

DON QUIXOTE

DE LA MANCHA

*TRANSLATED FROM THE SPANISH OF
MIGUEL CERVANTES SAAVEDRA*

COMPLETE IN ONE VOLUME

*CHICAGO
W. B. CONKEY COMPANY*

AUTHOR'S PREFACE.

READER, thou wilt believe me, I trust, without an oath, when I tell thee it was my earnest desire that this offspring of my brain should be as beautiful, ingenious, and sprightly as it is possible to imagine ; but alas ! I have not been able to control that order in nature's works whereby all things produce their like, and therefore what could be expected from a mind sterile and uncultivated like mine, but a dry, meager, fantastical thing, full of strange conceits ; and that might well be engendered in a prison—the dreadful abode of care, where nothing is heard but sounds of wretchedness ? Leisure, an agreeable residence, pleasant fields, serene skies, murmuring streams, and tranquillity of mind—by these the most barren muse may become fruitful, and produce that which will delight and astonish the world.

Some parents are so hoodwinked by their excessive fondness, that they see not the imperfections of their children, and mistake their folly and impertinence for sprightliness and wit ; but I, who, though seemingly the parent, am, in truth, only the step-father of Don Quixote, will not yield to this prevailing infirmity ; nor will I—as others would do—beseech thee, kind Reader, almost with tears in my eyes, to pardon or conceal the faults thou mayest discover in this brat of mine. Besides, thou art neither its kinsman, nor friend ; thou art in possession of thine own soul, and of a will as free and absolute as the best ; and art moreover in thine own house, being as much the lord and master of it as is the monarch of his revenue : knowing also the common saying—‘ Under my cloak a fig for the king : ’ wherefore I say, thou art absolved and liberated from every restraint or obligation, and mayest freely avow thy opinion on my performance, without fear of reproach for the evil, or hope of reward for the good thou shalt say of it. Fain, indeed, would I have given it to thee naked as it was born, without the decoration of a preface, or that numerous train of sonnets, epigrams, and other eulogies, now commonly placed at the beginning of every book ; for I confess that, although mine cost me some labor in composing, I found no part of it so difficult as this same Preface which thou art now reading ; yes, many a time have I taken up my pen, and as often laid it down again :—not knowing what to write.

Happening one day, when in this perplexity, to be sitting with the paper before me, pen behind my ear, my elbow on the table, and my cheek resting on my hand, deeply pondering on what I should say, a lively and intelligent friend unexpectedly entered ; and, seeing me in that posture, he inquired what made me so thoughtful. I told him I was musing on a preface for Don Quixote, and frankly confessed I had been so teased and harassed by it that I felt disposed to give up the attempt, and trouble myself

no further either with the preface, or the book, but rather leave the achievements of that noble knight unpublished. "For shall I not be confounded," said I, "with taunts of that old law-maker, the Vulgar, when, after so long a silence, I now, forsooth, come out, at this time a day, with a legend dry as a rush, destitute of invention, in a wretched style, poor in conception, void of learning, and without either quotations on the margin, or annotations at the end; while all other books, whether fabulous or profane, are so stuffed with sentences from Aristotle, Plato, and the whole tribe of philosophers, that the world is amazed at the extensive reading, deep learning and extraordinary eloquence of their authors! Truly, when these wise acres quote the Holy Scriptures, you would take them for so many St. Thomases, or other doctors of the church! And so observant are they of the rules of decorum, that in one line they will cite you the ravings of a lover, and in the next some pious homily—to the delight of every reader. In all these matters my book will be wholly deficient; for, heaven knows, I have nothing either to quote or make notes upon; nor do I know what authors I have followed, and therefore cannot display their names, as usual, in alphabetical succession, beginning with Aristotle, and ending with Xenophon, or with Zoilus or Zeuxis—the one a painter, the other a slanderous critic. It will also be ungraced by commendatory sonnets, from the pens of dukes, marquises, earls, bishops, ladies of quality, or other illustrious poets, though, were I to request them of two or three humbler friends, I know they would supply me with such as many of higher name amongst us could not equal. In short, my dear friend," continued I, "it is plain that signer Don Quixote must lie buried amongst the musty records of La Mancha, till heaven shall send some abler hand to fit him out in a manner suitable to his high deserts: since I find it impossible to perform that duty myself, nor only from a want of competent talents, but because I am naturally too lazy in hunting after authors to enable me to say, what I can say as well without them. These are the considerations that made me so thoughtful when you entered; and you must allow that it was not without sufficient cause."

