

Fighting Life's Battle;

OR, LADY BLANCHE'S BITTER PUNISHMENT

CHAPTER XXVI.—(Cont'd)

It was said so coolly, with such an utter lack of resentment against the man who had attempted his life, that Floris gazed at him with renewed interest.

"I am glad that you are better, that you were not badly hurt. I mean," she added, glancing at his arm, "that you were not killed."

"Oh, it was nothing," he said, quietly; "but it might have been worse but for you, madam."

"For me?" with a quick glance of surprise.

"Yes," he said in a low voice. "You stanching the wound in time; they said at the hospital that my recovery owed everything to that."

Floris looked down.

"I did very little; I was too frightened. But"—with another upward glance—"how did you know it was I?"

"I saw you for a moment as the blow was struck, and at the hospital they gave me this."

And he took from inside the breast of his coat her handkerchief. "My handkerchief!" she murmured. "I had forgotten it."

And she held out her hand.

He was looking at the handkerchief with a strange, intent expression in his eyes, and it dwelt in them still as he turned them on her and held out the handkerchief with a reluctance which, though not marked, Floris did not fail to notice.

"I would have returned it sooner," he said, "but the police—they are always fond of mystery—declined to give me your name. Perhaps they were right, yes, they were quite right—you had suffered enough annoyance. Not having your name, I was forced to wait and watch for you. I have seen you twice before, but not alone, and I wanted to see you alone and thank you."

Floris inclined her head. If affected her, this knowledge that she had been watched and waited for by this strange man.

He stood beside her silently for a moment, then he said:

"There was something else of yours, madam, which fell into my hands. A book—"

"Yes," said Floris, quickly.

"It was picked up close by the spot where I fell; and they gave it me under the impression that it belonged to me. I will restore it to you if you will tell me where I may bring it."

"Send it to Violet Villa," said Floris, "if you please."

He bowed. Floris was about to rise and give him good-day when he spoke again.

"You are fond of flowers, study them, madam?"

"Yes," said Floris.

"I judged so from the contents of the book. I also am fond of flowers. I have a collection, a poor one, but there are some rarities among it. Should I be asking too much if I begged you to accept of two specimens, madam?"

He spoke with such gravity and respect that Floris could not find it in her heart to refuse the offer.

"I have a friend who will be very glad to have them," she said, simply. "I am her assistant, and the book was for her use, not mine. Will you send them to the Violet Villa?"

"I will," he said.

Floris went home in a strange condition of mind.

The man's manner—his words, had affected her curiously. She found herself going over them in her mind with a wild sense of having heard them before, or rather, having heard the voice before. She said nothing to Mrs. Sinclair of the meeting, but set to work that evening with a strong determination to forget the whole occurrence. In the morning, a messenger from one of the hotels brought a packet and a note addressed to Miss Lillian Wood.

With an unusual tremor, Floris opened it.

afford me a deep satisfaction if you would allow me to offer you the remainder of my collection, which I hold as useless unless it prove of value in your eyes. Yours very truly,

OSCAR RAYMOND.

Floris sat and pondered over this note for some moments; then she went and boldly carried both flowers and note to Mrs. Sinclair.

The old lady listened indifferently enough until Floris came to the flower part of the story, then she woke to interest, and seized the specimens and uttered a cry of delight.

"My dear girl, where did you get these? Who gave them to you? Where did you say? His collection! Whose?"

Floris explained.

Accept them! Rob the man of such treasures! Impossible, of course! But I must see it! If the rest are anything as good as this it must be priceless! What is his address?"

Floris named the hotel.

"Write to him at once, and ask him to call," said the old lady.

Floris hesitated for a moment then she went to her writing table and wrote a short note, thanking him for the flowers and book, and requesting him to call on Mrs. Sinclair.

She signed the note, of course, with her assumed name, Lillian Wood, and she resolved that if he should accept the invitation, she would not appear.

On the morrow he came; and was shown into the library, and as the door was opened for him Floris passed out into the drawing-room.

When she heard the servant let him out of the house, she returned to the library to find that Mrs. Sinclair was even more fascinated than she herself had been.

"That's a wonderful young man you have discovered, my dear!" she said, with unwonted enthusiasm.

"I discovered!" said Floris, elevating her eyebrows.

"Well, well; it was through you!" said the old lady, impatiently. "At any rate, I am much obliged to you. I don't know when I have enjoyed a visit more. He doesn't know very much about botany, but what he does know he knows thoroughly; and he has traveled. There does not seem to be any place that he does not know. Ah, that is where men have the advantage over us poor women! He is coming here to-morrow to tea, and will bring some specimens with him."

The next evening as the lamps came in, Mr. Oscar Raymond was announced.

Mrs. Sinclair greeted him warmly but Floris merely inclined her head.

She officiated at the tea table, and gave him a cup of tea, then took a book and went to a remote corner.

He did not speak a word to her for some time, but confined his attentions to Mrs. Sinclair, listening rather than talking, his well-shaped head with its close, iron-gray hair, bent with respectful interest.

Two days passed, and on the third Oscar Raymond came again.

Floris was in the library with Mrs. Sinclair, and scarcely looked up when he came and made his bow.

