

CHAPTER LX

Wherein, That Gallant Gentleman And Demi-God, King Media, Scepter In Hand, Throws Himself Into The Breach

Sailing south from Vivenza, not far from its coast, we passed a cluster of islets, green as new fledged grass; and like the mouths of floating cornucopias, their margins brimmed over upon the brine with flowers. On some, grew stately roses; on others stood twin-pillars; across others, tri-hued rainbows rested.

Cried Babbalanja, pointing to the last, "Franko's pledge of peace! with that, she loudly vaunts she'll span the reef!--Strike out all hues but red,--and the token's nearer truth."

All these isles were prolific gardens; where King Bello, and the Princes of Porpheero grew their most delicious fruits,--nectarines and grapes.

But, though hard by, Vivenza owned no garden here; yet longed and lusted; and her hottest tribes oft roundly swore, to root up all roses the half-reef over; pull down all pillars; and dissolve all rainbows.

"Mardi's half is ours;" said they. Stand back invaders! Full of vanity; and mirroring themselves in the future; they deemed all reflected there, their own.

"Twas now high noon.

"Methinks the sun grows hot," said Media, retreating deeper under the canopy. "Ho! Vee-Vee; have you no cooling beverage? none of that golden wine distilled from torrid grapes, and then sent northward to be cellared in an iceberg? That wine was placed among our stores. Search, search the crypt, little Vee-Vee! Ha, I see it!--that yellow gourd!--Come: drag it forth, my boy. Let's have the amber cups: so: pass them round;--fill all! Taji! my demi-god, up heart! Old Mohi, my babe, may you live ten thousand centuries! Ah! this way you mortals have of dying out at three score years and ten, is but a craven habit. So, Babbalanja! may you never die. Yoomy! my sweet poet, may you live to sing to me in Paradise. Ha, ha! would that we floated in this glorious stuff, instead of this pestilent brine.--Hark ye! were I to make a Mardi now, I'd have every continent a huge haunch of venison; every ocean a wine-vat! I'd stock every cavern with choice old spirits, and make three surplus suns to ripen the grapes all the year round. Let's drink to that!--Brimmers! So: may the next Mardi that's made, be one entire grape; and mine the squeezing!"

"Look, look! my lord," cried Yoomy, "what a glorious shore we pass."

Sallying out into the high golden noon, with golden-beaming goblets suspended, we gazed.

"This must be Kolumbo of the south," said Mohi.

It was a long, hazy reach of land; piled up in terraces, traced here and there with rushing streams, that worked up gold dust alluvian, and seemed to flash over pebbled diamonds. Heliotropes, sun-flowers, marigolds gemmed, or starred the violet meads, and vassal-like, still sunward bowed their heads. The rocks were pierced with grottoes, blazing with crystals, many-tinted.

It was a land of mints and mines; its east a ruby; west a topaz. Inland, the woodlands stretched an ocean, bottomless with foliage; its green surges bursting through cable-vines; like Xerxes' brittle chains which vainly sought to bind the Hellespont. Hence flowed a tide of forest sounds; of parrots, paroquets, macaws; blent with the howl of jaguars, hissing of anacondas, chattering of apes, and herons screaming.

Out from those depths up rose a stream.

The land lay basking in the world's round torrid brisket, hot with solar fire.

"No need here to land," cried Yoomy, "Yillah lurks not here."

"Heat breeds life, and sloth, and rage," said Babbalanja. "Here live bastard tribes and mongrel nations; wrangling and murdering to prove their freedom.--Refill, my lord."

"Methinks, Babbalanja, you savor of the mysterious parchment, in Vivenza read:--Ha? Yes, philosopher, these are the men, who toppled castles to make way for hovels; these, they who fought for freedom, but find it despotism to rule themselves. These, Babbalanja, are of the race, to whom a tyrant would prove a blessing." So saying he drained his cup.

