

CHAPTER XLVIII

WHAT HAPPENED TO DON QUIXOTE WITH DONNA RODRIGUEZ, THE DUCHESS'S WOMAN: AS ALSO OTHER PASSAGES WORTHY TO BE RECORDED, AND HAD IN ETERNAL REMEMBRANCE

DON QUIXOTE, thus unhappily hurt, was extremely sullen and melancholy, his face wrapped up and marked, not by the hand of a Superior Being, but the paws of a cat, a misfortune incident to knight-errantry. He was six days without appearing in public; and one night, when he was confined to his apartment, as he lay awake reflecting on his misfortunes and Altisidora's importunities, he perceived somebody was opening his chamber-door with a key, and presently imagined that the amorous damsel was coming to make an attempt on his chastity, and expose him to the danger of forfeiting that loyalty which he had vowed to his Lady Dulcinea del Toboso. Prepossessed with that conceit, "No," said he, loud enough to be heard, "the greatest beauty in the universe shall never remove the dear idea of

the charming fair, that is engraved and stamped in the very centre of my heart, and the most secret recesses of my breast. No, thou only mistress of my soul, whether transformed into a rank country wench, or into one of the nymphs of the golden Tagus, that weave silk and gold in the loom; whether Merlin or Montesinos detained thee where they pleased, be where thou wilt, thou still art mine; and wherever I shall be, I must and will be thine." Just as he ended his speech, the door opened. Up got he in the bed, wrapped from head to foot in a yellow satin quilt, with a woollen cap on his head, his face and his mustachios bound up; his face to heal his scratches, and his mustachios to keep them down: In which posture he looked like the strangest apparition that can be imagined. He fixed his eyes towards the door, and when he expected to have seen the yielding and doleful Altisidora, he beheld a most reverend matron approaching in a white veil, so long that it covered her from head to foot. Betwixt her left-hand fingers she carried half a candle lighted, and held her right before her face, to keep the blaze of the taper from her eyes, which were hidden by a huge pair of spectacles. All the way she trod very softly, and moved at a very slow pace.

Don Quixote watched her motions, and, observing her garb and silence, took her for some witch or enchantress that came in that dress to practise her wicked sorceries upon him, and began to make the sign of the cross as fast as he could. The vision advanced all the while, and being got to the middle of the chamber lifted up its eyes, and saw Don Quixote thus making a thousand crosses on his breast. But if he was astonished at the sight of such a figure, she was no less affrighted at his; so that, as soon as she spied him thus wrapped up in yellow, so lank, bepatched and muffled up, "Bless me," cried she, "what is this!" With the sudden fright she dropped the candle, and now, being in the dark as she was running out, the length of her coats made her stumble, and down she fell in the middle of the chamber. Don Quixote at the same time was in great anxiety. "Phantom," cried he, "or whatsoever thou art, I conjure thee to tell me who thou art, and what thou requirest of me? If thou art a soul in torment, tell me, and I will endeavour thy ease to the utmost of my power; for I am a Catholic Christian, and love to do good to all mankind; for which reason I took upon me the order of knight-errantry, whose extensive

duties engage me to relieve the souls in purgatory." The poor old woman hearing herself thus conjured, judged Don Quixote's fears by her own, and therefore, with a low and doleful voice, "My Lord Don Quixote," said she, "if you are he, I am neither a phantom nor a ghost, nor a soul in purgatory, as I suppose you fancy, but Donna Rodriguez, my lady duchess's matron of honour, who come to you about a certain grievance, of the nature of those which you use to redress."—"Tell me, Donna Rodriguez," said Don Quixote, "are not you come to manage some love intrigue? If you are, take it from me, you will lose your labour: It is all in vain, thanks to the peerless beauty of my lady Dulcinea del Toboso! In a word, madam, provided you come not on some such embassy, you may go light your candle and return, and we will talk of any thing that you please; but remember, I bar all dangerous insinuations, all amorous enticements."—"What! I procure for others!" cried the matron; "I find you do not know me, sir. I am not so stale yet, to be reduced to such poor employments. I have good flesh still about me, heaven be praised, and all my teeth in my head, except some few which the rheums, so rife in this country of Arragon, have robbed me of.

