

CHAPTER XLVI

Wherein Babbalanja Bows Thrice

The next morning's twilight found us once more afloat; and yielding to that almost sullen feeling, but too apt to prevail with some mortals at that hour, all but Media long remained silent.

But now, a bright mustering is seen among the myriad white Tartar tents in the Orient; like lines of spears defiling upon some upland plain, the sunbeams thwart the sky. And see! amid the blaze of banners, and the pawings of ten thousand thousand golden hoofs, day's mounted Sultan, Xerxes-like, moves on: the Dawn his standard, East and West his cymbals.

"Oh, morning life!" cried Yoomy, with a Persian air; "would that all time were a sunrise, and all life a youth."

"Ah! but these striplings whimper of youth," said Mohi, caressing his braids, "as if they wore this beard."

"But natural, old man," said Babbalanja. "We Mardians never seem young to ourselves; childhood is to youth what manhood is to age:--something to be looked back upon, with sorrow that it is past. But childhood reeks of no future, and knows no past; hence, its present passes in a vapor."

"Mohi, how's your appetite this morning?" said Media.

"Thus, thus, ye gods," sighed Yoomy, "is feeling ever scouted. Yet, what might seem feeling in me, I can not express."

"A good commentary on old Bardianna, Yoomy," said Babbalanja, "who somewhere says, that no Mardian can out with his heart, for his unyielding ribs are in the way. And indeed, pride, or something akin thereto, often holds check on sentiment. My lord, there are those who like not to be detected in the possession of a heart."

"Very true, Babbalanja; and I suppose that pride was at the bottom of your old Ponderer's heartless, unsentimental, bald-pated style."

"Craving pardon, my lord is deceived. Bardianna was not at all proud; though he had a queer way of showing the absence of pride. In his essay, entitled,--"On the Tendency to curl in Upper Lips," he thus discourses. "We hear much of pride and its sinfulness in this Mardi wherein we dwell: whereas, I glory in being brimmed with it;--my sort of pride. In the presence of kings, lords, palm-trees, and all those who deem themselves taller than myself, I stand stiff as a pike, and will abate not one vertebra of my stature. But accounting no Mardian my superior, I account none my inferior; hence, with the social, I am ever ready to be sociable."

"An agrarian!" said Media; "no doubt he would have made the headsman the minister of equality."

"At bottom we are already equal, my honored lord," said Babbalanja, profoundly bowing--"One way we all come into Mardi, and one way we withdraw. Wanting his yams a king will starve, quick as a clown; and smote on the hip, saith old Bardianna, he will roar as loud as the next one."

"Roughly worded, that, Babbalanja.--Vee-Vee! my crown!--So; now, Babbalanja, try if you can not polish Bardianna's style in that last saying you father upon him."

"I will, my ever honorable lord," said Babbalanja, salaming. "Thus we'll word it, then: In their merely Mardian nature, the sublimest demi-gods are subject to infirmities; for struck by some keen shaft, even a king ofttimes dons his crown, fearful of future darts."

"Ha, ha!--well done, Babbalanja; but I bade you polish, not sharpen the arrow."

"All one, my thrice honored lord;--to polish is not to blunt."