must cause all these emotions in the soul of him that sees it, though he were never so insensible and unpolished. And it is absolutely impossible, that a play which has these qualifications, should not infinitely divert, satisfy and please, beyond another that wants them, as most of them do which are now usually acted. Neither are the poets who write them in fault, for some of them are very sensible of their errors, and extremely capable of performing their duty; but plays being now altogether becoming venal and a sort



of merchandize, they say, and with reason, that the actors would not purchase them, unless they were of that stamp; and therefore the poet endeavours to suit the humour of the actors, who is to pay him for his labour. For proof of this let any man observe that infinite number of plays composed by an exuberant Spanish wit,\* so full of gaiety and humour, in such elegant verse and choice language, so sententious, and to conclude, in such a majestic style, that his fame is spread through the universe: yet because he suited himself to the fancy of the actors, many of his pieces have fallen short of their due perfection, though some have reached it. Others write plays so inconsiderately, that after they have appeared on the stage, the actors have been forced to fly and abscond, for fear of being punished, as it has often happened, for having affronted kings, and dishonoured whole families. These, and many other ill consequences, which I omit, would cease, by appointing an intelligent and judicious person at court to examine all plays before they were acted, that is, not only those which are represented at court, but throughout all Spain; so that, without his licence, no magistrate should suffer any play to appear in public.

\* Lopes de Vega.

Thus players would be careful to send their plays to court, and might then act them with safety, and those who writ would be more circumspect, as standing in awe of an examiner that could judge of their works. By these means we should be furnished with good plays, and the end they are designed for would be attained, the people diverted, the Spanish wits esteemed, the actors safe, and the government spared the trouble of punishing them. And if the same person, or another, were entrusted to examine all the new books of knight-errantry, there is no doubt but some might be published with all that perfection, you, sir, have mentioned, to the increase of eloquence in our language, to the utter extirpation of the old books, which would be borne down by the new; and for the innocent pastime, not only of idle persons, but even of those who have most employment; for the bow cannot always stand bent, nor can human frailty subsist without some lawful recreation."

The canon and curate were come to this period, when the barber overtaking them, told the latter, that this was the place he had pitched on for baiting, during the heat of the day. The canon, induced by the pleasantness of the valley, and the satisfaction he found in



the curate's conversation, as well as to be farther informed of Don Quixote, bore them company, giving order to some of his men to ride to the next inn, and if his sumpter-mule were arrived, to send him down provisions to that valley, where the coolness of the shade, and the beauty of the prospect, gave him such a fair invitation to dine; and that they should make much of themselves and their mules with what the inn could afford.

In the meantime, Sancho having disengaged himself from the curate and barber, and finding an opportunity to speak to his master alone, he brushed up to the cage where the knight sate. "That I may clear my conscience, sir," said he, "it is fitting that I tell you the plain truth of your enchantment here. Who, would you think now, are these two fellows that ride with their faces covered? Even the parson of our parish and the barber; none else, I will assure you, sir. And they are in a plot against you, out of mere spite because your deeds will be more famous than theirs: this being supposed, it follows, that you are not enchanted, but only cozened and abused; and if you will but answer me one question fairly and squarely, you shall find this out to be a palpable cheat, and that there is

no enchantment in the case, but merely your senses turned topsy turvy."

"Ask me what questions you please, dear Sancho," said the knight, "and I will as willingly resolve them. But for thy assertion, that those who guard us are my old companions the curate and barber, it is illusion all. The power of magic indeed, as it has an art to clothe any thing in any shape, may have dressed these demons in their appearances to infatuate thy sense, and draw thee into such a labyrinth of confusion, that even Theseus's clue could not extricate thee out of it; and this with a design, perhaps, to plunge me deeper into doubts, and make me endanger my understanding, in searching into the strange contrivance of my enchantment, which in every circumstance is so different from all I ever read. Therefore rest satisfied that these are no more what thou imaginest, than I am a Turk. But now to thy questions; propose them, and I will endeavour to answer."

"Bless me," said Sancho, "this is madness upon madness; but since it is so, answer me one question. Tell me, as you hope to be delivered out of this cage here, and as you hope to find yourself in my lady Dulcinea's arms, when you least think on it; as you——"



“Conjure me no more,” answered Don Quixote, “but ask freely, for I have promised to answer punctually.”—“That is what I want,” said Sancho, “and you must tell me the truth, and the whole truth, neither more nor less, upon the honour of your knighthood.”—“Pr’ythee, no more of your preliminaries or preambles,” cried Don Quixote, “I tell thee I will answer to a tittle.”—“Then,” said Sancho, “I ask, with reverence be it spoken, whether your worship, since your being caged up, or enchanted, if you will have it so, has not had a motion, more or less, as a man may say?”—“I understand not that phrase,” answered the knight.—“Heigh-day!” quoth Sancho, “don’t you know what I mean? Why there is never a child in our country, that understands the christ-cross-row but can tell you. I mean, have you had a mind to do what another cannot do for you?”—“O now I understand thee, Sancho,” said the knight; “and to answer directly to thy question, positively yes, very often; and therefore prythee help me out of this strait; for, to be free with you, I am not altogether so sweet and clean as I could wish.”

## CHAPTER XXII

A RELATION OF THE WISE CONFERENCE BETWEEN  
SANCHO AND HIS MASTER

“AH! sir,” said Sancho, “have I caught you at last? This is what I wanted to know from my heart and soul. Come, sir, you cannot deny, that when any body is out of sorts, so as not to eat, or drink, or sleep, or do any natural occasions that you guess, then we say commonly they are bewitched or so; from whence may be gathered, that those who can eat their meat, drink their drink, speak when they are spoken to, and go to the back-side when they have occasion for it, are not bewitched or enchanted.”—“Your conclusion is good,” answered Don Quixote, “as to one sort of enchantment; but, as I said to thee, there is variety of enchantments, and the changes in them through the alterations of times and customs branch them into so many parts, that there is no arguing from what has been to what may be now. For my part I am verily persuaded of my enchantment, and this sup-