

CHAPTER XXXVI

THE STRANGE AND NEVER THOUGHT-OF ADVENTURE
OF THE DISCONSOLATE MATRON, *alias* THE
COUNTESS TRIFALDI, WITH SANCHE PANZA'S
LETTER TO HIS WIFE TERESA PANZA

THE whole contrivance of the late adventure was plotted by the duke's steward, a man of wit and a facetious and quick fancy: He made the verses, acted Merlin himself, and instructed a page to personate Dulcinea. And now, by his master's appointment, he prepared another scene of mirth, as pleasant, and as artful and surprising as can be imagined.

The next day, the duchess asked Sancho, "whether he had begun his penitential task, to disenchant Dulcinea?"—"Ay, marry have I," quoth Sancho, "for I have already lent myself five lashes on the buttocks."—"With what, friend?" asked the duchess.—"With the palm of my hand," answered Sancho.—"Your hand!" said the duchess, "those are rather claps than lashes, Sancho; I doubt Father Merlin will not be satisfied at so easy a rate;

for the liberty of so great a lady is not to be purchased at so mean a price. No, you should lash yourself with something that may make you smart: A good friar's scourge, a cat of nine-tails, or penitent's whip, would do well; for letters written in blood stand good; but works of charity, faintly and coldly done, lose their merit and signify nothing."—"Then, madam," quoth he, "will your worship's grace do so much as help me to a convenient rod, such as you shall think best; though it must not be too smarting neither; for faith, though I am a clown, my flesh is as soft as any lady's in the land, no disparagement to any body's buttocks."—"Well, well, Sancho," said she, "it shall be my care to provide you a whip, that shall suit your soft constitution, as if they were twins."—"But now, my dear madam," quoth he, "you must know I have written a letter to my wife Teresa Panza, to give her to understand how things are with me. I have it in my bosom, and it is just ready to send away; it wants nothing but the direction on the outside. Now I would have your wisdom to read it, and see if it be not written like a governor; I mean, in such a style as governors should write."—"And who penned it?" asked the duchess.—"What a question

there is now!" quoth Sancho. "Who should pen it but myself, sinner as I am?"—"And did you write it too?" said the duchess.—"Not I," quoth Sancho; "for I can neither write nor read, though I can make my mark."—"Let me see the letter," said the duchess; "for I dare say your wit is set out in it to some purpose." Sancho pulled the letter out of his bosom unsealed, and the duchess having taken it, read what follows:—

Sancho Panza to his Wife Teresa Panza.

"If I am well lashed, yet I am whipped into a government: If I have got a good government, it cost me many a good lash. Thou must know, my Teresa, that I am resolved thou shalt ride in a coach; for now, any other way of going is to me but creeping on all-fours, like a kitten. Thou art now a governor's wife, guess whether any one will dare to tread on thy heels. I have sent thee a green hunting-suit of *reparel*, which my Lady Duchess gave me. Pray see and get it turned into a petticoat and jacket for our daughter. The folks in this country are very ready to talk little good of my master, Don Quixote. They say he is a mad-wise-man, and a pleasant madman, and that I am not a jot behind-hand with him.

We have been in Montesinos' cave, and Merlin the wizard has pitched on me to disenchant Dulcinea del Toboso, the same who among you is called Aldonza Lorenzo. When I have given myself three thousand three hundred lashes, lacking five, she will be as disenchanted as the mother that bore her. But not a word of the pudding; for if you tell your case among a parcel of tattling gossips, you will never have done; one will cry it is white, and others, it is black. I am to go to my government very suddenly, whither I go with a huge mind to make money, as I am told all new governors do. I will first see how matters go, and then send thee word whether thou hadst best come or no. Dapple is well, and gives his humble service to you. I will not part with him, though I were to be made the Great Turk. My Lady Duchess kisses thy hands a thousand times over; pray return her two thousand for her one: For there is nothing cheaper than fair words, as my master says. Heaven has not been pleased to make me light on another cloakbag, with a hundred pieces of gold in it, like those you wot of. But all in good time, do not let that vex thee, my jug; the government will make it up, I will warrant thee. Though after all, one thing sticks plaguily in

my gizzard: They tell me, that when once I have tasted of it, I shall be ready to eat my very fingers after it, so savoury is the sauce. Should it fall out so, I should make but an ill hand of it; and yet your maimed crippled alms-folks pick up a pretty livelihood, and make their begging as good as a prebend. So that, one way or other, old girl, matters will go swimmingly, and thou wilt be rich and happy. Heaven make thee so, as well as it may; and keep me for thy sake. From this castle, the twentieth of June, 1614.

“Thy husband the Governor,
“SANCHO PANZA.”

“Methinks, Mr Governor,” said the duchess, having read the letter, “you are out in two particulars; first, when you intimate that this government was bestowed on you for the stripes you are to give yourself; whereas, you may remember it was allotted you before this disenchantment was dreamed of. The second branch that you failed in, is the discovery of your avarice, which is the most detestable quality in governors; because their self-interest is always indulged at the expense of justice. You know the saying, covetousness breaks the sack, and that vice always prompts a governor

to fleece and oppress the subject.”—“Truly, my good lady,” quoth Sancho, “I meant no harm, I did not well think of what I wrote; and if your grace’s worship does not like this letter, I will tear it and have another: but remember the old saying, seldom comes a better. I shall make but sad work of it, if I must pump my brains for it.”—“No, no,” said the duchess, “this will do well enough, and I must have the duke see it.”

