CHAPTER VII.

AN AUSPICIOUS UNION.

We entered at the President’s door, where we saw a number of waiters in black with short jackets such as are worn by stewards. To my surprise we found Ion and Diso amongst them. Ion took us into the banqueting-room.

"I did not know you were a waiter, Ion."

"Nor am I," he said, "but, as a reward, certain of us are allowed to act as waiters on state occasions, of which this is one of the most important in the history of Zara."

"I suppose you are well paid?"

"Yes; we are very well paid, though only in honour and not in coin; come, you and Nitho must take your places."

We were conducted to a group of ferns in a corner at the top of the room, behind which were two seats. These we occupied.

"Now, mind you don’t talk, Nitho," said Ion, and left us.

We looked round. The room was marble pillared, and profusely decorated with ferns and flowers, amongst which tiny electric lamps sparkled. The light principally came from two chandeliers suspended from the ceiling. Half hidden in foliage, was a string band, of piano, harp and violins.

"Isn’t it lovely?" said Nitho.

"Ion said you were not to talk."

"It does not matter if I am not heard."

The tables were arranged like an elongated horseshoe, and on every second chair was a bouquet of red and white camellias, which were the national flower of Ura.

"Hush!" said Nitho. The band played.

The President entered with a lady from Ura on his arm. Next came Vernon with some one I did not know—I was afraid he might have taken in Mary. They were received by two waiters, who marched in front, conducting them on either of the exterior sides of the tables towards the top of the room; the couples continued alternately going to either side till there were two magnificently dressed processions of splendid personages led respectively by the President and Vernon, coming towards the head of the table. At last Mary came, loveliest of them all,
dressed in dark blue velvet, trimmed with velvet of a lighter blue, her hair simply done in a knot on the top of her head, and brushed back from her forehead. Her every movement was grace itself, and with every turn of her head she seemed an apparition of greater loveliness. Almost too beautiful, I thought. Could so lovely and clever a woman have a feminine heart?

The waiters now directed some of the guests down the centre of the table, till presently up the two inner sides went processions similar to those on the outer, and by the time the President and Vernon had got to the head of the table the end of the inner circle had been reached and the room was nearly full. When the last of the guests had entered, the chairs were moved for the ladies, who sat down, and then the men took their seats. The music ceased, and the President stood up and said grace.

“I do wish I was quite grown up and then I might be sitting at the table like Mary,” said Nitho.

“You are just as well off where you are.”

“That’s impossible when I don’t think so.”

“What has the duke got on his head?” I asked.

“His coronet, of course,” said Nitho, surprised at my ignorance.

“All dukes have coronets, lords have a gold insignia for their button-hole, and knights a silver one.”

As I looked at the faces at the table, I was surprised at the robustness of the men and the healthy looks of the women; of the six or seven hundred persons at dinner, there was not one who was not of large stature and seemingly in perfect health. With this exception, and the fact that there was no wine or beer, and the people were merry, the dinner was such a one as you would expect royalty or a millionaire to give. During dinner the band played continuously, but not loud enough to interfere with the conversation. There were no speeches, and when dinner was over the ladies left. Vernon and the other delegates were conducted through one door by the waiters, and the President and legislators left by another.

“Come along,” said Nitho, “I know where to go.” And away we went to the Great Assembly Hall, which was now filled with people. Tier above tier was occupied, the only vacant seats being some to the right of the Speaker’s throne, and those which the legislators were to occupy.

The members of the House of Titles and the senators now began to take their places; then the ladies I had seen at dinner took the vacant rows of seats; the ones behind, Nitho told me, being filled with the senators' wives.

The scene was magnificent; the brilliant light and assembled thousands terrified me when I thought that I might have to speak before them. “Speak as you feel and fearlessly,” the words echoed in my ears. Some announcement was made and the duke entered, while every one stood up.
A short prayer was said, and we all, following the duke's example, sat down. A clerk rose and read from a warrant that Parliament had been called together by order of the President to receive a deputation from the people of Ura proposing their federation with the people of Zara, &c., &c., &c., and sat down. A messenger came to the bar of the House and announced that a deputation came from the Parliament of Ura. Being bid to bring them in, he left and returned with the deputation, at whose head was Vernon, in a dress like our Court dress, with a sword at his side.

As he came, legislators and people rose, the latter of whom applauded until the great hall echoed with the clapping of their hands. Vernon bowed low right and left. How handsome he looked gracefully receiving the ovation of this splendid multitude as his due! No wonder Mary loved him. The seats were resumed, and Vernon spoke. Slowly and distinctly he gravely began. I will give his every word—his gesture, which illustrated his words so that their meaning instantly reached the hearts and minds of his audience—I cannot reproduce; would that I could—they were complete in their perfection.

