

## CHAPTER X

### Kohl Tells Of One Ravoo, And They Land To Visit Revaneva, A Flourishing Artisan

Having seen all worth viewing in Yammo, we departed, to complete the circumnavigation of the island, by returning to Uma without reversing our prows. As we glided along, we passed many objects of interest, concerning which, Mohi, as usual, was very diffuse.

Among other things pointed out, were certain little altars, like milestones, planted here and there upon bright bluffs, running out into the lagoon. Dedicated respectively to the guardian spirits of Maramma, these altars formed a chain of spiritual defenses; and here were presumed to stand post the most vigilant of warders; dread Hivohitee, all by himself, garrisoning the impregnable interior.

But these sentries were only subalterns, subject to the beck of the Pontiff; who frequently sent word to them, concerning the duties of their watch. His mandates were intrusted to one Ravoo, the hereditary pontifical messenger; a long-limbed varlet, so swift of foot, that he was said to travel like a javelin. "Art thou Ravoo, that thou so pliest thy legs?" say these islanders, to one encountered in a hurry.

Hivohitee's postman held no oral communication with the sentries. Dispatched round the island with divers bits of tappa,

hieroglyphically stamped, he merely deposited one upon each altar; superadding a stone, to keep the missive in its place; and so went his rounds.

Now, his route lay over hill and over dale, and over many a coral rock; and to preserve his feet from bruises, he was fain to wear a sort of buskin, or boot, fabricated of a durable tappa, made from the thickest and toughest of fibers. As he never wore his buskins except when he carried the mail, Ravoo sorely fretted with his Hessians; though it would have been highly imprudent to travel without them. To make the thing more endurable, therefore, and, at intervals, to cool his heated pedals, he established a series of stopping-places, or stages; at each of which a fresh pair of buskins, hanging from a tree, were taken down and vaulted into by the ingenious traveler. Those relays of boots were exceedingly convenient; next, indeed, to being lifted upon a fresh pair of legs.

"Now, to what purpose that anecdote?" demanded Babbalanja of Mohi, who in substance related it.

"Marry! 'tis but the simple recital of a fact; and I tell it to entertain the company."

"But has it any meaning you know of?"

"Thou art wise, find out," retorted Braid-Beard. "But what comes of

it?" persisted Babbalanja.

"Beshrew me, this senseless catechising of thine," replied Mohi;

"naught else, it seems, save a grin or two."

"And pray, what may you be driving at, philosopher?" interrupted Media.

"I am intent upon the essence of things; the mystery that lieth beyond; the elements of the tear which much laughter provoketh; that which is beneath the seeming; the precious pearl within the shaggy oyster. I probe the circle's center; I seek to evolve the inscrutable."

"Seek on; and when aught is found, cry out, that we may run to see."

"My lord the king is merry upon me. To him my more subtle cogitations seem foolishness. But believe me, my lord, there is more to be thought of than to be seen. There is a world of wonders insphered within the spontaneous consciousness; or, as old Bardianna hath it, a mystery within the obvious, yet an obviousness within the mystery."

"And did I ever deny that?" said Media.

"As plain as my hand in the dark," said Mohi.

"I dreamed a dream," said Yoomy.

"They banter me; but enough; I am to blame for discoursing upon the deep world wherein I live. I am wrong in seeking to invest sublunary sounds with celestial sense. Much that is in me is incommunicable by this ether we breathe. But I blame ye not." And wrapping round him his mantle, Babbalanja retired into its most private folds.

Ere coming in sight of Uma, we put into a little bay, to pay our respects to Hevaneva, a famous character there dwelling; who, assisted by many journeymen, carried on the lucrative business of making idols for the surrounding isles.

Know ye, that all idols not made in Maramma, and consecrated by Hivohitee; and, what is more, in strings of teeth paid down for to Hevaneva; are of no more account, than logs, stocks, or stones. Yet does not the cunning artificer monopolize the profits of his vocation; for Hevaneva being but the vassal of the Pontiff, the latter lays claim to King Leo's share of the spoils, and secures it.

The place was very prettily lapped in a pleasant dell, nigh to the margin of the water; and here, were several spacious arbors; wherein, prostrate upon their sacred faces, were all manner of idols, in every imaginable stage of statuary development.

With wonderful industry the journeymen were plying their tools;--some chiseling noses; some trenching for mouths; and others, with heated

flints, boring for ears: a hole drilled straight through the occiput, representing the auricular organs.

"How easily they are seen through," said Babbalanja, taking a sight through one of the heads.

The last finish is given to their godships, by rubbing them all over with dried slips of consecrated shark-skin, rough as sand paper, tacked over bits of wood.

In one of the farther arbors, Hevaneva pointed out a goodly array of idols, all complete and ready for the market. They were of every variety of pattern; and of every size; from that of a giant, to the little images worn in the ears of the ultra devout.

"Of late," said the artist, "there has been a lively demand for the image of Arbino the god of fishing; the present being the principal season for that business. For Nadams (Nadam presides over love and wine), there has also been urgent call; it being the time of the grape; and the maidens growing frolicsome withal, and devotional."

Seeing that Hevaneva handled his wares with much familiarity, not to say irreverence, Babbalanja was minded to learn from him, what he thought of his trade; whether the images he made were genuine or spurious; in a word, whether he believed in his gods.

His reply was curious. But still more so, the marginal gestures wherewith he helped out the text.

"When I cut down the trees for my idols," said he, "they are nothing but logs; when upon those logs, I chalk out the figures of, my images, they yet remain logs; when the chisel is applied, logs they are still; and when all complete, I at last stand them up in my studio, even then they are logs. Nevertheless, when I handle the pay, they are as prime gods, as ever were turned out in Maramma."

"You must make a very great variety," said Babbalanja.

"All sorts, all sorts."

"And from the same material, I presume."

"Ay, ay, one grove supplies them all. And, on an average, each tree stands us in full fifty idols. Then, we often take second-hand images in part pay for new ones. These we work over again into new patterns; touching up their eyes and ears; resetting their noses; and more especially new-footing their legs, where they always decay first."

Under sanction of the Pontiff, Hevaneva, in addition to his large commerce in idols, also carried on the highly lucrative business of canoe-building; the profits whereof, undivided, he dropped into his private exchequer. But Mohi averred, that the Pontiff often charged

him with neglecting his images, for his canoes. Be that as it may, Hevaneva drove a thriving trade at both avocations. And in demonstration of the fact, he directed our attention to three long rows of canoes, upheld by wooden supports. They were in perfect order; at a moment's notice, ready for launching; being furnished with paddles, out-riggers, masts, sails, and a human skull, with a short handle thrust through one of its eyes, the ordinary bailer of Maramma; besides other appurtenances, including on the prow a duodecimo idol to match.

Owing to a superstitious preference bestowed upon the wood and work of the sacred island, Hevaneva's canoes were in as high repute as his idols; and sold equally well.

In truth, in several ways one trade helped the other. The larger images being dug out of the hollow part of the canoes; and all knotty odds and ends reserved for the idol ear-rings.

"But after all," said the artificer, "I find a readier sale for my images, than for my canoes."

"And so it will ever be," said Babbalanja.--"Stick to thy idols, man! a trade, more reliable than the baker's."