CHAPTER XIII.

MARRIAGE.

For a few days, the delegates carried on a minute examination of the prison arrangements, everyone prying as seemed to him fit. In the afternoons we would amuse ourselves in various ways; on the river the popular craft was a launch driven by compressed air with room for about ten people. They had also boats like our racing boats which held two people, and were very easy to row. In everything provision for two was made, boats, tricycles, suites of rooms, everything; this was caused by the early betrothal of the young people, and their, consequently, being very much together and sharing their amusements, which were very little interfered with by their marriage, as a reasonable period nearly always elapsed between the birth of the babies, so that one child was able to toddle before another was born. I rowed Mary up the river, and she told me about Pentona, the ways of which we discussed from both her and my point of view, and finally agreed on an issue. Surely no question can be so fairly argued as that discussed under the emotional reason of a woman, and the cold logic of a man. The one extreme tones down the other, and the golden mean is reached; for when you are discussing emotional beings you must have logic, warmed by feeling, if you would wisely decide. There is certainly no labour so sweet as that which, thus shared, is so made a labour of love. Mary rowed as did all the women, as they were of the opinion that exercises suitable for men were suitable for the mothers of men. The racing and competing they left to their sterner mates, believing that woman’s mission is to elevate, and encourage the men, but not to compete with them.

In a land where display is derided, and personal excellence only praised; where great wealth is unknown, and limited means considered the natural accompaniment of the commencement of a career; and where, further, girls and youths are brought up not to seek a wealthy partner, but one who is fitted to accompany them through life, and with whom, though they may possibly rise to wealth and honour, they will certainly attain happiness. Where all these unusual conditions prevailed, a man like myself
who saw he could earn a sufficient income, considered he was acting honourably and wisely in trying to persuade his lady love to become his wife, without waiting till he had earned sufficient to keep her in a state of idleness, that could not fail to deteriorate all her good qualities. We were tired of rowing, and rested under the drooping branches of a willow, some of which Mary held, and prevented the slight drifting that otherwise would have taken place in this lock-bound river. Mary with hatless head, mused on passing fancies, while I smoked a hookah in happy silence. With the perfection of companionship silence ceases to embarrass. She looked perfectly happy; with a woman the courtship of love is not a thing she wishes to hurry, but the more eager nature of man forces everything on to fruition.

"I think we have passed nothing of interest?" I said at last. "What I did not see you saw and pointed out. We were looking different ways."

"Not different ways," she said, with lovelit eyes; "but at the same surroundings from different views."

"Had you not rowed when you did I should have been very tired," I continued, "or we would not have come so far." She looked up at me and smiled, but did not speak, so I continued again.

"You guided the boat, and kept her on her course. Either would have been lonely without the other."

"We will always be together, Frank," she said.

"When the light has left the earth, and nature becomes still, you leave me; and I do not see you again till after the sun has melted the morning dew, and the birds have sung their songs to their mates. The thought of you is always with me, but, Mary, I long for you, and am very lonely."

"Do you think I am never lonely for want of you, Frank?"

"I hope you often are. Mary, will you fix the day for our wedding very soon? Only with you am I happy, and you are happier with me. In all eternity we cannot recover the time we lose now; be my wife soon; we are foolish to linger at the gates of happiness."

"Frank, it is foolish to gather fruit till you are sure they are ripe. You said you would be patient."

"I am as patient as possible, but why should we delay?"

"We shall delay no longer than you wish. You would not have our wedding till you return from Ura, for you do not wish to leave me before I have worn your ring an hour? When you wish, my love, I will be your wife."