"My Lord Speaker, Nobles and Senators, to you as the representatives of the people of Zara, I bring a message of love from the people of Ura sent by their Houses of Parliament. This message is to propose to unite these two nations, who are virtually one, being only separated by an imaginary boundary, and slight differences in their laws, which we now propose to assimilate. That our message may the more loudly appeal to your minds, I ask your permission to recall to you things from the past, and to mention things of the present.

"Many generations ago, when we were savages, such as the Rodas are now, the Law-giver and his two companions, being the only survivors from the ship Arctic, were rescued by a party of Rodas, and so the darkness of ignorance was dispelled by the bright light of perfect civilization. Mysterious and inscrutable to the finite mind of man are the workings of the infinite Almighty. Can any one say that the disaster to the Arctic, which was the cause of bringing happiness to the millions beyond the ice, was but a chance? Does any one believe that the survival of the great Law-giver, from whom alone came the knowledge that has enabled savage people to attain a civilization that has made destitution unknown, disease scarce, and happiness universal, was but the working of chance? If there is such a one, he must also believe that the infinite number of spheres which traverse the universe, and the laws which govern the world are also the works of chance, which is a thing no reasonable person can do. As you have heard, when the Law-giver had founded Zara in wisdom and strength, he allowed his friends, James Smith and Edward Vance, each of whom had received all the wisdom from him that their
smaller minds were capable of containing, to leave the City of the Voa with a picked and trusted band of followers, and establish themselves on the fertile banks of the Yanga and the Warna. Vance, in his vain ignorance, proclaimed himself king on the model of those countries which still try to extend the government of barbarism to meet the requirements of civilization. His doings, however, do not now further concern us. The people of Ura, whom James Smith established, have progressed till their governing system, which was possible when many of them were uneducated, has become impossible now that all are educated. Charity has been extended till now the wise and thrifty maintain the worthless, so that their numbers are increasing faster than are the numbers of the provident, and chaos approaches.

"Before the coming of Grieve Gathos, the wicked and foolish were prevented from becoming unbearably numerous by the deadly ravages of cold, starvation, and disease. Gathos stirred the hearts of the people, which always long for good, to give, to save these creatures from the miseries of their crimes, their faults and the prevailing laws. Gold poured in, in such a stream, and was so wisely expended, that it returned the wherewithal to supply food and shelter to all who would ask it, so that the parasites of society were preserved, to increase and multiply, and entice to their ranks all that were weak, so that now in Ura we have multitudes who feel no shame living on charity, as thriftlessly as the birds of the air and the beasts of the field, who regard not anything beyond the wants of the present. We have now, in Ura, multitudes of people—men, women, and children—who loiter in the streets in filthy rags, or who pursue vocations such as selling trinkets, which cannot possibly gain them a living. These people exist by misdirected charity.

"In our community no one is allowed to keep any animal, even the meanest, unless they can properly feed and maintain it.

"In our community no thing or animal that is detrimental to the general welfare is allowed to increase its species. And yet the community maintains in its midst human beings who are ill-fed, ill-clothed, and oftentimes diseased. And these people who are a greater curse to it than any animal or plant, are allowed unrestrained to propagate and increase, so that the harm they do society will not die with them. This has been because we misinterpreted liberty to mean that a man who does no active wrong must be allowed to do all the passive wrong that suits his disposition. These people are maintained because Christ says, Give to the poor, which does not mean support the unworthy so that they may multiply and maintain all evil. When I think of what has been and is, I am weighted down by sorrow, but when I think of what will be I am elated by joy. For I am as certain that these evils will be suppressed and that good will come in their stead, as I am that the evils of Ura are caused by misdirected good
and that the flow of sympathy in Zara will bear the fruit of action."

Again the great building echoed with the applause of the assembled multitude, to which were added the acclamations of assent from the nobles and senators.

Again Vernon bowed, but now his eyes were active, gleaming with rage or softening with sorrow in accord with his words. His nostrils expanded, his pale face worked and his actions were as eloquent as his words. While he was speaking we heard and saw him only, being oblivious of all but the erect form of the orator, and the magic of his eloquence.

"In Zara you progressed under the directions of the Law-giver. Perfect freedom was deemed to mean the right to lead any life that would repay the person so that he might have a sufficiency of food and raiment. Any one who could not do this was kept by the State, for whom he worked according to his abilities, till he had paid for his keep and earned sufficient to maintain him in freedom, till he could with energy find remunerative work.

"The State belonged to the individual and the individual to the State; therefore, if a man could not maintain himself, he was maintained by the State, and made to work long hours, so that when he should be released the healthful work of self-support would be a pleasure to him. Those who were incorrigible were maintained in comfort by the State in company with their own sex only, that their unwished-for kind might not be multiplied.

