CHAPTER V.

LIFE IN ZARA.

On going to my room, I was gratified to find that my soiled and ragged clothes had been washed and renovated, so that they looked quite presentable; some new collars, handkerchiefs, a pair of boots and a new cap, were all laid out as neatly as if the head steward had given the matter his personal attention.

On resuming my clothes, which consisted of the short jacket suit, usually worn by a ship's doctor, I was gratified to see that they were sufficiently becoming and useful, to be worn even by the artistic and sensible people whom I had discovered.

Though I was still weak, it was surprising the difference the three days of nourishing food and pleasant comfort had made. My thoughtful attendant—probably inspired by Mary—had left a light strong walking-stick for me, and a pair of gloves.

Even when I look back from the vantage of subsequent consideration, I can think of nothing that had been left undone, which could possibly have added to my comfort or happiness; except, perhaps, Nitho's broken sentence.

On entering the dining-room the Duchess came to meet me, making many kindly inquiries as to my welfare.

The Duke, who was talking to a distinguished-looking man, presently saw us, and came over with his companion.

"Frank, this is Vernon Dreman, a friend of ours and a leading citizen of the adjoining land of Ura. Vernon, this is Doctor Frank Farleigh, from the Middle Globe, of whom I have told you."

Vernon Dreman, a very fine athletic man, of about thirty-five years of age, was rather above the middle height. His pale, plain face, denoted tremendous energy of purpose, and the highest courage, linked with great shrewdness and mental activity. His short black hair showed a broad white forehead, very prominent over the eyes, which were blue and restless. His eyebrows and small moustachio were golden brown, his long, low-bridged nose had wide nostrils that extended when he was animated, and his coarse mouth was mounted on a determined-looking jaw and chin. His whole appearance was dandified, pleasant and courteous.
Instinctively, I felt we should come to conclusions, and that as an opponent this man would be dangerous.

"I congratulate you," he said, smiling pleasantly, "on your miraculous escape from the fate of your comrades, Frank, and hope I shall have the pleasure some day of entertaining you in Ura, with the Duke's party."

The electric bells rang.

"These bells ring in every room in the house for dinner, unless they are turned off, which is frequently the case," said the Duke.

Mary and Nitho came in, and we moved to a table that had been prepared for us. Mary said,—

"Frank, you may sit beside me, as you still want nursing."

Vernon smiled and said,—

"While you are nurse, Mary, he will never get well."

"Pardon me, he is getting well very fast," replied Mary.

"Then he cannot fully appreciate his position; I would certainly not get well very fast were I he. Do you intend to have a relapse, Frank?"

I hated this pleasant man, who sat beside Mary, with a quiet confidence that suggested he was her lover.

"Frank," said the Duke, "shall James Richards be buried or cremated?"

"Jim was a devout Roman Catholic, Duke," I replied, "and had a horror of cremation, so I should prefer ordinary burial for him."

"Then he shall be buried." He turned to the waitress, "Let Ion know that James Richards will be buried. The crematorium is on the way to the burial ground, and they are both several miles out of the city."

"How is it, Duke," I asked, "that you have dinner so late? surely it must very much interfere with business arrangements; it was fourteen when the dinner bell rang."

At Zara the hours are spoken of as one to twenty-four, as the case may be.

"For those in active business, a dinner is held in another room, from twelve till fourteen, so as to enable them to pass in and out, without disturbing one another. The regular dinner hour is fourteen, as we find it most suitable for all purposes."

The dinner was simple, but excellent in every way; the absence of wine, in place of which were various syrups, alone distinguishing it from a dinner in a rich man's house.

After dinner, the Duke, Vernon and I, went to a large billiard room to smoke, and Nitho brought in some cigars, and the hookah we had smoked the night before. Presently, Mary came in, and she and Vernon played billiards, and to my extreme delight, she won the game; it was not out of courtesy that Vernon lost, for he played carefully and brilliantly, and though
Mary's play was little better than his, the evident attention they both gave, showed that there was more than an ordinary wish to win in the heart of each.

This man, evidently, strove to excel at everything, though he was foolish to strive to exceed his lady love—for such Mary seemed to be—at even so trifling a thing as billiards.

