

CHAPTER XII.

OF THE STRANGE ADVENTURE WHICH BEFELL THE VALIANT DON QUIXOTE WITH THE BOLD KNIGHT OF THE MIRRORS

The night succeeding the day of the encounter with Death, Don Quixote and his squire passed under some tall shady trees, and Don Quixote at Sancho's persuasion ate a little from the store carried by Dapple, and over their supper Sancho said to his master, "Senor, what a fool I should have looked if I had chosen for my reward the spoils of the first adventure your worship achieved, instead of the foals of the three mares. After all, 'a sparrow in the hand is better than a vulture on the wing.'"

"At the same time, Sancho," replied Don Quixote, "if thou hadst let me attack them as I wanted, at the very least the emperor's gold crown and Cupid's painted wings would have fallen to thee as spoils, for I should have taken them by force and given them into thy hands."

"The sceptres and crowns of those play-actor emperors," said Sancho, "were never yet pure gold, but only brass foil or tin."

"That is true," said Don Quixote, "for it would not be right that the accessories of the drama should be real, instead of being mere fictions and semblances, like the drama itself; towards which, Sancho-and, as a necessary consequence, towards those who represent and produce it--I

would that thou wert favourably disposed, for they are all instruments of great good to the State, placing before us at every step a mirror in which we may see vividly displayed what goes on in human life; nor is there any similitude that shows us more faithfully what we are and ought to be than the play and the players. Come, tell me, hast thou not seen a play acted in which kings, emperors, pontiffs, knights, ladies, and divers other personages were introduced? One plays the villain, another the knave, this one the merchant, that the soldier, one the sharp-witted fool, another the foolish lover; and when the play is over, and they have put off the dresses they wore in it, all the actors become equal."

"Yes, I have seen that," said Sancho.

"Well then," said Don Quixote, "the same thing happens in the comedy and life of this world, where some play emperors, others popes, and, in short, all the characters that can be brought into a play; but when it is over, that is to say when life ends, death strips them all of the garments that distinguish one from the other, and all are equal in the grave."

"A fine comparison!" said Sancho; "though not so new but that I have heard it many and many a time, as well as that other one of the game of chess; how, so long as the game lasts, each piece has its own particular office, and when the game is finished they are all mixed, jumbled up and shaken together, and stowed away in the bag, which is much like ending life in the grave."

"Thou art growing less doltish and more shrewd every day, Sancho," said Don Quixote.

"Ay," said Sancho; "it must be that some of your worship's shrewdness sticks to me; land that, of itself, is barren and dry, will come to yield good fruit if you dung it and till it; what I mean is that your worship's conversation has been the dung that has fallen on the barren soil of my dry wit, and the time I have been in your service and society has been the tillage; and with the help of this I hope to yield fruit in abundance that will not fall away or slide from those paths of good breeding that your worship has made in my parched understanding."

Don Quixote laughed at Sancho's affected phraseology, and perceived that what he said about his improvement was true, for now and then he spoke in a way that surprised him; though always, or mostly, when Sancho tried to talk fine and attempted polite language, he wound up by toppling over from the summit of his simplicity into the abyss of his ignorance; and where he showed his culture and his memory to the greatest advantage was in dragging in proverbs, no matter whether they had any bearing or not upon the subject in hand, as may have been seen already and will be noticed in the course of this history.

In conversation of this kind they passed a good part of the night, but Sancho felt a desire to let down the curtains of his eyes, as he used to say when he wanted to go to sleep; and stripping Dapple he left him at

liberty to graze his fill. He did not remove Rocinante's saddle, as his master's express orders were, that so long as they were in the field or not sleeping under a roof Rocinante was not to be stripped--the ancient usage established and observed by knights-errant being to take off the bridle and hang it on the saddle-bow, but to remove the saddle from the horse--never! Sancho acted accordingly, and gave him the same liberty he had given Dapple, between whom and Rocinante there was a friendship so unequalled and so strong, that it is handed down by tradition from father to son, that the author of this veracious history devoted some special chapters to it, which, in order to preserve the propriety and decorum due to a history so heroic, he did not insert therein; although at times he forgets this resolution of his and describes how eagerly the two beasts would scratch one another when they were together and how, when they were tired or full, Rocinante would lay his neck across Dapple's, stretching half a yard or more on the other side, and the pair would stand thus, gazing thoughtfully on the ground, for three days, or at least so long as they were left alone, or hunger did not drive them to go and look for food. I may add that they say the author left it on record that he likened their friendship to that of Nisus and Euryalus, and Pylades and Orestes; and if that be so, it may be perceived, to the admiration of mankind, how firm the friendship must have been between these two peaceful animals, shaming men, who preserve friendships with one another so badly. This was why it was said--

For friend no longer is there friend;

The reeds turn lances now.

And some one else has sung--

Friend to friend the bug, etc.

And let no one fancy that the author was at all astray when he compared the friendship of these animals to that of men; for men have received many lessons from beasts, and learned many important things, as, for example, the clyster from the stork, vomit and gratitude from the dog, watchfulness from the crane, foresight from the ant, modesty from the elephant, and loyalty from the horse.

Sancho at last fell asleep at the foot of a cork tree, while Don Quixote dozed at that of a sturdy oak; but a short time only had elapsed when a noise he heard behind him awoke him, and rising up startled, he listened and looked in the direction the noise came from, and perceived two men on horseback, one of whom, letting himself drop from the saddle, said to the other, "Dismount, my friend, and take the bridles off the horses, for, so far as I can see, this place will furnish grass for them, and the solitude and silence my love-sick thoughts need of." As he said this he stretched himself upon the ground, and as he flung himself down, the armour in which he was clad rattled, whereby Don Quixote perceived that he must be a knight-errant; and going over to Sancho, who was asleep, he shook him by the arm and with no small difficulty brought him back to his senses, and said in a low voice to him, "Brother Sancho, we have got an adventure."