"Thus in plenty and happiness have all men lived, the wise increasing and the wicked decreasing, till in Zara the jails are empty, the asylums tenantless, and even Pentona but sparsely occupied. Seeing these things, we come to you, representatives of the people of Zara, and say, Let our laws be repealed and your laws be our laws in their place. Let the Parliament be held alternately at Zara and Ura; let us have representatives according to our population; let us have one coinage; and to commemorate our union, let learned men from each city together issue a phonetic dictionary, so that all our people may speak exactly the same tongue. And lend us the money to bring these things to pass. I am the mouthpiece of my colleagues, and together we represent Ura, whose message we have delivered."

Vernon sat down, and again the applause echoed and re-echoed through the building.

The duke now rose, and with a stately courtesy, almost unaccompanied by action, spoke,—

"Delegates from the people of Ura, having heard your words, I say, in the name of the people of Zara, that you and they are welcome to us."

Again the applause resounded, this time to confirm the duke's words.
“Long have we worked that the people of Ura and Zara, who are of the one race, might have the same laws, and be united in every way. That the Law-giver came to Voa and not to the Yanga is due alone to Providence. To him, under the will of the Almighty, belongs the prosperity and happiness of Zara, for which we should be thankful but not proud. Had we been directed by James Smith, and the people of Ura by the Law-giver, would we have been as wise as they have been to-day? We may hope so, but we cannot be certain. This union will be good for both people, and the foundation of happiness for all the earth.

“Knowing the feeling of the Parliament, I will personally take its vote. All who are in favour of our union with Ura will proclaim that fact by rising and asserting their minds.”

Nobles and senators rose with one accord, and their exclamations, “Aye, aye,” were lost in the confirming applause of the people.

Again the duke rose.

“It now remains for me to arrange with the President of Zara and President Dreman of Ura the first meeting of the combined legislators. This I will do. For the union which, I feel sure, will shortly be a fact, we are indebted to President Dreman, to whom the United Nations will accord all honour. But President Dreman’s labours would not have succeeded for many years yet were they not supported by the efforts of Mary Vernon, to whom praise and honour is also due. Legislators of Zara, shall Mary Vernon be asked to speak?”

Again the legislators rose as one man, and again their “Ayes” were drowned in the confirming applause of the multitude.

Slowly Mary came to the bar of the House. The duke and senators rose and bowed to her, and then resumed their seats. Till the legislators were seated she stood motionless. It seemed many minutes, though it could not have been many seconds; she looked like a divine messenger; her colour was heightened, and she seemed to have the royalty of a queen of heaven.

“My Lord Speaker and legislators of the people of Zara, Mr. President and delegates of the people of Ura, I have a joyful presentiment that this is the last time you will be addressed in these terms.”

The applause before had been enthusiastic, but it was now doubly so. The grave “hear, hears,” from the duke and every legislator of Zara or Ura were barely heard in the loud enthusiasm that seemed to make the very walls vibrate.

“In the union of two nations, or the union of two people, it ill becomes either to speak of which is giving the most or the least. Success is only gained when each strives for the benefit of the other, and in the other’s happiness make their joy. If in a forest are two men apart, they may each be attacked by animals that dare not assail them if they were together, and they can never
rest in safety. If these men unite, a host of enemies that dare attack them when alone would vanish, and they will both be benefited. So with Ura and Zara; the Gurlas and Rodas, who have harassed us apart, dare not approach us when united; and though we gain much, we lose nothing. In Zara, no change worthy of mention will take place; in Ura, those of the generous who have more than sufficient for their wants will give money to the State, to be expended wisely for the support of the destitute, instead of giving it, as they now do, to be spent with little wisdom and great detriment.

"Of those unworthy people who have more than sufficient for their wants and give nothing, a tax will be levied on their abundance, both for their benefit and the good of the State. Those who have only sufficient will no longer be grieved by the sight of their suffering brethren, while the destitute and wicked will be restrained and treated with a kindness they would never otherwise receive. So that temptations will be removed and happiness established. If I have done aught to hasten this, I shall be more than rewarded when I see happiness take the place of sorrow, and know I have laboured to bring about the change; but I shall ask a further favour, namely, that of suggesting a name for the united nations. The Rodas from whom we have all sprung call wedlock 'Undara.' Would such a name, in the absence of a better, be suitable to the wedlock of Zara and Ura? This question the united legislators alone can decide."

Mary bowed and retired, while the audience echoed the new name; till "Undara" the united nations became in the minds of the people.

The duke rose.

