A WOMAN'S LOVE

OR, A BROTHER'S PROMISE

CHAPTER VII.—(Continued.)

When the waiter had gone Hector went to one of his portmanteaux and drew out the bundle of documents which had been given him by Queen Maddalena on the eve of his departure. How often had he read and re-read them during the short voyage! often enough, at least, for him to know them by heart. Yet he wished to consult the particular one that conveyed instructions how to act and comport himself during the first days of his stay in the island. This was what he read in Bravo's angular handwriting:

If any one shows you a cross-hilted dagger or poniard bearing the letter R in silver, unhesitatingly ask him for the password. He should reply: 'For Palmetto, freedom.' If he does not, he has come by the sign wrongly, and you should find out who he is, so as to be able to report him to our friends that he may be watched. On receiving the correct reply, you will say: 'Freedom is but half.' The reply is. 'Freedom and Maddalena is all.' You will then say: 'Her Majesty Queen Maddalena,' and the answer must be: 'Whom God preserve.' Thereafter you may conduct the conversation as you please, only having regard to preserve your character of envoy of her Majesty, and in all things to comport yourself in accord with the dignity and honor of your position."

Hector then turned to the Directory of Persons and looked up the name of the colonel of Gastaldi's regiment.

"Don Miguel Ortona y Cajal," he read. "Resides on his estate of Friganeta, in the district of Telde, fifteen miles from Palm City. Believed to be a worthy man, but not very enthusiastic. Bound to the cause chiefly through the devotion of his daughter, the Senorita Asunta, whose hatred of Hispaniola and adoption of our side dates from the death of her favorite brother, Manrico, as a Hispaniolan conscript in San Domingo. Don Miguel can be reached through his daughter. Among your documents you will find a letter of introduction to her."

While Hector was debating in his mind in what way best to spend his first day in Palm City—whether to roam about and familiarise himself with the town and its environs, or at once to seek out the leader indicated in Bravo's memoranda—the matter was being settled for him by the Orange King. That alert personage burst into the room as Hector was packing away his papers.

"Glad to see you're up so early, Grant," he cried airily. "The early bird may not catch the worm, but at least he stands an excellent chance."

He waved his hand towards the window.

"Been taking in the view? What do you think of it?"

"A little bit like the scenery of a comic opera," said Hector, reverting to his first impression.

"Wait. The hills will remove the idea. They impress even me—an unimaginative business man."

"It's all so dusty here."

"Dust, tobacco, manana, oranges—these are Palmetto," answered Mr. Thomas Smith.

"Didn't know you made epigrams"

"I don't. I make money."

"And queens."

"You're too clever by half this morning, young man. Now, look here. This is what I came to say: These troops in camp are on their way home to Hispaniola. They are only stopping here to recruit their health after the malarial fever of the west. The general is stopping in this house. I caught him this morning. He has heard of me—everybody in Palm City knows me—and he invited me to accompany him to parade in half an hour. Will you come? You'll see the sort of material you've got to tackle. It'll be worth your while."

"Of course I'll come."

"All right. Get downstairs as soon as you can. I'm going to get something to eat."

Hector ate his fruit and drank his wine as he dressed, and in ten minutes he was seated in the dining-room, opposite General Stampa, one of the sauvest of Hispaniolan gentlemen, and one of the cruellest of the century. His record as commandant-general of the forces in Aruba, Hispaniola's chief colony in the West Indies, was unenviable even among a people not particularly noted for kindliness of heart. Fire and rapine had marked his progress of pacification—he had had the task of quelling a petty rebellion, and he had transformed an insignificant rising into a chronic insurrection lasting over years—death and wholesale robbery had raged wherever his tent-pegs had been driven. His name was used by Hispaniolan mothers as a bogey to fright their babes, and his soldiers hated him as much as they feared him. He was now returning home laden with the fruits of years of peculation and thievery, smiling and bland as a professor of moral philosophy, seeming to live only for his coffee, his cigarillo, and the sight of his home.

"Ah! senor, to the weary exile, what a beautiful word is home, with the loved ones waiting with open arms!"

If report were true, the general lived up to the maxim that tyranny, like charity, should begin at home.

"I sorrow over the delay that keeps me in durance here, even though it be a paradise. There is a villa in the shadow of the Sierras, where little ones are longing, not for the general, the soldier, no!—for the indulgent parent. But, thank the Holy Virgin! duty is my watchword—duty—duty." And he lit another cigarillo reflectively, while Hector wondered if this soft-spoken, soft-hearted gentleman were really the ogre, blood-stained and crime-stained, common talk had made him; wondered, too, if this were the man he might have to oppose in the day of battle.

