

## CHAPTER LI

### In Which Azzageddi Seems To Use Babbalanja For A Mouth-Piece

Porpheero far astern, the spirits of the company rose. Once again, old Mohi serenely unbraided, and rebraided his beard; and sitting Turk-wise on his mat, my lord Media smoking his gonfalon, diverted himself with the wild songs of Yoomy, the wild chronicles of Mohi, or the still wilder speculations of Babbalanja; now and then, as from pitcher to pitcher, pouring royal old wine down his soul.

Among other things, Media, who at times turned over Babbalanja for an encyclopaedia, however unreliable, demanded information upon the subject of neap tides and their alleged slavish vassalage to the moon.

When true to his cyclopaediatic nature, Babbalanja quoted from a still older and better authority than himself; in brief, from no other than eternal Bardianna. It seems that that worthy essayist had discussed the whole matter in a chapter thus headed: "On Seeing into Mysteries through Mill-Stones;" and throughout his disquisitions he evinced such a profundity of research, though delivered in a style somewhat equivocal, that the company were much struck by the erudition displayed.

"Babbalanja, that Bardianna of yours must have been a wonderful student," said Media after a pause, "no doubt he consumed whole

thickets of rush-lights."

"Not so, my lord.--'Patience, patience, philosophers,' said Bardianna; 'blow out your tapers, bolt not your dinners, take time, wisdom will be plenty soon.'"

"A notable hint! Why not follow it, Babbalanja?"

"Because, my lord, I have overtaken it, and passed on."

"True to your nature, Babbalanja; you stay nowhere."

"Ay, keep moving is my motto; but speaking of hard students, did my lord ever hear of Midni the ontologist and entomologist?"

"No."

"Then, my lord, you shall hear of him now. Midni was of opinion that day-light was vulgar; good enough for taro-planting and traveling; but wholly unadapted to the sublime ends of study. He toiled by night; from sunset to sunrise poring over the works of the old logicans. Like most philosophers, Midni was an amiable man; but one thing invariably put him out. He read in the woods by glow-worm light; insect in hand, tracing over his pages, line by line. But glow-worms burn not long; and in the midst of some calm intricate thought, at some imminent comma, the insect often expired, and Midni groped for a meaning. Upon

such an occasion, 'Ho, Ho,' he cried; 'but for one instant of sun-light to see my way to a period!' But sun-light there was none; so Midni sprang to his feet, and parchment under arm, raced about among the sloughs and bogs for another glow-worm. Often, making a rapid descent with his turban, he thought he had caged a prize; but nay. Again he tried; yet with no better success. Nevertheless, at last he secured one; but hardly had he read three lines by its light, when out it went. Again and again this occurred. And thus he forever went halting and stumbling through his studies, and plunging through his quagmires after a glim."

At this ridiculous tale, one of our silliest paddlers burst into uncontrollable mirth. Offended at which breach of decorum, Media sharply rebuked him.

But he protested he could not help laughing.

Again Media was about to reprimand him, when Babbalanja begged leave to interfere.

"My lord, he is not to blame. Mark how earnestly he struggles to suppress his mirth; but he can not. It has often been the same with myself. And many a time have I not only vainly sought to check my laughter, but at some recitals I have both laughed and cried. But can opposite emotions be simultaneous in one being? No. I wanted to weep;

but my body wanted to smile, and between us we almost choked. My lord Media, this man's body laughs; not the man himself."

"But his body is his own, Babbalanja; and he should have it under better control."

