

MIGUEL DE SAAVEDRA

THE HISTORY OF DON
QUIXOTE, VOLUME 2,
PART 23

Miguel Cervantes
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CHAPTER XIX.

IN WHICH IS RELATED THE ADVENTURE OF THE ENAMoured SHEPHERD, TOGETHER WITH OTHER TRULY DROLL INCIDENTS

Don Quixote had gone but a short distance beyond Don Diego's village, when he fell in with a couple of either priests or students, and a couple of peasants, mounted on four beasts of the ass kind. One of the students carried, wrapped up in a piece of green buckram by way of a portmanteau, what seemed to be a little linen and a couple of pairs of-ribbed stockings; the other carried nothing but a pair of new fencing-foils with buttons. The peasants carried divers articles that showed they were on their way from some large town where they had bought them, and were

taking them home to their village; and both students and peasants were struck with the same amazement that everybody felt who saw Don Quixote for the first time, and were dying to know who this man, so different from ordinary men, could be. Don Quixote saluted them, and after ascertaining that their road was the same as his, made them an offer of his company, and begged them to slacken their pace, as their young asses travelled faster than his horse; and then, to gratify them, he told them in a few words who he was and the calling and profession he followed, which was that of a knight-errant seeking adventures in all parts of the world. He informed them that his own name was Don Quixote of La Mancha, and that he was called, by way of surname, the Knight of the Lions.

All this was Greek or gibberish to the peasants, but not so to the students, who very soon perceived the crack in Don Quixote's pate; for all that, however, they regarded him with admiration and respect, and one of them said to him, "If you, sir knight, have no fixed road, as it is the way with those who seek adventures not to have any, let your worship come with us; you will see one of the finest and richest weddings that up to this day have ever been celebrated in La Mancha, or for many a league round."

Don Quixote asked him if it was some prince's, that he spoke of it in this way. "Not at all," said the student; "it is the wedding of a farmer and a farmer's daughter, he the richest in all this country, and she the fairest mortal ever set eyes on. The display with which it is to be attended will be something rare and out

of the common, for it will be celebrated in a meadow adjoining the town of the bride, who is called, par excellence, Quiteria the fair, as the bridegroom is called Camacho the rich. She is eighteen, and he twenty-two, and they are fairly matched, though some knowing ones, who have all the pedigrees in the world by heart, will have it that the family of the fair Quiteria is better than Camacho's; but no one minds that now-a-days, for wealth can solder a great many flaws. At any rate, Camacho is free-handed, and it is his fancy to screen the whole meadow with boughs and cover it in overhead, so that the sun will have hard work if he tries to get in to reach the grass that covers the soil. He has provided dancers too, not only sword but also bell-dancers, for in his own town there are those who ring the changes and jingle the bells to perfection; of shoe-dancers I say nothing, for of them he has engaged a host. But none of these things, nor of the many others I have omitted to mention, will do more to make this a memorable wedding than the part which I suspect the despairing Basilio will play in it. This Basilio is a youth of the same village as Quiteria, and he lived in the house next door to that of her parents, of which circumstance Love took advantage to reproduce to the world the long-forgotten loves of Pyramus and Thisbe; for Basilio loved Quiteria from his earliest years, and she responded to his passion with countless modest proofs of affection, so that the loves of the two children, Basilio and Quiteria, were the talk and the amusement of the town. As they grew up, the father of Quiteria made up his mind to refuse Basilio his wonted freedom

of access to the house, and to relieve himself of constant doubts and suspicions, he arranged a match for his daughter with the rich Camacho, as he did not approve of marrying her to Basilio, who had not so large a share of the gifts of fortune as of nature; for if the truth be told ungrudgingly, he is the most agile youth we know, a mighty thrower of the bar, a first-rate wrestler, and a great ball-player; he runs like a deer, and leaps better than a goat, bowls over the nine-pins as if by magic, sings like a lark, plays the guitar so as to make it speak, and, above all, handles a sword as well as the best."

"For that excellence alone," said Don Quixote at this, "the youth deserves to marry, not merely the fair Quiteria, but Queen Guinevere herself, were she alive now, in spite of Launcelot and all who would try to prevent it."

"Say that to my wife," said Sancho, who had until now listened in silence, "for she won't hear of anything but each one marrying his equal, holding with the proverb 'each ewe to her like.' What I would like is that this good Basilio (for I am beginning to take a fancy to him already) should marry this lady Quiteria; and a blessing and good luck – I meant to say the opposite – on people who would prevent those who love one another from marrying."

"If all those who love one another were to marry," said Don Quixote, "it would deprive parents of the right to choose, and marry their children to the proper person and at the proper time; and if it was left to daughters to choose husbands as they pleased, one would be for choosing her father's servant, and another,

some one she has seen passing in the street and fancies gallant and dashing, though he may be a drunken bully; for love and fancy easily blind the eyes of the judgment, so much wanted in choosing one's way of life; and the matrimonial choice is very liable to error, and it needs great caution and the special favour of heaven to make it a good one. He who has to make a long journey, will, if he is wise, look out for some trusty and pleasant companion to accompany him before he sets out. Why, then, should not he do the same who has to make the whole journey of life down to the final halting-place of death, more especially when the companion has to be his companion in bed, at board, and everywhere, as the wife is to her husband? The companionship of one's wife is no article of merchandise, that, after it has been bought, may be returned, or bartered, or changed; for it is an inseparable accident that lasts as long as life lasts; it is a noose that, once you put it round your neck, turns into a Gordian knot, which, if the scythe of Death does not cut it, there is no untying. I could say a great deal more on this subject, were I not prevented by the anxiety I feel to know if the senior licentiate has anything more to tell about the story of Basilio."

To this the student, bachelor, or, as Don Quixote called him, licentiate, replied, "I have nothing whatever to say further, but that from the moment Basilio learned that the fair Quiteria was to be married to Camacho the rich, he has never been seen to smile, or heard to utter rational word, and he always goes about moody and dejected, talking to himself in a way that shows plainly he

is out of his senses. He eats little and sleeps little, and all he eats is fruit, and when he sleeps, if he sleeps at all, it is in the field on the hard earth like a brute beast. Sometimes he gazes at the sky, at other times he fixes his eyes on the earth in such an abstracted way that he might be taken for a clothed statue, with its drapery stirred by the wind. In short, he shows such signs of a heart crushed by suffering, that all we who know him believe that when to-morrow the fair Quiteria says 'yes,' it will be his sentence of death."

"God will guide it better," said Sancho, "for God who gives the wound gives the salve; nobody knows what will happen; there are a good many hours between this and to-morrow, and any one of them, or any moment, the house may fall; I have seen the rain coming down and the sun shining all at one time; many a one goes to bed in good health who can't stir the next day. And tell me, is there anyone who can boast of having driven a nail into the wheel of fortune? No, faith; and between a woman's 'yes' and 'no' I wouldn't venture to put the point of a pin, for there would not be room for it; if you tell me Quiteria loves Basilio heart and soul, then I'll give him a bag of good luck; for love, I have heard say, looks through spectacles that make copper seem gold, poverty wealth, and blear eyes pearls."

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