

* 133

* CHAPTER XII.

CERVANTES.—HIS PERSILES AND SIGISMUNDA, AND ITS CHARACTER.—HIS DON QUIXOTE.—CIRCUMSTANCES UNDER WHICH IT WAS WRITTEN.—ITS PURPOSE AND GENERAL PLAN.—PART FIRST.—AVELLANEDA.—PART SECOND.—CHARACTER OF THE WHOLE.—CHARACTER OF CERVANTES.

SIX months after the death of Cervantes,¹ the license for publishing "Persiles and Sigismunda" was granted to his widow, and in 1617 it was * 134 printed.² His purpose * seems to have been

¹ At the time of his death Cervantes seems to have had the following works more or less prepared for the press, namely: "Las Semanas del Jardín," announced as early as 1613;—the Second Part of "Galatea," announced in 1615;—the "Bernardo," mentioned in the Dedication of "Persiles," just before he died;—and several plays, referred to in the Preface to those he published, and in the Appendix to the "Viaje del Parnaso." All these works are now probably lost. Others have been attributed to him. Of the "Buscapié" I shall speak in the Appendix, and of two apocryphal chapters of Don Quixote in a note to this chapter. To these may be added a letter on a popular festival, part of which is printed in the twentieth volume of the Biblioteca de Autores Españoles, 1851, p. xxvii.

² The first edition of Persiles y Sigismunda was printed with the following title: "Los Trabajos de Persiles y Sigismunda, Historia Setentrional, por M. de Cervantes Saavedra, dirigida," etc., Madrid, 1617, 8vo, por Juan de la Cuesta; and reprints of it appeared in Valencia, Pamplona, Barcelona, and Brussels, the same year. I have a copy of this first edition, and of the one printed at Pamplona the same year; but the most agreeable one is that of Madrid, 1802, 8vo, 2 tom. There is an English translation by M. L., published 1619, which I have never seen;

but from which I doubt not Fletcher borrowed the materials for that part of the Persiles which he has used, or rather abused, in his "Custom of the Country," acted as early as 1628, but not printed till 1647; the very names of the personages being sometimes the same. See Persiles, Book I. c. 12 and 13; and compare Book II. c. 4 with the English play, Act IV. scene 3, and Book III. c. 6, etc. with Act II. scene 4, etc. Sometimes we have almost literal translations, like the following:—

"Sois Castellano?" me preguntó en su lengua Portuguesa. "No, Señora," le respondí yo, "sino forastero, y bien lejos de esta tierra." "Pues aunque fuerades mil veces Castellano," replicó ella, "os librara yo, si pudiera, y os libraré si puedo; subid por cima deste lecho, y éntraos debaxo de este tapiz, y éntraos en un hueco que aquí hallareis, y no os movais, que si la justicia viniere, me tendrá respeto, y creará lo que yo quisiere decirles." Persiles, Lib. III. cap. 6.

In Fletcher we have it as follows:—

Guomar. Are you a Castilian?
Rutilio. No, Madam: Italy claims my birth.
Gui. I ask not
With purpose to betray you. If you were
Ten thousand times a Spaniard, the nation
We Portugals most hate, I yet would save you,
If it lay in my power. Lift up these hangings;
Behind my bed's head there 's a hollow place,
Into which enter.

[*Rutilio retires behind the bed.*]

to write a serious romance, which should be to this species of composition what the Don Quixote is to comic romance. So much, at least, may be inferred from the manner in which it is spoken of by himself and by his friends. For in the Dedication of the Second Part of Don Quixote he says, "It will be either the worst or the best book of amusement in the language"; adding, that his friends thought it admirable; and Valdivielso,³ after his death, said he had equalled or surpassed in it all his former efforts.

