I had nearly arrived at Zara. The journey seemed interminable, though much of my time had been pleasantly occupied by chatting to a white-haired old lady who was a fellow-passenger.

When approaching my destination even her kindly talk worried me. I couldn’t pretend to take an interest in her grandchildren, as I was too anxious to meet my betrothed. At the station, to my joy, I found Mary and Nitho waiting to meet me. Absence certainly sometimes makes the heart grow fonder, though it is a very dangerous remedy.

"Is Vernon able to walk about yet, Frank?" asked Nitho, garrulously. "Allan and I have come to the conclusion that his injuries will leave no ill effects."

"Oh!" I said, laughing, "it’s Allan and you now, is it? You have been expeditious about it."

"Pardon me, Frank," Nitho replied, with great pretence of dignity, "it’s Allan that has been expeditious, and I have succumbed to his eloquence. I wonder Mary did not tell you about it. She seemed to be half her time—very nearly—writing to you."

"I had other things to write about," said Mary.

As the tram took us on our homeward way, the beautiful clean streets and well-dressed pedestrians impressed me with wonder. In the few months since the new laws had been enforced at Ura, they had made wonderful progress, but were still much behind Zara, as it would take several years before the dirty and awkward horse traffic could be superseded by vehicles propelled by compressed air or electric power, and much longer before the beer or spirit-sodden faces would disappear, and their place be taken by healthy people who drank only when they were thirsty, and not for the pleasure they momentarily obtain by pouring intoxicants down their throats, to kill their nerves and sap their energy.

The Duchess Mura kissed me, on my return. A kiss from a woman who has reached the winter of life, after having wisely enjoyed a woman’s duties and pleasures, is surely an honour. I
was to be the husband of the woman her son had loved, and she loved me almost as she had loved him.

"Mary has shown me parts of your letters, Frank," she said kindly. "We have been busy for you in your absence, so that your wedding may take place soon."

Bel's white teeth showed through her smiling lips as she welcomed me and said, "Come down again soon, Frank, I have some oysters for you. You liked them so much when you came from the snow desert. Mother says they will do you good."

"And what does Savo Rea say?" I asked, laughing.

"Many nice things that I am not going to tell you."

Everyone was so kind that I realized I was home again, for surely home is the domicile of the woman one loves, be she sweetheart, wife, or mother.

In eastern stories they often tell of a vessel from which comes water—the most precious thing in a hot country—in an endless stream, and yet this magic vessel never became empty. I think this vessel must be an allegory for the human heart, which pours out a life-long stream of love and kindness if the flow is not dried up by selfishness or folly. Here the natural goodness of the human will was allowed to run its course unchecked. Temptations were suppressed, so that the folly and weakness of human nature—which is all more or less foolish and weak—might not be caused to overcome its noble aspirations. Every child was reared in love, to strive for good and shun evil. The budding sweetness of girlhood early found companionship with downy-chinned youth; the opposite natures elevating and making joyous each other. In the spring-time of life the man would marry, his life unsullied by the excusable, but undesirable, period of wild-oat sowing, which coarsens and brutalizes a man's nature in the Middle Globe. The woman would go to her husband without having to suffer the degradation of hunting all wealthy men, which can neither elevate her nature nor sweeten her temper. From cradle to grave the love and strength of both sexes were abundantly exercised. The woman who loves her parents, her husband and her children best, has the most love left for her children's mates and her grandchildren. The more goodness and love that is taken from the human heart, the more it has to give. I once knew a woman who had everything she wanted except the moon and a few other things that cannot be bought. Her father was a man with a fine discernment and appreciation for turtle soup, other good things, and money-making. In the course of time he was troubled by the painful efforts his digestive organs made to assimilate the good things he ate, and consequently suffered from gout in the left foot. These things, you know, will happen to the best regulated men. He had married the daughter of an Italian count, who had an English spouse. She was a
beautiful girl, just a quarter of a century younger than he. His age was forty-five.

