

CHAPTER LXX

They Land At Hooloomooloo

"Keep all three prows, for yonder rock." cried Media; "No sadness on this merry morn! And now for the Isle of Cripples,--even Hooloomooloo."

"The Isle of Cripples?"

"Ay; why not? Mohi, tell how they came to club." In substance, this was the narration.

Averse to the barbarous custom of destroying at birth all infants not symmetrically formed; but equally desirous of removing from their sight those unfortunate beings; the islanders of a neighboring group had long ago established an asylum for cripples; where they lived, subject to their own regulations; ruled by a king of their own election; in short, forming a distinct class of beings by themselves.

One only restriction was placed upon them: on no account must they quit the isle assigned them. And to the surrounding islanders, so unpleasant the sight of a distorted mortal, that a stranger landing at Hooloomooloo, was deemed a prodigy. Wherefore, respecting any knowledge of aught beyond them, the cripples were well nigh as isolated, as if Hooloomooloo was the only terra-firma extant.

Dwelling in a community of their own, these unfortunates, who otherwise had remained few in number, increased and multiplied greatly. Nor did successive generations improve in symmetry upon those preceding them.

Soon, we drew nigh to the isle.

Heaped up, and jagged with rocks; and, here and there, covered with dwarfed, twisted thickets, it seemed a fit place for its denizens.

Landing, we were surrounded by a heterogeneous mob; and thus escorted, took our way inland, toward the abode of their lord, King Yoky.

What a scene!

Here, helping himself along with two crotched roots, hobbled a dwarf without legs; another stalked before, one arm fixed in the air, like a lightning rod; a third, more active than any, seal-like, flirted a pair of flippers, and went skipping along; a fourth hopped on a solitary pin, at every bound, spinning round like a top, to gaze; while still another, furnished with feelers or fins, rolled himself up in a ball, bowling over the ground in advance.

With curious instinct, the blind stuck close to our side; with their chattering finger, the deaf and the dumb described angles, obtuse and

acute in the air; and like stones rolling down rocky ravines, scores of stammerers stuttered. Discord wedded deformity. All asses' brays were now harmonious memories; all Calibans, as angels.

Yet for every stare we gave them, three stares they gave us.

At last, we halted before a tenement of rude stones; crooked Banian boughs its rafters, thatched with fantastic leaves. So rambling and irregular its plan, it seemed thrown up by the eruption, according to sage Mohi, the origin of the isle itself.

Entering, we saw King Yoky.

Ah! sadly lacking was he, in all the requisites of an efficient ruler. Deaf and dumb he was; and save arms, minus every thing but an indispensable trunk and head. So huge his all-comprehensive mouth, it seemed to swallow up itself.

But shapeless, helpless as was Yoky,--as king of Hooloomooloo, he was competent; the state being a limited monarchy, of which his Highness was but the passive and ornamental head.

As his visitors advanced, he fell to gossiping with his fingers: a servitor interpreting. Very curious to note the rapidity with which motion was translated into sound; and the simultaneousness with which meaning made its way through four successive channels to the

mind--hand, sight, voice, and tympanum.

Much amazement His Highness now expressed; horrified his glances.

"Why club such frights as ye? Herd ye, to keep in countenance; or are afraid of your own hideousness, that ye dread to go alone? Monsters! speak."

"Great Oro!" cried Mohi, "are we then taken for cripples, by the very King of the Cripples? My lord, are not our legs and arms all right?"

"Comelier ones were never turned by turners, Mohi. But royal Yoky! in sooth we feel abashed before thee."

Some further stares were then exchanged; when His Highness sought to know, whether there were any Comparative Anatomists among his visitors.

"Comparative Anatomists! not one."

"And why may King Yoky ask that question?" inquired Babbalanja.

Then was made the following statement.

During the latter part of his reign, when he seemed fallen into his dotage, the venerable predecessor of King Yoky had been much attached

to an old gray-headed Chimpanzee, one day found meditating in the woods. Rozoko was his name. He was very grave, and reverend of aspect; much of a philosopher. To him, all gnarled and knotty subjects were familiar; in his day he had cracked many a crabbed nut. And so in love with his Timonean solitude was Rozoko, that it needed many bribes and bland persuasions, to induce him to desert his mossy, hillside, misanthropic cave, for the distracting tumult of a court.

But ere long, promoted to high offices, and made the royal favorite, the woodland sage forgot his forests; and, love for love, returned the aged king's caresses. Ardent friends they straight became; dined and drank together; with quivering lips, quaffed long-drawn, sober bumpers; comparing all their past experiences; and canvassing those hidden themes, on which octogenarians dilate.