But serious romantic fiction, which is peculiarly the offspring of modern civilization, was not yet far enough developed to enable one like Cervantes to obtain a high degree of success in it, especially as the natural bent of his genius was to humorous fiction. The imaginary travels of Lucian, three or four Greek romances, and the romances of chivalry, were all he had to guide him; for anything approaching nearer to the proper modern novel than some of his own tales had not yet been imagined. Perhaps his first impulse was to write a romance of chivalry, modified by the spirit of the age, and free from the absurdities which abound in the romances that had been written before his time.⁴ But if he had such a thought, the

So:—but from this stir not.
If the officers come, as you expect they will do,
I know they owe such reverence to my lodgings,
That they will easily give credit to me
And search no further.

Act II. Sc. 4.

Other parallel passages might be cited; but it should not be forgotten, that there is one striking difference between the two; for that, whereas the Persiles is a book of great purity of thought and feeling, "The Custom of the Country" is one of the most indecent plays in the language; so indecent, indeed, that Dryden rather boldly says it is worse in this particular than all his own plays put together. Dryden's Works, Scott's ed., London, 1808,

8vo, Vol. XI. p. 239. The earliest translation I remember to have seen of the Persiles and Sigismunda is in French by François de Rosset, Paris, 1618; but the best is an anonymous one in the purest English, (London, 1854,) understood to be by Miss L. D. Stanley; but in which a good many passages are omitted, ex. gr. Book III. Chaps. VI., VII., VIII., etc. I have also an Italian one by Francesco Ella, printed at Venice, 1626.

³ In the Aprobacion, dated September 9, 1616, ed. 1802, Tom. I. p. vii.

⁴ This may be fairly suspected from the beginning of the 48th chapter of the First Part of Don Quixote.

success of his own Don Quixote almost necessarily prevented him from attempting to put it in execution. He therefore looked rather to the Greek romances, and, as far as he used any model, took the "Theagenes and Chariclea" of Heliodorus.⁵ He calls * 135 what he produced "A * Northern Romance," and makes its principal story consist of the sufferings of Persiles and Sigismunda, — the first the son of a king of Iceland; the second the daughter of a king of Friesland, — laying the scene of one half of his fiction in the North of Europe, and that of the other half in the South. He has some faint ideas of the sea-kings and pirates of the Northern Ocean, but very little of the geography of the countries that produced them; and as for his savage men and frozen islands, and the wild and strange adventures he imagines to have passed among them, nothing can be more fantastic and incredible.

In Portugal, Spain, and Italy, through which his hero and heroine — disguised as they are from first to last under the names of Periandro and Auristela — make a pilgrimage to Rome, we get rid of most of the extravagances which deform the earlier portion of the romance. The whole, however, consists of a labyrinth of tales, showing, indeed, an imagination quite aston-

⁵ Once he intimates that it is a translation, but does not say from what language. (See opening of Book II.) An acute and elegant critic of our own time says, "Des naufrages, des déserts, des descentes par mer, et des ravissements, c'est donc toujours plus ou moins l'ancien roman d'Héliodore." (Sainte Beuve, Critiques, Paris, 1839, 8vo, Tom. IV. p. 173.) These words describe more than half of the Persiles and Sigismunda. Two imitations of the Persiles, or, at any rate, two imitations of the Greek romance which was the chief model of the Persiles,

soon appeared in Spain. The first is the "Historia de Hipólito y Aminta" of Francisco de Quintana, (Madrid, 1627, 4to,) divided into eight books, with a good deal of poetry intermixed. The other is "Eustorgio y Clorilene, Historia Moscovica," by Enrique Suarez de Mendoza y Figueroa, (1629,) in thirteen books, with a hint of a continuation; but my copy was printed Çaragoça, 1665, 4to. Both are written in bad taste, and have no value as fictions. The latter seems to have been plainly suggested by the Persiles.

ishing in an old man like Cervantes, already past his grand climacteric, — a man, too, who might be supposed to be broken down by sore calamities and incurable disease; but it is a labyrinth from which we are glad to be extricated, and we feel relieved when the labors and trials of his Persiles and Sigismunda are over, and when, the obstacles to their love being removed, they are happily united at Rome. No doubt, amidst the multitude of separate stories with which this wild work is crowded, several are graceful in themselves, and others are interesting because they contain traces of Cervantes's experience of life,⁶ while, * through the whole, his style is more * 136 carefully finished, perhaps, than in any other of his works. But, after all, it is far from being what he and his friends fancied it was, — a model of this peculiar style of fiction, and the best of his efforts.

