

CHAPTER XLIX

Yillah

While for a few days, now this way, now that, as our craft glides along, surrounded by these locusts of the deep, let the story of Yillah flow on.

Of her beauty say I nothing. It was that of a crystal lake in a fathomless wood: all light and shade; full of fleeting revealings; now shadowed in depths; now sunny in dimples; but all sparkling and shifting, and blending together.

But her wild beauty was a veil to things still more strange. As often she gazed so earnestly into my eyes, like some pure spirit looking far down into my soul, and seeing therein some upturned faces, I started in amaze, and asked what spell was on me, that thus she gazed.

Often she entreated me to repeat over and over again certain syllables of my language. These she would chant to herself, pausing now and then, as if striving to discover wherein lay their charm.

In her accent, there was something very different from that of the people of the canoe. Wherein lay the difference. I knew not; but it enabled her to pronounce with readiness all the words which I taught her; even as if recalling sounds long forgotten.

If all this filled me with wonder, how much was that wonder increased, and yet baffled again, by considering her complexion, and the cast of her features.

After endeavoring in various ways to account for these things, I was led to imagine, that the damsel must be an Albino (Tulla) occasionally to be met with among the people of the Pacific. These persons are of an exceedingly delicate white skin, tinted with a faint rose hue, like the lips of a shell. Their hair is golden. But, unlike the Albinos of other climes, their eyes are invariably blue, and no way intolerant of light.

As a race, the Tullas die early. And hence the belief, that they pertain to some distant sphere, and only through irregularities in the providence of the gods, come to make their appearance upon earth: whence, the oversight discovered, they are hastily snatched. And it is chiefly on this account, that in those islands where human sacrifices are offered, the Tullas are deemed the most suitable oblations for the altar, to which from their birth many are prospectively devoted. It was these considerations, united to others, which at times induced me to fancy, that by the priest, Yillah was regarded as one of these beings. So mystical, however, her revelations concerning her past history, that often I knew not what to divine. But plainly they showed that she had not the remotest conception of her real origin.

But these conceits of a state of being anterior to an earthly existence may have originated in one of those celestial visions seen transparently stealing over the face of a slumbering child. And craftily drawn forth and re-echoed by another, and at times repeated over to her with many additions, these imaginings must at length have assumed in her mind a hue of reality, heightened into conviction by the dreamy seclusion of her life.

But now, let her subsequent and more credible history be related, as from time to time she rehearsed it.