

MIGUEL DE SAAVEDRA

THE HISTORY OF DON
QUIXOTE, VOLUME 1,
PART 05

Miguel Cervantes
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Содержание

CHAPTER XIV.

4

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

15

Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra

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CHAPTER XIV.

WHEREIN ARE INSERTED
THE DESPAIRING VERSES
OF THE DEAD SHEPHERD,
TOGETHER WITH OTHER
INCIDENTS NOT LOOKED FOR

THE LAY OF CHRYSOSTOM

Since thou dost in thy cruelty desire
The ruthless rigour of thy tyranny
From tongue to tongue, from land to land proclaimed,
The very Hell will I constrain to lend
This stricken breast of mine deep notes of woe
To serve my need of fitting utterance.

And as I strive to body forth the tale
Of all I suffer, all that thou hast done,
Forth shall the dread voice roll, and bear along
Shreds from my vitals torn for greater pain.
Then listen, not to dulcet harmony,
But to a discord wrung by mad despair
Out of this bosom's depths of bitterness,
To ease my heart and plant a sting in thine.

The lion's roar, the fierce wolf's savage howl,
The horrid hissing of the scaly snake,
The awesome cries of monsters yet unnamed,
The crow's ill-boding croak, the hollow moan
Of wild winds wrestling with the restless sea,
The wrathful bellow of the vanquished bull,
The plaintive sobbing of the widowed dove,
The envied owl's sad note, the wail of woe
That rises from the dreary choir of Hell,
Commingled in one sound, confusing sense,
Let all these come to aid my soul's complaint,
For pain like mine demands new modes of song.

No echoes of that discord shall be heard
Where Father Tagus rolls, or on the banks
Of olive-bordered Betis; to the rocks
Or in deep caverns shall my plaint be told,
And by a lifeless tongue in living words;
Or in dark valleys or on lonely shores,
Where neither foot of man nor sunbeam falls;

Or in among the poison-breathing swarms
Of monsters nourished by the sluggish Nile.
For, though it be to solitudes remote
The hoarse vague echoes of my sorrows sound
Thy matchless cruelty, my dismal fate
Shall carry them to all the spacious world.

Disdain hath power to kill, and patience dies
Slain by suspicion, be it false or true;
And deadly is the force of jealousy;
Long absence makes of life a dreary void;
No hope of happiness can give repose
To him that ever fears to be forgot;
And death, inevitable, waits in hall.
But I, by some strange miracle, live on
A prey to absence, jealousy, disdain;
Racked by suspicion as by certainty;
Forgotten, left to feed my flame alone.
And while I suffer thus, there comes no ray
Of hope to gladden me athwart the gloom;
Nor do I look for it in my despair;
But rather clinging to a cureless woe,
All hope do I abjure for evermore.

Can there be hope where fear is? Were it well,
When far more certain are the grounds of fear?
Ought I to shut mine eyes to jealousy,
If through a thousand heart-wounds it appears?
Who would not give free access to distrust,

Seeing disdain unveiled, and – bitter change! —
All his suspicions turned to certainties,
And the fair truth transformed into a lie?
Oh, thou fierce tyrant of the realms of love,
Oh, Jealousy! put chains upon these hands,
And bind me with thy strongest cord, Disdain.
But, woe is me! triumphant over all,
My sufferings drown the memory of you.

And now I die, and since there is no hope
Of happiness for me in life or death,
Still to my fantasy I'll fondly cling.
I'll say that he is wise who loveth well,
And that the soul most free is that most bound
In thralldom to the ancient tyrant Love.
I'll say that she who is mine enemy
In that fair body hath as fair a mind,
And that her coldness is but my desert,
And that by virtue of the pain he sends
Love rules his kingdom with a gentle sway.
Thus, self-deluding, and in bondage sore,
And wearing out the wretched shred of life
To which I am reduced by her disdain,
I'll give this soul and body to the winds,
All hopeless of a crown of bliss in store.