This honor, if we may trust the uniform testimony of two centuries, belongs, beyond question, to his Don Quixote, — the work which, above all others, not merely of his own age, but of all modern times, bears most deeply the impression of the national character it represents, and has, therefore, in return, enjoyed a degree and extent of national favor never granted to any other.⁷ When Cervantes began to write it is wholly

⁶ From the beginning of Book III., we find that the action of Persiles and Sigismunda is laid in the time of Philip II. or Philip III., when there was a Spanish viceroy in Lisbon, and the travels of the hero and heroine in the South of Spain and Italy seem to be, in fact, Cervantes's own recollections of the journey he made through the same countries in his youth; while Chapters 10 and 11 of Book III. show bitter traces of his Algerine captivity. His familiarity with Portugal, as seen in this work, should also be noticed. Frequently, indeed, as in almost every-

thing else he wrote, we meet intimations and passages from his own life. Persiles and Sigismunda, after all, was the most immediately successful of any of the works of Cervantes. Eight editions of it appeared in two years, and it was translated into Italian, French, and English, between 1618 and 1626.

⁷ My own experience in Spain fully corroborates the suggestion of Inglis, in his very pleasant book, (Rambles in the Footsteps of Don Quixote, London, 1837, 8vo, p. 26,) that "no Spaniard is entirely ignorant of Cervantes." At least, none I ever questioned on the subject — and

uncertain. For twenty years preceding the appearance of the First Part he printed almost nothing;⁸ and the little we know of him during that long and dreary period of his life shows only how he obtained a hard subsistence for himself and his family by common business agencies, which, we have reason to suppose, were generally of trifling importance, and which, we are sure, were sometimes distressing in their consequences. The tradition, therefore, of his persecutions in La Mancha, and his own averment that the Don Quixote was begun in a prison, are all the hints we have received concerning the circumstances under which it was first imagined; and that such circumstances should have tended to such a result is a striking fact in the history, not only of Cervantes, * 137 but of * the human mind, and shows how different was his temperament from that commonly found in men of genius.

His purpose in writing the Don Quixote has sometimes been enlarged by the ingenuity of a refined criticism, until it has been made to embrace the whole of the endless contrast between the poetical and the prosaic in our natures,—between heroism and generosity on one side, as if they were mere illusions, and a cold selfishness on the other, as if it were the truth and reality of life.⁹ But this is a metaphysical conclusion drawn from views of the work

their number was great in the lower conditions of society—seemed to be entirely ignorant what sort of persons were Don Quixote and Sancho Panza.

⁸ He felt this himself as a dreary interval in his life, for he says in his Prólogo: "Al cabo de tantos años como ha, que duermo en el silencio del olvido," etc. In fact, from 1584 till 1605 he had printed nothing except a few short poems of little value, and

seems to have been wholly occupied in painful struggles to secure a subsistence.

