

CHAPTER XLIV

Through Dominora, They Wander After Yillah

At last, withdrawing from the presence of King Bello, we went forth, still intent on our search.

Many brave sights we saw. Fair fields; the whole island a garden; green hedges all round; neat lodges, thick as white mice in the landscape; old oak woods, hale and hearty as ever; old temples buried in ivy; old shrines of old heroes, deep buried in broad groves of bay trees; old rivers laden down with heavy-freighted canoes; humped hills, like droves of camels, piled up with harvests; every sign and token of a glorious abundance, every sign and token of generations of renown. Rare sight! fine sight! none rarer, none finer in Mardi.

But roving on through this ravishing region, we passed through a corn-field in full beard, where a haggard old reaper laid down his hook, beseeching charity for the sake of the gods.--"Bread, bread! or I die mid these sheaves!"

"Thrash out your grain, and want not."

"Alas, masters, this grain is not mine; I plough, I sow, I reap, I bind, I stack,--Lord Primo garners."

Rambling on, we came to a hamlet, hidden in a hollow; and beneath weeping willows saw many mournful maidens seated on a bank; beside each, a wheel that was broken. "Lo, we starve," they cried, "our distaffs are snapped; no more may we weave and spin!"

Then forth issued from vaults clamorous crowds of men, hands tied to their backs.--"Bread! Bread!" they cried. "The magician hath turned us out from our glen, where we labored of yore in the days of the merry Green Queen. He has pinioned us hip and arm that we starve. Like sheep we die off with the rot.--Curse on the magician. A curse on his spell."

Bending our steps toward the glen, roaring down the rocks we descried a stream from the mountains. But ere those waters gained the sea, vassal tribute they rendered. Conducted through culverts and moats, they turned great wheels, giving life to ten thousand fangs and fingers, whose gripe no power could withstand, yet whose touch was soft as the velvet paw of a kitten. With brute force, they heaved down great weights, then daintily wove and spun; like the trunk of the elephant, which lays lifeless a river-horse, and counts the pulses of a moth. On all sides, the place seemed alive with its spindles. Round and round, round and round; throwing off wondrous births at every revolving; ceaseless as the cycles that circle in heaven. Loud hummed the loom, flew the shuttle like lightning, red roared the grim forge, rung anvil and sledge; yet no mortal was seen.

"What ho, magician! Come forth from thy cave!"

But all deaf were the spindles, as the mutes, that mutely wait on the Sultan.

"Since we are born, we will live!" so we read on a crimson banner, flouting the crimson clouds, in the van of a riotous red-bonneted mob, racing by us as we came from the glen. Many more followed: black, or blood-stained:--.

"Mardi is man's!"

"Down with landholders!"

"Our turn now!"

"Up rights! Down wrongs!"

"Bread! Bread!"

"Take the tide, ere it turns!"

Waving their banners, and flourishing aloft clubs, hammers, and sickles, with fierce yells the crowd ran on toward the palace of Bello. Foremost, and inciting the rest by mad outcries and gestures, were six masks; "This way! This way!" they cried,--"by the wood; by

the dark wood!" Whereupon all darted into the groves; when of a sudden, the masks leaped forward, clearing a long covered trench, into which fell many of those they led. But on raced the masks; and gaining Bello's palace, and raising the alarm, there sallied from thence a woodland of spears, which charged upon the disordered ranks in the grove. A crash as of icicles against icebergs round Zembla, and down went the hammers and sickles. The host fled, hotly pursued. Meanwhile brave heralds from Bello advanced, and with chaplets crowned the six masks.--"Welcome, heroes! worthy and valiant!" they cried. "Thus our lord Bello rewards all those, who to do him a service, for hire betray their kith and their kin."

Still pursuing our quest, wide we wandered through all the sun and shade of Dominora; but nowhere was Yillah found.