"Ah! yes," murmured Stampa," "duty. I have other children, the King's, ten thousand of them here. We go to pay them a little morning visit—in their nursery. Come, gentlemen, time flies."

At the door of the hotel they found three fine Andalusian barbs, at the head of each a Hispaniolan orderly.

"I have taken the liberty, Senor Smith——"

Stampa indicated the horses with a courtly wave of the hand.

"You are more than kind," said Mr. Smith, "but——"

"They are as gentle as lambs. Have no fear."

"Our costume——"

"We do not trouble about fashions here. Come."

They turned their horses' heads to the right and rode slowly along to the Alameda, where the General's staff, glittering with gold, awaited him. Hector, conscious of his own strength and fine physique, nurtured among the purple hills of the North, felt a certain amount of reasonable contempt for the puny individualities of the General's entourage, and to himself he commented adversely on their slovenly appearance. Most of them wore beards, in no very kempt condition, while some even grew small mutton-chop whiskers. Nor was he impressed much by their demeanour; some were openly servile, while others had an air of bored haughtiness that could be read to mean the indifference of the degenerate. There was not one open, frank countenance among them; suspicion, cunning, dissipation—the marks of these were plentiful.

The staff saluted perfunctorily and fell in behind the General and his friends.

They came soon to the camp, a little city of white tents, beautiful in the sun. As they passed through on their way to the parade-ground, a parallelogram of lava-dust, Hector noted that the tents were not so beautiful as they had seemed at a distance. They were tattered and old, and had they belonged to any other nation than Hispaniola, would have been condemned long since. Fortunately, in the glorious, almost rainless climate of Palmetto, tents did not matter. Still, the fact made another point towards his estimate of the Hispaniolan army.

The parade-ground was quite a mile long by about half a mile in breadth. Here Hector had his first view of the palm trees that give their soft name to the island. They enclosed the ground on three sides, their feathery green tops casting a grateful shadow on the hot black grit, that to walk on was a torture. Along one of the sides stretched a line of carriages, the smart victorias and lumbering barouches of the island aristocracy, and the ricketty tartanas of the less well-to-do; while on the opposite side, in the full glare of the morning sun, sprawled the common people, with here and there a mountaineer seated on his donkey or mule. In the centre of the space the troops stood to attention, shabby in bleached blue and dingy white.

The General turned his horse's head towards the line of carriages. "Our first duty," he said, twirling his grey moustache with a fat hand, "is toward the fair. Beauty and Duty, the soldier's twin-stars from time immemorial. Good rhyme in your English tongue, and most delightful reason in all tongues."

The Orange King grunted on Stampa's right, and on his left. Hector, remembering the man's record, grew hot with disgust.

"We have to make distinctions here, senor," went on the General. "We do not recognize or only distantly, these Palmetto animals. Still there are sufficient of our own country-women here to make life not all an Eveless Eden. The Palmetto women are not devoid of charm, but they are—what shall I say?—treacherous cats. Man and woman alike are rebellious animals. Fire and sword——"

He paused to bow to an overdressed matron in tight purple, swelling in a vast green barouche.

"Charming woman—wife of our Superintendent of Customs. Fire and sword, as I was saying, would work wonders among these rebels."

"Rebels, did you say?" interrupted the Orange King.

"Traitors and rebels," rejoined Stampa. "I only hope that they take it into their heads to rise while I command here. I promise they shall have short shrift."

"But I always thought the Palmettos were the most peaceable race——"

"Then, my dear Senor Smith, you thought wrongly. Why, only yesterday our Governor had news from our ambassador in your gay capital transmitted from Madura, that a plot is being hatched there, a plot to overturn the rule of his Most Catholic Majesty."

Hector stiffened himself in the saddle.

"Myself, I place small faith in the rumour. It is nothing but one of these anarchist scares. But if it should be true—well, stay with us a little while, and I'll show you how I deal with such cattle."

He reined up beside a large open carriage, in which sat a dark beauty, radiant by the side of a prophet-like hidalgo, with a long white beard and flowing moustache. Stampa bowed low.

"Senorita Asunta," he said, "this is a red-letter day in my calendar. Two suns shine on me," and he made a grandiloquent sweep of his arm as if to include the heavens and the fair lady. "Don Miguel, I greet you. I desire to present to you my friends, Senor Thomas Smith and Senor Hector Grant."

The senorita flashed her wonderful eyes on Hector, who for one dazzled moment sat his horse in silent admiration. Then he bowed and murmured something inaudible.

