A WOMAN'S LOVE

OR, A BROTHER'S PROMISE

CHAPTER VI.

People called the Orange King a lucky man. He, himself, when he could be got to talk, declared that Luck consisted in knowing when to take Time by the forelock and how to twist the thin grey wisp. "Do now" was his favorite maxim. It actuated his life and all his actions, whether it was a question of smashing a rival's line of steamships, or so small a matter as ordering his winter supply of household coal. His second favorite maxim was "To-morrow went out when the Telegraph came in." There was nothing new in his creed, which was the old one of "Time is money." Only—he lived up to it, and so came in ahead of all competitors in whatsoever field.

His visit to the Palce in Bloomsbury lasted exactly thirty-five minutes .

Hector took him through Bravo's room in Charford Street, along the corridor where the ten kept constant guard, and into the great White Hall. The Orange King said nothing. He shrugged his shoulders in a curiously un-English way when he caught sight of the silver throne : that was the only sign of surprise he allowed himself to express,

Don Augustin, in his court dress, awaited them here. In spite of Hector's warnings, Bravo, it was evident, was intent on ceremony and formality. But, somehow, Smith's unruffled calm and cold eye wrought their effect; and with a sigh of resignation Don Augustin opened the door leading into the boudoir and waved an invitation to enter.

Maddalena was awaiting them.

It was a curious partie carree : Bravo, old and grey, with the wrinkled sad face of disappointed age; Smith, quiet, keen, not fifty, clean shaven but for a heavy iron-grey moustache and the tiniest of tufts on the lower lip; Grant, tall, fair, with a fresh young face, and a Viking's head of crinkly gold hair; and the Queen, radiant and richly young, with the bloom of a newly-opened rose.

Mr. Smith spoke a single sentence of hurried compliment. He knew something of the sort was expected of him, and he got through it as quickly as possible. This was the one moment when it could be said that he was not altogether at his ease. Maddalena blushed and bowed.

"I suppose I may see those papers now," he said, looking towards Hector.

A casket lay on the table. Maddalena moved towards it, and opened it with a little gold key that hung at her chatelaine.

"I have spent all the day in setting them in order," she said, "so as to save your time."

"Thank you. May I sit ?"

Don Augustin looked horrified, but Maddalena waved her hand to a chair. The Orange King sat down, and for ten minutes read document after document, paying no attention to the others, who awaited eagerly the result of his scrutiny.

"That's all right," he said shortly, when he had finished. "Now, the next thing is to assign to me the promised monopoly of the orange trade. I am going to sink half a million in this venture. If the affair comes to nothing, I am the only one who loses anything. If it comes off all right, I must see that I don't lose. My experience is that kings have short memories." He spoke a little bitterly; for it was only a couple of years before that a successful annexation of territory on the Congo brought to a certain grasping monarch much solid revenue, and to Thomas Smith, who had provided the major part of the capital, nothing, absolutely nothing, except a Star and a Ribbon, both of which he had returned.

"Sir !" began Don Augustin, aflame with anger, his hand on his toasting-fork sword.

"With you, madam, it is, of course different," went on Mr. Smith, unheeding the interruption. "Still—"

Maddalena smiled. "Our agreement shall be in writing, sir. I should prefer it so. Will you write the paper ? I will sign it."

Don Augustin led the way, resentfully, to an escritoire. For a couple of minutes Mr. Smith wrote. Then he rose and read the following :

" 'We, Maddalena, Queen of the Isle of Palms, hereby agree and promise to grant and deliver, duly signed and sealed, to Thomas Smith, of Orange House, Duke Street, Liverpool, a charter of monopoly of the orange trade of the Isle of Palms, for the term of ninety-nine (99) years, in consideration of services rendered and to be rendered; and we further agree and promise that such charter shall be granted and delivered within six months of the date of our coronation."

"I think that is sufficient for my side of the transaction. As a matter of fact, until you are recognised by the Powers, this agreement is not worth the paper it's written on. But that comes later. I have also written an undertaking on my part to finance this enterprise in consideration of receiving the monopoly."

