

A Loveless Marriage;

OR

A MATTER OF EXCHANGE.

CHAPTER XXXII.

"I seed him. 'Twas a fine stroke. I've come to finish his job for him," said Black Sandy, with a sinister glance at that part of the walk down which St. John had gone.

Vereker said nothing. It was strange—the strangest thing possible, but he found that he couldn't stir. Fear, that cruel thing that he had so often instilled into others, had now taken possession of him. His eyes opened wider, and glared at Black Sandy, and his face grew greyer than the darkening heavens above him. Not a word passed his lips. The horrible numbness that had attacked his lower limbs had seized upon his tongue also.

Black Sandy stooped lower, and thrust his hand into his breast. There was a mad gleam as of dawning satisfaction in his eyes. Slowly he drew out his hand again, and the cold bright glitter of steel shone through the fading light. It seemed to fascinate Vereker. He removed his fixed stare from the man's knife. It was long; it was sharp; it was as bright as silver. It seemed to hold him as by some subtle charm, but at last he tore himself from the contemplation of it, and lifted his gaze blankly to the savage face above him, that every moment seemed to come nearer and nearer.

All at once the full, awful knowledge of what was surely coming, grew plain to his bewildered mind, and a horrible scream broke from his lips.

Black Sandy killed it at its birth. He laid his hand with a strong, strangling pressure upon Vereker's throat.

"Your time is come, my lad," said he. "Think now on my best, think, think, think!"

He lifted his hand, the knife flashed brightly in the growing dusk, and then the hand descended. With the glaring open eyes of the doomed man fixed upon it, with all the awful horror of perfect consciousness in them, the knife sank deep into the quivering flesh.

Once, twice, thrice, it rose and fell! There was an abominable crashing, forcing noise, a wild convulsion of the arms and legs, a sickening contortion of the features, an unearthly groan, and then—an eternal silence!

It was over!

Black Sandy rose to his feet with a fierce, revengeful chuckle.

"Thou'lt be the ruin o' no more wenchies, my man," said he. He stopped and peered into the ghastly dead face below him as if to make sure of his work. "Thou'lt tell no tales either," he said. He gave the still warm corpse a kick or two, dragged the butcher's knife out of the gaping wound and flung it far from him into the distant field. Then, without a backward glance, he sprang through the laurels, and was soon a mile away from that tragic spot.

Slowly the evening was growing to night, though still daylight claimed a slight allegiance. The song of the birds was growing fainter, more intermittent. There in the shrubberies, where many of them slept, the quiet was almost perfect.

Once a little robin flew to the ground and perched upon the breast of the murdered man, with a daring, a certainty of safety, that might have surprised one looking from a distance on what seemed a sleeping form. A last hymn of praise burst from the tiny creature's throat; soon she must seek her rest; she wiped her beak to and fro on the edge of the grey coat, twittered and preened herself a bit, then shook her wings and disappeared. She did not know that her little claws were then as red as the crimson feathers of her breast.

Still, no one came. The short October day was almost done, a touch of solemnity grew upon the air. The sun had dropped finally beneath the distant hills, and the roar from the sleepless ocean sounded louder as the silence of earth became deeper.

It was as yet a very pallid moon; Dorothy and Farquhar, stepping lightly over the stepping-stones of the small stream below there at the end of the meadow, paused midway up at it.

"A baby of a moon," said she, admiringly. "How does it dare face the strong old day? I'm afraid, however, it is rather later than we thought it."

"It would be early if it was July," said he. "Perhaps you had better not stay very long. I'll wait for you at the end of the shrubberies. Now that your aunt—our aunt," with a tender squeeze of the arm, "is in a good temper, let us try and keep her there."

"I shan't be more than a quarter of an hour; will that do? Fancy, Aunt Jemima taking it so beautifully. Well, you know I warned you she would either kiss you or kill you."

"She did neither, however. She was most forbearing; she was, in fact, so agreeable that she rather put me out."

Dorothy laughed. "See how glad she is to get rid of me," said she. "Doesn't that thought make you quake? Doesn't your heart

fail you? Consider what a life I must have led her."

"I can only think of the life I am going to lead you," returned he promptly. "Where shall I lead you first, Vienna? You said—once you thought Vienna would be interesting."

