CHAPTER XII.

OUR ERRING BROTHERS.

On coming down next morning, I found Vernon had been up early, and, with Cora's aid, dispatched his private correspondence. I did not wish to question Mary about the Pentona methods; for, though she would give me any amount of information, I was afraid I would gain her contempt by failing at once to realize the simple common-sense laws and customs of this wonderful country.

She was, however, more surprised at the extreme stupidity of many of the laws of Ura than I was at the laws of Zara, which were perfectly consistent with common sense, while the former were remnants of barbarism and class legislation, quite unsupported by reason.

As the possibility of appearing ridiculous to Mary was a serious matter, and I wished very much to discuss, and fully understand, the penal laws, I hailed Vernon's presence with delight.

"I fail to realize how all those prisoners can be kept in subjection by the few jailors. Is it not inexplicable to you?" I asked him.

"Oh, no," he answered, "for I have studied it all long ago, before I commenced to advocate the Federation in fact. The whole thing is perfectly simple, the prisoners are treated with consideration and fairness, and have all to gain by behaving well, and all to lose by behaving badly. The punishments are not severe, but they are certain. And crimes of all sorts are deterred by the certainty not the severity of the punishment. You must remember that many of the prisoners are only lazy, and very few of them really vicious."

"Suppose," I suggested, "they revolted successfully, what would happen?"

"The revolt would shortly be subdued, and the prisoners made to pay the whole cost of subduing it, and probably get at least a year each in the sixteen-hour cells."

"How do you mean they would have to pay the cost of subduing an insurrection?"

"Exactly what I say. For instance, two men a few days ago
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quarrelled over a game of cards; one accused the other of cheating, and struck him in the face. Next day they were tried, and five witnesses lost six hours' work each through giving evidence. These thirty hours were divided between the quarrellers, and the aggressor was further given six days in the sixteen-hour cells. It was proved that the aggressor was in the wrong, but the defendant increased his anger by rudely contradicting him. Thus you see the prisoners had to pay the whole cost of the trial, and so it is with everything, the prisoners must pay for their faults with their work.”

“What are the sixteen-hour cells?” I asked.

“Why, those we saw last, where the men are let out of their cells to work for eight hours and then sent back. They have the privilege, like all prisoners, of working two hours extra, which they all do, for they see no one while they are locked up.”

Shortly after the rest of our party came down to breakfast, during which we decided to visit the cells for the worst prisoners first. The Chief Governor of the prisoners—there were three Governors—Darcy Prano Brender, and his wife breakfasted with us, after which we returned to the prisons. We were first shown the solitary confinement cells, twenty in number, where prisoners who were very badly behaved were put. The Governor told us that five years' imprisonment was the highest sentence inflicted, even for murder, and that when a prisoner by misconduct brought his sentence up to nine years, or was violent, he was put in these cells; for every day he was kept solitary he had three days added to his sentence, and when that reached ten years he was executed.”

“Do you hang or behead here?” I asked.

“Neither,” replied Darcy, “from a locked safe outside a tube leads to that hole in the centre of the ceiling; the first night after a man's sentence has reached ten years, at the hour of 24 the ventilation of his room is closed, and chloroform pumped into it with a syringe. At 24.30 the room is ventilated, and the three prison doctors enter, and send a poisonous injection into a vein of the dead man, who next day is sent to the School of Surgeons for dissection.”

“Of course he is told that he is to be executed?”

“No, after his sentence reaches nine years he is put in here, and he knows that if he receives a further year's sentence he will be executed, but if he commit a fault, he is never told what his sentence is. We find that a month in these cells brings any man to reason, with only one or two exceptions.”

“Then there are very few executions?”