Don Augustin took both papers with shaking hands—poor old man! What a moment it was for him—and having read them, passed them to Maddalena. Without reading either she placed them on the table.

"Don Augustin," she said, "you advise me to sign this document !"

"Yes, madam," and her chamberlain bowed.

Then Hector had his breath taken away by the same question being put to him. The blood surged in his ears, and with dim eyes he saw the face of the Queen, smiling yet wistful. In a voice he did not recognise for his own, he replied :

"Yes, madam."

So the Queen took her first official document and signed it clearly and boldly—"Maddalena R."

The Orange King signed the second paper, and an exchange was made.

"I don't want to interfere in any plans you may have made, madam," he said; "but to a certain extent, the man who pays the piper has the right to call the tune. I would suggest, therefore, that Mr. Grant go out to Palm Island as soon as it is convenient. He can prospect, see what the state of affairs is like, how much the Palmettos are to be relied upon, and arrange for your going there as soon as possible. I shall be glad to see you ruling over the island, madam. Anything will be better than Hispaniolan misrule. It costs me quite £15,000 a year."

"We had decided that Mr. Grant should go out soon," said Don Augustin.

"Good," said Mr. Smith, "I go back to Liverpool to-night. To-morrow I shall write Mr. Grant and tell him when he ought—when I think he ought to start. Advices from my agents in Palmetto will await me. If their report is favorable, I shall at once place orders for ammunition and guns. It will be a provisional order only, until Mr. Grant reports fully as to the necessary quantities. One of my steamers will take the armaments from England to Antwerp, where they will be transhipped for the island; and, another steamer I shall place at your disposal as soon as it is advisable for you to leave England." Then with a swift turn to Grant, "Is there anything else you think it necessary to discuss now ?"

"There is so much that there is nothing," said Hector.

"Then," said Mr. Smith, rising from his chair and buttoning his overcoat, "I shall be going. With your permission, madam," he added, remembering the courtesy due to Maddalena.

"Sir," she said, "I thank you. And I hope to make you believe that if kings have short memories, queens have long ones."

"Madam," he replied, "may your hope be realized. I can wish you nothing better—nothing better for myself, either," he added, with a laugh that tried to be cynical.

Don Augustin opened the door of the noudoir, to escort the Orange King through the maze. Hector was about to follow, but a sign from Maddalena held him. The chamberlain and the millionaire passed out, and the door closed.

Hector turned and faced the Queen. There was silence for a moment.

"What do you think of the Orange King ?" said he.

"Think !" she cried : "I do not think. I feel, I feel. And I know now that I shall sit on the throne of my fathers."

"I thought he would impress you in that way."

"There is such an air of calm confidence, of assured success about him."

"That's half the battle in this world." said Hector. "Give people the impression that you're going to win and you remove half the probable obstacles. They say, 'It won't be good to rub against that man. Better to be on his side than against him.' Yes, Thomas Smith is a great character."

"I shall know how to reward him when I come to my own," said Maddalena.

"O, there's the monopoly," laughed Hector.

"That's nothing," said she, "that's all to my advantage. Do you know, I have been wondering during these last days how I am ever to reward you and Don Augustin sufficiently."

"Wait until the work is done, dear lady."

"O, but I can't help thinking and planning."

"I don't think we shall want any reward. Is that ungracious? What I mean is that to Don Augustin it will be enough to see his beloved mistress on the throne of her fathers, to see the people of his dear island freed from tyranny and happy under your rule, to die among the green of the palms he loves so well."

"And yourself ?"

"I ?—— There will be some excitement, a trifle of fighting, a trifle of plotting and planning. Let me have my share in these, and let me see you crowned in the Cathedral of Palm City—surely that is reward great enough for me."

Yet as he spoke he knew that he was keeping back somewhat of his desire. For even as he looked at her a certain strange tremor, a divine shudder ran through him, stirring him as Spring stirs the sap.

