CHAPTER X.

AN ECLECTIC DOGMA.

In the Middle Globe, where labour is so severe as to tax the strength to its utmost limit, the o'erwrought brain and tired limbs strive to regain their normal condition by a laziness on Sunday mornings as unnatural to the properly constituted as the excessive strain of week days is hurtful. In Zara, where all worked according to their fitness, to a reasonable extent, there was no overtaxing of nature, so naturally everyone rose as usual on Sunday morning, looking forward to a day of quiet pleasure.

In Ura it was different; there the well-salaried bishop would go to church on Sunday in his carriage, with one or two coachmen, and preach against all manner of work on that day, either by "Thy man-servant or maid-servant," and would then go home to a well-served hot dinner, which necessitated his servants working; probably he would make up for thus in practice violating his precept, by closing all the picture-galleries, museums, and such-like innocent places of amusement, where the poor man could take his wife and children on the Sabbath, and force him to stay at home, so that he might elevate his soul by refusing to yield to the temptations of the public-house. In Zara, Sunday was observed as a complete day of rest and pleasure, cold dishes alone being obtainable, as nearly all the kitchen attendants were relieved from duty for the day. Tea and porridge were the only hot things supplied. After breakfast, the Duke, Vernon, Diso and myself went into the centre garden, where we smoked and talked.

"I have not yet learnt what form or forms of religion are followed by the people of Zara. Will you tell me, Duke?" I asked.

"Certainly, Frank," he replied; "the people of Zara follow a religion founded by the Law-giver, whose energetic and comprehensive mind guides us universally with a wisdom almost divine. The religion he established is founded on the teachings of Christ, whose divinity cannot be proved, but whose words show the highest wisdom, namely, that of forgiveness and charity. The Law-giver did not adopt the teachings of the Bible, as they are quite contrary to human justice, inasmuch as they ordain
that all humanity are to be for ever punished for the fault of two people who lived many hundreds of years ago; with the exception of some who will escape, with the punishment inflicted on this earth, through the sufferings of some one—a man or God called Christ—who also lived many centuries ago. Human laws do not punish people for the sins of their forefathers, and the laws of nature only punish for a few generations; while neither human nor natural laws forgive on account of the suffering of a person antecedent to the sinner. To the teaching of Christ the Law-giver added the laws of Nature, which he asserted were the ordinances of the Almighty, and logically proved that by following them, according to dictates of moderation and wisdom, a human being led the happiest life possible to his organization. The Law-giver further preached that this life was only to fit us, according to our works, for a higher or lower life hereafter, which would bring us nearer to the perfect happiness of heaven, or the awful misery of hell."

"The religion," I said, highly interested, "seems in different points to agree with different religions at the Middle Globe; for instance, the disbelief in the Divinity of Christ is"—here the Duke silenced me with a gesture, and said,—

"The Law-giver neither believed nor disbelieved the Divinity of Christ, but held it unproved, and believed that only by always striving after truth, and treating our fellow men with charity and forgiveness could we be elevated. Charity and forgiveness are the foundation of the laws of Zara."

"Do you forgive the murderer and the thief?" I asked questioningly.

"Certainly we do," replied the Duke, "and extend to them our charity. As, however, it would not be for the murderer's good to allow him to destroy his body and soul with other murders—for what a man does once he may do again—we restrain him to prevent this, and make him, for his benefit, lead a life that will bring to perfection his mind and body, and if in the course of a few years his nature improves sufficiently, we let him free; if not, we restrain him all his life."

"And supply him," said Vernon, "with more comforts and luxuries than are enjoyed by one half the people of Ura."

"That will not be so for long, Vernon," said the Duke. "As to the thief, we forgive him too, but bring the folly of his offence fully to his mind, by making him pay towards the cost of protecting the wise from the foolish."

"Should you not rather say the good from the bad?" I asked.