By-and-by she loved, but not her husband. She had notions about honour and that sort of thing. Perhaps it was her English blood. British women are prone to these weaknesses. She pined and died, as some wild birds die when caged in comfort and plenty, but robbed of freedom and the love of their mates. Fortunately all women and birds are not so foolish. She left my heroine as a legacy to her husband. The child, who had her mother's beauty and her father's mind, showed an early taste for frocks, and a keen appreciation for all good things. Of course she married a duke. Thank goodness the rich American girls cannot buy up all the poor dukes. The one remaining support of the titled aristocrat is the heiress—principally from 'Merica. In heiresses alone they have a monopoly. Now that they are deprived of all—that is, very nearly all—sinecures and monopolies, may the wealthy girls long be preserved to maintain and sustain them in their glittering glory on the face of the earth.

Her carriage one day knocked down and broke the leg of a pauper child. It shocked her very much.

"I have no sympathy with these wretched people," she said.

This woman who loved no one, could not even spare sympathy—which is only love diluted; milk of human kindness and water—for the poor child her carriage had maimed. Her coachman's wife, who had a flock of children to love, could spare abundant affection for this wayfarer, and daily took it something to the hospital. I think Lazarus will give poor Dives a cup of water, even if it is against the rules of heaven, unless heaven robs a man of sympathy.

When I came down, Duke Mura had returned, and kindly welcomed me back. Bel had spread the oysters out, and stood happy in the belief that she was giving me pleasure. I didn't want the bivalves, but ate them to please the merry-faced girl who brought them. It is very nice to have people lovingly thoughtful for your comfort, even if it occasionally causes you to eat when you would rather not.

"I am glad to hear that Vernon is recovering," said the duke. "His clever defence against his wretched assailant was characteristic of him. He is always ready, and never overcome, while he has a means of defence."

"I wonder he had time to think what to do," said Nitho. "I never heard of him biting anybody before. I think it was rather a dreadful thing to do."

"It was the only defence he had," replied the duke, "and therefore quite justifiable. His left arm was completely disabled, and with only one arm he would have been powerless against a strong man like Ava."
"How is he getting on with his love-making?" asked the duchess. "She was very foolish to fall in love with him, but I always thought it would come right in the end."

"He has got on very well," I replied. "Last night he told me that Cora intended to give up her secretaryship."

"Good gracious me!" said Nitho. "What was that for?"

"So that she might become the Duchess Dreman. I suppose that she will want to make some small preparation for the event."

Nitho waltzed round the room, clapping her hands, in a state of great delight.

"It will be a very great event!" said the duke, when quiet was restored. "I expect it will be the grandest marriage that has ever taken place at Fregida, where Vernon is now, as President of Undara, the leading man."

"And Cora as the leading man's leader," said Nitho, airily, "will be the first person in Fregida."

"Don't talk, Nitho!" said the duke, and continued, "He is now on the highest pinnacle of fame and popularity. The wealthy heads of families have had to settle considerable sums of money on their younger relations, to partially escape the progressive income-tax, so that numbers of marriages and general prosperity have been brought about; the result of which has been to make Vernon a hero, even with the wealthy classes. And with all the others he is almost a god."

"Tell the duke about Hugo Marna, Frank, please," said Mary.

"You'll turn to sugar-candy, Mary, if you don't stop looking at Frank," said Nitho, "though that would be nicer than a pillar of salt."

Mary tried to look indignant, but only succeeded in blushing.

"Hugo Marna," I explained, "was one of those who received the honour of a dukedom at Ura. I daresay you well remember him, duke? A tall, bald man with a thin clean-shaven face, and spectacles. He walked on a stick, and was the only bent-shouldered man who received a title. He is a land and coal-mine owner, and has an income of over twenty-seven thousand crowns a year. As he is a frugal old bachelor, his prosperity is increasing very rapidly, and his only pleasure is in adding to his possessions. Notwithstanding the fact that among his many poor relations is a widow with six daughters and three sons, several of whom were engaged, but had to postpone their marriages indefinitely, on account of their poverty. Now the old fellow so hated the income-tax, that, to avoid it as much as possible, he settled five hundred crowns a year on his sister, and a similar sum on each of her nine children, and bought himself a dukedom. He has also endowed the College of Engineers, so as to reduce his income to nine thousand crowns a year."

