

Fighting Life's Battle;

OR, LADY BLANCHE'S BITTER PUNISHMENT

CHAPTER XXX.—(Cont'd)

She shrank back from his blazing eyes and wild, wicked words. "I did you wrong," she said, sadly, her lips quivering.

He controlled himself as if by a mighty effort, and drew a long breath.

"We will not bandy words," he said, grimly; "I will not detain you many moments longer. I want to say this, and then I will go. When I heard of your treachery—and his—I swore that wherever I met him, let it be when and where it might, I would kill him. But I have repented of that rash oath; I should have remembered that your love made him sacred to me. Tell him that he need hide no longer—that he need not fear me. For your sake he shall go unpunished for as black a piece of treachery as the world has seen since Judas!"

Floris put out her hand to him. "What are you saying? What are these wild words? Whom am I to tell? Oh, am I dreaming?"

"Whom? The man who stole you from me—Bertie Clifford," he said white to the lips and unnaturally calm.

Floris put her hands to her brow. "Bertie Clifford—the man—! Oh, Heaven, what does this mean?" He looked at her, a wild mad doubt rising in his mind.

"Yes, Bertie Clifford! Are you not married to him?"

"No," came from her parched lips.

He clutched the gate. "No! Then, do you tell me—but no, he would not be so base and vile as that. Then where is he? You fled with him; you left Ballyfloe together! Will you deny that?"

—Floris came nearer. Truth alone in her face the dignity of injured innocence beamed from her dark eyes.

"I deny! No! It is true, I came with Lord Clifford from Ballyfloe."

He made a despairing gesture. "Why should we bandy words? Good-by, Floris, good-by! Tell him he is safe from me, tell him that—" he turned as her voice rung out, clear and commanding: "Stop!"

He stood stock-still and wated.

"Lord Norman, you have cruelly slandered me—ay, more, an absent man! One so honorable and good that his name should not pass your stained and dishonored lips! You accuse me of flying—flying—with Lord Clifford!"

She laughed—a terrible, piteous laugh.

"What mad story you have heard I know not. The truth is all I know or care for. Lord Clifford met me by accident at Ballyfloe station, he accompanied me to London, and then, having done all that a brother could do to comfort and console me under my heavy trouble, he left me. Since that hour I have neither seen nor heard from him! There is my answer to the foul lie you heard and believed!"

He glared at her—white, breathless.

"You—you received a telegram from him?"

"A telegram?" she repeated. "Ah! From him? No, from home. It was to say that my mother was dying—"

"Great and merciful Heaven! Floris—Floris!" he cried in a voice of despair, "is this true? Oh, how blind, blind I have been; how mad! Floris, forgive me! Forgive—oh, my poor darling! Why are you here? Why did you not write to me? Why—my brain is reeling. Have pity on me, Floris, and tell me all; this hideous mystery holds me in a net!"

She saw the sweat standing in great drops upon his brow, and his hands clinch on the gate until they were white as his face.

"I am here—earning my living," she said, simply. "I came here to be away from England, to learn to forget, to—to—I must go now—Lord Norman. Good-by."

"No!" he cried, hoarsely; "not yet. Go? By Heaven, you shall not go! Floris! Floris! My darling, my long lost darling!" and he stretched out his hands.

A light, a beautiful light, shone in his eyes, and she made a step forward. Then suddenly she stopped and shuddered.

"No! No!" she wailed. "You forget—you have forgotten Lady Blanche!"

He started and a cold chill fell upon his passion.

"Blanche!" he echoed, huskily. Great Heaven! He was to be married to her in a few days, married to her; and Floris—

She put out her hand to him. "Oh, Bruce, Bruce, how could you have been so wicked?"

He hung his head. "Be just!" he murmured. "You left me. I was a one in the world! I had lost you—what did it matter whom I married—"

She moaned and hid her face, then she looked up suddenly. "I left you!" she said, in a low, intense tone. "You had lost me! Oh, Bruce, Bruce, you were false to me before I left Ballyfloe. You think I do not know—"

He started. "I false to you before—I false to you! Floris, what is this? For Heaven's sake, speak plainly! Speak out at once! I am almost frenzied with this torture! I false to you! Am I dreaming?"

