

Imaginary Invalid Act III Scene III

SCENE III.—ARGAN, BÉRALDE.

BER. You will allow me, brother, to ask you, before all things, not to excite yourself in our conversation.

ARG. Agreed.

BER. To reply without bitterness, to the things I may say to you.

ARG. Yes.

BER. And to argue together the matters which we have to discuss, with a mind free from all passion.

⁸⁶ In the original *un médecin à notre poste*.

does not cure much; and the whole excellence of their art consists in a pompous gibberish, in a specious verbiage, which gives you words instead of reasons, and promises instead of effects.

ARG. But after all, brother, there are people as learned and as clever as you; and we find that, in case of illness, everyone has recourse to doctors.

BER. It is a sign of human weakness, and not of the truth of their art.

ARG. But doctors must believe in the truth of their art, inasmuch as they make use of it for themselves.

BER. That is because there are some among them who themselves share in the popular error by which they profit; and others who profit by it without sharing in it. Your Mr. Purgon, for instance, does not discriminate very clearly; he is a thorough physician from head to foot; a man who believes in his rules more than in all mathematical demonstrations, and who would think it a crime to wish to examine them; who sees nothing obscure in physic, nothing dubious, nothing difficult, and who, with an impetuosity of prejudice, a stiff-necked assurance, a coarse common sense and reasoning, rushes into purging and bleeding, and hesitates at nothing. You must not owe him a grudge for all he might do to you: he would despatch you with the most implicit faith; and he would, in killing you, only do what he has done to his wife and children, and what, if there were any need, he would do to himself.

ARG. That is because you bear him a grudge from infancy, brother.⁸⁸ But to cut it short, let us come to the fact. What must we do, then, when we are ill?

BER. Nothing, brother.

ARG. Nothing?

BER. Nothing. We must remain quiet. If we leave nature alone, she recovers gently from the disorder into which she has fallen. It is our anxiety, our impatience, which spoils all; and nearly all men die of their remedies, not of their diseases.

ARG. But you must admit, brother, that this nature may be assisted by certain things.

⁸⁸ The original has *vous avez, mon frère, une dent de lait contre lui*; *dent de lait* means literally, a first or shedding tooth.

BER. Good Heavens! brother, these are mere ideas with which we love to beguile ourselves; and, at all times, beautiful fictions have crept in amongst men, in which we believe, because they flatter us, and because it were to be wished that they were true. When a physician speaks to you of aiding, assisting, and supporting nature, to take away from her what is hurtful, and to give her that which she wants, to re-establish her, and to put her in the full possession of her functions; when he speaks to you of rectifying the blood, of regulating the bowels and the brain, of relieving the spleen, of putting the chest to rights, of mending the liver, of strengthening the heart, of renewing and preserving the natural heat, and of being possessed of secrets to prolong life till an advanced age, he just tells you the romance of physic. But when you come to the truth and experience, you find nothing of all this; and it is like those beautiful dreams, which, on awaking, leave you nothing but the regret of having believed in them.

ARG. Which means that all the knowledge of the world is contained in your head, and that you profess to know more about it than all the great physicians of our age.

BER. In speaking and in reality, your great physicians are two different sorts of persons. Hear them hold forth, they are the cleverest people in the world; see them act, they are the most ignorant of all men.

ARG. Lack-a-day! you are a great doctor; and I should much like to have one of these gentlemen here, to refute your arguments, and to take you down a peg or two.

BER. I, brother, I do not assume the task of combating the Faculty; and every one, at his own risk and cost, may believe whatever he pleases. What I say about it is simply between ourselves, and I should have wished to be somewhat able to dispel the error in which you are, and to take you, for your amusement, to see one of the comedies of Molière upon this subject.

ARG. Your Molière, with his comedies, is a fine impertinent fellow! and I think it is like his impudence to go and bring upon the stage such worthy persons as the physicians.

BER. He does not make fun of physicians, but of the ridiculousness of physic.

ARG. It is like him to do so, to interfere about controlling the Faculty ! There is a fine booby, a brazen impertinent fellow, to make fun of consultations and prescriptions, to attack the body of physicians, and to put on his stage such venerable persons as these gentlemen !

BER. What would you have him put there but the various professions of men ? They put princes and kings there every day, who are of quite as good family as physicians.

ARG. Now, by all that is terrible !⁸⁹ if I were the physicians, I would avenge myself of his impertinence ; and would let him die without assistance, whenever he felt ill. He might say and do what he liked ; I would not prescribe even the least bleeding, or the smallest enema ; and I would say to him : die, die ; that will teach you another time to make fun of the Faculty.

BER. You are very angry with him ?

ARG. Yes. He is a foolish fellow ; and if the physicians be wise, they will do what I say.

BER. He will be wiser still than your physicians, for he will not ask them for their assistance.

ARG. So much the worse for him, if he have no recourse to remedies.

BER. He has his reasons for not wishing for them, and he maintains that it is permitted only to robust and vigorous people, who have sufficient strength left to bear the remedies with the disease ; but that, as for him, he has just strength enough to bear his illness.

ARG. Silly reasons these ! There, brother, let us talk no more about this man ; for he excites my bile, and you will bring on my illness again.

BER. Very well, brother ; and to change our conversation, I will tell you, that on account of a trifling repugnance on the part of your daughter, you should not take the violent resolution to place her in a convent : that in the choice of a son-in-law, you should not blindly yield to a passion which carries you away ; and that, in such a matter, you should accommodate yourself somewhat to the inclination of your child, seeing that it is for her life, and that on it depends the happiness of a union.