

## CHAPTER CIV

Wherein Babbalanja Broaches A Diabolical Theory, And, In His Own Person, Proves It

"A truce!" cried Media, "here comes a gallant before the wind.--  
Look, Taji!"

Turning, we descried a sharp-prowed canoe, dashing on, under the pressure of an immense triangular sail, whose outer edges were streaming with long, crimson pennons. Flying before it, were several small craft, belonging to the poorer sort of Islanders.

"Out of his way there, ye laggards," cried Media, "or that mad prince, Tribonnora, will ride over ye with a rush!"

"And who is Tribonnora," said Babbalanja, "that he thus bravely diverts himself, running down innocent paddlers?"

"A harum-scarum young chief," replied Media, "heir to three islands; he likes nothing better than the sport you now see see him at."

"He must be possessed by a devil," said Mohi.

Said Babbalanja, "Then he is only like all of us." "What say you?" cried Media.

"I say, as old Bardianna in the Nine hundred and ninety ninth book of his immortal Ponderings saith, that all men--"

"As I live, my lord, he has swamped three canoes," cried Mohi, pointing off the beam.

But just then a fiery fin-back whale, having broken into the paddock of the lagoon, threw up a high fountain of foam, almost under Tribonnora's nose; who, quickly turning about his canoe, cur-like slunk off; his steering-paddle between his legs.

Comments over; "Babbalanja, you were going to quote," said Media. "Proceed."

"Thank you, my lord. Says old Bardianna, 'All men are possessed by devils; but as these devils are sent into men, and kept in them, for an additional punishment; not garrisoning a fortress, but limboed in a bridewell; so, it may be more just to say, that the devils themselves are possessed by men, not men by them.'"

"Faith!" cried Media, "though sometimes a bore, your old Bardianna is a trump."

"I have long been of that mind, my lord. But let me go on. Says Bardianna, 'Devils are divers;--strong devils, and weak devils;

knowing devils, and silly devils; mad devils, and mild devils; devils, merely devils; devils, themselves bedeviled; devils, doubly bedeviled."

"And in the devil's name, what sort of a devil is yours?" cried Mohi.

"Of him anon; interrupt me not, old man. Thus, then, my lord, as devils are divers, divers are the devils in men. Whence, the wide difference we see. But after all, the main difference is this:--that one man's devil is only more of a devil than another's; and be bedeviled as much as you will; yet, may you perform the most bedeviled of actions with impunity, so long as you only bedevil yourself. For it is only when your devilry injures another, that the other devils conspire to confine yours for a mad one. That is to say, if you be easily handled. For there are many bedeviled Bedlamites in Mardi, doing an infinity of mischief, who are too brawny in the arms to be tied."

"A very devilish doctrine that," cried Mohi. "I don't believe it."

"My lord," said Babbalanja, "here's collateral proof;--the sage lawgiver Yamjamma, who flourished long before Bardianna, roundly asserts, that all men who knowingly do evil are bedeviled; for good is happiness; happiness the object of living; and evil is not good."

"If the sage Yamjamma said that," said old Mohi, "the sage Yamjamma

might have bettered the saying; it's not quite so plain as it might be."

"Yamjamma disdained to be plain; he scorned to be fully comprehended by mortals. Like all oracles, he dealt in dark sayings. But old Bardianna was of another sort; he spoke right out, going straight to the point like a javelin; especially when he laid it down for a universal maxim, that minus exceptions, all men are bedeviled."

"Of course, then," said Media, "you include yourself among the number."

"Most assuredly; and so did old Bardianna; who somewhere says, that being thoroughly bedeviled himself, he was so much the better qualified to discourse upon the deviltries of his neighbors. But in another place he seems to contradict himself, by asserting, that he is not so sensible of his own deviltry as of other people's."

"Hold!" cried Media, "who have we here?" and he pointed ahead of our prow to three men in the water, urging themselves along, each with a paddle.

We made haste to overtake them.

"Who are you?" said Media, "where from, and where bound?"

"From Variora," they answered, "and bound to Mondoldo." "And did that devil Tribonnora swamp your canoe?" asked Media, offering to help

them into ours.

"We had no such useless incumbrance to lose," they replied, resting on their backs, and panting with their exertions. "If we had had a canoe, we would have had to paddle it along with us; whereas we have only our bodies to paddle."

"You are a parcel of loons," exclaimed Media. "But go your ways, if you are satisfied with your locomotion, well and good."

"Now, it is an extreme case, I grant," said Babbalanja, "but those poor devils there, help to establish old Bardianna's position. They belong to that species of our bedeviled race, called simpletons; but their devils harming none but themselves, are permitted to be at large with the fish. Whereas, Tribonnora's devil, who daily runs down canoes, drowning their occupants, belongs to the species of out and out devils; but being high in station, and strongly backed by kith and kin, Tribonnora can not be mastered, and put in a strait jacket. For myself, I think my devil is some where between these two extremes; at any rate, he belongs to that class of devils who harm not other devils."

"I am not so sure of that," retorted Media. "Methinks this doctrine of yours, about all mankind being bedeviled, will work a deal of mischief; seeing that by implication it absolves you mortals from moral accountability. Further-more; as your doctrine is exceedingly

evil, by Yamjamma's theory it follows, that you must be proportionably bedeviled; and since it harms others, your devil is of the number of those whom it is best to limbo; and since he is one of those that can be limboed, limboed he shall be in you."

And so saying, he humorously commanded his attendants to lay hands upon the bedeviled philosopher, and place a bandage upon his mouth, that he might no more disseminate his devilish doctrine.

Against this, Babbalanja demurred, protesting that he was no orang-outang, to be so rudely handled.

"Better and better," said Media, "you but illustrate Bardianna's theory; that men are not sensible of their being bedeviled."

Thus tantalized, Babbalanja displayed few signs of philosophy.

Whereupon, said Media, "Assuredly his devil is foaming; behold his mouth!" And he commanded him to be bound hand and foot.

At length, seeing all resistance ineffectual, Babbalanja submitted; but not without many objurgations.

Presently, however, they released him; when Media inquired, how he relished the application of his theory; and whether he was still of old Bardianna's mind?

To which, haughtily adjusting his robe, Babbalanja replied, "The strong arm, my lord, is no argument, though it overcomes all logic."

END OF VOL. I.