A WOMAN'S LOVE

OR, A BROTHER'S PROMISE

CHAPTER I.—(Continued.

They leaned on the eastern parapet. The night had faired, and the moon was rising. A misty radiance hung over the housetops, and the black bulk of the riverside warehouses took on unreal magnificence of stature. The span of Blackfriars Bridge was a dream, airy as gossamer. Paul's master of the East, reared his dome into the clearing sky, supreme and absolute. And the river, dark and mysterious, swept on in such majestic curves of sad indifference that Hector was stirred to dreams of the sea, of stately ships of white sails under the stars, of roving to strange ports and islands green with palms.

"The Isle of Palms is far away," said the old man in a low voice.

Hector started as if he had been stabbed: his very thought had taken words.

"The Isle of Palms is far away," the old man repeated. "Like a green jewel it lies under the sun all day, and all night under the stars like a sleeping maid. Blue waters ring its shores, white clouds kiss its hills, green covers it like a robe. But the jewel sparkles in a tyrant's crown, and the sleeping maid is a slave. The white clouds carry his curses, the green hides the graves of his victims. Your river—ah! your river—I follow it, round every bend, over every reach, down, down to the sea. Then I go westward with the sun, and southward with the brave wind—days and days I go, and as the seventh night falls I come to my Isle of Palms. The lights glimmer on the shore; the thrum of the guitar comes over the waters; I smell the smell of my own land, my own hills; I hear a lover singing in the soft Palmetto speech—I am home."

Hector could find no word to break the silence. The roar of London was all about them, but the silence that fell when the old man ceased to speak could be felt; a hush like that of the moment between a dream and the waking. He looked at his companion who stood, hands folded on the parapet, gazing out over the river as if he could see the green islands rising out of the dark waters of the Thames.

At last Bravo turned and took Hector's arm.

"Come away!" he said abruptly.

They walked Strandwards.

"The sight of your Thames always fills me with impossible dreams. All day I grieve that Palmetto lies under the iron heel of Hispaniola, all my waking thoughts are of her misery and despair. But, sometimes—with night and the river—the hopes of years, the long desires, come back to me, and I see my Palmetto delivered from the oppressor. For a little while I live in a fool's paradise. Yet I can never forget that my hopes are impossible."

"Why impossible?" cried Hector, moved out of himself.

"First because I am no longer young. Second, because there is lacking the great solvent of all difficulties, the key to open all doors—gold, always gold."

Grant's heart went out to the old man who, though his hair was almost white, preserved still the fair fancies of youth; who, though crushed by the hand of Fate, yet had divine moments of rebellion; who, though knowing well that his hope was forlorn, clung to it with all the tenacity of a lover. Hector had heard the old man speak in this strain before, but his words, so earnest yet so resigned, had never so moved him as they did now.

Forlorn hopes appealed ever to the heart of Hector Grant. He came of stock whose hopes were all forlorn. His ancestors—witness the family tree—were out with Montrose they lost life in the '15; they lost lands and life in the '45; they died penniless and lonely under the banner of John Company; they gave their blood, their all, for Poland; and his father—so near as that—left the world in a blaze of glory at Gravelotte, when Hector was walling into it. This was Hector's rosary all beads of glorious disaster. His bead? Was it possible to add one?

Scarce half an hour ago he had been grumbling over himself, lamenting his absorption into the drab Nirvana of habit and daily routine. His brain was growing rusty and his blood dawdled like a Lowland stream He was slowly drifting into a state of carelessness, when he would be a mere walking emptiness, a galvanized corpse, a machine, and not a human being full of the riot of blood and the joy of living. His line, like the Appian Way, would end in a mire, he himself another Galloway. Still—the lust of life and doing was hidden away somewhere in him. For there were hours when he craved madly for excitement—the stir of fighting, adventuring, peril of the land and peril of the sea, jeopardy and thrill of the open road, foray in strange country and battle in the night.

Ah! if only the hour came!

