CHAPTER VIII.

INFELIX FELIX.

In the morning I awoke early and got up and dressed. Vernon was asleep, and lay quiet as a child. His restless energy and comprehensive brain, so active in the day, needed the kind restorative of a night of rest to fit them for fresh work. Elsewhere than in Zara he would not have found a woman to refuse him, but here the purity of the men was regarded as necessary as the purity of the women. They had indeed reached a state of civilization I thought unattainable. Leaving Vernon asleep, I went to the study to wait for Mary; success seemed too much to hope for, but who could say?—at the worst I could only fail. The time went so slowly; I had so little to hope for. At last she came.

"Frank, what are you doing?" she asked in surprise.

"Nothing," I said, stupidly.

"So I see; but what did you come here to do?"

"To tell you I love you—though that everyone does. To tell you that you are the sunshine of my life, and that if I cannot win you for my wife, I shall not seek for happiness here, but only hereafter. Mary, may I hope that you may learn to love me? Perhaps—"

"Frank, we know nothing of each other; if you love so quickly will you not soon forget?"

"Forget you, Mary, that is impossible, all my life I have been longing for you. Is it only chance that has brought me to you? Not in all the world is there a woman so beautiful, or so good!"

"Oh! Frank, I sometimes thought you loved me, but never like this."

"Mary, let me hope, only let me hope. I will strive for your love and be patient. Do not refuse me yet!"

"Frank, I do not—think— I love you!"

A voice came carolling along the passage, and the door opened. Nitho entered; her eyes opened very wide.

"It seems possible to make hay before the sun has begun to shine. Which of you is to blame for this?" she asked, in mock anger.
"Nitho, you must always knock before you enter a room," said Mary, severely.

"In future I shall not either knock or enter a room where you and Frank are, I have a feeling heart. It's empty at present, and contains apartments to suit a single gentleman."

Nitho's merry audacity was irresistible, even Mary smiled, and I, seeing nothing was to be gained by staying, left. I never felt more elated in my life. Vernon's chance was now not worth much, while mine was excellent. What an angel I had won, or rather, stood a good chance of winning. Starvation was nothing, if I had only known what was to follow. Poor Vernon, I felt quite sorry for him, but he could easily get a wife, while for me it was Mary or celibacy. At breakfast, everyone was doubly gay. The next two days, or rather afternoons, were to be kept as holidays and devoted to sport of all sorts in honour of the visit of the delegates from Ura.

The Duchess saw by my face that I had told Mary of my love and prospered in my suit. Mary was grave, but her sweet face was undisturbed by doubt. Surely in time she would love me, as I felt she could love, with that thoroughness a woman feels for the man who gives his life for her service, and becomes her champion and her hero. Poor Vernon looked a conqueror as he was, little believing the woman he had chosen, and thought he had only to ask, would refuse him, because his life was not up to her standard of right. After breakfast Vernon joined Mary, and they went away together. The Duchess was wise, had I not spoken when I did, the fortress of Mary's heart—a fortress with all women made to be conquered by the knight who comes inspired by love, armed with devotion, and ready, as all true knights are, for victory or death—would have capitulated to the devotion of Vernon; this the Duchess had seen, and, inspired by prejudice, been my friend.

"Frank," she said, "I am so glad you have been successful."

"I have not been quite successful; Mary said she did not think she loved me."

"But she did not refuse you," said the Duchess smiling, "and so will feel bound to refuse Vernon, whom she otherwise would have accepted; for he is a lover of whom any girl would be proud, and with a woman admiration begets love. She told me she had met you in the study, and when I said I felt sure you loved her and were worthy of her, she kissed me, and made no reply."

Long afterwards I heard from Mary what I shall now write. Vernon asked her to come to the rotunda tower, and she went; he then told her that his life had been a life of work and victory—which was true—and that in the future he would bring happiness to the land of his birth, which he hoped, and believed, would reward him with the highest honours—all these things afterwards came to pass. He said also that he had had but little happiness, and
though he was honoured in the land, no heart beat for him alone, as his heart for her. He then asked her to share his life and be his wife and his angel.

