

CHAPTER LVIII

They Visit The Extreme South Of Vivenza

We penetrated further and further into the valleys around; but, though, as elsewhere, at times we heard whisperings that promised an end to our wanderings;--we still wandered on; and once again, even Yoomy abated his sanguine hopes.

And now, we prepared to embark for the extreme south of the land.

But we were warned by the people, that in that portion of Vivenza, whither we were going, much would be seen repulsive to strangers. Such things, however, indulgent visitors overlooked. For themselves, they were well aware of those evils. Northern Vivenza had done all it could to assuage them; but in vain; the inhabitants of those southern valleys were a fiery, and intractable race; heeding neither expostulations, nor entreaties. They were wedded to their ways. Nay, they swore, that if the northern tribes persisted in intermeddlings, they would dissolve the common alliance, and establish a distinct confederacy among themselves.

Our coasting voyage at an end, our keels grated the beach among many prostrate palms, decaying, and washed by the billows. Though part and parcel of the shore we had left, this region seemed another land.

Fewer thriving things were seen; fewer cheerful sounds were heard.

"Here labor has lost his laugh!" cried Yoomy.

It was a great plain where we landed; and there, under a burning sun, hundreds of collared men were toiling in trenches, filled with the taro plant; a root most flourishing in that soil. Standing grimly over these, were men unlike them; armed with long thongs, which descended upon the toilers, and made wounds. Blood and sweat mixed; and in great drops, fell.

"Who eat these plants thus nourished?" cried Yoomy. "Are these men?" asked Babbalanja.

"Which mean you?" said Mohi.

Heeding him not, Babbalanja advanced toward the fore-most of those with the thongs,--one Nulli: a cadaverous, ghost-like man; with a low ridge of forehead; hair, steel-gray; and wondrous eyes;--bright, nimble, as the twin Corposant balls, playing about the ends of ships' royal-yards in gales.

The sun passed under a cloud; and Nulli, darting at Babbalanja those wondrous eyes, there fell upon him a baleful glare.

"Have they souls?" he asked, pointing to the serfs.

"No," said Nulli, "their ancestors may have had; but their souls have been bred out of their descendants; as the instinct of scent is killed in pointers."

Approaching one of the serfs, Media took him by the hand, and felt of it long; and looked into his eyes; and placed his ear to his side; and exclaimed, "Surely this being has flesh that is warm; he has Oro in his eye; and a heart in him that beats. I swear he is a man."

"Is this our lord the king?" cried Mohi, starting.

"What art thou," said Babbalanja to the serf. "Dost ever feel in thee a sense of right and wrong? Art ever glad or sad?--They tell us thou art not a man:--speak, then, for thyself; say, whether thou beliest thy Maker."

"Speak not of my Maker to me. Under the lash, I believe my masters, and account myself a brute; but in my dreams, bethink myself an angel. But I am bond; and my little ones;--their mother's milk is gall."

"Just Oro!" cried Yoomy, "do no thunders roll,--no lightnings flash in this accursed land!"

"Asylum for all Mardi's thralls!" cried Media.

"Incendiaries!" cried he with the wondrous eyes, "come ye, firebrands,

to light the flame of revolt? Know ye not, that here are many serfs, who, incited to obtain their liberty, might wreak some dreadful vengeance? Avaunt, thou king! thou horrified at this? Go back to Odo, and right her wrongs! These serfs are happier than thine; though thine, no collars wear; more happy as they are, than if free. Are they not fed, clothed, and cared for? Thy serfs pine for food: never yet did these; who have no thoughts, no cares."

"Thoughts and cares are life, and liberty, and immortality!" cried Babbalanja; "and are their souls, then, blown out as candles?"

"Ranter! they are content," cried Nulli. "They shed no tears."

"Frost never weeps," said Babbalanja; "and tears are frozen in those frigid eyes."

"Oh fettered sons of fettered mothers, conceived and born in manacles," cried Yoomy; "dragging them through life; and falling with them, clanking in the grave:--oh, beings as ourselves, how my stiff arm shivers to avenge you! 'Twere absolution for the matricide, to strike one rivet from your chains. My heart outswells its home!"

"Oro! Art thou?" cried Babbalanja; "and doth this thing exist? It shakes my little faith." Then, turning upon Null, "How can ye abide to sway this curs'd dominion?"