A thought leaped in his brain. This man was old and he was young. With this old man's knowledge and his own strength (all the stronger because long asleep), it might be possible to do something; the dream might be hammered into reality, and he, Hector Chisholm Grant have his fill of fighting. Was it possible?

The blood boiled in his throat with the heat of the impulse. There was no reasoning over it; instinct, long hereditary instinct, clamored and urged and battered—and he found, on a sudden, to his no small amaze, that he had come to a resolution. So a man wonders who finds his sword in his hand, and cannot remember having drawn it. He spoke before he knew.

"Senor Bravo," said he, in a voice that was new to himself. They were passing the Lyceum Theatre, Grant all oblivious that his way lay eastward.

The grizzled Palmetto looked up from under his broad sombrero, and his grey moustache and imperial bristled.

"Yes?" he said inquiringly.

"I know something of your island's history. We have talked—rather you have talked to me about it, how often? I have thought—"

He hesitated, for now that he came to speak the words, they seemed so feeble, he was so helpless—it was so ridiculous, here, in London's heart, to propose so mad a thing. But in spite of his boyish blush of shame the thought rushed into words.

"I want to help—I must help. Can't I?"

Bravo drew a deep breath. He was excited, but kept himself in fine control. He had been waiting for this, he had been expecting it.

"Before I say a word of answer to your question, let us go over the ground again. You will not interrupt until I am finished. That is understood?"

"It is understood."

For a few moments there was silence, and Hector made an assumption of calmness by lighting a cigarette.

"To begin at the beginning," said the old man in an even voice. "For three centuries Palmetto was a prosperous kingdom under the rule of the Ribeiros, a royal family among royal families. Close on ninety years ago Hispaniola, by a knave's trick—all the world knows of it—claimed sovereignty, deposed Emanuele XIX. and took possession by force. The Powers were too busy to pay any attention: Napoleon had his back to the wall, and the nations were at his throat. In the din and scuffle, the theft of Palmetto went practically unnoticed. The royal family was exiled, and since then Hispaniolo has held what she stole. Possession is all the points of modern law: so none has questioned her right.

"So much for the position historical.

"Now—the position actual!

"What is there to say? O! I cannot be calm. Hispaniola grinds my brethren like so much corn. She bleeds them of their hard-wrung earnings. She takes their sons and sends them to death in her western colonies. She racks them with taxes innumerable; levies import duties on every imaginable article of necessity that the island does not produce; in a word, makes the right to live a luxurious privilege.

"Do you want an instance? If a Palmetto wishes to leave the island he must obtain a passport. Nominally, on this there is stamp duty of two pesetas. But before all the Hispaniolan official palms are oiled—from the Governor's, down through secretaries' and orderlies', to the gate porter's—forty pounds English do not cover the cost. Few Palmettos leave their prison on these terms, and the world cannot hear of their troubles.

"Can they not write? you say. Yes, they can write, but their letters are opened, and they are promptly arrested on some trumpery charge, and linger in goals without trial for months and years. You have never been in an Hispaniolan prison? Ah! well—

"Hispaniolan spies are everywhere. Why, no one lights a cigarillo in the streets of Palm City without looking round twice.

"When you are born you are taxed; when you are married you are taxed; when you die, you cannot be buried until your relatives pay the burial-tax.

"This is outside. Every one knows this. Your British tourist knows it, but it is no concern of his. The inside is known only to those who have suffered. We hate the Hispaniolan, for he is a thief and a liar and a murderer.

"We would cast off his yoke but alas! we are not strong enough. We have men willing to die, but there are no guns because we have no money.

"All the people are hungry for relief from oppression, and they are ever faithful; hoping, almost against hope, for the return of their rightful ruler—"

"There is, then, a descendant of the Ribeiros?" interrupted Hector, forgetful of his promise.

"For the return of her Majesty, Queen Maddalena!" continued the old man, with a touch of that love for dramatic climax possessed by all Southern peoples.

"Queen Maddalena!" cried Hector.

"The last and the best and fairest of her race!"

Hector's impulse leaped in him, again, stronger and more madly than ever.

