CHAPTER XIX.

A MODEL FARM.

Since I had succeeded in getting the date of my wedding fixed, everyone had helped me in their own way. Everybody always does seem to be the best side out when a wedding approaches. If an old man marries a young woman, or an old woman a young man, people persuade themselves that the ancient party is not really old, but only appears so, owing to having been born about twenty years too soon; and so they do not shiver with the shadow of the thought of the man, in the dim future, sitting with shrunken limbs and doting brain by the fireside, whilst his buxom wife irritably scolds the servants, chafing under her ill-assorted union, or piously wishes for the time when the poor old creature will go to heaven, or elsewhere, and leave her free. Nor does the picture of an old woman, miserable with the knowledge of a faithless mate, whose strong manhood turns from her withered lips, come to their mind. Certainly, it is not wise to forestall evil, nor is it wise to pursue a pleasant path, in which there is only going forward, if it ends in a thicket of briars, which can only be traversed with torn garments and bleeding hands, even if they do look pretty and pleasant when viewed from afar.

Our honeymoon was to be spent at Andra Mura's farm, not in billing and cooing, for we could do as much of that as we wished—at least, my betrothed thought so—in our spare time. I was told that the women of Ura allowed their husbands to gluttonize on kisses for the first month after they were married, and were surprised to find that frequently, for the rest of their lives, they viewed kisses as things to be disregarded. I thought that a month for kisses, and one's lady, love, would not be too long by one second; but I was told I was wrong, and was asked if I would be content to eat one sort of food, from an inexhaustible pile, every day for a week. I wasn't even allowed to answer, and so the matter ended. On the farm, when I was not working at my books, I was to help Andra, but generally my time would be taken up, so I was informed, seeing the country, and learning about farm arrangements. Presents now began to arrive. Amongst the first was one from Duke Dreman, with a kind, fanciful letter, which perfectly illustrated his character. His present was a gold ring for Mary, with one diamond. Engraved on the inside were the
words, "Love ever, and forgive." In the letter he sent a receipt for all the money he had lent me; and, amongst other things, he wrote, "May your lives be free from evil, as the stone I send you is from flaw. For your future wife I have a deep regard. Further, she is a friend of my darling. For both their sakes, I hope their friendship will continue and strengthen. The settling of the debt you owe is of no consequence to me, and its removal will take an obstacle—a slight one—from your matrimonial path. Judging your love by my own, I feel that the promise I now give, to always be a friend to the woman who is to be your wife, and any who may hereafter inherit your name, will be of more value in your sight than the trinket and scrap of paper I enclose. I have shielded Cora as fully as money and man's love can shield anyone; and if, in the near or far future, she or hers want consolation or a friend, treat them as you would have me treat your darlings, and so will I act to them. Men like us, who have faced toil, and stood at the gates of death, fear nothing for ourselves; but for our loved ones, who have not our strength, we sometimes tremble."

It was a letter that, like its writer, was true and good. Much more it said, and every word went to my heart. My lady read it. "To have such a friend," she said, "is to be happy, for he will keep his word, as the sun its course. Frank, let us love him and his, as we love ourselves, now and always."

"Now and always, my queen!" I said. And so it was.

