

CHAPTER LXXXI

Wherein Babbalanja Relates The Adventure Of One Karkeke In The Land Of Shades

At our morning repast on the second day of our stay in the hollow, our party indulged in much lively discourse.

"Samoa," said I, "those isles of yours, of whose beauty you so often make vauntful mention, can those isles, good Samoa, furnish a valley in all respects equal to Willamilla?"

Disdainful answer was made, that Willamilla might be endurable enough for a sojourn, but as a permanent abode, any glen of his own natal isle was unspeakably superior.

"In the great valley of Savaii," cried Samoa, "for every leaf grown here in Willamilla, grows a stately tree; and for every tree here waving, in Savaii flourishes a goodly warrior."

Immeasurable was the disgust of the Upoluan for the enervated subjects of Donjalolo; and for Donjalolo himself; though it was shrewdly divined, that his annoying reception at the hands of the royalty of Juam, had something to do with his disdain.

To Jarl, no similar question was put; for he was sadly deficient in a taste for the picturesque. But he cursorily observed, that in his blue-water opinion, Willamilla was next to uninhabitable, all view of the sea being intercepted.

And here it may be well to relate a comical blunder on the part of honest Jarl; concerning which, Samoa, the savage, often afterward twitted him; as indicating a rusticity, and want of polish in his breeding. It rather originated, however, in his not heeding the conventionalities of the strange people among whom he was thrown.

The anecdote is not an epic; but here it is.

Reclining in our arbor, we breakfasted upon a marble slab; so frost-white, and flowingly traced with blue veins, that it seemed a little lake sheeted over with ice: Diana's virgin bosom congealed.

Before each guest was a richly carved bowl and gourd, fruit and wine freighted also the empty hemisphere of a small nut, the purpose of which was a problem. Now, King Jarl scorned to admit the slightest degree of under-breeding in the matter of polite feeding. So nothing was a problem to him. At once reminded of the morsel of Arvaroot in his mouth, a substitute for another sort of sedative then unattainable, he was instantly illuminated concerning the purpose of the nut; and very complacently introduced each to the other; in the innocence of his ignorance making no doubt that he had acquitted

himself with discretion; the little hemisphere plainly being intended as a place of temporary deposit for the Arva of the guests.

The company were astounded: Samoa more than all. King Jarl, meanwhile, looking at all present with the utmost serenity. At length, one of the horrified attendants, using two sticks for a forceps, disappeared with the obnoxious nut, Upon which, the meal proceeded.

This attendant was not seen again for many days; which gave rise to the supposition, that journeying to the sea-side, he had embarked for some distant strand; there, to bury out of sight the abomination with which he was freighted.

Upon this, his egregious misadventure, calculated to do discredit to our party, and bring Media himself into contempt, Babbalanja had no scruples in taking Jarl roundly to task. He assured him, that it argued but little brains to evince a desire to be thought familiar with all things; that however desirable as incidental attainments, conventionalities, in themselves, were the very least of arbitrary trifles; the knowledge of them, innate with no man. "Moreover Jarl," he added, "in essence, conventionalities are but mimickings, at which monkeys succeed best. Hence, when you find yourself at a loss in these matters, wait patiently, and mark what the other monkeys do: and then follow suit. And by so doing, you will gain a vast reputation as an accomplished ape. Above all things, follow not

the silly example of the young spark Karkeke, of whom Mohi was telling me. Dying, and entering the other world with a mincing gait, and there finding certain customs quite strange and new; such as friendly shades passing through each other by way of a salutation;-- Karkeke, nevertheless, resolved to show no sign of embarrassment. Accosted by a phantom, with wings folded pensively, plumes interlocked across its chest, he off head; and stood obsequiously before it. Staring at him for an instant, the spirit cut him dead; murmuring to itself, 'Ah, some terrestrial bumpkin, I fancy,' and passed on with its celestial nose in the highly rarified air. But silly Karkeke undertaking to replace his head, found that it would no more stay on; but forever tumbled off; even in the act of nodding a salute; which calamity kept putting him out of countenance. And thus through all eternity is he punished for his folly, in having pretended to be wise, wherein he was ignorant. Head under arm, he wanders about, the scorn and ridicule of the other world."

Our repast concluded, messengers arrived from the prince, courteously inviting our presence at the House of the Morning. Thither we went; journeying in sedans, sent across the hollow, for that purpose, by Donjalolo.