As I rowed back, I felt that my queen would guide the vessel of our happiness on the river of life firmly and well, and would take an oar when I tired, that our vessel might still progress. Though I did less than the delegates, in searching for knowledge of the prison life, I learnt more from daily discussing it with
Mary, who had studied it all. One more journey we took, that we might see the granite quarries, where the stone was got that seemed to defy decay. The quarry was a huge cutting in the side of the hill, which seemed to have a grey granite foundation; here the prisoners rough-hewed the stone, which was then sent to the prison to be finished and fitted for its place. At the end of the week we returned, the delegates having each or severally examined everything from the working of the breeding and clearing farm, and the mines, to the sixteen-hour cells, and execution room. In journeying up the river, I was surprised at the mighty workings of the water, but in journeying back again the simplicity of the natural laws, that were made to work for the community, was what impressed me most. As we sped along the power of the air we breathe, but which seems to us nothing, was brought to my mind by our rapid progress. Vernon was discussing his pamphlet with the duke, having Cora as an audience, and half the passengers were engaged with the study of the statistics they had gathered, when we reached the wharf at Zara. Next day, Mary asked me if I would come with her to the marriage bureau?

"Certainly. Surely you do not countenance such an institution?"

Mary looked at me in astonishment, as she replied,—

"We all support the bureau. At Ura marriage, which is the most important event in the life of a man or woman, is left quite to chance. When a man or woman want to marry, they are restricted, in the choice of a mate, to the few people of their immediate circle; and when they do marry, frequently know nothing but the best behaviour form, and outside appearance, of their partner. In no other event are people so careless. In Ura, if a woman wants a dress, she does not restrict her choice to material made in Ura, but selects from all the material of Fregida, one of a texture, colour, form, and which, well, in every particular, suits her; yet she gives her happiness, and life, to the care of a man of whom she knows hardly anything, and her choice is restricted to the few men she meets. With a man in Ura, if he wants a horse, he finds out all the horses for sale, and then purchases one to suit him in every way, after finding out its pedigree, temper, history, and all about it; yet he only chooses a wife from the few girls he personally knows, and marries her oftentimes in ignorance of her tastes and habits. In Zara a list of every marriageable man and woman is kept, so that when a girl wants a husband she can find out all about every man of a marriageable age."

"Do the girls, then, do the courting?" I asked in surprise.

"Certainly not, but generally one of their friends makes inquiries, and without their knowledge they are given opportunities of meeting a suitable man. The men sometimes make inquiries, but generally inquiries are made by the mothers, for their sons
or daughters, when they are nearly grown up. I am now going to make inquiries for Nitho, who, though a nice girl in every way, has as yet failed to meet her fate.

"Why is that? She seems a most attractive girl."

"And so she is, but she has been very much with Vernon, and is a little in love with him in her childish way, just sufficient to compare him to her would-be admirers, and to have him occupy her thoughts."

"Well, I am surprised at her being in love with Vernon."

"Frank, dear, you are a goose; when a clever girl leaves off romping, she wants something beyond her toys to sympathize with. Nitho turned to Vernon for sympathy, and liked him too much to think of a lover."

"Tell me who are the marriage bureau?" I queried.

"They are five matrons, one of whom is a doctor, and they make a list of the marriageable people in their district, and send a copy of it to every other similar bureau, who send them in return similar lists. So that full particulars are recorded, and can be ascertained of every unbetrothed bachelor or spinster."

We now entered a block and came to the bureau, which bore the inscription "Dr. Nora Luon Alba. Marriage bureau." We entered and I was introduced to a white-haired comfortably proportioned old lady, who I afterwards learned was a widow, and the mother of four married daughters. After I had answered several inquiries, Mary said,—

"Doctor Nora, I am come to see if we can find a mate for Nitho Mura?"

The old lady smiled. "I thought you had come to find a mate for Doctor Frank?"

Mary actually blushed, and the dear old lady nodded to me, and said pleasantly,—

"You are a lucky man, Frank."

I should have liked to kiss her, she looked so kind and good. "Nitho," she continued, as she opened a ledger, "is registered as pretty, clever, and very merry. Now such a girl should have a clever mate who can gain her respect and laugh with her, or one who can gain her love, and will not mind her laughing at him. In the medical school is a young doctor who is very clever, but is so wrapped up in his work that he goes out very little and is rather quiet. He is a good son and a good brother, and his sisters admire and love him, as therefore his wife is likely to do. Now Nitho's mirth will keep this man from deadening his soul with too much work, and her cleverness will cause her to be a companion to him."