"Peace, fanatic! Who else may till unwholesome fields, but these? And as these beings are, so shall they remain; 'tis right and righteous! Maramma champions it!--I swear it! The first blow struck for them, dissolves the union of Vivenza's vales. The northern tribes well know it; and know me."

Said Media, "Yet if--"

"No more! another word, and, king as thou art, thou shalt be dungeoned:--here, there is such a law; thou art not among the northern tribes."

"And this is freedom!" murmured Media; "when heaven's own voice is throttled. And were these serfs to rise, and fight for it; like dogs, they would be hunted down by her pretended sons!"

"Pray, heaven!" cried Yoomy, "they may yet find a way to loose their bonds without one drop of blood. But hear me, Oro! were there no other way, and should their masters not relent, all honest hearts must cheer this tribe of Hamo on; though they cut their chains with blades thrice edged, and gory to the haft! 'Tis right to fight for freedom, whoever be the thrall."

"These South savannahs may yet prove battle-fields," said Mohi; gloomily, as we retraced our steps.

"Be it," said Yoomy. "Oro will van the right."

"Not always has it proved so," said Babbalanja. "Oft-times, the right fights single-handed against the world; and Oro champions none. In all things, man's own battles, man himself must fight. Yoomy: so far as feeling goes, your sympathies are not more hot than mine; but for these serfs you would cross spears; yet, I would not. Better present woes for some, than future woes for all."

"No need to fight," cried Yoomy, "to liberate that tribe of Hamo instantly; a way may be found, and no irretrievable evil ensue."

"Point it out, and be blessed, Yoomy."

"That is for Vivenza; but the head is dull, where the heart is cold."

"My lord," said Babbalanja, "you have startled us by your kingly sympathy for suffering; say thou, then, in what wise manner it shall be relieved."

"That is for Vivenza," said Media.

"Mohi, you are old: speak thou."

"Let Vivenza speak," said Mohi.

"Thus then we all agree; and weeping all but echo hard-hearted Nulli. Tears are not swords and wrongs seem almost natural as rights. For the righteous to suppress an evil, is sometimes harder than for others to uphold it. Humanity cries out against this vast enormity:-- not one man knows a prudent remedy. Blame not, then, the North; and wisely judge the South. Ere, as a nation, they became responsible, this thing was planted in their midst. Such roots strike deep. Place to-day those serfs in Dominora; and with them, all Vivenza's Past;-- and serfs, for many years, in Dominora, they would be. Easy is it to stand afar and rail. All men are censors who have lungs. We can say, the stars are wrongly marshaled. Blind men say the sun is blind. A thousand muscles wag our tongues; though our tongues were housed, that they might have a home. Whose is free from crime, let him cross himself--but hold his cross upon his lips. That he is not bad, is not of him. Potters' clay and wax are all, molded by hands invisible. The soil decides the man. And, ere birth, man wills not to be born here or there. These southern tribes have grown up with this thing; bond-women were their nurses, and bondmen serve them still. Nor are all their serfs such wretches as those we saw. Some seem happy: yet not as men. Unmanned, they know not what they are. And though, of all the south, Nulli must stand almost alone in his insensate creed; yet, to all wrong-doers, custom backs the sense of wrong. And if to every Mardian, conscience be the awarder of its own doom; then, of these tribes, many shall be found exempted from the least penalty of this sin. But sin it is, no less;--a blot, foul as the crater-pool of hell; it puts out the sun at noon; it parches all fertility; and, conscience or no

conscience--ere he die--let every master who wrenches bond-babe from mother, that the nipple tear; unwreathes the arms of sisters; or cuts the holy unity in twain; till apart fall man and wife, like one bleeding body cleft:--let that master thrice shrive his soul; take every sacrament; on his bended knees give up the ghost;--yet shall he die despairing; and live again, to die forever damned. The future is all hieroglyphics. Who may read? But, methinks the great laggard Time must now march up apace, and somehow befriend these thralls. It can not be, that misery is perpetually entailed; though, in a land proscribing primogeniture, the first-born and last of Hamo's tribe must still succeed to all their sires' wrongs. Yes. Time--all-healing Time--Time, great Philanthropist!--Time must befriend these thralls!"

"Oro grant it!" cried Yoomy "and let Mardi say, amen!"

"Amen! amen! amen!" cried echoes echoing echoes.

We traversed many of these southern vales; but as in Dominora,--so, throughout Vivenza, North and South,--Yillah harbored not.