“Within the last twenty years there have only been two. The only serious crimes ever perpetrated in Zara are caused by love. The last man executed killed a girl who had been his betrothed, but who found she could not love him, and transferred her affec-
tions. He was sent here under a five years' sentence; and got very violent through brooding over his crime. He would get reasonable till something reminded him of the woman he had killed, when he would assault his jailors or fellow-prisoners, and refuse to work; he went on this way till his sentence reached the fatal term, when he was chloroformed. The other man was a burglar who came from Ura, and tried to rob a block, but was discovered and captured, though not till he had killed a constable. He was sent here under the maximum sentence, and we found him utterly without reason, though he had the cunning of a fox. He tried to get up a revolt, and when his fellow-prisoners reported him, tried to kill one of them, and so brought his sentence up to the death term."

One of the delegates asked to be shown how the chloroform was sent into the room, so lavender water was put into the chloroform bottle, and he was asked to go into the cell, politely he suggested that Mary would go first, which she did with my escort. The room was unfurnished, but had a mirror fixed in the wall opposite the door. The scent was delicious, and though the surroundings were weird, I could not sacrifice so excellent an opportunity, but took my lady love in my arms and kissed her. There are other things besides food for which men get ravenous. We left the cell, and two delegates went in, the Duke stepped down from a little platform, he was smiling about something, and directed Mary, to get on it and apply her eye to a hole in the wall which she did, and her face became red with blushes.

"I was the only one who looked to see how you and Frank enjoyed the scent, Mary," said the Duke.

I now took a look and lo! through the hole which ended in a shaded round piece of glass, every part of the room could be seen directly or in the mirror. I looked round. The Duke was still smiling. Mary entered no more cells with me.

"In Ura, as you know, Duke," said a delegate, "we execute with electricity; what advantage do you claim for chloroform?"

"In the first place," replied the Duke, "it is the simpler and less expensive; in the second, it does away with the brutal spectacle of witnessing a man being killed, and the publishing of gruesome details to poison the public mind. When a criminal receives the death sentence it is reported to the judges in council, who confirm it, or give the man another chance, as they think fit. And the execution is carried out in a painless manner unwitnessed by any but the Almighty."

We next came to a room with a treadmill, above which hung two ropes with delta handles.

"This," said Darcy Brender, "is a room that has not been used for about forty years, before which time if a prisoner would not work, he was tied by the wrists to those two handles, and made to do a certain amount of labour. By pulling the handles
one at a time and then slackening them he operated a wheel similar to that operated by his feet. If he refused to work, he was hung up by his wrists till he did; as a matter of fact, if a prisoner remained hanging by his wrists for five minutes, he never again refused work."

"This seems to me an excellent plan," said a delegate. "Would it not be better to make prisoners work this way than to execute them?"

"We have not found it so," replied Brender; "the work done on the treadwheel is virtually useless, as by putting up an extra water wheel in the race, we would get as much work done as forty prisoners could do. There always have been, and I am afraid always will be, men who are neither amenable to reason nor force. These while they live are a sorrow to themselves and a nuisance to the community, and so are better dead."

We now went to the prisons for the women and children; these were almost exactly like those we had already seen, but the women almost without exception were well behaved, and hardly ever punished, except for carelessness. They were much lazier than the men, but had a greater dread of having their terms extended, or being sent to the sixteen-hour cells. We found that no woman had been executed for nearly a century. They were all dressed in short skirts, knickerbockers, and stockings. Their dresses were uncorrected with bustle or similar contrivance, and fitted closely to their figures. They wore various sorts of hats; we found that on entering the prison they were supplied with a straw or a felt hat, as they chose; these they were allowed to trim in their leisure if they wished, as they usually did. The girls were dressed similarly to the women, and the boy children, who were kept here up to the age of twelve, were dressed, as the male prisoners were, in a coat like a shooting coat, with knickerbockers, stockings, and either a straw or felt hat, like the women wore, but untrimmed. There were, however, hardly any children in the prisons of Pentona, as no children were born there, and the cases where they came with their parent, or parents, were very few. We next visited the prison factories. First we went to the clothing factory; here the sewing machines were all driven by compressed air. In different rooms we found women employed at work in every stage of development from cutting out to finishing different articles of dress. We were told by the superintendent that she had no difficulty in getting the women to work, or in teaching them how to execute it. They all seemed happy and orderly, and were very much better off than ordinary factory hands in the Middle Globe. The boot factory was managed solely by men, and machinery was very largely used. We next went to the prison stores, which were huge places, well supplied with an excellent stock; we could here see more plainly than in the prisons that the number of convicts had been
very much reduced. Rows of shelves that were labelled, and had evidently once been occupied, were now vacant, and several shelved rooms were empty.

