

Fighting Life's Battle;

OR, LADY BLANCHE'S BITTER PUNISHMENT

CHAPTER XXIX.—(Cont'd)

Five minutes passed, and then he rose and began to pace up and down. The balcony ran the length of the house, and, making a turn, reached the head of the staircase leading to the street.

The city looked so beautiful that he felt tempted to a stroll. He got his hat from the room, and passing along the balcony went down the steps into the street.

Ten minutes after he had gone, a tall figure, a duplicate of his, stepped out from one of the rooms on the same floor, and, walking to the spot where he had sat, went to the rail and leaned over.

As he did so, Lady Blanche came through the window with the letter she had written in her hand.

"Bruce, I have written my letter. Shall we go and post it? A walk would be beautiful now, it is so cool and pleasant. Bruce, are you asleep?" and she went up softly behind him and touched his arm.

The man turned round slowly and raised his hat, the moonlight falling upon his wan and haggard face.

Lady Blanche staggered and clutched the rail with one hand while the other flew to her heart. "Oscar Raymond!" she breathed, with ashy lips. "Oscar Raymond!"

Lord Norman stood for a moment at the bottom of the steps, then aimlessly turned to the right and sauntered along the quiet street.

The beauty of the city, hushed in the serene rays of the moon, touched him with a pensive sadness and recalled the past with a peculiar poignancy.

He was to be married to Lady Blanche in two or three weeks, by which time they expected to reach Paris in their wanderings; but if any one had stopped him and asked him why he was marrying her, he would have been puzzled to find a good and sufficient reason.

After the recovery from the shock of Floris' supposed baseness, he had declared that he would never again look upon a woman with the eyes of kindness, would live and die hating and avoiding her sex. For weeks he had kept himself secluded from the world, had shut himself up and yielded to the bitterness and grief which the destruction of his faith in his beautiful girl-love had caused him.

But men of Lord Norman's class cannot remain in seclusion long. They have duties to perform which may not be neglected, and gradually he emerged from his retirement and was seen in his old world again—the world of the clubs and "the shady side of Pall Mall."

Lady Blanche played a waiting game, and her reward came in due season.

One evening, in the midst of a song she was singing while he was lounging in the glasshouse within hearing the song came to an abrupt stop.

He turned to see the cause, and saw that her head had dropped on her hands, as if she had broken down.

He flung his cigar away and went quickly to her.

"What is the matter, Blanche?" he asked.

She looked up and tried to smile, as if ashamed and annoyed.

"Nothing, nothing at all, Bruce," she said, wiping her eyes. "I felt rather low-spirited, that was all. Everything seems to go wrong and at cross-purposes, doesn't it? Go back to your cigar, Bruce, and I'll play something excruciatingly lively."

"Do not," he said.

Then he stood still and looked down at her.

He knew that she loved him; she was beautiful—a woman of whom any man might well be proud.

It was necessary that he should marry, unless he wished the old title he bore to die out.

For a moment the color left her face, and her heart seemed to stand still. It had come at last.

"Be my wife, Blanche," he said gently, "and I will try to make you happy."

She turned her face upon him and looked at him with all her soul in her eyes.

"Ah, Bruce, you would have to try such a very little. Ah, you know—you know."

Then he bent and kissed her, and she put her arms round his neck and drew him down to her in a passionate embrace.

And so she had won him at last. She was too clever to rest assured on a false security.

While Bruce was in England he might meet Floris Carlisle at any hour, explanations might ensue, and—

She persuaded him to take her, Lord Seymour accompanying them, on a continental trip.

"We can be married at Paris, Bruce. I hate London. Let us be married at Paris."

He had consented, as he would have done if she had asked him to take her to Timbuctoo; and so here they were in Florence, and in a few weeks they were to be married.

Lord Norman sauntered on, thinking of it all, wandering mentally back to the old days when Floris was at his side, and he had so often tried to persuade her to name the day for their union. She had always put him off.