"I go," said Stampa, "to my duties. I leave you, senores, in hospitable hands. Farewell, senorita—farewell, senor."

Fortune, thought Hector was beginning to smile upon him: nothing happier could have been destined, surely. For a moment he resented the almost cavalier fashion in which the Hispaniolan general had shouldered Smith and himself into the company of the Ortonas, and left them there in their moment of surprise; and then he realized that Stampa had all unwittingly done him a service he would have been at some trouble to accomplish for himself. A moment's glance at the soft sunlit blue of sky and sea, and he took new courage between his two hands—he turned towards Asunta.

Her face was surely the morning: the clear blue of sky and sea he had just been invoking for inspiration was in her eyes; in the flash of her white teeth was the snowy sparkle of foam that marked the surf-line; her hair—no, that was not morning, it was the hour of night that comes before the dawn. She was beautiful indeed: not as Maddalena the incomparable Queen was beautiful—hers was the loveliness and brooding fairness of night; but alive and quivering with the life and brio of a Palmetto morning. Why, you could see her dancing as she sat smiling, half lost in the gaping depths of the great family carriage.

"You are from London, then senor?" The question was a sigh—a curve in the silence more than a break.

"From London last."

"And you arrived——"

"But last night."

"Yet you must have been afoot early. We take a week's sleep before coming to a morning parade. But the English are a sleepless race—they make a work of pleasure."

"Say, rather, they make a pleasure of their work—that's why they succeed."

"Ah! do you also boast like all other English?"

"No, no. I only speak for them. I am not English. I am a Scot, and perhaps I do not love my brothers overmuch; yet I cannot be silent when solid virtue is attacked.

"But are not Scot and English one?"

"Thank God, no! The desire to be individual and to remain so, preserves each of us alive and strong: like cometition between traders, the higher national rivalry makes us respectful of each other."

"Ah! so you are a Scot."

"Worse than that," laughed Hector, "much worse—I am what is called a Highlander."

A little shadow of inquiry darkened the whiteness of her brow.

"How shall I explain? Perhaps you have the same distinctions here. It is the difference between one born on the Monte and one born down in Palm City or the plains."

She took the point.

"I myself," she smiled, not a little proudly, "was born in the Monte."

"Then the subtle distinction——"

"O yes, I feel it. But tell me——and she paused as if finding her grasp of English insufficient to express her meaning; as if, too, she knew her question was abrupt. "Why are you here, for pleasure or for work? I mean, do you make holiday, or are you like Mr. Smith, on business?"

Hector looked at her straight. She had turned away her eyes, seeming intent on nothing but the swaying line of troops that filed by with a tired, half-awake sort of plod, a slouch that was the outcome of orders, not of will.

"Both," he answered. "Work, not business, I know; and, I hope, pleasure too."

She flashed on him again.

"It is difficult to combine the two."

"Duty does that for us."

"You have the last word," she cried, very pleased.

"It pays to have it," said Hector, half conscious that by saying it he had spoiled her implied compliment. Yet she nodded in agreement.

Smith was doing his best to carry on a conversation with Don Miguel. It was rather a one-sided affair, for Smith's knowledge of the Palmetto tongue was limited, and Don Miguel knew no other. But by dint of expressive gesture, he managed to convey to the Orage King a quantity of interesting mis-information.

The parade was nearly over. Stampa and his staff finished their march of inspection through the opened ranks and took up their places at the saluting-base, under the limp folds of the Hispaniolan flag. The troops were wheeled into long wavering lines for the march past.

The massed bands made a premature dash at the Hispaniolan National Anthem; but at the end of two bars a staff officer sprang at them with windmill arms, and they fell asleep, or lit their cigarillos again, as the whim took them.

Asunta looked up at Hector, and smiled contemptuously. He smiled back a question.

"The Anthem!" she said "Was that one of the shadows?"

"Shadows?"

"Coming events, you know."

"Ah!——" His eyes gloomed, but he answered lightly enough. "So you read our poets, senorita."

"O! we have a proverb ourselves—'over the shadow is the cloud.'"

There was some commotion and outcry at the saluting-base that stopped Hector's reply. The Hispaniolan flag drooped from a tall and heavy pole, fixed loosely in the shifty lava-dust. Came a sudden flaw, and the silk flapped out to its full glory. All the morning it had hung lazily; this was its effort, and it was too great. The pole came down with a crash on a little group of officers who scattered with strange unmanlike cries of consternation; and the flag of Hispaniola, the old oriflamme of conquest, cast a cloud of black sand to the sun.