"I have seen so little, that everything would be interesting. You know it all, you shall take me just wherever you like. That will save me the trouble of deciding, and besides—What's that?"

She pointed to something that lay half hidden in a bunch of thistles, on her right hand; she could hardly see what it was, but it shone a little as the pale rays of the young moon fell on it, and attracted her attention.

Farquhar did not at first see where her gaze was directed, and she went up to the thistles, and drew out from it a knife; a moment later she dropped it, and a sharp cry broke from her.

"Oh! Arthur, look, look! There is blood on it! Oh! look at my hand! Oh! what shall I do?" She fell on her knees and tried in a little frenzied fashion to rub off the stain upon her pink palm in the short dewy grass.

Farquhar bent over the knife and examined it closely.

"It is strange. It certainly is blood," he said slowly. "What could have brought the knife here?"

"It won't come off," cried Dorothy, in terrible distress. She was gazing with a shuddering distaste at her hand. "Get me some water. Where are you, Arthur; what are you doing? Don't touch that awful knife, with a vengeance that startled him. 'Don't! Let it lie there. I tell you there is some dreadful story connected with it.'"

"Nonsense, darling! I daresay it is only—"

"It is what I say—the instrument of some terrible crime. I'm certain there is human blood on it!" Here she began to cry, and glanced fearfully around her, and clung to Farquhar with an honest grip that spoke of unaffected terror. "Oh, how dark it is. Come, come up to the house with me, and let us tell Cecil!"

She started at full speed for the house, and Farquhar, tucking his arm into hers, ran with her. She stopped only as they got to the high bank that led direct to that part of the shrubberies where the laurels grew.

It was steep, and she was a little out of breath from her run and her excitement, so that she walked slowly up, and at the top paused for a while. As she stood there some strange, unaccountable dislike to go on, to take another step in the direction of the shrubberies, took possession of her.

"Let us go home," she said, turning a pale face to Farquhar. "I don't feel as if I could go on."

"Then don't, darling. Why should you? You look quite unwell. We need not go back by—that field; we can go round by Barrett's farm; it won't be half a mile out of our way."

"Yes, I know. But it seems cowardly, doesn't it? And you said you heard Cecil was not well. Perhaps, if I wait a little I shall be able to overcome this silly—"

Speech failed her. A wild, a piercing shriek rent the air. It sounded quite near. It came, indeed, from the shrubberies—that part of them that was not a hundred yards distant from where they stood.

"Great Heaven! what has happened?" she cried. She drew herself from Farquhar's grasp and stood erect. All her fear seemed to have vanished. "That was Cecil's voice," she said. "Come!—come quickly! She wants me!"

CHAPTER XXXIII.

Mrs. Vereker was standing, as rigid as though smitten into stone, in the centre of the small gravelled walk that ran between the laurels. On the grass before her, almost at her feet lay the dead body of her husband.

There could be no doubt that the scream they had heard had come from her lips, yet it was difficult to realize it as one gazed on her marble features. Her eyes were riveted upon that awful figure lying so close to her; her lips were tightly closed, and to Farquhar it seemed as though she did not breathe.

Dorothy ran to her and tried to pull her aside, but Mrs. Vereker resisted angrily.

"It is Francis," she said. "But who did it? Who?"

She drew the nails of her fingers into her palms, and looked at Dorothy with an awful fear in her eyes.

"That will be discovered later on. Come away now. Come," cried Dorothy vehemently. "Do not stay here looking at it. Come with me, Cecil, I desire you."

"He can't be dead! There must be life in him still," said Mrs. Vereker, panting and shivering. She fell on her knees beside Farquhar, who was examining the corpse. "His heart—try if it beats. Dorothy, run for brandy, for anything. He can't be dead, I tell you!"

"Mrs. Vereker, go indoors with Dorothy. I implore you," said Farquhar. "He," solemnly, "he is surely dead."

As he said this he uncovered his head. "What do you know about it, sir?" cried she in a piercing tone. "Send for a doctor. I tell you he must be brought back to life. It was an accident—I mean—I—Dorothy, why do you stand there idly? Send for a doctor, I tell you."

