

CHAPTER LXV

Taji Makes Three Acquaintances

Down to this period, I had restrained Samoa from wandering to the neighboring islands, though he had much desired it, in compliance with the invitations continually received. But now I informed both him, and his comrade, of the tour I purposed; desiring their company.

Upon the announcement of my intention to depart, to my no small surprise Media also proposed to accompany me: a proposition gladly embraced. It seems, that for some reason, he had not as yet extended his travels to the more distant islands. Hence the voyage in prospect was particularly agreeable to him. Nor did he forbear any pains to insure its prosperity; assuring me, furthermore, that its object must eventually be crowned with success. "I myself am interested in this pursuit," said he; "and trust me, Yillah will be found."

For the tour of the lagoon, the docile Chamois was proposed; but Media dissented; saying, that it befitted not the lord of Odo to voyage in the equipage of his guest. Therefore, three canoes were selected from his own royal fleet.

One for ourselves, and a trio of companions whom he purposed introducing to my notice; the rest were reserved for attendants.

Thanks to Media's taste and heedfulness, the strangers above mentioned proved truly acceptable.

The first was Mohi, or Braid-Beard, so called from the manner in which he wore that appendage, exceedingly long and gray. He was a venerable teller of stories and legends, one of the Keepers of the Chronicles of the Kings of Mardi.

The second was Babbalanja, a man of a mystical aspect, habited in a voluminous robe. He was learned in Mardian lore; much given to quotations from ancient and obsolete authorities: the Ponderings of Old Bardianna: the Pandects of Alla-Malolla.

Third and last, was Yoomy, or the Warbler. A youthful, long-haired, blue-eyed minstrel; all fits and starts; at times, absent of mind, and wan of cheek; but always very neat and pretty in his apparel; wearing the most becoming of turbans, a Bird of Paradise feather its plume, and sporting the gayest of sashes. Most given was Yoomy to amorous melodies, and rondos, and roundelays, very witching to hear. But at times disdainful the oaten reed, like a clarion he burst forth with lusty lays of arms and battle; or, in mournful strains, sounded elegies for departed bards and heroes.

Thus much for Yoomy as a minstrel. In other respects, it would be hard to depict him. He was so capricious a mortal; so swayed by contrary moods; so lofty, so humble, so sad, so merry; so made up of

a thousand contradictions, that we must e'en let him depict himself as our story progresses. And herein it is hoped he will succeed; since no one in Mardi comprehended him.

Now the trio, thus destined for companions on our voyage, had for some time been anxious to take the tour of the Archipelago. In particular, Babbalanja had often expressed the most ardent desire to visit every one of the isles, in quest of some object, mysteriously hinted. He murmured deep concern for my loss, the sincerest sympathy; and pressing my hand more than once, said lowly, "Your pursuit is mine, noble Taji. Where'er you search, I follow."

So, too, Yoomy addressed me; but with still more feeling. And something like this, also, Braid-Beard repeated.

But to my sorrow, I marked that both Mohi and Babbalanja, especially the last, seemed not so buoyant of hope, concerning lost Yillah, as the youthful Yoomy, and his high-spirited lord, King Media.

As our voyage would embrace no small period of time, it behoved King Media to appoint some trustworthy regent, to rule during his absence. This regent was found in Almanni, a stem-eyed, resolute warrior, a kinsman of the king.

All things at last in readiness, and the ensuing morning appointed for a start, Media, on the beach, at eventide, when both light and

water waned, drew a rude map of the lagoon, to compensate for the obstructions in the way of a comprehensive glance at it from Odo.

And thus was sketched the plan of our voyage; which islands first to visit; and which to touch at, when we should be homeward bound.