

CHAPTER LXXXIII

They Land

The song was ended; and as we gained the strand, the crowd embraced us; and called us brothers; ourselves and our humblest attendants.

"Call ye us brothers, whom ere now ye never saw?"

"Even so," said the old man, "is not Oro the father of all? Then, are we not brothers? Thus Alma, the master, hath commanded."

"This was not our reception in Maramma," said Media, "the appointed place of Alma; where his precepts are preserved."

"No, no," said Babbalanja; "old man! your lesson of brotherhood was learned elsewhere than from Alma; for in Maramma and in all its tributary isles true brotherhood there is none. Even in the Holy Island many are oppressed; for heresies, many murdered; and thousands perish beneath the altars, groaning with offerings that might relieve them."

"Alas! too true. But I beseech ye, judge not Alma by all those who profess his faith. Hast thou thyself his records searched?"

"Fully, I have not. So long, even from my infancy, have I witnessed

the wrongs committed in his name; the sins and inconsistencies of his followers; that thinking all evil must flow from a congenial fountain, I have scorned to study the whole record of your Master's life. By parts I only know it."

"Ah! baneful error! But thus is it, brothers!! that the wisest are set against the Truth, because of those who wrest it from itself."

"Do ye then claim to live what your Master hath spoken? Are your precepts practices?"

"Nothing do we claim: we but 'earnestly endeavor."

"Tell me not of your endeavors, but of your life. What hope for the fatherless among ye?"

"Adopted as a son."

"Of one poor, and naked?"

"Clothed, and he wants for naught."

"If ungrateful, he smite you?"

"Still we feed and clothe him."

"If yet an ingrate?"

"Long, he can not be; for Love is a fervent fire."

"But what, if widely he dissent from your belief in Alma;--then, surely, ye must cast him forth?"

"No, no; we will remember, that if he dissent from us, we then equally dissent from him; and men's faculties are Oro-given. Nor will we say that he is wrong, and we are right; for this we know not, absolutely. But we care not for men's words; we look for creeds in actions; which are the truthful symbols of the things within. He who hourly prays to Alma, but lives not up to world-wide love and charity--that man is more an unbeliever than he who verbally rejects the Master, but does his bidding. Our lives are our Amens."

"But some say that what your Alma teaches is wholly new--a revelation of things before unimagined, even by the poets. To do his bidding, then, some new faculty must be vouchsafed, whereby to apprehend aright."

"So have I always thought," said Mohi.

"If Alma teaches love, I want no gift to learn," said Yoomy.

"All that is vital in the Master's faith, lived here in Mardi, and in humble dells was practiced, long previous to the Master's coming. But

never before was virtue so lifted up among us, that all might see; never before did rays from heaven descend to glorify it, But are Truth, Justice, and Love, the revelations of Alma alone? Were they never heard of till he came? Oh! Alma but opens unto us our own hearts. Were his precepts strange we would recoil--not one feeling would respond; whereas, once hearkened to, our souls embrace them as with the instinctive tendrils of a vine."

"But," said Babbalanja, "since Alma, they say, was solely intent upon the things of the Mardi to come--which to all, must seem uncertain--of what benefit his precepts for the daily lives led here?"

"Would! would that Alma might once more descend! Brother! were the turf our everlasting pillow, still would the Master's faith answer a blessed end;--making us more truly happy here. That is the first and chief result; for holy here, we must be holy elsewhere. 'Tis Mardi, to which loved Alma gives his laws; not Paradise."

"Full soon will I be testing all these things," murmured Mohi.

"Old man," said Media, "thy years and Mohi's lead ye both to dwell upon the unknown future. But speak to me of other themes. Tell me of this island and its people. From all I have heard, and now behold, I gather that here there dwells no king; that ye are left to yourselves; and that this mystic Love, ye speak of, is your ruler. Is it so? Then, are ye full as visionary, as Mardi rumors. And though for a time, ye

may have prospered,--long, ye can not be, without some sharp lesson to convince ye, that your faith in Mardian virtue is entirely vain."