He was a brave wooer, and nearly won the woman he loved, her heart softened to him, but something—perhaps the Duchess had whispered in her ear a warning of men who come from a land where immorality is but a thing to smile at; perhaps the love I had shown—made her refuse his suit. She said she was honoured above all women by gaining the love of Vernon and myself; mine was no great triumph, though after all if a woman has the love of a strong man, who finds favour in her eyes, it is the foundation of happiness for all her life, and so, for her, a great thing.

Vernon's pale face was paler, but he showed no sign of his sorrow. Like all rulers of the world, he was brave under defeat, and modest under triumph. Though I had won Mary from him, it was not through my strength, but his weakness; and all my life I felt that by her love alone could I be worthy of the place in her heart from which I had driven him.

Early in the day we left by tram for the recreation grounds, which were about seven miles from the centre of Zara. The trams, which were something like those in Melbourne or Chicago, were perfect as a means of transit, passing your doorway at least every minute, or within a hundred and twenty yards of it, they took you on with one charge to your destination. Each tram consisted of two cars, the first of which was open at the sides, the second closed in, and each had a row of seats back to back, down the top, which gave a splendid view of everything they passed. The grounds were enclosed with a corrugated iron fence about six feet high, on top of which was open wire netting, which extended for about two feet supported by barbed wire. On one side was a huge pavilion capable of seating forty thousand people, and of sheltering nearly as many more; in the centre of the grounds was a space divided off for the football match, which was to be played between teams from Zara and Ura, and in another part of the ground a track for foot-racing. The shops and business places closed at noon, and from 12½ till 14 o'clock the trams came from Zara in one long line at intervals of about three hundred yards. Many of the passengers stepped off the trams before they stopped, and in less than a minute from the time of stopping the last of them had reached the road, and the tram was returning to Zara. On every side of the grounds the trams brought the sight-seers, till in an hour and a half they had carried over sixty thousand people to the sports. I went with Nitho and Mary to see the footballers, and found to my delight that Cula was the captain of those representing Zara. Daisy was with him, and had been staying at the house of his parents, a natural and proper arrangement that would have been at least unusual at the Middle Globe.
The teams, each of twenty as with us, were magnificent men, though those of Zara were much the finer on an average. Cula in his football dress was a perfect model, and in every way suggested an athlete of ancient Greece or Troy. While nearly every player for Zara had his betrothed with him, the Ura team were, with an occasional exception, unbetrothed, and without an exception were not accompanied by their lady loves. The Zara team wore grey, trimmed with pink, and those from Ura black and yellow; each of the uniforms being both handsome and effective.

Looking round on the assembled multitude of men, women, and children, the complete absence of poverty or coarseness was a striking feature in the scene.

"I have never seen so splendid a crowd in all my life, Mary," I said; "it is like a scene from the future painted by a hopeful dreamer. Is there absolutely no poverty in Zara?"

"Oh, yes," she replied, "there is lots of poverty in Zara, but no destitution; destitute people are sent to Pentona; at Ura you will see lots of wretched mortals in every crowd who have little more reason than the wolves, and are much more degraded than any animal could be."

"But now," saith Nitho, "that Ura is the second city of Undara, all the destitute people [and loafers will be sent to Pentona, and then the crowds will be shorn of their objectionable elements."

A bell rang, and the players, most of whom wore Inverness capes, as their clothes were of the lightest possible description, threw off their overcoats and entered the enclosure. Every one's attention was directed to the gate, and in the midst of hand-clapping, a man dressed completely in white entered, to whom they all rose their caps. His back was towards us, but his graceful strength was strikingly displayed, in a tight knitted singlet, and tight knickerbockers. Everything he wore, from his silk cap to his running shoes, were at once suited to display his strength, and load it in the slightest degree. They came to the centre of the ground, and so approached us.

"Why, that is Vernon in white; what is he doing here?" I asked, in surprise.

