

CHAPTER XXXVII

THE FAMOUS ADVENTURE OF THE DISCONSOLATE
MATRON* CONTINUED

THE duke and duchess were mightily pleased to find Don Quixote wrought up to a resolution so agreeable to their design. But Sancho, who made his observations, was not so well satisfied. "I am in a bodily fear," quoth he, "that this same Mistress Waiting-woman will be a baulk to my preferment. I remember I once knew a Toledo apothecary, that talked like a Canary bird, and used to say, Wherever come old waiting-women, good luck can happen there to no man. Body o'me, he knew them too well, and therefore valued them accordingly. He could have eaten them all with a grain of salt. Since then the best of them are so plaguy troublesome and impertinent, what will those be that are in doleful dumps, like this same Countess Threefolds, three skirts, or three tails,† what do you call her?"—"Hold your

* The Spanish is *Duenna*, which signifies an old waiting-woman, or governante, as it is rendered in Quevedo's Visions.

† Trifaldi, the name of the Countess, signifies Three Skirts, or Three tails.

tongue, Sancho," said Don Quixote. "This matron, that comes so far in search of me, lives too remote to lie under the lash of the apothecary's satire. Besides, you are to remember she is a countess; and when ladies of that quality become governantes, or waiting-women, it is only to queens or empresses; and in their own houses they are as absolute ladies as any others, and attended by other waiting-women."—"Ay, ay," cried Donna Rodriguez, who was present, "there are some that serve my lady duchess here in that capacity, that might have been countesses too, had they had better luck. But we are not all born to be rich, though we are all born to be honest. Let nobody then speak ill of waiting-gentlewomen, especially of those that are ancient and maidens; for though I am none of those, I easily conceive the advantage that a waiting-gentlewoman, who is a maiden, has over one that is a widow. When all is said, whoever will offer to meddle with waiting-women will get little by it. Many go out for wool, and come home shorn themselves."—"For all that," quoth Sancho, "your waiting-women are not so bare, but that they may be shorn, if my barber spoke truth; so that they had best not stir the rice, though it sticks to the pot."

—“These squires, forsooth,” answered Donna Rodriguez, “must be always cocking up their noses against us. As they are always haunting their antichambers, like a parcel of evil spirits as they are, they see us whisk in and out at all times; so, when they are not at their devotion, which, heaven knows, is almost all the day long, they can find no other pastime than to abuse us, and tell idle stories of us, unburying our bones, and burying our reputation. But their tongues are no slander: and I can tell those silly rake-shames, that, in spite of their flouts, we shall keep the upper hand of them, and live in the world in the better sort of houses, though we starve for it, and cover our flesh, whether delicate or not, with black gowns, as they cover a dunghill with a piece of tapestry when a procession goes by. ’Slife, sir, were this a proper time, I would convince you and all the world, that there is no virtue but is inclosed within the stays of a waiting-woman.”—“I fancy,” said the duchess, “that honest Rodriguez is much in the right: But we must now choose a fitter time for this dispute, to confound the ill opinion of that wicked apothecary, and to root out that which the great Sancho Panza has fixed in his breast.”—“For my part,” quoth Sancho, “I

will not dispute with her; for since the thoughts of being a governor have steamed up into my brains, all my concern for the squire is vanished into smoke; and I care not a wild fig for all the waiting-women in the world.”

This subject would have engaged them longer in discourse, had they not been cut short by the sound of the fife and drums that gave them notice of the Disconsolate Matron’s approach. Thereupon the duchess asked the duke, how it might be proper to receive her? and how far ceremony was due to her quality as a countess?—“Look you,” quoth Sancho, striking in before the duke could answer, “I would advise you to meet her countess-ship half-way, but for the waiting-womanship, do not stir a step.”—“Who bids you trouble yourself?” said Don Quixote.—“Who bid me?” answered Sancho, “why, I myself did. Have I not been squire to your worship, and thus served a ’prenticeship to good manners? And have not I had the Flower of Courtesy for my master, who has often told me, a man may as well lose at one-and-thirty with a card too much, as a card too little? Good wits jump; a word to the wise is enough.”—“Sancho says well,” said the duke; “to decide the matter, we will first see what kind of a

countess she is, and behave ourselves accordingly."

Now the fife and the drums entered as before. But here the author ends this short chapter, and begins another, prosecuting the same adventure, which is one of the most notable in the history.

51