⁹ This idea is found partly developed by Bouterwek, (*Geschichte der Poesie und Beredsamkeit*, Göttingen, 1803, 8vo, Tom. III. pp. 335–337,) and fully set forth and defended by Sismondi, with his accustomed eloquence. *Littérature du Midi de l'Europe*, Paris, 1813, 8vo, Tom. III. pp. 339–343.

at once imperfect and exaggerated; contrary to the spirit of the age, which was not given to a satire so philosophical and generalizing, and contrary to the character of Cervantes himself, as we follow it from the time when he first became a soldier, through all his trials in Algiers, and down to the moment when his warm and trusting heart dictated the Dedication of "Persiles and Sigismunda" to the Count de Lemos. His whole spirit, indeed, seems rather to have been filled with a cheerful confidence in human virtue, and his whole bearing in life seems to have been a contradiction to that discouraging and saddening scorn for whatever is elevated and generous, which such an interpretation of the Don Quixote necessarily implies.¹⁰

Nor does he himself permit us to give to his romance any such secret meaning; for, at the very beginning of the work, he announces it to be his sole purpose to break down the vogue and authority of books of chivalry, and, at the end of the whole, he declares anew, in his own person, that "he had had no other desire than to render abhorred of men the false and absurd stories contained in books of chivalry";¹¹ exulting * in his success, as an * 138

¹⁰ Many other interpretations have been given to the Don Quixote. One of the most absurd is that of Daniel De Foe, who declares it to be "an emblematic history of, and a just satire upon, the Duke de Medina Sidonia, a person very remarkable at that time in Spain." (*Wilson's Life of De Foe*, London, 1830, 8vo, Vol. III. p. 437, note.) The "Bascapié"—if there ever was such a publication—pretended that it set forth "some of the undertakings and gallantries of the Emperor Charles V." See Appendix (D).

¹¹ In the Prólogo to the First Part, he says, "*No mira á mas que á deshacer la autoridad y cabida, que en el mundo*

y en el vulgo tienen los libros de Caballerías"; and he ends the Second Part, ten years afterwards, with these remarkable words: "*No ha sido otro mi deseo, que poner en aborrecimiento de los hombres las fingidas y dispartadas historias de los libros de Caballerías, que por las de mi verdadero Don Quixote van ya tropezando, y han de caer del todo sin duda alguna. Vale.*" It seems really hard that a great man's word of honor should thus be called in question by the spirit of an over-refined criticism, two centuries after his death. D. Vicente Salvá has partly, but not wholly, avoided this difficulty in an ingenious and pleasant essay on the ques-

achievement of no small moment. And such, in fact, it was, for we have abundant proof that the fanaticism for these romances was so great in Spain, during the sixteenth century, as to have become matter of alarm to the more judicious. Many of the distinguished contemporary authors speak of its mischiefs, and among the rest Fernandez de Oviedo, the venerable Luis de Granada, Luis de Leon, Luis Vives, the great scholar, and Malon de Chaide, who wrote the eloquent "Conversion of Mary Magdalen."¹² Guevara, the learned and fortunate courtier of Charles the Fifth, declares that "men did read nothing in his time but such shameful books as 'Amadis de Gaula,' 'Tristan,' 'Primaleon,' and the like";¹³ the acute author of "The Dialogue on Languages" says that "the ten years he passed at court he wasted in studying 'Florisando,' 'Lisuarte,' 'The Knight of the Cross,' and other such books, more than he can name";¹⁴ and from different

tion, "Whether the Don Quixote has yet been judged according to its merits"; — in which he maintains that Cervantes did not intend to satirize the substance and essence of books of chivalry, but only to purge away their absurdities and improbabilities; and that, after all, he has given us substantially only another romance of the same class, which has ruined the fortunes of all its predecessors by being itself immensely in advance of them all. Ochoa, *Apuntes para una Biblioteca*, Paris, 1842, 8vo, Tom. II. pp. 723-740.