On hearing this tale of distress, my friend struck his forehead with the palm of his hand, and, bursting into a loud laugh, said, "I now see I have been in an error ever since I have known you; I always took you for a discreet and sensible man, but now it appears you are as far from being so as heaven is from earth. What! is it possible that things of such little moment should have power to embarrass and confound a genius like yours, formed to overcome and trample under foot the greatest obstacles?—By my faith! this is not incapacity, but sheer idleness; and if you would be convinced that what I say is true, attend to me, and in the twinkling of an eye you shall see me put those difficulties to the rout, which you say prevent your introducing to the world, the history of the renowned Don Quixote, the light and mirror of all knight-errantry."

"Say on," replied I, "and tell me how you propose to fill up the vacuum which my fear has created, or how brighten up the gloom that surrounds me." "Nothing so easy," said he; "your first difficulty respecting the want of sonnets, epigrams, or panegyrics by high and titled authors may be at once removed, simply by taking the trouble to compose them yourself, and then baptizing them by whatever name you please: fathering them upon Prester John of the Indies, or the emperor Trapisonda, who, to my certain knowledge, were famous poets; but suppose they were not so, and that sundry pedants and praters, doubting that fact, should slander you—heed them not: for, should they even convict you of falsehood, they can not deprive you of the hand that wrote it."

"Now, as to your marginal citations of those authors and books, whence

you collected the various sentences and sayings interspersed through your history, it is but scattering here and there over your pages some scraps of Latin which you know by heart, or that will cost you but little trouble to find :—for example, when treating of liberty or slavery,

'Non bene pro toto libertas venditur auro,'

then on the margin you clap me down the name of Horace, or whoever said it. If your subject be the power of death, then opportunely comes,

'Pallida Mors, æquo pulsat pede pauperum tabernas Regumque turres.'

If friendship, or loving our enemies,—as God enjoins,—forthwith you look into the Holy Scriptures, and without any very curious search, you will be able to take the identical words of the sacred text :

'Ego autem dico vobis, diligite inimicos vestros.'

If you should be speaking of evil thoughts, recollect the Evangelist :

'De corde exeunt cogitationes malæ.'

On the inconstancy of friends, Cato will give you this distich :

*'Donec eris felix, multos numerabis amicos,
Tempora si fuerint nubila, solus eris.'*

By the assistance of these, or such like dribblets of learning, you will at least gain the credit of being a scholar—a character which in these times leads to both honor and profit.

“As for annotations at the end of your book, you may safely manage it in this manner : if you should have occasion to speak of a giant, let it be Goliath, for there you will have, at a small expense, a noble annotation, which will run thus :—‘The giant Goliath, or Goliath, was a Philistine whom the shepherd David slew in the valley of Terebinthus, by means of a great stone which he cast from a sling’—as recorded in the Book of Kings, where you will find both chapter and verse. And, in order to prove yourself skilled in human literature and cosmography, take an opportunity to mention the river Tagus, on which an admirable note will present itself, to this effect :—‘The river Tagus was so named by a king of Spain ; its source is in such a place ; and after kissing the walls of the celebrated city of Lisbon, is swallowed up in the ocean. Its sands are reported to be of gold’—and so on. If you would treat of robbers, I will furnish you with the history of Cacus, for I have it at my fingers’ ends ; and, if of courtesans, there is the Bishop of Mondonedo, who will accommodate you with a Lania, a Lais, and a Flora, which annotation cannot fail to do you infinite credit. If you have to speak of cruel females, Ovid will supply you with Medea ; if enchanters and witches be your theme, Homer has a Calypso, and Virgil a Circe ; if valiant commanders, Julius Cæsar and his Commentaries are at your service, and Plutarch will give you a thousand Alexanders. If love should chance to engage your pen, with the two ounces which you possess of the Tuscan tongue, you may apply to Leon Hebrao, who will provide you abundantly ; or in case you dislike to visit foreign parts, you have here, at home, Fonseca, on ‘the Love of God,’ which contains all that you, or the most inquisitive, can possibly desire on that subject. In short, do you only contrive to introduce these names or allusions, and leave both quotations and annotations to me ; for I will engage to fill up your margins, and add four whole sheets to the end of your book.