CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE END OF A HERO.

When the duchess returned, Vernon asked,—
"Are the children gone to bed?"
"No, dear!"
"Please bring them in."
"My husband," said the white-faced woman; "you will tire yourself."
"For the last time, my wife."
She turned and left us. Presently she came back with the baby, a fat, dimpled child of eighteen months, asleep in her arms.
"Do not wake her," he said, and kissed her once.
Then two little girls of four and six came in. They had been crying, child-like, in sympathy with the general grief. Seeing their father looking, as they thought, well, they ran joyously to him and kissed his face, telling him how glad they were he had killed the bear. Then they kissed him for "Good-night."
"Always be good girls," he said, "and love mother."
When they had gone, he turned to his wife.
"Tell them, sometimes," he said; "and then they will remember."
The two eldest girls now came. They were eight and eleven, and realized fully what had happened. The second girl, brown-eyed, like her mother, who had always been the father's special pet, took his face in her hands, and sobbed, and kissed it, both children weeping bitterly, discharging their grief in tears, as do the clouds their moisture in rain.
Children and spring allow tears but a passing supremacy. The sunshine of their existence can only be temporarily repressed. When they had exhausted their grief sufficiently to listen, he said,—
"My little girls, I am going away to the boys in heaven. No one but you will be left to comfort mother. Always remember that that will be your task."
He stopped, he was getting weak. The children could not answer for sobbing.
Promise, and kiss me good-bye."
They did so and left, and once more the room was quiet.
Cora knelt at the bedside, quiet except for an occasional sobbing
sigh. He looked at her lovingly.
"I think it will be well with her, Frank," he said, after awhile.
"She is very brave and patient."
He was right, she was very brave and patient. Since her
marriage her life had been happy as a bird’s in spring, and now
the winter of misery was upon her in all the cold distress of
overwhelming disaster, she faced it with a heroism a hero might
have envied. There never has been, nor ever will there be, a
thing so supporting to the finite strength of humanity as that
conviction, more common amongst women than amongst men,
that they are watched over by an infinite and merciful power,
that only sends unhappiness for the individual’s ultimate good,
and that will eventually unite them in joy with those they love,
for all eternity. Fortified by this belief, and trusting to her
husband’s wisdom, as only second to that of the Almighty, joys
did not spoil her, or sorrow crush. Amongst those who had come
to speak with the dying president—for the news of the disaster
had been flashed along the telegraph wires throughout all the
land, as the brain flashes intelligence along the nerves to every
part of the body—were the venerable Duke Phedra, Duke Ance,
whose wise and energetic labours for the good of Gurla had got
him a title, and Sir Diso Rota, who now, with a number of
others, were waiting on the chance of once more seeing the duke
alive.
Being informed of this, he said,—
"Frank, I will see them all."
"You are not strong enough, Vernon," I said, wondering at
his fortitude. "You must only see one or two. Why will you
not rest?"
"Not now, tell them." His voice had become very weak and
low.
Going to them, I told them what the duke wished, and exactly
how things stood, and asked them to select two or three of their
number to go to him.
They then selected the three I have named, and we went in
together.
Nothing was altered since I left. The duchess was still on her
knees.
Each one in turn took and kissed his hand, and the wise old
duke spoke:
"We have come to see you once more, Duke Vernon. Together
we have worked, but always you have led us. Now... the
old man stopped, trembling and overcome with grief, "who
shall be our leader?"
"That the wisdom of the people will decide," said the dying
man. "Have no fear, there are lots worthy. When the time is ripe, a fit man will be found; I know of many such."

"Will you nominate a man to carry on the work?" asked Duke Ance.

"No, my friend. Among you there are some more able than I. Say to the Parliament that I thank them for their kindnesses, and dying, asked them to forgive my faults, and always believe I acted for the best. Say to the people, I ask them to shed no tear for me, but for my wife and children I ask their love." He paused from weakness for a moment, and then, with an effort continued: "Tell them I asked in all humility, those who love me, that they will remember all men may err, and always strive to be wise, love and forgive."