"God send us a good one," said Sancho; "and where may her ladyship the adventure be?"

"Where, Sancho?" replied Don Quixote; "turn thine eyes and look, and thou wilt see stretched there a knight-errant, who, it strikes me, is not over and above happy, for I saw him fling himself off his horse and throw himself on the ground with a certain air of dejection, and his armour rattled as he fell."

"Well," said Sancho, "how does your worship make out that to be an adventure?"

"I do not mean to say," returned Don Quixote, "that it is a complete adventure, but that it is the beginning of one, for it is in this way adventures begin. But listen, for it seems he is tuning a lute or guitar, and from the way he is spitting and clearing his chest he must be getting ready to sing something."

"Faith, you are right," said Sancho, "and no doubt he is some enamoured knight."

"There is no knight-errant that is not," said Don Quixote; "but let us listen to him, for, if he sings, by that thread we shall extract the ball of his thoughts; because out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh."

Sancho was about to reply to his master, but the Knight of the Grove's voice, which was neither very bad nor very good, stopped him, and listening attentively the pair heard him sing this

SONNET

Your pleasure, prithee, lady mine, unfold;
 Declare the terms that I am to obey;
My will to yours submissively I mould,
 And from your law my feet shall never stray.
 Would you I die, to silent grief a prey?
Then count me even now as dead and cold;
 Would you I tell my woes in some new way?
Then shall my tale by Love itself be told.
The unison of opposites to prove,
 Of the soft wax and diamond hard am I;
But still, obedient to the laws of love,
 Here, hard or soft, I offer you my breast,
 Whate'er you grave or stamp thereon shall rest
 Indelible for all eternity.

With an "Ah me!" that seemed to be drawn from the inmost recesses of his heart, the Knight of the Grove brought his lay to an end, and shortly afterwards exclaimed in a melancholy and piteous voice, "O fairest and most ungrateful woman on earth! What! can it be, most serene Casildea de

Vandalia, that thou wilt suffer this thy captive knight to waste away and perish in ceaseless wanderings and rude and arduous toils? It is not enough that I have compelled all the knights of Navarre, all the Leonese, all the Tartesians, all the Castilians, and finally all the knights of La Mancha, to confess thee the most beautiful in the world?"

"Not so," said Don Quixote at this, "for I am of La Mancha, and I have never confessed anything of the sort, nor could I nor should I confess a thing so much to the prejudice of my lady's beauty; thou seest how this knight is raving, Sancho. But let us listen, perhaps he will tell us more about himself."

"That he will," returned Sancho, "for he seems in a mood to bewail himself for a month at a stretch."

But this was not the case, for the Knight of the Grove, hearing voices near him, instead of continuing his lamentation, stood up and exclaimed in a distinct but courteous tone, "Who goes there? What are you? Do you belong to the number of the happy or of the miserable?"

"Of the miserable," answered Don Quixote.

"Then come to me," said he of the Grove, "and rest assured that it is to woe itself and affliction itself you come."

Don Quixote, finding himself answered in such a soft and courteous

manner, went over to him, and so did Sancho.

The doleful knight took Don Quixote by the arm, saying, "Sit down here, sir knight; for, that you are one, and of those that profess knight-errantry, it is to me a sufficient proof to have found you in this place, where solitude and night, the natural couch and proper retreat of knights-errant, keep you company." To which Don made answer, "A knight I am of the profession you mention, and though sorrows, misfortunes, and calamities have made my heart their abode, the compassion I feel for the misfortunes of others has not been thereby banished from it. From what you have just now sung I gather that yours spring from love, I mean from the love you bear that fair ingrate you named in your lament."

In the meantime, they had seated themselves together on the hard ground peaceably and sociably, just as if, as soon as day broke, they were not going to break one another's heads.

"Are you, sir knight, in love perchance?" asked he of the Grove of Don Quixote.

"By mischance I am," replied Don Quixote; "though the ills arising from well-bestowed affections should be esteemed favours rather than misfortunes."

"That is true," returned he of the Grove, "if scorn did not unsettle our reason and understanding, for if it be excessive it looks like revenge."

"I was never scorned by my lady," said Don Quixote.

"Certainly not," said Sancho, who stood close by, "for my lady is as a lamb, and softer than a roll of butter."

"Is this your squire?" asked he of the Grove.

"He is," said Don Quixote.

"I never yet saw a squire," said he of the Grove, "who ventured to speak when his master was speaking; at least, there is mine, who is as big as his father, and it cannot be proved that he has ever opened his lips when I am speaking."

"By my faith then," said Sancho, "I have spoken, and am fit to speak, in the presence of one as much, or even--but never mind--it only makes it worse to stir it."

The squire of the Grove took Sancho by the arm, saying to him, "Let us two go where we can talk in squire style as much as we please, and leave these gentlemen our masters to fight it out over the story of their loves; and, depend upon it, daybreak will find them at it without having made an end of it."

"So be it by all means," said Sancho; "and I will tell your worship who I

am, that you may see whether I am to be reckoned among the number of the most talkative squires."

With this the two squires withdrew to one side, and between them there passed a conversation as droll as that which passed between their masters was serious.