Thou whose injustice hath supplied the cause
That makes me quit the weary life I loathe,
As by this wounded bosom thou canst see

How willingly thy victim I become,
Let not my death, if haply worth a tear,
Cloud the clear heaven that dwells in thy bright eyes;
I would not have thee expiate in aught
The crime of having made my heart thy prey;
But rather let thy laughter gaily ring
And prove my death to be thy festival.
Fool that I am to bid thee! well I know
Thy glory gains by my untimely end.

And now it is the time; from Hell's abyss
Come thirsting Tantalus, come Sisyphus
Heaving the cruel stone, come Tityus
With vulture, and with wheel Ixion come,
And come the sisters of the ceaseless toil;
And all into this breast transfer their pains,
And (if such tribute to despair be due)
Chant in their deepest tones a doleful dirge
Over a corse unworthy of a shroud.
Let the three-headed guardian of the gate,
And all the monstrous progeny of hell,
The doleful concert join: a lover dead
Methinks can have no fitter obsequies.

Lay of despair, grieve not when thou art gone
Forth from this sorrowing heart: my misery
Brings fortune to the cause that gave thee birth;
Then banish sadness even in the tomb.

The "Lay of Chrysostom" met with the approbation of the listeners, though the reader said it did not seem to him to agree with what he had heard of Marcela's reserve and propriety, for Chrysostom complained in it of jealousy, suspicion, and absence, all to the prejudice of the good name and fame of Marcela; to which Ambrosio replied as one who knew well his friend's most secret thoughts, "Senor, to remove that doubt I should tell you that when the unhappy man wrote this lay he was away from Marcela, from whom he had voluntarily separated himself, to try if absence would act with him as it is wont; and as everything distresses and every fear haunts the banished lover, so imaginary jealousies and suspicions, dreaded as if they were true, tormented Chrysostom; and thus the truth of what report declares of the virtue of Marcela remains unshaken, and with her envy itself should not and cannot find any fault save that of being cruel, somewhat haughty, and very scornful."

"That is true," said Vivaldo; and as he was about to read another paper of those he had preserved from the fire, he was stopped by a marvellous vision (for such it seemed) that unexpectedly presented itself to their eyes; for on the summit of the rock where they were digging the grave there appeared the shepherdess Marcela, so beautiful that her beauty exceeded its reputation. Those who had never till then beheld her gazed upon her in wonder and silence, and those who were accustomed to see her were not less amazed than those who had never seen her before. But the instant Ambrosio saw her he addressed her, with

manifest indignation:

"Art thou come, by chance, cruel basilisk of these mountains, to see if in thy presence blood will flow from the wounds of this wretched being thy cruelty has robbed of life; or is it to exult over the cruel work of thy humours that thou art come; or like another pitiless Nero to look down from that height upon the ruin of his Rome in embers; or in thy arrogance to trample on this ill-fated corpse, as the ungrateful daughter trampled on her father Tarquin's? Tell us quickly for what thou art come, or what it is thou wouldst have, for, as I know the thoughts of Chrysostom never failed to obey thee in life, I will make all these who call themselves his friends obey thee, though he be dead."

"I come not, Ambrosia for any of the purposes thou hast named," replied Marcela, "but to defend myself and to prove how unreasonable are all those who blame me for their sorrow and for Chrysostom's death; and therefore I ask all of you that are here to give me your attention, for will not take much time or many words to bring the truth home to persons of sense. Heaven has made me, so you say, beautiful, and so much so that in spite of yourselves my beauty leads you to love me; and for the love you show me you say, and even urge, that I am bound to love you. By that natural understanding which God has given me I know that everything beautiful attracts love, but I cannot see how, by reason of being loved, that which is loved for its beauty is bound to love that which loves it; besides, it may happen that the lover of that which is beautiful may be ugly, and ugliness being detestable, it