"Why to nine thousand crowns?" asked the duchess.
"Because over that sum pays a tax of twenty-five per cent. He will now have, with his untaxed ducal allowance, an income of twelve thousand crowns a year."

"And quite enough for any bachelor," said Nitho, decisively.

"I hear," said the duke, "that the class who are most bitter against the tax is the class of idlers like Ben Ava, who only live for pleasure. People who support fighting and betting-men, and unhappy women."

That was certainly so, for this class were so utterly selfish, that they howled with rage at having to give up the smallest of their vices.

By-and-by I took Mary to the drawing-room, where we turned down the lights and talked. Every day we had sent each other a letter, but this was certainly a poor substitute for meeting hand to hand and heart to heart. Sentiments which sound like music from a lover's lips, seem poor and foolish when sent in a letter. I had once thought my darling too clever and strong to feel womanly love. I was wrong. No woman can be too highly endowed to feel love; though if she be low as the animals, she can only love like them.

Before we parted, Mary had fixed the day of our marriage.

In the morning the duchess took Mary and me to see the rooms she had secured for the commencement of our married life. On a higher flat, more in the northern end of the block than the duke's apartments, she took us to two large rooms, handsomely furnished in a harmony of very dark blue.

"I hope you will like them, Frank!" said the duchess, in her sweet motherly fashion. "I have had them fitted up with Mary's favourite colours."

The rooms were delightful, and looked out on the garden square in the centre of the block. They were both large. The sitting-room; furnished with a secretaire, book-case, and piano, besides the ordinary furniture, looked half studio, half drawing-room. The bedroom, apart from a large mirror-faced wardrobe, which wheeled out from the wall, and revealed a bed which could be lowered when needed, seemed a handsome boudoir.

"They are very handsome and nice indeed," I said gratefully to the kind old lady, "but I am afraid that Mary will not be content to be mistress of two rooms only."

"Of two rooms and a husband who loves me. Why not? What more could I want?" said Mary, with a touch of Nitho's manner. "I can eventually extend my dominion."

"I am afraid you will be lonely, and weary for something to do."

"I don't think so! When we get up, we will go to breakfast—sometimes I will give you breakfast here, but seldom, and only as a treat—then you will go to your work, and be away all day. When you are gone, I will put our establishment in order."
"You surely do not mean to say," I asked in shocked astonishment, "that personally you propose to dust these rooms, and make the bed, and act as a housemaid after you are married?"

Mary laughed, and the duchess smiled.

"Frank, dear, you really are a goose," said Mary sweetly, "in some things, though always a good, kind, considerate one. To put my establishment in order, after the ceremony you insisted on my fixing last night, will take me an hour at most every morning. Then I shall do some work."

"What sort of work?" I asked. "Will you make no provision for pleasure?"

"Reading, writing, music, frocks, and woman's work generally. Everything shall be pleasure. Sometimes I shall have someone to see me, sometimes make a call, but generally till dinner time I shall remain in my kingdom. After dinner—you must come home to dinner whenever you can—I shall do multitudes of things, and when you come home, I shall sometimes let you work, and sometimes let you read to me, or take me somewhere."

"You will be better off than if you had a big house, costing six times your income, at Ura," said the duchess, "for you will have the use of baths, library, drawing, smoking, music, billiard and other rooms, and Mary will never be lonely, for she can always make a call without putting her hat on."

Afterwards I learned that these beautifully furnished rooms were a wedding present from the dear old lady and her husband, Duke Mura, both of whom found their greatest pleasure in generous deeds.

