

CHAPTER XXIV.

WHICH GIVES AN ACCOUNT OF A THOUSAND FLIM-
FLAMS AND STORIES, AS IMPERTINENT AS NECES-
SARY TO THE RIGHT UNDERSTANDING OF THIS
GRAND HISTORY

THE translator of this famous history declares, that, at the beginning of the chapter which treats of the adventure of Montesinos' cave, he found a marginal annotation, written with the Arabian author's own hand, in these words:

"I cannot be persuaded, nor believe, that all the wonderful accidents said to have happened to the valorous Don Quixote in the cave, so punctually befel him as he relates them: for the course of his adventures hitherto has been very natural, and bore the face of probability; but in this there appears no coherence with reason, and nothing but monstrous incongruities. But, on the other hand, if we consider the honour, worth, and integrity of the noble Don Quixote, we have not the least reason to suspect he would be guilty of a lie; but rather

that he would sooner have been transfixed with arrows. Besides, he has been so particular in his relation of that adventure, and given so many circumstances, that I dare not declare it absolutely apocryphal; especially when I consider, that he had not time enough to invent such a cluster of fables. I therefore insert it among the rest, without offering to determine whether it is true or false; leaving it to the discretion of the judicious reader. Though I must acquaint him by the way, that Don Quixote, upon his deathbed, utterly disowned this adventure, as a perfect fable, which, he said, he had invented purely to please his humour, being suitable to such as he had formerly read in romances." And so much by way of digression.

The scholar thought Sancho the most saucy servant, and his master the calmest madman, that ever he saw; though he attributed the patience of the latter to a certain good humour, and easiness of temper, infused into him by the sight of his mistress Dulcinea, even under enchantment; otherwise he would have thought his not checking Sancho a greater sign of madness than his discourse. "Noble Don Quixote," said he, "for four principal reasons, I am extremely pleased with having taken this journey

with you. First, it has procured me the honour of your acquaintance, which I shall always esteem a singular happiness. In the second place, sir, the secrets of Montesinos' cave, and the transformations of Guadiana, and Ruydera's lakes, have been revealed to me, which may look very great in my Spanish Ovid. My third advantage is, to have discovered the antiquity of card-playing, which I find to have been a pastime in use even in the Emperor Charles the Great's time, as may be collected from the words of Durandarte, who, after a long speech of Montesinos', said, as he waked, 'Patience, and shuffle the cards;' which vulgar expression he could never have learned in his enchantment. It follows, therefore, that he must have heard it when he lived in France, which was in the reign of that emperor; which observation is nicked, I think, very opportunely for my supplement to Polydore Virgil, who, as I remember, has not touched upon card-playing. I will insert it in my work, I'll assure you, sir, as a matter of great importance, having the testimony of so authentic and ancient an author as Sir Durandarte. The fourth part of my good fortune, is to know the certain and true source of the river Guadiana, which has hitherto disappointed all human inquiries."

"There is a great deal of reason in what you say," answered Don Quixote; "but, under favour, sir, pray tell me, should you happen to get a license to publish your book, which I somewhat doubt, whom will you pitch upon for your patron?"—"O, sir!" answered the author, "there are grandees¹ enough in Spain, sure, that I may dedicate to."—"Truly, not many," said Don Quixote; "there are, indeed, several, whose merits deserve the praise of a dedication, but very few, whose generosity will reward the pains and civility of the author. I must confess, I know a prince, whose generosity may make amends for what is wanting in the rest; and that to such a degree, that, should I make bold to come to particulars, and speak of his great merits, it would be enough to stir up a noble emulation in above four generous breasts; but more of this some other time—it is late now, and therefore convenient to think of a lodging."

