

CHAPTER XX

Babbalanja Quotes From An Antique Pagan; And Earnestly Presses It Upon The Company, That What He Recites Is Not His, But Another's

Journeying on, we stopped by a gurgling spring, in a beautiful grove; and here, we stretched out on the grass, and our attendants unpacked their hampers, to provide us a lunch.

But as for that Babbalanja of ours, he must needs go and lunch by himself, and, like a cannibal, feed upon an author; though in other respects he was not so partial to bones.

Bringing forth the treasure he had buried in his bosom, he was soon buried in it; and motionless on his back, looked as if laid out, to keep an appointment with his undertaker.

"What, ho! Babbalanja!" cried Media from under a tree, "don't be a duck, there, with your bill in the air; drop your metaphysics, man, and fall to on the solids. Do you hear?"

"Come, philosopher," said Mohi, handling a banana, "you will weigh more after you have eaten."

"Come, list, Babbalanja," cried Yoomy, "I am going to sing."

"Up! up! I say," shouted Media again. "But go, old man, and wake him: rap on his head, and see whether he be in."

Mohi, obeying, found him at home; and Babbalanja started up.

"In Oro's name, what ails you, philosopher? See you Paradise, that you look so wildly?"

"A Happy Life! a Happy Life!" cried Babbalanja, in an ecstasy. "My lord, I am lost in the dream of it, as here recorded. Marvelous book! its goodness transports me. Let me read:--'I would bear the same mind, whether I be rich or poor, whether I get or lose in the world. I will reckon benefits well placed as the fairest part of my possession, not valuing them by number or weight, but by the profit and esteem of the receiver; accounting myself never the poorer for any thing I give. What I do shall be done for conscience, not ostentation. I will eat and drink, not to gratify my palate, but to satisfy nature. I will be cheerful to my friends, mild and placable to my enemies. I will prevent an honest request, if I can foresee it; and I will grant it, without asking. I will look upon the whole world as my country; and upon Oro, both as the witness and the judge of my words and my deeds. I will live and die with this testimony: that I loved a good conscience; that I never invaded another man's liberty; and that I preserved my own. I will govern my life and my thoughts, as if the whole world were to see the one, and to read the other; for what does it signify, to make any thing a secret to my neighbor, when to Oro all

our privacies are open."

"Very fine," said Media.

"The very spirit of the first followers of Alma, as recorded in the legends," said Mohi.

"Inimitable," said Yoomy.

Said Babbalanja, "Listen again:--'Righteousness is sociable and gentle; free, steady, and fearless; full of inexhaustible delights.'
And here again, and here, and here:--The true felicity of life is to understand our duty to Oro.'--'True joy is a serene and sober motion.'
And here, and here,--my lord, 'tis hard quoting from this book;--but listen--'A peaceful conscience, honest thoughts, and righteous actions are blessings without end, satiety, or measure. The poor man wants many things; the covetous man, all. It is not enough to know Oro, unless we obey him.'"

"Alma all over," cried Mohi; "sure, you read from his sayings?"

"I read but odd sentences from one, who though he lived ages ago, never saw, scarcely heard of Alma. And mark me, my lord, this time I improvise nothing. What I have recited, is here. Mohi, this book is more marvelous than the prophecies. My lord, that a mere man, and a heathen, in that most heathenish time, should give utterance to such

heavenly wisdom, seems more wonderful than that an in-spired prophet should reveal it. And is it not more divine in this philosopher, to love righteousness for its own sake, and in view of annihilation, than for pious sages to extol it as the means of everlasting felicity?"

"Alas," sighed Yoomy, "and does he not promise us any good thing, when we are dead?"

"He speaks not by authority. He but woos us to goodness and happiness here."

"Then, Babbalanja," said Media, "keep your treasure to yourself. Without authority, and a full right hand, Righteousness better be silent. Mardi's religion must seem to come direct from Oro, and the mass of you mortals endeavor it not, except for a consideration, present or to come."

"And call you that righteousness, my lord, which is but the price paid down for something else?"

"I called it not righteousness; it is religion so called. But let us prate no more of these things; with which I, a demi-god, have but little in common. It ever impairs my digestion. No more, Babbalanja."

"My lord! my lord! out of itself, Religion has nothing to bestow. Nor will she save us from aught, but from the evil in ourselves. Her one

grand end is to make us wise; her only manifestations are reverence to Oro and love to man; her only, but ample reward, herself. He who has this, has all. He who has this, whether he kneel to an image of wood, calling it Oro; or to an image of air, calling it the same; whether he fasts or feasts; laughs or weeps;--that man can be no richer. And this religion, faith, virtue, righteousness, good, whate'er you will, I find in this book I hold. No written page can teach me more."

"Have you that, then, of which you speak, Babbalanja? Are you content, there where you stand?"

"My lord, you drive me home. I am not content. The mystery of mysteries is still a mystery. How this author came to be so wise, perplexes me. How he led the life he did, confounds me. Oh, my lord, I am in darkness, and no broad blaze comes down to flood me. The rays that come to me are but faint cross lights, mazing the obscurity wherein I live. And after all, excellent as it is, I can be no gainer by this book. For the more we learn, the more we unlearn; we accumulate not, but substitute; and take away, more than we add. We dwindle while we grow; we sally out for wisdom, and retreat beyond the point whence we started; we essay the Fondiza, and get but the Phe. Of all simpletons, the simplest! Oh! that I were another sort of fool than I am, that I might restore my good opinion of myself. Continually I stand in the pillory, am broken on the wheel, and dragged asunder by wild horses. Yes, yes, Bardianna, all is in a nut, as thou sayest; but all my back teeth can not crack it; I but crack my own jaws. All round

me, my fellow men are new-grafting their vines, and dwelling in flourishing arbors; while I am forever pruning mine, till it is become but a stump. Yet in this pruning will I persist; I will not add, I will diminish; I will train myself down to the standard of what is unchangeably true. Day by day I drop off my redundancies; ere long I shall have stripped my ribs; when I die, they will but bury my spine. Ah! where, where, where, my lord, is the everlasting Tekana? Tell me, Mohi, where the Ephina? I may have come to the Penultimate, but where, sweet Yoomy, is the Ultimate? Ah, companions! I faint, I am wordless:-
-something, nothing, riddles,--does Mardi hold her?"

"He swoons!" cried Yoomy.

"Water! water!" cried Media.

"Away:" said Babbalanja serenely, "I revive."