A WOMAN'S LOVE

OR, A BROTHER'S PROMISE

CHAPTER VIII.

Among its feathery palms Friganeta dreamed and gazed lazily out upon the sea. Vineyards and orange groves sloped away almost to the dark strip of shore, and ever through the breaks of the purple and gold and green of them peeped the sunlit blue of the Atlantic. To Hector it was the Lotos Land, where day following day like strung blossoms, and like strung blossoms night followed night.

Yet it was not all folding of the hands, and drowse in the shade. There was much business with Don Miguel, whose seventy years were not yet all eaten of the locust, and who belied the lukewarm estimate of him in Bravo's memorandum. Sometimes, too, came the Orange King out of up Palm City, bringing news of arms upon the sea, great stores of ammunition, boxes of shrapnel and case, and medicine chests and bales of surgical lint. Asunta bore her share in the consultations, and helped much; for she had at fingers' end what this man could do and could not, what that man could not and could. It was she who made the suggestion about landing the contraband at Espoleto, on the north side of the island, where was a natural harbor used only by half a dozen fishermen, and—most fortunate of all—where only a weekly visit was paid by the Hispaniolan customs officer. True, Espoleto was full five and twenty miles from Caldera, the rallying-point aamd general headquarters: but what are five and twenty miles when the countryside, with its asses and its mules, is afire for liberty and Maddalena? Why, sunset to sunrise will see the work done.

The Orange King praised her nimbleness of wit. Yet at the back of that cool brain of his, amid details of ordnance, and steam pressures, and special soils for oranges, and Stock Exchange prices, he stowed away a neat little bundle of dislike labelled Asunta. He walked through the world by instinct: to look at a man or a woman and say, "You'll do," or "You won't do," was enough for him. He did not mince matters with Hector when he got his chance.

Hector was seeing him a Scots mile on the road to Palm City, the Orange King stepping sturdily, bridle over his arm.

"So she is on the sea," murmured Hector, sending his burning gaze to the horizon, as if he saw there the ship that bore the Queen, as if there

On the deep sky's verge a fluctuant light
Gleamed, grew, shone strengthened into perfect sight,
As bowed and dipped and rose again the sail's clear white.

The Orange King had arranged it all. The Palmettos wanted the spark. Surely their Queen would fire them. He sent two cables, and Maddalena was coming.

"Four days now—that's all. Merchant has full particulars about Espoleto, and if he makes the island by daylight he has orders to stand out again until nightfall."

"Do you come with us to meet her?"

"No, I shall remain at Palm City. Not that I'm afraid, but I believe the authorities are beginning to wonder what takes me out here so often."

"Hang the authorities!"

"With all my heart. Only last night, Stampa chaffed me. Said he didn't think much of 'Asunta Smith' as a name——"

"He's a beast."

"Or of 'Asunta Grant,' either."

"What!"

"Well, you know, people will talk. Sometimes they manage to get a little truth into what they say." And he looked sideways at Hector, with a quizzical sort of air, as if inviting confidence.

"That's the worst shot you ever made in your life, Mr. Smith."

"I hope so. But I'll tell you one thing, my young friend. I stake my reputation for acuteness on it: Dona Asunta wouldn't need to be asked twice, if you were the man that put the question."

Hector stiffened. That sort of talk was irksome to him. He knew Asunta was a lovely woman; he was thrown much in her society; why, she was a "working patriot," and he treated her frankly as a comrade, just as he imagined she regarded him; but O! this was too ridiculous! He had no eyes for a star howsoever brilliant, he who was mad with the moon; where the Queen was, who looked at the slave? No: and he was sure that Asunta had no thought for him beyond this—he was the herald of liberty, the avant-courier of Maddalena, to be honored as such. Nothing more.

"I shall never—to use your phrase—'put the question.'"

"I'm glad to hear it. All the same, take a little friendly advice from me. I like you, Grant, or I wouldn't worry to talk to you. If you're wise, you'll leave Friganeta at once. Get up into the Monte—find some excuse—you have to make preparations for the Queen's arrival—anything. Get away, and get away soon. She's fond of you, man I can see it. Anybody with half an eye can see that she'd give her head to have you. The atmosphere at Friganeta's getting tropical. Clear out! Send me word where you billet yourself Good-night."

