

CHAPTER XXXII

My Lord Media Summons Mohi To The Stand

While slowly the night wore on, and the now scudding clouds flown past, revealed again the hosts in heaven, few words were uttered save by Media; who, when all others were most sad and silent, seemed but little moved, or not stirred a jot.

But that night, he filled his flagon fuller than his wont, and drank, and drank, and pledged the stars.

"Here's to thee, old Arcturus! To thee, old Aldebaran! who ever poise your wine-red, fiery spheres on high. A health to thee, my regal friend, Alphacca, in the constellation of the Crown: Lo! crown to crown, I pledge thee! I drink to ye, too, Alphard! Markab! Denebola! Capella!--to ye, too, sailing Cygnus! Aquila soaring!--All round, a health to all your diadems! May they never fade! nor mine!"

At last, in the shadowy east, the Dawn, like a gray, distant sail before the wind, was descried; drawing nearer and nearer, till her gilded prow was perceived.

And as in tropic gales, the winds blow fierce, and more fierce, with the advent of the sun; so with King Media; whose mirth now breezed up afresh. But, as at sunrise, the sea-storm only blows harder, to settle

down at last into a steady wind; even so, in good time, my lord Media came to be more decorous of mood. And Babbalanja abated his reveries.

For who might withstand such a morn!

As on the night-banks of the far-rolling Ganges, the royal bridegroom sets forth for his bride, preceded by nymphs, now this side, now that, lighting up all the flowery flambeaux held on high as they pass; so came the Sun, to his nuptials with Mardi:--the Hours going on before, touching all the peaks, till they glowed rosy-red.

By reflex, the lagoon, here and there, seemed on fire; each curling wave-crest a flame.

Noon came as we sailed.

And now, citrons and bananas, cups and calabashes, calumets and tobacco, were passed round; and we were all very merry and mellow indeed. Smacking our lips, chatting, smoking, and sipping. Now a mouthful of citron to season a repartee; now a swallow of wine to wash down a precept; now a fragrant whiff to puff away care. Many things did beguile. From side to side, we turned and grazed, like Juno's white oxen in clover meads.

Soon, we drew nigh to a charming cliff, overrun with woodbines, on high suspended from flowering Tamarisk and Tamarind-trees. The

blossoms of the Tamarisks, in spikes of small, red bells; the Tamarinds, wide-spreading their golden petals, red-streaked as with streaks of the dawn. Down sweeping to the water, the vines trailed over to the crisp, curling waves,--little pages, all eager to hold up their trains.

Within, was a bower; going behind it, like standing inside the sheet of the falls of the Genesee.

In this arbor we anchored. And with their shaded prows thrust in among the flowers, our three canoes seemed baiting by the way, like wearied steeds in a hawthorn lane.

High midsummer noon is more silent than night. Most sweet a siesta then. And noon dreams are day-dreams indeed; born under the meridian sun. Pale Cynthia begets pale specter shapes; and her frigid rays best illuminate white nuns, marble monuments, icy glaciers, and cold tombs.

The sun rolled on. And starting to his feet, arms clasped, and wildly staring, Yoomy exclaimed--"Nay, nay, thou shalt not depart, thou maid!--here, here I fold thee for aye!--Flown?--A dream! Then siestas henceforth while I live. And at noon, every day will I meet thee, sweet maid! And, oh Sun! set not; and poppies bend over us, when next we embrace!"

"What ails that somnambulist?" cried Media, rising. "Yoomy, I say!

what ails thee?"

"He must have indulged over freely in those citrons," said Mohi, sympathetically rubbing his fruitery. "Ho, Yoomy! a swallow of brine will help thee."

"Alas," cried Babbalanja, "do the fairies then wait on repletion? Do our dreams come from below, and not from the skies? Are we angels, or dogs? Oh, Man, Man, Man! thou art harder to solve, than the Integral Calculus--yet plain as a primer; harder to find than the philosopher's-stone--yet ever at hand; a more cunning compound, than an alchemist's--yet a hundred weight of flesh, to a penny weight of spirit; soul and body glued together, firm as atom to atom, seamless as the vestment without joint, warp or woof--yet divided as by a river, spirit from flesh; growing both ways, like a tree, and dropping thy topmost branches to earth, like thy beard or a banian!--I give thee up, oh Man! thou art twain--yet indivisible; all things--yet a poor unit at best."

"Philosopher you seem puzzled to account for the riddles of your race," cried Media, sideways reclining at his ease. "Now, do thou, old Mohi, stand up before a demi-god, and answer for all.--Draw nigh, so I can eye thee. What art thou, mortal?"

"My worshipful lord, a man."

"And what are men?"

"My lord, before thee is a specimen."

"I fear me, my lord will get nothing out of that witness," said Babbalanja. "Pray you, King Media, let another inquisitor cross-question."

"Proceed; take the divan."

"A pace or two farther off, there, Mohi; so I can garner thee all in at a glance.--Attention! Rememberest thou, fellow-being, when thou wast born?"

"Not I. Old Braid-Beard had no memory then."

"When, then, wast thou first conscious of being?"

"What time I was teething: my first sensation was an ache."

"What dost thou, fellow-being, here in Mardi?"

"What doth Mardi here, fellow-being, under me?"

"Philosopher, thou gainest but little by thy questions," cried Yoomy advancing. "Let a poet endeavor."

"I abdicate in your favor, then, gentle Yoomy; let me smooth the divan for you;--there: be seated."

"Now, Mohi, who art thou?" said Yoomy, nodding his bird-of-paradise plume.

"The sole witness, it seems, in this case."

"Try again minstrel," cried Babbalanja.

"Then, what art thou, Mohi?"

"Even what thou art, Yoomy."

"He is too sharp or too blunt for us all," cried King Media. "His devil is even more subtle than yours, Babbalanja. Let him go."

"Shall I adjourn the court then, my lord?" said Babbalanja.

"Ay."

"Oyez! Oyez! Oyez! All mortals having business at this court, know ye, that it is adjourned till sundown of the day, which hath no to-morrow."