"No," said the Duke decidedly; "for all humanity is divided into two divisions, the wise and the foolish, of which the good and the bad are only two kinds. All the good are wise, for only by wisdom can they be good. When a wise man passes an open window on which some money is lying, the natural love of money
makes him wish to take it; but wisdom says, 'No, if you take it you may be seen and punished, and if you take it undetected you will seek another opportunity of gaining pleasure without an effort, and so become discontented and unhappy.' When the wise man is wronged he does not retaliate, as he sees that he might so bring on himself more sorrow, but he avoids the man who has wronged him, so that he may profit in the future by the lesson of the past. When the foolish man sees money lying to his hand, he says, 'If I can get this without anyone seeing me, I will gain what all desire, without the trouble of earning it,' so he spies round, and takes it cunningly; he then spends it, and the thought of the pleasure it brought him makes him discontented with his duties, and he ceases to feel the joy of self-respect. When the foolish man is wronged he retaliates, and brings on himself the active hatred and retaliation of the person who has wronged him. From wisdom comes all that is good, and from folly all that is bad, so saith the Law-giver.

"And the Law-giver was right," said Diso. "You go to the laws of God which are the laws of nature, and they are wise, and must be wisely followed. Man has wisdom and must act with wisdom or suffer, the animals have no wisdom and are protected by nature's laws. Man covers himself with clothes, and when he is heated with exertion he feels inclined to throw them off, and sit naked in the cool, but wisdom makes him sacrifice the momentary pleasure for the good of his life, and so he survives. The animal is protected by nature in this and every other case. The wise sacrifice the moment for the hour, and the day for the year, and are happy. The wicked sacrifice the hour for the minute, and the year for the day, and are unhappy. These laws the Law-giver proved; and the people of Zara illustrate their wisdom with their lives."

As Diso ceased to speak the church bells and chimes filled the air with their silvery tones.

"Come," said the Duke, "let us go in and get ready for church."

We entered, and shortly were joined by the rest of the Duke's family and guests. On entering the street I found the trams were running.

"You do not enforce universal rest, Duke—the trams run, I see?"

"They run," said the venerable old noble, "that rest may be as wisely universal as possible. By running they enable people to go to what church they like, otherwise many would stay at home; during church they cease to run, but afterwards they run to enable the people rationally to enjoy their rest, which they otherwise could not do."

Our party forming in groups walked to church, and I found myself between the Duchess and Mary.
"You cannot have been to church for a very long time, Frank?" said the Duchess.

"For the last few weeks," I replied, with heartfelt gratitude for my preservation, "we had even lost count of the Sunday. We had nothing to hope or pray for; we seemed at the gates of eternity; God's messenger, Death, never left us."

"Frank, do not talk of it, it makes me unhappy," said Mary.

'It must have been a dreadful time, and one that could alone be borne by brave men sure of immortality," said the Duchess reverentially.

"Parson Hamer will be almost sure to preach about the union of Zara and Ura," said Mary.

"Do your parsons usually preach about political events, Mary?" I asked.

"From a religious and philosophical point of view they discuss, and hold up for contemplation, every event of consideration."

"Surely this must often lead to disputes and create unnecessary friction?"

"We do not find it so," said Mary; "in Zara everything is managed for the benefit of the common weal and, as we have no class interests, discussion can only clear up doubtful points without the possibility of creating anger. Everything is decided in the bright light of reason, assisted by facts."

The church, on the banks of the Voa, was a building like one of our cathedrals, with a square plain tower at one end. Inside it was fitted up with pews, seated as are theatre stalls; in front of each seat was a small shelf for the books, and a folding stool to kneel on. At the top of the church was a slightly raised stage, in the centre of which was a pulpit. In rows on the walls, arranged in the form of pyramids, were urns containing the ashes of the departed dead. The congregation arrived punctually, as this first element of courtesy was universally and strictly recognized. I found afterwards that the seats, which were leased by the congregation, as they are with us, were only reserved till the commencement of the hymn with which the service opened, during which the visitors who were waiting were shown by the verger to any vacant seats. The music of the organ was sounding as we took our places; its full deep notes filled the church, as with the majesty of God's voice. Hardly had I realized the simple grandeur of the building, when the music ceased and the parson entered. He was a tall, strong man, looking doubly broad and strong in his plain white surplice. His broad white forehead, from which his black hair, parted in the middle, was brushed back, surmounted large blue eyes, a broad irregular nose, full firm lips, a wide jaw and a square chin; his grave, kind face was very mobile and clean shaved. For a minute—a full minute—he covered his face with his hands, and prayed. He then gave out the first hymn, which we all sang standing up. I
noticed now those who were waiting entered, and every seat in
the church was filled. The opening hymn, which was written by
Vernon, at the request of Parson Hamer, I will give, as it is a
fair sample of the religion of Zara.