"Hard by us here, sir," said the author, "is a hermitage, the retirement of a devout person, who, as they say, was once a soldier, and is looked upon as a good Christian; and so charitable, that he has built there a little house

¹ Grandees are such of the nobility as have the privilege of being covered before the king.

at his own expense, purely for the entertainment of strangers."—"But does he keep hens there, trow?" asked Sancho.—"Few hermits in this age are without them,"¹ said Don Quixote; "for their way of living now falls short of the strictness and austerity of those in the deserts of Egypt, who went clad only with palm-leaves, and fed on the roots of the earth. Now, because I speak well of these of old, I would not have you think I reflect on the others. No, I only mean that their penances are not so severe as in former days; yet this does not hinder but that the hermits of the present age may be good men. I look upon them to be such; at least, their dissimulation secures them from scandal; and the hypocrite that puts on the form of holiness, does certainly less harm than the barefaced sinner."

As they went on in their discourse, they saw a man following them a great pace on foot, and switching up a mule laden with lances and halberts. He presently overtook them, gave them the time of the day, and passed by. "Stay, honest fellow," cried Don Quixote, seeing him go so fast, "make no more haste than is consistent with good speed."—"I can-

¹ See Appendix, Note 1, Chapter XXIV.

not stay, sir," said the man; "for these weapons that you see must be used to-morrow morning; so, sir, I am in haste—good bye—I shall lodge to-night at the inn beyond the hermitage; if you chance to go that way, there you may find me; and I will tell you strange news: so fare ye well." Then, whipping his mule, away he moved forwards, so fast that Don Quixote had not leisure to ask him any more questions.

The knight, who had always an itching ear after novelties, to satisfy his curiosity immediately proposed their holding straight on to the inn, without stopping at the hermitage, where the scholar designed to have stayed all night. Well, they all consented, and made the best of their way: however, when they came near the hermitage, the scholar desired Don Quixote to call with him for a moment, and drink a glass of wine at the door. Sancho no sooner heard this proposed, but he turned Dapple that way, and rode thither before; but, to his grief, the hospitable hermit was abroad, and nobody at home but the hermit's companion, who, being asked whether he had any *strong* liquor within, made answer, that he could not come at any, but as for *small* water, he might have his belly-full. "Body of me!" quoth

Sancho, "were mine a water-thirst, or had I liking to your cold comfort, there are wells enough upon the road, where I might have swilled my skinful. Oh! the good cheer at Don Diego's house, and the savoury scum at Camacho's wedding! when shall I find your fellow!" They now spurred on towards the inn, and soon overtook on the road a young fellow, beating it on the hoof pretty leisurely. He carried his sword over his shoulder, with a bundle of clothes hanging upon it, which, to all outward appearance, consisted of a pair of breeches, a cloak, and a shirt or two. He had on a tattered velvet jerkin, with a ragged satin lining: his shirt hung out, his stockings were of silk, and his shoes square at the toes, after the court fashion. He seemed about eighteen or nineteen years of age, a good, pleasant-looking lad, and of a lively and active disposition. To pass the fatigue of his journey the best he could, he sung all the way; and, as they came near him, was just ending the last words of a ballad, which the scholar got by heart, and were these.

"A plague on ill-luck! now my ready's all gone
To the wars poor pilgarlick must trudge;
Though had I but money to rake as I've done,
The devil a foot would I budge."

"So, young gentleman," said Don Quixote

to him, "methinks you go very light and airy. Whither are you bound, I pray you, if a man may be so bold?"—"I am going to the wars, sir," answered the youth; "and for my travelling thus, heat and poverty will excuse it."—"I admit the heat," replied Don Quixote; "but why poverty, I beseech you?"—"Because I have no clothes to put on," replied the lad, "but what I carry in this bundle; and if I should wear them out upon the road, I should have nothing to make a handsome figure with in any town; for I have no money to buy new ones, till I overtake a regiment of foot, that lies about some twelve leagues off, where I design to list myself, and then I shall not want a conveniency to ride with the baggage till we come to Carthagená, where, I hear, they are to embark; for I had rather serve the king abroad, than any beggarly courtier at home."—"But pray," said the scholar, "have not you laid up something while you were there?"—"Had I served any of your grandees or great persons," said the young man, "I might have done well enough, and have had a commission by this time; for their foot-boys are presently advanced to captains and lieutenants, or some other good post; but a plague on it, sir, it was always my ill fortune to serve pitiful upstarts and

