

CHAPTER LXXXII

They Sail From Night To Day

Ere long the three canoes lurched heavily in a violent swell. Like palls, the clouds swept to and fro, hooding the gibbering winds. At every head-beat wave, our arching prows reared up, and shuddered; the night ran out in rain.

Whither to turn we knew not; nor what haven to gain; so dense the darkness.

But at last, the storm was over. Our shattered prows seemed gilded. Day dawned; and from his golden vases poured red wine upon the waters.

That flushed tide rippled toward us; floating from the east, a lone canoe; in which, there sat a mild, old man; a palm-bough in his hand: a bird's beak, holding amaranth and myrtles, his slender prow.

"Alma's blessing upon ye, voyagers! ye look storm-worn."

"The storm we have survived, old man; and many more, we yet must ride," said Babbalanja.

"The sun is risen; and all is well again. We but need to repair our prows," said Media.

"Then, turn aside to Serenia, a pleasant isle, where all are welcome; where many storm-worn rovers land at last to dwell."

"Serenia?" said Babbalanja; "methinks Serenia is that land of enthusiasts, of which we hear, my lord; where Martians pretend to the unnatural conjunction of reason with things revealed; where Alma, they say, is restored to his divine original; where, deriving their principles from the same sources whence flow the persecutions of Maramma,--men strive to live together in gentle bonds of peace and charity;--folly! folly!"

"Ay," said Media; "much is said of those people of Serenia; but their social fabric must soon fall to pieces; it is based upon the idlest of theories. Thanks for thy courtesy, old man, but we care not to visit thy isle. Our voyage has an object, which, something tells me, will not be gained by touching at thy shores. Elsewhere we may refit. Farewell! 'Tis breezing; set the sails! Farewell, old man."

"Nay, nay! think again; the distance is but small; the wind fair,--but 'tis ever so, thither;--come: we, people of Serenia, are most anxious to be seen of Mardi; so that if our manner of life seem good, all Mardi may live as we. In blessed Alma's name, I pray ye, come!"

"Shall we then, my lord?"

"Lead on, old man! We will e'en see this wondrous isle."

So, guided by the venerable stranger, by noon we descried an island
blooming with bright savannas, and pensive with peaceful groves.

Wafted from this shore, came balm of flowers, and melody of birds: a
thousand summer sounds and odors. The dimpled tide sang round our
splintered prows; the sun was high in heaven, and the waters were deep
below.

"The land of Love!" the old man murmured, as we neared the beach,
where innumerable shells were gently rolling in the playful surf, and
murmuring from their tuneful valves. Behind, another, and a verdant
surf played against lofty banks of leaves; where the breeze, likewise,
found its shore.

And now, emerging from beneath the trees, there came a goodly
multitude in flowing robes; palm-branches in their hands; and as they
came, they sang:--

Hail! voyagers, hail!

Whence e'er ye come, where'er ye rove,

No calmer strand,

No sweeter land,

Will e'er ye view, than the Land of Love!

Hail! voyagers, hail!

To these, our shores, soft gales invite:

The palm plumes wave,

The billows lave,

And hither point fix'd stars of light!

Hail! voyagers, hail!

Think not our groves wide brood with gloom;

In this, our isle,

Bright flowers smile:

Full urns, rose-heaped, these valleys bloom.

Hail! voyagers, hail!

Be not deceived; renounce vain things;

Ye may not find

A tranquil mind,

Though hence ye sail with swiftest wings.

Hail! voyagers, hail!

Time flies full fast; life soon is o'er;

And ye may mourn,

That hither borne,

Ye left behind our pleasant shore.