FORTY-FOURTH COLLOQUY

PRECIOUS STONES

RUANO

NOW it will be well if we discuss the precious stones that enter into the composition of cordial lectuaries, which are so necessary in physic.

ORTA

I will only speak to you of medicinal stones, and of those which are in India, for if we discussed them all we should never come to an end. I must tell you that the medicines which enter into the composition of the lectuary *de gemis* are usually called *fragmenta preciosa.*

RUANO

I will ask you afterwards to tell me about some of the others.

ORTA

I will tell you in few words. But as to those others it is necessary to advise you to take back 10 *crusados* of them to give to the Spanish druggists, that henceforward they may buy the true stones, for they are not very dear. First the sapphire,

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which deserves to be worth a great deal, but which may be bought with little money. Its blue is very delightful to the eye. There are two sorts, one very obscure, the other very clear, which is called a "water sapphire." This has not so high a price, and sometimes they set them with colour to look like diamonds, by which some people have been taken in. One and another is found in Calicut and Cananore, and in many parts of the kingdom of Bisnaguer, also in Ceylon, and much the best in Pegu. These stones being so delightful to the eye, yet a large and clear one of the first water scarcely reaches to a price of 1000 *crusados*. I say that on the authority of what I have heard from those lands. When you are on your way to Cochin you can buy, in Calicut and Cananore, lots which, when washed, leave a good quantity. I also bought them in a lot, for they cost little money.

RUANO

Tell me about jacinths and garnets.

ORTA

There are some in such quantities that it is only necessary to spend a little money to buy a sackful. You will find many in Calicut and Cananore. A score of those that have been washed go for a *vintem*. Those uncleaned are much cheaper. Garnets are not only in the places I mentioned but also in Cambaya and Balagate, where they are sold at very low prices.

RUANO

Next comes the sardonix.

ORTA

That stone is not in our country. Some of them come from abroad, but there is much divergence as to what stone it is. My advice would be to leave it in its place, when you do

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not find jacinth or garnet. The jacinth is also brought to Lisbon from a place called Belas, and they may be found in many corners of Spain if they are sought for. Some consider these two stones, the jacinth and garnet, to be species of the ruby.

RUANO

What can you tell me about the ruby and carbuncle?

ORTA

I say that under this name of ruby there are many kinds. The principal is called in Greek *antrax*, and in Latin *carbunculus*, which is as much as to say "a live coal."

RUANO

I want to get one for myself, not to use as medicine, but I have heard that they light up at night.

ORTA

Do not you believe it. These are the sayings of dotage.

RUANO

Have you not seen it yourself, or heard that it is so?

ORTA

I have never seen it. But it is true that a lapidary told me that he counted on a table a few very fine rubies from Ceylon, very small, such as we call score rubies, because they are sold at twenty the *vintem*. One got between the folds of a table, and at night, in the dark, the table seemed to have a spark of fire, so that it was like a candle. A very small ruby was found, and when it was taken up the spark no longer appeared on the table. I do not know whether this is the truth or a lie. But I know that the lapidary who told me

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this professionally, told lies sometimes, as he found them profitable in his trade, and he got so used to it that he occasionally related marvels of his own accord.

RUANO

Now when a ruby is very fine as regards colour and water—I mean when it is 24 carats and quite perfect as to colour—should we call it a carbuncle?

ORTA

I think so. I have seen some called TOQUES, which have a price according to their size, shape, and water, and the clearest I saw were those the price of which was 20,000 *crusados*.[1] It was owned by a great Lord of the Deccan, who showed it to me, as I was a great favourite of his, and he made me give my word that I would not mention it to any one in that land nor to the King of it. He told me it cost him 6 *maunds* of gold, equal to 5 Portuguese *arrobas*.

RUANO

This would be a good stone to use in pharmacy, if the druggists are liberal.

ORTA

No. For the druggists you can find many as cheap as the jacinth, and indeed a certain quantity has been sent to Castile. There is another kind which we call BALAX, which is somewhat red and with a lower price, and another called ESPINHELA. This has a colour more inclined to flame, but it is of less price, because it has not the water of the true ruby. There are other white rubies in many shades. Others are slightly encarnadine, or of a whitish cherry colour. Others half-white half-vermilion, others half-sapphire half-ruby. All these I have seen, and if

[1] 43,000,000 reis = £8600. Four times that in present money.

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you like I can show them to you before you go. There are many other kinds of these rubies about which I do not care to talk to you, nor about their prices.

RUANO

Can you excuse me for asking the cause of this variation in the colour of the rubies?

ORTA

That which I have heard said, that is most conformable to reason, is that the ruby in the rock, when it is near its birth, is white, and that as it matures it reaches to the perfection of vermilion. As this perfection cannot be acquired at once, sometimes stones are found becoming red, as I said, and sometimes with bands of yellow and white. As they say that the ruby and sapphire come from one rock, there are other stones that become a mixed blue and red, like a true composition of dark blue and vermilion, and almost red. In some languages of India they call such a stone NILACANDI, which is as much as to say "ruby and sapphire."