He closed his eyes; and the old duke stooped and kissed him on the forehead, as did the others.

Together we returned to those who had sent us, amongst whom were representatives from all Undara and Roda. The old duke, with streaming eyes and trembling hands, told what had occurred, and concluded by saying,—

"Long have I known him, and always has he striven for the right, nobly has he lived, and nobly now he dies."

At the suggestion of Duke Ance, the dying man's message to the people was sent to every town in the land beyond the ice.

It was past midnight, but only the children were in bed. Sleep, work, business of all sorts had been forgotten, and everywhere people waited for news of Duke Vernon. Returning, I gave the dying man a stimulant, and he commenced to speak to his wife. The exertion of talking had reduced him very much, and I could see that the end was nearly come.

"My dear," he said to her, "when I am gone to the boys, you will not have time to sorrow. We will—one or the other of us—be always with you, and watch over you. This the Almighty will not deny us. When you ride Motrarer, we will be with you—Vernon said so. Everywhere one of us will be with you to shield you; you will feel us in the wind. We will be doing our work, and preparing for you; we will all be so lonely separated. You must look after the children for me, as well as for yourself—be father and mother. I thought I should live to bequeath my work to the boys: I was presumptuous in my ambition; but I was always prepared for failure. I always thought of you."

"My husband, my hero," sobbed the poor wife. "Think only of yourself."

"You are my better self, my wife. You have always prayed for both."

"Pray now, my husband."

"Presently. First promise me you will see to the horses and dogs as we did, and keep them all."

"Yes, my dear."
"You promise."
"Yes," said the sobbing wife.
"You will not sorrow. Remember for the children's sake, and though I cannot hold you in my arms, I will be near you, and grieve, if you grieve; or joy, if you be happy."
"Spare me, my husband."
"Remember, dear, I will be always near you."
"Frank," he turned to me, he was very weak and faint, "remember to stay near Cora till she has got over the sorrow of our loss. She will do what you tell her, do not let her change her life. You will cremate the boys and me, and put our ashes in the one urn. When Cora has done her work—which will not be for many years—mingle her ashes with ours. Now, dear, I will pray with you."

Cora, with both his hands in hers, commenced to pray. He shut his eyes, and his lips seemed to move. Parson Hamer had come, and was waiting to see the last of Vernon. I went to him.
"The duke is dying, Parson Hamer," I whispered. "Will you come and pray with him?"
"Did he ask me to?" the parson asked suspiciously.
"No."
"Then I will not."

Of the parson's acts no one could disapprove, but both they and his words were what the middle world would call "extremely unorthodox."

He continued, "What does such a man want with prayer, when he is dying? Nothing. His whole life has been one long, noble prayer, better than the words of ten lifetimes of supplications. His message to the Parliament and the people is a prayer. His death is a prayer. Let him talk to his poor wife—dear good woman—I will pray with her when he is gone. If he can pray, he can talk; I will talk to him."

And the parson and I went in without more discussion.

They were still as I left them, the wife's prayers only interrupted by her occasional sobs. She prayed for him and their dead sons. She prayed as she felt, with all the love of a good woman for her husband and children—surely such prayers should move God's mercy. His eyes were opened, and he seemed to be thinking more of her than her words. The parson put his hand on her shoulder. She stopped and looked up. Her face was white and drawn, but alight with the belief that moves mountains. Such a face one would suppose the old martyrs to have, as they prayed between the agonies of torture. She was glad to see Hamer. In only one thing would she have had her husband changed. He could never pray. His acts, he said, were his prayers, for they earned him the prayers of his wife, and other people holy in the sight of heaven. Had he but prayed, she would have had nothing to wish for.
"Parson Hamer," she said, "will you pray with the duke? You have heard?" Again she buried her face and wept.

