

CHAPTER XCVI

Samoa A Surgeon

The second day of our stay in Mondoldo was signalized by a noteworthy exhibition of the surgical skill of Samoa; who had often boasted, that though well versed in the science of breaking men's heads, he was equally an adept in mending their crockery.

Overnight, Borabolla had directed his corps of sea-divers to repair early on the morrow, to a noted section of the great Mardian reef, for the purpose of procuring for our regalement some of the fine Hawk's-bill turtle, whose secret retreats were among the cells and galleries of that submerged wall of coral, from whose foamy coping no plummet dropped ever yet touched bottom.

These turtles were only to be obtained by diving far down under the surface; and then swimming along horizontally, and peering into the coral honeycomb; snatching at a flipper when seen, as at a pinion in a range of billing dove-cotes.

As the king's divers were thus employed, one of them, Karhownoo by name, perceived a Devil-shark, so called, swimming wistfully toward him from out his summer grotto in the reef. No way petrified by the sight, and pursuing the usual method adopted by these divers in such emergencies, Karhownoo, splashing the water, instantly swam toward

the stranger. But the shark, undaunted, advanced: a thing so unusual, and fearful, that, in an agony of fright, the diver shot up for the surface. Heedless, he looked not up as he went; and when within a few inches of the open air, dashed his head against a projection of the reef. He would have sank into the live tomb beneath, were it not that three of his companions, standing on the brink, perceived his peril, and dragged him into safety.

Seeing the poor fellow was insensible, they endeavored, ineffectually, to revive him; and at last, placing him in their canoe, made all haste for the shore. Here a crowd soon gathered, and the diver was borne to a habitation, close adjoining Borabolla's; whence, hearing of the disaster, we sallied out to render assistance.

Upon entering the hut, the benevolent old king commanded it to be cleared; and then proceeded to examine the sufferer.

The skull proved to be very badly fractured; in one place, splintered.

"Let me mend it," said Samoa, with ardor.

And being told of his experience in such matters, Borabolla surrendered the patient.

With a gourd of water, and a tappa cloth, the one-armed Upoluan carefully washed the wound; and then calling for a sharp splinter of

bamboo, and a thin, semi-transparent cup of cocoa-nut shell, he went about the operation: nothing less than the "Tomoti" (head-mending), in other words the trepan.

The patient still continuing insensible, the fragments were disengaged by help of a bamboo scalpel; when a piece of the drinking cup--previously dipped in the milk of a cocoanut--was nicely fitted into the vacancy, the skin as nicely adjusted over it, and the operation was complete.

And now, while all present were crying out in admiration of Samoa's artistic skill, and Samoa himself stood complacently regarding his workmanship, Babbalanja suggested, that it might be well to ascertain whether the patient survived. When, upon sounding his heart, the diver was found to be dead.

The bystanders loudly lamented; but declared the surgeon a man of marvelous science.

Returning to Borabolla's, much conversation ensued, concerning the sad scene we had witnessed, which presently branched into a learned discussion upon matters of surgery at large.

At length, Samoa regaled the company with a story; for the truth of which no one but him can vouch, for no one but him was by, at the time; though there is testimony to show that it involves nothing at

variance with the customs of certain barbarous tribes.

Read on.