Hector's superstition took the sign, and met a companion superstition in Asunta's eyes. She stood up in the carriage and laughed. Her father spoke to her sharply, and she gave him the explanation. He, too, stood up, and so they remained until a squad had raised the flag again.

"The shadows gather fast," she said.

"The clouds too," said Hector; "the clouds with the lightning."

Donna Asunta fumbled with her hand among the chiffons on her breast. She drew forth something which she held out to Hector—a tiny brooch, a silver cross-hilt dagger with the significant R. He was not taken by surprise.

"Give me the word."

"For Palmetto, freedom." It was the merest whisper.

"Freedom is but half."

"Freedom and Maddalena is all."

"Her Majesty Queen Maddalena."

"Who God preserve!"

He gave her back the jewel. The march past was now going on to the blare of trumpets and the clang of cymbals and drums.

"We must see you soon at Friganeta," she said.

"As soon as it is convenient for you to receive me."

She whispered to her father. The old man glanced round swiftly: there was none to see—every eye was fixed on the undulating lines of soldiery: he raised his hand, and in military fashion saluted Hector.

"To-morrow," said Donna Asunta.

Then silence fell, and continued until the parade was over. The troops filed off to their camping-ground, and the dark plain, dull and hot and dusty, was soon filled with the breaking crowd. Smith and Hector fell in, one on each side of the Ortona carriage. Chatter began again.

Just outside the town, and at the edge of the parade-ground, a road turned off to the left.

"Our way lies here," said Asunta. "For ten miles straight, through the orange groves. The road is easy."

"Then till to-morrow, farewell," said Hector.

"Until to-morrow," she laughed, "Don Baldassare."

"Baldassare? No, Hector—Ettore, as you say," he replied.

"Ettore? Well, that may come. Let it be Baldassare now. Adios!

"Adios! Adios!"

Hector wondered why she should have called him by that outlandish name. He was soon to know.

(To be Continued.)

WAR ON MALARIA.

Dr. Koch Stamped It Out on an Austrian Island.

Austria has along its Adriatic shores a stretch of warm, marshy lands infested with malaria. The result is that this coast is not so densely peopled as the inland regions though its fishing and other industries should attract a large population.

About two years ago Dr. Koch, whose investigations in Africa had convinced him that malaria might be overcome, expressed the opinion that the unhealthful conditions on the Adriatic seaboard could be removed. If there was an opportunity to make the experiment under the best conditions he would be glad to do so.

He desired to test the matter at a place so isolated that it could not be invaded by swarms of the species of mosquito which conveys the microbs of malaria and communicates it to persons by its sting. The low lying island of Brioni, about four miles off the coast of the Istrian peninsula, sixty miles south of Trieste, was well situated for his work.

It is so far from the mainland that the mosquito, which cannot fly a great distance, is unable to reach it, unless taken over on boats. Dr. Koch would have to fight the insect only as it is bred in the swamps of Brioni.

He was told to go ahead and funds were supplied for the work. He laid out the plan of campaign and employed Prof. Frosch and Dr. Blundau of Berlin to execute it.

His scheme included both the treatment of the sick and the extermination of the cause of malaria. All patients were treated at public expense. A force of workmen was employed to drain the swamps. The island was placed under thorough sanitary control, and every mudhole or water receptacle that might serve as a breeding place received attention.

The work has met with remarkable success. To all appearances Brioni is now entirely free from malaria.

This result has led the Austrian Government to begin an attempt to exterminate malaria on the coast of Istria. Three stations have been established, and a sufficient force to carry out Dr. Koch's methods has been employed.

If the work of these stations is successful other stations will be established in all parts of Istria and Dalmatia which are infested with malarial diseases.

TO HELP POOR CHILDREN.

The Earl of Meath, a somewhat enthusiastic British humanitarian, has suggested to the London school authorities that children of the elementary grades be taken from the city and brought up in model country villages, the parents to pay only the bare cost of food, the country council footing other expenses. He urges that in this way children of the very poor would have an otherwise unobtainable chance to grow up strong, healthy and good citizens In addition, many of them would probably stay in the country, thereby helping to repopulate the rural districts.

BIRD'S REMARKABLE POWER

Mr. J. Lancaster, an American naturalist, who spent five years on the west coast of Florida studying birds there, came to the conclusion that, of all the feathered tenants of the air, the frigate-bird can fly the longest without resting. He has seen one flying for a whole week night and day without repose. The frigate bird's wings is very great, and it can fly at a speed of ninety-six miles an hour without seeming to flap its wings very much.

There are no entirely good men; no entirely bad women.

"Why, William, I'm surprised!"
"It's mutual, ma, it's mutual!"