

## CHAPTER VI

WHAT PASSED BETWEEN DON QUIXOTE, HIS NIECE,  
AND THE HOUSEKEEPER: BEING ONE OF THE MOST  
IMPORTANT CHAPTERS IN THE WHOLE HISTORY

WHILE Sancho Panza and his wife Teresa Cascajo had the foregoing impertinent\* dialogue, Don Quixote's niece and housekeeper were not idle, guessing by a thousand signs that the knight intended a third sally. Therefore they endeavoured by all possible means to divert him from his foolish design, but all to no purpose; for this was but preaching to a rock, and hammering cold stubborn steel. But among other arguments; "In short, sir," quoth the housekeeper, "if you will not be ruled, but will needs run wandering over hill and dale, like a stray soul between heaven and hell, seeking for mischief, for so I may well call the hopeful adventures which you go about, I will never leave complaining to heaven and the king, till there is a stop put to it some way or other."

\* So it is in the original, viz. *impertinente platica*: but Mr. Jarvis, very justly, suspects the irony to be here broke by the transcriber or printer, and not by the author himself, and that it should be (*importante*) *important*, which carries on the grave ridicule of the history.

"What answer heaven will vouchsafe to give thee, I know not," answered Don Quixote: "neither can I tell what return his majesty will make to thy petition. This I know, that were I a king, I would excuse myself from answering the infinite number of impertinent memorials that disturb the repose of princes. I tell thee, woman, among the many other fatigues which royalty sustains, it is one of the greatest to be obliged to hear every one, and to give answer to all people. Therefore, pray trouble not his majesty with anything concerning me."—"But pray, sir, tell me," replied she, "are there not a many knights in the king's court?"—"I must confess," said Don Quixote, "that, for the ornament, the grandeur, and the pomp of royalty, many knights are, and ought to be, maintained there."—"Why then," said the woman, "would it not be better for your worship to be one of those brave knights, who serve the king their master on foot in his court?"—"Hear me, sweet-heart," answered Don Quixote, "all knights cannot be courtiers, nor can all courtiers be knights-errant. There must be of all sorts in the world; and though we were all to agree in the common appellation of knights, yet there would be a great difference between the one and the other. For your

courtiers, without so much as stirring out of their chambers, or the shade and shelter of the court, can journey over all the universe in a map, without the expense and fatigue of travelling, without suffering the inconveniences of heat, cold, hunger, and thirst; while we who are the true knight-errants, exposed to those extremities, and all the inclemencies of heaven, by night and by day, on foot as well as on horseback, measure the whole surface of the earth with our own feet. Nor are we only acquainted with the pictures of our enemies, but with their very persons, ready upon all occasions and at all times to engage them, without standing upon trifles, or the ceremony of measuring weapons, stripping, or examining whether our opponents have any holy relics, or other secret charms about them, whether the sun be duly divided, or any other punctilios and circumstances observed among private duelists; things which thou understandest not, but I do: And must further let thee know, that the true knight-errant, though he met ten giants, whose tall aspiring heads not only touch but overtop the clouds, each of them stalking with prodigious legs like huge towers, their sweeping arms like masts of mighty ships, each eye as large as a mill-wheel,

and more fiery than a glass-furnace; yet he is so far from being afraid to meet them, that he must encounter them with a gentle countenance, and an undaunted courage, assail them, close with them, and if possible vanquish and destroy them all in an instant; nay, though they came armed with the scales of a certain fish, which they say is harder than adamant, and instead of swords had dreadful sabres of keen Damascan steel, or mighty maces with points of the same metal, as I have seen them more than a dozen times. I have condescended to tell thee thus much, that thou may'st see the vast difference between knights and knights; and I think it were to be wished that all princes knew so far how to make the distinction, as to give the pre-eminence to this first species of knights-errant, among whom there have been some whose fortitude has not only been the defence of our kingdom, but of many more, as we read in their histories."—"Ah! sir," said the niece, "have a care what you say; all the stories of knights-errant are nothing but a pack of lies and fables, and if they are not burnt, they ought at least to wear a Sanbenito,\* the badge of heresy, or some other mark of infamy, that the world may