"My lord, that last sentiment decides the authorship of the scroll. But, with deference, tyrants seldom can prove blessings; inasmuch as evil seldom eventuates in good. Yet will these people soon have a tyrant over them, if long they cleave to war. Of many javelins, one must prove a scepter; of many helmets, one a crown. It is but in the wearing.--Refill, my lord."

"Fools, fools!" cried Media, "these tribes hate us kings; yet know not, that Peace is War against all kings. We seldom are undone by spears, which are our ministers.--This wine is strong."

"Ha, now's the time! In his cups learn king-craft from a king. Ay, ay, my lord, your royal order will endure, so long as men will fight. Break the spears, and free the nations. Kings reap the harvests that wave on battle-fields. And oft you kings do snatch the aloe-flower, whose slow blossoming mankind watches for a hundred years.--Say on, my lord."

"All this I know; and, therefore, rest content. My children's children will be kings; though, haply, called by other titles. Mardi grows fastidious in names: we royalties will humor it. The steers would burst their yokes, but have not hands. The whole herd rears and plunges, but soon will bow again: the old, old way!"

"Yet, in Porpheero, strong scepters have been wrested from anointed hands. Mankind seems in arms."

"Let them arm on. They hate us:--good;--they always have; yet still we've reigned, son after sire. Sometimes they slay us, Babbalanja; pour out our marrow, as I this wine; but they spill no kinless blood. 'Twas justly held of old, that but to touch a monarch, was to strike at Oro.--Truth. The palest vengeance is a royal ghost; and regicides but father slaves. Thrones, not scepters, have been broken. Mohi, what of the past? Has it not ever proved so?"

"Pardon, my lord; the times seem changed. 'Tis held, that demi-gods no more rule by right divine. In Vivenza's land, they swear the last kings now reign in Mardi."

"Is the last day at hand, old man? Mohi, your beard is gray; but, Yoomy, listen. When you die, look around; mark then if any mighty change be seen. Old kingdoms may be on the wane; but new dynasties advance. Though revolutions rise to high spring-tide, monarchs will still drown hard;--monarchs survived the flood!"

"Are all our dreams, then, vain?" sighed Yoomy. "Is this no dawn of day that streaks the crimson East! Naught but the false and flickering lights which sometimes mock Aurora in the north! Ah, man, my brother! have all martyrs for thee bled in vain; in vain we poets sang, and prophets spoken? Nay, nay; great Mardi, helmed and mailed, strikes at Oppression's shield, and challenges to battle! Oro will defend the right, and royal crests must roll."

"Thus, Yoomy, ages since, you mortal poets sang; but the world may not be moved from out the orbit in which first it rolled. On the map that charts the spheres, Mardi is marked 'the world of kings.' Round centuries on centuries have wheeled by:--has all this been its nonage? Now, when the rocks grow gray, does man first sprout his beard? Or, is your golden time, your equinoctial year, at hand, that your race fast presses toward perfection; and every hand grasps at a scepter, that kings may be no more?"

"But free Vivenza! Is she not the star, that must, ere long, lead up the constellations, though now unrisen? No kings are in Vivenza; yet, spite her thralls, in that land seems more of good than elsewhere. Our hopes are not wild dreams: Vivenza cheers our hearts. She is a rainbow to the isles!"

"Ay, truth it is, that in Vivenza they have prospered. But thence it comes not, that all men may be as they. Are all men of one heart and

brain; one bone and sinew? Are all nations sprung of Dominora's loins?
Or, has Vivenza yet proved her creed? Yoomy! the years that prove a
man, prove not a nation. But two kings'-reigns have passed since
Vivenza was a monarch's. Her climacteric is not come; hers is not yet
a nation's manhood even; though now in childhood, she anticipates her
youth, and lusts for empire like any czar. Yoomy! judge not yet. Time
hath tales to tell. Many books, and many long, long chapters, are
wanting to Vivenza's history; and whet history but is full of blood?"

"There stop, my lord," said Babbalanja, "nor aught predict. Fate
laughs at prophets; and of all birds, the raven is a liar!"