"Acting as central umpire," said Nitho; "of all umpires he is the best, he can do nearly everything well, and though he never competes, as he says he is too old, he is the leading supporter and advocate of athletic sports. I do wish you could hand him over to me, Mary!"

"You certainly are in love with him, Nitho," said Mary, severally; "but if you are sensible you will choose a husband for personal goodness, and not because he excels others in great things. A husband is wanted for every-day use, and to be nice
in every little thing, for both of which he is spoilt by great successes."

"Is it not unusual and derogatory for a president of a civilized nation to act as umpire in a football match?" I asked.

"Unusual, yes; but surely not derogatory? It cannot be derogatory to anyone to do a desirable thing well," Mary replied.

"But for a man in the highest position in the state to mix amongst athletes surely brings him down to their level?" I protested.

"If nature has risen him up to their muscular level," said Mary, "his position will be exalted by the exercise of his strength, controlled by a wisdom and tact not accorded to most athletes. When honours and position were given to men on account of their birth, and not their excellence, they were compelled to avoid the populace, to prevent them discovering what poor creatures they were."

"Do be quiet, Mary, Vernon is going to speak," said Nitho impatiently.

Vernon, in the centre of the ground, faced the players and the pavilion.

"Footballers," he asked, "will you have a fast game, a slow game, or a medium game?"

As one voice came the answer from the players,—

"Fast, fast, fast!"

"Gentlemen, permit me to thank you"—Vernon bowed as men should bow. Why are men of this century in the Middle Globe so careless in many graceful courtesies?—"for the honour you have done me in electing me to the position of central umpire, and to remind you that in so doing you have made it my duty to decide on every part of your game, except that relating to goals; that against my decision there is no appeal, and that any one who disputes it, disputes your election of me, by questioning the exercise of that power you have given me. Gentlemen, you have two minutes to take your places, after which the visiting team will kick off."

In an instant the players became animated, and distributed themselves as directed all over the ground. Vernon stood, his left hand before him, consulting a tiny watch strapped on his wrist. The crowd was silent with the intense excitement that comes while awaiting any great contest. Vernon called play, the ball sped towards the Ura goal, and the forty-one splendid men were engaged in a struggle that exercised and increased their muscle, their endurance, good temper, tact, and most of the ennobling qualities of strong men. They played under rules that seemed to me like those known as the Association rules, revised and amended by common sense; indeed, the one difference I found between the laws and customs of Undara and the Middle Globe was that those of the former were such as would have been
in the latter were the Middle Globe governed by wise men, who passed laws and inaugurated customs solely for the good of the commonweal.

"Poor Diso," laughed Nitho, as one of the grey and pink players cannoned off a Ura man and rolled on the turf. In a moment he was up and off again.

"Do they never hurt themselves, Nitho?" I queried.

"Very seldom; there have been ribs and arms broken, but breaks of some sort or other occur at all of the games men like," replied Nitho, airily.

"Statistics show," said Mary, "that the accidents at football are eighteen per cent. fewer than those which occur at rowing and twenty-seven per cent. fewer than are caused by riding, so you see it is not a dangerous game, and at the same time about the finest and most invigorating of all pastimes."

The teams were well matched, the ball passing up and down the ground very evenly; so far, the game stood one goal two behinds Zara, to two behinds Ura.

"Did not the visiting team gain an advantage by having the kick-off, Mary?"

"Yes," replied Mary, "but only a slight one, which is always given to them out of courtesy, and because a team is always stronger at home, as it has all its players to choose from; while, when it leaves home, its choice is restricted to those who can go with it."

"Goodness me!" said Nitho, "what a tumble Cula has given the Ura captain."

The tumbles were common enough, and were principally caused by two players rushing against each other while in pursuit of the ball. Half time was called, and the men rested for ten minutes, when play was resumed from the opposite end of the ground. At the end of the game, Zara had won by three-goals four behinds, to one goal three behinds. After the football some coursing took place; the hare was liberated from a box, and two hounds, such as I have before described, released to course it. The dogs, which were picked specimens, while strong enough to kill a reindeer, were fleet enough to catch the hare, though not till it had tired, and so lost its first swiftness. The dogs seemed never to tire, the distance they could travel being almost limitless.