"Can't I help, Senor Bravo?"

The old man smiled.

"But I have not finished. When I have told you everything, when I have shown you my last argument—you may ask me then."

They were come to a dingy door, one of the hundred and twenty-five dingy doors of Charford Street, Russell Square.

"You will come into my lodgings and smoke a cigarette," said Bravo, inserting his latchkey.

They entered a room scantily furnished in the early Victorian manner, the classic mode in all Bloomsbury lodging houses.

On a table in the middle of the room were a lamp, a little tray with cigarettes and matches, and another tray with a bottle of wine and a couple of glasses.

"Sit here," said the old man, pushing forward the one easy chair, "and pray help yourself to a glass of wire and a cigarette. Both wine and tobacco are from Palmetto. You will excuse me for a moment?"

"Certainly."

Bravo left the room.

Hector glanced about him; he had seen it all before. Indeed, in his early days in London he had lived in a similar dungeon. A well-worn horsehair sofa occupied the side of the room opposite the fireplace. On the right hand of the fireplace was a rickety side-board, and on the left a nest of crabbed book-shelves. By the window stood a writing-table, and opposite the window were folding doors, obviously opening into a bedroom. A few uncomfo table chairs gaudily antimacassared, and half a dozen execrable prints in frames of mildewed gilt, completed the furniture.

Hector was not left long to his whirling circle of thoughts.

The sliding doors rattled in their grooves. Hector rose to his feet. with amaze at the figure that entered. It was Senor Bravo. indeed, but Senor Bravo transformed and transfigured.

Gone were sombrero and voluminous cloak, gone were the stooped shoulders, gone was the slouching gait.

Here was a gentleman of middle age, dignified, with a presence. The shaggy eyebrows and well-trimmed moustache and imperial Hector knew; he did not know the close-cropped hair above a broad, heavily-wrinkled forehead.

But it was Senor Bravo's dress that riveted his gaze: a costume of black velvet and silver: black velvet coat with silver buttons, and with a silver "R" on each lapel; black satin breeches, white silk stockings. and shoes with silver buckles; ruffles of white lace at the wrists, a jabot of white lace at the throat, and at the left lip a rapier, silver-hilted, and sheathed in black enamel.

For a moment Hector thought that his host was of a surety gone crazed.

Bravo seemed to divine what was passing in Hector's mind. He waved a withered hand courteously, as to say "Your thought is natural.

"No, my friend, I am not mad.

"I have spoken to you of Palmetto, and you have responded in al the warmth of your young heart. I—I, who am suspicious of every human being, I trust you. Will you not trust me?"

Hector pulled himself together and laughed.

"Surely."

"Then follow me. And whatever you see or hear—above all, whatever you feel—do not fear."

He led the way into the bedroom, for bedroom it was. A single candle shed light. Hector looked about him. It was of the stereotyped Bloomsbury pattern: a bed, a chest of drawers with a mirror, a washhandstand, a couple of chairs, a large wooden trunk, and the inevitable "Descent from the Cross"—a den to make sleep a thing of dread.

Bravo swung the chest of drawers away from the wall. A low door was disclosed. He blew out the candle.

"Place your hands an my shoulders. So. Now, do not speak. When I go forward, follow. Do not lose touch. We go down three steps—now."

Hector counted three steps. Then he heard the door close behind them.

"Forward!"

Hector kept touch. As he walked he felt once a hot breath on his cheek and he heard a sigh, followed by the click of a trigger—or was it the sibilant swish of steel? The sounds are absolutely dissimilar, yet now he could not distinguish between them.

"Stop!"

There was a flood of light. They were standing at the end of a narrow passage, before a baize-covered door. Bravo turned with a smile.

"Faith is good," he said. "Look!"

Hector looked behind him. He counted ten men, in uniforms of white and purple, who stood like statues, with drawn swords against their shoulders. And Hector, although he smiled the superior smile his intelligence and taste exacted, yet felt a queer little tremor run down his spinal column.

Bravo opened the door.

"Come," he said.