"I'll send at once," said Farquhar. "I'll do all that is necessary, if you will only go away." He was terribly distressed. "I'll see also that the police are communicated with at once."

"The police! What for? Oh! no, no, no." Her voice grew into a scream. "He is not dead. Oh! get help, do something. Dear, dear Dorothy, help me now. Oh! why did I leave, why did I go away?" She caught Farquhar's arm. "Put your hand upon his heart again," she said, "you may have been mistaken."

Farquhar shook his head. He could not speak. Something in the shocked expression of his face convinced her that all was indeed over. She turned with a gasping sigh to Dorothy, and fell fainting into her arms.

Farquhar lifted her, and carried her as quickly as he could towards the house.

"Who would have thought she would have taken it like this?" said he. "Such a brute—er—er—as that poor fellow was. If she had adored him she could not have felt it worse. Dorothy, my poor girl, this is an awful ordeal for you. Will you be able to stay with her?"

"I don't understand her," said Dorothy. "Stay? Of course I shall stay. Do you think I would leave her now?" She spoke very bravely, though her face was as white as a sheet, and she was trembling in every limb.

"What did she mean about an accident?" said he.

"I don't know. I don't think she knew what she was saying." Then suddenly she broke out. "That knife! Arthur! That knife!"

He gave her a startled glance, but at this instant some of the women who had seen them from the upper windows came running out, anxious to know what was the matter with their mistress.

To them he resigned his unconscious burden, and they and Dorothy passed into the house.

By this time the alarm had spread, and men from the stableyard and some of the indoor men came hurrying to him. Messengers were sent post-haste for doctors and for the police, whilst others lifted the dead body of their master and carried him indoors. There had been no love lost between master and men, yet a terrible melancholy fell on all, and those who spoke addressed each other in hoarse whispers, with pale faces, and lips that trembled.

Farquhar, taking two of the men with him as witnesses, went down to the field that he and Dorothy had so lately crossed, undreaming of evil, and there searched for and secured the knife.

The blood was now almost dry upon it, but yet it was not without a shudder that Farquhar touched it. As he and one of the footmen were examining it, a young lad, a stable-boy, lately hired from the village, spoke suddenly:

"I seen just such another," said he, "yesterday—I were down yonder," pointing in the direction of the village.

"Yes," said Farquhar, looking at him. "And with whom?"

"Babbs, the butcher, sir. Him as supplies the house here."

"Like this?" said Farquhar, regarding the lad with keen eyes. "And where did Babbs get his, eh?"

"I dunno, sir. Most like at Mr. Cummins', opposite his stall. Mr. Cummins' he do deal in knives and pots and pans, and such like."

"Cummins," repeated Farquhar slowly. He had folded the knife in his handkerchief, and now went silently back to the house, his companion following.

The police had arrived by this time, and Farquhar was only too glad to surrender the knife to them. He told them what the stable-boy had said about its fac-simile in Babbs' possession, and mentioned also that the boy—believed it had been bought at Cummins'. The sergeant, who seemed an intelligent man, took the knife and gazed at it somewhat abstractedly.

"And you have no idea, sir, as to who—there is no clue, you say. Have you never thought—hasn't it occurred to you—" he paused as if slightly embarrassed.

"If I haven't thought, you have," said Farquhar. "What is your suspicion? You think, perhaps—" a sudden glance of comprehension brightened his face. "Is it Black Sandy?" he said.

"That was my thought, sir, surely. And this knife—But of course it is mere surmise, nevertheless—"

"Where is Sandy now?" asked Farquhar eagerly.

"Ah! that is just what I shall find out," said the sergeant. He rose as he spoke. "I have already sent two of my men to his house; if not there they will know what to do. It is hard to speak sometimes; but you know, sir, there were reasons why—"

"Yes, yes, I know," said Farquhar. Of course the news had spread like wildfire. Barely half-an-hour after the discovery of Vereker's dead body, the intelligence of his death was conveyed to Lady Bessy Gifford, and by her to St. John.

"Good heavens! what an ending!" said she. "Who could have done it? Of course he was on the worst possible terms with his tenants—but then he was on the worst possible terms with everybody, so that doesn't count. I could name a good round dozen of people this moment," making a pretence of counting on her pretty taper fingers. "who would, at any moment, have been delighted to murder him if they could have done it with safety. Oh! poor

wretch! what a miserable stop to all ways."