"His peace has been made with God long ago, dear duchess. He is going to meet his sons, and have his reward, which will be great." Hamer, with firm voice, looked like one inspired. "We will pray for ourselves by-and-by; for we, not he, have need of help from heaven in our heavy sorrow. Now we will talk to him."

The dying man would not talk much more. His voice was hardly louder than a whisper. He could barely move his hands. Only his eyes were bright and lifelike.

"Hamer," he said, "she will be lonely. Come and pray with her often, and cheer her up."

"All Undara will cheer her up, duke," he said huskily.

The dying man's mind commenced to wander.

"All Undara," he said, evidently trying to collect his thoughts. "Vernon, you, and Novel must unite all Undara." He evidently thought someone was speaking. "Do not be severe with the Rodas, they are improving fast," his finger-tips idly catching the counterpane. "Then let your sons complete the work." Again he rested, smiling to himself. "That Roda does not understand you, Vernon—ask Novel to do it." He evidently thought he was watching the boys and the Rodas building the toy-house. Suddenly his face changed, and he said quite clearly,—

"My boys, we have built a tower of Babel."

His eyes closed, and I thought he slept. He seemed strangely quiet. I stooped over him. His brave life was ended, and he had gone to join the boys he so dearly loved.

Parson Hamer looked at me inquiringly. Understanding his glance, I bent my head. He knelt beside the widow and commenced to pray aloud. He prayed for her and her little daughters, that she might be supported in her loneliness, and be enabled to face her loss with cheerfulness and resignation. The good man's voice filled the room with mellow sound and holy Christ-like thought. The parson's prayer now went up for the dead boys, and then for "Vernon Dreman, Thy servant, now lying dead!"

My head was bowed in prayer.

Hardly had he finished his sentence, when a piercing shriek filled the room, and the poor wife threw herself sobbing on her dead husband's breast. She had known that death was near, but now it had come she felt unprepared and stunned. At last tears came to her relief, and then we left her with her dead hero.

The duke and his sons now lay in state in the Presidential residence at Ura. From far and near, from Roda, Gurla, and all
Undara, came men of all grades and opinions. Some there were who regarded the dead man's ideas as too progressive, and him as an enthusiast of extreme ability and energy, and for this reason to be regarded as dangerous; but everyone admitted his great goodness and wonderful ability, and the almost miraculous good he had done for all the people of Fregida. The former were the rare exceptions, the people who would find fault with anything; the rest regarded the dead duke with a love and reverence such as no other man ever inspired. His splendid eloquence, great energy and ability, and, above all, his unfailing courtesy, Christ-like power of forgiveness, and desire to give everyone the full credit due to them, supported as these qualities were by his great wealth—pity such qualities should need a setting of gold to complete their power—had enabled him to step into the position of leader when just such a man was wanted, and at the same time to do great good, and cover himself with glory.

Foremost amongst the mourners were Duke Mura (now over ninety years of age, who had known Vernon Dreman from the time he first came into notice, and had loved and helped him almost as if he had been one of his own sons), Duke Ance, and Prince Valentine, who was now known as Duke Vance, having purchased a title and become a leader of progress, the duke's persuasive eloquence having joined the divided factions, so that the only difference between them now was as to the best way to proceed.

William Moran, rewarded with the title of "Sir," who had always regarded Duke Dreman as a heaven-sent leader, now wept by the corpse. Edna Kerna, Sir Diso Rota, and all the leading men, came to gaze on or offer their floral tributes to the great hero. Flowers of every colour, wreathed, or gathered in various forms, were laid around the three dead Dremans, till they reached to their level, and they seemed in a floral lake.

On the day of cremation the streets were lined, and the Crematorium crowded the night before by people anxious to hear the funeral oration of Parson Hamer. Funerals, as a rule, were conducted with the least possible pomp, people regarding it as their duty to be kind to their friends during their life, but not to intensify or keep alive the grief at their loss by useless ceremony, which made the tremendous preparations for this one the more unusual. The funeral car was followed first by the members of the two houses of Parliament; then by the leading officers and people of Fregida; and lastly, by a mighty concourse of people of every sort.