"The common error, my lord. Our souls belong to our bodies, not our bodies to our souls. For which has the care of the other? which keeps house? which looks after the replenishing of the aorta and auricles, and stores away the secretions? Which toils and ticks while the other sleeps? Which is ever giving timely hints, and elderly warnings? Which is the most authoritative?--Our bodies, surely. At a hint, you must move; at a notice to quit, you depart. Simpletons show us, that a body can get along almost without a soul; but of a soul getting along without a body, we have no tangible and indisputable proof. My lord, the wisest of us breathe involuntarily. And how many millions there are who live from day to day by the incessant operation of subtle processes in them, of which they know nothing, and care less? Little ween they, of vessels lacteal and lymphatic, of arteries femoral and temporal; of pericranium or pericardium; lymph, chyle, fibrin, albumen, iron in the blood, and pudding in the head; they live by the charity of their bodies, to which they are but butlers. I say, my lord, our bodies are our betters. A soul so simple, that it prefers evil to good, is lodged in a frame, whose minutest action is full of unsearchable wisdom. Knowing this superiority of theirs, our bodies are inclined to be willful: our beards grow in spite of us; and as

every one knows, they sometimes grow on dead men."

"You mortals are alive, then, when you are dead, Babbalanja."

"No, my lord; but our beards survive us."

"An ingenious distinction; go on, philosopher."

"Without bodies, my lord, we Mardians would be minus our strongest motive-passions, those which, in some way or other, root under our every action. Hence, without bodies, we must be something else than we essentially are. Wherefore, that saying imputed to Alma, and which, by his very followers, is deemed the most hard to believe of all his instructions, and the most at variance with all preconceived notions of immortality, I Babbalanja, account the most reasonable of his doctrinal teachings. It is this;--that at the last day, every man shall rise in the flesh."

"Pray, Babbalanja, talk not of resurrections to a demi-god."

"Then let me rehearse a story, my lord. You will find it in the 'Very Merry Marvelings' of the Improvisitor Quiddi; and a quaint book it is. Fugle-fi is its finis:--fugle-fi, fugle-fo, fugle-fogle-orum!"

"That wild look in his eye again," murmured Yoomy. "Proceed, Azzageddi," said Media.

"The philosopher Grando had a sovereign contempt for his carcass. Often he picked a quarrel with it; and always was flying out in its disparagement. 'Out upon you, you beggarly body! you clog, drug, drag! You keep me from flying; I could get along better without you. Out upon you, I say, you vile pantry, cellar, sink, sewer; abominable body! what vile thing are you not? And think you, beggar! to have the upper hand of me? Make a leg to that man if you dare, without my permission. This smell is intolerable; but turn from it, if you can, unless I give the word. Bolt this yam!--it is done. Carry me across yon field!--off we go. Stop!--it's a dead halt. There, I've trained you enough for to-day; now, sirrah, crouch down in the shade, and be quiet.--I'm rested. So, here's for a stroll, and a reverie homeward:--Up, carcass, and march.' So the carcass demurely rose and paced, and the philosopher meditated. He was intent upon squaring the circle; but bump he came against a bough. 'How now, clodhopping bumpkin! you would take advantage of my reveries, would you? But I'll be even with you;' and seizing a cudgel, he laid across his shoulders with right good will. But one of his backhanded thwacks injured his spinal cord; the philosopher dropped; but presently came to. 'Adzooks! I'll bend or break you! Up, up, and I'll run you home for this.' But wonderful to tell, his legs refused to budge; all sensation had left them. But a huge wasp happening to sting his foot, not him, for he felt it not, the leg incontinently sprang into the air, and of itself, cut all manner of capers. Be still! Down with you!' But the leg refused. 'My arms are still loyal,' thought Grando; and with them he

at last managed to confine his refractory member. But all commands, volitions, and persuasions, were as naught to induce his limbs to carry him home. It was a solitary place; and five days after, Grando the philosopher was found dead under a tree."

"Ha, ha!" laughed Media, "Azzageddi is full as merry as ever."

"But, my lord," continued Babbalanja, "some creatures have still more perverse bodies than Grando's. In the fables of Ridendiabola, this is to be found. 'A fresh-water Polyp, despising its marine existence; longed to live upon air. But all it could do, its tentacles or arms still continued to cram its stomach. By a sudden preternatural impulse, however, the Polyp at last turned itself inside out; supposing that after such a proceeding it would have no gastronomic interior. But its body proved ventricle outside as well as in. Again its arms went to work; food was tossed in, and digestion continued.'"