Mary and I visited the sittings of the committee who were compiling the phonetic dictionary. Mary had resigned, and the duke had taken Diso Rota in her place. Presently Diso came out to us. He was, if possible, more dandified than ever; that is if extreme neatness and taste in dress can be called dandyism. He had the same springy, energetic walk, and seemed highly satisfied with his new duties. In reply to a query as to how he liked them, he said, "Oh, very much. We are engaged in a work that will do more than anything else to unite the scattered members of the race established by the Law-giver. We not only will cause them all to pronounce words in the same way, but will enable the people who assimilate with us to easily and properly learn our language, and so tend to make it universal."

"Do you think your work," I asked, "will really have so wide a range?"

"Certainly!" Diso replied. "People who speak the same tongue, read the same books, and think much the same thoughts; and as one universal language is wanted, we go far to make ours that one, by making its spelling phonetic, so that it is easily learned."

"Perhaps," said Mary, "we have a greater necessity for a
phonetic language at Fregida than in the Middle Globe. With us our scattered and distant communities, like Gurla, Ura, Bulla, and others have got, during many decades, to speak with different pronunciation, and so intensify their separation. They have also adopted words from Esquimaux, and other languages, the spelling of which they have retained while altering the pronunciation, so that our language has become difficult and ridiculous, as letters have different values in different words."

"Have you quite given up the scavengering, Diso?" I asked.

"I am now one of the Inspectors," he answered proudly. "To improve the means of utilizing the refuse of a city is surely a noble thing. You will have noticed at Ura how the refuse pollutes the river, and is wasted. It is simply sinful; they make the fruitful earth sterile, and the beautiful rivers filthy."

Diso went back to his work, and we watched the rationalizing of a contorted language. Most of the committee were old men—splendid old men—who had reached that age when rapid motion ceases to be a pleasure, and when appetites no longer crave for an excessive indulgence. When armed with the experience of years, and untroubled with the restlessness of early manhood, they can give all their thoughts patiently to their work.

"Surely," I said to Mary, "this dictionary will cost a great deal of money to the State?"

"On the contrary," she replied, "the State will gain by it, as they print the dictionary by contract, and charge a fraction over cost on each edition, for the expense of compilation."

In the morning Mary received a letter from Cora, which she read and re-read, though it was a very lengthy production. She leant back in her chair and considered it. Presently she came over to me, and kissed me. Why does a woman always want to kiss somebody when her emotions are pleasurably roused?

"Frank," she said, "Cora's letter tells me all about it. I am so glad. They will have the most magnificent wedding that ever was. Ours shall be quite a simple one. I prefer it."

Surely she was not repenting her refusal of Vernon, and "the most beautiful wedding that ever was."

"Would you like me to read you some of Cora's letter?"

I saw I was expected to say yes, so I complied.

"The first part won't interest you." She turned over a page and read as follows:

"When Frank and Gea left us, the duke put his hand on mine, and said in a voice that made me tremble with joy, for it told me he loved me—'Cora, I have been so successful, that men think I have nothing left to wish for, but if I have not one more success, all my triumphs will turn to ashes. I have met many women who were good and beautiful, and whom I thought I loved, when I only liked. I know now, for I have learnt what love is. In the pebbles on the river bank, one often thinks one
has found a jewel, but generally it turns out to be only a common crystal. At last I have found a jewel, a priceless treasure. Other men may only see in my prize a beauty such as they have seen before, but I see more. I see a light that will brighten my whole life, if I can only win it. There are two things one can only hope for, but can never be sure of. They are heaven, and a woman's love. Cora, I see that you are beautiful; that all men can see, and I know that you are good and true; not as other women, but with a steadfastness like that of the planets. This is not given to other men to see. My darling, I love you! I love you! I love you! Will you be my wife?"

Mary ceased reading. She had forgotten Vernon's love for her, in the joy she felt for her friend's happiness. She did not want his love, why should she grudge it to another? I remember when we had been told that an empty heart was a sorry thing. She proceeded with the letter. "I think I said yes, but it didn't matter. He had been very quiet lately. I guessed the reason, but I had to wait. I could not tell him till he asked me. Soon he became bright and happy. I shall never let him be sad again, because now I have the right to tell him everything. Then he began to arrange. No one can arrange things like he can. He said I must go home, and he would settle a thousand crowns a year on me, so that I could always give him a birthday present.