Issuing from the noble building crowned by a mighty monument of the dead man, the solemn procession slowly wended its way to the Crematorium. In its wake, like the winding of a river, came the sorrowing multitude. The father, with a son on either side of him, lay in an open coffin, visible to the eyes of the weeping
crowd. The mightiness of death gave to the face of the strong man a sweet gentleness of expression that only his friends knew as natural to him. Nearly every person in Fregida had, at one time or other, listened to the living words that came like music from his lips, as living body to the spirit of his genius. Listening to his words, they had seen vividly on his face the picture of the feelings they awoke.

The low, sweet tones, and gentle smile, with humid eyes, that came to him as he pleaded for feuds to be forgotten, or generous deeds to be done; the lofty crest, dilated nostril, and sparkling eye that with the clarion voice urged the wisdom of right and drew the veil from the future; the pointed finger and smile of scorn that lay bare the folly of the selfish, or the fallacy of pretence; all that and more were memories in the minds of most of those who sorrowed at his funeral. But the placid gentleness of the dead man showed him in yet another character. The mothers looked on the dead sons at his side, and wept with a fellow-feeling for the desolate widow.

What would they do had such a fate happened to their children? They wept and prayed God to protect them from the sorrow of the poor woman bereaved in one day of her boy-children and her husband. The maids looked on the dead youths, and wept for the loss of so much promise. The men, with stern faces, grieved for the loss of their noble leader and the youths that they had regarded as the future leaders of their sons. The little children wept because they saw others weep, and smiled because the piles of flowers and passing people pleased them.

At last they reach the cemetery, in sight of the tall tower that bore the monument of the dead duke, and the hearse drew up for the last scene in the being of Duke Dreman.

Only the line of those who followed from the hearse to the gate gained admittance to the crematorium grounds. All around the ground was covered with a sea of human beings, and the houses as far as the eye could see were dotted with spectators.

Parson Hamer, bare-headed and big, on a raised pulpit outside the chapel, stood in view of the bare-headed multitude. The day was sunshiny and calm, yet the voice of the preacher, clear and sonorous as it was, only reached the few surrounding thousands of the numerous throng.

The beautiful service proceeded with all the people joining in; those near the pulpit acting as a guide to those further away, who in turn led those behind them, so that the multitude joined the parson almost as one man. The low-pitched voices of the many thousands of people, as they uttered Christ’s prayer in unison, rose from the earth with a noise as of distant thunder or a mighty earthquake. Excepting this, the stillness was only broken by the many uttered “Amens.”

When the funeral oration was reached the very air seemed
petrified with silence, so great was the stillness. For a moment—a long impressive moment—the parson stood with open eyes, sightless with many visions, and voice dumb beneath the weight of a flood of thought. Then he commenced—slow and laboured at first:

"All my life long have I lived to preach what the life of this man, now dead before us, has illustrated. I have preached, and he has proved, that the laws of nature are the laws of God, and if we obey them and conform to them, as taught by Christ we shall attain the greatest happiness here, and raise our souls to a happier hereafter. That sin is punished in this life, and goodness rewarded. The corollary of which is, that our acts here bring us to a higher or lower existence. That all things are in reason and conformity with one great law. That man's mind can comprehend his surroundings, and with these alone he has to do; those who would have us disobey the wise laws that unalterably control us, because they pretend to reveal the wish of the unknown Almighty, prove by their arguments their own folly. You cannot understand our words, they say, because you are finite, and we speak of what is infinite. Our answer is our reason is equal to yours, talk to us in a manner that can be understood; leave the infinite power to manage its own business, which it will in its own good time. We are given the power to help to fill the world with happiness, and banish misery and disease; let us do this; it is our duty, the way is plain before us, it is our only means of happiness. Take from our lives greed, hatred, laziness, presumptuousness, and all folly, and encourage self-respect, forgiveness, industry and all wisdom, as taught by Christ and all great men. These things I preach, and, to the best of my strength, practise; for I know that they are the foundation of wisdom, which bears the fruit of happiness. Our friend Vernon Dreman—(he was a friend to us all; first, he was a perfect friend in the closer relations of life—son, brother, husband, father—then he was a perfect friend to all mankind; only by being perfect in both could he be perfect in either)—our friend, Vernon Dreman, by his life proved my preaching, and caused a host of others to do so.