"Truth. We have no king; for Alma's precepts rebuke the arrogance of place and power. He is the tribune of mankind; nor will his true faith be universal Mardian's, till our whole race is kingless. But think not we believe in man's perfection. Yet, against all good, he is not absolutely set. In his heart, there is a germ. That we seek to foster. To that we cling; else, all were hopeless!"

"Your social state?"

"It is imperfect; and long must so remain. But we make not the miserable many support the happy few. Nor by annulling reason's laws, seek to breed equality, by breeding anarchy. In all things, equality is not for all. Each has his own. Some have wider groves of palms than others; fare better; dwell in more tasteful arbors; oftener renew their fragrant thatch. Such differences must be. But none starve outright, while others feast. By the abounding, the needy are supplied. Yet not by statute, but from dictates, born half dormant in us, and warmed into life by Alma. Those dictates we but follow in all we do; we are not dragged to righteousness; but go running. Nor do we live in common. For vice and virtue blindly mingled, form a union where vice too often proves the alkali. The vicious we make dwell apart, until reclaimed. And reclaimed they soon must be, since every thing invites. The sin of others rests not upon our heads: none we

drive to crime. Our laws are not of vengeance bred, but Love and Alma."

"Fine poetry all this," said Babbalanja, "but not so new. Oft do they warble thus in bland Maramma!"

"It sounds famously, old man!" said Media, "but men are men. Some must starve; some be scourged.--Your doctrines are impracticable."

"And are not these things enjoined by Alma? And would Alma inculcate the impossible? of what merit, his precepts, unless they may be practiced? But, I beseech ye, speak no more of Maramma. Alas! did Alma revisit Mardi, think you, it would be among those Morals he would lay his head?"

"No, no," said Babbalanja, "as an intruder he came; and an intruder would he be this day. On all sides, would he jar our social systems."

"Not here, not here! Rather would we welcome Alma hungry and athirst, than though he came floating hither on the wings of seraphs; the blazing zodiac his diadem! In all his aspects we adore him; needing no pomp and power to kindle worship. Though he came from Oro; though he did miracles; though through him is life;--not for these things alone, do we thus love him. We love him from, an instinct in us;--a fond, filial, reverential feeling. And this would yet stir in our souls, were death our end; and Alma incapable of befriending us. We love him

because we do."

"Is this man divine?" murmured Babbalanja. "But thou speakest most earnestly of adoring Alma:--I see no temples in your groves."

"Because this isle is all one temple to his praise; every leaf is consecrated his. We fix not Alma here and there; and say,--'those groves for Him, and these broad fields for us.' It is all his own; and we ourselves; our every hour of life; and all we are, and have."

"Then, ye forever fast and pray; and stand and sing; as at long intervals the censer-bearers in Maramma supplicate their gods."

"Alma forbid! We never fast; our aspirations are our prayers; our lives are worship. And when we laugh, with human joy at human things, --then do we most sound great Oro's praise, and prove the merit of sweet Alma's love! Our love in Alma makes us glad, not sad. Ye speak of temples;--behold! 'tis by not building them, that we widen charity among us. The treasures which, in the islands round about, are lavished on a thousand fanes;--with these we every day relieve the Master's suffering disciples. In Mardi, Alma preached in open fields, --and must his worshipers have palaces?"

"No temples, then no priests;" said Babbalanja, "for few priests will enter where lordly arches form not the portal."

"We have no priests, but one; and he is Alma's self. We have his precepts: we seek no comments but our hearts."

"But without priests and temples, how long will flourish this your faith?" said Media.

"For many ages has not this faith lived, in spite of priests and temples? and shall it not survive them? What we believe, we hold divine; and things divine endure forever."

"But how enlarge your bounds? how convert the vicious, without persuasion of some special seers? Must your religion go hand in hand with all things secular?"