They passed through into a great room hung with curtains of silver tissue and lit by a huge chandelier of a hundred lights. Their feet rested on a carpet like velvet, soft and thick and white. Chairs of white velvet with arms of silver, lined each side of the hall. At one end, on a dais, stood a high throne, seemingly all of silver. Behind the throne fell a curtain of purple, in the centre of which shone a gigantic silver "R" surmounted by a silver crown.

Grant seized the old man's arm.

"In God's name, what sorcery is this?"

Bravo's eyes glittered and he drew himself up to his full height.

"My last argument. You are in the palace of——"

One of the white curtains parted and there appeared the slim figure of a young woman robed in unrelieved black. A blood-red rose flamed in her hair.

Bravo advanced a pace and raised his voice:

"Her Majesty Queen Maddalena, whom God preserve!"

(To be Continued.)

THE 100-MILE TRAIN.

We're Likely to Be Travelling at That Rate.

We note with pleasure that our space devouring friends at Zossen, Germany, have not yet satiated their hunger for pace, and touched the record the other day for no less than 140 miles per hour, says the Street Railway Journal. They seem to be overcoming air pressure rather comfortably up to the present, and we have heard nothing about the motors failing or the pressure caving in the front end of the car.

Perhaps the doubting gentlemen who figured on the motors burning out from overload at 80 miles per hour to 100 miles per hour will now be convinced that higher speeds are both possible and practicable. One hundred and forty miles per hour is a decidedly hot pace, but it will more than likely be beaten before we go to press. It has taken a good many years to evolve the two-minute trotting horse, but this year we have him in triplicate, and just so it has been with electric tailroading. Once the records began to break they fairly blew up and left only small fragments.

One hundred and forty miles per hour, even if not outdone by a considerable margin, still means that the hundred-mile-an-hour train is much nearer to reality than it has ever been before. That speed is quite feasible whenever it is demanded, and it is moreover, quite high enough to meet the requirements of humanity for some little time to come. Its real importance lies, as we have often remarked, in its application to long lines on which the saving of time would be material. Cutting down the running time to Flatbush or Hackensack may defer the dyspepsia of the commuter for another season or two, but it is not commercially important. It is cutting the time on long runs that counts—reducing the time to Washington to less than three hours, and converting the trip to Chicago into a mere night's run.

It is now announced that the experiments have been conducted largely with the idea of the early application of the system to the railroad connecting Berlin with Hamburg, distant by rail 176 miles from each other, and that an early conversion of that line is by no means improbable. Somehow the hundred-mile-an-hour train looks nearer than it did a few months ago, and our spyglass is still trained in the direction of Germany.

FETICH DOCTORS.

Have Just Stirred Up a Revolt in the Congo Free State.

A despatch from London says that fetich doctors in the Lomami District of the Congo State, about 900 miles from the Atlantic, have stirred up many natives to revolt, fortifying their courage to this point by incantations which will render them invulnerable to the bullets of the whites.

Fetichism is recognized as an impediment to progress on the Congo. Just as the Congo State has made the crimes of slave raiding, cannibalism, and human sacrifices punishable with death, so it has placed the arts of the fetich doctor on the list of misdemeanors, and punishes these men when they are caught plying their trade.

These fellows live by their wits. They keep alive faith in the efficacy of charms, belief in witch craft, and many other harmful superstitions. Any one is likely to be accused of being a witch if he happens to have property that is coveted by the chief or the fetich doctor, or has incurred the hatred of some one whom the fetich man desires to please. The natives believe that the person thus acused is a wizard, and when he takes the poison test, and staggers and falls under the influence of the drug, his guilt is considered as established, and the by-standers rush at him and beat him to death.

Dr. Bentley, of the Baptist missions, wrote a while ago that many hundreds of terrible stories of this kind with much variety of detail might easily be collected. He told of a case on the Lower Congo where eighteen men were compelled to suffer death because a fetich doctor accused them of causing the death of six men who had been drowned by the upsetting of their canoe.