Hector walked back to Friganeta not altogether easy in his mind. But it was not so much of Asunta he thought, as of Maddalena on the sea. Yet Asunta's bold beauty obtruded itself again and again, and for the first time since he had set his hand to this business or revolution he felt that success might not be the certainty he had thought it would be. Now that the Orange King had opened a new door in his brain, recollections of little actions, little speeches, little looks of Asunta's trooped out and set themselves in disconcerting array; and he saw that, taken in the mass, they could mean but one thing. He wished for a moment that he had never entered on this adventure, and the next second upbraided himself for his cowardice. Why, but for the adventure he would never have seen, never have known, never have loved Maddalena: his love was all miserably hopeless, but it was now the mainspring of his life, the very breath of his nostrils. Maddalen, O Maddalena! She was coming. She was coming.

Yet—and yet—success seemed to recede as Asunta's face rose again in his vision. Asunta thrwarted might be Asunta an enemy, and with her almost man's energy and power of hate—he knew how great were both—God alone could tell the end. Yes, he must leave Friganeta—he would leave it that night.

A strangely familiar cry clove the stillness of the starlit dark. Hector stopped and listened. He heard the fall of running feet. Again came the cry—it was his name, and with no softness of Palmetto speech. He ran back and fell into the arms of Alasdair.

"O! man, Heckie, I thocht ye wad never hear me."

"Alasdair, by all that's holy!"

"I met a man back thonder on a shaltie, that could speak English. It wass pleasant to hear aifter the terrible lingo these safages taalk."

"That was Mr. Smith, the Orange King."

"Man, man, wass thon him? He's a grate chentleman."

"Have you walked all the way from Palm City?"

"O! it's only a bittock, an' wass there no you at the end o' 't? But I wouldna mind a dram. It's fushionless rubbidge they give you here."

"I believe they have some whiskey at Friganeta."

"At where?"

"Friganeta, where I am stopping—Don Miguel's place."

"Man, I canna get my tongue roond their names anyway, although it's some like the Gawlic at times. But tell me, Heckie, what new ploy is this you're aifter—it must be a big thing. An' will I see the Queen?"

"Yes, Alasdair, you shall see the Queen. She will be here in a few days now, But I'll tell you all about it to-night, when you've had some supper. Have you left your luggage at Palm City?"

"Luggage! That's a good choke! Luggage! Man. Heckie, when I got your letter I jist came away ass I wass. I jist stopped to put on my hainin' kilt. The people here aafe never seen a kilt pefore, I'll be thinkin'. There was a crood that followed me two or three mile oot o' the toon."

Hector could not help smiling at the thought. Alasdair was certainly a sight for the gods. Tall, one-eyed, red of hair and beard, brick-red of skin, arrayed in full majesty of kilt, plaid and bonnet, a great dirk at his hip, Alasdair might well have attracted a crowd of the simple wonder-loving Palmettas.

"And how did you like the sea?"

"O! man, it wass good, but I was always longin' to be at the chourney's end for the sake of seein' you."

"Well, now that you do see me, what have you to say?"

Alasdair turned his one eye on Hector with as much impartiality as he could: to him his foster-brother was a very prince of men, in whom was no flaw: but strive as he would he could not keep out of his eye (which seemed to hold all the keenness and expressiveness of the lost one in addition to its own) a gleam of affection half sorrowful, half playful.

"It's too dark to see you proper, but yop're no so stoot as you wass. An' your face is more pleasanter than I hev seen it pefore. An' I'm thinkin'," he added, with a little of satisfaction at his own acuteness, "that you'll be in love!"

"Alasdair!"

"O! but I'm tellin' you. Did you think I couldna see that? A man never looks ass you was lookin' just now, except when his hert is full of the only lassie in the world."

"I've never had any secrets from you yet, Alasdair—— You're right. But I'm half afraid to whisper it to myself——"

Their talk had carried them up the avenue that led to the house, and now they stood at the door opening into the patio, where a tiny fountain plashed amid green branches and flaming blossoms.