"We hold not, that one man's words should be a gospel to the rest; but that Alma's words should be a gospel to us all. And not by precepts would we have some few endeavor to persuade; but all, by practice, fix convictions, that the life we lead is the life for all. We are apostles, every one. Where'er we go, our faith we carry in our hands, and hearts. It is our chiefest joy. We do not put it wide away six days out of seven; and then, assume it. In it we all exult, and joy; as that which makes us happy here; as that, without which, we could be happy nowhere; as something meant for this time present, and henceforth for aye. It is our vital mode of being; not an incident. And when we die, this faith shall be our pillow; and when we rise, our staff; and at the end, our crown. For we are all immortal. Here, Alma

joins with our own hearts, confirming nature's promptings."

"How eloquent he is!" murmured Babbalanja. "Some black cloud seems floating from me. I begin to see. I come out in light. The sharp fang tears me less. The forked flames wane. My soul sets back like ocean streams, that sudden change their flow. Have I been sane? Quickened in me is a hope. But pray you, old man--say on--methinks, that in your faith must be much that jars with reason."

"No, brother! Right-reason, and Alma, are the same; else Alma, not reason, would we reject. The Master's great command is Love; and here do all things wise, and all things good, unite. Love is all in all. The more we love, the more we know; and so reversed. Oro we love; this isle; and our wide arms embrace all Mardi like its reef. How can we err, thus feeling? We hear loved Alma's pleading, prompting voice, in every breeze, in every leaf; we see his earnest eye in every star and flower."

"Poetry!" cried Yoomy; "and poetry is truth! He stirs me."

"When Alma dwelt in Mardi, 'twas with the poor and friendless. He fed the famishing; he healed the sick; he bound up wounds. For every precept that he spoke, he did ten thousand mercies. And Alma is our loved example."

"Sure, all this is in the histories!" said Mohi, starting.

"But not alone to poor and friendless, did Alma wend his charitable way. From lowly places, he looked up; and long invoked great chieftains in their state; and told them all their pride was vanity; and bade them ask their souls. 'In me,' he cried, 'is that heart of mild content, which in vain ye seek in rank and title. I am Love: love ye then me.'"

"Cease, cease, old man!" cried Media; "thou movest me beyond my seeming. What thoughts are these? Have done! Wouldst thou unking me?"

"Alma is for all; for high and low. Like heaven's own breeze, he lifts the lily from its lowly stem, and sweeps, reviving, through the palmy groves. High thoughts he gives the sage, and humble trust the simple. Be the measure what it may, his grace doth fill it to the brim. He lays the lashings of the soul's wild aspirations after things unseen; oil he poureth on the waters; and stars come out of night's black concave at his great command. In him is hope for all; for all, unbounded joys. Fast locked in his loved clasp, no doubts dismay. He opes the eye of faith and shuts the eye of fear. He is all we pray for, and beyond; all, that in the wildest hour of ecstasy, rapt fancy paints in bright Auroras upon the soul's wide, boundless Orient!"

"Oh, Alma, Alma! prince divine!" cried Babbalanja, sinking on his knees--"in thee, at last, I find repose. Hope perches in my heart a dove;--a thousand rays illumine;--all Heaven's a sun. Gone, gone! are

all distracting doubts. Love and Alma now prevail. I see with other eyes:--Are these my hands? What wild, wild dreams were mine;--I have been mad. Some things there are, we must not think of. Beyond one obvious mark, all human lore is vain. Where have I lived till now? Had dark Maramma's zealot tribe but murmured to me as this old man, long since had I, been wise! Reason no longer domineers; but still doth speak. All I have said ere this, that wars with Alma's precepts, I here recant. Here I kneel, and own great Oro and his sovereign son."

"And here another kneels and prays," cried Yoomy.

"In Alma all my dreams are found, my inner longings for the Love supreme, that prompts my every verse. Summer is in my soul."

"Nor now, too late for these gray hairs," cried Mohi, with devotion.

"Alma, thy breath is on my soul. I see bright light."

"No more a demigod," cried Media, "but a subject to our common chief. No more shall dismal cries be heard from Odo's groves. Alma, I am thine."

With swimming eyes the old man kneeled; and round him grouped king, sage, gray hairs, and youth.

There, as they kneeled, and as the old man blessed them, the setting sun burst forth from mists, gilded the island round about, shed rays

upon their heads, and went down in a glory--all the East radiant with
red burnings, like an altar-fire.