

CHAPTER XLIX

They Draw Nigh To Porpheero; Where They Behold A Terrific Eruption

Gliding away from Verdanna at the turn of the tide, we cleared the strait, and gaining the more open lagoon, pointed our prows for Porpheero, from whose magnificent monarchs my lord Media promised himself a glorious reception.

"They are one and all demi-gods," he cried, "and have the old demi-god feeling. We have seen no great valleys like theirs:--their scepters are long as our spears; to their sumptuous palaces, Donjalolo's are but inns:--their banquetting halls are as vistas; no generations run parallel to theirs:--their pedigrees reach back into chaos.

"Babbalanja! here you will find food for philosophy:--the whole land checkered with nations, side by side contrasting in costume, manners, and mind. Here you will find science and sages; manuscripts in miles; bards singing in choirs.

"Mohi! here you will flag over your page; in Porpheero the ages have hived all their treasures: like a pyramid, the past shadows over the land.

"Yoomy! here you will find stuff for your songs:--blue rivers flowing through forest arches, and vineyards; velvet meads, soft as ottomans:

bright maidens braiding the golden locks of the harvest; and a background of mountains, that seem the end of the world. Or if nature will not content you, then turn to the landscapes of art. See! mosaic walls, tattooed like our faces; paintings, vast as horizons; and into which, you feel you could rush: See! statues to which you could off turban; cities of columns standing thick as mankind; and firmanent domes forever shedding their sunsets of gilding: See! spire behind spire, as if the land were the ocean, and all Bello's great navy were riding at anchor.

"Noble Taji! you seek for your Yillah;--give over despair! Porpheero's such a scene of enchantment, that there, the lost maiden must lurk."

"A glorious picture!" cried Babbalanja, but turn the medal, my lord;--what says the reverse?"

"Cynic! have done.--But bravo! we'll ere long be in Franko, the goodliest vale of them all; how I long to take her old king by the hand!"

The sun was now setting behind us, lighting up the white cliffs of Dominora, and the green capes of Verdanna; while in deep shade lay before us the long winding shores of Porpheero.

It was a sunset serene.

"How the winds lowly warble in the dying day's ear," murmured Yoomy.

"A mild, bright night, we'll have," said Media.

"See you not those clouds over Franko, my lord," said Mohi, shaking his head.

"Ah, aged and weather-wise as ever, sir chronicler;--I predict a fair night, and many to follow."

"Patience needs no prophet," said Babbalanja. "The night, is at hand."

Hitherto the lagoon had been smooth: but anon, it grew black, and stirred; and out of the thick darkness came clamorous sounds. Soon, there shot into the air a vivid meteor, which bursting at the zenith, radiated down the firmament in fiery showers, leaving treble darkness behind.

Then as all held their breath, from Franko there spouted an eruption, which seemed to plant all Mardi in the foreground.

As when Vesuvius lights her torch, and in the blaze, the storm-swept surges in Naples' bay rear and plunge toward it; so now, showed Franko's multitudes, as they stormed the summit where their monarch's palace blazed, fast by the burning mountain.

"By my eternal throne!" cried Media, starting, "the old volcano has burst forth again!"

"But a new vent, my lord," said Babbalanja.

"More fierce this, than the eruption which happened in my youth," said Mohi--"methinks that Franko's end has come."

"You look pale, my lord," said Babbalanja, "while all other faces glow;--Yoomy, doff that halo in the presence of a king."

Over the waters came a rumbling sound, mixed with the din of warfare, and thwarted by showers of embers that fell not, for the whirling blasts.

"Off shore! off shore!" cried Media; and with all haste we gained a place of safety.

Down the valley now poured Rhines and Rhones of lava, a fire-freshet, flooding the forests from their fastnesses, and leaping with them into the seething sea.

The shore was lined with multitudes pushing off wildly in canoes.

Meantime, the fiery storm from Franko, kindled new flames in the distant valleys of Porpheero; while driven over from Verdanna came

frantic shouts, and direful jubilees. Upon Dominora a baleful glare was resting.

"Thrice cursed flames!" cried Media. "Is Mardi to be one conflagration? How it crackles, forks, and roars!--Is this our funeral pyre?"

"Recline, recline, my lord," said Babbalanja. "Fierce flames are ever brief--a song, sweet Yoomy! Your pipe, old Mohi! Greater fires than this have ere now blazed in Mardi. Let us be calm;--the isles were made to burn;--Braid-Beard! hereafter, in some quiet cell, of this whole scene you will but make one chapter;--come, digest it now."

"My face is scorched," cried Media.

"The last, last day!" cried Mohi.

"Not so, old man," said Babbalanja, "when that day dawns, 'twill dawn serene. Be calm, be calm, my potent lord."

"Talk not of calm brows in storm-time!" cried Media fiercely. "See! how the flames blow over upon Dominora!"

"Yet the fires they kindle there are soon extinguished," said Babbalanja. "No, no; Dominora ne'er can burn with Franko's fires; only those of her own kindling may consume her."

"Away! Away!" cried Media. "We may not touch Porpheero now.--Up sails!
and westward be our course."

So dead before the blast, we scudded.

Morning broke, showing no sign of land.

"Hard must it go with Franko's king," said Media, "when his people
rise against him with the red volcanoes. Oh, for a foot to crush them!
Hard, too, with all who rule in broad Porpheero. And may she we seek,
survive this conflagration!"

"My lord," said Babbalanja, "where'ere she hide, ne'er yet did Yillah
lurk in this Porpheero; nor have we missed the maiden, noble Taji! in
not touching at its shores."

"This fire must make a desert of the land," said Mohi; "burn up and
bury all her tilth."

"Yet, Mohi, vineyards flourish over buried villages," murmured Yoomy.

"True, minstrel," said Babbalanja, "and prairies are purified by fire.
Ashes breed loam. Nor can any skill make the same surface forever
fruitful. In all times past, things have been overlaid; and though the
first fruits of the marl are wild and poisonous, the palms at last

spring forth; and once again the tribes repose in shade. My lord, if calms breed storms, so storms calms; and all this dire commotion must eventuate in peace. It may be, that Perpheero's future has been cheaply won."