

## CHAPTER V

### They Visit The Great Morai

As garrulous guide to the party, Braid-Beard soon brought us nigh the great Morai of Maramma, the burial-place of the Pontiffs, and a rural promenade, for certain idols there inhabiting.

Our way now led through the bed of a shallow water-course; Mohi observing, as we went, that our feet were being washed at every step; whereas, to tread the dusty earth would be to desecrate the holy Morai, by transferring thereto, the base soil of less sacred ground.

Here and there, thatched arbors were thrown over the stream, for the accommodation of devotees; who, in these consecrated waters, issuing from a spring in the Morai, bathed their garments, that long life might ensue. Yet, as Braid-Beard assured us, sometimes it happened, that divers feeble old men zealously donning their raiment immediately after immersion became afflicted with rheumatics; and instances were related of their falling down dead, in this their pursuit of longevity.

Coming to the Morai, we found it inclosed by a wall; and while the rest were surmounting it, Mohi was busily engaged in the apparently childish occupation of collecting pebbles. Of these, however, to our no small surprise, he presently made use, by irreverently throwing them at all objects to which he was desirous of directing attention.

In this manner, was pointed out a black boar's head, suspended from a bough. Full twenty of these sentries were on post in the neighboring trees.

Proceeding, we came to a hillock of bone-dry sand, resting upon the otherwise loamy soil. Possessing a secret, preservative virtue, this sand had, ages ago, been brought from a distant land, to furnish a sepulcher for the Pontiffs; who here, side by side, and sire by son, slumbered all peacefully in the fellowship of the grave. Mohi declared, that were the sepulcher to be opened, it would be the resurrection of the whole line of High Priests. "But a resurrection of bones, after all," said Babbalanja, ever osseous in his allusions to the departed.

Passing on, we came to a number of Runic-looking stones, all over hieroglyphical inscriptions, and placed round an elliptical aperture; where welled up the sacred spring of the Morai, clear as crystal, and showing through its waters, two tiers of sharp, tusk-like stones; the mouth of Oro, so called; and it was held, that if any secular hand should be immersed in the spring, straight upon it those stony jaws would close.

We next came to a large image of a dark-hued stone, representing a burly man, with an overgrown head, and abdomen hollowed out, and open for inspection; therein, were relics of bones. Before this image we paused. And whether or no it was Mohi's purpose to make us tourists

quake with his recitals, his revelations were far from agreeable. At certain seasons, human beings were offered to the idol, which being an epicure in the matter of sacrifices, would accept of no ordinary fare. To insure his digestion, all indirect routes to the interior were avoided; the sacrifices being packed in the ventricle itself.

Near to this image of Doleema, so called, a solitary forest-tree was pointed out; leafless and dead to the core. But from its boughs hang numerous baskets, brimming over with melons, grapes, and guavas. And daily these baskets were replenished.

As we here stood, there passed a hungry figure, in ragged raiment: hollow cheeks, and hollow eyes. Wistfully he eyed the offerings; but retreated; knowing it was sacrilege to touch them. There, they must decay, in honor of the god Ananna; for so this dead tree was denominated by Mohi.

Now, as we were thus strolling about the Morai, the old chronicler elucidating its mysteries, we suddenly spied Pani and the pilgrims approaching the image of Doleema; his child leading the guide.

"This," began Pani, pointing to the idol of stone, "is the holy god Ananna who lives in the sap of this green and flourishing tree."

"Thou meanest not, surely, this stone image we behold?" said Divino.

"I mean the tree," said the guide. "It is no stone image."

"Strange," muttered the chief; "were it not a guide that spoke, I would deny it. As it is, I hold my peace."

"Mystery of mysteries!" cried the blind old pilgrim; "is it, then, a stone image that Pani calls a tree? Oh, Oro, that I had eyes to see, that I might verily behold it, and then believe it to be what it is not; that so I might prove the largeness of my faith; and so merit the blessing of Alma."

"Thrice sacred Ananna," murmured the sad-eyed maiden, falling upon her knees before Doleema, "receive my adoration. Of thee, I know nothing, but what the guide has spoken. I am but a poor, weak-minded maiden, judging not for myself, but leaning upon others that are wiser. These things are above me. I am afraid to think. In Alma's name, receive my homage."

And she flung flowers before the god.

But Fauna, the hale matron, turning upon Pani, exclaimed, "Receive more gifts, oh guide." And again she showered them upon him.