When Mary wrote to Cora, her eyes were full of tears, distilled of happiness. I did not see her letter, but I know it contained as much love as a diamond contains light. These happy women were strong and fearless, knowing that an infinite and all-powerful love shed its protection over them and theirs. This Vernon could not realize, and so he was a coward for those who were dear to him. The Duke and Duchess Phedra sent a dainty service of porcelain. Its white cups lined with pink were pretty and fragile as the petals of a blush rose. White and pink and gold. It seemed, to my sailor eyes, too beautiful for use. From Ion Mura, and Edie, his wife, came the skin of the great beast from whose clutches they had saved me. It was soft as a glove, and the hair white like snow. As I laid it on the ground its glass eyes seemed to glare at me, and its powerful claws to be ready to rend me limb from limb. Cula sent two compressed-gas rifles, one for each of us, which would discharge sixty bullets in a continuous stream, if necessary, without being reloaded. With very little noise the bullets went on their smokeless, deadly mission. On our wedding-day, these and many other gifts made a great pile, to prove the great kindness of our numerous friends. To our wedding came Cora and her mother. Cora was completely changed in every way. On her fingers precious stones glittered, her dress was richer, and she seemed taller. She felt and looked a queen. She had become dignified, but her big brown eyes alone showed her
happiness. Cula Dero came with his wife. She moved about
bird-like as ever, her silvery laughter sweet as a thrush's song.
Nearly every one we knew was present, to show their love for the
bride and their kindness to me. Our marriage was to take place
at Duke Mura's apartments. The marriage-day had come, and
Allan Mona and I were on the way to the wedding.
"You ought," I said, "to be able to pass an examination on the
duties of a bridegroom with honour, Allan, after the care Nitho
has taken to teach you."
"I am letter perfect," he answered, uneasily, "but the uncertainty about the grouping and the interludes are very likely to
puzzle me."
"Nitho's instructions should have been more definite."
"They were definite and brief. She says that I must mind you
don't hide yourself in your beard, and shut my eyes if I see any­
one nicer than her, and then I will be all right."
Parson Hamer officiated at the service, which seemed to me the
same as that at the Middle Globe. Mary's father, a tall, intel­
lectual old man, who farmed for a living and studied geology for a
pleasure, gave her away. She was dressed in a dark grey walking
frock, as we were to start for Andra's farm after the wedding.
Amongst a number of tall women—all the women of Zara were
tall—she was the tallest. Stately and tall. Strong and gentle.
Clever and good. Of them all I saw only her, the rest seemed
shadows. Parson Hamer felt and spoke the beautiful words of
the marriage service so that they went to both our hearts, purging
them of pride and moving them for good. In a little while I was
a married man. A man with a double existence for happiness,
with a being better and purer than myself, to be ever ready to
turn me from evil and cheer me for good. We signed a book, and
then commenced the good-byes.
"If you haven't noticed how admirably Allan did justice to my
instructions, Frank, I must conclude that marriage has made you
selfish," said Nitho.
Duke Phedra had sent his air carriage to take us to the out­
skirts of the city, where Andra was to meet us, and in it we
started on our honeymoon journey, midst a shower of good wishes
and rosebuds. Andra and his wife were waiting to meet us with
a pair-horse wagonette. Horses, after all, are pleasanter to drive,
even if neither so safe nor reliable, than an electro car or a com­
pressed-air carriage. The roads were wide and tree planted.
Throughout Zara, the highways and byways were all of uniform
width.
The farmhouse was a large two-storey building with a wide
veranda, surrounded by a garden, and flanked by outbuildings.
Andra's sister-in-law, Nellie Porto, kissed Mary, and was intro­
duced to me. She was a handsome, fair girl of ample proportions
and placid manner, whose kind face showed a contented amia-
bility, and suggested a nature too self-satisfied to undertake anything unusual, or to trouble about trifles. The farm hands constituted a considerable and various community, living under hotel-like arrangements. At supper, which was a feast meal in our honour, every person on the farm over ten years of age came to table, except the maids who served and waited. There was no distinction whatever, further than the usual extra respect shown to the master of the house. The term farm labourer was unknown, and certainly would not have been applicable to the educated, intelligent men and women who did the work on the farm. The only difference between them and the people in the duke’s household was that they were brawnier, more sunburnt, and of a less restless and perhaps not of quite so keenly intellectual a type. The difference, however, was not greater than is frequently seen among brothers.

The dinner was really good, and like that usually served in an American hotel, but without the endless variety of dishes. The dessert consisted of fruit, freshly picked, bright and mellow, with the perfection that alone comes from the ripening on the parent stem. Andra’s buxom wife spoke to him, and asked that the glasses be filled. Mary’s hand caught mine under the table, and she whispered, “Speak as you did at the Senate, my husband.”

I felt a mighty joy. For the first time she gave me the title I had won of her love. A title that every worthy man has taken with pride since civilization dawned. I noticed that only the women filled their glasses. The liquor was a wine made from a sort of elderberry, that sparkled like champagne, that was exhilarating and slightly intoxicating, though no one ever got inebriated with it.

