

CHAPTER LXXXVI

Of Those Scamps The Plujii

The beach gained, we embarked.

In good time our party recovered from the seriousness into which we had been thrown; and a rather long passage being now before us, we whiled away the hours as best we might.

Among many entertaining, narrations, old Braid-Beard, crossing his calves, and peaking his beard, regaled us with some account of certain invisible spirits, ycleped the Plujii, arrant little knaves as ever gulped moonshine.

They were spoken of as inhabiting the island of Quelquo, in a remote corner of the lagoon; the innocent people of which island were sadly fretted and put out by their diabolical proceedings. Not to be wondered at; since, dwelling as they did in the air, and completely inaccessible, these spirits were peculiarly provocative of ire.

Detestable Plujii! With malice aforethought, they brought about high winds that destroyed the banana plantations, and tumbled over the heads of its occupants many a bamboo dwelling. They cracked the calabashes; soured the "poe;" induced the colic; begat the spleen; and almost rent people in twain with stitches in the side. In short,

from whatever evil, the cause of which the Islanders could not directly impute to their gods, or in their own opinion was not referable to themselves,--of that very thing must the invisible Plujii be guilty. With horrible dreams, and blood-thirsty gnats, they invaded the most innocent slumbers.

All things they bedeviled. A man with a wry neck ascribed it to the Plujii; he with a bad memory railed against the Plujii; and the boy, bruising his finger, also cursed those abominable spirits.

Nor, to some minds, at least, was there wanting strong presumptive evidence, that at times, with invisible fingers, the above mentioned Plujii did leave direct and tangible traces of their presence; pinching and pounding the unfortunate Islanders; pulling their hair; plucking their ears, and tweaking their beards and their noses. And thus perpetually vexing, incensing, tormenting, and exasperating their helpless victims, the atrocious Plujii reveled in their malicious dominion over the souls and bodies of the people of Quelquo.

What it was, that induced them to enact such a part, Oro only knew; and never but once, it seems, did old Mohi endeavor to find out.

Once upon a time, visiting Quelquo, he chanced to encounter an old woman almost doubled together, both hands upon her abdomen; in that manner running about distracted.

"My good woman," said he, "what under the firmament is the matter?"

"The Plujii! the Plujii!" affectionately caressing the field of their operations.

"But why do they torment you?" he soothingly inquired. "How should I know? and what good would it do me if I did?"

And on she ran.

At this part of his narration, Mohi was interrupted by Media; who, much to the surprise of all present, observed, that, unbeknown to him (Braid-Beard), he happened to have been on that very island, at that very time, and saw that identical old lady in the very midst of those abdominal tribulations.

"That she was really in great distress," he went on to say, "was plainly to be seen; but that in that particular instance, your Plujii had any hand in tormenting her, I had some boisterous doubts. For, hearing that an hour or two previous she had been partaking of some twenty unripe bananas, I rather fancied that that circumstance might have had something to do with her sufferings. But however it was, all the herb-leeches on the island would not have altered her own opinions on the subject."

"No," said Braid-Beard; "a post-mortem examination would not have

satisfied her ghost."

"Curious to relate," he continued, "the people of that island never abuse the Plujii, notwithstanding all they suffer at their hands, unless under direct provocation; and a settled matter of faith is it, that at such times all bitter words and hasty objurgations are entirely overlooked, nay, pardoned on the spot, by the unseen genii against whom they are directed."

"Magnanimous Plujii!" cried Media. "But, Babbalanja, do you, who run a tilt at all things, suffer this silly conceit to be uttered with impunity in your presence? Why so silent?"

"I have been thinking, my lord," said Babbalanja, "that though the people of that island may at times err, in imputing their calamities to the Plujii, that, nevertheless, upon the whole, they indulge in a reasonable belief. For, Plujii or no Plujii, it is undeniable, that in ten thousand ways, as if by a malicious agency, we mortals are woefully put out and tormented; and that, too, by things in themselves so exceedingly trivial, that it would seem almost impiety to ascribe them to the august gods. No; there must exist some greatly inferior spirits; so insignificant, comparatively, as to be overlooked by the supernal powers; and through them it must be, that we are thus grievously annoyed. At any rate; such a theory would supply a hiatus in my system of meta-physics."

"Well, peace to the Plujii," said Media; "they trouble not me."