

CHAPTER XXV

WHERE YOU FIND THE GROUNDS OF THE BRAYING
ADVENTURES, THAT OF THE PUPPET-PLAYER,
AND THE MEMORABLE DIVINING OF THE FORTUNE-
TELLING APE

DON QUIXOTE was on thorns to know the strange story that the fellow upon the road engaged to tell him; so that, going into the stable, he minded him of his promise, and pressed him to relate the whole matter to him that moment. "My story will take up some time," quoth the man, "and is not to be told standing: have a little patience, master of mine, let me make an end of serving my mule, then I will serve your worship, and tell you such things as will make you stare."—"Do not let that hinder you," replied Don Quixote, "for I will help you myself." And so saying, he lent him a helping hand, cleansing the manger, and sifting the barley, which humble compliance obliged the fellow to tell his tale the more willingly; so that, seating himself upon a bench, with Don Quixote, the scholar,

the page, Sancho, and the inn-keeper about him, for his full auditory, he began in this manner.

"It happened on a time, that, in a borough about some four leagues and a half from this place, one of the * aldermen lost his ass. They say it was by the roguery of a waggish jade that was his maid; but that is neither here nor there—the ass was lost and gone, that is certain; and what is more, it could not be found neither high nor low. This same ass had been missing about a fortnight, some say more, some less, when another alderman of the same town, meeting this same losing alderman in the market-place, 'Brother,' quoth he, 'pay me well, and I will tell you news of your ass.'—'Troth!' replied the other, 'that I will; but then let me know where the poor beast is.'—'Why,' answered the other, 'this morning what should I meet upon the mountains yonder but he, without either pack-saddle or furniture, and so lean that it grieved my heart to see him; but yet so wild and skittish, that when I would have driven him home before me, he ran away as the devil were in him, and got into the thickest of the wood. Now, if you please, we will both go together and look for

* Rigidor.

him; I will but step home first and put up this ass, then I will come back to you, and we will about it out of hand.'—'Truly, brother,' said the other, 'I am mightily beholden to you, and will do as much for you another time.' The story happened neither more nor less, but such as I tell you, for so all that know it relate it word for word. In short, the two aldermen, hand in hand, a-foot trudged up the hills, and hunted up and down; but after many a weary step, no ass was to be found. Upon which, quoth the alderman that had seen him to the other, 'Hark you me, brother, I have a device in my noddle to find out this same ass of yours, though he were under ground, as you shall hear. You must know I can bray to admiration, and if you can but bray but never so little, the job is done.'—'Never so little!' cried the other; 'body of me, I won't vail my bonnet at braying to e'er an ass or alderman in the land.'—'Well, we shall try that,' quoth the other, 'for my contrivance is, that you go on one side of the hill, and I on the other; sometimes you shall bray, and sometimes I; so that, if your ass be but thereabouts, my life for yours, he will be sure to answer his kind, and bray again.'—'Gramercy, brother,' quoth the other; 'a rare device, i'fack! let you alone for plot-

ting.' At the same time they parted according to agreement, and when they were far enough off, they both fell a-braying so perfectly well, that they cheated one another; and meeting, each in hopes to find the ass, 'Is it possible, brother,' said the owner of the ass, 'that it was not my ass that brayed?'—'No, marry, that it was not, it was I,' answered the other alderman. 'Well, brother,' cried the owner, 'then there is no manner of difference between you and an ass, as to matter of braying; I never heard anything so natural in my life.'—'O fie! sir,' quoth the other, 'I am nothing to you: you shall lay two to one against the best brayer in the kingdom, and I will go your halves. Your voice is lofty, and of a great compass; you keep excellent time, and hold out a note rarely, and your cadence is full and ravishing. In short, sir, I knock under the table, and yield you the bays.'—'Well then, brother,' answered the owner, 'I shall always have the better opinion of myself for this one good quality; for though I knew I brayed pretty well, I never thought myself so great a master before.'—'Well,' quoth the other, 'thus you see what rare parts may be lost for want of being known; and a man never knows his own strength till he puts it to a trial.'—'Right,

brother,' quoth the owner; 'for I should never have found out this wonderful gift of mine, had it not been for this business in hand, and may we speed in it, I pray!' After these compliments they parted again, and went braying, this on one side of the hill, and that on the other. But all to no purpose, for they still deceived one another with their braying, and running to the noise, met one another as before.