"It seems to me cruel sport, Mary."

"Yes," she replied, "I think it is; but the men say the dogs must be practised, and the hares are used to being hunted by the wolf, the fox, and many other animals, and as one snap kills them, they are not cruelly treated."

Only in one case did a hare escape. At one end of the grounds were boxes, to which the hares retreated as they had no other cover, and in every case when released they made for these. The
dogs turned and returned their game, finally killing them, but this one hare kept bravely on and escaped them.

"Poor brute!" I sighed, "he will probably be killed next coursing meeting?"

"He will not again be coursed," said Mary, "as every hare fleet enough to escape is liberated; because we wish to improve the speed of the wild hares in every way so that they may escape the wild animals, who are our mutual enemies."

The return home was interesting as showing the capability of the trams. Three tram lines came from Zara to different sides of the grounds direct; at the end of the grounds ran a third tram at right angles to all the trams leading to Zara, this acted as two lines, as people wished to go either way; then other trams went to Zara at distances of six hundred yards, the two first of these, and the four first I mentioned making six in all, each took the people away as fast as they could take their places, so that in a very much shorter time than they could have gone by ordinary rail, this numerous multitude had disappeared and were on their way home. On our return home, I went to my room, where I found Vernon changing his football clothes.

"Are you very tired?" I asked. "You worked as hard as any of the players."

"I am not tired a bit," he replied pleasantly; "my work was rather different to that of the players, I escaped their tumbles, and having to run at my very highest speed as they occasionally had; on the other hand I ran nearly as far as any, and further than most, as I averaged about eight and a half miles an hour, or ran seventeen during the game."

"This seems wonderful, and more than I ever knew any man in such a position as yours capable of," I said admiringly.

"Most men in Ura," replied Vernon, "eat so much rich food that their physical energy is quite destroyed, but I prefer a healthy body for a healthy mind, and fancy I have as much satisfaction at my simple meals as they do at their expensive and elaborate ones, while I certainly enjoy all out-door sports immeasurably more than they do. Many men in Zara in the highest positions retain their muscular energy, which is frequently, however, spoiled by their wives' coddling."

After dinner I found the Duchess had reserved a seat at a theatre for me, and very kindly placed me next to Mary. Surely the best ally a man can have in his wooing is a woman who is a friend of his lady love! The theatre was like one of our largest and handsomest, but without private boxes, the whole house being arranged with seats, such as the stalls have with us.

"You said, Mary, that there were places in the theatre where the fee was small—all the seats seem the same?" I asked.

"So they are," said Mary; "but if you are at the back of the stalls (similar to our pit) or the tiers, you neither see nor hear as
well as you would if you were more favourably placed, therefore
the charge is less."

"And I suppose you do not book your seats in advance?"

"If you wish to make sure of your seat you do, as every seat
is numbered. Frequently every seat in the house is sold weeks
before the performance."

In Zara, our plan of boxes, which are a waste of room, and
having a part where seats could not be booked in advance, would
have been looked on as ridiculous; but then in Zara they had
neither the dirty pauper nor sodden idler.

The play, "The Bread-Winner," was a domestic comedy, won­
derfully acted and put upon the stage, but unlike our dramas,
which never go beyond the honeymoon at most, traced the career
of its characters from betrothal till the launching in life of the
children. The play opened with the love-making of Ivan Borner
and Nina Pansa. Ivan was a handsome, careless man, devoted
completely to sport and pleasure, and utterly selfish and heedless
of the future. His profession was a pretence of literature. Nina
Pansa was a girl, far-seeing, earnest and kind, who devoted her
time to painting. She had some money, on the strength of which,
and the prospects of a book he was going to write, they got
married; she toiled unceasingly; and was in reality the bread­
winner, he wasted his time pretending to work, but being in
reality idle. This continued till their children were grown up,
for whose sake the mother rebels, and, rather than see their lives
spoilt, leaves her husband, who eventually is sent to Pentona.