Andra rose. “My friends, it is my privilege to propose a toast that every maid hopes to hear in her honour, and every man to reply to. As I think the maids are better women after hearing it,” (the men applauded), “and I am quite certain the men are much better after replying to it” (they all applauded). “I hope your turns will soon come. I have to propose the health of the bride, Mrs. Frank Farleigh, whom my wife has persuaded to come to Onara Fields” (the name of the farm) “for her honeymoon. When she comes into our gardens we will pick her the ripest fruit and the sweetest flowers. When she comes to our fields we will make her a throne of hay and a bouquet from the hedgerows. When she goes to the farmyard the hens will show her all they know about the management of chickens. To the health and happiness of the bride!”

The women lifted their glasses, from which they took a sip, and handed them to the men, who, with a bow to my wife and a “Health and happiness to the bride,” drank up the wine. The women then sang the following song, the men joining in the chorus:
May joy betide thee, gentle bride,
God send thee love, and much beside,
Sweet beauty, in thy husband's eye,
Often to laugh, seldom to sigh.

Chorus.

Joy betide thee, gentle bride,
May love be ever, love be ever, love be ever at thy side.

And other loves may heaven give,
So that your kind may ever live,
And when you seek a heavenly way,
You in your children here may stay. Chorus.

The tact to guide to noble aim
The man your heart does not disdain;
And all the joy that women know,
Who wisely on love's path do go. Chorus.

The echo of the bass voices had hardly died away when Mrs. Andra threw me a kiss from the end of her fat fingers, and I rose with a full heart to try and express some of the grateful pride that thrilled me.

"Mrs. Andra, Andra, and friends! Andra has told you that a man becomes better after he has replied to the health he has just proposed. I am sorry that the improvement does not take place before instead of after, so that better justice might be done in the reply. On my wife's behalf, permit me to thank you for so kindly welcoming her, and drinking her health. That she will enjoy the fruit, admire the flowers, and sympathize with the hen-mother, I am sure. That she will enjoy them doubly, because they come with love and kindness, I am also sure. Under ordinary circumstances I would help her to admire them, but till my honeymoon is over I decline to admire anything but her. On her behalf, and my own, permit me to thank you for the kindness you have extended to us."

And so we received our welcome. With music we ended the day. On the farm the days commenced and ended early. Most of the songs had a chorus in which three or four voices joined, and made the great room echo with melody. The intellectual surroundings were as much brighter than and superior to those of a farm at the Middle Globe, as was the electric light, generated from windmills, and used at the former, to the grease-dropping candles or kerosine lamps of the latter. The last song, sung by a woman's voice, which was joined by all in the refrain, I shall give, as it is a sample of the songs of Andra's farm.

GOOD NIGHT.

Good night, till light
Comes with the morn.
May sleep, sweet sleep, eyes close,
And sweet repose
In the morning we went to the milking sheds, where we found Nellie superintending the first milking of the cows; a beautiful, quiet lot of polled cattle.

"Have none of the cattle horns in Undara, Nellie?" I asked.

"No," she replied, "sometimes a calf show signs of their coming, and it is at once dehorned. Many years ago nearly all the cattle had horns, supplied by nature as a protection against their enemies; but as men did away with their enemies, and, finding they then used their horns only to hurt each other, deprived the cattle of them, nature at last ceased to supply any."

The milk was poured into a huge can, mounted on three wheels. I was then taken to the dairy. Part of it was placed aside for immediate use, and the remainder put into a contrivance which separated the cream from the milk. The cream was then made into butter, and the milk given to the calves and the pigs. At certain times large quantities of cheese were made. Many of the neighbouring farmers sent their milk to be treated at Onara; as the wisdom of co-operation was universally established. Big-wheeled tricycles worked by a maid or youth, and carrying a big tin of milk, kept arriving one after the other, till there seemed to be more milk than could be supplied by all the cows on the face of the earth. Pints and quarts were useless as means of measurement, the milk was in barrels full. While we were watching the cows going to their pastures, a whistle sounded a long-sustained note, which ended up in a shriek, and the buxom women, and the big armed men, came trooping in to breakfast. The men, clad in armless singlets and close-fitting knickerbockers, were models of strength. In a big lavatory they left their boots, and
put on slippers, made their ablutions, and appeared in the breakfast room in thick tight-fitting singlets, fresh as the morning, and merry as children. Many of the maids dressed like the men, with only the difference that their sleeves were long, and the extra smartness which feminine fingers make with any apparel; while the married women wore short skirts, and slightly different bodices. Again the whistle blew, and before the people in the cities were out of bed, we had commenced breakfast, and ere they had dressed, had each disposed of more good food than most of them would consume in a day. After breakfast, Andra and the men prepared to go to the field, where they were cutting and stacking the ripe corn.