The Duchess now joined us, and we went to the tram in front of the house, which fortunately took us right to our destination. After Mary's explanation, I could better understand and appreciate the wonders of Zara, the magnificent blocks of houses we passed, the splendid shops, the wonderful river embanked and bridged, and then, as we left the thickly populated town, the beautifully cultivated and irrigated farm gardens. Still further on, some ten miles from the midst of the city, we passed a beautiful large building, which the Duke told me was a hospital.

"Do you not find a difficulty in bringing invalids so far from the town?" I asked the Duke.

"None whatever," he replied, "all sufferers from any disease which is contagious are brought out here; the tram is especially extended, so that invalids may be conveyed without any bad results. Some day I will show you the hospital, which is one of our special prides."

On we sped.

"There is the crematorium," said the Duke, "we have four, on different sides of the town, as cremation is now as common almost, as the ordinary burials."

"Is it not more expensive than the ordinary burials? With us it is too expensive for any but rich people."

"On the contrary," he answered, "the expense is rather less; the ordinary burial necessitates the purchase of the ground for the coffin, the coffin clothes, and the cost of digging the grave, to which you may almost always add the cost of fencing it in, and erecting on it some memorial. Now the cost of cremation is only the crematorium fees, which cover the rent of the crematorium, the cost of fuel and attendance, all of which are very small; while the ashes of the deceased are deposited in an urn, that usually costs only a few pence, so you see cremating is economical."

"With us," said Vernon, "it is very expensive, because cremation is unusual, and the crematorium is an ornate and costly building. After the first few cremations in a day, the subsequent ones cost a mere nothing, so you see if the expense is shared by a number, cremating is economical, whereas if shared by a few it is costly."

We now came to the cemetery, which was a very large field, enclosed with strong wire netting, and studded with ornamental trees; in the centre was a house, with a church attached. Here
we found Ion, Edie, a priest, and a number of people unknown to me.

Poor Jim lay on a shawl-like piece of cloth in an iron coffin; the cloth was about eight feet by three, and so would have covered him completely.

His gaunt, white, starved face, summoned to my mind spectres of my dead comrades, who, like him had died of starvation. As I looked on his hollow closed eyes, and almost skeleton face, I shuddered, for I thought how narrowly I had escaped his fate.

Truly, I had been dragged back from the jaws of death, after suffering, more keenly than most, the horror of its approach.

I took Jim's hand in mine, for the last good-bye; his cold hand, that so often had returned the pressure of mine. The grasp of a hand from a man we love; the kiss of a woman, whose sweetness has brightened our life, and they pass away to become but memories, and join those we hope to meet in the hereafter.

Mary's hand was on my arm, she covered Jim over, and the service began.

The beautiful burial service of Christian lands was called to my mind by that which was now passing. The earnest priest prayed for the spirit of the dead, "in the land where his actions on earth shall transport his soul." All through the responses of the service I heard the clear voice of Mary—the woman who had been so kind to me, and whom I had falsely repaid by falling in love with. God forgive me!

"Now shall this body return to the earth from whence it came." Four bearers bore out the coffin to the grave, which to my surprise, was only about three feet deep. "Earth to earth, dust to dust," they took hold of the shawl, and so lifted Jim into his last resting-place. Surely all men, who bravely strive onwards for good, will be rewarded with a happier hereafter, irrespective of creed or country. Jim had been brave, kind, unselfish and considerate, surely he would be rewarded. God be good to him!

The grave was covered in, and we went away.

I looked round, in the cemetery were a flock of sheep, who kept the grass nipped down, and so enabled the place more easily to be maintained in good order.

"Here," said the Duke, "our dead, who are not cremated, are buried; we bury them earth to earth, so their bodies may return to the earth whence they came. For twenty-five years the grave is looked after by the care-taker, then, unless a further fee is paid, all traces of it are allowed to disappear, and the casket which held the soul, is forgotten and as if it had never been; while the soul, imperishable, will be striving upwards to perfection."

The day was bright with the keenness of winter, and sweet with the flowers of early spring, but I was weak and depressed.
“Come,” said Mary, “I will take you home, Frank, you are tired and sad, and so have need of rest. Duke, we will see you at supper-time.”

“My dear Mary,” said the Duchess, “my daughter that was to be, you are always thoughtful for others,” and she took the girl’s face in both her hands and kissed her.