"She loved Bertie all the time, poor girl," he thought bitterly, as he stopped and looked at the river, leaning on the bridge, all unconsciously, where Floris so often stood. "Poor girl, why did she deceive me? Why did she not come to me and say, 'Bruce, I do not love you; I find that my heart is not given to you; I love Bertie? Heaven knows I would have let go without a single hard thought."

He lit another cigar, and turned from the bridge.

Presently he heard the sound of a piano. It would not have attracted his attention—for it was not the first piano he had heard that night—but there was something in the air that seemed familiar.

What was it? A voice now rose, a very soft, pretty voice, and accompanied the piano. He could not catch the words, and yet, almost unconsciously, he found himself supplying them! What were they? Surely he had heard them sung to this tune!

"My sweet girl-love, with frank gray eyes, Though years have passed, I see you still, There where you stood beside the mill, Beneath the bright autumnal skies. Low o'er the marsh the curlew flew, The mavis sang upon the bough. Oh, love, dear love, my heart was true. It beats as truly, fondly, now, Though years have passed, I love you yet; Do you still remember, or do you forget?"

Where had he heard them? They were the verses Floris had sung to Bertie one morning—the morning of the fancy fair! A pang shot through his heart; in his mind's eyes he saw her as she looked that day, so fair and bright and girlish!

He looked up at the house. It was a villa almost shrouded by trees; there was a light burning in the window on the ground floor, and through the open window came the sound of the piano and the voice.

A few minutes passed, and he was about to go on his way when he heard a light step behind him. Some one had come from the house into the garden, tempted into the night air by the moonlight. He wondered vaguely whether it was the unknown singer.

The steps came nearer, and the tall, slim figure of a girl came slowly down to the gate and stood behind it, so near that he could have touched her with his hand, but he could not see her face.

So there she stood within reach of him, all unconscious of his proximity.

She stood for a moment and then turned, but at that instant a longing to see her face which had fallen upon Lord Norman, became irresistible.

He rose to his full height and turned to the gate.

He knew her at once, and his heart seemed to stand still.

If it had been to save his life he could not have resisted speaking her name.

"Floris!" he said, softly, yet in a tone of intense feeling.

She heard him, and uttering a faint cry, put her hand to her heart, but she did not turn her head.

Perhaps—who knows?—she thought that it was a trick of her imagination.

How often in her dreams had she heard him call her thus! In her dreams!

"Floris!" he said again.

Then she turned her white face and looked at him.

For a minute they looked into each other's eyes, as if they were both looking at the ghosts of their dead selves.

Then she saw it was indeed he, and with a low cry of pain—actual pain—she covered her face with her hands.

He set his teeth. He misunderstood the gesture, and took it for one of guilt and remorse.

"Floris," he said in a low voice, "is it indeed you? Are you afraid of me?"

CHAPTER XXX.

Her hands dropped from her face, and she shook her head, her great eyes fixed on him with a wistful yearning.

"Will you speak to me?" he said, holding the gate with his hot hands, his heart beating fast. "You are not afraid of me! You have no need to be! Speak to me, Floris!"

She opened her lips—the lips he had kissed.

"No; I am not afraid," she murmured, and her voice sounded to him like a ghost's. "How—why did you come here?" and she looked around.

"I am staying here, in Florence," he said, with a voice that shook from agitation. "I did not know—"

"You did not know that I was here," she finished for him, "or you would not have come."

"No; I should not have come! No! And yet I am not sorry that I have seen you!"

A pause for a moment. She could not summon strength enough to leave him. His eyes—so wistful, so sad, so reproachful—held her as by a charm.

"Have you—been ill?" he asked, suddenly, almost gently.

She shook her head.

"Why do you wear that black dress?" he asked.

"My mother—" she faltered.

He hung his head.

"I did not know. Why did you not tell—but why should you? And you are not ill?"

"No."

"And—and—you are happy?" he continued, hoarsely.

