

CHAPTER LXXIV

A Death-Cloud Sweeps By Them, As They Sail

Next day, a fearful sight!

As in Sooloo's seas, one vast water-spout will, sudden, form: and whirling, chase the flying Malay keels; so, before a swift-winged cloud, a thousand prows sped by, leaving braided, foaming wakes; their crowded inmates' arms, in frenzied supplications wreathed; like tangled forest-boughs.

"See, see," cried Yoomy, "how the Death-cloud flies! Let us dive down in the sea."

"Nay," said Babbalanja. "All things come of Oro; if we must drown, let Oro drown us."

"Down sails: drop paddles," said Media: "here we float."

Like a rushing bison, sweeping by, the Death-cloud grazed us with its foam; and whirling in upon the thousand prows beyond, sudden burst in deluges; and scooping out a maelstrom, dragged down every plank and soul.

Long we rocked upon the circling billows, which expanding from that center, dashed every isle, till, moons after-ward, faint, they laved

all Mardi's reef.

"Thanks unto Oro," murmured Mohi, "this heart still beats."

That sun-flushed eve, we sailed by many tranquil harbors, whence fled those thousand prows. Serene, the waves ran up their strands; and chimed around the unharmed stakes of palm, to which the thousand prows that morning had been fastened.

"Flying death, they ran to meet it," said Babbalanja. "But 'tis not that they fled, they died; for maelstroms, of these harbors, the Death-cloud might have made. But they died, because they might not longer live. Could we gain one glimpse of the great calendar of eternity, all our names would there be found, glued against their dates of death. We die by land, and die by sea; we die by earthquakes, famines, plagues, and wars; by fevers, agues; woe, or mirth excessive. This mortal air is one wide pestilence, that kills us all at last. Whom the Death-cloud spares, sleeping, dies in silent watches of the night. He whom the spears of many battles could not slay, dies of a grape-stone, beneath the vine-clad bower he built, to shade declining years. We die, because we live. But none the less does Babbalanja quake. And if he flies not, 'tis because he stands the center of a circle; its every point a leveled dart; and every bow, bent back:--a twang, and Babbalanja dies."