"I think he will do," said Mary. "What is his name?"

"Allan Deo Mona; he is a doctor at the Northern Medical School."
"This is doing formally a little more than is done unformally at the Middle Globe," I ventured to remark.

"In Ura and Gurla," said Doctor Nora, "a man who has money is pursued by the girls and their mothers; if he has dyspepsia or consumption it makes no difference. They want the lazy luxury that money brings; of course they would sooner the man was worthy of their love, but that he is not so does not prevent them using all their powers to entice him."

"Of course that is not so in Zara?" I asked.

"Certainly not," said the old lady, "the women of Zara are too sensible to value a man for his possessions; they value him for himself, and his desirable qualities."

The old lady did not put the marriage customs of Ura and Gurla in a favourable light. I could quite imagine that the poor girls brought up in luxury were often forced to marry rich and unpleasant men, but surely that was their misfortune, and because they could not get men who were rich and nice; certainly their mothers would have been kinder to them, if they had brought them up simply so that they could have been happy with a poor man, and not had to turn from all but rich wooers. We left the doctor, and strolled homewards by the river.

"Who elected the marriage bureau, Mary?"

"The matrons of the district. Every matron is eligible for the position. They receive a salary of fifty crowns a year, and with the exception of the doctor, who is elected for life, retain their position for six years, retiring two every three years."

"Do you have no men connected with the bureau?" I asked.

"No; marriage is a subject that can only be properly treated by the instinctive wisdom of women. If a man is condemned to celibacy the bureau is informed."

"Do you mean to say that in Zara a man's liberty can so far be invaded as to prevent his marrying?" I questioned in consternation.

"Certainly," said Mary, "the community is considered first in everything, though that nearly always includes the welfare of the individual. If a man develops cancer, consumption, or any similar complaint, he is forbidden to marry, though both those diseases are nearly unknown now."

"Your climate is evidently a healthy one?"

"Climate has very little to do with it; it is our laws that stamp out disease. In Ura when a man has consumption, heart disease, or any other disease that weakens him, he is forced to stay at home a great deal, and his longing for a sympathizing nurse generally cause him to marry, while many of the stronger men remain single, so that the people of Ura are getting more delicate and afflicted every year."

Certainly my lady love was wise as she was beautiful. Her loveliness was of a kind that cannot be fully realized at a glance,
for the goodness of her heart and the wisdom of her mind beautified her face, as the sun and the clouds beautify the heavens, and change their aspect, so that they are more beautiful the more you study them.

“Frank, dear,” said Mary coaxingly one day, “I want you to go to the medical triumvirate to-morrow, and see Dr. Allan Mona. I know you will like him, and want you to bring him home with you.” I promised compliance, and she continued: “He is twenty-two, and Nitho is nineteen, so they are just a nice age; as a two years' engagement will bring them to the marriageable age, and enable them to thoroughly understand each other.”

Next day I visited the triumvirate, who were three medical men of eminence appointed by the Senate, who received patients and diagnosed their complaints, but did not prescribe, so that the family doctor had the aid of the highest medical wisdom to guide him. When anyone got unwell they visited the triumvirate who gave them a written opinion, which they took to their own doctor; if they were too unwell, their private doctor obtained the advice of the triumvirs. As a medical man, and a regarder of professional etiquette, I felt it a humiliation to have to follow the opinion of other doctors, no matter how eminent they were; but as a layman I recognized the wisdom of the plan. Allan Mona I found here acting as one of the secretaries. He was a tall, slight man with a brown beard, and coarse dark hair, which stood up from his forehead, which was high and large. His eyes were brown, and of the ordinary size, while his features were straight. He was rather a book-worm, and completely devoted to his profession, which he regarded as most exalted, and one the limits of which were beyond comprehension. In manner he was gravely formal, and devoid of that graceful ease which was usual in Zara, and which is supposed in the Middle Globe to be a characteristic of aristocracy. After going over the rooms of the triumvirate, which consisted of the consulting room, an operating room, and a library, we took the tram and went to the hospital.