As fast as the influence of the Congo State is extended over its vast domain, the authorities are making much trouble for the fetich doctor by diminishing his prestige and punishing him for practising his art. So he regards white men as his special enemies, and, if possible, stirs up the natives against them.

AS TO NICKNAMES.

Given Often for Absurd Reasons and Generally Stick.

"Wonderful how names stick to a person," said the observant man "There were two nice little women in our village who came to call on us one evening, and we offered them popcorn which the children had just brought in from the kitchen. They refused, but not so emphatically as to keep us from giving them two heaping plates of the corn. We kept refilling the plates and they kept crunching all the evening. There was something so funny about it that I called them 'the popcorn ladies', and the name has stuck to them so that the whole village know them by it.

"I once knew a man who talked incessantly in a high pitched voice, and a bright girl dubbed him 'the chirper.' The name was quickly passed around among the young people, and now the greater part of his friends know him by that name. A dignified young woman of my acquaintance goes by the name of 'Whont' to this day because when she was a little girl she used to call herself 'Mrs. Whont' when she played grown-up ladies, and the family picked it up. She simply can't shake the absurd name.

"More than one red-haired man is known by the name of "Pink" and philosophically accepts the title. I have an acquaintance who holds a responsible position who is known by the name of 'Dotty.' It seems that one day a mischievous girl discovered that he had three prominent dimples. She promptly dubbed him 'Dotty Dimple,' and now he is known to all his associates as Dotty.' Another man of my acquaintance is always called 'Bluebeard' because he has such a white and thin skin that if he does not shave daily his beard shows like through it. That name, too, came through a woman's quick wit.

"An old lady friend of mine is still called 'Peachy' because when she was a young girl she had a complexion like peaches and cream. Her brother promptly dubbed her 'Peachy,' and 'Peachy' she will remain to the end of her days. In a certain household a very feminine little woman is still called 'The Boy,' because when she was a young girl she went through a serious illness which made it necessary to cut her hair short. Her younger sister said she was 'the boy' of the family, and the dainty lady is still called by that absurd name.

"An effeminate man was once called 'Viola' by one of the boys in the office, and now we know him by nothing else. Another one of the boys in the office is always called 'Chesty,' and though he got angry at first, he has cheerfully accepted the new name now.

"Our bookkeeper is always putting in his oar when it is not at all necesssary, and I think now he will be known until the end of time as 'General Butts.' A friend of mine who is always called 'Cheerful' does not know whether he is called that because his friends believe he has a cheerful disposition or because they consider him a cheerful idiot. But, at any rate, he can't shake the name."

FORMOSAN SAVAGES.

Thought One Chinaman Was the Same as Another.

When the Japanese seized Formosa they had a sharp campaign against the Chinese population, many of whom resented their arrival by taking up arms. The savage tribes who occupy the mountains of the eastern third of the island informed the Japanese that they would like to help in the war against their inveterate enemies.

The Japanese with some hesitation accepted a small party of these allies, and have been telling ever since a curious story about the failure of the experiment. Food and quarters were provided for the hillsmen with the army, and off they started over the plains to meet the Chinese insurgents.

All went well for a few days, when it became evident that the new recruits were discontented. They finally presented themselves before the commander of the forces and plainly expressed their disappointment and disgust.

They said the Japanese had come to Formosa to kill Chinese; but here they had been marching for days among thousands of Chinese, working in the fields or busy about the houses. To be sure, these people were unarmed, and for that reason it would have been all the easier to kill them, and why the Japanese had allowed these thousands to live passed their comprehension.

They said they desired to return to their tribe, whose warriors, though few in number, could make a larger collection of Chinese heads than the whole Japanese force together. So they were started back for their hills under escort, and thus ended their participation in the Japanese campaign.

DISRAELI WAS A COWARD.

The late earl of Beaconsfield was gifted with any amount of political and moral courage, but he was an abject coward physically. When he was still plain Mr. Disraeli his wife once said of him: "Benjamin is the greatest coward I ever saw. Why do you know I always have to pull the string of his shower bath?" And the great man was fain to confess that this was actually the case.