She looked at him, her eyes full of a sad reproach and despair. "Why do you force me to speak?" she said, in a low voice. "What can it matter now? All is past between us. You are married—"

"No!" he thundered. She panted, then her quick eyes read the truth.

"Ah, not yet, but going to be. Is it not so, Bruce?"

He hung his head, then he looked up. "Never mind Blanche," he said, hoarsely, "tell me what you meant by my being false to you. What lies have they told you? Great Heaven, what is this mystery which has wrecked and ruined both our lives? What have they told you?"

She came nearer. "Bruce," mournfully, "what they told me would have mattered little, but—I saw for myself!"

"Saw for yourself! Saw what?" he demanded.

She turned her head away. "Bruce, I—I was in the greenhouse on the afternoon you came back from Scarfross to meet Lady Blanche, and saw and heard all that passed between you! Oh, Bruce, Heaven forgive you as—I have done!" and the tears welled to her eyes.

There was silence for a moment, silence broken by an awful oath. She started and turned to him. He had flung the gate open and stood before her, his eyes blazing into hers, his lips set.

"Are you mad?" he cried, almost inaudibly. "Floris, look at me! Look at me! Look at me, I say!"

She raised her eyes to his fearlessly, though there was something awful in the expression of his face.

"Now tell me, slowly, carefully, what you mean; what you think you saw."

She opened her lips once, twice; the scene came back in all its force shook her very soul.

"Bruce, I saw you at her feet. I heard you implore her to fly with you. I heard you tell her that you had never loved—loved—any other than her! I heard you say that I—oh, I cannot go on! Spare me!"

"You saw—you heard!" he said, his face close to hers. "Great Heaven! am I going mad! When was this?"

"The day you left Ballyfloe for Scarfross. Ah! have you no pity on me, no mercy?"

"The day I left Ballyfloe!" he repeated, disregarding her entreaty. "You say I came back to Ballyfloe—that I saw Blanche? It is a lie! Do you hear? It is a lie! Who ever told you—but you saw me, you say? Floris, let me look at you. Is this my Floris who stands here and tells me this? Am I mad—are we both mad? Merciful Heaven, what does it mean? Listen to me!" and he drew her closer to him by her arm, so close that his hot breath fanned her cheek. "Listen to me as if the words I am going to speak were those of a dying man! Floris, you could not have seen me on that day—you did not see me, as you describe it, on any day, at that time; but on that day!—I tell you solemnly, here face to face, with Heaven above us to hear me,

that I did not come back to Ballyfloe that day!"

She panted, and drew back her head to gaze at him.

"Bruce!"

"I did not come back," he repeated, in a frenzied voice. "I went straight to Scarfross! Great Heaven! do you doubt me! A dozen witnesses can prove it. There were men whose side I never left, Lord Harry—Donald. Go back! why I did not go back for weeks; I was nearly killed the following morning—"

"Ah!" she breathed, her breath coming in quick gasps.

"Was struck down by a stag, and kept at Scarfross for weeks confined to my bed—to my room. All this can be proved! Are you listening? Why do you stare at me so?"

"Then—then, that is why you did not write?" she gasped, an awful sense of mystery enveloping her.

"Yes! At first I was senseless for days; unable to write for weeks. When I was able, they told me that you had—had fled with Bertie! Now do you understand that you cannot have seen me with Blanche, as you suppose?"

She uttered a cry of despair. "Bruce, I saw you—"

"Great Heaven! I shall go mad!"

"And if it was not you—who was it?"

He looked at her scared, frightened face.

"Who was it? I saw you—heard you speak to her. The girl Josine—"

"Josine!" he muttered.

"Josine told me that I should do so; led me to the place; stood beside me. If you speak of proof—ask her. Oh, Bruce! and yet—and yet—"

He laughed grimly, savagely. "And yet you think I speak the truth. My poor Floris! My brain is reeling! There is some devilish mystery at the bottom of this! What it is, Heaven only knows; but I will learn. The girl Josine, you say—where is she? and Blanche—"

"Who told you that I had fled with Lord Clifford?" asked Floris, quickly.

