

CHAPTER LXXXII

How Donjalolo, Sent Agents To The Surrounding Isles; With The Result

Ere recounting what was beheld on entering the House of the Morning, some previous information is needful. Though so many of Donjalolo's days were consumed by sloth and luxury, there came to him certain intervals of thoughtfulness, when all his curiosity concerning the things of outer Mardi revived with augmented intensity. In these moods, he would send abroad deputations, inviting to Willamilla the kings of the neighboring islands; together with the most celebrated priests, bards, story-tellers, magicians, and wise men; that he might hear them converse of those things, which he could not behold for himself.

But at last, he bethought him, that the various narrations he had heard, could not have been otherwise than unavoidably faulty; by reason that they had been principally obtained from the inhabitants of the countries described; who, very naturally, must have been inclined to partiality or uncandidness in their statements. Wherefore he had very lately dispatched to the isles special agents of his own; honest of heart, keen of eye, and shrewd of understanding; to seek out every thing that promised to illuminate him concerning the places they visited, and also to collect various specimens of interesting objects; so that at last he might avail himself of the researches of others, and see with their eyes.

But though two observers were sent to every one of the neighboring lands; yet each was to act independently; make his own inquiries; form his own conclusions; and return with his own specimens; wholly regardless of the proceedings of the other.

It so came to pass, that on the very day of our arrival in the glen, these pilgrims returned from their travels. And Donjalolo had set apart the following morning to giving them a grand public reception. And it was to this, that our party had been invited, as related in the chapter preceding.

In the great Palm-hall of the House of the Morning, we were assigned distinguished mats, to the right of the prince; his chiefs, attendants, and subjects assembled in the open colonnades without.

When all was in readiness, in marched the company of savans and travelers; and humbly standing in a semi-circle before the king, their numerous hampers were deposited at their feet.

Donjalolo was now in high spirits, thinking of the rich store of reliable information about to be furnished.

"Zuma," said he, addressing the foremost of the company, "you and Varnopi were directed to explore the island of Rafona. Proceed now, and relate all you know of that place. Your narration heard, we will

list to Varnopi."

With a profound inclination the traveler obeyed.

But soon Donjalolo interrupted him. "What say you, Zuma, about the secret cavern, and the treasures therein? A very different account, this, from all I have heard hitherto; but perhaps yours is the true version. Go on."

But very soon, poor Zuma was again interrupted by exclamations of surprise. Nay, even to the very end of his mountings.

But when he had done, Donjalolo observed, that if from any cause Zuma was in error or obscure, Varnopi would not fail to set him right.

So Varnopi was called upon.

But not long had Varnopi proceeded, when Donjalolo changed color.

"What!" he exclaimed, "will ye contradict each other before our very face. Oh Oro! how hard is truth to be come at by proxy! Fifty accounts have I had of Rafona; none of which wholly agreed; and here, these two varlets, sent expressly to behold and report, these two lying knaves, speak crookedly both. How is it? Are the lenses in their eyes diverse-hued, that objects seem different to both; for undeniable is it, that the things they thus clashingly speak of are

to be known for the same; though represented with unlike colors and qualities. But dumb things can not lie nor err. Unpack thy hampers, Zuma. Here, bring them close: now: what is this?"

"That," tremblingly replied Zuma, "is a specimen of the famous reef-bar on the west side of the island of Rafona; your highness perceives its deep red dyes."

Said Donjalolo, "Varnopi, hast thou a piece of this coral, also?"

"I have, your highness," said Varnopi; "here it is."

Taking it from his hand, Donjalolo gazed at its bleached, white hue; then dashing it to the pavement, "Oh mighty Oro! Truth dwells in her fountains; where every one must drink for himself. For me, vain all hope of ever knowing Mardi! Away! Better know nothing, than be deceived. Break up!"

And Donjalolo rose, and retired.

All present now broke out in a storm of vociferation; some siding with Zuma; others with Varnopi; each of whom, in turn, was declared the man to be relied upon.

Marking all this, Babbalanja, who had been silently looking on, leaning against one of the palm pillars, quietly observed to Media:--

"My lord, I have seen this same reef at Rafona. In various places, it is of various hues. As for Zuma and Varnopi, both are wrong, and both are right."