RUANO

Tell me the names of these stones in Arabic and in the language of this land.

ORTA

The Arabs and Persians call the ruby JACUT, and the people of this land MANICA. The jacinth and garnet have special names, as when one says "yellow ruby" or "black ruby" for garnet. The sapphire is NILA.

RUANO

It is very desirable that you should tell me about the emerald, the best stone of all, which is an ingredient in the lectuary *de gemis*, and they call it *ferruzegi*.

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ORTA

Emeralds are not so cheap, and for emerald the *ferruzegi* should not be understood. The true emerald is rare and fetches a very high price. The proper rock where it occurs is not known, so that those who come to where it is washed do not find sufficient. He who says that *ferruzegi* means an emerald does not understand Arabic. The intention of Mesué was to enter emerald in this composition, though Cristofero de Honestis, the commentator of Mesué, felt differently. The reason is that the name of an emerald in this country and in Persia is PACHEC and in Arabic ZAMARRAT. Serapio, in the chapter on emeralds, has ZABARGET instead of ZAMARRAT, but it should not be ZABARGET, as the Pandetarian[1] shows.

RUANO

What does FERRUZEGI mean?

ORTA

You must know that in Arabic *p* and *f* as letters are like brothers, as I have said before, whence Mesué in Arabic has this FERRUZEGI, which means a turquoise, or of a turquoise, for PURUZA is a turquoise in Arabic, of which there is a great quantity in Persia.

RUANO

Truly for this alone one would wish to come to India, but if I did not find you perhaps I should not say that. From this time forward when I find FERRUZEGI in Avicenna or in any book of the Arabs, I shall understand it to be a turquoise, and I will not allow the druggist to fling green enamel into the lectuary *de gemis*, nor any other green stones. For I remember, the other day, one came here to sell a jewel with many small emeralds, and you said that they were all false

[1] Matheus Silvaticus.

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and that they were made of bits of glass in Bisnaguer and Balagat, at least the largest of them, and that it was a thing so common among them that no one noticed it. Henceforth when I come to an emerald I shall say, beforehand, that it is not to be put into the lectuary without being quite certain what it is, "*A viride vitro libera nos Domine!*" A modern doctor says that our emeralds of Peru are of much more use for medicinal purposes.

ORTA

I say that those stones of Peru, called emeralds, were brought to this land. At first they fetched a high price, but afterwards they were found to be false[1] and cannot be sold. You will have to be on your guard against them.

RUANO

Tell me whether the turquoise is used in medicine?

ORTA

Some people have told me that it is, others that it is not, among the Gentios. Among the Moors all say that it is used in medicine.

RUANO

Tell me about the chrysolite, amethyst, beryl (you say there is no crystal in this country), and the jasper.

ORTA

Of the jasper I need not speak to you, as there is plenty in your own country, and you know more than I do about it. There are small porcelains[2] of jasper or green stone, which is like emerald, and it may be that the stone found in Genoa, and called emerald, may be this stone. But it has been sought,

[1] This is not true. Those from South America are true emeralds of excellent colour and water.

[2] Word used for a cup, irrespective of the material it is made of.

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a few times, to obtain better authority for this, and the Genoese may speak in due time. In Balagate they gave me a porcelain for 200 *pardoas*, and if it was emerald, a thousandth times that amount would not be taken for it, according to the value they put on emeralds. I spoke to you of the beryl when we discussed the diamonds. There is a good deal of it in Cambaia, Bisnaguer, and Ceylon, and in other places. Chrysolite and amethyst come from Ceylon, and they have both these stones and many others in Balagate of Nizamoxa. All that Balagate is surrounded by many kinds of stones. That called ALAQUECA[1] by us, but QUEQUI in Arabic, is worth a Castilian real for one *arratel* of the stone worked in small pieces. This stone has a more certain virtue than all the rest, for it staunches the blood very suddenly.

RUANO

Cat's eyes are, I believe, very good. Where do they come from?

ORTA

The best are in Ceylon, and are worth more there than in Portugal, for I saw one taken to Portugal which was worth 600 *cruzados* here, but in Portugal it would not fetch more than 90. It was brought back here to be sold for its value. For this reason the cat's eye is not taken to Portugal for sale.

RUANO

What properties has it?

ORTA

The people of this country say that it has the property of keeping a man's wealth in his possession without its diminishing, and rather it will be increased.

[1] Carnelian.

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RUANO

Whence are those rubies of the localities of which you have not told me?

ORTA

Some few are from Ceylon, but not very good, others from Pegu, and they say that they come from the lands of Burma, which is much farther off. This is the best information I have. If I am wrong in anything you must pardon me, for I do not know everything thoroughly.

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