"Blanche!" he returned, quickly.

A cold shudder ran through her, and her head drooped.

"Do you mean to say that—" he could not go on for a moment—"that Blanche lied, and purposely deceived me—deceived both of us?" he said, hoarsely.

She shook her head wearily. "I do not know! I cannot say! It is all dark, dark to me!"

"But there shall be light!" he exclaimed. "Blanche is here in Florence. She shall tell me the truth; the girl Josine, I will wring the truth from her! Oh, my darling! Oh, Floris, my Floris! thank Heaven it is not too late!" and he put out his arms.

She drew back from him, deathly pale, and her lips parted slowly, sadly.

"Too late; it is too late!" she murmured, gently. "We cannot bring back the past. It is too late! Think of Blanche, Bruce! She has done no wrong. You—you are to be married to her—"

His hands fell to his side, he turned his face away.

"Why should she suffer? For us Bruce, all is lost save honor. You must still keep that! There has been some dark mystery; I do not know what it is, no, not even yet; but we have met again too late. Good-by, Bruce—good-by. In time, far in the future, we may meet—"

her voice broke, and with a groan he took a step toward her, but she drew still further back—"in time you and I will meet as friends—dear, true friends—but no more, Bruce. Good-by!"

She put out her hand as she spoke and he seized it and held it.

"Good-by?" he cried, hoarsely. "Do you think I am going to let you go like this? No! Floris you are mine—you love me still—"

"Ah, yes," she breathed, the tears running down her sweet face; "I love you still; but it is because of that we must part. Stand firm by your honor, Bruce; do not play Lady Blanche false as—as I once thought you had played me. Good-by!"

He caught her hand to his lips and kissed it passionately, his hot lips burning it, and with a cry of mingled pain and joy that he should so kiss her, she drew her hand away, and vanished.

(To be continued.)

ONLY A FEW OF US.

Teacher—"How many make a million, Johnny?"
Johnny—"Not many."

Another love affair is the best cement for a broken heart.

AIR FLEET FOR ENGLAND

AEROPLANES WILL DISPLACE HORSES IN WARS.

Major Baden-Powell Says British Nation Dare Not Fall Behind.

The assertion that aeroplanes will displace horses in future warfare, and form mounts for dashing squadrons of aerial cavalry signaled an address by Major Baden-Powell, before the Royal United Service Institution, London, recently, while Lord Roberts uttered a stirring demand that England wake up and prepare for the utilization of aerial craft and prosecute systematically the development of the airship and aeroplane. A large audience of military and naval men and aeronautical experts signified their enthusiastic assent.

"We have been contented to wait and benefit by the experience of others," said Lord Roberts. "We cannot afford to be behind-hand. We must make our machines, have trials and have a staff of men

TRAINED AND READY

to adopt themselves to aerial machines.

"I am anxious that the country wake up to the necessity of doing its utmost to perfect these craft. We still are strangely apathetic. The future dirigibles and aeroplanes will be as far ahead of those of to-day as the present locomotives are ahead of the first locomotive built."

Major Baden Powell said.—"There is no doubt that the machines of to-day, both dirigibles and aeroplanes, are capable of the greatest use in case of war. Let us not forget that they could come without warning from the continent and wreak great damage. We must make preparations to defend ourselves against such possible aggression."

He specifically pointed out that they could be utilized as follows: Reconnaissance, obtaining complete and reliable information of the enemy's position, movements, armaments and numbers; transportation of troops by the employment of thousands of aeroplanes capable of carrying three or four men each; discharge explosive with much damage by hovering over the enemy's country and dropping bombs on powder magazines, stores, bridges and railways; raids, by carrying small parties of troops for

DASHING FORAYS;

communications, could carry despatches and communicate with any besieged place; in savage warfare they would have great moral effect by dropping bombs to spread panic among the ignorant enemy; as a lookout; unsurpassed as a coign of vantage for the commander-in-chief during an action; advantages of the airship as compared to the marine vessel, greater speed, wider view, ability to rise to a sufficient height to avoid projectiles and to get vertically above an enemy. All evoked tremendous enthusiasm.