"What a nice way to make a present, Frank?" said Mary, stopping.

Naturally, I felt how nice it would be to be able to make such a present to one's darling. I think she guessed what I was thinking about, for she said,—

"Of course, she would love him just as well if he were poor. She cannot love him better than I love you, my Frank. Can she?"

There was only one thing for me to do, and I did it. I think a woman's love is too measureless to compare with anything. Infinite things are like each other, but beyond comparison.

She continued to read:

"After I was gone, Gea told me he called all the servants together, and told them. He then thanked them for the faithful service they had rendered him, and said that he would give any of them who wished to leave, a small annuity, and would always be their friend. Those who wished to be with him after he was married—and he hoped very much that that would mean them all—must go and see the future Duchess Dreman—when Gea told me, my cheeks burned—and get her to re-engage them. They all came one morning with Gea—they got a neighbour to look after the place—and asked if they might be my servants. They hoped I would let them stay on. They said there never was so kind a man as the duke, and they knew I would make him happy, and—oh, my dear! such lots of nice things, that I
kissed them every one, and said that I would never part with them until they were married. I know I should not have kissed them, but some of them cried, and I had to. I seem to want everything now. Of course, I only want him, but that is everything. It's helping to bring about what is good, and to suppress what is bad, and nothing else counts. Gea tells me he is so lonely and restless without me, that I feel inclined to go to him with a clergyman and a special licence, and marry him and never leave him again."

"You see," I said, "that some women pity their lover's loneliness, and actually wish to get married."

"It is quite possible to wish to get married without saying so," said Mary, reproachfully, and proceeded: "You know he thinks of everyone but himself; and though they are all very thoughtful, I feel that no one but me is able to properly look after him. He is getting the house re-decorated, and sends me harmonies to choose for the different rooms. He says what I like he will like, and he wants everything done exactly according to my taste; but I know what he likes, and I am getting things done as he would do them if he had not me to consider. I feel I am deceiving him a little, but as I really think his favourite colours are the prettiest, it is very little; besides, I intend to tell him some day."

Mary read me no more, and as she put down the letter, said, "She is a dear good girl, Frank, and will make Vernon the happiest man in the world."

"Except me and some others," I suggested.

Mary only noticed my remark with a glance, and continued,—

"She will be a perfect president's wife, as she has no pride, and lots of dignity and common sense."

"I expect she will coddle Vernon until he becomes fat and lazy, and like an idol, content to sit still and be worshipped."

"There is no fear of that. He is a man that cannot be made lazy, and who will be all the better for petting and love."

Wedding preparations became the only theme of interest. Consultations of various sorts were held all day and every day, till I was only saved from thinking a bridegroom was a superfluous person at his own wedding by the occasional interviews that I had with my lady love.

In the evenings Allan Mona would come home with me to dine, and to see Nitho. He would smile and stroke his beard while Nitho chatted, only occasionally giving an opinion, or venturing a remark. He was clever and good, but his close devotion to his work had prevented his cultivating, or thinking of, amusements and lighter matters. The student, if he would become a successful man, must when he commences his career, devote time and solitude to mentally digesting what his brain has absorbed, or else his learning will be but loads of learned lumber in his head.
Our work kept us very much together, and we became daily closer friends. The period of my marriage was drawing so near, that I had to find a best man, and as Duke Dreman was too busy with his own marriage arrangements to come to Zara and act for me, I asked Allan Mona if he would undertake the office.

"I have never been at a wedding, Frank," he said, "and am afraid that I should fail to perform my duties properly."

"Well, we will teach you. Nitho has been a bridesmaid, so she can instruct you in your duties."

"In that case, I shall be very happy to act."
And so it was decided.