But stay a little, I will go light my candle, and then I will tell you my misfortunes, for it is you that sets to right every thing in the world." This said, away she went, without stopping for an answer.

Don Quixote expected her a while quietly, but his working brain soon started a thousand chimeras concerning this new adventure, and he fancied he did ill in giving way, though but to a thought of endangering his faith to his mistress. "Who knows," said he to himself, "but that the devil is endeavouring to circumvent me with an old governante, though it has not been in his power to do it with countesses, marchionesses, duchesses, queens, nor empresses. I have often heard say, and that by persons of great judgment, that if he can, he will rather tempt a man with an ugly object, than with one that is beautiful.* Who knows but this solitude, this occasion, the stillness of the night, may rouse my sleeping desires, and cause me in my latter age to fall, where I never stumbled before? In such cases it is better to fly than to stay to face the danger. But why do I argue so foolishly? Sure it is impossible that an antiquated waiting-matron, in a long white veil like a winding-

* In the original, with a flat-nosed, rather than a hawk-nosed woman.

sheet, with a pair of spectacles over her nose, should create or waken an unchaste thought in the most abandoned libertine in the world. Is there any of these duennas or governantes that has good flesh? Is there one of these implements of antichambers that is not impertinent, affected, and intolerable? Avaunt, then, all ye idle crowd of wrinkled female waiters, unfit for any human recreation! How is that lady to be commended, who, they tell us, set up only a couple of mawkins in her chamber, exactly representing two waiting-matrons with their work before them! The state and decorum of her room was as well kept with those statues, as it would have been with real duennas." So saying, he started from the bed, to lock the door, and shut out Donna Rodriguez; but, in that very moment, she happened to come in with a wax-candle lighted; at which time spying the knight near her, wrapped in his quilt, his face bound up, and a woollen cap on his head, she was frightened again, and started two or three steps back. "Sir knight," said she, "is my honour safe? for I do not think it looks handsomely in you to come out of your bed."—"I ought to ask you the same question, madam," said Don Quixote; "and therefore tell me whether I shall be safe from being

assaulted and ravished.”—“Whom are you afraid of, sir knight?” cried she.—“Of you,” replied Don Quixote; “for, in short, I am not made of marble, nor you of brass; neither is it now the noon of day, but that of night, and a little later too, if I am not mistaken; besides, we are in a place more close and private than the cave must have been, where the false and presumptuous Æneas enjoyed the beautiful and tender-hearted Dido. However, give me your hand, madam; for I desire no greater security than that of my own continence and circumspection.” This said, he kissed his own right hand, and with it took hold of hers, which she gave him with the same ceremony.

Here Cid Hamet (making a parenthesis) swears by Mahomet, he would have given the best coat of two that he had, only to have seen the knight and the matron walk thus hand in hand from the chamber-door to the bed-side. To make short, Don Quixote went to bed again, and Donna Rodriguez sat down in a chair at some distance, without taking off her spectacles, or setting down the candle. Don Quixote crowded up together, and covered himself close, all but his face, and after they had both remained in silence, the first that broke it was the knight. “Now, madam,”

said he, “you may freely unburden your heart, sure of attention to your complaints from chaste ears, and assistance in your distress from a compassionate heart.”—“I believe as much,” said the matron, “and promised myself no less charitable an answer from a person of so graceful and pleasing a presence. The case then is, noble sir, that though you see me sitting in this chair, in the middle of Arragon, in the habit of an insignificant unhappy duenna, I am of Asturias de Oviedo, and one of the best families in that province. But my hard fortune, and the neglect of my parents, who fell to decay too soon, I cannot tell how, brought me to Madrid, where, because they could do no better, for fear of the worst, they placed me with a court lady, to be her chambermaid. And, though I say it, for all manner of plain work I was never outdone by any one in all my life. My father and mother left me at service, and returned home, and some few years after they both died, and went to heaven, I hope; for they were very good and religious Catholics. Then was I left an orphan, and wholly reduced to the sorrowful condition of such court-servants, wretched wages, and a slender allowance. About the same time the gentleman-usher fell in love with me before I