For when the fires and broils of youth are passed, and Mardi wears its truer aspect--then we love to think, not act; the present seems more unsubstantial than the past; then, we seek out gray-beards like ourselves; and hold discourse of palsies, hearses, shrouds, and tombs; appoint our undertakers; our mantles gather round us, like to winding-sheets; and every night lie down to die. Then, the world's great bubble bursts; then, Life's clouds seem sweeping by, revealing heaven to our straining eyes; then, we tell our beads, and murmur pater-nosters; and in trembling accents cry--"Oro! be merciful."

So, the monarch and Rozoko.

But not always were they thus. Of bright, cheerful mornings, they took slow, tottering rambles in the woods; nodding over grotesque walking-sticks, of the Chimpanzee's handiwork. For sedate Rozoko was a diletante-arborist: an amateur in canes. Indeed, canes at last became his hobby. For half daft with age, sometimes he straddled his good staff and gently rode abroad, to take the salubrious evening air; deeming it more befitting exercise, at times, than walking. Into this menage, he soon initiated his friend, the king; and side by side they often pranced; or, wearying of the saddle, dismounted; and paused to ponder over prostrate palms, decaying across the path. Their mystic rings they counted; and, for every ring, a year in their own calendars.

Now, so closely did the monarch cleave to the Chimpanzee, that, in good time, summoning his subjects, earnestly he charged it on them, that at death, he and his faithful friend should be buried in one tomb.

It came to pass, the monarch died; and Poor Rozoko, now reduced to second childhood, wailed most dismally:--no one slept that night in Hooloomooloo. Never did he leave the body; and at last, slowly going round it thrice, he laid him down; close nestled; and noiselessly expired.

The king's injunctions were remembered; and one vault received them

both.

Moon followed moon; and wrought upon by jeers and taunts, the people of the isle became greatly scandalized, that a base-born baboon should share the shroud of their departed lord; though they themselves had tucked in the aged AENEAS fast by the side of his Achates.

They straight resolved, to build another vault; and over it, a lofty cairn; and thither carry the remains they revered.

But at the disinterring, a sad perplexity arose. For lo surpassing SAUL and JONATHAN, not even in decay were these fast friends divided. So mingled every relic,--ilium and ulna, carpus and metacarpus;--and so similar the corresponding parts, that like the literary remains of Beaumont and of Fletcher, which was which, no spectacles could tell. Therefore, they desisted; lest the towering monument they had reared, might commemorate an ape, and not a king.

Such the narration; hearing which, my lord MEDIA kept stately silence. But in courtly phrase, as beseemed him, BABBALANJA, turban in hand, thus spoke:--

"My concern is extreme, King YOKY, at the embarrassment into which your island is thrown. Nor less my grief, that I myself am not the man, to put an end to it. I could weep that Comparative Anatomists are not so numerous now, as hereafter they assuredly must become; when

their services shall be in greater request; when, at the last, last day of all, millions of noble and ignoble spirits will loudly clamor for lost skeletons; when contending claimants shall start up for one poor, carious spine; and, dog-like, we shall quarrel over our own bones."

Then entered dwarf-stewards, and major-domos; aloft bearing twisted antlers; all hollowed out in goblets, grouped; announcing dinner.

Loving not, however, to dine with misshapen Mardians, King Media was loth to move. But Babbalanja, quoting the old proverb--"Strike me in the face, but refuse not my yams," induced him to sacrifice his fastidiousness.

So, under a flourish of ram-horn bugles, court and company proceeded to the banquet.

Central was a long, dislocated trunk of a wild Banian; like a huge centipede crawling on its hundred branches, sawn of even lengths for legs. This table was set out with wry-necked gourds; deformities of calabashes; and shapeless trenchers, dug out of knotty woods.

The first course was shrimp-soup, served in great clamp-shells; the second, lobsters, cuttle-fish, crabs, cockles, cray-fish; the third, hunchbacked roots of the Taro-plant--plantains, perversely curling at the end, like the inveterate tails of pertinacious pigs; and for

dessert, ill-shaped melons, huge as idiots' heads, plainly suffering from water in the brain.

Now these viands were commended to the favorable notice of all guests; not only for their delicacy of flavor, but for their symmetry.

And in the intervals of the courses, we were bored with hints to admire numerous objects of vertu: bow-legged stools of mangrove wood; zig-zag rapiers of bone; armlets of grampus-vertebrae; outlandish tureens of the callipees of terrapin; and cannakins of the skulls of baboons.

The banquet over, with many congees, we withdrew.

Returning to the water-side, we passed a field, where dwarfs were laboring in beds of yams, heaping the soil around the roots, by scratching it backward; as a dog.

All things in readiness, Yoky's valet, a tri-armed dwarf, treated us to a glorious start, by giving each canoe a vigorous triple-push, crying, "away with ye, monsters!"

Nor must it be omitted that just previous to embarking, Vee-Vee, spying a curious looking stone, turned it over, and found a snake.