

CHAPTER VIII

They Meet The Pilgrims At The Temple Of Oro

Deep, deep, in deep groves, we found the great temple of Oro,
Spreader-of-the-Sky, and deity supreme.

While here we silently stood eyeing this Mardi-renowned image, there entered the fane a great multitude of its attendants, holding pearl-shells on their heads, filled with a burning incense. And ranging themselves in a crowd round Oro, they began a long-rolling chant, a sea of sounds; and the thick smoke of their incense went up to the roof.

And now approached Pani and the pilgrims; followed, at a distance, by the willful boy.

"Behold great Oro," said the guide.

"We see naught but a cloud," said the chief Divino.

"My ears are stunned by the chanting," said the blind pilgrim.

"Receive more gifts, oh guide!" cried Fauna the matron. "Oh Oro! invisible Oro! I kneel," slow murmured the sad-eyed maid.

But now, a current of air swept aside the eddying incense; and the willful boy, all eagerness to behold the image, went hither and thither; but the gathering of attendants was great; and at last he exclaimed, "Oh Oro! I can not see thee, for the crowd that stands between thee and me."

"Who is this babbler?" cried they with the censers, one and all turning upon the pilgrims; "let him speak no more; but bow down, and grind the dust where he stands; and declare himself the vilest creature that crawls. So Oro and Alma command."

"I feel nothing in me so utterly vile," said the boy, "and I cringe to none. But I would as lief adore your image, as that in my heart, for both mean the same; but more, how can I? I love great Oro, though I comprehend him not. I marvel at his works, and feel as nothing in his sight; but because he is thus omnipotent, and I a mortal, it follows not that I am vile. Nor so doth he regard me. We do ourselves degrade ourselves, not Oro us. Hath not Oro made me? And therefore am I not worthy to stand erect before him? Oro is almighty, but no despot. I wonder; I hope; I love; I weep; I have in me a feeling nigh to fear, that is not fear; but wholly vile I am not; nor can we love and cringe. But Oro knows my heart, which I can not speak."

"Impious boy," cried they with the censers, "we will offer thee up, before the very image thou contemnest. In the name of Alma, seize him."

And they bore him away unresisting.

"Thus perish the ungodly," said Pani to the shuddering pilgrims.

And they quitted the temple, to journey toward the Peak of Ofo.

"My soul bursts!" cried Yoomy. "My lord, my lord, let us save the boy."

"Speak not," said Media. "His fate is fixed. Let Mardi stand."

"Then let us away from hence, my lord; and join the pilgrims; for, in these inland vales, the lost one may be found, perhaps at the very base of Ofo."

"Not there; not there;" cried Babbalanja, "Yillah may have touched these shores; but long since she must have fled."