dreamt of any such thing, Heaven knows. He was somewhat stricken in years, had a fine beard, was a personable man, and, what is more, as good a gentleman as the king, for he was of the mountains. We did not carry matters so close in our love but it came to my lady's ear; and so, to hinder people's tongues, without any more ado, she caused us to be married in the face of our holy mother the Catholic Church, which matrimony produced a daughter, that made an end of my good fortune, if I had any. Not that I died in child-bed, for I went my full time, and was safely delivered, but because my husband (rest his soul) died a while after of a fright; and had I but time to tell you how it happened, I dare say you would wonder." Here she began to weep piteously. "Good sir," cried she, "I must beg your pardon, for I cannot contain myself. As often as I think of my poor husband I cannot forbear shedding of tears. Bless me, how he looked! and with what stateliness he would ride, with my lady behind him, on a stout mule as black as jet; for coaches and chairs were not used then as they are now-a-days, but the ladies rode behind the gentlemen-ushers. And now my tongue is in, I cannot help telling you the whole story, that you may see what a fine well-bred man my

dear husband was, and how nice in every punctilio.

"One day, at Madrid, as he came into St James's Street, which is somewhat narrow, with my lady behind him, he met a judge of the court, with two officers before him; whereupon, as soon as he saw him, to show his respect, my husband turned about his mule, as if he designed to have waited on him. But my lady whispering him in the ear, 'What do you mean,' said she, 'blockhead! do not you know I am here?' The judge, on his side, was no less civil; and, stopping his horse, 'Sir,' said he, 'pray keep your way; you must not wait on me, it becomes me rather to wait on my Lady Gasilda' (for that was my lady's name). However, my husband, with his hat in his hand, persisted in his civil intentions. But at last, the lady being very angry with him for it, took a great pin, or rather as I am apt to believe, a bodkin, out of her case, and run it into his back; upon which, my husband suddenly starting, and crying out, fell out of the saddle, and pulled down my lady after him. Immediately two of her footmen ran to help her, and the judge and his officers did the like. The gate of Guadalajara was presently in a hubbub (the idle people about the gate I

mean). In short, my lady returned home afoot, and my husband went to a surgeon, complaining that he was pricked through the lungs. And now this civility of his was talked of everywhere, insomuch, that the very boys in the streets would flock about him and cheer him: For which reason, and because he was somewhat short-sighted, my lady dismissed him her service, which he took so to heart, poor man, that it cost him his life soon after. Now was I left a poor helpless widow, and with a daughter to keep, who still increased in beauty as she grew up, like the foam of the sea. At length, having the name of an excellent workwoman at my needle, my lady duchess, who was newly married to his grace, took me to live with her here in Arragon, and my daughter as well as myself. In time the girl grew up, and became the most accomplished creature in the world. She sings like a lark, dances like a fairy, trips like a wild buck, writes and reads like a schoolmaster, and casts accompts like an usurer. I say nothing of her neatness; but certainly the purest spring water that runs is not more cleanly; and then for her age, she is now, if I mistake not, just sixteen years, five months, and three days old. Now, who should happen to fall in love with this

daughter of mine, but a mighty rich farmer's son, that lives in one of my lord duke's villages not far off; and, indeed, I cannot tell how he managed matters, but he plied her so close, that, upon a promise of marriage, he wheedled her into a consent, and, in short, got his will of her, and now refuses to make his word good. The duke is no stranger to the business, for I have made complaint to him about it many and many times, and begged of him to enjoin the young man to wed my daughter; but he turns his deaf ear to me, and cannot endure I should speak to him of it, because the young knave's father is rich, and lends the duke money, and is bound for him upon all occasions, so that he would by no means disoblige him.