\* A coat of black canvass, painted over with flames and devils, worn by heretics when going to be burnt, by order of the Inquisition.

know them to be wicked, and perverters of good manners."—"Now, by the powerful sustainer of my being," cried Don Quixote, "wert thou not so nearly related to me, wert thou not my own sister's daughter, I would take such revenge for the blasphemy thou hast uttered, as would resound through the whole universe. Who ever heard of the like impudence? That a young baggage, who scarce knows her bobbins from a bodkin, should presume to put in her oar, and censure the histories of knights-errant! What would Sir Amadis have said, had he heard this! But he undoubtedly would have forgiven thee, for he was the most courteous and complaisant knight of his time, especially to the fair sex, being a great protector of damsels; but thy words might have reached the ears of some, that would have sacrificed thee to their indignation; for all knights are not possessed of civility or good-nature; some are rough and revengeful; and neither are all those that assume the name of a disposition suitable to the function. Some indeed are of the right stamp, but others are either counterfeit, or of such an alloy as cannot bear the touch-stone, though they deceive the sight. Inferior mortals there are, who aim at knighthood, and strain to reach the height of

honour; and high-born knights there are, who seem fond of grovelling in the dust, and being lost in the crowd of inferior mortals. The first raise themselves by ambition or by virtue; the last debase themselves by negligence or by vice; so that there is need of a distinguishing understanding to judge between these two sorts of knights, so nearly allied in name, and so different in actions."—"Bless me! dear uncle," cried the niece, "that you should know so much, as to be able, if there was occasion, to get up into a pulpit, or preach\* in the streets, and yet be so strangely mistaken, so grossly blind of understanding, as to fancy a man of your years and infirmity can be strong and valiant; that you can set everything right, and force stubborn malice to bend, when you yourself stoop beneath the burden of age; and what is yet more odd, that you are a knight, when it is well known you are none? For though some gentlemen may be knights, a poor gentleman can hardly be so, because he cannot buy it."

"You say well, niece," answered Don Quixote; "and as to this last observation, I could tell you things that you would admire

\* A common thing in Spain and Italy, for the friars and young Jesuits, in an extraordinary fit of zeal, to get upon a bulk, and hold forth in the streets or market-place.

at, concerning families; but because I will not mix sacred things with profane, I waive the discourse. However, listen both of you, and for your farther instruction know, that all the lineages and descents of mankind are reducible to these four heads: First, of those who, from a very small and obscure beginning, have raised themselves to a spreading and prodigious magnitude. Secondly, of those who, deriving their greatness from a noble spring, still preserve the dignity and character of their original splendour. A third, are those who, though they had large foundations, have ended in a point like a pyramid, which by little and little dwindles as it were into nothing, or next to nothing, in comparison of its basis. Others there are (and those are the bulk of mankind) who have neither had a good beginning, nor a rational continuance, and whose ending shall therefore be obscure; such are the common people, the plebeian race. The Ottoman family is an instance of the first sort, having derived their present greatness from the poor beginning of a base-born shepherd. Of the second sort, there are many princes who, being born such, enjoy their dominions by inheritance, and leave them to their successors without addition or diminution. Of the third sort,

there is an infinite number of examples: for all the Pharaohs and Ptolemies of Egypt, your Cæsars of Rome, and all the swarm (if I may use that word) of princes, monarchs, lords, Medes, Assyrians, Persians, Greeks and Barbarians: all these families and empires have ended in a point, as well as those who gave rise to them; for it were impossible at this day to find any of their descendants, or if we could find them, it would be in a poor grovelling condition. As for the vulgar, I say nothing of them, more than that they are thrown in as cyphers to increase the number of mankind, without deserving any other praise. Now, my good-natured souls, you may at least draw this reasonable inference from what I have said of this promiscuous dispensation of honours, and this uncertainty and confusion of descent, that virtue and liberality in the present possessor, are the most just and undisputable titles to nobility; for the advantages of pedigree, without these qualifications, serve only to make vice more conspicuous. The great man that is vicious will be greatly vicious, and the rich miser is only a covetous beggar; for, not he who possesses, but that spends and enjoys his wealth, is the rich and the happy man; nor