The one woman had thought of her dead son, who was to have been the husband of the other, and their hearts had been drawn together, and their eyes filled with tears. The mother’s heart was heavy for the loss of her dead son, and the heart of the maid was sorrowful for her lost lover.

Memories of what might have been should never hinder the fruition of what might and should be; surely Clara was right when she said an empty heart was a sorry thing.

“I will come with you, Mary,” said Vernon, “for both you and Frank need cheering up.” So together we returned to the tramline, where presently a tram came, returning to Zara, and we started for home.

“These are wonderful trams, are they not?” said Vernon, “and the cost of running them is a mere trifle. They bring in an immense income to the state, who charge one farthing for any ride within the city boundary, and the same price for every stage, which is a mile, or part of a stage, outside.”

“Why, how can they manage to keep such perfect roads, and supply such luxurious tramcars, for such a small sum?” I asked.

“Principal,” he replied, “because compressed air, which is their motive power, costs them hardly anything; but for many other reasons, one of which is, that everyone uses the trams, which are the most excellent means of transit imaginable.”

“How can the compressed air cost so little? Every commercial power simply means carbon, in some form or other, and if you do not bring the coal to compress your air, into the town, you must take your compressed air from the coal station to where you require to use it.”

Vernon laughed. “What you say is true of Ura, as it doubtless will be of the land you come from, but here in Zara they so thoroughly understand the laws of force, that they make the wind and the waters toil for them. In Zara, compressed air and electricity do all the work, and they are imprisoned for men’s use by the Voa and the mighty winds.”

“Your words are pleasantly poetical,” I answered, “but I fail to comprehend how your ideas can be practically applied.”

“That we will show you when we come to the Voa,” said Mary, “for it works for us with the strength of millions of horses, and supplies us with light, luxury, and motive power.”

“We are ripe in Ura for amalgamation, Mary,” said Vernon, “and I have come with other representatives of our country, armed with definite proposals to effect it; you will be glad to learn that——”
“Pardon me, Vernon,” said Mary, “here is the river Voa, let us get out, and we will show Frank our champion worker, who never rests. You are not too tired, Frank?”

“Oh no, you interest me beyond measure,” I answered.

We got out at a bridge over the Voa.

“Behold!” said Mary, “and be convinced.”

I looked at the river, which placidly ran beneath me. As I had before seen, it was walled into three channels, the two outer of which were about thirty feet wide, and the inner one, which carried the main body of water, about one hundred and fifty feet. The outer channels were covered in along most of their course, while the inner, with its centre pierced by the pillars that supported the numerous light bridges that spanned it, gave its surface to smokeless vessels, evidently driven by compressed air, or electricity, that rapidly moved up or down on either side. The river was a tidal one, and now flowed rapidly inwards.

“I see the Voa,” I said, “but cannot realize how it supplies Zara with light and power.”

“The Voa rises and falls twelve feet with each tide, so that there is always a stream of water rushing up or down. Part of this we take through the left or outer channels to a large lock-bound stretch of river bed which is emptied or filled by each tide; the channel on the right side carries the waters of the Voa, which rush along its way like a mill-stream. Each of these contain numerous water-wheels, which the tide or the river turns, and so operates the machinery, which supplies all our light and power, or in other words, our compressed air and electricity.”

“It is really wonderful,” I replied in surprise. “But I should say it would lead to starving the working man.”

“Not at all,” said Mary, “it only leads to shortening his hours of labour, which are now six, but which will be reduced to five, directly we effect our union with the Uras, and finish their main public works. We have been preparing for this for many years.”

“You will not find any difficulty at all, Mary,” interposed Vernon. “The large majority of our people have realized, by personal observation, the happy effect of your laws, and the few foolish or selfish among them who oppose the wish of the majority will soon be silenced.

“Is your government different to that of Zara, Vernon?”

“Different in every way,” he replied. “With us we have men so rich that they could not spend even the interest of their money on themselves, unless they gambled.”

“That is nothing to be proud of,” said Mary.

“Then there are hundreds of men, women and children,” continued Vernon, “who die every year from starvation, or through want.”

“While such is the case,” said, Mary indignantly, “those who indulge in laziness or luxury are earning the anger of the
Almighty, and fitting themselves for a more degraded state than that of these starving creatures."

