

CHAPTER XXII

Yoomy Sings Some Odd Verses, And Babbalanja Quotes From The Old Authors Right And Left

Sailing from Padulla, after many pleasant things had been said concerning the sights there beheld; Babbalanja thus addressed Yoomy-- "Warbler, the last song you sung was about moonlight, and paradise, and fabulous pleasures evermore: now, have you any hymns about earthly felicity?"

"If so, minstrel," said Media, "jet it forth, my fountain, forthwith."

"Just now, my lord," replied Yoomy, "I was singing to myself, as I often do, and by your leave, I will continue aloud."

"Better begin at the beginning, I should think," said the chronicler, both hands to his chin, beginning at the top to new braid his beard.

"No: like the roots of your beard, old Mohi, all beginnings are stiff," cried Babbalanja. "We are lucky in living midway in eternity. So sing away, Yoomy, where you left off," and thus saying he unloosed his girdle for the song, as Apicius would for a banquet.

"Shall I continue aloud, then, my lord?"

My lord nodded, and Yoomy sang:--

"Full round, full soft, her dewy arms,--
Sweet shelter from all Mardi's harms!"

"Whose arms?" cried Mohi.

Sang Yoomy:--

Diving deep in the sea,
She takes sunshine along:
Down flames in the sea,
As of dolphins a throng.

"What mermaid is this?" cried Mohi.

Sang Yoomy:--

Her foot, a falling sound,
That all day long might bound.
Over the beach,
The soft sand beach,
And none would find
A trace behind.

"And why not?" demanded Media, "why could no trace be found?"

Said Braid-Beard, "Perhaps owing, my lord, to the flatness of the mermaid's foot. But no; that can not be; for mermaids are all vertebrae below the waist."

"Your fragment is pretty good, I dare say, Yoomy," observed Media, "but as Braid-Beard hints, rather flat."

"Flat as the foot of a man with his mind made up," cried Braid-Beard. "Yoomy, did you sup on flounders last night?"

But Yoomy vouchsafed no reply, he was ten thousand leagues off in a reverie: somewhere in the Hyades perhaps.

Conversation proceeding, Braid-Beard happened to make allusion to one Rotato, a portly personage, who, though a sagacious philosopher, and very ambitious to be celebrated as such, was only famous in Mardi as the fattest man of his tribe.

Said Media, "Then, Mohi, Rotato could not pick a quarrel with Fame, since she did not belie him. Fat he was, and fat she published him."

"Right, my lord," said Babbalanja, "for Fame is not always so honest. Not seldom to be famous, is to be widely known for what you are not, says Alla-Malolla. Whence it comes, as old Bardianna has it, that for years a man may move unnoticed among his fellows; but all at once, by

some chance attitude, foreign to his habit, become a trumpet-full for fools; though, in himself, the same as ever. Nor has he shown himself yet; for the entire merit of a man can never be made known; nor the sum of his demerits, if he have them. We are only known by our names; as letters sealed up, we but read each other's superscriptions.

"So with the commonalty of us Mardians. How then with those beings who every way are but too apt to be riddles. In many points the works of our great poet Vavona, now dead a thousand moons, still remain a mystery. Some call him a mystic; but wherein he seems obscure, it is, perhaps, we that are in fault; not by premeditation spoke he those archangel thoughts, which made many declare, that Vavona, after all, was but a crack-pated god, not a mortal of sound mind. But had he been less, my lord, he had seemed more. Saith Fulvi, 'Of the highest order of genius, it may be truly asserted, that to gain the reputation of superior power, it must partially disguise itself; it must come down, and then it will be applauded for soaring.' And furthermore, that there are those who falter in the common tongue, because they think in another; and these are accounted stutterers and stammerers."

"Ah! how true!" cried the Warbler.

"And what says the archangel Vavona, Yoomy, in that wonderful drama of his, 'The Souls of the Sages?'--'Beyond most barren hills, there are landscapes ravishing; with but one eye to behold; which no pencil can portray.' What wonder then, my lord, that Mardi itself is so blind.

'Mardi is a monster,' says old Bardianna, 'whose eyes are fixed in its head, like a whale's; it can see but two ways, and those comprising but a small arc of a perfect vision. Poets, heroes, and men of might, are all around this monster Mardi. But stand before me on stilts, or I will behold you not, says the monster; brush back your hair; inhale the wind largely; lucky are all men with dome-like foreheads; luckless those with pippin-heads; loud lungs are a blessing; a lion is no lion that can not roar.' Says Aldina, 'There are those looking on, who know themselves to be swifter of foot than the racers, but are confounded with the simpletons that stare.'"

"The mere carping of a disappointed cripple," cried Mold. His biographer states, that Aldina had only one leg."

"Braid-Beard, you are witty," said Babbalanja, adjusting his robe.

"My lord, there are heroes without armies, who hear martial music in their souls."