"Is the literal part of that a fact?" asked Mohi.

"True as truth," said Babbalanja; "the Polyp will live turned inside out."

"Somewhat curious, certainly," said Media.--"But me-thinks, Babbalanja, that somewhere I have heard something about organic functions, so called; which may account for the phenomena you mention; and I have heard too, me-thinks, of what are called reflex actions of the nerves, which, duly considered, might deprive of its strangeness

that story of yours concerning Grande and his body."

"Mere substitutions of sounds for inexplicable meanings, my lord. In some things science cajoles us. Now, what is undeniable of the Polyp some physiologists analogically maintain with regard to us Mardians; that forasmuch, as the lining of our interiors is nothing more than a continuation of the epidermis, or scarf-skin, therefore, that in a remote age, we too must have been turned wrong side out: an hypothesis, which, indirectly might account for our moral perversities: and also, for that otherwise nonsensical term--'the coat of the stomach;' for originally it must have been a surtout, instead of an inner garment."

"Pray, Azzageddi," said Media, "are you not a fool?"

"One of a jolly company, my lord; but some creatures besides wearing their surtouts within, sport their skeletons without: witness the lobster and turtle, who alive, study their own anatomies."

"Azzageddi, you are a zany."

"Pardon, my lord," said Mohi, "I think him more of a lobster; it's hard telling his jaws from his claws."

"Yes, Braid-Beard, I am a lobster, a mackerel, any thing you please; but my ancestors were kangaroos, not monkeys, as old Boddo erroneously



opined. My idea is more susceptible of demonstration than his. Among the deepest discovered land fossils, the relics of kangaroos are discernible, but no relics of men. Hence, there were no giants in those days; but on the contrary, kangaroos; and those kangaroos formed the first edition of mankind, since revised and corrected."

"What has become of our finises, or tails, then?" asked Mohi, wriggling in his seat.

"The old question, Mohi. But where are the tails of the tadpoles, after their gradual metamorphosis into frogs? Have frogs any tails, old man? Our tails, Mohi, were worn off by the process of civilization; especially at the period when our fathers began to adopt the sitting posture: the fundamental evidence of all civilization, for neither apes, nor savages, can be said to sit; invariably, they squat on their hams. Among barbarous tribes benches and settles are unknown. But, my lord Media, as your liege and loving subject I can not sufficiently deplore the deprivation of your royal tail. That stiff and vertebrated member, as we find it in those rustic kinsmen we have disowned, would have been useful as a supplement to your royal legs; and whereas my good lord is now fain to totter on two stanchions, were he only a kangaroo, like the monarchs of old, the majesty of Odo would be dignified, by standing firm on a tripod."

"A very witty conceit! But have a care, Azzageddi; your theory applies not to me."

"Babbalanja," said Mohi, "you must be the last of the kangaroos."

"I am, Mohi."

"But the old fashioned pouch or purse of your grandams?" hinted Media.

"My lord, I take it, that must have been transferred; nowadays our sex carries the purse."

"Ha, ha!"

"My lord, why this mirth? Let us be serious. Although man is no longer a kangaroo, he may be said to be an inferior species of plant. Plants proper are perhaps insensible of the circulation of their sap: we mortals are physically unconscious of the circulation of the blood; and for many ages were not even aware of the fact. Plants know nothing of their interiors:--three score years and ten we trundle about ours, and never get a peep at them; plants stand on their stalks:--we stalk on our legs; no plant flourishes over its dead root:--dead in the grave, man lives no longer above ground; plants die without food:--so we. And now for the difference. Plants elegantly inhale nourishment, without looking it up: like lords, they stand still and are served; and though green, never suffer from the colic:--whereas, we mortals must forage all round for our food: we cram our insides; and are loaded down with odious sacks and intestines. Plants make love

and multiply; but excel us in all amorous enticements, wooing and winning by soft pollens and essences. Plants abide in one place, and live: we must travel or die. Plants flourish without us: we must perish without them."

"Enough Azzageddi!" cried Media. "Open not thy lips till to-morrow."