is very absurd to say, "I love thee because thou art beautiful, thou must love me though I be ugly." But supposing the beauty equal on both sides, it does not follow that the inclinations must be therefore alike, for it is not every beauty that excites love, some but pleasing the eye without winning the affection; and if every sort of beauty excited love and won the heart, the will would wander vaguely to and fro unable to make choice of any; for as there is an infinity of beautiful objects there must be an infinity of inclinations, and true love, I have heard it said, is indivisible, and must be voluntary and not compelled. If this be so, as I believe it to be, why do you desire me to bend my will by force, for no other reason but that you say you love me? Nay – tell me – had Heaven made me ugly, as it has made me beautiful, could I with justice complain of you for not loving me? Moreover, you must remember that the beauty I possess was no choice of mine, for, be it what it may, Heaven of its bounty gave it me without my asking or choosing it; and as the viper, though it kills with it, does not deserve to be blamed for the poison it carries, as it is a gift of nature, neither do I deserve reproach for being beautiful; for beauty in a modest woman is like fire at a distance or a sharp sword; the one does not burn, the other does not cut, those who do not come too near. Honour and virtue are the ornaments of the mind, without which the body, though it be so, has no right to pass for beautiful; but if modesty is one of the virtues that specially lend a grace and charm to mind and body, why should she who is loved for her beauty part with it to gratify one who for

his pleasure alone strives with all his might and energy to rob her of it? I was born free, and that I might live in freedom I chose the solitude of the fields; in the trees of the mountains I find society, the clear waters of the brooks are my mirrors, and to the trees and waters I make known my thoughts and charms. I am a fire afar off, a sword laid aside. Those whom I have inspired with love by letting them see me, I have by words undeceived, and if their longings live on hope – and I have given none to Chrysostom or to any other – it cannot justly be said that the death of any is my doing, for it was rather his own obstinacy than my cruelty that killed him; and if it be made a charge against me that his wishes were honourable, and that therefore I was bound to yield to them, I answer that when on this very spot where now his grave is made he declared to me his purity of purpose, I told him that mine was to live in perpetual solitude, and that the earth alone should enjoy the fruits of my retirement and the spoils of my beauty; and if, after this open avowal, he chose to persist against hope and steer against the wind, what wonder is it that he should sink in the depths of his infatuation? If I had encouraged him, I should be false; if I had gratified him, I should have acted against my own better resolution and purpose. He was persistent in spite of warning, he despaired without being hated. Bethink you now if it be reasonable that his suffering should be laid to my charge. Let him who has been deceived complain, let him give way to despair whose encouraged hopes have proved vain, let him flatter himself whom I shall entice, let him boast whom I shall receive;

but let not him call me cruel or homicide to whom I make no promise, upon whom I practise no deception, whom I neither entice nor receive. It has not been so far the will of Heaven that I should love by fate, and to expect me to love by choice is idle. Let this general declaration serve for each of my suitors on his own account, and let it be understood from this time forth that if anyone dies for me it is not of jealousy or misery he dies, for she who loves no one can give no cause for jealousy to any, and candour is not to be confounded with scorn. Let him who calls me wild beast and basilisk, leave me alone as something noxious and evil; let him who calls me ungrateful, withhold his service; who calls me wayward, seek not my acquaintance; who calls me cruel, pursue me not; for this wild beast, this basilisk, this ungrateful, cruel, wayward being has no kind of desire to seek, serve, know, or follow them. If Chrysostom's impatience and violent passion killed him, why should my modest behaviour and circumspection be blamed? If I preserve my purity in the society of the trees, why should he who would have me preserve it among men, seek to rob me of it? I have, as you know, wealth of my own, and I covet not that of others; my taste is for freedom, and I have no relish for constraint; I neither love nor hate anyone; I do not deceive this one or court that, or trifle with one or play with another. The modest converse of the shepherd girls of these hamlets and the care of my goats are my recreations; my desires are bounded by these mountains, and if they ever wander hence it is to contemplate the beauty of the heavens, steps by which the

soul travels to its primeval abode."

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