

## CHAPTER LVII

### Taji Takes Counsel With Himself

My brief intercourse with our host, had by this time enabled me to form a pretty good notion of the light, in which I was held by him and his more intelligent subjects.

His free and easy carriage evinced, that though acknowledging my assumptions, he was no way overawed by them; treating me as familiarly, indeed, as if I were a mere mortal, one of the abject generation of mushrooms.

The scene in the temple, however, had done much toward explaining this demeanor of his. A demi-god in his own proper person, my claims to a similar dignity neither struck him with wonder, nor lessened his good opinion of himself.

As for any thing foreign in my aspect, and my ignorance of Mardian customs---all this, instead of begetting a doubt unfavorable to my pretensions, but strengthened the conviction of them as verities. Thus has it been in similar instances; but to a much greater extent. The celebrated navigator referred to in a preceding chapter, was hailed by the Hawaiians as one of their demi-gods, returned to earth, after a wide tour of the universe. And they worshiped him as such, though incessantly he was interrogating them, as to who under the sun

his worshipers were; how their ancestors came on the island; and whether they would have the kindness to provide his followers with plenty of pork during his stay.

But a word or two concerning the idols in the shrine at Odo. Superadded to the homage rendered him as a temporal prince, Media was there worshiped as a spiritual being. In his corporeal absence, his effigy receiving all oblations intended for him. And in the days of his boyhood, listening to the old legends of the Mardian mythology, Media had conceived a strong liking for the fabulous Taji; a deity whom he had often declared was worthy a niche in any temple extant. Hence he had honored my image with a place in his own special shrine; placing it side by side with his worshipful likeness.

I appreciated the compliment. But of the close companionship of the other image there, I was heartily ashamed. And with reason. The nuisance in question being the image of a deified maker of plantain-pudding, lately deceased; who had been famed far and wide as the most notable fellow of his profession in the whole Archipelago. During his sublunary career, having been attached to the household of Media, his grateful master had afterward seen fit to crown his celebrity by this posthumous distinction: a circumstance sadly subtracting from the dignity of an apotheosis. Nor must it here be omitted, that in this part of Mardi culinary artists are accounted worthy of high consideration. For among these people of Odo, the matter of eating and drinking is held a matter of life and of death. "Drag away my

queen from my arms," said old Tyty when overcome of Adommo, "but leave me my cook."

Now, among the Mardians there were plenty of incarnated deities to keep me in countenance. Most of the kings of the Archipelago, besides Media, claiming homage as demi-gods; and that, too, by virtue of hereditary descent, the divine spark being transmissible from father to son. In illustration of this, was the fact, that in several instances the people of the land addressed the supreme god Oro, in the very same terms employed in the political adoration of their sublunary rulers.

Ay: there were deities in Mardi far greater and taller than I: right royal monarchs to boot, living in jolly round tabernacles of jolly brown clay; and feasting, and roystering, and lording it in yellow tabernacles of bamboo. These demi-gods had wherewithal to sustain their lofty pretensions. If need were, could crush out of him the infidelity of a non-conformist. And by this immaculate union of church and state, god and king, in their own proper persons reigned supreme Caesars over the souls and bodies of their subjects.

Beside these mighty magnates, I and my divinity shrank into nothing. In their woodland ante-chambers plebeian deities were kept lingering. For be it known, that in due time we met with several decayed, broken down demi-gods: magnificos of no mark in Mardi; having no temples wherein to feast personal admirers, or spiritual devotees. They

wandered about forlorn and friendless. And oftentimes in their dinnerless despair hugely gluttonized, and would fain have grown fat, by reflecting upon the magnificence of their genealogies. But poor fellows! like shabby Scotch lords in London in King James's time, the very multitude of them confounded distinction. And since they could show no rent-roll, they were permitted to fume unheeded.

Upon the whole, so numerous were living and breathing gods in Mardi, that I held my divinity but cheaply. And seeing such a host of immortals, and hearing of multitudes more, purely spiritual in their nature, haunting woodlands and streams; my views of theology grew strangely confused; I began to bethink me of the Jew that rejected the Talmud, and his all-permeating principle, to which Goethe and others have subscribed.

Instead, then, of being struck with the audacity of endeavoring to palm myself off as a god--the way in which the thing first impressed me--I now perceived that I might be a god as much as I pleased, and yet not whisk a lion's tail after all at least on that special account.

As for Media's reception, its graciousness was not wholly owing to the divine character imputed to me. His, he believed to be the same. But to a whim, a freakishness in his soul, which led him to fancy me as one among many, not as one with no peer.

But the apparent unconcern of King Media with respect to my godship, by no means so much surprised me, as his unaffected indifference to my amazing voyage from the sun; his indifference to the sun itself; and all the wonderful circumstances that must have attended my departure. Whether he had ever been there himself, that he regarded a solar trip with so much unconcern, almost became a question in my mind. Certain it is, that as a mere traveler he must have deemed me no very great prodigy.

My surprise at these things was enhanced by reflecting, that to the people of the Archipelago the map of Mardi was the map of the world. With the exception of certain islands out of sight and at an indefinite distance, they had no certain knowledge of any isles but their own.

And, no long time elapsed ere I had still additional reasons to cease wondering at the easy faith accorded to the story which I had given of myself. For these Mardians were familiar with still greater marvels than mine; verily believing in prodigies of all sorts. Any one of them put my exploits to the blush.

Look to thy ways then, Taji, thought I, and carry not thy crest too high. Of a surety, thou hast more peers than inferiors. Thou art overtopped all round. Bear thyself discreetly and not haughtily, Taji. It will not answer to give thyself airs. Abstain from all consequential allusions to the other world, and the genteel deities

among whom thou hast circled. Sport not too jauntily thy raiment,  
because it is novel in Mardi; nor boast of the fleetness of thy  
Chamois, because it is unlike a canoe. Vaunt not of thy pedigree,  
Taji; for Media himself will measure it with thee there by the  
furlong. Be not a "snob," Taji.

So then, weighing all things well, and myself severely, I  
resolved to follow my Mentor's wise counsel; neither arrogating  
aught, nor abating of just dues; but circulating freely, sociably,  
and frankly, among the gods, heroes, high priests, kings, and  
gentlemen, that made up the principalities of Mardi.