

Fighting Life's Battle;

OR, LADY BLANCHE'S BITTER PUNISHMENT

CHAPTER XXVII.

Floris lay awake that night thinking of this which had befallen her.

The passionate words, the pleading voice, rang in her ears so that she could not sleep, could not think.

She went about the house the next day like a wan ghost, so pale and quiet, and yet so lovely in her pallor and quietude, that even Mrs. Sinclair smiled through her spectacles admiringly.

"You were right to call yourself Lillian, my dear," she said. "You are like a lily broken down by rain, this morning; but I don't like to see you so pale. You must not do any work to-day."

But Floris insisted with eagerness upon accomplishing her daily task. The day wore on, the bells filled the soft spring air with their melody, and as the sun began to slip behind the hills, she stole out to keep her appointment.

As she reached the square, glowing bravely in its budding foliage and sweet with the scent of almond blossoms, she saw him pacing to and fro, his arms folded on his breast, the sun shining on the close-cut, iron-gray hair.

He turned and saw her, and came toward her with that peculiar suppressed eagerness which belongs to a lover who is still in the agonies of suspense, and raised his hat. Floris gave him her hand, and he walked beside her to the seat.

"It was good of you to come," he said at last. "I scarcely dared to hope that you would grant my request; it seemed a bold and presumptuous one while I made it, but after I left you it grew in my mind to be audacious. And yet I could not say all I wished to say last night before your friend. Ah, yes, it was good of you to come."

Floris looked straight before her; his voice seemed to sound as if from a distance and mingled with the strains of the brass band on the quay.

"I had promised," she said, in a low voice; "but I am sorry—"

"Ah, do not say that," he broke in. "If you knew how I have looked forward to this meeting, how I have counted the hours—"

He stopped, and his white, thin hand went to his lips, as if to repress the eagerness and passion with which he had begun to speak, for Floris had shrunk slightly.

"I—forgive me—I am too impetuous," he pleaded; "but the depth of my love for you must be my excuse. Miss Wood, I have asked you to meet me here that I may have a precious opportunity of telling you how devotedly I love you, and tell you what sort and manner of man it is who dares to lift his eyes to you. Love, they say, levels all distinctions; but I feel that there is a gulf between us which only your charity and mercy can bridge over."

He paused, and Floris saw the hand resting on the seat near her elbow tremble like a leaf in the breeze.

"Last night, when I spoke to you—with the mad recklessness of a man possessed with one idea, one hope, one mad longing and desire, I expected, I dreaded that you would send me from you with a word of contempt and anger. Miss Wood, it would have been only just contempt and well-merited anger. Who am I, that I should dare to speak of love to such as you? Who am I? I will tell you. I was once a gentleman, have been an adventurer and a gambler, for Heaven's sake, do not turn away. Hear me out," for Floris had shrunk away from him slightly but perceptibly.

"Hear me out, I beseech you," he pleaded, moistening his lips and clutching the seat. "I say that I was an adventurer and gambler, yet a change has come over my life, my very thoughts. Fate favored me; I saw you again in the quiet sanctity of your home; the reverence which you had filled me with leaped into a love so deep and passionate that I could not repress its utterance. Though I felt that you must drive me from you, as I deserved to be driven, I must speak, I must tell you all that your beauty, your purity, your goodness have wrought in me."

Floris roused herself from her reverie and raised her head, but he put up his hand slowly.

"Do not answer me yet. Give me a few more minutes, a few kind words, then—then do with me what you will. I have said that I am a

gentleman by birth; but I am poor—oh, I know you so well, though I have seen you so few times that I know money, wealth or poverty would make little difference to you! I am poor. I could be a rich man yet, for I have learned some skill at the gambling table, but all that is passed. I have touched my last card, come what will. From the hour I first saw you I resolved that my life, if I decided to keep it, should become a changed one. In the future I would place myself in the ranks with honest men, would leave the old life of adventure and trickery forever. There may be little chance for me in the future, and yet—and yet I am not without hope. I am not an old man, I am younger than you think," and he smiled faintly, "though my hair has gone gray and the life I have led has left its marks upon my face. I am young enough to hope that, if you will trust yourself to me, I can make a place for you in the world in which you would be secure. I am young enough to feel ambition, an honorable ambition, thrill through every nerve at the prospect of a life spent in devotion to you. Will you accept that life? Will you trust me? Will you be my wife?"

