

Fighting Life's Battle;

OR, LADY BLANCHE'S BITTER PUNISHMENT

CHAPTER XXVIII.

Floris Carlisle! He clutched the seat with both hands, and looked down at her as she bent forward, her face hidden in her hands, her slight figure shaken by her grief; looked down at her with an expression in his face which, dreadful as it was, but poorly reflected the remorse within him.

Retribution! What retribution could be more dire—more complete than this?

That the very woman who had, as it were, plucked him from the depths of degradation, and inspired him with a desire for a higher life, should prove to be the girl whom he had, with cold-blooded heartlessness, tricked and deceived!

It seemed so direct a blow from an indignant Providence that he stood stunned and overwhelmed.

What should he say to her? Great and merciful Heaven!—what could he say? In an instant a wild temptation assailed him. Why should he tell her who he was, and the crime he had committed?

Why not keep his secret forever, or at any rate until he had married her and made her his own? He might tell her then, perhaps.

He put the terrible temptation away from him with a shudder. Vile as he had been, he was not vile enough for that.

His head drooped; a wistful, aching longing came over him to tell her all; to throw himself at her feet and say, "It is I, who love you better than life itself, who have done this!" but he could not find strength for it.

He waited; silent, motionless—his brain whirling, his heart aching with a dull, gnawing despair.

Floris struggled with her outburst of grief.

Slowly she raised her head, and stretched out her hand toward him, but he did not—could not—take it.

"Forgive me!" she said; "I—I have been very selfish. But it will all come back to me so plainly! It seems only yesterday that it all happened, instead of months ago! And now, now that I have told you all, you see, do you not, that it is impossible I could ever be your wife; do you not?"

He tried to speak, but the words died away on his dry lips.

"Ah, yes," she said, "it is better that it should be so, that you should understand why—why it cannot be as you would wish it. But I am very grateful; you have been very kind and considerate, and I am sorry that I could not say yes. As to trust, yes, I would have trusted you. I do not think you will go back to the evil life you have lived. If—if," she went on, looking up at him and starting slightly at the sight of the pallor and haggardness which had settled on his face—"if you have freely forgiven me for inflicting so much pain on you, will you promise me that—that you will keep the resolution that you have made?"

He was silent.

She sighed.

"If you would," she pleaded meekly, "it would be some consolation for me in my solitude to feel that I had been the means of effecting some good in my poor, miserable life! Will you not promise to keep upon the path which you have struck out for yourself?"

She put out her hand with a humble, deprecating glance at him, and slowly he took her hand and held it in his own, hot and burning and feverish.

"I promise," he said, hoarsely. "I promise! You shall see that I can remember, and keep my promise."

That was all. He could not trust himself to utter another word.

He put her hand down gently, looked into her eyes with all the agony of despair burning in his, and turned and left her.

With unsteady steps and with the face of a man who has suddenly been told that he is condemned to death, he made his way to his hotel.

It was the Hotel Italia, the best hotel in the place, and he held the best rooms in it.

For when he had told Floris that he was poor, he had omitted to tell her that it was his intention to give up the money he had to some charity.

He crossed the street and entering the hall, went up to the landlord, whose voice he heard raised in loud conversation with his wife.

Oscar Raymond leaned against the window of the little office, and waited till the man was disengaged.

Now and then fragments of the conversation reached him. It seemed that they were deploring their lack of accommodation.

An English milord was about to arrive with his friends and suite, and the Hotel Italia was too full to afford them the rooms they required.

"Barti! It is always so!" ejaculated the little landlord, excitedly. "When one is busy then come persons of importance, and one has to send them to the attics—at other times, when one is empty, then no one comes of any kind; it is always so!"

Oscar Raymond stepped up to him.

"You can have my rooms," he said. "I leave Florence to-night."

"But signor—"

"You can have them in half an hour," went on Oscar Raymond. "Send my luggage to the railway station."

The landlord was profuse in his regrets at losing so good a customer as Signor Raymond, and gratitude for his consideration.

"You see, this is a great English milord—oh, very great! and naturally the Hotel Italia would like to give him of its best!"