As before, he devoted himself to the old lady, and did not venture to address Floris until just as he was leaving.

Then he came and stood beside her, with his hat in his hand, and waited until she looked up.

"Are you going, Mr. Raymond?" she said coldly.

"Yes," he answered with a touch of sadness in his voice; "I am going. I wanted to say 'good-by' instead of 'good-day.' Miss Wood."

Floris looked at the paper spread out on the desk before her.

Mrs. Sinclair having bade him adieu, had turned to her books as if there was no one besides herself in the room.

able to see that my presence is distasteful to you!"

"Mr. Raymond!" she said, very rebukingly.

"It is true," he continued sadly. "I know that you will be glad when I have gone. You have avoided me so plainly that—" he paused.

A vague feeling of remorse seized Floris.

"I am very, very sorry," she quietly murmured.

"No, do not say that! I know so well that you are glad this is the last time you will see me. And yet you do me wrong, believe me!"

"How?" she asked in a low voice, though she might have safely shouted so far as Mrs. Sinclair, absorbed in her books, was concerned.

"In this," he said, humbly. "You have heard stories about me; you have heard that I am one whose character is so bad that I am not fit to breathe the same air as yourself."

Floris bowed her lids.

"You do not deny it," he went on. "Would to Heaven that I could say they were false. But I cannot, least of all to you! But"—he sighed, and his voice grew strangely soft and sad—"but it is possible for even such as I to repent and change. And I have done both. Miss Wood, the man who stands before you is a different man to him whom you saw engaged in a vulgar brawl a month ago."

Floris remained silent. Her heart beat fast and furiously.

The soft, penitent voice, the humble, pleading words affected her more than she cared to show.

"A month may be a lifetime, and this month has been a lifetime to me! I have learned that all my past life has been wasted, and of no account—worse than wasted, seeing how great a barrier it has raised between such as I am and you."

Floris tried to rise, to speak, but she could not; the soft, musical voice held her bound and enthralled and as she listened came the old, old questions, "Where had she heard it before?"

"I cannot tell you how your coldness and avoidance of me affects me," he went on, "but I cannot leave you forever without telling you that the change which has been wrought in me is your work, and has been as much your doing as that which writing beneath your hand."

"I cannot listen," murmured Floris, slowly.

"Bear with me!" he pleaded, humbly. "Though I know I risk all by thus prematurely laying my heart bare before you, I must speak! I must bare it! Miss Wood, Lillian! I love you!"

Floris rose, pale and trembling.

"You—love—"

"I love you," he said, white and trembling, even as she was. "There I have said it, and let it stand. It has been on my mind—on my lips—no hope—of winning you, and yet I must say it. But, before I go, will you let me plead on my behalf?"

Floris was silent.

The witchery, the fascination which this man could exercise by voice and manner was insensibly stealing over her.

His handsome face, the dark eyes glowing with passion of intense love seemed to sink into her soul.

A kind of mystic glamour seemed to enwrap her as in some subtle shroud.

She could not lift her eyes to his, she could not speak.

"I love you," he repeated, and Floris, as she listened, wondered why the words did not ring and re-echo in the ears of Mrs. Sinclair as they did in her own; but the enthusiast was absorbed by her books and heard nothing.

"I love you with all my heart and soul! Send me away from you forever and I shall love you still. While I live I shall carry your image in my heart. I am a changed man. I am Oscar Raymond no longer. I can scarcely recognize myself! A month ago I was—all that you had been told I was; but now I stand before you a different being, reformed, purified by my love for you. I beg, I implore you to hesitate before you cast me off. Such as I am, my love for you has made me. For Heaven's sake have pity on me."

His voice grew hoarse and broken but still the nameless fascination held Floris bound as in a chain.

She panted for breath, like a deer hard pressed by the hounds and held at bay.

"I—I will not listen—I cannot believe. Oh, go—please, go," she panted.

He took up his hat.

"Will you meet me in the square, under the limes, to-morrow, at seven?" he pleaded. "If it be the last time, meet me there. A soul trembling 'twixt evil and good—I beg for one last word."

"I—I will meet you," she panted.

(To be continued.)

On the Farm

BREEDING THE DAIRY COW.

It has been a matter of question, as a writer says, whether the produce of developed or undeveloped animals were more likely to reproduce the qualities for which they were bred. It is, however, now conceded by all intelligent breeders that the only correct and safe course to pursue is to breed only from developed animals. In fact—the more highly developed the animals are the better and the more generation of developed ancestors, the greater assurance of success, for inheritance is stronger when the possession of great capacity is found in several members of a family than when it appears only at rare intervals.

The bull is not developed like the other animals mentioned, but he inherits his development, he acquires it through his dam, and his sire's dam and his female ancestors. Although the good milking quality of a cow is not transmitted to her son so that he gives milk, it is transmitted through the son to the son's daughters, influenced in quality by the fact that the son did not exercise it. The sire's dam is, therefore, as close to the sire's daughter as is the daughter's own dam.