CHRIST'S PRAYER.

"Almighty power, in heaven above
We praise Thy name in hallowed love,
And strive to cause Thy will be done
As 'tis in heaven and here begun.

Give us, we pray, our daily bread,
That by our strength, Thy will be sped;
Forgive our sins, we pray the Lord,
As we forgiveness do afford.

Protect us from temptation's way,
And 'gainst us powers of evil stay;
For Thine the kingdom, glory, power,
For ever, from creation's hour.

Amen.

The hymn finished, the parson spoke,—

"My friends, we will now in silence consider our acts since the
time of our last self-examination. A folly sorrowed for is half
forgiven, and not likely to be repeated. Let us examine our
hearts as to what we have done that we should not have done,
and as to what we have left undone that we should have done, and
may the Almighty shield us from the result of our folly, and
guide us to the paths of wisdom. Amen."

The amen was repeated by the congregation, who then knelt,
and with bowed heads thought and prayed. After about ten
minutes, another hymn was given out and most of the congrega-
tion stood up and sang. Some of the people still knelt, but one
by one they rose from their knees and joined in the singing.
Mary was one of those who rose last, and Vernon one who rose
first. He considered he was punished on earth for all his follies,
and that his life was one long prayer, as he strived with brain
and muscle to wisely work for the good of his fellow men and his
own glory. She, with that true religion which nearly all women
feel, but which reaches very few men, humbly reviewed her life,
hoping to gain wisdom by the mercy of God rather than her own
strength. When she rose from her knees her face had that joyful
calm which passeth all understanding. I who had thought but
little, feeling only her presence, and while the others prayed
leaned over and kissed her forehead, felt ashamed. Surely she
had remembered me in her prayers, and surely also her love would
make me certain of heaven, for I felt that not even the power of
God could bring her joy while I was in grief. I have always
believed and now I am sure, that to those who worthily love, and are worthily beloved, heaven here and hereafter is almost assured. Parson Hamer entered the pulpit, and the people settled themselves with an evident expectancy of hearing something worth listening to. Their manner contrasted forcibly and favourably with the stolid indifference with which many congregations resign themselves to suffer in silence the torrent of words their preacher may think fit to inflict on them. Parson Hamer spoke slowly, and with great distinctness,—

"My friends, on this the first occasion that has occurred to me, I shall address you on the wise union of Ura and Zara under the Republic of Undara. I shall take as my text the wise and beautiful prayer of that man or God called Christ. A prayer which must make many people think he was more than man, if less than God. To this prayer you have given tuneful utterance in the first hymn of this service, kindly written by President Dreman at my desire." Parson Hamer paused for a moment, and then proceeded fluently and eloquently: "'Our Father, who art in Heaven.' To the Almighty power to whom we are indebted for our being, we direct our prayer; to Him in that perfect happiness of wisdom to which we shall all arrive after having, little by little, elevated our lives, in the happy path to perfection. 'Hallowed be Thy name.' Surely we cannot think of this infinite power which our finite minds can only realize, without comprehending, without reverencing it. For ever be it hallowed. 'Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in Heaven.' To this end have we made a great advance, through combining with our neighbours; to suppress the suffering of folly, and enforce the happiness of wisdom." And so he proceeded, moving the hearts of his hearers, and foreshadowing the things that happened, and which it will be my privilege to recount, therefore it is not now expedient for me to give this very feeling and able sermon in full. After the sermon, the service concluded with a hymn. As we walked home, I asked Mary,—

"Is it not usual to make a collection after the sermon, or during the service?"

"No," she said, "as it encourages ostentation instead of charity. There is a box at the door into which people can put their offerings, but only those who have no seats or come on Sunday to pray after service put money in. The church is supported by the rent from its pews."

"What was the platform for?" I asked. "In the Middle Globe, such an arrangement is never seen."

"The platform is necessary when the stage is used either for lecture or concert purposes," said Mary, in a matter-of-fact tone. "You surely do not have lectures or concerts in church?"

