

## CHAPTER VI

### They Discourse Of The Gods Of Mardi, And Braid-Beard Tells Of One Foni

Walking from the sacred inclosure, Mohi discoursed of the plurality of gods in the land, a subject suggested by the multitudinous idols we had just been beholding.

Said Mohi, "These gods of wood and of stone are nothing in number to the gods in the air. You breathe not a breath without inhaling, you touch not a leaf without ruffling a spirit. There are gods of heaven, and gods of earth; gods of sea and of land; gods of peace and of war; gods of rook and of fell; gods of ghosts and of thieves; of singers and dancers; of lean men and of house-thatchers. Gods glance in the eyes of birds, and sparkle in the crests of the waves; gods merrily swing in the boughs of the trees, and merrily sing in the brook. Gods are here, and there, and every where; you are never alone for them."

"If this be so, Braid-Beard," said Babbalanja, "our inmost thoughts are overheard; but not by eaves-droppers. However, my lord, these gods to whom he alludes, merely belong to the semi-intelligibles, the divided unities in unity, thin side of the First Adyta."

"Indeed?" said Media.

"Semi-intelligible, say you, philosopher?" cried Mohi. "Then, prithee,

make it appear so; for what you say, seems gibberish to me."

"Babbalanja," said Media, "no more of your abstrusities; what know you mortals of us gods and demi-gods? But tell me, Mohi, how many of your deities of rock and fen think you there are? Have you no statistical table?"

"My lord, at the lowest computation, there must be at least three billion trillion of quintillions."

"A mere unit!" said Babbalanja. "Old man, would you express an infinite number? Then take the sum of the follies of Mardi for your multiplicand; and for your multiplier, the totality of sublunarians, that never have been heard of since they became no more; and the product shall exceed your quintillions, even though all their units were nonillions."

"Have done, Babbalanja!" cried Media; "you are showing the sinister vein in your marble. Have done. Take a warm bath, and make tepid your cold blood. But come, Mohi, tell us of the ways of this Maramma; something of the Morai and its idols, if you please."

And straightway Braid-Beard proceeded with a narration, in substance as follows:--

It seems, there was a particular family upon the island, whose

members, for many generations, had been set apart as sacrifices for the deity called Doleema. They were marked by a sad and melancholy aspect, and a certain involuntary shrinking, when passing the Morai. And, though, when it came to the last, some of these unfortunates went joyfully to their doom, declaring that they gloried to die in the service of holy Doleema; still, were there others, who audaciously endeavored to shun their fate; upon the approach of a festival, fleeing to the innermost wilderness of the island. But little availed their flight. For swift on their track sped the hereditary butler of the insulted god, one Xiki, whose duty it was to provide the sacrifices. And when crouching in some covert, the fugitive spied Xiki's approach, so fearful did he become of the vengeance of the deity he sought to evade, that renouncing all hope of escape, he would burst from his lair, exclaiming, "Come on, and kill!" baring his breast for the javelin that slew him.

The chronicles of Maramma were full of horrors.

In the wild heart of the island, was said still to lurk the remnant of a band of warriors, who, in the days of the sire of the present pontiff, had risen in arms to dethrone him, headed by Foni, an upstart prophet, a personage distinguished for the uncommon beauty of his person. With terrible carnage, these warriors had been defeated; and the survivors, fleeing into the interior, for thirty days were pursued by the victors. But though many were overtaken and speared, a number survived; who, at last, wandering forlorn and in despair, like

demoniacs, ran wild in the woods. And the islanders, who at times penetrated into the wilderness, for the purpose of procuring rare herbs, often scared from their path some specter, glaring through the foliage. Thrice had these demoniacs been discovered prowling about the inhabited portions of the isle; and at day-break, an attendant of the holy Morai once came upon a frightful figure, doubled with age, helping itself to the offerings in the image of Doleema. The demoniac was slain; and from his ineffaceable tatooning, it was proved that this was no other than Foni, the false prophet; the splendid form he had carried into the rebel fight, now squalid with age and misery.