Major Baden-Powell has written several articles on aeronautics, including "Ballooning as a Sport." He invented a man-lifting kite in 1894 and made frequent ascents by kites in following years. He re-founded the Aeronautic Society and acted as its honorary secretary for some years, after which he was elected president. He joined the Scots Guards in 1882 and has seen much actual service. He served with his regiment and on staff throughout the South African war.

THAT CLOCK AGAIN.

Gerund, who stuttered badly, returned home at four a.m. in a blissful mood from an "evening" at the club. On entering the house, he was greeted from above by Mrs. Gerund, and the following dialogue ensued:

"Is that you, John?" accused Mrs. Gerund from the landing.

"Y-y-yes, m'dear, that's m-me!" delightedly answered Gerund.

"What do you mean, sir?" thundered his wife, "by coming home at four o'clock?"

"F-four o'clock!" echoed Gerund in a gently surprised and hurt tone. "Why, it's j-j-jus' one o'clock."

"Sir," came the frigid voice from above, "the clock has just struck four!"

When Gerund replied, it was in a subdued, almost hopeless tone, but with absolute conviction. "D-do you know, my d-dear, that the clock is st-t-tuttering again?"

TEARFUL.

Nothing will thaw the frigid heart of a man as quickly as a pretty woman's tears.

On the Farm

PREPARING FOR THE CHURN.

When cream from several separations is collected, the churning should not be made for a number of hours after the addition of the last batch of cream. Unless this time is given the fresh cream added will not have soured throughout the mass of sour cream, and if in this condition much butter fat will be lost in the buttermilk. Time must be given for complete and thorough blending of the various lots so that they are practically one, the acid being developed in all alike. This may be done very nicely by taking the previous night's separation as the last and churning the next day, thus giving ample time for the proper ripening of the last cream added.

During the last few hours of ripening there should be taken into consideration the temperature at which the cream must be churned. When it is completely ripe or has reached that point where the flavor is fine and the aroma good, it should be quickly brought to the temperature necessary for churning if not already at that temperature. If it has to be lowered several degrees, it should stand at the churning temperature for a period of three or four hours before churning. This becomes necessary because the butter-fat is a poor conductor of heat and takes longer to change in temperature than the milk serum. Every one is familiar with the fact that oils and fats cool very slowly.

During the process of ripening, the cream should be stirred occasionally to obtain best results. Just what is the result of stirring is not entirely known or why it is necessary, but it is known that cream when frequently stirred ripens with a more uniform and finer flavor than cream which is ripened without stirring.

BRAINS AS WELL AS HANDS.

There are good cows and poor cows in all breeds. Whatever breed you may choose you will find it necessary to employ the service of the scales and the Babcock test, and be governed by their verdict. Too much bother! Well, perhaps so but if you are not willing to use your brains as well as your hands, and to look carefully after all the details of the business, better let the cows alone entirely, for the probabilities are you were not born in the right time of the moon to make a successful dairyman anyway. If you cannot find pleasure and satisfaction in looking after the details of the business, noting the improvements and failures, studying into the reasons for the success or failure, either there is something lacking in your early education or else you have mistaken your calling and had better continue raising wheat to sell as long as the farm will produce paying crops, then sell the farm and go to town to live. Or, what would be better still, seek some other employment than farming at once. Life is largely what we make it, and a young man should carefully study his own inclination and capabilities in choosing an occupation for life. If he has no natural liking for domestic animals and takes no interest in animal life, better choose some other occupation than farming, for the raising of animals of some kind is a necessary adjunct to the best development of the farm.

SYSTEMATIC FARMING.

To keep accounts which give results comparable from year to year, the farm must be arranged according to a system. The fields must be definitely laid out, preferably in groups, so arranged for rotations that the number of fields in each group equals the number of years the rotation runs; that there may be the same acreage devoted to each of the three great classes of rotation crops and of the permanently seeded crops each year, viz., the grains, the grass crops, and the cultivated crops. The live stock and other means of reducing the crops to more finished forms, bringing higher prices per acre, must also be managed in a more systematic manner, so that the general results in their relations to each crop can be recorded and compared, that the unprofitable enterprises may thus be reduced and more attention devoted to those which give the best profits.