

CHAPTER LVIII

HOW ADVENTURES CROWDED SO THICK AND THREE-
FOLD ON DON QUIXOTE, THAT THEY TROD UPON
ONE ANOTHER'S HEELS

DON QUIXOTE no sooner breathed the air in the open field, free from Altisidora's amorous importunities, than he fancied himself in his own element; he thought he felt the spirit of knight-errantry reviving in his breast; and turning to Sancho, "Liberty," said he, "friend Sancho, is one of the most valuable blessings that Heaven has bestowed upon mankind. Not all the treasures concealed in the bowels of the earth, nor those in the bosom of the sea, can be compared with it. For liberty a man may, nay ought, to hazard even his life, as well as for honour, accounting captivity the greatest misery he can endure. I tell thee this, my Sancho, because thou wert a witness of the good cheer and plenty which we met with in the castle; yet, in the midst of those delicious feasts, among those tempting dishes, and those liquors cooled with snow, methought

I suffered the extremity of hunger, because I did not enjoy them with that freedom as if they had been my own; for, the obligations that lie upon us to make suitable returns for kindnesses received, are ties that will not let a generous mind be free. Happy the man whom Heaven has blessed with bread, for which he is obliged to thank kind Heaven alone!"—"For all these fine words," quoth Sancho, "it is not proper for us to be unthankful for two good hundred crowns in gold, which the duke's steward gave me in a little purse, which I have here, and cherish in my bosom, as a relic against necessity, and a comforting cordial, next my heart, against all accidents; for we are not like always to meet with castles where we shall be made much of. A peascods on it! We are more likely to meet with damned inns, where we shall be rib-roasted."

As the wandering knight and squire went discoursing of this and other matters, they had not ridden much more than a league ere they espied about a dozen men, who looked like country-fellows sitting at their victuals, with their cloaks under them, on the green grass, in the middle of a meadow. Near them they saw several white cloths or sheets, spread out

and laid close to one another, that seemed to cover something. Don Quixote rode up to the people, and, after he had civilly saluted them, asked what they had got under that linen? "Sir," answered one of the company, "they are some carved images that are to be set up at an altar we are erecting in our town. We cover them lest they should be sullied, and carry them on our shoulders for fear they should be broken."—"If you please," said Don Quixote, "I should be glad to see them; for, considering the care you take of them, they should be pieces of value."—"Ay, marry are they," quoth another, "or else we are damnably cheated; for there is never an image among them that does not stand us more than fifty ducats; and, that you may know I am no liar, do but stay and you shall see with your own eyes." With that, getting up on his legs, and leaving his victuals, he went and took off the cover from one of the figures, that happened to be St George on horseback, and under his feet a serpent coiled up, his throat transfixed with a lance, with the fierceness that is commonly represented in the piece; and all, as they use to say, spick and span new, and shining like beaten gold. Don Quixote having seen the image, "This," said

he, "was one of the best knights-errant the divine warfare or church-militant ever had; his name was Don St George, and he was an extraordinary protector of damsels. What is the next?" The fellow having uncovered it, it proved to be St Martin on horseback. "This knight, too," said Don Quixote at the first sight, "was one of the Christian adventurers, and I am apt to think he was more liberal than valiant; and thou mayst perceive it, Sancho, by his dividing his cloak with a poor man; he gave him half, and doubtless it was winter-time, or else he would have given it him whole, he was so charitable."—"Not so neither, I fancy," quoth Sancho; "but I guess he stuck to the proverb, To give and keep what is fit, requires a share of wit." Don Quixote smiled, and desired the men to shew him the next image, which appeared to be that of the Patron of Spain on horseback, with his sword bloody, trampling down Moors, and treading over heads. "Ay, this is a knight indeed," cried Don Quixote when he saw it, "one of those that fought in the squadrons of the Saviour of the world; he is called Don St Jago Mata Moros, or Don St James the Moor-killer, and may be reckoned one of the most valorous saints and professors

of chivalry that the earth then enjoyed, and Heaven now possesses." Then they uncovered another piece, which shewed St Paul falling from his horse, with all the circumstances usually expressed in the story of his conversion, and represented so to the life, that he looked as if he had been answering the voice that spoke to him from Heaven. "This," said Don Quixote, "was the greatest enemy the church-militant had once, and proved afterwards the greatest defender it will ever have. In his life a true knight-errant, and in death a stedfast saint; an indefatigable labourer in the vineyard of the Lord, a teacher of the Gentiles, who had Heaven for his school, and Christ himself for his master and instructor." Then Don Quixote, perceiving there were no more images, desired the men to cover those he had seen: "And now, my good friends," said he to them, "I cannot but esteem the sight that I have had of these images as a happy omen; for these saints and knights were of the same profession that I follow, which is that of arms: The difference only lies in this point, that they were saints, and fought according to the rules of holy discipline; and I am a sinner, and fight after the manner of men. They conquered Heaven by force, for

Heaven is taken by violence; but I, alas! cannot yet tell what I gain by the force of my labours: Yet, were my Dulcinea del Toboso but free from her troubles, by a happy change in my fortune, and an improvement in my understanding, I might perhaps take a better course than I do."—"Heaven grant it," quoth Sancho, "and let the devil do his worst."