The look of reproach, of angelic sadness that shone from her dark eyes to his soul.

He sighed—it was almost a groan.

"Has he tired of you already?" he said, hoarsely. "Great Heaven! is it possible? Floris, I could almost wish that I had not seen you!—and yet—"

Two tears gathered in her eyes and fell slowly on her cheek. The sight of them tortured him.

"For Heaven's sake, don't cry!" he said, hastily; "the—past is over and done with. I—I am sorry you are not happy. Oh, Heaven! to see you standing there and to know the gulf that divides us. Floris—Floris, why did you do it?"

She looked at him with troubled, wondering questioning.

"Why did you, Floris? Heaven—why did you not tell me—why did you not come to me and—and—but to go like that, without a word! Did you want to break my heart—were you quite heartless, Floris?"

She looked at him as if she could not believe her senses, and one white hand went to her forehead tremblingly.

"I do not understand! Why do you speak to me like this?—why do you ask me these questions? Oh, it is cruel, cruel, knowing how wicked you have been—how hard and heartless yourself!"

"I!" he said, in amazement; and in his eagerness and excitement he pushed the gate open; but, as she shrank back, he too stepped back and closed it again. "I!"

"Oh, do not mock me," she almost wailed. "I do not want you to say that you are sorry; I did not wish to see you; I was learning to forget—"

"Forget!" he echoed, almost fiercely. "You can talk of forgetting to me! Do you think that any human being, however callous, can forget another she has so wronged as you have wronged me?"

"Wronged you!" she cried, in a low voice, "wronged you! I? Oh, Bruce, Bruce!"

"Yes, cruelly, foully wronged me!" he said, passionately. "Did ever man love a woman more dearly than I loved you? And you stole away from me, jilted me without a word of warning—one word of remorse or penitence! If I did not love you, I could strike you down at my feet—now."

(To be continued.)

On the Farm

A SERIES OF QUESTIONS

Why is it, when the proof is overwhelming, that the heifers from a registered bull are worth a third more in the cow market, that a graded-up herd is twice as productive in milk, that a great majority of farmers owning cows, with eyes in their heads to see these things, will still persist in using a cheap grade or scrub bull worth possibly for beef \$25 or \$30?

Why is it, with proof on every hand to confirm it, that it is worth while to feed a good cow all she will eat of a well-balanced ration with milk, butter and cheese at present prices; that you will find a host of farmers who believe that they will lose money if they feed such a cow a liberal grain ration?

Why is it, when any common mind could easily reason to it that a cow needs just as good air as the men and women do, that farmers shut up a stable of cows with all their manures and urine about them, without a supply of fresh air and proceed deliberately to poison their cows to death?

Why is it, when it must be apparent before their eyes every day, that the farmers who are most intelligent are the most prosperous, that so large a proportion of men who keep cows will not read or take any pains to inform themselves on this dairy question? Why do such men prefer to be ignorant rather than intelligent?

Why is it, that, when thousands upon thousands of farmers use silos and declare constantly that the silo is a money-making thing, it is so hard to convince a large portion of other farmers that it would be a wise thing for them if they built a silo?

Why is it, that a great proportion of farmers will persist in feeding oats worth \$23 a ton, and corn worth the same, when they could sell the grain and buy a better feed that will produce a quarter to a third more milk, for a much less proportion in price?

Why is it that so many farmers will still use the dirty, uncomfortable rigid old stanchion with all the danger of injury to the cow stepping on the teats and udder of the next cow when she is laying down?

Why is it, that so few farmers will put in the King system of ventilation in their stables and more will persist in building new barns and stables with no provision whatever for such a system of ventilation when it would be very easy to provide this almost indispensable thing for the health and increased efficiency of the cattle?

Why is it, that it is so hard and such slow work in getting farmers to take especial pains to produce clean, sweet cream for the creamery, and see to it that the cream is sent to the creamery before it is spoiled and unfit to make good butter from it?