"How many prisoners," Vernon asked Darcy, "can you receive at Pentona from Ura?"

"About three thousand, delivered in gangs of about two hundred every second week," he replied, after a moment's thought.

"That will be more than sufficient," said Vernon, "as our prison population will be reduced very much by the amount of work to be had, and the imprisonment of the utterly criminal who encourage the unfortunate, or idle, to evil ways."

We next came to the justice chamber, which was presided over by three judges, and in which a jury were unknown. Juries had been done away with in Zara for many years and three judges substituted, as it was thought that three men of proved ability, who were educated and used to receiving and weighing evidence, when assisted by experts, were much better able to give a fair decision, than twelve ordinary men selected from the multitude by the working of chance. Another novelty we found introduced into the law courts, namely hypnotism or mesmerism, the former of which was simply a mechanical application of the latter. In every case where the judges were doubtful of the truth of evidence, they had power to order the witness to be examined under the influence of mesmerism. And in all trials where a serious case had been made out against a prisoner who pleaded not guilty, he also was examined under mesmerism. In my college days I had studied mesmerism, so decided to question Darcy.

"If a witness or prisoner refuses to be mesmerized," I asked, "how do you proceed?"

"That never happens now," said Darcy; "when it used to, the witness was strapped down in the mesmeric chair, made to inhale an anaesthetic, and hypnotized with revolving mirrors. Mesmerism is now so thoroughly understood that no one minds going under its influence; and now even a criminal who has something to hide, goes under the influence voluntarily, rather than by force."

"Have you no fear of the mesmerizer influencing the mind of the patient by exercising his own knowledge of the case?"

"No; for a mesmerizer who does not know the parties is retained in every case that may become important, and sworn that he will not learn about the evidence."

We now returned to dinner, after which we went into the country to see the farm prisons, which supplied produce of all sorts for the criminal establishments, and where the very old paupers were sent, for here the longevity of the criminal, or foolish class, as they were called, was remarkable. The trams took us through the suburbs of Pentona, to the farm prison, which was situated
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on a block of nearly three thousand acres of land, and worked in connection with a sheep and cattle farm, further down the river, where the prisoners, besides rearing cattle, cleared and irrigated land which the government sold to the people, leaving the prisoners to move on their holding, and clear and irrigate fresh soil. We did not see the second farm, but learnt that it was composed solely of men, who acted as pioneers, after having served a probationary sentence at Pentona. We next visited the farm prison, which was situated almost in the middle of the farm, and consisted of an eight-storey building very similar to those of Zara. On one side was a glass-house covering about five acres, the other sides being surrounded with uncovered gardens. At regular intervals of about one hundred yards were large windmills which surrounded the farm house, and supplied it with electric light and compressed air, though they had sometimes to be assisted by horse labour. On entering, we were taken over the place, which was so similar to the prisons as not to need describing. We then went to the top of the house, and surveyed the surrounding country. The farm was divided by rails and barbed wire into a number of fields containing from five to fifty acres. There were numerous sheds in which the cattle were stabled in winter, and just beyond the garden, several small houses dotted about, which we were told were for the pigs and poultry. These we found were movable, their feet being fixed into hollow iron spikes driven into the ground. We found the prisoners had a band of musicians, and were well supplied with papers and books, so that they had many more comforts than are given to ordinary farmers. They had, in fact, everything but freedom and the society of women. The glass-house was prolific in vegetables, and only by its aid, the gardener told us, could be properly and surely rear young plants all the year round, which out of doors were at the mercy of the frost. All the farm was irrigated, and laid out on the most scientific principles. The fowl and the pig houses especially attracted my attention. The former were movable houses without floors, having from their lower rim or edge projecting downwards a row of three-inch spikes. At each of the four corners were spikes a foot long, which fitted into large hollow ones driven into the ground, so that the house could be moved out into the fields in the spring time little by little, and easily taken up or put down. This they did to enable the fowls to get the grasshoppers, which we were told came in myriads every spring. The pigs' houses were also movable, on a similar plan, and kept perfectly clean, much as they are in Chicago, and are not in most other parts of the world. Having done our duty by seeing all that was to be seen, we returned home. Here we found one of the barrack's prisoners waiting to see President Dreman, who interviewed him, and then returned to us. Vernon told us that a committee of ten old men had been
selected, with the sanction of the prison authorities, to wait on him and offer to do all that lay in their power to aid in watching the prisoners to be sent from Ura, and making them contented with their lot, and that they would wait on him after tea. In due time the ten old men marched solemnly in, each of them gravely shaking hands with Vernon; they seemed more sorry for, than ashamed of, their imprisonment, and while regarding themselves as worthy of pity on account of their wrong-doing, evidently regarded their prison career with pride.