"Will you come, Frank?" asked Andra.

I looked at Mary pleadingly.

"I will go if you care, Frank," she said. So we went.

The tall corn heads undulated with the wind, like the sea surface on a calm day, after rough weather. Two horse-drawn machines cut and bound the corn in sheaves, while in another part of the field the wheat was being thrashed and bagged, while the straw was pressed and carted away. Presently Mrs. Andra came up with a fat round-faced baby in her arms.

"Come, Mary," she called out, cheerily, "and see how we get the men their dinner."

I stuck my fork in the ground to accompany my wife. Mrs. Andra laughed, and said,—

"You needn't come, Frank. If men are allowed to be too lavish of their love when the honeymoon is on, they often become bankrupt of it before they are grandfathers."

"You will soon be as gentle under feminine rule as I am, Frank," said Andra, laughing, "and come to think the women are wise in some things; but very few."

Mary would sooner have stayed, but was lovingly marched off by our matronly hostess. At midday, Mrs. Andra, Mary, and several of the women returned with some hand-carts containing the dinner and some light hop beer. A whistle sounded, and the men gathered round, and commenced another substantial meal. The solid breakfast of the morning was quite forgotten, and their early appetite was put to shame by the sustained energy with which they attacked their dinner. Dinner, a rest, and a smoke, occupied an hour, and then work was resumed as energetically as ever. Strolling back with the women, I said questioningly to Mrs. Andra,—

"You don't limit your work to six hours on the farm, evidently?"

"No," she replied, "but the men get a day's pay for each six hours' work they do. Many of the regular farm workers earn two days' pay every day during the harvesting, but most of the men from the towns can only manage nine or ten hours' work."
"You seem to keep them busily employed during their working hours?"

"We do, and very hard work it is."

"Do you pay them all the same?"

"Oh, no. We pay them according to the amount of strength or skill required."

"The farm is taken on a limited co-operative arrangement," said Mary, "which Andra will explain to you after supper."

As I had not heard any details of the co-operative system which was usual in Zara, I asked Andra to tell me how it applied to his farm.

"Well," he said, "my wife and I had been betrothed two years, when the owner of this farm died, and it became for sale. Lucie was an excellent housekeeper, and I a good farmer, while Aubrey Shanna and his betrothed, May Arly, had been working on the same estate as us for over two years, and I knew them to be wise workers, while Nellie had commenced the dairy work, and was getting on very well. So we agreed together to all go into partnership, and take the farm, if we could borrow the necessary money to enable us to do so. I then went to my father, who promised to put three thousand crowns into the partnership. This enabled us to purchase the farm, which we called Onara Fields, and an outlying block of land. Of course, we only paid a deposit, and left the balance—nearly all, in fact—on the place as a mortgage. Still we purchased it, and it was ours, subject to the mortgage. We stocked our land, furnished the house, and established ourselves comfortably, leaving a balance in the bank, for current expenses. We were to receive half of our wages at the end of every week. At the end of the year, half the interest on the money lent was to be paid, and the balance of the profit, if any, to be divided pro rata between the money lent and us. At the end of the first year, after paying half wages and half interest, the interest share of the remaining profits was seventy-five crowns or shares, and the total wages one hundred and eighty-two crowns or shares. Well, we had only one hundred and ninety-two crowns to divide, so the money share received fifty-six crowns, and the wages share, which was us, one hundred and thirty-five crowns. Of course we paid for everything as we went, and for all hired labour in full. At the end of the second year we had three hundred and seventy-seven crowns to divide, so the money share received ninety-five crowns, and the labour two hundred and thirty-two. At the end of the fifth year we gave the money interest notice that we would pay it off after the next division, had a valuation of all our effects according to the agreement, and a division according to increased value. The money interest after being paid its shares to the end of the fifth year in full, received interest at the rate of twenty-one and one-twelfth per cent. per annum, so it did very
well. In three years there will be another complete division of the profits, and the money interest will be paid off in full. Then we will reap all the profits for ourselves and get rapidly well off."

