

## CHAPTER XXIII

OF THE WONDERFUL THINGS WHICH THE UNPARALLELED DON QUIXOTE DECLARED HE HAD SEEN IN THE DEEP CAVE OF MONTESINOS, THE GREATNESS AND IMPOSSIBILITY OF WHICH MAKES THIS ADVENTURE PASS FOR APOCRYPHAL

It was now past four in the afternoon, and the sun was opportunely hid behind the clouds, which, interposing between his rays, invited Don Quixote, without heat or trouble, to relate to his illustrious auditors the wonders he had seen in Montesinos' cave.

"About twelve or fourteen men's depth," said he, "in the profundity of this cavern, on the right hand, there is a concavity wide enough to contain a large waggon, mules and all. This place is not wholly dark, for through some chinks and narrow holes, that reach to the distant surface of the earth, there comes a glimmering light. I discovered this recess, being already weary of hanging by the loins, discouraged by the profound darkness of the region below me, destitute of a guide, and not knowing whither I went: resolving therefore to rest myself there

a while, I called to you to give me no more rope, but it seems you did not hear me. I therefore entered, and coiling up the cord, sat upon it very melancholy, and thinking how I should most conveniently get down to the bottom, having nobody to guide or support me. While thus I sat pensive, and lost in thought, insensibly, without any previous drowsiness, I found myself surprised by sleep; and after that, not knowing how, nor which way I wakened, I unexpectedly found myself in the finest, the sweetest, and most delightful meadow, that ever nature adorned with her beauties, or the most inventive fancy could ever imagine. Now, that I might be sure this was neither a dream nor an illusion, I rubbed my eyes, blowed my nose, and felt several parts of my body, and convinced myself that I was really awake, with the use of all my senses, and all the faculties of my understanding sound and active as at this moment.

"Presently I discovered a royal and sumptuous palace, of which the walls and battlements seemed all of clear and transparent crystal. At the same time, the spacious gates opening, there came out towards me a venerable old man, clad in a sad-coloured robe, so long that it swept the ground; on his breast and shoul-



ders he had a green satin tippet after the manner of those worn in colleges. On his head he wore a black Milan cap, and his broad hoary beard reached down below his middle. He had no kind of weapon in his hands, but a rosary of beads about the bigness of walnuts, and his credo beads appeared as large as ordinary ostrich eggs. The awful and grave aspect, the pace, the port and goodly presence of this old man, each of them apart, and much more all together, struck me with veneration and astonishment. He came up to me, and without any previous ceremony, embracing me close, 'It is a long time,' said he, 'most renowned knight, Don Quixote de la Mancha, that we who dwell in this enchanted solitude have hoped to see you here; that you may inform the upper world of the surprising prodigies concealed from human knowledge in this subterranean hollow, called the cave of Montesinos: An enterprise reserved alone for your insuperable heart, and stupendous resolution. Go with me then, thou most illustrious knight, and behold the wonders inclosed within the transparent castle, of which I am the perpetual governor and chief warden, being the same individual Montesinos, from whom this cavern took its name.'

"No sooner had the reverend old man let me know who he was, but I entreated him to tell me, whether it was true or no, that, at his friend Durandarte's dying request, he had taken out his heart with a small dagger, the very moment he expired, and carried it to his mistress Belerma, as the story was current in the world?—'It is literally true,' answered the old gentleman, 'except that single circumstance of the dagger; for I used neither a small nor a large dagger on this occasion, but a well-polished poniard, as sharp as an awl.' "

"I will be hanged," quoth Sancho, "if it was not one of your Seville poniards of Raymond de Hoze's making."—"That cannot be," said Don Quixote, "for that cutler lived but the other day, and the battle of Roncesvalles, where this accident happened, was fought many ages ago: but this is of no importance to the story."—"You are in the right, sir," said the student, "and pray go on, for I hearken to your relation with the greatest satisfaction imaginable."