"From the land that gave us the Law-giver has come to Zara one who like him was lost in the ice, but who has alone survived his unfortunate companions. In such a time as this, when the civilization of Zara is being elsewhere adopted, it would be interesting to hear of the progress of civilization and happiness at the Middle Globe. Shall Frank Farleigh speak?"

The answer, "Yes, yes," roared in my brain and darkened my eyes; —"Speak as you think, speak as you think, and fearlessly." In the blindness of my terror, Mary seemed to stand before me and beckon me to advance. I moved to the bar of the House and spoke, though my brain was in a whirl, and my words came involuntarily.

"My friends, I was lost in the wilderness of the ice and snow, where all my comrades lay dead; with the coming night I would have joined them, for the hand of death was almost on me. An angry bear came, seemingly to hasten my end, when Ion Mura appeared in his sleigh, killed the bear, and saved me. Since then I have been treated as a favoured guest in the house of Duke Mura."
"Of the civilization of the Middle Globe, I can only say that it has added to the luxury of the rich without detracting from the misery of the poor; that the weight of labour and the hours of toil are but little changed for the better, that neither temperance nor virtue have prevailed, that the plethora of wealth and the misery of starvation are side by side; that the idle and criminal multiply on the alms of the generous, while brave men and noble women live in celibacy rather than bring children into a world, the misery of which is always watching to overwhelm them. Would that they could see the wisdom of shielding the fool from his folly, and the idler from his loathsomeness.

"Send to them, I pray you, the message of your wise civilization, that joy may come to all."

I returned to my seat, ignorant of what I had said till I saw the papers of next day. A hand was laid on my shoulder.

"Bravo, Frank!" said Diso.

"The Duchess has sent for you, come with me."

I was brought to realize the present. A trumpet sounded, the proclamation of adjournment was made, and the Duke bowed and left the chamber.

"Come," said Diso, and led me away. We found the Duchess in the President's reception room, she spoke kindly of my speech and presented me to the President and his wife, the Duke and Duchess Phedra. The great room was thronged with tastefully dressed men and women, all of the latter who were from Ura being noticeable by their contracted waists and comparatively uniform appearance. Vernon and Mary were each receiving the universal congratulations on their speeches, and being the cause of hastening the desired union; the new name, Undara, was universally used, and had evidently accorded with the popular taste. At last we left, and on reaching home the Duchess whispered to me, "Come to me in the Duke's study, Frank, I have something to say to you." She left and shortly after I followed and found her sitting in the Duke's easy chair. The room was dimly lighted, but I could see she was very grave. I sat down.

"How eager everyone seemed to-night for the union of the sister communities," I said.

She ignored my sentence and asked, "Frank, do you love Mary?"

Why did she want to know? Was she, too, going to tell me that Mary would marry Vernon?

“Yes; who could help loving her?" I said in despair.

"You surely know what I mean?" said the Duchess seriously.

"Do you love her with your whole heart and soul? Is she the only woman in the world for you? Do you wish to make her your wife?"

"Aye, that I do, though I know the wish is hopeless. She is the joy of the world to me. With her as my wife, I could be
doubly strong and brave, looking to the future fearlessly, knowing that works I could not finish would be completed by some who would be wiser images of myself with the noble nature of their mother. Knowing that daughters should make happy my old age, and that my lovely Mary would be mine for ever. That together we would rise and rise till we reached the happiness of heaven. Without her I have only my work to cheer and comfort me.” My head fell on my hands, I was in despair.

“Frank, my dear, come to me.”

I went to the Duchess, resting on one knee by her chair. She took my face in both her hands and kissed me.

“She was to have been the wife of my dear son Seena, who thought as you have spoken, and would have realized what you have said. But he was killed.”

The tears were in the mother’s eyes, and she sorrowed for her son. Presently she spoke again,—

“Mary’s deep grief is past, and her lover is but a memory, this is right, she would have given her life to him, but he is gone. Frank, dear, you remind me of my son, like him you are brave and good. Vernon loves Mary, but she cannot love him. Frank, dear, in Ura—it is horrible—the men do not lead pure lives. In the streets you will see all day long, women, some of them beautiful women, loitering and smiling at the men as they pass. Frank, can a woman love a man whose life has been soiled by these creatures? Can she believe that he will regard her as something quite different from them? Frank, I would have Mary, who is to me as a daughter, marry a man in every way worthy of her, which Vernon is not. Mary knows these things. Go to her to-morrow, early, and tell her of your love. Vernon will ask her to be his wife, and if she has heard you, she may not take him, he is brave and good, but he is a man of Ura and not worthy of Mary.”

The advice of the Duchess was wise. I kissed her hand, which trembled with emotion.

“Frank, be here to-morrow, early, before breakfast, and I will send Mary in to write a letter for me, ask her then; after breakfast Vernon will ask her, but you must be first.”