

## CHAPTER LXXVIII

### Babbalanja Solus

Of the House of the Afternoon something yet remains to be said.

It was chiefly distinguished by its pavement, where, according to the strange customs of the isle, were inlaid the reputed skeletons of Donjalolo's sires; each surrounded by a mosaic of corals,--red, white, and black, intermixed with vitreous stones fallen from the skies in a meteoric shower. These delineated the tattooing of the departed. Near by, were imbedded their arms: mace, bow, and spear, in similar marquetry; and over each skull was the likeness of a scepter.

First and conspicuous lay the half-decayed remains of Marjora, the father of these Coral Kings; by his side, the storied, sickle-shaped weapon, wherewith he slew his brother Teei.

"Line of kings and row of scepters," said Babbalanja as he gazed.

"Donjalolo, come forth and ponder on thy sires. Here they lie, from dread Marjora down to him who fathered thee. Here are their bones, their spears, and their javelins; their scepters, and the very fashion of their tattooing: all that can be got together of what they were. Tell me, oh king, what are thy thoughts? Dotest thou on these thy sires? Art thou more truly royal, that they were kings? Or more a man, that they were men? Is it a fable, or a verity about Marjora and

the murdered Teei? But here is the mighty conqueror,--ask him. Speak to him: son to sire: king to king. Prick him; beg; buffet; entreat; spurn; split the globe, he will not budge. Walk over and over thy whole ancestral line, and they will not start. They are not here. Ay, the dead are not to be found, even in their graves. Nor have they simply departed; for they willed not to go; they died not by choice; whithersoever they have gone, thither have they been dragged; and if so be, they are extinct, their nihilities went not more against their grain, than their forced quitting of Mardi. Either way, something has become of them that they sought not. Truly, had stout-hearted Marjora sworn to live here in Willamilla for ay, and kept the vow, that would have been royalty indeed; but here he lies. Marjora! rise! Juam revolteth! Lo, I stamp upon thy scepter; base menials tread upon thee where thou hest! Up, king, up! What? no reply? Are not these bones thine? Oh, how the living triumph over the dead! Marjora! answer. Art thou? or art thou not? I see thee not; I hear thee not; I feel thee not; eyes, ears, hands, are worthless to test thy being; and if thou art, thou art something beyond all human thought to compass. We must have other faculties to know thee by. Why, thou art not even a sightless sound; not the echo of an echo; here are thy bones. Donjalolo, methinks I see thee fallen upon by assassins:--which of thy fathers riseth to the rescue? I see thee dying:--which of them telleth thee what cheer beyond the grave? But they have gone to the land unknown. Meet phrase. Where is it? Not one of Oro's priests telleth a straight story concerning it; 'twill be hard finding their paradises. Touching the life of Alma, in Mohi's

chronicles, 'tis related, that a man was once raised from the tomb.  
But rubbed he not his eyes, and stared he not most vacantly? Not one  
revelation did he make. Ye gods! to have been a bystander there!

"At best, 'tis but a hope. But will a longing bring the thing  
desired? Doth dread avert its object? An instinct is no preservative.  
The fire I shrink from, may consume me.--But dead, and yet  
alive; alive, yet dead;--thus say the sages of Maramma. But die we  
then living? Yet if our dead fathers somewhere and somehow live, why  
not our unborn sons? For backward or forward, eternity is the same;  
already have we been the nothing we dread to be. Icy thought! But  
bring it home,--it will not stay. What ho, hot heart of mine: to beat  
thus lustily awhile, to feel in the red rushing blood, and then be  
ashes,--can this be so? But peace, peace, thou liar in me, telling me  
I am immortal--shall I not be as these bones? To come to this! But  
the balsam-dropping palms, whose boles run milk, whose plumes wave  
boastful in the air, they perish in their prime, and bow their  
blasted trunks. Nothing abideth; the river of yesterday floweth not  
to-day; the sun's rising is a setting; living is dying; the very  
mountains melt; and all revolve:--systems and asteroids; the sun  
wheels through the zodiac, and the zodiac is a revolution. Ah gods!  
in all this universal stir, am I to prove one stable thing?

"Grim chiefs in skeletons, avaunt! Ye are but dust; belike the dust  
of beggars; for on this bed, paupers may lie down with kings, and  
filch their skulls. This, great Marjora's arm? No, some old

paralytic's. Ye, kings? ye, men? Where are your vouchers? I do reject your brother-hood, ye libelous remains. But no, no; despise them not, oh Babbalanja! Thy own skeleton, thou thyself dost carry with thee, through this mortal life; and aye would view it, but for kind nature's screen; thou art death alive; and e'en to what's before thee wilt thou come. Ay, thy children's children will walk over thee: thou, voiceless as a calm."

And over the Coral Kings, Babbalanja paced in profound meditation.