

CHAPTER XCII

The God Keevi And The Precipice Op Mondo

One object of interest in Ohonoo was the original image of Keevi the god of Thieves; hence, from time immemorial, the tutelar deity of the isle.

His shrine was a natural niche in a cliff, walling in the valley of Monlova And here stood Keevi, with his five eyes, ten hands, and three pair of legs, equipped at all points for the vocation over which he presided. Of mighty girth, his arms terminated in hands, every finger a limb, spreading in multiplied digits: palms twice five, and fifty fingers.

According to the legend, Keevi fell from a golden cloud, burying himself to the thighs in the earth, tearing up the soil all round. Three meditative mortals, strolling by at the time, had a narrow escape.

A wonderful recital; but none of us voyagers durst flout it. Did they not show us the identical spot where the idol fell? We descended into the hollow, now verdant. Questionless, Keevi himself would have vouched for the truth of the miracle, had he not been unfortunately dumb. But by far the most cogent, and pointed argument advanced in support of this story, is a spear which the priests of Keevi brought

forth, for Babbalanja to view.

"Let me look at it closer," said Babbalanja.

And turning it over and over and curiously inspecting it, "Wonderful spear," he cried. "Doubtless, my reverends, this self-same spear must have persuaded many recusants!"

"Nay, the most stubborn," they answered.

"And all afterward quoted as additional authority for the truth of the legend?"

"Assuredly."

From the sea to the shrine of this god, the fine valley of Monlova ascends with a gentle gradation, hardly perceptible; but upon turning round toward the water, one is surprised to find himself high elevated above its surface. Pass on, and the same silent ascent deceives you; and the valley contracts; and on both sides the cliffs advance; till at last you come to a narrow space, shouldered by buttresses of rock. Beyond, through this cleft, all is blue sky. If the Trades blow high, and you came unawares upon the spot, you would think Keevi himself pushing you forward with all his hands; so powerful is the current of air rushing through this elevated defile. But expostulate not with the tornado that blows you along; sail on;

but soft; look down; the land breaks off in one sheer descent of a thousand feet, right down to the wide plain below. So sudden and profound this precipice, that you seem to look off from one world to another. In a dreamy, sunny day, the spangled plain beneath assumes an uncertain fleeting aspect. Had you a deep-sea-lead you would almost be tempted to sound the ocean-haze at your feet.

This, mortal! is the precipice of Mondo.

From this brink, spear in hand, sprang fifty rebel warriors, driven back into the vale by a superior force. Finding no spot to stand at bay, with a fierce shout they took the fatal leap.

Said Mohi, "Their souls ascended, ere their bodies touched."

This tragical event took place many generations gone by, and now a dizzy, devious way conducts one, firm of foot, from the verge to the plain. But none ever ascended. So perilous, indeed, is the descent itself, that the islanders venture not the feat, without invoking supernatural aid. Flanking the precipice beneath beetling rocks, stand the guardian deities of Mondo; and on altars before them, are placed the propitiatory offerings of the traveler.

To the right of the brink of the precipice, and far over it, projects a narrow ledge. The test of legitimacy in the Ohonoo monarchs is to stand hereon, arms folded, and javelins darting by.

And there in his youth Uhia stood.

"How felt you, cousin?" asked Media.

"Like the King of Ohonoo," he replied. "As I shall again feel; when
King of all Mardi."