

A TREASURE  
(Un Tesoro)

I

“Don’t lose hope, Don Restituto, don’t lose hope! Columbus had to work very hard in order to discover the New World, and you will agree that that was a snap of the fingers compared to the matter we are dealing with. Art, Archeology, and History, are all waiting with baited breath for the results of our daring enterprise. The sciences in Europe all have their eyes fixed on us. Don’t lose hope, good friend, because we are now getting close to the end of our mission.”

“It’s time for us to find a place to finish this, because I am at the point where I can not continue to have faith in what we are doing. What horrible complexities, what unworkable complications! This is not a path fit for men, it’s a goat path.”

“Do you see that little town half-hidden by the irregularities of the valley stretching before our feet? Well, in the exact place where you see those houses, not a bit closer and not a bit farther away, there was, in former times, the location of the famous *Micaonia* of the Phoenicians, the *Micogarie* or *Micogurioe* of the Romans, and the *Guadalmicola* of the Arabs. Now, thanks to the changes that have occurred with the passage of time, it has become the Cebollinos of our days.”

“But, are you sure?”

“Of course I am; how could you doubt it? Quinto Curcio has said so; both Plinys, the Elder and the Younger, have confirmed it; Sardanapalus, Priam of Troy, and Confucius have already endorsed this idea and although the Jewish Rabbi, Ben Arras, and the Moor, Tarfe, have differing opinions, the Chronicles of Archbishop Turpin and the Memoirs of Prester John of India have removed even the slightest doubt about this matter.”

“So you think it is certain that we will be able to find what we are searching for?”

“Yes, all that we have ever imagined, and more; so much more than we would ever be able to carry it away with us. Just digging a little, but what am I saying... I am sure that very near the surface we will find some cameos, as well as amphoras, urns and tripods, not to mention rings, necklaces, pendants and medallions, and all that will be easy to find. When I tell you that we will have an archeological treasure in our possession...”

“May God grant it! If we make any of these discoveries, it will be worth the effort...”

Saying that, both men mounted on separate mules; after the previous discussion, which took place on the highest and most rugged part of the mountain that towered over the town of Cebollinos, they spurred their mounts and gradually began to descend the trail, which wound between rocks and crevices, to the bottom of the valley.

II

The clock on the church had just stuck twelve when our two men arrived at the door of the only inn in the town, with the hot sun bearing down on their backs, their dry mouths filled with the dust of the trail, and their sweat running down over their faces.

Don Restituto wanted to get a bite to eat and take a siesta for a couple of hours before continuing their exploration, but his companion, a true apostle of archeology who was therefore indefatigable, used his eloquence to convince him to do the opposite.

After some effort both friends, each one armed with a spade and accompanied by the owner of the inn, headed toward one of the exits of the town, coming to a halt next to the remains of a brick structure, which our archeological expert had *a priori* classified as the foundation of a Celtiberian fortress.

After only a few thrusts of their spades they uncovered a small metal object that was shiny and round.

The archeologist declared it was a gold medallion that had belonged to King Asex, the only item that was missing from the numismatic collection in the London Museum.

After a more careful examination, with the help of the innkeeper, they came to the conclusion that it was actually one of the buttons from a Royalist jacket.

“Here you have an object that in a thousand years or so will become an item of great curiosity. Hang on to it, Don Restituto, it’s certainly worth something.”

“Yes, if I had the hope of living that long, I suppose it would be worth keeping,” said Don Restituto, sighing and sadly throwing away the button, which the innkeeper quickly picked up, since earlier that day he had lost a button from his trousers and he wanted to replace it with one that was more shiny and beautiful.

Without losing heart the archeologist began digging once more. Don Restituto wiped the sweat from his brow with a large handkerchief, produced an enormous box of snuff, from which he took a pinch, and then offered some to the innkeeper. After rubbing his hands, he slowly bent over and, picking up his spade, reluctantly joined his colleague in his work.

For the next few hours they found nothing more than a few scraps of old shoe-leather, the bones of different animals that did not appear to be antediluvian, as well as hundreds of other nameless objects, of the type that you would find in any old rubbish heap.

Don Restituto was reaching the point where he was ready to abandon the search for an archaeological treasure, and the innkeeper, who had been attracted by the idea of finding something of value, was about to leave, when the apostle of science uttered a shout of jubilation.

He had found an object that was almost completely covered with dirt, except for the handle. Casting aside his spade, and digging with his fingers so as not to damage this precious find, in a matter of seconds he was able to uncover it and show it triumphantly to his astonished companions.

“Here it is,” he exclaimed enthusiastically, “here is the discovery I was waiting for that makes all our efforts worthwhile; here you see a vessel made of potter’s clay about which we can write a report which will be the envy of the entire Academy. Look at this, Don Restituto; just look at the strange and unusual features of this object. This is not a Celtiberian vase, or a Roman amphora. It looks something like a Roman drinking cup, but it could also be an ancient carafe. And what gloss, what luster! These objects found unexpectedly in the depths of the earth remind us of the grandeur of our forefathers and become the envy of our modern history. What porcelain or china could ever compare with this magnificent vessel, which I would not hesitate to classify as Etruscan, judging by the shape, and the blue and green borders which decorate it. Yes, good Restituto, our

fortune is made with this priceless discovery; this alone will establish our reputation; and think of the envy the experts will feel when we show them this great treasure!.”

At this point the innkeeper, who had followed the thread of the archeologist’s account with growing interest, broke out with a bitter exclamation, saying with sobs and sighs, as though his heart were breaking:

“Oh, what a fool I have been! To think that I have had such great value in my hands all these years, and have not even realized it!”

“What are you saying, man?” the Don Restituto and his self-confident companion both said at the same time.

“Just as I said. This vessel, or jar, or whatever it is, this great treasure, in short, has been in my house for many years until, during the last time my father was ill, it became unserviceable and I threw it in the garbage pit. What a fool I have been to use such a valuable object for such base purposes, and then make no effort to make sure that it was preserved!”

“Tell me then, good friend,” asked Don Restituto, who was beginning to smell a rat; “where did you get this... well... let’s call it a vase?”

“Oh, I bought it at a feria in the neighboring village, from a pottery maker.”

“And it was used for, a...?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Then, in short, it was nothing more than a...”

“Exactly.”

Meanwhile, the archeologist looked like he had been struck by a lightning bolt, after hearing these words.

Don Restituto took out his handkerchief again and, after calmly wiping his brow carefully brushed off the dirt that had spread over his trousers during the excavation. He then drew out his snuff box and, without offering it to anyone, took a pinch which he placed in both sides of his nose, saying only:

“It’s all my fault!”