Reference is made to this opinion of an experienced breeder and widely-known writer who says—

My experience of over forty years, as a breeder clearly demonstrates to me that the get of any sire whether equine or bovine, has a tendency to generally resemble the characteristics of the dam of that sire more than that of any other ancestor back of its own parents; consequently in breeding dairy cows of different classes I have always endeavored to obtain a bull to head my herd from the best milking or butter cows to be obtained and generally with the best results.

ARTIFICIAL MANURES.

The appearance, smell and color of artificial manures are no guide as to their value; the only true test in buying is chemical analysis although the best test is made by the crop itself.

Sulphate of ammonia is a substance which is very variable in appearance; it may be red or white or yellow or blue, without any real difference to the quality.

Similarly, potash, salts and especially kainit, is subject to considerable variation in color. It may be light grey or yellow or light red, but the tint of color has absolutely nothing to do with its fertilizing value.

Superphosphate may be a light grey or a brown; its tint simply depends on the color of the raw material from which it is manufactured. The farmer need not trouble about the tint so long as the percentage of phosphate of lime is up to the guaranteed standard.

In bone manures, some farmers like to see pieces of bone, looking like plums in a plum pudding and they regard their appearance as evidence of the good character of the manure. They are nothing of the sort, and very likely have been purposely put in to catch the farmer's eye. In a properly made bone manure the bone material is ground fine, and so changed in appearance by the action of the acid that the bones cannot be seen.

FARM NOTES.

There are many old meadows which would be much improved by having a good scratching in the spring when the grass begins to start, with a light sharp harrow, and then the application of from 200 to 400 pounds of commercial fertilizer per acre.

It will be soon time to loog for attacks of roup among the poultry. Rainy days, damp houses and yards, and, more than all these, the drafts through the house, reaching the birds on the roosts, are the predisposing cause. This last can be easily guarded against, looking for cracks and broken windows before the cold night winds begin to blow.

While most farmers salt their

stock with some degree of regularity, there are too many who defer this till they have nothing else to do. Very many do not realize the great importance of a constant supply of salt for live stock. In some experiments that were made in France it was found that a lot of steers which were given free access to salt at all times made a much larger gain on the same amount of food than did a similar lot which were not given salt at all, and another lot which was salted once a week did but little better than those which were not given any.

In all decomposition there is a resulting production of ammonia, which becomes a total loss or evaporates in the atmosphere if not absorbed by some substance which has the power of absorption. Land plaster has that power, and kainit has even more of it. Dry earth is also a good absorbent, and the drier it is the better it is, as water alone, while holding a certain amount of ammonia in solution, parts with it to the surrounding atmosphere. Lime and ashes liberate ammonia, the ashes or any material containing potash, more than the lime. Therefore, they should never be mixed with nitrogenous manure until the latter is mixed with earth or some other absorbent of nitrogen.

WOMEN OF THE BEDE HOUSE.

English Home Where Fashion Has Not Changed in 300 Years.

The bede house (which means praying house) was founded in the reign of James I. by Henry Howard, the eccentric Earl of Northampton, and the Howard badge is still worn by the inmates on Sundays and holidays. Nor is this the most curious detail of their attire, for the old ladies are garbed now just as they were in the first days of the foundation—blue gowns, scarlet cloaks and high peaked hats, like those worn by Welsh women, writes a London correspondent.

At Rising then, more than at any place I know, we can fancy ourselves back in early Stuart days, having around us these "bedes women" dressed in the identical costumes of 300 years ago. Nothing has been changed in the fashion of their clothes, nor in the dear little rooms they inhabit. As for the inmates themselves, surely they are pretty much the same as were those first fortunate old creatures who profited by Henry Howard's charity and offered up their prayers for his benefit. For in this world of change nothing changes so little as the human heart, and the kinship of humanity runs through every age. The rules under which admittance is obtained were drawn up by the founder.

Every applicant must prove herself to be of "an honest life and conversation religious, grave and discreet, able to read (if such an one may be had), a single woman, her place to be void upon marriage, to be fifty years of age at least, no common beggar, scold, haunter of taverns, inns or alehouses." Once in, she must hear prayers read by the governess twice a day and be very regular in her attendance at church. Furthermore, she must never be found guilty of atheism, heresy, blasphemy, neglect of duty or misbehavior in the performance of it, or she will be expelled, sent out into the cold world again, far from the haven of peace and rest.

But I am quite sure that none of the old ladies would ever do anything to merit dismissal; they live apparently in the most delightful bonds of sisterly love, taking any donations you may give them for the maintenance of a donkey and small carriage, in which the infirm inmates may take an airing.

A COOK WANTED.

Mrs. Jollie was a lady who was fond of a joke. One evening she chanced to meet her cook in the company of her sweetheart. Now Jane's "young man" boasted of a hirsute adornment on the upper lip of the first quality, while Mr. Jollie kept his face clean shaven.

The following morning the lady said to her:

"Jane, I cannot imagine how you can allow your beau to kiss you with such a heavy moustache; I should think it must tickle very much."

"Well, ma'am," replied Jane, instinctively drawing her hand across her mouth, "I can't say but what it do tickle a bit; but—gie me that before the scrubbing the master gives ye—he fairly makes yer face sore."