"Therefore, sir, I apply myself to your worship, and beseech you to see my daughter righted, either by entreaties or by force, seeing every body says you were sent into the world to redress grievances, and assist those in adversity. Be pleased to cast an eye of pity on my daughter's orphan state, her beauty, her youth, and all her other good parts; for, on my conscience, of all the damsels my lady has, there is not one can come up to her by a mile; no, not she that is cried up as the airiest and finest of them all, whom they call Altisidora;

I am sure she is not to be named the same day; for, let me tell you, sir, all is not gold that glisters. This same Altisidora, after all, is a hoity toity, that has more vanity than beauty, and less modesty than confidence. Besides, she is none of the soundest neither, for her breath is so strong, that nobody can endure to stand near her for a moment. Nay, my lady duchess too—but I must say no more, for, as they say, walls have ears.”—“What of my lady duchess?” said Don Quixote. “By all that is dear to you, Donna Rodriguez, tell me, I conjure you.”—“Your entreaties,” said the matron, “are too strong a charm to be resisted, dear sir, and I must tell you the truth. Do you observe, sir, that beauty of my lady’s, that softness, that clearness of complexion, smooth and shining, like a polished sword, those cheeks all milk and vermilion, fair like the moon, and glorious like the sun, that air, when she treads, as if she disdained to touch the ground, and, in short, that look of health that enlivens all her charms? let me tell you, sir, she may thank Heaven for it in the first place, and next to that, two issues in both her legs, which she keeps open to carry off the ill humours, with which the physicians say her body abounds.”—“Blessed Virgin!” cried Don Quixote; “is it possible

the duchess should have such drains! I should not have believed it from any body but you, though a barefoot friar had sworn it. But yet, certainly from so much perfection no ill humours can flow, but rather liquid amber. Well, I am now persuaded such sluices may be of importance to health.”

Scarce had Don Quixote said these words, when at one bounce the chamber-door flew open; whereupon Donna Rodriguez was seized with such a terrible fright, that she let fall her candle, and the room remained as dark as a wolf’s mouth, as the saying is, and presently the poor duenna felt somebody hold her by the throat, and squeeze her weasand so hard, that it was not in her power to cry out; and another, having pulled up her coats, laid on her so unmercifully upon her bare buttocks with a slipper, or some such thing, that it would have moved any one, but those that did it, to pity. Don Quixote was not without compassion, yet he did not think fit to stir from the bed, but lay snug and silent all the while, not knowing what the meaning of this bustle might be, fearing lest the tempest that poured on the matron’s posteriors might also light upon his own; and not without reason, for indeed, after the mute executioners had well cured the old

gentlewoman (who durst not cry out) they came to Don Quixote, and turning up the bed-clothes, pinched him so hard and so long, that, in his own defence, he could not forbear laying about him with his fists as well as he could, till at last, after the scuffle had lasted about half an hour, the invisible phantoms vanished. Donna Rodriguez set her coats to rights, and, lamenting her hard fortune, left the room without speaking a word to the knight. As for him, he remained where he was, sadly pinched and tired, and very moody and thoughtful, not knowing who this wicked enchanter should be, that had used him in that manner. But we shall know that in its proper time. Now, let us leave him, and return to Sancho Panza, who calls upon us, as the order of our history requires.

CHAPTER XLIX

WHAT HAPPENED TO SANCHE PANZA, AS HE WENT
THE ROUNDS IN HIS ISLAND

WE left our mighty governor much out of humour, and in a pelting chafe with that saucy knave of a countryman, who, according to the instructions he had received from the steward and the steward from the duke, had bantered his worship with his impertinent description. Yet, as much a dunce and fool as he was, he made his party good against them all. At last addressing himself to those about him, among whom was Dr Pedro Rezio, who had ventured into the room again, after the consult about the duke's letter was over: "Now," said he, "do I find in good earnest that judges and governors must be made of brass, or ought to be made of brass, that they may be proof against the importunities of those that pretend business, who, at all hours, and at all seasons, would be heard and despatched, without any regard to any body but themselves, let what come of the rest, so their turn is served. Now,