

CHAPTER XXVI

A Reception Day At Pimminee

Next morning, Nimni apprized us, that throughout the day he proposed keeping open house, for the purpose of enabling us to behold whatever of beauty, rank, and fashion, Pimminee could boast; including certain strangers of note from various quarters of the lagoon, who doubtless would honor themselves with a call.

As inmates of the mansion, we unexpectedly had a rare opportunity of witnessing the final toilets of the Begum and her daughters, preparatory to receiving their guests.

Their four farthingales were placed standing in the middle of the dwelling; when their future inmates, arrayed in rudimental vestments, went round and round them, attaching various articles of finery, dyed scarfs, ivory trinkets, and other decorations. Upon the propriety of this or that adornment, the three Vowels now and then pondered apart, or together consulted. They talked and they laughed; they were silent and sad; now merry at their bravery; now pensive at the thought of the charms to be hidden.

It was O who presently suggested the expediency of an artful fold in their draperies, by the merest accident in Mardi, to reveal a tantalizing glimpse of their ankles, which were thought to be pretty.

But the old Begum was more active than any; by far the most disinterested in the matter of advice. Her great object seemed to be to pile on the finery at all hazards; and she pointed out many as yet vacant and unappropriated spaces, highly susceptible of adornment.

At last, all was in readiness; when, taking a valedictory glance, at their intrenchments, the Begum and damsels simultaneously dipped their heads, directly after emerging from the summit, all ready for execution.

And now to describe the general reception that followed. In came the Roes, the Fees, the Lol-Lols, the Hummee-Hums, the Bidi-Bidies, and the Dedidums; the Peenees, the Yamoyamees, the Karkies, the Fanfums, the Diddledees, and the Fiddlefies; in a word, all the aristocracy of Pimminee; people with exceedingly short names; and some all name, and nothing else. It was an imposing array of sounds; a circulation of ciphers; a marshaling of tappas; a getting together of grimaces and furbelows; a masquerade of vapidities.

Among the crowd was a bustling somebody, one Gaddi, arrayed in much apparel to little purpose; who, singling out Babbalanja, for some time adhered to his side, and with excessive complaisance, enlightened him as to the people assembled.

"That is rich Marmonora, accounted a mighty man in Pimminee; his bags of teeth included, he is said to weigh upwards of fourteen stone;

and is much sought after by tailors for his measure, being but slender in the region of the heart. His riches are great. And that old vrow is the widow Roo; very rich; plenty of teeth; but has none in her head. And this is Finfi; said to be not very rich, and a maid. Who would suppose she had ever beat tappa for a living?"

And so saying, Gaddi sauntered off; his place by Babbalanja's side being immediately supplied by the damsel Finfi. That vivacious and amiable nymph at once proceeded to point out the company, where Gaddi had left off; beginning with Gaddi himself, who, she insinuated, was a mere parvenu, a terrible infliction upon society, and not near so rich as he was imagined to be.

Soon we were accosted by one Nonno, a sour, saturnine personage. "I know nobody here; not a soul have I seen before; I wonder who they all are." And just then he was familiarly nodded to by nine worthies abreast. Whereupon Nonno vanished. But after going the rounds of the company, and paying court to many, he again sauntered by Babbalanja, saying, "Nobody, nobody; nobody but nobodies; I see nobody I know."

Advancing, Nimni now introduced many strangers of distinction, parading their titles after a fashion, plainly signifying that he was bent upon convincing us, that there were people present at this little affair of his, who were men of vast reputation; and that we erred, if we deemed him unaccustomed to the society of the illustrious.

But not a few of his magnates seemed shy of Media and their laurels. Especially a tall robustuous fellow, with a terrible javelin in his hand, much notched and splintered, as if it had dealt many a thrust. His left arm was gallanted in a sling, and there was a patch upon his sinister eye. Him Nimni made known as a famous captain, from King Piko's island (of which anon) who had been all but mortally wounded somewhere, in a late desperate though nameless encounter.

"Ah," said Media as this redoubtable withdrew, Fofi is a cunning knave; a braggart, driven forth, by King Piko for his cowardice. He has blent his tattooing into one mass of blue, and thus disguised, must have palmed himself off here in Pimminee, for the man he is not. But I see many more like him."

"Oh ye Tapparrians," said Babbalanja, "none so easily humbugged as humbugs. Taji: to behold this folly makes one wise. Look, look; it is all round us. Oh Pimminee, Pimminee!"