"President Dreman," began the old man who came before supper, and who was evidently the inspirer of the party, "we have followed your career with sympathy, and are proud to think that through you we shall have the honour of living at a time when the blessings of wisdom are to be brouught to the people of Ura."

Dreman bent his head in recognition of the compliment.

"We have been thinking, President Dreman," he continued, "that we might assist you in your labour, by assuring you that we will all—I say all, for I speak for my nine friends,"—they bowed their assent—"and together we speak for all the prisoners of the barrack prison—we will all regard the foolish people you send here from Ura as friends, and while watching them carefully to see that they are amenable to discipline, will try our best to make them comfortable and happy."

Vernon thanked them warmly and eloquently; admired the prison arrangements and the excellent work of the prisoners, and concluded by pointing out that though they had unfortunately got into prison, their behaviour, while there, proved that they were wiser than many outside its walls, and gained them universal respect. The old men were evidently moved by the generous courtesy of President Dreman, and each accorded him their heart-felt praise, as they shook hands, and accepted a cigar from his cigar-box. When the last of the ten had left, the duke spoke,—

"Vernon, you will be talked about as a god in Pentona, these men are driven to take a double interest in passing events, having no interests of their own to attend to, and have followed every movement of your career. Henceforth, they will feel that in watching and attending to the Ura prisoners, they are sharing a career that has been a glory to them, and will talk of 'our reform.'"

Vernon smiled. "I shall be happy to share the 'our' with them if they bring happiness to the unfortunates amongst my fellow-citizens who will be sent to Pentona. Every helper is welcome to me."

The duke turned to the delegates and said,—

"This incident shows clearly how we have managed to make our prisoners take a pride and interest in their prison work. And
now you have seen them at some of their occupations, you will recognize that they do not compete with free labour, but shorten the working hours of all. They work the coal mines in connection with the iron mines, and the Government sell bar iron cheaply, and so encourage its manufacture. By making rough bricks, and quarrying the granite they enable waterworks to be carried out, and buildings to be erected that otherwise could not be commenced for many years to come. By cleaning and irrigating the rough land they make it fit for the farmer, so that our rapid increase of population may be provided for; and while they do all this they still only cost the Government the price of their supervision, the wholesale price of cloth, and a few other things, which their work pays for several times over. And last, but not least, our weak and criminal population are kindly provided for, and restrained from reproducing, as a curse for the next generation, children without the wisdom to be good or happy."