From where he sat in shadow he looked at her. Was ever woman so witching as this ? She was in the ripening prime of youth, and the mere body of her, rounded and supple, seemed the sweet composite of all joyous maidenhood. A smile lingered about the pomegranates of her parted lips—a smile that was, he whispered, a butterfly, one of her kind, pure thoughts made visible. The light touched her hair. A crown would soon rest on that most queenly head, yet what bauble of gold and jewels could ever match her beauty half so well as that present dark glory ?

He had dallied with the daring thought before this hour. But it was always half dreamfully : she was the princess in a poem, and in poems all things are possible, none more possible than the impossible. And this was no poem—this was Life, where things are often impossible.

Still——

O ! but he loved her, he loved her.

The full revelation shone swift upon him, as the sun smites the sea at dawn. He walked in the midst of the great epiphany. It was Spring, and all about him leagues of daffodils shook golden lances; the green hills flamed emerald; the sea was silver at white heat; and every thicket was like his heart, a nest of singing birds, every bird singing the self-same song of "I love her, I love her."

Her voice broke in on his moment.

"You do not hope for much."

He laughed, bewildered yet happy.

"Ah ! I may not tell you all I hope; but, as the old Scots saying goes, 'She that bodes a silk goon may get the sleeve o't.' "

Don Augustin returned. He looked keenly at Maddalena and then at Hector. Some suspicion was in his mind, and for a moment a dark shadow wrinkled his brow. But the suspicion and the shadow passed.

"Your Mr. Smith is a terrible man, a machine," he cried. "Ah ! if I had only met him years ago, instead of trusting to your politicians —they are not statesmen. He settles the fate of a nation with the swiftness and precision of the guillotine."

"He is a business man—the business man of the future," said Hector, glad of relief from his mad dream. "We are beginning to feel the necessity for such men in our government. Our Secretary for the Colonies is a business man. The making of steel screws and the selling of them was no bad preparation for empire-building."

"That will be our difficulty when we form a Cabinet in Palmetto," said Bravo. "We are not a business people. We are poets and dreamers, we are fighters and lovers——"

"One or two of Smith's heads of departments might be induced to take portfolios," laughed Hector. "Smith himself would make no bad Royal Chancellor."

"Ah !" sighed Bravo. "All that is on the knees of the gods; and, meanwhile, there is the ousting of Hispaniola. Mr. Smith has great faith in you."

"That is hopeful," rejoined Hector.

"I, too," said Maddalena.

"Then I am fully armed," Hector answered, all his heart thanking her from his eyes.

"He sees that you are enthusiastic," said Bravo. "And enthusiasm wins more battles than the sword."

Two nights later Hector received the following characteristic note :—

"Orange House, Duke Street,
Liverpaol.

"Dear Sir,—You had beeter start for Palmetto on Friday. Our boat, the s. s. Jebba, leaves the Mersey at 8 p. m. on that day. I shall expect to see you on board about 6 p. m. Yours truly,

THOMAS SMITH."

Hector sought Don Augustin at Johnson's, but not finding him there took his way to Charford Street. He let himself in quietly by means of the latch-key Bravo had given him. The old man's rooms were empty. Expecting, therefore, to find him with the Queen, Hector went along the secret passage into the White Hall, and tapped at the door of the boudoir. There was no answer, so Hector opened the door and entered. The boudoir was empty, too, but it was brilliantly lighted, and looked as if Maddalena had just left it. He had hardly entered before she returned.

"Mr. Grant," she cried, in delighted surprise. "You are welcome indeed."

"The humblest of your servants, madam," he said, bowing low.

She gave him her hand, and he stooped to kiss it, but she withdrew it hastily.

"No, no, that is for the Queen. For your friend, your English shake of the hand is better."

And again she extended her hand frankly, while that wonderful rippling smile irradiated her features.

"You bring me news ?"

"We are beginning. Look."

And Hector gave her the Orange King's laconic message.

As she read it she sighed joyously.

"Mr. Smith does not waste words," she cried. "You go to-morrow ?"

"Surely—unless you have other commands."

"I ? What have I to do with it, my friend ? You are doing all these things for me—you and Don Augustin."