"Why not blow their trumpets louder, then," cried Media, that all Mardi may hear?"

"My lord Media, too, is witty, Babbalanja," said Mohi.

Breathed Yoomy, "There are birds of divinest plumage, and most glorious song, yet singing their lyrics to themselves."

Said Media, "The lark soars high, cares for no auditor, yet its sweet notes are heard here below. It sings, too, in company with myriads of mates. Your soliloquists, Yoomy, are mostly herons and owls."

Said Babbalanja, "Very clever, my lord; but think you not, there are men eloquent, who never babble in the marketplace?"

"Ay, and arrant babblers at home. In few words, Babbalanja, you espouse a bad cause. Most of you mortals are peacocks; some having tails, and some not; those who have them will be sure to thrust their plumes in your face; for the rest, they will display their bald cruppers, and still screech for admiration. But when a great genius is born into Mardi, he nods, and is known."

"More wit, but, with deference, perhaps less truth, my lord. Say what you will, Fame is an accident; merit a thing absolute. But what matter? Of what available value reputation, unless wedded to power, dentals, or place? To those who render him applause, a poet's may seem a thing tangible; but to the recipient, 'tis a fantasy; the poet never so stretches his imagination, as when striving to comprehend what it is; often, he is famous without knowing it."

"At the sacred games of Lazella," said Yoomy, "slyly crowned from behind with a laurel fillet, for many hours, the minstrel Jarmi wandered about ignorant of the honors he bore. But enlightened at last, he doffed the wreath; then, holding it at arm's length, sighed

forth--Oh, ye laurels! to be visible to me, ye must be removed from my brow!"

"And what said Botargo," cried Babbalanja, "hearing that his poems had been translated into the language of the remote island of Bertranda?-- 'It stirs me little; already, in merry fancies, have I dreamed of their being trilled by the blessed houris in paradise; I can only imagine the same of the damsels of Bertranda.' Says Boldo, the Materialist,--'Substances alone are satisfactory.'"

"And so thought the mercenary poet, Zenzi," said Yoomy. "Upon receiving fourteen ripe yams for a sonnet, one for every line, he said to me, Yoomy, I shall make a better meal upon these, than upon so many compliments."

"Ay," cried Babbalanja, "'Bravos,' saith old Bardianna, but induce flatulency."

Said Media, "And do you famous mortals, then, take no pleasure in hearing your bravos?"

"Much, my good lord; at least such famous mortals, so enamored of a clamorous notoriety, as to bravo for themselves, when none else will huzza; whose whole existence is an unintermitting consciousness of self; whose very persons stand erect and self-sufficient as their infallible index, the capital letter I; who relish and comprehend no

reputation but what attaches to the carcass; who would as lief be renowned for a splendid mustache, as for a splendid drama: who know not how it was that a personage, to posterity so universally celebrated as the poet Vavona, ever passed through the crowd unobserved; who deride the very thunder for making such a noise in Mardi, and yet disdain to manifest itself to the eye."

"Wax not so warm, Babbalanja; but tell us, if to his contemporaries Vavona's person was almost unknown, what satisfaction did he derive from his genius?"

"Had he not its consciousness?--an empire boundless as the West. What to him were huzzas? Why, my lord, from his privacy, the great and good Logodora sent liniment to the hoarse throats without. But what said Bardianna, when they dunned him for autographs?--'Who keeps the register of great men? who decides upon noble actions? and how long may ink last? Alas! Fame has dropped more rolls than she displays; and there are more lost chronicles, than the perished books of the historian Livella.' But what is lost forever, my lord, is nothing to what is now unseen. There are more treasures in the bowels of the earth, than on its surface."

"Ah! no gold," cried Yoomy, "but that comes from dark mines."

Said Babbalanja, "Bear witness, ye gods! cries fervent old Bardianna, that besides disclosures of good and evil undreamed of now, there will

be other, and more astounding revelations hereafter, of what has passed in Mardi unbeheld."

"A truce to your everlasting pratings of old Bardianna," said King Media; why not speak your own thoughts, Babbalanja? then would your discourse possess more completeness; whereas, its warp and woof are of all sorts,--Bardianna, Alla-Malolla, Vavona, and all the writers that ever have written. Speak for yourself, mortal!"

"May you not possibly mistake, my lord? for I do not so much quote Bardianna, as Bardianna quoted me, though he flourished before me; and no vanity, but honesty to say so. The catalogue of true thoughts is but small; they are ubiquitous; no man's property; and unspoken, or bruited, are the same. When we hear them, why seem they so natural, receiving our spontaneous approval? why do we think we have heard them before? Because they but reiterate ourselves; they were in us, before we were born. The truest poets are but mouth-pieces; and some men are duplicates of each other; I see myself in Bardianna."

"And there, for Oro's sake, let it rest, Babbalanja; Bardianna in you, and you in Bardianna forever!"