

## CHAPTER LIX

### They Converse Of The Mollusca, Kings, Toad-Stools And Other Matters

Once more embarking, we gained Vivenza's southwestern side and there, beheld vast swarms of laborers discharging from canoes, great loads of earth; which they tossed upon the beach.

"It is true, then," said Media "that these freemen are engaged in digging down other lands, and adding them to their own, piece-meal. And this, they call extending their dominions agriculturally, and peaceably."

"My lord, they pay a price for every canoe-load," said Mohi.

"Ay, old man, holding the spear in one hand, and striking the bargain with the other."

"Yet charge it not upon all Vivenza," said Babbalanja. "Some of her tribes are hostile to these things: and when their countryman fight for land, are only warlike in opposing war."

"And therein, Babbalanja, is involved one of those anomalies in the condition of Vivenza," said Media, "which I can hardly comprehend. How comes it, that with so Many things to divide them, the valley-tribes still keep their mystic league intact?"

"All plain, it is because the model, whence they derive their union, is one of nature's planning. My lord, have you ever observed the mysterious federation subsisting among the molluscs of the Tunicata order,--in other words, a species of cuttle-fish, abounding at the bottom of the lagoon?"

"Yes: in clear weather about the reefs, I have beheld them time and again: but never with an eye to their political condition."

"Ah! my lord king, we should not cut off the nervous communication between our eyes, and our cerebellums."

"What were you about to say concerning the Tunicata order of mollusca, sir philosopher?"

"My very honorable lord, I hurry to conclude. They live in a compound structure; but though connected by membranous canals, freely communicating throughout the league--each member has a heart and stomach of its own; provides and digests its own dinners; and grins and bears its own gripes, without imparting the same to its neighbors. But if a prowling shark touches one member, it ruffles all. Precisely thus now with Vivenza. In that confederacy, there are as many consciences as tribes; hence, if one member on its own behalf, assumes aught afterwards repudiated, the sin rests on itself alone; is not participated."

"A very subtle explanation, Babbalanja. You must allude, then, to those recreant tribes; which, while in their own eyes presenting a sublime moral spectacle to Mardi,--in King Bello's, do but present a hopeless example of bad debts. And these, the tribes that boast of boundless wealth."

"Most true, my lord. But Bello errs, when for this thing, he stigmatizes all Vivenza, as a unity."

"Babbalanja, you yourself are made up of members:--then, if you be sick of a lumbago,--'tis not you that are unwell; but your spine."

"As you will, my lord. I have said. But to speak no more on that head --what sort of a sensation, think you, life is to such creatures as those mollusca?"

"Answer your own question, Babbalanja."

"I will; but first tell me what sort of a sensation life is to you, yourself, my lord."

"Pray answer that along with the other, Azzageddi."

"Directly; but tell me, if you will, my lord, what sort of a sensation life is to a toad-stool."

"Pray, Babbalanja put all three questions together; and then, do what you have often done before, pronounce yourself a lunatic."

"My lord, I beseech you, remind me not of that fact so often. It is true, but annoying. Nor will any wise man call another a fool."

"Do you take me for a mere man, then, Babbalanja, that you talk to me thus?"

"My demi-divine lord and master, I was deeply concerned at your indisposition last night:--may a loving subject inquire, whether his prince is completely recovered from the effect of those guavas?"

"Have a care, Azzageddi; you are far too courteous, to be civil. But proceed."

"I obey. In kings, mollusca, and toad-stools, life is one thing and the same. The Philosopher Dumdi pronounces it a certain febrile vibration of organic parts, operating upon the vis inertia of unorganized matter. But Bardianna says nay. Hear him. 'Who put together this marvelous mechanism of mine; and wound it up, to go for three score years and ten; when it runs out, and strikes Time's hours no more? And what is it, that daily and hourly renews, and by a miracle, creates in me my flesh and my blood? What keeps up the perpetual telegraphic communication between my outpost toes and

digits, and that domed grandee up aloft, my brain?--It is not I; nor you; nor he; nor it. No; when I place my hand to that king muscle my heart, I am appalled. I feel the great God himself at work in me. Oro is life."

"And what is death?" demanded Media.

"Death, my lord!--it is the deadest of all things."