"Who is he?" asked Oscar Raymond, indifferently.

The landlord tried to remember the name, but after striking his forehead melodramatically several times, gave it up as a bad job, and Oscar Raymond ascended to his rooms and listlessly packed his things. When he had finished, he descended and gave the keys of his apartments to the landlord.

"They are at your disposal now," he said.

Having paid his bills he went to the station, and aimlessly took a ticket for Paris. In Paris he would be able to think of his ultimate destination. Here, in Florence, he could think of nothing save the pale, lovely face of the girl he had left weeping in the square! the girl whose happiness he would give his heart's blood to secure, the girl whose felicity he had ruined and wrecked!

More utterly wretched than he had thought it possible for him ever to be, he paced up and down the station.

The usual bustle and stir of an arriving train passed him by unnoticed, the people started now and then at the tall, distinguished man with the wan, haggard face, but he was unconscious of their glances. All his thoughts were concentrated on Floris Carlisle.

The expected train came in, and he was turning in his restless promenade to get out of the way of the bustle, when he saw the door of a first-class compartment open and a gentleman alight. It was Lord Norman!

In a moment, at sight of him, Oscar Raymond stood motionless, then with an effort he recovered his presence of mind and slipped behind a pillar.

Lord Norman held out his hand to some one in the carriage, and the some one proved to be Lady Blanche.

Lord Seymour followed, and the two valets and Lady Blanche's maid came up to them from a second-class carriage.

Oscar Raymond took in all the scene meant in a moment.

They were married!

He leaned against the pillar; his arms folded across his chest, his head drooping.

They are married! The plot he had conceived had been successful! Lady Blanche had triumphed, and Floris Carlisle was left in the blankness of solitude and desertion. An awful rage and despair sprang full-born into his breast.

Lady Blanche looked more beautiful than ever as she stood by Lord Norman's side. The old serene, placid loveliness had returned to her fair face, and shone in her velvety eyes.

"I have triumphed! I have won!" seemed to proclaim itself in her very gait and bearing.

And as he looked there rose before his eyes the vision of Floris, pale and sad and despairing, robbed by the vilest acts of her lover, and her young life condemned to melancholy and hopeless solitude.

Mad rage devoured him. With clinched hands he strode forward as if to accost her, then he remembered what he was and shrank back. But he would not leave Florence now!

He waited until the party had started for the hotel, in the grandest carriage available, then moodily followed them.

When he reached the hotel, the confusion attendant upon the arrival of such important guests reigned rampant.

In the stir and bustle and confusion of waiters and chambermaids—flying apparently with no definite purpose, hither and thither—his return was unnoticed.

He waited in the shadows of the hall for a little while, with no settled intention in his mind, only a dim, vague rage of impatience then a thought struck him.

He went to the office and opened the visitor's book. Never, for a moment did he doubt that they were married, but he thought he would ascertain.

With trembling hand he turned to the page for the day and bent over it in the dim light.

Then with a low cry of relief he shut the book and wiped from his brow the sweat that had gathered there.

The name she had written was not Blanche Norman, but Blanche Seymour!

They were not married yet!

CHAPTER XXIX.

The moon rose over the city and poured its light on to the front of the Hotel Italia.

In a balcony on the first floor Lord Norman was seated in a low chair.

A cigar that had gone out was between his fingers, and his thoughts seemed to have wandered far away.

He was looking older by some years than when he saw him last, and there was a scar on his forehead which Lord Harry's stag had left as a slight reminder.

There was, too, a sad moodiness in the dark eyes that robbed his face of its youthfulness, and was not good to see.

It was the look of a man who had found life considerably less worth living for—a look of doubt and distrust of his fellows, which Rousseau might have worn in his worst epoch.

He sat very still, and with the grave, queer look in his eyes, and doubtless his mind was wandering to some of those moonlight nights on which, with Floris by his side, he had felt assured that the world was the best of all possible worlds, and that life was well worth living.