Why is it, that farmers as a class, are so slow and difficult to convince of the value of all these much needed improvements and of a change on their part towards such improvements?

After all the missionary work that has been put forth, but comparatively few of our farmers are alive to these questions.—Hoard's Dairyman.

IMPROVED SEED WHEAT.

The Experimental Station of Kansas has been doing some most excellent work in improving seed wheat, beginning with the Turkey or Turkish Red, which was introduced in that state some twenty-five years ago by Mennonites from Russia.

The United State Department of Agriculture has been bringing over

in the last ten years a large number of samples. The experimental station has been growing and breeding them, and has been distributing them among Kansas farmers. It may perhaps surprise those who have only a very little faith in growing winter wheat to know that the average yield from the different varieties of this Turkish Red wheat, which goes under the various names of Kharkov, Defiance, Malakof, Crimean, Hungarian, Weisenberg, and Ghirka, have averaged from thirty-eight to fifty-six bushels per acre. This, be it remembered, is the average for five years. A number of varieties have yielded this last year from forty-six to fifty-four bushels per acre.

The station has also been experimenting with soft wheats, which do better in the southern part of that state and corresponding climates than in the central or northern parts and climates north. The yield of these has averaged for the last four years from thirty-five to forty-one bushels per acre.

WON'T SEE COMET FOR YEARS.

The Sun Will Interfere With Early Observations.

Problems gather in the wake of Halley's Comet as it wings its flight towards the sun and earth. Little by little more of its romantic story becomes known, but the greater light casts a denser shadow, and a completer view reveals more clearly the central problem of the comet.

Every fine night the comet is photographed at Greenwich, (England) Observatory, and Mr. Crommelin recently informed a newspaper representative that it is brightening very rapidly indeed. When it was first photographed its magnitude was about sixteen. Now it is about twelve. That is, it is about eighty times brighter than in September, and it is brightening about one-magnitude (i.e., twenty times) a month.

It is now thought that the comet may become faintly visible to the naked eye by the middle or end of February, but it will then be nearing the back of the sun and it will be too close to that object to be clearly visible. For two months after it will remain in the very near neighborhood of the sun and no observations will be possible.

If it is not seen in February the comet will not become visible until the end of April, when it will be a morning star, rising about 2-1/2 hours before the sun. It will transit the sun's disc about 2 a.m. on May 19, and this will be a moment of intense interest to astronomers, as it will then be possible to see whether the nucleus shows in front of the sun or not. If it can be seen it will be possible to form some idea of the density of the comet.

AN ANCIENT PEOPLE.

Recently Discovered Facts About the Hittites.

Some interesting details are given by Prof. John Garstang of the ancient race of people mentioned in the Bible as the Hittites. He said there could be nothing more romantic than the finding of Boghas, the old capital of the Hittites' country in Southern Syria. A few yards below the surface of this once famous city had been found the remains of the palaces which belonged to the great Hittite king who fought the Pharaohs.

The land of the Hittites had been discovered by the finding of a whole series of monuments, carvings, and rock sculpture. As early as B. C. 2000 they were a force in Southern Syria, and we could learn that they were an extremely mixed race, with a touch of the Mongolian.

About B. C. 1300 the Hittite, Babylonian and Egyptian people held the balance of power in Western Asia. One thing of striking interest was the recent discovery of a message which the King of Babylon sent to the King of the Hittite, which read: "I hear you are carrying on with the King of Egypt. What does this mean?"

The Hittite king then made an extract from the treaty he had just concluded with a Pharaoh and sent it to the Babylonian king, at the same time keeping a copy of his letter. That copy had now come down to us. Other letters, too, had been found.

A gentleman may be merely a lazy man who has money.

Mother—"There were two apples in the cupboard, Tommy, and now there is only one. How's that?" Tommy (who sees no way of escape)—"Well, ma, it was so dark in there I didn't see the other!"