"We have both; religion teaches the necessity of educating and amusing people, which is done by both lectures and concerts."
"It would not be sanctioned with us. Personally I do not see that any harm could come of it, but the clergy would not allow it."

"Stupidity alone could make them object. Some years ago many of the people of Ura tried to make religion out to be a gloomy and mournful thing, but we teach that it is both bright and joyful."

Religion I have never studied, and perhaps that is the reason that I think the Almighty Being who sent the sunshine, the song birds, and the flowers with their beauty and perfume, never intended His worship to be aught than a thing of music and joy, to bring happiness to the human beings He has put into this beautiful world. After dinner we went to the Zoological Gardens, which were in a great park with an artificial stream of water taken from the Voa flowing through it, making ponds for the seals and marshes for the birds, so that every animal might live with favourable surroundings. The birds were in great aviaries, down the centre of which ran passages covered in with wire netting, so that we could see the birds and animals as plainly as if they were restricted to the little places in which we put them. The great eagles sailed round and round a big circular aviary in the centre of which was a winding stair, which people went up one side and down the other, and from where these kings of birds could be watched. Even the great fields, wooded in the centre to shelter the deer and other animals, were entered by arched steps, which took you to a covered path that went through the wood to the other side, where you left as you had entered. Not that the animals were frightened, for you could buy food for any of them, from dead pigeons or sparrows for the eagles or hawks, to carrots or such like dainties for the herbivorous animals; though not one amongst them, or the birds, seemed to be afraid of the spectators, whom they regarded as possible donors of delicacies. When we came to the enclosure where the great Polar bears were kept, I noticed that Vernon and the Duke passed on without looking at them.

"Why do they pass by these splendid animals without looking at them, Mary?" I asked, wonderingly, as Vernon was usually so very observant.

"Because," said Mary, in subdued awestricken tones, "Vernon has a savage antipathy to the bears, the sight of which always disturbs him. Do you believe in presentiments, Frank?"

"Of course not. Do you?" I asked, lightly.

"They may be warnings," said Mary, with half conviction. "Surely there is a power that can tell, at least some of the events of the future, and may not that power throw the cold shadow of coming calamity on the human mind as a warning? Vernon has a hatred of bears, he feels they will be the cause of death or sorrow to him. He is the cause of death to them as the people of
Ura seek them and kill them, so that his presentiment may not come true."

We next came to the game enclosure, where partridges and quails were kept in great numbers.

"What do they want with so many specimens of these birds, Mary?"

"For breeding purposes; every spring they turn out dozens of the hens each with their brood of from six to ten little ones, which grow up and provide us with food in the end of summer."

I found these birds, which were quite tame in the aviaries, became wild directly they were turned out in the wilds where food was plentiful. The timid eider duck here had its nest lined with down from its breast, which it plucked bare that its little ones might be warm. We passed representatives of nearly every species of beast or bird common to these regions, all of which were surrounded with such things as they would find in their wild state. After we were tired of the animals we returned, full of wonder, as one could not fail to be at the strange productions of nature. After supper we listened to the music, singing, and reciting, of the occupants of our side of the block in the music-room. Nearly every one seemed to be able to do something to help to make the evening pass pleasantly, and what was done was well done. They had grown beyond that stage of society in which young men, conscious of unearned wealth, and sustained by a good tailor, considered they fulfilled their duties to themselves and society by sitting solemnly with an eyeglass stuck in one eye, while they occasionally break their contemplation of nothing, by uttering platitudes about the weather or some other subject of equal interest. How these merry girls would have shocked the paragons of society who only think of what is fashionable, and value words from the lips of a titled fool more than wisdom from the noble workers. These men and maidens—pity them Miss de Vere, they know no better—regarded only worth and wisdom, and actually felt no shame in any occupation that was not degrading. They actually valued people alone for their worth, and did not strive to hide their natural selves. Alas! they had no rules of fashion to dictate follies to them.

In the morning we were to leave for Pentona, to view and rearrange its capacity so that it could receive and succour the unhappy dregs of many generations of civilization, who led a miserable existence in Ura to its detriment, and who increased and multiplied to the sorrow of posterity.