

## CHAPTER XCV

### That Jolly Old Lord Borabolla Laughs On Both Sides Of His Face

"A very good palace, this, coz, for you and me," said waddling old Borabolla to Media, as, returned from our excursion, he slowly lowered himself down to his mat, sighing like a grampus.

By this, he again made known the vastness of his hospitality, which led him for the nonce to parcel out his kingdom with his guests.

But apart from these extravagant expressions of good feeling, Borabolla was the prince of good fellows. His great tun of a person was indispensable to the housing of his bullock-heart; under which, any lean wight would have sunk. But alas! unlike Media and Taji, Borabolla, though a crowned king, was accounted no demi-god; his obesity excluding him from that honor. Indeed, in some quarters of Mardi, certain pagans maintain, that no fat man can be even immortal. A dogma! truly, which should be thrown to the dogs. For fat men are the salt and savor of the earth; full of good humor, high spirits, fun, and all manner of jollity. Their breath clears the atmosphere: their exhalations air the world. Of men, they are the good measures; brimmed, heaped, pressed down, piled up, and running over. They are as ships from Teneriffe; swimming deep, full of old wine, and twenty steps down into their holds. Soft and susceptible, all round they are easy of entreaty. Wherefore, for all their rotundity, they are too

often circumnavigated by hatchet-faced knaves. Ah! a fat uncle, with a fat paunch, and a fat purse, is a joy and a delight to all nephews; to philosophers, a subject of endless speculation, as to how many droves of oxen and Lake Eries of wine might have run through his great mill during the full term of his mortal career. Fat men not immortal! This very instant, old Lambert is rubbing his jolly abdomen in Paradise.

Now, to the fact of his not being rated a demi-god, was perhaps ascribable the circumstance, that Borabolla comported himself with less dignity, than was the wont of their Mardian majesties. And truth to say, to have seen him regaling himself with one of his favorite cuttle-fish, its long snaky arms and feelers instinctively twining round his head as he ate; few intelligent observers would have opined that the individual before them was the sovereign lord of Mondoldo.

But what of the banquet of fish? Shall we tell how the old king ungirdled himself thereto; how as the feast waxed toward its close, with one sad exception, he still remained sunny-sided all round; his disc of a face joyous as the South Side of Madeira in the hilarious season of grapes? Shall we tell how we all grew glad and frank; and how the din of the dinner was heard far into night?

We will.

When Media ate slowly, Borabolla took him to task, bidding him

dispatch his viands more speedily.

Whereupon said Media "But Borabolla, my round fellow, that would abridge the pleasure."

"Not at all, my dear demi-god; do like me: eat fast and eat long."

In the middle of the feast, a huge skin of wine was brought in. The portly peltry of a goat; its horns embattling its effigy head; its mouth the nozzle; and its long beard flowed to its jet-black hoofs. With many ceremonial salams, the attendants bore it along, placing it at one end of the convivial mats, full in front of Borabolla; where seated upon its haunches it made one of the party.

Brimming a ram's horn, the mellowest of bugles, Borabolla bowed to his silent guest, and thus spoke--"In this wine, which yet smells of the grape, I pledge you my reverend old toper, my lord Capricornus; you alone have enough; and here's full skins to the rest!"

"How jolly he is," whispered Media to Babbalanja.

"Ay, his lungs laugh loud; but is laughing, rejoicing?"

"Help! help!" cried Borabolla "lay me down! lay me down! good gods, what a twinge!"

The goblet fell from his hand; the purple flew from his wine to his face; and Borabolla fell back into the arms of his servitors. "That gout! that gout!" he groaned. "Lord! lord! no more cursed wine will I drink!"

Then at ten paces distant, a clumsy attendant let fall a trencher--  
"Take it off my foot, you knave!"

Afar off another entered gallanting a calabash--"Look out for my toe, you hound!"

During all this, the attendants tenderly nursed him. And in good time, with its thousand fangs, the gout-fiend departed for a while.

Reprieved, the old king brightened up; by degrees becoming jolly as ever.

"Come! let us be merry again," he cried, "what shall we eat? and what shall we drink? that infernal gout is gone; come, what will your worships have?"

So at it once more we went.

But of our feast, little more remains to be related than this;--that out of it, grew a wondrous kindness between Borabolla and Jarl. Strange to tell, from the first our fat host had regarded my Viking

with a most friendly eye. Still stranger to add, this feeling was returned. But though they thus fancied each other, they were very unlike; Borabolla and Jarl. Nevertheless, thus is it ever. And as the convex fits not into the convex, but into the concave; so do men fit into their opposites; and so fitted Borabolla's arched paunch into Jarl's, hollowed out to receive it.

But how now? Borabolla was jolly and loud: Jarl demure and silent; Borabolla a king: Jarl only a Viking;--how came they together? Very plain, to repeat:--because they were heterogeneous; and hence the affinity. But as the affinity between those chemical opposites chlorine and hydrogen, is promoted by caloric; so the affinity between Borabolla and Jarl was promoted by the warmth of the wine that they drank at this feast. For of all blessed fluids, the juice of the grape is the greatest foe to cohesion. True, it tightens the girdle; but then it loosens the tongue, and opens the heart.

In sum, Borabolla loved Jarl; and Jarl, pleased with this sociable monarch, for all his garrulity, esteemed him the most sensible old gentleman and king he had as yet seen in Mardi. For this reason, perhaps; that his talkativeness favored that silence in listeners, which was my Viking's delight in himself.

Repeatedly during the banquet, our host besought Taji to allow his henchman to remain on the island, after the rest of our party should depart; and he faithfully promised to surrender Jarl, whenever we

should return to claim him.

But though I harbored no distrust of Borabolla's friendly intentions, I could not so readily consent to his request; for with Jarl for my one only companion, had I not both famished and feasted? was he not my only link to things past?

Things past!--Ah Yillah! for all its mirth, and though we hunted wide, we found thee not in Mondoldo.