younger brothers; and my allowance was commonly so ill paid, and so small, that the better half was scarce enough to wash my linen; how then should a poor devil of a page, who would make his fortune, come to any good in such a miserable service?"—"But," said Don Quixote, "how comes it about that in all this time you could not get yourself a whole livery?"—"Alack-a-day, sir," answered the lad, "I had a couple; but my masters dealt with me as they do with novices in monasteries; if they go off before they profess, the fresh habit is taken from them, and they return them their own clothes. For you must know, that such as I served, only buy liveries for a little ostentation; so, when they have made their appearance at court, they sneak down into the country, and then the poor servants are stripped, and must even betake themselves to their rags again."

"A sordid trick," said Don Quixote; "or, as the Italians call it, a notorious *espilorcheria*.¹ Well, you need not repine at leaving the court, since you do it with so good a design; for there is nothing in the world more commendable than to serve God in the first place, and the king in the next, especially in the pro-

¹ *Espilorcheria*, a beggarly mean action.

fession of arms, which, if it does not procure a man so much riches as learning, may at least entitle him to more honour. It is true, that more families have been advanced by the gown, but yet your gentlemen of the sword, whatever the reason of it is, have always I know not what advantage above the men of learning; and something of glory and splendour attends them, that makes them outshine the rest of mankind. But take my advice along with you, child; if you intend to raise yourself by military employment, I would not have you be uneasy with the thoughts of what misfortunes may befall you; the worst can be but to die, and if it be a good honourable death, your fortune is made, and you are certainly happy. Julius Cæsar, that valiant Roman emperor, being asked what kind of death was best, 'That which is sudden and unexpected,' said he; and though his answer had a relish of paganism, yet, with respect to human infirmities, it was very judicious; for, suppose you should be cut off at the very first engagement by a cannon-ball, or at the spring of a mine, what matters it? it is all but dying, and there is an end of the business. As Terence says, a soldier makes a better figure dead in the field of battle, than alive and safe in flight. The

more likely he is to rise in fame and preferment, the better discipline he keeps; the better he obeys, the better he will know how to command: and pray, observe, my friend, that it is more honourable for a soldier to smell of gunpowder than of musk and amber; or if old age overtakes you in this noble employment, though all over scars, though maimed and lame, you will still have honour to support you, and secure you from the contempt of poverty, nay, from poverty itself; for there is care taken that veterans and disabled soldiers may not want; neither are they to be used as some men do their negro slaves, who, when they are old, and past service, are turned naked out of doors, under pretence of freedom, to be made greater slaves to cold and hunger; a slavery from which nothing but death can set the wretches free. But I will say no more to you on this subject at this time. Get up behind me, and I will carry you to the inn, where you shall sup with me, and to-morrow morning make the best of your way, and may heaven prosper your good designs."

The page excused himself from riding behind the knight, but accepted of his invitation to supper very willingly. Sancho, who had all the while given ear to his master's discourse, is

said to have been more than usually surprised, hearing him talk so wisely. Now blessing on thee, master of mine, thought he to himself, how comes it about that a man who says so many good things, should relate such ridiculous stories and whimsies as he would have us believe of Montesinos' cave? Well, Heaven knows best, and the proof of the pudding is the eating.—By this time it began to grow dark, and they arrived at the inn, where Don Quixote alighting, asked presently for the man with the lances and halberts. The innkeeper answered, that he was rubbing down his mule in the stable. Sancho was very well pleased to be at his journey's end, and the more, that his master took the house for a real inn, and not for a castle, as he used to do. He and the scholar then set up the asses, giving Rozinante the best manger and standing in the stable.