On the last occasion Maddalena had said, "Don Augustin and you." Hector wondered if the transposition were intentional, and if it were whether it was due to his sudden importance in the scheme of affairs or to the beginning of something deeper. He looked on her with all a lover's earnestness, and for a moment he fancied that in her smile he could read something of happy augury. But he put the dream behind him, for your true lover is ever the first to discount alluring prospects.

"Yes," he said, "I shall go to-morrow."

"O ! how I wish I were a man !" she cried. "Then I could come, too —come and see my own land, my own people."

"Your day is not far off," Hector answered. "I have been making a little calculation, and I find that, if all things go smoothly, it is possible for you to be crowned on the first day of the New Year, the new century. Six months is surely a little time to wait."

"It does not seem long to you who are doing something. But when all one's doing is just waiting, a day is a year—a week an eternity. Why, in six months I may be dead!"

Like a flash the vision came, and like a flash it was gone and forgotten. He laughed lightly, and set it down, inwardly, to his "confoundedly vivid imagination."

"You must not say things like that," he answered her. "If you are not hopeful and fearless how can we have high hearts ?"

"O ! do not think that I shall fail you in hope," she assured him. "Yet has not one of your poets said, 'Hope thou not much, and fear thou not at all '? Hope has been my food all these years, and I think there is sufficient left to carry me on to the end."

"Especially," said Hector, "since the end is so near. To be sure, nothing actual, nothing tangible, is done yet—beyond enlisting the sympathy of the Orange King."

"And that was your doing."

"It was nothing—but the work seems so straightforward, so simple, that I am all confidence."

"Your departure for Palmetto is sudden, and Don Augustin and I did not think it would come so quickly, yet we have been making preparations. Far into the night we wrote. See ?"

She rose, and taking from the escritoire a bundle of papers, handed them to Hector.

"These are for you."

"And they are——?"

"Introductions to the leaders in Palmetto, lists of all our chief friends, particulars of where you may find them and how you are to make yourself known to them. Then, there is an open letter or commission appointing you my representative in the island, authorizing you to do in my name what you deem best for the cause, and commanding our friends to obey your orders in all things as though the orders were our own."

Hector knew from Bravo that some such commission would be given to him, but he did not surmise that the fulness and power of it would be so great as this. He was touched by the extravagance of confidence, and he could not help showing it in his face.

"I am overpowered by your Majesty's trust in me."

"Is it not deserved ? Can I do less than acknowledge in the only way yet possible to me all that you have done, all that you are undertaking, all that you are risking ? It is little more than a week since Don Augustin brought you to me, and said, 'This is your saviour, this is the saviour of Palmetto.' Since that night how much has happened : you have abandoned a career in which you might have attained, who knows what eminence; you have—"

"Pray, pray," interrupted Hector.

"No, you must let me speak. You have sacrificed time and money to find the means of doing me and my country the greatest service we needed; and now you are going to increase the debt by risking your life and enduring all perils for my sake and my country's. Ah! my confidence is little for all this."

(To be Continued.)

A ZOOLOGIST'S PARADISE

ENGLISHMEN'S PRIVATE ZOO LARGEST IN WORLD.

Keeps all Kinds of Animals at Times in His Sitting Room.

Beautiful Hazlemere Park, in Buckinhamshire, England, is not only one of the handsomest seats in the country, but is also a veritable zoologists' paradise, for it is filled with almost every species of animal under the sun.

Here young Bob Leadbetter, one of the wealthiest and most eligible young men in London's society, is master and rides to his heart's content his hobby for queer pets. His beautifully kept lawns and gardens are given over to a number of magnificent creatures whose roars at one time made African jungles shake and the sight of whose tawny and striped bodies has caused terror throughout certain parts of India.

In various parts of the estate there are picturesque rustic houses filled with strong and padlocked iron cages, and these cages are occupied by some strange, some ferocious and beautiul, and some terrifying, and all odd-looking inhabitants for a quiet and respectable country home in England.

