

## CHAPTER LXII

### They Encounter Gold-Hunters

Now, northward coasting along Kolumbo's Western shore, whence came the same wild forest-sounds, as from the Eastern; and where we landed not, to seek among those wrangling tribes;--after many, many days, we spied prow after prow, before the wind all northward bound: sails wide-spread, and paddles plying: scaring the fish from before them.

Their inmates answered not our earnest hail.

But as they sped, with frantic glee, in one long chorus thus they sang:--

We rovers bold,  
To the land of Gold,  
Over bowling billows are gliding:  
Eager to toil,  
For the golden spoil,  
And every hardship biding.  
See! See!  
Before our prows' resistless dashes,  
The gold-fish fly in golden flashes!  
'Neath a sun of gold,  
We rovers bold,

On the golden land are gaining;  
And every night,  
We steer aright,  
By golden stars unwaning!  
All fires burn a golden glare:  
No locks so bright as golden hair!  
All orange groves have golden gushings:  
All mornings dawn with golden flushings!  
In a shower of gold, say fables old,  
A maiden was won by the god of gold!  
In golden goblets wine is beaming:  
On golden couches kings are dreaming!  
The Golden Rule dries many tears!  
The Golden Number rules the spheres!  
Gold, gold it is, that sways the nations:  
Gold! gold! the center of all rotations!  
On golden axles worlds are turning:  
With phosphorescence seas are burning!  
All fire-flies flame with golden gleamings:  
Gold-hunters' hearts with golden dreamings!  
With golden arrows kings are slain:  
With gold we'll buy a freeman's name!  
In toilsome trades, for scanty earnings,  
At home we've slaved, with stifled yearnings:  
No light! no hope! Oh, heavy woe!  
When nights fled fast, and days dragged slow.

But joyful now, with eager eye,  
Fast to the Promised Land we fly:  
Where in deep mines,  
The treasure shines;  
Or down in beds of golden streams,  
The gold-flakes glance in golden gleams!  
How we long to sift,  
That yellow drift!  
Rivers! Rivers! cease your going!  
Sand-bars! rise, and stay the tide!  
'Till we've gained the golden flowing;  
And in the golden haven ride!

"Quick, quick, my lord," cried Yoomy, "let us follow them; and from the golden waters where she lies, our Yillah may emerge."

"No, no," said Babbalanja,--"no Yillah there!--from yonder promised-land, fewer seekers will return, than go. Under a gilded guise, happiness is still their instinctive aim. But vain, Yoomy, to snatch at Happiness. Of that we may not pluck and eat. It is the fruit of our own toilsome planting; slow it grows, nourished by many teats, and all our earnest tendings. Yet ere it ripen, frosts may nip;--and then, we plant again; and yet again. Deep, Yoomy, deep, true treasure lies; deeper than all Mardi's gold, rooted to Mardi's axis. But unlike gold, it lurks in every soil,--all Mardi over. With golden pills and potions is sickness warded off?--the shrunken veins of age, dilated

with new wine of youth? Will gold the heart-ache cure? turn toward us  
hearts estranged? will gold, on solid centers empires fix? 'Tis toil  
world-wasted to toil in mines. Were all the isles gold globes, set in  
a quicksilver sea, all Mardi were then a desert. Gold is the only  
poverty; of all glittering ills the direst. And that man might not  
impoverish himself thereby, Oro hath hidden it, with all other  
banes,--saltpeter and explosives, deep in mountain bowels, and river-  
beds. But man still will mine for it; and mining, dig his doom.--  
Yoomy, Yoomy!--she we seek, lurks not in the Golden Hills!"

"Lo, a vision!" cried Yoomy, his hands wildly passed across his eyes.  
"A vast and silent bay, belted by silent villages:--gaunt dogs howling  
over grassy thresholds at stark corpses of old age and infancy; gray  
hairs mingling with sweet flaxen curls; fields, with turned furrows,  
choked with briars; arbor-floors strown over with hatchet-helves,  
rotting in the iron; a thousand paths, marked with foot-prints, all  
inland leading, none villageward; and strown with traces, as of a  
flying host. On: over forest--hill, and dale--and lo! the golden  
region! After the glittering spoil, by strange river-margins, and  
beneath impending cliffs, thousands delve in quicksands; and, sudden,  
sink in graves of their own making: with gold dust mingling their own  
ashes. Still deeper, in more solid ground, other thousands slave; and  
pile their earth so high, they gasp for air, and die; their comrades  
mounting on them, and delving still, and dying--grave pile on grave!  
Here, one haggard hunter murders another in his pit; and murdering,  
himself is murdered by a third. Shrieks and groans! cries and curses!

It seems a golden Hell! With many camels, a sleek stranger comes--  
pauses before the shining heaps, and shows his treasures: yams and  
bread-fruit. 'Give, give,' the famished hunters cry-- 'a thousand  
shekels for a yam!--a prince's ransom for a meal!--Oh,  
stranger! on our knees we worship thee:--take, take our gold; but let  
us live!' Yams are thrown them and they fight. Then he who toiled not,  
dug not, slaved not, straight loads his caravans with gold; regains  
the beach, and swift embarks for home. 'Home! home!' the hunters cry,  
with bursting eyes. 'With this bright gold, could we but join our  
waiting wives, who wring their hands on distant shores, all then were  
well. But we can not fly; our prows lie rotting on the beach. Ah!  
home! thou only happiness!--better thy silver earnings than all these  
golden findings. Oh, bitter end to all our hopes--we die in golden  
graves."