he neither who barely spends, but who does it with discretion. The poor knight indeed cannot shew he is one by his magnificence; but yet by his virtue, affability, civility, and courteous behaviour, he may display the chief ingredients that enter into the composition of the knighthood; and though he cannot pretend to liberality, wanting riches to support it, his charity may recompense that defect; for an alms of two maravedis cheerfully bestowed upon an indigent beggar, by a man in poor circumstances, speaks him as liberal as the larger donative of a vain-glorious rich man before a fawning crowd. These accomplishments will always shine through the clouds of fortune, and at last break through them with splendour and applause. There are two paths to dignity and wealth; arts and arms. Arms I have chosen; and the influence of the planet Mars that presided at my nativity, led me to that adventurous road. So that all your attempts to shake my resolution are in vain: for in spite of all mankind, I will pursue what heaven has fated, fortune ordained, what reason requires, and (which is more) what my inclination demands. I am sensible of the many troubles and dangers that attend the prosecution of knight-errantry, but I also know

what infinite honours and rewards are the consequences of the performance. The path of virtue is narrow, and the way of vice easy and open; but their ends and resting-places are very different. The latter is a broad road indeed, and down hill all the way; but death and contempt are always met at the end of the journey: whereas the former leads to glory and life, not a life that soon must have an end, but an immortal being. For I know, as our great\* Castilian poet expresses it, that

‘Through steep ascents, through strait and rugged ways,  
Ourselves to glory’s lofty seats we raise:  
In vain he hopes to reach the bless’d abode,  
Who leaves the narrow path, for the more easy road.’”

“Alack-a-day!” cried the niece, “my uncle is a poet too! He knows every thing. I will lay my life he might turn mason in case of necessity. If he would but undertake it, he could build a house as easy as a bird-cage.”—“Why truly, niece,” said Don Quixote, “were not my understanding wholly involved in thoughts relating to the exercise of knight-errantry, there is nothing which I durst not engage to perform, no curiosity should escape my hands, especially bird-cages and tooth-

\* Boscan, one of the first reformers of the Spanish poetry.

pickers.”\* By this somebody knocked at the door, and being asked who it was, Sancho answered it was he. Whereupon the house-keeper slipped out of the way, not willing to see him, and the niece let him in. Don Quixote received him with open arms; and locking themselves both in the closet, they had another dialogue as pleasant as the former.

\* *Palillo de dientes*, i. e. a little stick for the teeth. Tooth-pickers in Spain are made of long shavings of boards, split and reduced to a straw's breadth, and wound up like small wax-lights.

## CHAPTER VII

AN ACCOUNT OF DON QUIXOTE'S CONFERENCE WITH HIS SQUIRE, AND OTHER MOST FAMOUS PASSAGES

THE house-keeper no sooner saw her master and Sancho locked up together, but she presently surmised the drift of that close conference, and concluding that no less than villainous knight-errantry and another sally would prove the result of it, she flung her veil over her head, and, quite cast down with sorrow and vexation, trudged away to seek Samson Carrasco, the bachelor of arts; depending on his wit and eloquence, to dissuade his friend Don Quixote from his frantic resolution. She found him walking in the yard of his house, and fell presently on her knees before him in a cold sweat, and with all the marks of a disordered mind. “What is the matter, woman,” said he, somewhat surprised at her posture and confusion, “what has befallen you, that you look as if you were ready to give up the ghost?”—“Nothing,” said she, “dear sir, but that my master is departing!