Dim lights shone from unobtrusive corners, making soft and shadowy the cool space. And now, against the background of green and dusky red, the shadows took shape, moved, and Asunta, radiant in palest yellow, came to meet them with outstretched hands and welcoming eyes—rather, came to meet Hector, for Alasdair lingered in the darkness.

"Your Orange King," she began. "I shall hate him soon. Every time he comes, you walk away with him, and each time you stay longer and longer."

"Indeed, but this time it was not he. My brother——"

"Your brother?"

"My foster-brother has arrived—is here. Come, Alasdair, come and be presented."

Asunta bent forward and peered forward and into the outer dark, as Hector turned to the door and beckoned. There was a moment's pause, and then Alasdair stepped forward into the light, making that bow of dignified deference all Highlanders can flourish from the cradle; that bow which begins with a low louting and ends with a straight gaze into your eyes. Alasdair raised his head. Asunta clutched Hector's arm involuntarily, and from her cheeks went at a breath every drop of blood.

"Dona Asunta, my brother Alasdair——"

He stopped; for he felt now her grip on his arm. He turned in a flurry of solicitude.

"What is it? What is it? Are you ill?"

"No—no," she whispered, making the sign of the Cross. "It's nothing. I have been feeling faint all day. I am very silly. It's all over now——" Then to Alasdair, "You are welcome, sir, to Friganeta."

"I am proud to meet your leddyship," said Alasdair simply.

"Senor Grant has spoken much of you; you are indeed welcome, sir."

"The foolish fellow has walked all the way from Palm City," laughed Hector, "Everybody rides here, here, Alasdair—even the beggar has his ass."

The sound of voices drew Don Miguel from his study into the patio and again the ceremony of presentation had to be gone through. The old man held out his hand to Alasdair, and received such a grip as made him half repent of his ready courtesy. Then father and daughter conferred, and announced that Alasdair might have the room next to Hector's, looking out upon the vineyards and the sea.

"But," said Hector, with a smile that hid his real purpose, "I fear that Alasdair will not be able to partake of your hospitality, however willing he may be. Nor can I, any longer, Don Miguel."

"How that?" cried the old man, and Asunta paled.

"Mr. Smith and I have had a long talk, and he wants me—you know, after all, he's the real Commander-in-Chief: he pays—he wants me to get to Caldera to-night. It is necessary that all things be ready for the arrival of the Queen."

"There are yet four days," said Don Miguel. "Why go to-night? Manana—manana."

"It will be manana before I get there, and there is so much to do."

"Wait until to-morrow, and I shall come and help you; two heads are better than one."

"Truly, but I have my orders."

"Orders from the Orange King!" sneered Asunta.

"He pays—and he knows better than I what is best."

"But you are the representative of the Queen, and take orders from none. You order!"

"Again true. But what would the Queen be without her chancellor, her man of experience, to keep a steady hand on the helm of State? Besides, although I am sorry that my stay under this so hospital roof is broken, I agree with Mr. Smith; there is so much to do, so much to do."

"We shall come with you, then," cried Asunta, clapping her hands; and to the servant who answered her signal—"Horses for four. Juan, at once—fly!"

"But, senorita," said Hector, "consider; it is a camp, a fortress; there is none there but men. There is no comfort there for you——"

"Comfort! For me! Am I, too, not going to fight? Am I not to have my blow of vengeance? Am I not ready to shoulder a musket? I will take my share of the rough, so please you, senor."

"Forgive me," said Hector with a smile, "all that comes in good time When her Majesty lands, I shall ask you to be there to meet her; she will be glad of your presence, your sympathy, your sisterly help. Nay—I was keeping this for a surprise, but you have forced my hand—it is her Majesty's pleasure to name you her chief maid-of-honor, and I, as her Majesty's representative, now formally declare you inducted and installed into your high office, from now until her Majesty releases you."

The honor was not altogether unexpected, but the pleasure it gave Asunta was keen. For the moment she forgot everything in it—everything save to stoop and kiss Hector's hand. There was nothing ridiculous in the action—it was outwardly a mere expression of thanks. Yet behind that, she did not let it slip her that the hand was Hector's. He felt her lips burn, and he withdrew it a trifle faster than was chivalrous.