“Do you not find it very inconvenient to have your hospital so far out of the city?” I asked.

“No,” said Allan Mona; “on the contrary, it has many advantages, such as fresh air and perfect quiet. All contagious diseases are sent there at once, and any accident, such as a broken leg, is attended to where it took place, and then the patient is taken out in an ambulance car, in which he is just as comfortable as if he were in bed.”

“I am told you have very little illness at Zara?”

“That is so, heart disease, consumption, and cancer are almost unknown with us, though they are propagated and common in Ura; here all disease is scarce and of a mild form, principally because the people are of so splendid a physique.”
The hospital stood in a large garden, and was tiled and enamelled throughout, so that all the surfaces were incapable of absorbing germs of any sort. Like all the other buildings, it was of eight storeys, and contained the most wonderful museum and dissecting room I had ever seen. Considering the population of Zara, the patients were very few, and consisted principally of women who had come there to be confined. Nearly all the work of nursing was done by the medical students; about one-fifth of whom were women, whose college was attached, and most of whom lived at the hospital.

"Have you not great trouble in getting subjects for dissection?" I asked.

"No," replied Doctor Allan; "for everyone who dies in the hospital or at Pentona goes for dissection; and very many people will their bodies to the medical school after death."

There were not ten per cent. of the invalids here that would have been in a population of similar size in the Middle Globe, where disease is so much encouraged. I brought Allan Mona home with me, as Mary had desired, and we became fast friends. Shortly afterwards I got an appointment as a secretary of the same triumvirate. After a few days' stay at Zara, the delegates returned to Ura, and the duke, Mary, and I, with the representatives from the parliament of Zara to that of Ura, prepared for our journey to the latter city, where the laws of Zara were to be forthwith enforced little by little. On reaching the Sherea Railway Station, from which we went to Sherea, a distance of two hundred and eighty miles of our journey, we found an immense glass-covered storehouse, very much larger than any station on the Middle Globe. Corn of all sorts and coal was here stowed in immense quantities. The railway consisted of a double line, each of which carried all the traffic going one way, so that the chance of an accident was minimized. Behind every train was a small trolley, so that when a breakdown of any sort took place a messenger could be sent back to warn the coming trains of danger. Our carriage, which was long, and very much on the plan of a Pullman car, was furnished so that travellers had perfect hotel accommodation on their journey. After we had started, Mary and I went on the dividing platform, so that I might see the country we passed through. On either side the land was laid out in arable or plantation blocks, trees being planted at regular intervals for timber and shelter for the cattle. The houses were few and far between, and of only two or three storeys. On we went, the country, as we looked back, rushing away from us, for we travelled at the rate of forty-two miles an hour. We passed a goods train on a siding.

"I suppose, Mary," I asked, "that train has shunted to let us pass?"
"Yes," she replied, "every fifteen miles there is a telephone station where the slow trains are shunted off to let the fast ones pass. For instance, every station knows when our train is due, and if a slow train comes up not far enough ahead to reach the next station without delaying us, it is shunted till we pass."

As we took up water without stopping, we went right on to Sherea, which was a city laid out like Zara, but containing a population of only about six hundred thousand inhabitants. Here we broke our journey and put up at an hotel. As it was only the sixteenth hour, Mary and I went to the Sherea, where we hired an electric launch and went up the river. The banks were walled in, exactly as they were at Zara, which had evidently been taken as a pattern. The setting sun, whose rays glistened on the grey granite, warned us to return. The unpolluted river, clear and bright, swished past our bows as we glided on our smokeless way. The shadows of the houses crept across the river as the sun set, and the splendour of the scene made us silent.

