

CHAPTER 2

The New Knight's First Adventures

IT WAS DAYBREAK WHEN DON QUIXOTE RODE AWAY FROM the inn, proud of being a full-fledged knight. Reflecting, however, that he still lacked a squire, a necessary assistant to a knight, and remembering that he had a man at home—a very honest and simple fellow—whom he could probably enlist in this service, he turned his horse's head in the direction of his native village.

He had not gone very far when he was startled by loud cries of distress from a forest a little distance away. Riding at once in that direction, he came upon a strange scene. He saw a stout lad of about fifteen tied to a tree, stripped to his waist. A burly farmer was thrashing him unmercifully with a strap. Don Quixote commandingly called on the man to stop or face

instant death, and the farmer, daunted by this sudden sight, did so at once. In apologetic tones, he explained that the boy was an habitually idle servant of his, who, instead of looking after the sheep entrusted to him, was constantly losing one or more of them, and therefore was getting correction. The youth, however, said his master was looking for an excuse to cheat him of the wages he was due.

Don Quixote, without hearing more, sided with the boy and commanded his master to release him at once and pay what he owed him, which appeared to be sixty-three **reals** for nine month's service. The man obeyed without a word, untied the youth, and promised to pay him what he was due,

and even more, if he would come

home with him, since he did not have money with him. The boy protested that if his master got him in his clutches again, he would flay him like **St. Bartholomew**. To answer this, Don Quixote decided that the farmer should swear by the order of chivalry to pay the boy honestly and let him go free without further harm. The farmer was willing to swear this oath, or any

REALS
A silver coin about the size of a quarter once used in Spain and its possessions.



ST. BARTHOLOMEW
One of the 12 apostles of Jesus, sent by him to spread the Christian religion. St. Bartholomew preached in Asia Minor, Persia, and India. He was tortured to death in Armenia by having his skin torn off while still alive and then being beheaded.

other, to get rid of the knight, and so the matter was decided, in spite of the youth's loud objections that the farmer would certainly not keep his promise. Don Quixote could not imagine such wickedness, but warned the farmer that he was dealing with the Knight of La Mancha, the righter of wrongs, who would return and punish him harshly if he failed in any detail of his promise. Satisfied with that, he put his spurs to Rocinante and rode rapidly away.

The farmer watched the knight until he was out of sight, and when he saw the coast was clear he turned to the lad and said, "Come here, my son, and I will pay you what I owe you, as the good gentleman commanded me." With that he grabbed the boy, tied him to the tree again, and whipped him within an inch of his life. "Now," he said, "you can call on your knight and see if he can wipe that out. I have a good mind to skin you alive, just as you said I would." However, he let the youngster go and urged him to seek justice from his champion. The boy vowed he would, but apparently he never succeeded.

Meanwhile the knight, having covered miles of road on his way home, saw a company of men coming towards him. They were six silk merchants riding to **Murcia** with four mounted servants and three mule drivers on foot. Don Quixote instantly identified

MURCIA
A province
of Spain on its
Mediterranean
coast.

them as knights with their squires and servants. Pleased with the good work he had done with the farmer, he decided to make this an occasion for proving his new knighthood. So he planted himself in the middle of the road with his lance raised



and his shield in position, just as he had read in books of chivalry.

When the party came within hail, he called out in a defiant tone, "Halt, every one of you, until each of you swears there is not in the whole world a more beautiful lady than the Empress of La Mancha, Dulcinea del Toboso."

The merchants stopped, wondering what sort of escaped lunatic this figure might be. To humor him, however, one stepped forward and said, "Sir knight, none of us are acquainted with the lady you mention, but if you show her to us, no doubt we shall be able to agree with you."

"And what would be the use of that?" argued Don Quixote. "That would be nothing but admitting the obvious. The important point is that, without seeing her, you affirm it and mean it. If you refuse, I challenge you to combat, all haughty and overbearing as you are. You can come at me one at a time, as the rules of chivalry direct, or you can come all at once, as is the custom with those of your low breeding. I am ready and waiting, confident in the justice of my cause."

"But sir," pleaded the amused merchant, "I beg you in the name of all the princes here that you not burden our consciences by forcing us to confess something we have no knowledge of, and which so much insults the lovely Queens of Alcarria and Estramadura. Show us at least some picture, however small, of the lady, so that we may have some excuse for doing as you wish. Indeed, I say for all of us that we are so anxious to oblige you that we would declare her all you say she is even if the portrait showed her to be squint-eyed and hump-backed!"



ONE OF THE MULE DRIVERS PROCEEDED
TO BEAT HIM IN A BRUTAL FASHION.

At these suggestions Don Quixote boiled with rage. “She is neither squint-eyed nor humpbacked, you dogs! You will pay for the outrageous blasphemy you have uttered against a beauty so rare as that of my lady.”

Saying this, he leveled his lance and charged the spokesman of the group, for whom things might have gone badly, except that Rocinante stumbled and rolled with his master over and over on the ground. Don Quixote, weighed down with his ancient armor and hindered by his weapons and spurs,

was unable to get up, in spite of all his efforts. He kept calling to the merchants not to leave like cowards, but to wait until he could get back on his horse.

The merchants paid no attention to his ravings and went on their way. But one of the mule drivers, a violent, bad-tempered fellow, resented the knight's insults and, first smashing the lance in pieces, proceeded to beat him with a stave of it in a most brutal fashion. At length the fellow gave in to the repeated calls of the merchants to come along and left the poor fallen gentleman half dead on the road, less able to get up than ever. There Don Quixote lay, bruised and almost unconscious, comforting himself with thoughts about similar misfortunes that happened to other knights, and reciting in a feeble voice what he could remember of their poetic words as they lay wounded and abandoned on the field of battle.

As he was going on in this way, a countryman who happened to be from the same village came along, who, seeing a fellow creature in such obvious suffering, began to help him as much as he could. He soon discovered that the battered man was no other than his neighbor Don Quixote. With some difficulty he lifted him on his mule and led the animal and Rocinante by the bridles toward the village, much concerned with the knight's rambling talk and the difficulty of keeping him from falling on the road again.