"And now," he went on laughingly to keep the situation to comedy, "you are under her Majesty's orders—of those of her representative."

"Si, si, senor."

"Do you still desire to come to Caldera?"

"O! but yes, but yes."

"Must I order, then? And Hector smiled with a side look to Don Miguel.

Asunta's face fell. She saw the trap now. She shrugged her shoulders almost contemptuously, swept him an over-elaborate courtesy, and left the patio on the top of a ninth wave of dignity and resentment.

Hector looked queryingly at her father, and for reply the old man blew a thin spiral that was eloquence sublimed.

"I have offended Dona Asunta."

"Tut, tut! Her mother was the same—one moment a fire to warm you, and the next to consume you, to leave you white bones. But it passes quickly."

"There is no place fitting at Caldera."

"She knows that."

"It would be most unwise——"

"Manana—manana—she will have forgotten. Let us talk of other things. Your friend must eat."

"That would not be amiss, I daresay; but," he added, with a little return of his lighter spirit, "to drink is imperative."

A servant was called, and to him was Alasdair entrusted. Ere he went, however, he whispered into Hector's ear:

"Thon's no her?"

Hector shook his head, and Alasdair followed the servant with a satisfied spring in his step.

A little talk of horses to carry them up into the Monte, a little questioning about by-paths and short cuts, a little settling of when Don Miguel and Asunta were to come to Caldera, and Hector retired to his room to pack a valise and see to his arms.

Came a tap on his door. He flung it wide open, to see Asunta, breathless and reckless.

"You hate me!"

"Dona Asunta!"

"You hate me!"

"That is not possible— Why should I?"

"But you do not love me? Do you love me?"

There was a desperate woman behind every breath of it. Eagerness crushed all softness from her face: the cheek bones hardened, the chin and nose sharpened, the mouth shut on a line. But with all sheer desperation, there was somehow—it was all sheer desperation, there was somehow—it was in the eyes—a hint of surrender, of melting, such as one may see in a frost-bound hillside half a-thrill for spring and the green kirtle.

"But do you love me?" The attack was swift and dangerously fierce; yet it lost something of its point and force in that it was not expected. When attack is counted on, reason shapes (even chuckles over) a good half hundred plans of defence; and then the blow smashes in a fashion that calls for none of your fine schemes. But let the storm break on a sudden, instinct, not reason, is the saviour, and the involuntarily uttered word, the involuntarily clenched hand, preserves peace not without honor if, alas! without happiness. So was it here.

"Do you love me?"

"That is not possible."

The words came of themselves: and no sooner were they uttered than he shrank from his own brutality. He drew back a pace or two, and she moved over the threshold. His heart was full of pity, yet he dare show none; that would only be added aggravation

"Not possible?"

"It is not possible, senorita."

"But see, I love you—Hector. I have even taught my tongue to say your hard Northern name—Hector. I love you."

"What do you expect me to say, senorita?— That I am honored? Truly, I am honored—how empty—"

"No, no. Say that you love me."

"I cannot."

"But I will make you love me."

"Nay, senorita——"

"But I will. You do not know me yet. You have not seen into my heart; but I will show you. When you learn how I can love you, how I do love you, you must, you shall—O! Hector, am I not worth the loving?"

The hardness was all gone now—as a cloud dies in the sun.

"Yes, you are worth the loving."

"And you will love me—say you will."

"Senorita, you make it very difficult for me——"

"O! but I could not hold my peace any more. You are going away, you will not let me come with you; 'it is not possible,' you say—you say 'it is not possible' to everything. O! if I were a man, I would make all things possible. But I'm glad I am a woman, for I can give myself to you. Hector, you must love me. I love you."

He took her hands.

"Senorita," he said, "you are not a school-girl—you are a woman, and I will speak to you frankly and in good comradeship. You offer me your love. It is a great gift, but I must put it aside—not with scorn, believe me—I must put it aside. I cannot take it—— What more to say? I'm sorry."

And he dropped her hands. She was all hot lava again: in her eyes the smoulder a word would stir into hell, in her voice the very hiss of it.