Upon this, the willful boy who would not have Pani for his guide, entered the Morai; and perceiving the group before the image, walked rapidly to where they were. And beholding the idol, he regarded it

attentively, and said:--"This must be the image of Doleema; but I am not sure."

"Nay," cried the blind pilgrim, "it is the holy tree Ananna, thou wayward boy."

"A tree? whatever it may be, it is not that; thou art blind, old man."

"But though blind, I have that which thou lackest."

Then said Pani, turning upon the boy, "Depart from the holy Morai, and corrupt not the hearts of these pilgrims. Depart, I say; and, in the sacred name of Alma, perish in thy endeavors to climb the Peak."

"I may perish there in truth," said the boy, with sadness; "but it shall be in the path revealed to me in my dream. And think not, oh guide, that I perfectly rely upon gaining that lofty summit. I will climb high Ofo with hope, not faith; Oh, mighty Oro, help me!"

"Be not impious," said Pani; "pronounce not Oro's sacred name too lightly."

"Oro is but a sound," said the boy. "They call the supreme god, Ati, in my native isle; it is the soundless thought of him, oh guide, that is in me."

"Hark to his rhapsodies! Hark, how he prates of mysteries, that not even Hivohitee can fathom."

"Nor he, nor thou, nor I, nor any; Oro, to all, is Oro the unknown."

"Why claim to know Oro, then, better than others?"

"I am not so vain; and I have little to substitute for what I can not receive. I but feel Oro in me, yet can not declare the thought."

"Proud boy! thy humility is a pretense; at heart, thou deemest thyself wiser than Mardi."

"Not near so wise. To believe is a haughty thing; my very doubts humiliate me. I weep and doubt; all Mardi may be light; and I too simple to discern."

"He is mad," said the chief Divino; "never before heard I such words."

"They are thoughts," muttered the guide.

"Poor fool!" cried Fauna.

"Lost youth!" sighed the maiden.

"He is but a child," said the beggar. These whims will soon depart;

once I was like him; but, praise be to Alma, in the hour of sickness I repented, feeble old man that I am!"

"It is because I am young and in health," said the boy, "that I more nourish the thoughts, that are born of my youth and my health. I am fresh from my Maker, soul and body unwrinkled. On thy sick couch, old man, they took thee at advantage."

"Turn from the blasphemer," cried Pani. "Hence! thou evil one, to the perdition in store."

"I will go my ways," said the boy, "but Oro will shape the end."

And he quitted the Morai.

After conducting the party round the sacred inclosure, assisting his way with his staff, for his child had left him, Pani seated himself on a low, mossy stone, grimly surrounded by idols; and directed the pilgrims to return to his habitation; where, ere long he would rejoin them.

The pilgrims departed, he remained in profound meditation; while, backward and forward, an invisible ploughshare turned up the long furrows on his brow.

Long he was silent; then muttered to himself, "That boy, that wild,

wise boy, has stabbed me to the heart. His thoughts are my suspicions. But he is honest. Yet I harm none. Multitudes must have unspoken meditations as well as I. Do we then mutually deceive? Off masks, mankind, that I may know what warranty of fellowship with others, my own thoughts possess. Why, upon this one theme, oh Oro! must all dissemble? Our thoughts are not our own. Whate'er it be, an honest thought must have some germ of truth. But we must set, as flows the general stream; I blindly follow, where I seem to lead; the crowd of pilgrims is so great, they see not there is none to guide.--It hinges upon this: Have we angelic spirits? But in vain, in vain, oh Oro! I essay to live out of this poor, blind body, fit dwelling for my sightless soul. Death, death!--blind, am I dead? for blindness seems a consciousness of death. Will my grave be more dark, than all is now?--From dark to dark!--What is this subtle something that is in me, and eludes me? Will it have no end? When, then, did it begin? All, all is chaos! What is this shining light in heaven, this sun they tell me of? Or, do they lie? Methinks, it might blaze convictions; but I brood and grope in blackness; I am dumb with doubt; yet, 'tis not doubt, but worse: I doubt my doubt. Oh, ye all-wise spirits in the air, how can ye witness all this woe, and give no sign? Would, would that mine were a settled doubt, like that wild boy's, who without faith, seems full of it. The undoubting doubter believes the most. Oh! that I were he. Methinks that daring boy hath Alma in him, struggling to be free. But those pilgrims: that trusting girl.--What, if they saw me as I am? Peace, peace, my soul; on, mask, again."



And he staggered from the Morai.