After supper we went to the hotel tower, and looked on the city, with its brilliantly lighted streets beneath us. There are some things that must be seen to be realized, and which cannot properly be described. The scene beneath us was one of these. Many years ago, while up the country in Australia, I met a man—he was young, with the mind of an artist, and the enthusiasm of youth—who had never seen the ocean. I described it to him till we both believed he had fully realized its immensity and grandeur. Subsequently we went on a holiday trip to the seaside. Together we rode one evening to a cliff washed by the waves of the Southern Ocean. The hollow roar of the breakers filled the still hot air of summer with the sound one hears in a big shell if it is held to the ear. Suddenly our horses stopped at the top of the rise, and there beneath us the great waves formed far out, commencing in a ripple, to rush shorewards, growing as they went, till they became great crested monsters, that broke on the beach, and sprinkled the cliff face with their spray. Out to sea, a vessel, like a ship in a picture, was disappearing in the distance, while the glass-like surface of the water was lit up by the restless rays of the setting sun. I turned to my friend, and, as I looked on his awestruck face, felt that he had not from my words realized the wonders of the sea. In the grandeur of God's ocean, a woman's face, or a man's love, there is that which cannot be described, and which passeth all understanding, so that it can only be comprehended, and to the duller mind is as a sealed book. If you can get to a height or a tower which overlooks a city, go there at night, and you will see the streets stretching away beneath you with fiery eyes on either side, till they become a thin
luminous streak. The buildings will be dark masses, giving a sense of loneliness. Imagine in place of this, streets which, instead of being dotted with feeble lamps, seem rivers of light that fade away in the distance without even a spot of darkness. This we saw, and our nostrils were not offended with the dust and odour from roads given over to horse traffic, for here, where compressed air took the place of horses, the scent of the gardens alone filled the air, and made pleasant the beauties of the night.

How very many ways there are of looking at the same thing! If a good municipal councillor were with us, looking down on Sherea, he would make mental notes of the saving effected by conducting the majority of the traffic on rails, and the balance with rubber tires on asphalte. He would chuckle to think of the light cost of maintaining roads free from the iron-shod feet of horses, and his heart would glow when he contemplated, say free education and a remission of a penny in the pound for his beloved ratepayers. The engineer would sigh as he thought how all these ideas had been plagiarized from him, for in his youth he had worked out a plan to do all this, but found individual interests too powerful to allow the good of the community to be studied; and so his plans were neatly tied up and deposited on the top of the bookcase, where they now lie covered with the dust of many years. Alas, those years! not only have they done this, but they have robbed him of his hair so cunningly that he could never detect the theft of a single lock; and then the dreams of his youth, where had they gone?

The poor parson of a hungry parish would wonder if the fat horses had been made into sausages for the hungry poor. He would tremble to think of the day that Smith, the dockman, who had broken his leg, was turned into the street, with his wife and family, for arrears of rent. On that memorable day he had gone to Sir Bere de Reesh, whose carriage horses were the admiration of everyone, and had told him of Smith. Sir Bere declined to interfere. “Political economy; foundation of a great nation.” He had gone back to Smith and told the crowd that Sir Bere’s horses should be killed to feed the people, and their oats given to the starving. That fat horses should not be allowed in a city where men, and women, and children starved to death in dozens. He was a fool, that parson; he lived in poverty such as was the lot of Christ and His disciples. Perhaps not altogether a fool, who shall say? When Sir Bere, loaded with honour and tortured with gout, was hastened to his grave by the excesses of his eldest son, who inherited his energy and owned the best prize-fighters, the fastest horses, and more lovely members of the corps-de-ballet than any other man in the country, the parson was
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officiating at his daughter's marriage. When the splendour of Sir Bere's funeral was the talk of everyone, the parson was christening his youngest daughter's first baby. She married James Dry, the bookseller. Old clothes and short commons are dangerous but not fatal to happiness, which greatly depends on the nerves and liver.

We were tired of gazing at the city, and giving words to our random thoughts, so went to the duke and discussed our next day's journey.