"Sor—ry!. And—you—can—not. That means but one thing—another."

Hector would not answer that.

"Is it not so?"

He bowed his head.

"Good—most good, Don Baldassare." And she flung out of the room, with never another word or another look; but as she went she laughed loud with laughter that was not good to hear.

(To be Continued.)

WORLD'S MISSIONARY WORK.

List of the Principal Societies and Their Contributions.

Following are the names, character and income last year of the principal missionary societies of the world:

Church Missionary Society, England, foreign, $1,765,815.

Methodist Society, United States, home and foreign, $1,749,318.

Propagation of the Faith, Roman Catholic, foreign, $1,319,608.

Presbyterian Home Board, United States, $1,293,321.

Presbyterian Foreign Board, United States, $1,049,840.

Landon Missionary Society, Congregational, foreign, $998,911.

Protestant Episcopal Board, home and foreign, United States, $864,764.

Propagation of the Gospel, England, foreign, $762,650.

American Lutheran Societies, foreign, $745,890.

American Board, Congregational foreign, $740,777.

American Baptist Missionary Union, foreign, $722,767.

Wesleyan Missionary Society, England, foreign, $691,415.

American Lutheran Societies, homes, $654,300.

Congregational Home societies, United States, $642,250.

American Baptist Home Mission Society, $640,669.

United Free Church of Scotland, Presbyterian, foreign, $441,811.

Baptist Missionary Society, England, foreign, $430,045.

Methodist Church, south, United States, foreign, $339,728.

Zenana Society England and Canada, foreign, $283,665.

China Inland Mission, England and Canada, $257,232.

Disciples of Christ, United States, home, $244,967.

Southern Baptist Convention, United States, foreign, $218,512.

Baptist Publication Society, United States, home, $211,064.

Disciples of Christ, United States, foreign, $210,000.

United Presbyterian Board, United States, foreign, $193,000.

Presbyterian Church, South, United States, foreign, $167,900.

Presbyterian Church, South, United States, home, $158,496.

Universities Mission to Central Africa, England, $151,856.

Church of Scotland, Presbyterian, foreign, $149,815.

Adventists, United States, foreign, $144,000.

Presbyterian Church, England, foreign, $132,550.

Zenana Bible and Medical missions, England, foreign, $132,065.

Regions beyond Missionary Union, England, foreign, $125,000.

Friends Foreign Missions, association, England, $122,000.

Moravian Missions, England and American, foreign, $108,026.

Southern Baptist Convention, United States, home, $100,450.

There are many small, but no large missionary societies, Protestant, on the continent of Europe. The large missionary funds of the Catholic church are handled by the Propaganda Fide, which is a committee of the Curia at Rome, and by Jesuit, Dominican, Franciscan and other societies and orders. There is, however, one foreign missionary society, having headquarters in Paris and in Lyons. Its income last year was $1,319,608, almost all of it given by the Catholics of France. The Bible and Tract societies of Great Britain had incomes last year that aggregated $900,000, and the same societies in the United States received and disbursed $750,000. The year 1903 showed a slight increase all around over the previous year.

BACK TO NEBUCHADNEZZAR.

Of the four hundred barons in the British House of Lords, about a dozen date back to 1400, the earliest being 1264. The oldest family in the British Isles is the Mar Family, in Scotland, 1093. The Campbells of Argyll began in 1190; the Grosvenors, the Duke of Westminster's family, 1066. The Austrian House of Hapsburg goes back to 952, and the House of Bourbon to 864. The descendants of Mohammed, who was born in 570, are all registered authoritatively in a book kept in Mecca by a chief of the family. Little or no doubt exists of the absolute authenticity of the long line of Mohammed's descendants. In China there are many old families; also among the Jews. But in point of pedigrees the Mikado of Japan has a unique record. His place has been filled by members of his family for more than twenty-five hundred years. The present Mikado is the one hundred and twenty-second in the line. The first one was contemporary with Nebuchadnezzar, 666 years before Christ.

Hewitt—"Gruet has an eye to business." Jewett—"Yes; one eye to his own and two to other people's."