They went into the garden, where they were to dine that day, and there she shewed the duke the learned epistle, which he read over with a great deal of pleasure.

After dinner, Sancho was entertaining the company very pleasantly, with some of his savoury discourse, when suddenly they were surprised with the mournful sound of a fife, which played in concert with a hoarse unbraced drum. All the company seemed amazed and discomposed at the displeasing noise; but Don Quixote especially was so alarmed with this solemn martial harmony, that he could not compose his thoughts. Sancho’s fear undoubtedly wrought the usual effects, and carried him to crouch by the duchess.

During this consternation, two men in deep mourning cloaks trailing on the ground, entered

the garden, each of them beating a large drum, covered also with black, and with these a third playing on a fife, in mourning like the rest. They ushered in a person of gigantic stature, to which the long black garb in which he was wrapped up, was no small addition: It had a train of a prodigious length, and over the cassock was girt a broad black belt, which slung a scimitar of a mighty size. His face was covered with a thin black veil, through which might be discerned a beard of a vast length, as white as snow. The solemnity of his pace kept exact time to the gravity of the music: In short, his stature, his motion, his black hue, and his attendance, were every way surprising and astonishing. With this state and formality he approached, and fell on his knees at a convenient distance before the duke; who not suffering him to speak till he arose, the monstrous spectre erected his bulk, and throwing off his veil, discovered the most terrible, hugeous, white, broad, prominent, bushy beard, that ever mortal eyes were frightened at. Then fixing his eyes on the duke, and with a deep sonorous voice, roaring out from the ample cavern of his spreading lungs, "Most high and potent lord," cried he, "my name is Trifaldin with the white beard, squire to the Countess Trifaldi, otherwise called the Discon-

solate Matron, from whom I am ambassador to your grace, begging admittance for her ladyship to come and relate, before your magnificence, the unhappy and wonderful circumstances of her misfortune. But first she desires to be informed whether the valorous and invincible knight, Don Quixote de la Mancha, resides at this time in your castle; for it is in quest of him that my lady has travelled without coach or palfrey, hungry and thirsty; and, in short, without breaking her fast, from the kingdom of Candaya, all the way to these your grace's territories: A thing incredibly miraculous, if not wrought by enchantment. She is now without the gate of this castle, waiting only for your grace's permission to enter." This said, the squire coughed, and with both his hands, stroked his unwieldy beard from the top to the bottom, and with a formal gravity expected the duke's answer.

"Worthy Squire Trifaldin with the white beard," said the duke, "long since have we heard of the misfortunes of the Countess Trifaldi, whom enchanters have occasioned to be called the Disconsolate Matron; and therefore, most stupendous squire, you may tell her that she may make her entry; and that the valiant Don Quixote de la Mancha is here present, on whose generous assistance she may

safely rely for redress. Inform her also from me, that if she has occasion for my aid, she may depend on my readiness to do her service, being obliged, as I am a knight, to be aiding and assisting, to the utmost of my power, to all persons of her sex in distress, especially widowed matrons, like her ladyship."

Trifaldin, hearing this, made his obeisance with the knee, and, beckoning to the fife and drums to observe his motion, they all marched out in the same solemn procession as they entered, and left all the beholders in a deep admiration of his proportion and deportment.

Then the duke, turning to Don Quixote, "Behold, Sir Knight," said he, "how the light and the glory of virtue dart their beams through the clouds of malice and ignorance, and shine to the remotest parts of the earth. It is hardly six days since you have vouchsafed to honour this castle with your presence, and already the afflicted and distressed flock hither from the uttermost regions, not in coaches, or on dromedaries, but on foot, and without eating by the way; such is their confidence in the strength of that arm, the fame of whose great exploits flies and spreads everywhere, and makes the whole world acquainted with your valour."

"What would I give, my lord," said Don

Quixote, "that the same holy pedant were here now, who, the other day at your table, would have run down knight-errantry at such a rate, that the testimony of his own eyes might convince him of the absurdity of his error, and let him see, that the comfortless and afflicted do not, in enormous misfortunes, and uncommon adversity, repair for redress to the doors of droning churchmen, or your little parish priests of villages; nor to the fireside of your country gentleman, who never travels beyond his land-mark; nor to the lolling lazy courtier, who rather hearkens after news which he may relate, than endeavours to perform such deeds as may deserve to be recorded and related. No, the protection of damsels, the comfort of widows, the redress of the injured, and the support of the distressed, are nowhere so perfectly to be expected as from the generous professors of knight-errantry. Therefore I thank heaven a thousand times for having qualified me to answer the necessities of the miserable by such a function. As for the hardships and accidents that may attend me, I look upon them as no discouragements, since proceeding from so noble a cause. Then let this matron be admitted to make known her request, and I will refer her for redress to the force of my arm, and the intrepid resolution of my courageous soul."