"You should make allowances, Mary," pleaded Vernon, "their education makes them think that this state of things is necessary; besides, they give a great deal for the poor people."

"What they give is only as a narcotic to their consciences, and they will get no credit for it, till it is enough to supply all their fellow beings with sufficient food and clothing. I have seen them driving their fat horses through a district of starving people; I would kill their horses, and give their flesh and the corn they consume to feed the famishing."

Her eyes sparkled and her cheek flushed with earnestness; that she would like to do as she said, there was no doubt.

"We are going to right all this now, Mary," said Vernon gently. "These people are giving up a great many things for the good of their fellow citizens. Remember they only act as they have been taught to, and those who do justly according to their lights must not be too harshly judged."

"I was wrong, Vernon, and you are right." Mary looked up into his face as she spoke. "These things will soon be of the past, for the sunrise of knowledge is dispelling the darkness of ignorance, and happiness shall prevail."

All this time we had been standing on the bridge, forgetful of the passing moments. A tram stopped, we looked up. The Duke and his party were returning home, so we joined them, and all went home together.

At the door we met Nitho.

"I saw you and your attendants on the bridge, Mary. I was in the dome. Vernon, you will share the guests' room with Frank."

"Thanks, Nitho," said Vernon, smiling. "I will go up with Frank now."

So we went to our room together, where we found a second bed had been placed. Before we had been many minutes in the room, we heard a knock at the door, and a woman's voice ask,—

"May I come in?"

Vernon replied, "Come in, sweet voice," and Bel entered.

"Mother sent me up with some oysters and brown bread and butter for Frank. Shall I get you some, Vernon?"

"No, thanks, Bel," he replied. "But you may give me a kiss."

"I'm too old now, Vernon; besides, Savo Reo and I think we shall suit each other and become betrothed."

"What does your mother say, pretty one?" he asked.

"She says, Savo is a lucky man."

"And what do you say, pretty one?"

"That if Savo is lucky, I too must be lucky, for happiness cannot come to a man unless it also comes to his betrothed."
“Wisely said, Bel. Now run away and I will bring down the tray and its contents.”

Clara smiled and vanished.

“Isn’t she a lovely personification of happiness?” continued Vernon. “You would hardly believe it, but there are people at Ura, who would be shocked at Bel’s dress, because it shows the shape of her lovely figure and legs; yet these people see nothing shocking in the exact representation of a naked woman in marble or on canvas. Strange, isn’t it? And the people I speak of don’t consider themselves fools; quite the reverse, they pretend to be patterns to others.”

This was evidently a case where silence was golden, so I quietly finished my oysters.

“You will be able to give me a lot of information about the Middle Globe, Frank, by-and-by, meanwhile you must take a fee in advance, or let me act as your banker,” said Vernon presently.

I refused at first, but he would take no denial, and the delicacy of his offer almost made me forget that I was laying myself under an obligation to the man who was to wed the woman I loved. He gave me some notes and coins.

“In Zara,” he explained, “it is a punishable offence not to give a receipt for any sum over two shillings, so you must get a receipt-book and make out a receipt at your leisure. Though pray don’t send it to me.”

“I shall send you the receipt,” I insisted; “but tell me why this is.”

“ Principally to enable the income tax to be collected, I believe.”

The coins were like ours; there were some farthings, seemingly the same; pennies like ours, with the addition of a silver cross on one side; one silver coin like our florin, another like our shilling, and a coin similar to our sovereign, called a crown.

“These coins,” I said to Vernon, “are very like those of the Middle Globe.”

“They have a simple decimal coinage here,” he replied, “a copper farthing; a groat, which is a copper coin with a silver cross worth ten farthings; a silver florin worth ten groats, and a golden crown worth ten florins, besides pennies or half groats, and shillings or half florins; and notes worth from five crowns upwards.

“ This seems a very excellent plan.”

“The notes,” he continued, “can only be handled five times, as you will see by the lines on the back. When the Bank gives them out, the taker has to sign them, and the Bank stamps his signature. When he passes on a note he initials the signature of the person who receives it, and so on till the last man getting it, returns it to the Bank. By this means, notes are prevented from being too much used, or forged, so that they are always clean and safe.”
“Are all your banks safe—do they never become insolvent?” I asked.