He bent over her as he spoke and extended his hand tremblingly toward her, his face white and working, his eyes pleadingly fixed on hers.

Floris sat motionless, looking beyond him with eyes that saw nothing of the lovely almond blossoms or the fair scene stretched at her feet.

What should she say to him? His words, his manner of saying them, moved her as deeply as it was possible for her to be moved by voice or words.

That he loved her she could not doubt, passionate earnestness had rung in every tone.

He had not asked her to love him, he did not seem to expect it, he had asked her to trust him, to be his wife, to share and encourage his struggles toward a better life!

Should she say "Yes?" Should she trust him?

What was there left to live for? No friends, her lover false and treacherous, no object in life.

Why should she not become of some use in the social scheme, and let this man take her?

Her silence tortured him.

"Ah," he breathed. "I see it is hopeless. My past has shocked and alarmed you. How could it be otherwise. How could I hope that you would trust yourself to one whose past, on his own confession, has been as black as mine, for your life has been like that of an innocent child playing amid the flowers that lined its path; you have known nothing of man's baseness—and I come to you with my life all seared and stained! Of course, there can be only one answer for me! You will tell me to go, to live honestly if I can, and to forget you! But that is not possible. I cannot forget. But I will remember you as one who, like an angel indeed, shone in my path for one brief moment to show me that there was still hope for even such as I!"

His voice trembled and grew almost inaudible.

Floris's eyes filled with tears.

It was as if a soul on the brink of the precipice were holding out its hand to her, and crying, in a very piteous voice, "Save me!"

She turned her eyes upon him; he saw the tears, and a wild hope sprang up within him.

He drew a sharp breath, and his white hand stole very gently and fearfully to her arm.

She put up her hand, and set it as a barrier between them.

"Wait," she said, with a little pant. "You have not heard, I have not told you—"

"What have you to tell me?" he asked, fearfully. "Speak to me—give me an answer, for Heaven's sake. See, I am patient, and—and ready to hear anything, to obey you in everything."

She struggled against the tremor that had seized her, then she raised her eyes, full of trouble and uncertainty, to his.

"I am a stranger almost to you—you know nothing about me—"

"You have laid bare your own life to me, and I cannot let you think, even though we are to part now—"

"Do not speak of parting," he pleaded, with feverish eagerness.

"Even though we are to part, I cannot let you think that my past has had no history, that—that I cannot go on," she broke off, piteously.

"Do not," he said, quickly; "you shall tell me some other time. Oh, it is the present and the future for which I am begging. Trust yourself to me, say 'I will be your wife,' and all will be well; I know it, I feel it. I will make the remainder of your life so happy that the past, sad though it may have been, shall seem like a dream from which my love has awakened you!"

She hung her head.

"I—I do not ask you to love me, not now at once," he went on. "In time—"

She raised her eyes and looked at him, and the look made his heart grow cold for a moment.

"No," she said, in a low voice, "you have not asked me to love you. Had you done so, I would have answered you before this, at once, I cannot love you."

His face went from the faint flush which hope had implanted there to a very wan pallor.

"I cannot love you," she said, bravely and firmly. "I have no power of loving left! My heart is like a stone."

She pressed her hand to her side with a piteous little gesture which wrung his heart.

"It is as if it were dead," she went on, still in the low, quivering voice. "There can be no such thing as love for me. Is it not right that I should tell you then, who have been so frank with me?" and she turned her large eyes on him piteously.

He bit his lip, and was silent.