Absorbed in this moody contemplation, he did not hear a light step on the window sill behind him; and Lady Blanche stepped out and laid her hand on his shoulder before he knew that she was near.

"How beautiful it is, Bruce," she said, softly, looking out on the city that lay in the moonlight beneath them like a picture of Canaletti's. "I am awfully fond of Florence. And one sees it at its best to-night."

He nodded, but he did not speak.

Never very talkative, he had become remarkably silent and short of speech since the news of Floris' "falseness" had been broken to him.

"Poor papa has gone to bed," she went on, softly, her hand resting on his shoulder, so that her white, delicate fingers could touch his hair. "He is tired out. What do you think he said to-night, Bruce?" and she blushed and smiled.

"Don't know," came listlessly from his lips.

"He said that we might have waited until we were married before we made this trip, and that it was confoundedly like a honeymoon. Poor papa. It was a little too bad to drag him across the channel; but it will do him good, and I am sure you are ever so much better, aren't you, Bruce?"

"Considering that there hasn't been the slightest thing the matter with me for months past, I may say that I am," he answered languidly. "I've noticed, Blanche, that you have got a fixed idea in your head that this trip was made for my especial benefit. It is very flattering to me, but my—"

"Yes, yes, I know," she said, with a little laugh, but with a sudden restless shimmer in her eyes that was strangely at variance with her serene and reposeful voice. "But all the time it was I who was so anxious to get out of England. It's quite true, Bruce, I had grown

sick of England; Scotland, especially."

"Scotland isn't England," he murmured.

"I longed to get away, and I should have been ill if I hadn't crossed the channel. And—and it was so good of you to consent to our marriage taking place at Paris—"

He looked at his cigar, and seeing that it was out, flung it away and felt for his cigar case.

"I have a letter to write now, Bruce," she said, presently. "It is but a short one. Wait here and I will join you when I have finished."

And she left him.
(To be continued.)

On the Farm

A COW'S ACCOUNT.

Farmers, do you keep records? It is doubtful if there is anyone thing that will add more to the interest of farm labor, or make its usefulness more apparent in shorter time than one simple method of figuring. Supposing that mixed farming is followed, an answer is desired to the query, which pays best, sheep, poultry, fruit, cows, steers or grain? It may be found after a year's record that the farm is best adapted for dairying. Then will naturally follow the investigation, which cow pays best? This phase of the question has not yet appealed to all owners of dairy herds, but is in truth at the very foundation of profitable dairying. Every farmer is interested in cutting out all unprofitable features of his business, he wants to produce plenty of good milk at the least cost, and to this end dairy records are indispensable. Why? Simply because they enable the watchful owner to detect those cows that give the most milk and fat in proportion to the feed consumed. Which cows will respond to a little extra grain? Which cow can I least afford to sell? Are any in my herd not paying? Will it pay me to get a good pure bred sire? The dairyman needs to know such points definitely hence he must keep records of feed and milk. Forms are supplied free on application to the Dairy Commissioner, Ottawa, Ont.

WINTER FEEDING.

Hens will lay during all seasons of the year providing they are well fed. They should receive sufficient food to sustain life and renew the tissues, keep the body warm and produce eggs. If there is not sufficient for all this the egg yield will be robbed to supply the deficiencies for the other demands. As soon as the hens on the range cease to find a sufficient supply of bugs and worms to satisfy the demand for meat they must be fed meat or the yield of eggs will cease. Hens begin to lay quickly in spring as soon as vegetation begins to sprout and bugs and worms are plentiful; and they cease just as quickly when this necessity is taken from them. A quick response to the demands of nature should be given to supply the hen when the frosts of fall begin to deprive her of nature's food supply.

Poultry that is to be sold to market, whether old or young, should be held over until they have finished the molt and have been fed into proper condition for market. It never pays to sell hens in molt unless they are fat and plump. There is always a loss in selling young stock in thin flesh or poor condition. Thin poultry will average 3 to 3½ pounds in weight. This same poultry properly fed into market condition will weigh 4½ to 4¾ pounds each. All the addition above the original will be table meat, and the carcass is advanced one-third in weight without adding anything to the waste material. Poultry thin in flesh at 9c a pound is less profitable to the purchaser than the same poultry would be if fattened to table weight and purchased at 14c. per pound. A good quality brings a profitable market price.