"At last they agreed to bray twice one after another, that by that token they might be sure it was not the ass, but they that brayed. But all in vain—they almost brayed their hearts out, but no answer from the ass. And indeed, how could it, poor creature! when they found him at last in the wood half eaten by the wolves. 'Alack-a-day! poor Grizzle,' cried the owner; 'I do not wonder now he took so little notice of his loving master. Had he been alive, as sure as he was an ass, he would have brayed again. But let him go; this comfort I have at least, brother; though I have lost him, I have found out that rare talent of yours, that has hugely solaced me under this affliction.'—'The glass is in a good hand, Mr Alderman,' quoth the other, 'and if the abbot sings well the young monk is not much behind him.'

"With this, these same aldermen, very much down in the mouth, and very hoarse, went home, and told all their neighbours the whole story word for word; one praising the other's skill in braying, and the other returning the compliment. In short, one got it by the end, and the other got it by the end; the boys got it, and all the idle fellows got it, and there was such a brawling, and such a braying in our town, that one would have thought hell broke loose among us. But to let you see now how the devil never lies dead in a ditch, but catches at every foolish thing to set people by the ears, our neighbouring towns had it up; and when they saw any of our townsfolks, they fell a-braying, hitting us in the teeth with the braying of our aldermen. This made ill blood between us; for we took it in mighty dudgeon, as well we might, and came to words upon it, and from words to blows; for the people of our town are well known by this, as the beggar knows his dish, and are apt to be jeered where-soever they go; and then to it they go, ding dong, hand over head, in spite of law or gospel. And they have carried the jest so far, that I believe to-morrow, or next day, the men of our town, to-wit, the brayers, will be in the field against those of another town about two

leagues off, that are always plaguing us. Now, that we should be well provided, I have brought these lances and halberts that ye saw me carry. So this is my story, gentlefolks, and if it be not a strange one, I am woundily mistaken."

Here the honest man ended; when presently enters a fellow, dressed in trowsers and doublet all of chamois leather, and calling out, as if he were somebody: "Landlord," cried he, "have you any lodgings? for here comes the fortune-telling ape, and the puppet-show of Melisandra's¹ deliverance."—"Body of me!" cried the inn-keeper, "who's here? Master Peter! We shall have a merry night, faith! Honest Master Peter, you are welcome with all my heart; but where is the ape, and the show, that I cannot see them?"—"They will be here presently," said Peter; "I only came before, to see if you had any lodgings."—"Lodging, man," said the inn-keeper; "zookers! I would turn out the Duke of Alva himself, rather than Master Peter should want room. Come, come, bring in your things, for here are guests in the house to-night that will be good customers to you, I warrant you."—"That is a good hearing," said Peter; "and to encourage them I will lower my prices; and if I can but

¹ See Appendix, Note 1, Chapter XXV.

get my charges to-night, I will look for no more; so I will hasten forward the cart." This said, he ran out of the door again.

I had forgot to tell you, that this same Master Peter wore over his left eye, and half his cheek, a patch of green taffata, by which it was supposed that something ailed that side of his face. Don Quixote inquired who this Master Peter was, and what his ape and his show. "Why, sir," answered the inn-keeper, "he has strolled about the country this great while with a curious puppet-show, which represents the play of Melisandra and Don Gayeros, one of the best shows that has been acted time out of mind in this kingdom. Then he has an ape: bless us, sir, it is such an ape!—but I will say no more—you shall see, sir. It will tell you everything you ever did in your life. The like was never seen before. Ask him a question, it will listen to you; and then, whip! up it leaps on its master's shoulder, and whispers first in his ear what it knows, and then Master Peter tells you. He tells you what is to come, as well as what is past: it is true, he does not always hit so pat as to what is to come; but after all, he is seldom in the wrong, which makes us apt to think the devil helps him at a dead lift. Two