"That, sir," said the knight, "increases my pleasure in telling it. But to proceed: The venerable Montesinos, having conducted me into the crystal palace, led me into a spacious ground-room, exceeding cool, and all of ala-



baster. In the middle of it stood a stately marble tomb, that seemed a master-piece of art; upon which lay a knight extended all at length, not of stone or brass, as on other monuments, but pure flesh and bones: He covered the region of his heart with his right hand, which seemed to me somewhat hairy, and very full of sinews, a sign of the great strength of the body to which it belonged. Montesinos, observing that I viewed this spectacle with surprise, 'Behold,' said he, 'the flower and mirror of all the amorous and valiant knights of his age, my friend Durandarte, who, together with me and many others of both sexes, are kept here enchanted by Merlin, that British magician, who, they say, was the son of the Devil, though I cannot believe it; only his knowledge was so great, that he might be said to know more than the devil. Here I say we are enchanted, but how and for what cause no man can tell, though time, I hope, will shortly reveal it. But the most wonderful part of my fortune is this; I am as certain, as that the sun now shines, that Durandarte died in my arms; and that with these hands I took out his heart, by the same token that it weighed above two pounds, a sure mark of his courage: for, by the rules of natural philosophy, the

most valiant men have still the biggest hearts. Nevertheless, though this knight really died, he still complains and sighs sometimes as if he were alive.'

"Scarce had Montesinos spoke these words, but the miserable Durandarte cried out aloud, 'Oh! cousin Montesinos, the last and dying request of your departing friend, was to take my heart out of my breast with a poniard or a dagger, and carry it to Belerma.' The venerable Montesinos, hearing this, fell on his knees before the afflicted knight, and with tears in his eyes, 'Long, long ago,' said he, 'Durandarte, thou dearest of my kinsmen, have I performed what you enjoined me on that bitter fatal day when you expired. I took out your heart with all imaginable care, not leaving the least particle of it in your breast: I gently wiped it with a laced handkerchief, and posted away with it to France, as soon as I had committed your dear remains to the bosom of the earth, having shed tears enough to have washed my hands clear of the blood they had gathered by plunging in your entrails. To confirm this truth yet farther, at the first place where I stopped from Roncesvalles, I laid a little salt upon your heart, to preserve it from putrefaction, and keep it, if not fresh, at least free from



any ill smell, till I presented it into the hands of Belerma, who with you and me, and Guadiana<sup>1</sup> your squire, as also Ruydera (the lady's woman) with her seven daughters, her two nieces, and many others of your friends and acquaintance, is here confined by the necromantic charms of the magician Merlin; and though it be now above five hundred years since we were first conveyed into this enchanted castle, we are still alive, except Ruydera, her daughters and nieces, who by the favour of Merlin, that pitied their tears, were turned into so many lakes, still extant in the world of the living, and in the province of La Mancha, distinguished by the name of the lakes of Ruydera; seven of them belonged to the kings of Spain, and the two nieces to the Knights of the most Holy Order of St John. Your squire Guadiana, lamenting his hard fate, was in like manner metamorphosed into a river that bears his name; yet still so sensible of your disaster, that when he first arose out of the bowels of the earth to flow along its surface, and saw the sun in a strange hemisphere, he plunged again under ground, striving to hide his melting sorrows from the world; but

<sup>1</sup> Guadiana, a river in Spain, that sinks into the earth, and rises again a great distance off.

the natural current of his waters forcing a passage up again, he is compelled to appear where the sun and mortals may see him. Those lakes mixing their waters in his bosom, he swells, and glides along in sullen state to Portugal, often expressing his deep melancholy by the muddy and turbid colour of his streams; which, as they refuse to please the sight, so likewise deny to indulge mortal appetite, by breeding such fair and savoury fish as may be found in the golden Tagus. All this I have often told you, my dearest Durandarte; and since you return me no answer, I must conclude you believe me not, or that you do not hear me; for which (witness it heaven) I am extremely grieved. But now I have other news to tell ye, which, though perhaps it may not assuage your sorrows, yet I am sure it will not increase them. Open your eyes, and behold in your presence that mighty knight, of whom Merlin the sage has foretold so many wonders: That Don Quixote de la Mancha, I mean, who has not only restored to the world the function of knight-errantry, that has lain so long in oblivion, but advanced it to greater fame than it could boast in former ages, the nonage of the world. It is by his power we may expect to see the fatal charm dissolved, that keeps us