COWS AND CASH.

Dairy farmers in Canada should think seriously of what might easily be accomplished by a very little extra effort! Very few would pass by the opportunity of picking up five or six five dollar bills. A huge sum of money is waiting for owners of dairy cows.

Not only is present cash value assured for the application of a little

brain power, but a solid and permanent improvement of dairy conditions, a distinct raising of the whole status of dairy farming, a measurable gain in contentment and self-respect, a notable and enviable addition to our reputation among the nations of the world as high class dairymen would quickly result. Unfortunately we have to go on record even in these days of widespread and easily-available dairy knowledge as owning lots of cows that produce only 2,000 or 2,500 pounds milk during their best six or seven months. Such cows are no credit to their owners, and such owners scarcely de credit to the dignified title of dairymen. Canadians should jealously guard against such a condition of affairs being possible. It is easy to detect those poor cows by recording weights of milk, and it is injurious to any district to retain such wretched specimens, mongrels not real dairy cows. The queen of the dairy, the select cow will do infinitely better if handled right by men who put dairy intelligence into daily operation. To return to that pile of cash; if only half the cows in Ontario were made to yield just ten dollars more worth of milk, it means an extra five millions of dollars within easy reach.

HOW HE REFORMED.

An Old Toper Explained to a Sympathetic Audience.

Father Mathew, the Irish advocate of temperance, whose name, said Dr. William Ellery Channing, deserved "to be placed in the calendar not far below that of the apostles," often had to listen to personal experiences which did not sound so tragic as the penitent meant them to be. One evening, says the Rev. Edward Gilliat, in "Heroes of Modern Crusades," an old toper had been explaining to a sympathetic audience how he had been given to long sprees:

"Well," said he, "of course I kind o' thought I couldn't go on without bringing me and the poor, wife and childer to sup sorrow."

"I first drank me own clothes into pawn; then I drank me wife's cloak off her back; then I drank her flannel petticoat and her gound; then I drank the cups and saucers out of the cupboard; then I drank the pot and the kettle off the fire; then I drank the bedclothes from the bed, and the bed from under me self and me wife."

"Well, what brought me to me senses at last was the cold flure and the poor childer crying, 'Daddy, we're so hungry!'"

"I remember the last night of me bla'guarding there wasn't a bit to eat or a sup to taste for the poor little things; and the big boy, he said, 'Poor mudder didn't eat a bit all day; she gave all she had to Katty and Billy.'"

"Daddy, I can't go to sleep, I'm so cold," says the littlest boy.

"God forgive your unnatural father!" said I, "and hold yer whisht," said I, "and I'll make ye comfortable;" and with that, saving your presence, ladies, I takes me breeches—'tis no laughing matter, I tell ye—and I goes over to the crachers, and I sticks one of the childer into one of the legs, and another of the childer into the other leg, and I buttons the waist-band round their necks; and I tould 'em for their life not to sneeze.

"But he cockrow in the morning Billy, who was a mighty airy bird, cries out:

"Daddy; daddy!"

"What's the matter?" says I.

"I want to get up, daddy?" says he.

"Well, get up, and bad scran to ye!" says I.

"I can't," says the young shaver.

"Why can't ye, ye cantankerous cur?" says I.

"Me and Tommy's in the breeches," says he, sadly.

"Get out of it," says I.

"Daddy, don't ye remember? We're buttoned up," says the little chap, 's smart as ye please.

"So up I got and unbuttoned the crachers, and I says to meself, 'twas a burning shame that the childer of a Christian man should be buttoned up yonder instead o' lying in a decent bed."

"So I slips the breeches on me shanks," concluded the penitent, "and off I goes to your riverence and takes the pledge; and 'twas the crown piece that your riverence, God bless ye! slipped into the heel o' me fist that set me up again in the world!"

If you can say anything good of a man say it now. To-morrow may be too late.