¹² See Oviedo, *Hist. General y Natural de las Indias*, Ed. Rios, Tom. I. 1851, p. xxix. *Símbolo de la Fé*, Parte II. cap. 17, near the end. J. P. Forner, *Reflexiones*, etc., 1786, pp. 32-35. *Conversion de la Magdalena*, 1592, *Prólogo al Letor*. All five are strong in their censures; and to them may be added Juan Sanchez Valdes de la Plata, who in the *Prólogo* to his "Chronica del Hombre" (folio, 1595), — a book packed full of crude learning on the destiny of man, his powers and his in-

ventions, — says, that "young men and girls, and even those of ripe age and estate, do waste their time in reading books which with truth may be called sermon-books of Satan, full of debilitating vanities and blazonries of the knightships of the Amadis and Esplandians, with the rest of their crew, from which neither profit nor doctrine can be gathered, but such as makes their thoughts the abode of lies and false fancies, which is a thing the Devil doth much covet." It should be noticed, however, that Nicolas Antonio at the end of the seventeenth century was by no means willing to give up books of chivalry. See *Preface to Bibliotheca Nova*, § 27.

¹³ "Vemos, que ya no se ocupan los hombres sino en leer libros que es afrenta nombrarlos, como son Amadis de Gaula, Tristan de Leonis, Primaleon," etc. *Argument to the Aviso de Privados*, *Obras de Ant. de Guevara*, Valladolid, 1545, folio, f. clviii, b.

¹⁴ The passage is too long to be conveniently cited, but it is very severe

sources we *know, what, indeed, we may *gather from Cervantes himself, that many who read these fictions took them for true histories.¹⁵ At last they were deemed so noxious, that, in 1553, they were prohibited by law from being printed or sold in the American colonies, and in 1555 the same prohibition, and even the burning of all copies of them extant in Spain itself, was earnestly asked for by the Cortes.¹⁶ The evil, in fact, had become formidable, and the wise began to see it.

To destroy a passion that had struck its roots so deeply in the character of all classes of men,¹⁷ to break up the only reading which at that time could be considered widely popular and fashionable,¹⁸ was certainly

See Mayans y Siscar, *Orígenes*, Tom. II. pp. 157, 158.

¹⁵ See *ante*, Vol. I. pp. 223-226. But, besides what is said there, Francisco de Portugal, who died in 1632, tells us in his "Arte de Galanteria," (Lisboa, 1670, 4to, p. 96,) that Simon de Silveira (I suppose the Portuguese poet who lived about 1500, Barbosa, Tom. III. p. 722) once swore upon the Evangelists, that he believed the whole of the Amadis to be true history.

¹⁶ Clemencin, in the Preface to his edition of *Don Quixote*, Tom. I. pp. xi-xvi, cites many other proofs of the passion for books of chivalry at that period in Spain; adding a reference to the "Recopilacion de Leyes de las Indias," Lib. I. Tit. 24, Ley 4, for the law of 1553, and printing at length the very curious petition of the Cortes of 1555, which I have not seen anywhere else, except in the official publication of the "Capitulos y Leyes," (Valladolid, 1558, fol. lv, b,) and which would probably have produced the law it demanded, if the abdication of the Emperor, the same year, had not prevented all action upon the matter.

¹⁷ Allusions to the fanaticism of the lower classes on the subject of books of chivalry are happily introduced into

Don Quixote, Parte I. c. 32, and in other places. It extended, too, to those better bred and informed. Francisco de Portugal, in the "Arte de Galanteria," cited in a preceding note, and written before 1632, tells the following anecdote: "A knight came home one day from the chase and found his wife and daughters and their women crying. Surprised and grieved, he asked them if any child or relation were dead. 'No,' they answered, suffocated with tears. 'Why, then, do you weep so?' he rejoined, still more amazed. 'Sir,' they replied, 'Amadis is dead.' They had read so far." p. 96.