"You ask me to trust you," she murmured. "If you knew how all faith in a man's words was slain in me you would scarcely hope that even what you have said could move me."

The tears came into her eyes, but she brushed them away quickly.

"Before I can give you any answer I must tell you my story. When you have heard it you will know how impossible it is that there should ever be any power in my heart to give back the love you have spoken of. If—if—when you have heard all, you still think, you will wish that I should be your wife—"

He seized her hand, but she disengaged it, and went on, with an unnatural calm.

"If you should still think that I could make your life better worth the living, then—"

"Then you will say 'yes?' You will be my wife?" he murmured, huskily. "Oh, take my answer now; before you say another word. I care not what may have happened in the past. I care not. Oh, do I not know beyond all doubt that let it have been what it may, you are pure and blameless!"

His absolute trust and devotion touched her.

"Listen to me and be patient," she said. "You, who have only seen me here in Florence, only know me as a woman with a broken spirit living a life under a dark and heavy cloud. It is hard for me even to remember that a short time ago, ah, how long it seems, sometimes! I was a happy, light-hearted girl! I don't think"—pensively, and with a faint smile that was more piteous than tears—"that there was ever any girl happier than I was! I used to fear sometimes that I was too happy, and to tremble lest the gods should be envious and send a thunderbolt to shatter my joy-dream—"

"I know," he murmured, softly, sympathizingly. "Ever since last night I have told myself that it would not be possible or right for man to be so happy as your 'yes' would make me."

Floris sighed.

"I was engaged to be married to a man I loved with all my heart and soul—"

He did not move, but his eyes grew fixed, with an intent expression in them, as if he were looking through and beyond her.

"She told me that another woman in the same house had stolen his heart from me, and that that very night they had planned to fly together; that he had in cold blood decided to leave me for net, to desert me who loved him with all my heart and soul, who would have given my life to insure one hour's happiness to him, who, if he had come to me and told me that he loved her best, would have given him his freedom and—"

He broke off, and a passionate sob seemed to choke her.

The man beside her did not move, did not speak.

"I—I treated the girl's story as a lie, a stupid invention prompted by malice. I—I—oh, Heaven! it all comes back to me now! I would not believe until I had proof, until I saw, heard, was shown beyond the shadow of doubt that my lover had been false to me. The girl offered proof. That afternoon I followed her to a conservatory near a room. I—I saw the man I loved at the feet of the woman who had stolen him from me; I—I cannot go on. I—oh, leave me! leave me!"

And hiding her face in her hands she wept, wept bitterly for the first time since her mother's death.

And he?

He stood beside her like a man turned to stone.

Gradually the truth had broken in upon his soul.

Gradually, step by step, he had traced the identity of this woman he loved with all the passion his intense nature was capable of, with the girl whose happiness he had, with diabolical ingenuity, wrecked and ruined.

Despair—despair darker and more terrible than that which falls upon the assassin—fell upon him, like the cold hand of death.

The girl with the pure, sweet eyes, with the pale, lovely, suffering face, was the girl whose happiness he had hunted down and destroyed!

She was not Lillian Wood, but Floris Carlisle!

(To be continued.)

On the Farm

FARM BUTTER MAKING.

So the buttermaker of to-day must serve cleanliness if he or she would produce a fine article. Our modern separators, churns and other up-to-date utensils give us a distinct advantage over our forefathers so far as convenience goes, but all these count for naught if we neglect to enforce this most essential condition and fail to keep all immaculately clean.

In hot weather cream sours quickly in spite of every endeavor, and churning should be done with greater frequency than at other seasons. It is quite a job to do this every day, yet where the refrigerating apparatus is not of the best it is wise to do so. Early morning is the best time to churn, before the sun gets high.

As soon as the granules of butter appear a cupful of salt should be put into the churn. This is the best thing to assist in the separation of butter from the buttermilk and in no way interferes with the subsequent salting, neither with the use of the buttermilk for cooking or stock feeding purposes.

