

MIGUEL DE SAAVEDRA

THE HISTORY OF DON
QUIXOTE, VOLUME 2,
PART 38

Miguel Cervantes
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CHAPTER LXII.

WHICH DEALS WITH THE ADVENTURE OF THE ENCHANTED HEAD, TOGETHER WITH OTHER TRIVIAL MATTERS WHICH CANNOT BE LEFT UNTOLD

Don Quixote's host was one Don Antonio Moreno by name, a gentleman of wealth and intelligence, and very fond of diverting himself in any fair and good-natured way; and having Don Quixote in his house he set about devising modes of making him exhibit his mad points in some harmless fashion; for jests that give pain are no jests, and no sport is worth anything if it hurts another. The first thing he did was to make Don Quixote take off his armour, and lead him, in that tight chamois suit we have

already described and depicted more than once, out on a balcony overhanging one of the chief streets of the city, in full view of the crowd and of the boys, who gazed at him as they would at a monkey. The cavaliers in livery careered before him again as though it were for him alone, and not to enliven the festival of the day, that they wore it, and Sancho was in high delight, for it seemed to him that, how he knew not, he had fallen upon another Camacho's wedding, another house like Don Diego de Miranda's, another castle like the duke's. Some of Don Antonio's friends dined with him that day, and all showed honour to Don Quixote and treated him as a knight-errant, and he becoming puffed up and exalted in consequence could not contain himself for satisfaction. Such were the drolleries of Sancho that all the servants of the house, and all who heard him, were kept hanging upon his lips. While at table Don Antonio said to him, "We hear, worthy Sancho, that you are so fond of manjar blanco and forced-meat balls, that if you have any left, you keep them in your bosom for the next day."

"No, senor, that's not true," said Sancho, "for I am more cleanly than greedy, and my master Don Quixote here knows well that we two are used to live for a week on a handful of acorns or nuts. To be sure, if it so happens that they offer me a heifer, I run with a halter; I mean, I eat what I'm given, and make use of opportunities as I find them; but whoever says that I'm an out-of-the-way eater or not cleanly, let me tell him that he is wrong; and I'd put it in a different way if I did not respect the honourable

beards that are at the table."

"Indeed," said Don Quixote, "Sancho's moderation and cleanliness in eating might be inscribed and graved on plates of brass, to be kept in eternal remembrance in ages to come. It is true that when he is hungry there is a certain appearance of voracity about him, for he eats at a great pace and chews with both jaws; but cleanliness he is always mindful of; and when he was governor he learned how to eat daintily, so much so that he eats grapes, and even pomegranate pips, with a fork."

"What!" said Don Antonio, "has Sancho been a governor?"

"Ay," said Sancho, "and of an island called Barataria. I governed it to perfection for ten days; and lost my rest all the time; and learned to look down upon all the governments in the world; I got out of it by taking to flight, and fell into a pit where I gave myself up for dead, and out of which I escaped alive by a miracle."

Don Quixote then gave them a minute account of the whole affair of Sancho's government, with which he greatly amused his hearers.

On the cloth being removed Don Antonio, taking Don Quixote by the hand, passed with him into a distant room in which there was nothing in the way of furniture except a table, apparently of jasper, resting on a pedestal of the same, upon which was set up, after the fashion of the busts of the Roman emperors, a head which seemed to be of bronze. Don Antonio traversed the whole apartment with Don Quixote and walked

round the table several times, and then said, "Now, Senor Don Quixote, that I am satisfied that no one is listening to us, and that the door is shut, I will tell you of one of the rarest adventures, or more properly speaking strange things, that can be imagined, on condition that you will keep what I say to you in the remotest recesses of secrecy."

"I swear it," said Don Quixote, "and for greater security I will put a flag-stone over it; for I would have you know, Senor Don Antonio" (he had by this time learned his name), "that you are addressing one who, though he has ears to hear, has no tongue to speak; so that you may safely transfer whatever you have in your bosom into mine, and rely upon it that you have consigned it to the depths of silence."

"In reliance upon that promise," said Don Antonio, "I will astonish you with what you shall see and hear, and relieve myself of some of the vexation it gives me to have no one to whom I can confide my secrets, for they are not of a sort to be entrusted to everybody."

Don Quixote was puzzled, wondering what could be the object of such precautions; whereupon Don Antonio taking his hand passed it over the bronze head and the whole table and the pedestal of jasper on which it stood, and then said, "This head, Senor Don Quixote, has been made and fabricated by one of the greatest magicians and wizards the world ever saw, a Pole, I believe, by birth, and a pupil of the famous Escotillo of whom such marvellous stories are told. He was here in my house,

and for a consideration of a thousand crowns that I gave him he constructed this head, which has the property and virtue of answering whatever questions are put to its ear. He observed the points of the compass, he traced figures, he studied the stars, he watched favourable moments, and at length brought it to the perfection we shall see to-morrow, for on Fridays it is mute, and this being Friday we must wait till the next day. In the interval your worship may consider what you would like to ask it; and I know by experience that in all its answers it tells the truth."

Don Quixote was amazed at the virtue and property of the head, and was inclined to disbelieve Don Antonio; but seeing what a short time he had to wait to test the matter, he did not choose to say anything except that he thanked him for having revealed to him so mighty a secret. They then quitted the room, Don Antonio locked the door, and they repaired to the chamber where the rest of the gentlemen were assembled. In the meantime Sancho had recounted to them several of the adventures and accidents that had happened his master.

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