"Folly is misery; wisdom is happiness. To me it seems but yesterday that Vernon Dreman, young and energetic, was first heard advocating a progress then—a time fresh in the memory of all old people—deemed visionary and impossible. Since then these things, and more, have come to pass. The hour was fit for such a man to pluck happiness from a period ripened by centuries of labour, and Vernon Dreman was the man. The man cannot make the time—that is the work of many men and

1 These words are respectively "folly" and "wisdom" in the original manuscript, but mean what we designate "sin" and "goodness." In reality, the words are synonymous.—[Editor.]
many decades—but he is made by it; he can, however, hasten its progress, as Duke Dreman has done, to the limit of its speed. When he first began to come to the front, men said, 'He is headstrong; a torrent of empty words; there would always be a degraded and unreclaimable portion of human society.' This was necessary under their laws, though impossible under ours. Then when people began to admire his views and actions, the scoffers said, 'He is immoral, worthless,' and in the name of a religion founded on charity and forgiveness, magnified all his actions that could not bear the light, till, from a hasty sentence born of anger, they made a reasonable conspiracy, and held a word and smile to a woman as evidences of every immorality. Certainly he was not in all things above the evil customs of his day, for then there was a latitude in lust; acts within which only caused honourable men to make coarse jokes, and virtuous women to smilingly say, 'It was not all his fault.' He was amongst the best of a bad time. Then he commenced to advocate union with Zara; the happiness of wisdom, and the wisdom of self-respect, industry, and forgiveness. That his splendid eloquence hastened the union of Zara and Gurla under the federation of Undara, there is no doubt. That his wisdom and courage were the cause of a great change for the good in Undara, there is also no doubt. The crushing of the hostile element in Gurla, and its acceptance of the wisdom of Undara, is also largely due to him. Had he lived, he would have reclaimed the Rodas, and brought all Fregida under the happy influence of perfect wisdom. Great have been his achievements for good, and great his reward. In all his career no just man could ever say that he received harm from the dead duke, or that he ever bore malice; and yet there are thousands who have received his favours and forgiveness. Now what has been his recompense? Wealth has rewarded his projects; fame his efforts in the cause of his fellows; and love and happiness been his daily portion. His wife has blessed his love with children, two of whom—oh! heavy loss—lie here dead. That they would in the course of time replace their father, and continue his works, he and every one believed. And now, by mischance, they are dead, and of Duke Dreman's loved ones only wife and daughters live to mourn their loss. Of his life I have spoken; now to speak of his death. Dying, he had no fear for himself, and only thought of others. His children he gave to his wife's care, and for her asked the protection of his friends. To the people he left this message—think of it for ever, 'I ask them,' he said, 'to shed no tear for me; but for my wife and children, I ask their love. Tell them I ask, in all humility, that those who love me will remember that all men may err, and always strive to be wise; love and forgive.' As you remember the message well or ill, so will your lives be the more or less like his.
The good man ceased, and the ceremony proceeded. Soon the bodies were placed in their iron coffins and sent to the flames, from which they returned a handful of dust. The ashes of the father and sons were together placed in an urn, which was deposited in the chapel attached to the Parliament House. And so ended the career of a great and noble man.

So truly was he my friend, that I should doubt my opinion of him, were it not universally confirmed, alike by friends and opponents—enemies he had none. That I have made a sketch of the land beyond the ice, which is also a sketch of this man, is necessitated by the fact that the history of both are so nearly the same as to defy disentanglement.