¹⁸ Cervantes himself, as his *Don Quixote* amply proves, must, at some period of his life, have been a devoted reader of the romances of chivalry. How minute and exact his knowledge of them was may be seen, among other passages, from one at the end of the twentieth chapter of Part First, where, speaking of Gasabal, the esquire of Gallaor, he observes that his name is mentioned *but once* in the history of Amadis of Gaul; — a fact which the indefatigable Mr. Bowle took the pains to verify, when reading that huge romance. See his "Letter to Dr. Percy, on a New and Classical Edition of *Don Quixote*," London, 1777, 4to, p. 25.

a bold undertaking, and one that marks anything rather than a scornful or broken spirit, or a want of faith in what is most to be valued in our common nature. The great wonder is, that Cervantes * 140 succeeded. But that he did, there is no * question. No book of chivalry was written after the appearance of Don Quixote, in 1605; and from the same date, even those already enjoying the greatest favor ceased, with one or two unimportant exceptions, to be reprinted;¹⁹ so that, from that time to the present, they have been constantly disappearing, until they are now among the rarest of literary curiosities; — a solitary instance of the power of genius to destroy, by a single well-timed blow, an entire department, and that, too, a flourishing and favored one, in the literature of a great and proud nation.

The general plan Cervantes adopted to accomplish this object, without, perhaps, foreseeing its whole course, and still less all its results, was simple as well as original. In 1605,²⁰ he published the First Part of Don Quixote, in which a country gentleman of La Mancha — full of genuine Castilian honor and enthusiasm, gentle and dignified in his character, trusted by

¹⁹ In the commentary of Faria y Sousa on the *Lusiad*, 1637, (Canto VI. fol. 138,) he says already that in consequence of the publication of the Don Quixote, books of chivalry "no son tan leídos"; and in a dedication to the Madrid edition of that work, 1668, we are told that its previous repeated impressions "han desterrado los libros de caballerías tan perjudiciales a las costumbres." Navarrete, pp. 500, 502. Clemencin, moreover, and finally in his Preface, 1833, notes "D. Policisne de Boecia," printed in 1602, as the *last* book of chivalry that was written in Spain, and adds, that, after 1605, "*no se publicó de nuevo libro alguno de caballerías, y dejaron de reimprimirse los anteriores*" (p. xxi). To this re-

mark of Clemencin, however, there are exceptions. For instance, the "Genealogía de la Toledana Discreta, Primera Parte," por Eugenio Martínez, a tale of chivalry in octave stanzas, not ill written, was reprinted in 1608; and "El Caballero del Febo," and "Claridiano," his son, are extant in editions of 1617. The period of the passion for such books in Spain can be readily seen in the Bibliographical Catalogue, and notices of them by Salvá, in the Repertorio Americano, (London, 1827, Tom. IV. pp. 29-74,) and still better in the Catalogue prefixed by Gayangos to Rivadeneyra's Biblioteca, Tom. XL. 1857. It was eminently the sixteenth century.

²⁰ See Appendix (E).

his friends, and loved by his dependants — is represented as so completely crazed by long reading the most famous books of chivalry, that he believes them to be true, and feels himself called on to become the impossible knight-errant they describe, — nay, actually goes forth into the world to defend the oppressed and avenge the injured, like the heroes of his romances.

To complete his chivalrous equipment — which he had begun by fitting up for himself a suit of armor strange to his century — he took an esquire out of his neighborhood; a middle-aged peasant, ignorant and credulous to excess, but of great good-nature; a glutton and a liar; selfish and gross, yet attached to his master; shrewd enough occasionally to see the folly of their position, but always * amusing, * 141 and sometimes mischievous, in his interpretations of it. These two sally forth from their native village in search of adventures, of which the excited imagination of the knight, turning windmills into giants, solitary inns into castles, and galley-slaves into oppressed gentlemen, finds abundance, wherever he goes; while the esquire translates them all into the plain prose of truth with an admirable simplicity, quite unconscious of its own humor, and rendered the more striking by its contrast with the lofty and courteous dignity and magnificent illusions of the superior personage. There could, of course, be but one consistent termination to adventures like these. The knight and his esquire suffer a series of ridiculous discomfitures, and are at last brought home, like madmen, to their native village, where Cervantes leaves them, with an intimation that the story of their adventures is by no means ended.

From this time we hear little of Cervantes and