All this while the men wondered at Don Quixote's figure, as well as his discourse, but could not understand one half of what he meant. So that, after they had made an end of their dinner, they got up their images, took their leave of Don Quixote, and continued their journey.

Sancho remained full of admiration, as if he had never known his master; he wondered how he should come to know all these things; and fancied there was not that history or adventure in the world but he had at his fingers' ends. "Faith and troth, master of mine," quoth he, "if what has happened to us to-day may be called an adventure, it is one of the sweetest and most pleasant we ever met with in all our rambles; for we are come off without a dry basting, or the least bodily fear. We have not so much as laid our hands upon our weapons, nor have we beaten the earth with

our carcases; but here we be safe and sound, neither a-dry nor a-hungry. Heaven be praised that I have seen all this with my own eyes!"—"Thou sayest well, Sancho," said Don Quixote; "but I must tell thee, that seasons and times are not always the same, but often take a different course; and, what the vulgar call forebodings and omens, for which there are no rational grounds in nature, ought only to be esteemed happy encounters by the wise. One of these superstitious fools, going out of his house betimes in the morning, meets a friar of the blessed order of St Francis, and starts as if he had met a griffin, turns back, and runs home again. Another wiseacre happens to throw down the salt on the table-cloth, and thereupon is sadly cast down himself, as if nature were obliged to give tokens of ensuing disasters by such slight and inconsiderable accidents as these. A wise and truly religious man ought never to pry into the secrets of Heaven. Scipio, landing in Africa, stumbled and fell down as he leaped a-shore: Presently his soldiers took this for an ill omen; but he, embracing the earth, cried, 'I have thee fast, Africa; thou shalt not escape me.' In this manner, Sancho, I think it a very happy accident that I met these images."—"I think

so too," quoth Sancho; "but I would fain know why the Spaniards call upon that same St James, the destroyer of Moors; just when they are going to give battle, they cry, St Jago, and close Spain. Pray, is Spain open, that it wants to be closed up? What do you make of that ceremony?"—"Thou art a very simple fellow, Sancho," answered Don Quixote. "Thou must know, that Heaven gave to Spain this mighty champion of the Red Cross for its patron and protector, especially in the desperate engagements which the Spaniards had with the Moors; and therefore they invoke him, in all their martial encounters, as their protector; and many times he has been personally seen cutting and slaying, overthrowing, trampling, and destroying the Hagarene* squadrons; of which I could give thee many examples, deduced from authentic Spanish histories."

Here Sancho changing the discourse, "Sir," quoth he, "I cannot but marvel at the impudence of Altisidora, the duchess's damsel. I warrant you that same mischief-monger they call Love has plaguily mauled her, and run her through without mercy. They say he is a

* Hagarene squadrons, *i.e.* Moorish, because they have a tradition that the Moors are descended from Hagar.

little blind urchin, and yet the dark youth, with no more eye-sight than a beetle, will hit you a heart as sure as a gun, and bore it through and through with his dart, if he undertakes to shoot at it. However, I have heard say, that the shafts of love are blunted and beaten back by the modest and sober carriage of young maidens. But, upon this Altisidora, their edge seems rather to be whetted than made blunt.”—“You must observe, Sancho,” said Don Quixote, “that Love is void of consideration, and disclaims the rules of reason in his proceedings. He is like death, and equally assaults the lofty palaces of kings, and the lowly cottages of shepherds. Wherever he takes entire possession of a soul, the first thing he does, is to banish thence all bashfulness and shame. So, these being banished from Altisidora’s breast, she confidently discovered her loose desires, which, alas! rather filled me with confusion than pity.”—“If so,” quoth Sancho, “you are confoundedly cruel: How could you be so hard-hearted and ungrateful? Had the poor thing but made love to me, I dare say I should have come to at the first word, and have been at her service. Beshrew my midriff, what a heart of marble, bowels of brass, and soul of plaster you have! But I cannot for the blood

of me imagine what the poor creature saw in your worship, to make her dote on you, and play the fool at this rate! Where the devil was the sparkling appearance, the briskness, the fine carriage, the sweet face, that bewitched her? Indeed, and indeed, I often survey your worship, from the tip of your toe to the topmost hair on your crown; and, not to flatter you, I can see nothing in you, but what is more likely to scare one, than to make one fall in love. I have heard that beauty is the first and chief thing that begets love; now, you not having any, if it like your worship, I cannot guess what the poor soul was smitten with.”—“Take notice, Sancho,” answered Don Quixote, “that there are two sorts of beauty; the one of the soul, and the other of the body. That of the soul lies and displays itself in the understanding, in principles of honour and virtue, in a handsome behaviour, in generosity and good breeding; all which qualities may be found in a person not so accomplished in outward features. And when this beauty, and not that of the body, is the object of love, then the assaults of that passion are much more fierce, more surprising and effectual. Now, Sancho, though I am sensible I am not handsome, I know at the same time I am not deformed;