Almost every sort of animal that roams the forest or plain is represented in Mr. Leadbetter's collection and only the most exclusive blue-blooded members of each family are allowed to become inmates of Hazlemere Park.

Some of Mr. Leadbetter's society friends in London think it is a dangerous fad for a man to have, but then they have not seen the young Englishman with his pets.

He is as devoted to all of them as they are to him, and he even has a number of the less formidable ones in his house, where they have taken entire possession of his own private domain.

He has always been particularly fond of animals of every sort and kind. He began keeping wolves and tiger cats and various other small and harmless pets when he was fifteen years old.

But the hunting instinct is strong in Mr. Leadbetter, and with true huntsman's scorn of all prey that is not of the finest, he refused to add to his menagerie any that were not particular fine specimens of their kind.

He believed that in a private collection everything should be of the best that accounts for the reputation his menagerie has gained among zoologists for its exceptionally fine and healthy animals.

NO ARTIFICIAL HEAT.

The young man has decided opinions on the way to manage and rear his pets and he carries them into practice.

He does not believe in any artificial heat for tropical animals in the coldest weather and neither his lions not tigers, born as the majority of them have been, in India, are supplied with any artificial heat during the winter. They have roomy sleeping places behind their front dens and in the cold weather any amount of straw. Otherwise, they must depend upon nature for their heat and comfort.

Mr. Leadbetter has had tame leopards, lions, bears, wolves and jackals on different occasions in the house and in his own particular sitting-room. They always owned him as master and would obey no one else. Of course, he brought them in first very young.

The most valuable specimens of this unique zoo at the present time are four lions, one, Sultan, a large, beautiful, full-maned animal, is considered the largest and finest specimen in any zoological establishment in the world.

The lions do particularly well under Mr. Leadbetter's care, and two strong litters of four have been reared and bred at Hazlemere Park.

Mr Leadbetter head keeper's favorite amusement is to put a three-month old lion cub on his knee and watch him play with a kitten, his great playfellow. The cat always sleeps curled up on the lion's back and many a fine romp the two—the great and the little cat—have together.

The Englishman's pride and particular friends are the royal Bengal tigers, which are wonderfully fine animals and so devoted to their master that they make a great fuss over him every time he visits them. Emperor the big male, always comes up to be stroked.

There are some very large white Siberian camels that are beautiful beasts, and one, a stallion, is an enormous creature, with a wonderfully good temper.

The list of the animals that the young zoologist has spent so many years and so much care in collecting is a large one.

GREAT VARIETY OF ANIMALS.

Besides the tigers, lions and lionesses, leopards, pumas, bears, including a very big one from Alaska, some Malay sun bears, several hyenas, including the spotted or laughing variety, now very scarce, indeed, and a lot of big Siberian wolves, bred at Hazlemere; jackals from Africa and India, some white Siberian camels, several brown camels from Egypt, a number of yaks, a flock of Syrian sheep, a white sacred Egyptian ass, llamas, alpacas, peccaries monkeys of numerous varieties, Indian zebus, buffaloes and two white sacred Indian zebus. This about completes the list of wild animals, but by no means includes the whole collection.

There are wonderfully beautiful foreign birds—scarlet macaws, blue and yellow military macaws, several parrots, cockatoos and every other conceivable feathered foreigner.

Mr. Leadbetter has a strange power over his animals and it is the rarest thing for even the wildest to show their well-loved master the slightest antagonism.

Of all the many wild beasts he has had as pets, on only two occasions has he been injured by them. One was a half-grown brown bear and the other a year-old lion. Both instances he puts down to their ungovernable tempers, which for the instant got quite the better of them, for, according to Mr. Leadbetter, a pet animal is always sorry afterward.

Bears, he has discovered, are the most uncertain and he warns all venturers into the field of animal collection to beware of this particular branch of the animal family. He can claim experience as the basis of this warning, for he had at one time seven bears.

In the centre of Kildine, an island in the North Sea, is perhaps the most curious lake in the world. The surface of its waters is quite fresh and supports fresh-water creatures, but deep down it is as salt as the greatest depths of the sea, and salt water fish live in it.