“Our only Bank is the State, none other is allowed at Zara.”

We went down to tea, the scene was very animated, everybody was well-dressed and merry, and the variety of costumes seemed like a vision from the “Arabian Nights.” For the first time I realized that dress was not only a covering to keep its wearer warm, but also a thing to be so arranged as to show the beauties and hide the defects of the person it covered. Fashion is a very different thing, being only an arrangement of dress, that is adopted by some person in power, and so enforced by custom on suffering humanity. Certainly the dress customs of Zara deserved no second-rate praise.

The gaiety seemed contagious. The waiters and waitresses even joining in the laughter without anyone being shocked.

The room was divided into tables of different sizes, the more numerous being arranged for four or six persons, every table was artistically decorated; though, indeed, artistic seemed a word applicable to everything.

The supper was simpler than the dinner, consisting of only one flesh course, which offered a great variety of meats and entrees to choose from; sweets, a variety of hot cakes, and fruit; with the hop tea, or syrups and water to drink.

Everyone seemed to realize that eating was a function necessary to maintain the human energy, and so should be made as pleasant as possible; but that it should not be degraded to gluttony, or pursued solely for its own sake. That gluttony or gourmandism, as it is courteously called, is a common thing we know, and will continue to be as long as there are so many people whose palate is more highly developed than their conversational powers, and who inherit wealth from men who were unable to transmit them their ability.

Much to my gratification, Vernon’s official duties called him away to his colleagues. He was very kind and nice, but you cannot really like a man who prevents the possibility of you winning the woman you learnt to love without knowing she was engaged.

We were in the music room, when Nitho came in.

“Mary,” she said, “the children are having their bath, shall we go and see them, and take Frank?”

Mary stopped playing. “Oh yes, come along,” and she vanished.

Nitho clapped her hands.

“Come along Frank, run!” and away she went. In an instant I was pursuing her at the top of my speed, and only caught her barely in time to enter the moving lift with her and Mary.

“Frank,” said Mary, in mock earnest, “you are driving us to conduct that is reprehensible.”
"Misconduct, Mary, if you please," said Nitho with a little mow.

We had reached our landing. This time, getting a pretty fair start, I entered the bathing room, within touch of my leaders.

The room contained a stove, two carved marble basins, and a number of easy chairs. In each basin was a baby splashing and enjoying itself, with the abandon of infancy.

A number of women were either drying their babies—all of whom seemed to be from two to three years old—or looking on at the cherub-like atoms, that with or without their night-gowns—generally without—were taking their turn to be tossed by several men, who were kept very busy indeed. I was seized by two toddlers, and implored in baby accents to "jump them," which I did.

This consisted in catching hold of a child by his night-dress, failing which, by an arm and a leg, and lifting him up at arm's length above your head. Encore! Encore!! Encore!!! Everybody who wasn't talking was laughing. Occasionally an urchin would be snatched up by his mother and carried away. But the children enjoyed their fun, or submitted to be taken to bed with the utmost goodness.

Nitho clapped her hands.

"Isn't it splendid, Frank? Cula says it's the best possible exercise for a boxer. Do you box?"

"Of course I do!" I gasped in the pauses of my exercise.

"Give Frank a rest, children," said Mary, and rescued me from my pretty persecutors.

I was panting and perspiring, for it was the hardest work I had done for some considerable time.

Sitting with the matrons, I became a looker on at the prettiest tableau vivant I had ever seen.

The lovely naked children—surely nothing is more beautiful than a nude baby—romping with their pretty mates in long gowns, or being tossed by men; the mothers and attending maids looking the while with beaming joy on their tiny comforters and merry surroundings.

"In Ura," said Nitho, "many of the wealthy women are ashamed to nurse their own babies; but nurse instead little dogs, that they teach to carry a handkerchief, catch a biscuit, or suffer to snore on their sofas; poor benighted things, and many of the men—I know you won't believe me, Frank, but it's true all the same—are actually ashamed to be seen nursing their own babies. I shan't have a husband from Ura, though this house will probably get one without my aid."

When I slept that night, the babies came to my dreams, but when I wanted to toss them, flew away. They had wings, of course. Perhaps though, they were not babies at all, but only angels.