After the salt has been introduced the churn should be revolved a few times, when the liquid will run off freely. Another cupful of salt in the first rinse water, fresh and cold from the well, will do good service. Wash twice, revolving the churn but a few times so as not to mass the granules, then drain while the salt is being measured, for measuring is better than weighing and it is sufficiently accurate for all practical purposes. Measure the cream in the churn at the beginning and ascertain how many pounds it yields to the inch, or if a small churn, what fraction of a pound

per inch of cream. After once weighing the amount of butter churned, thereafter it can be safely estimated by measure. The pint cup full of salt weighs approximately one pound, so that much bother of weighing salt and butter each time is avoided by following this simple rule.

Buttermakers are practising working in the churn much more commonly now than fifteen or more years ago. By scattering one-third the required amount of salt over the butter, then tipping the churn forward so it exposes a fresh surface for half the remainder, giving it a backward turn to expose a third surface for the final portion then placing the cover in position and revolving very slowly ten or a dozen times, the salt is pretty well incorporated. If the cover is then removed, the brine drained and the butter broken apart, a dozen more revolutions ought to leave it in prime condition for packing. Should a few mottles appear in the finished product, it indicates that a few more revolutions of the churn should have been added to still further aid in the even distribution of the salt. Nine times out of ten experience has shown that mottles are due to this cause. The object of working is to distribute the salt evenly and extract the surplus brine; when this has been accomplished, it is time to stop, for further manipulation will be an injury to the texture or grain of the butter.

GET RID OF THE CULLS.

Get rid of your "cull" just as soon as possible after they are ready for market. This is an important matter that is sometimes overlooked by breeders of poultry. Especially is this important where space is limited. "Culls" are a hindrance to the growth and development of the balance of the flock, for several reasons. Neither growing chicks or the old fowls do well in overcrowded quarters, are more liable to contract disease and become lousy. Besides the breeder is enabled to give better care to the balance of the flock after the culls are out of the way. Cull closely, disposing of all specimens that show any permanent defect, such as wry tails, crooked breast bone, roach back, twisted back, feathers on legs or toes in American, Spanish, and other clean-legged breeds, and lack of feathers on legs and toes in the Asiatic breeds, or any serious defect in comb, wattles or earlobes. In fact, get rid of all birds having any defect that you know cannot be outgrown. If raising market poultry, of course, these defects cut no figure, but even in this branch of the business careful culling is desirable and profitable, as the flock should be weeded out and the non-productive birds discarded.

HINTS ON ENSILAGE MAKING.

The following points derived from personal experience may be interesting to those desiring information on the matter of feed conservation in the form of silage, says the Silverwood Gazette, Brisbane, Australia. Silage-making is a simple matter. With sufficient facilities and common care, there need be no doubt as to success. When vegetable matter of any kind is placed in a heap, fermentation quickly commences. This fermentation is not desirable in the vegetable matter consigned to a silo, as while the fermentation goes on the feed value of the stuff is deteriorating. The fermentation indicated by the heat of the mass cannot be completely stopped; but endeavor should be made to keep the mass at as low a temperature as possible. As an aid to this, the maize, lucerne, or what not should be chaffed into the silo continuously until the silo is completely filled. This material will quickly sink at least one-third of its bulk, when it should be again filled, and again a shrinkage will follow, and be again filled up. Ultimately it should be weighed. If this course be followed excellent results will be achieved. On cutting out, it will be noted that the color of the material will vary as the bottom is approached. The uppermost portion will be very dark, almost black, owing to the fermentation which has taken place, while at the bottom it will appear as green as when put in. The greenness is due to the absence of fermentation, which has been brought about by the pressure of the upper mass, which has squeezed all their air out of the lower portion. No fermentation can go on if air be absent. The green is the best silage if one may judge by the greater appreciation accorded by the cow. She is the best judge. Continuous carting and chaffing may not be feasible on small farms; but perfectly good silage may be obtained by cutting and carting on one day and chaffing the next.