The pathos and truth of the story were so well conceived and sus­
tained, that the simple materials made a sublime drama. It is
needless to say that in a land where a scavenger was a polished
dandy of unusual ability and received into the highest society,
the noble profession of acting, which in the Middle Globe is
still a slighted calling, containing many undesirable people, was
here an honoured vocation, to which all who were especially fitted
turned their attention.

On scanning the audience, I noticed that every one, not except­
ing the women, took off their hats, which called to mind the many
times I had been half cheated of my view of the stage by the
high hat of some woman in the pit, who could without any
trouble have removed the offending head-gear to her lap, till the
play was done. After the performance we returned home, many
of us on foot, and Mary and I amongst the rest. The streets were
so brilliantly lighted that everything was as distinct as at noon­
day.

"Is not the cost of lighting the streets so brilliantly very heavy,
Mary?" I asked.

"No," she replied. "Economy is one of its chief advantages;
when we commenced to progress, we doubled the number of our
lights, and reduced our police force one half."
That would be a saving in the police pay of at least five times as much as the extra cost of the light. But was the new plan as good as the old—and how do you justify dismissing one half of your police force?" I asked, thinking I had found a weak spot in the plan described.

"The new plan," replied Mary, smiling at my earnestness, "was so much better than the old, that it almost at once did away with theft and burglary, and quite suppressed midnight idlers; as for the police, none of them were dismissed; the increased lights took nearly five years to install, during which death, superannuation, and resignation reduced the ranks of the constables; which was brought to the required strength by drafting some of their numbers into other departments, so they suffered no hardship."

"But surely the greater distance the constables had to go gave the criminals a chance?"

"It did not seem to, each constable had a scarlet bicycle, and at night a hound to accompany him. To each block, which averages ten thousand people, there is one constable always on the beat, so that there is always a constable on two sides of the block, each of whom can see right through, thus no person can possibly be in the streets without being seen. So that light has made theft or loitering impossible."

"Is it not a barbarous plan," I protested, "to use dogs to hunt people with?"

"We don't hunt people with dogs, the dog is company for the constable, and prevents the possibility of his being shot—our air-guns make no noise—and some criminal taking his place; these are the only reasons for having the dogs, who, however, would help the constable if they were assaulted."

The constables and their dogs passed and repassed us as we strolled along.

"How silently they go along," I said wonderingly.

"Yes, all the tyres are rubber faced," said Mary, "and the roads are asphalted, which helps the traffic very much, and keeps the place perfectly clean, as a shower of rain washes every particle of dust into the sewers."

There seemed no end to the wonders of Zara, which were each as simple as they were efficient. On reaching home we found Nitho waiting for us.

"How you two manage to keep up your spirits so well is a wonder," she said tiredly. "You always look as if you were trying to learn something, Frank."

"At present," I replied, "I should like to learn how you liked the play?"

"Oh, very well, but I should have preferred going to the dance," said Nitho, stifling a yawn. "How much longer must I stay up to chaperon you two? I think you had better go to bed, Frank."
She looked and smiled, she certainly had not a feeling heart, or she would have left me alone with Mary. I stooped and kissed my lady love's hand, her beautiful, shapely, strong hand. Nitho eyed me critically and said,—

"You do that awkwardly, Frank, you evidently require practice."

"Then help me to practise kissing lips," and I took the audacious young woman in my arms and kissed her. Quite unconcerned she laughed and told me,—

"You should only practise these things with your sweetheart, Frank."

"I know that," I replied, "but children don't count."

Nitho was not a child, but at a period of girlhood—

That like a bud, grown through its sheltering leaves
Impelled by nature, turns towards the sun,
And soon, developed by his glowing kiss,
Unfolding petals bloom forth from their folds
Perfume and beauty to the neigh'ring world.