"It seems to me," I said, "that the money share has been like a greedy dragon, devouring a huge slice of the profits earned by you, which it must continue to devour until the end of your tenth year of labour. Surely it is most unfair?"

"On consideration," said Andra, "you will see it is perfectly fair. This money was advanced to enable us to go into business as farmers; had we had a few bad years, and some bad luck, such as disease among the cattle or our crops, it would have been all lost, or rather a large portion of it would have been lost, while we would have received only half wages. Where there is risk, there must be large profits to enable people to take the risk. Further, the person advancing the money does all he can to enable us to sell our produce, so you see it is quite fair. Had we not got this money, we would have been working for other people all our days."

"It enables men like my husband," said Lucy, "who have shown energy and ability, to make a start for themselves, without having to spend the best years of their lives saving sufficient to enable them to do so."

Andra only smiled. He was evidently used to this sort of thing; his wife was too much in earnest even to be aware that she had complimented her husband.

"The co-operation in this plan," I said, "seems to be very limited. Could you not make it include your humblest farm assistants?"

"Impossible, as a rule," Andra replied, "for they would not take the necessary risks, and so would not be entitled to the possible profits. In certain cases we do, however. For instance, at our outlying grazing block we have a man and his family in charge, and have agreed to give him half wages like ourselves, and a similar pro rata share of the profits."

"Before they had been in charge a month the children caught the black stallion," said Nellie.

"How did they do that, and what is the black stallion?" I asked.

"On Mount Boro," Nellie replied, "there are some wild horses, amongst whom was born the black stallion. When he was first seen he was a big two-year-old, black as jet, without a hair or spot of any other colour. When he grew to be four years old he was supposed to be the handsomest and fleetest horse in all Fregida. Lots of people tried to catch him, but they could never succeed, for he was as cunning as he was handsome, and could tell a trap in a minute, people said, by the scent of the human hands that constructed it. At night time he would leap the
fences and join the other horses, till at last they tried to shoot him, but always unsuccessfully. Several times they got him in stockyards, but he would always get out directly anyone came near. People said he climbed the fences. In reality he would leap on the top rail and tumble over. To bring cattle from this farm and return with others takes five days. After Marco Zilla had been settled there a short time he left his wife and three children, and came down to us with some cattle. When he had gone the black stallion, seeing everything was quiet, came to the neighbouring woods, and neighed to a beautiful mare that Mrs. Zella had. Seeing this, she and her boys determined to try and catch him, so they put the mare in the inner inclosure of a double stockyard, giving her a good supply of food and water, while with a very long cord they kept the outer gate open. By loosening this cord, which led to a thicket where they concealed themselves, they could close the gate quietly. When night came the eldest boy and his mother went to the string, and watched from their hiding-place, after putting the other two children to bed. Presently they heard the stallion call and the mare answer him. They continued to call to one another till at last the black stallion entered the yard, and they let the gate quietly close. He looked round, but the mare called him, and he returned to her. Presently he trotted round the yard, but the mare again called him; she seemed to know that she had to keep his attention occupied. Quietly Mrs. Zella and her boy went to bed. Next morning the stallion was still there, trotting round and round the yard, only stopping occasionally to winnow to the mare through the rails. Had anything frightened him he would have made an effort to get over the fence, but fortunately nothing did, and he stayed contentedly near the mare, who was all the time very sociable. At the end of the third day he was half starved and weak with trotting round and round the yard, so they decided to bring the poor mare some food, as she had eaten all hers up the first day, and was beginning to be very hungry. When they brought the mare food, the stallion snorted and reared, and then with a rush and a bound tried to get over the fence, but only succeeded in getting his fore legs on the top and falling back. Again and again he tried, but always unsuccessfully, for he was too weak for want of food and water. The fourth day the poor brute drank out of a bucket, and in the evening when Zella came home he threw a halter over his head and secured him. Weak as he was he made a great struggle for mastery, but after a while, finding that he only received food and kindness from Zella, soon became tame, and now there is no quieter or handsomer horse in Fregida than the beautiful black stallion."