She had been talking incessantly, and had therefore hardly noticed St. John's extraordinary silence. He had not, indeed, once opened his lips since the ghastly story was told to him. He had grown extremely pale, and there was a suppressed look about him, as though he were keeping guard over himself.

"What a scandal!" went on Lady Bessy. "And—it seems brutal to say so, so early in the day—but what a deliverance for her. Poor thing! It is a fine property, too, and by the settlements she inherits everything. It is not entailed in any part, I think. What a hideous catastrophe! And she was the one to find him. The unfortunate! Certainly misfortune seems to follow some people. Now why could it not have been anybody else but her? It seems such a piling up of agony, and so unnecessary. How curious she should have been there just then—that she should have gone there, I mean. So late in the evening, too! And a very unfrequented part of the grounds, I am told."

St. John's face had turned even grayer.

"She was in the habit of walking there," he said. He said it deliberately; and saying it, he knew that he lied.

"Well, it was most unhappy. I wonder if they have found out anything yet. The murderer, whoever it was, can hardly hope to escape."

"How you dwell upon it," cried he, so suddenly, with such sharp anger, that she looked at him a moment in astonishment.

"How should I not dwell upon it? Is it such an every-day occurrence? I tell you my flesh crept when they first told me; as it is I am quite unnerved. And common people—servants, how they gloat over the minor, the nasty details. It appears that poor Cecil's white gown was quite stained with his blood."

"Not another word. Do you hear? I can't bear it," exclaimed he, in a choked voice. He began to pace up and down the room, as though quiet was no longer possible to him. Lady Bessy lay back in her chair and gazed at him compassionately.

"Poor dear fellow! How he feels it for her. Ah! a lover in a thousand! Well, things could hardly have fallen out better. Now I shall keep him at home; and the property is everything that is desirable." All this ran through her mind.

"I suppose I had better go up there," said St. John, at last, stopping opposite to her. His voice sounded hoarse and unnatural.

"Oh! I think not. Not so soon. Tomorrow morning, now. Forgive me, dearest Hilary, if I say I think you ought to be specially careful just now. You see your attentions there have always been so marked, and—and one should always think of the future, and above all things be careful to give no handle for idle talk to—"

She stopped abruptly. He had ceased to rattle walk up and down the room, and turned his eyes on her with such a depth of anguish in them, that frightened, puzzled, anxious, she had found it impossible to go on. When she recovered herself he had left the room.

(To be Continued.)

FRANCE IS A QUEER NATION.

Anomalous Conditions Surrounds Death Penalty.

The anomalous conditions in France surrounding the question of the death penalty, which is no more inflicted, although the statute still provides capital punishment, causes more or less continual discussion. M. Deibler, who does not need the salary as an executioner since he has a competence, still declares emphatically that capital punishment should not be abolished. Crimes, he says, were never so numerous as since its discontinuance, and never have the courts pronounced so many death sentences.

Twenty-nine condemnations to death were pronounced last year, a number never before known in any such period. M. Deibler says that had he been required to execute them, he asks himself how he could have accomplished it. They would average one every dozen days, or nearly three a month, whereas formerly there were few years in which there were above ten condemnations, while in his 20 years as executioner he guillotined all told only 112. Furthermore, during the last eight years he had executed only 21 in France and Corsica and only one in Paris.

As to his harsh functions, M. Deibler says: "There is little need for remorse when I consider the young scamps that I have had business with. It is a service that I have rendered to them and the State in suppressing them. Of the 112 I executed only one was above 40; the others were all from 18 to 26. Who knows what they would have done and what crimes they would have committed had they lived a longer time?"

Asked as to his emotions at an execution, Deibler said his duty was practically a surgical operation, and he had no more right to feel emotion than a surgeon did in cutting up a living person. The first time he found himself a little uncomfortable. Afterwards it was a habit.

Purchaser—"You told me that parrot I bought of you was the most intelligent bird in your collection, while the fact is he doesn't talk at all." Dealer—"That's what I meant when I spoke of his intelligence."

"What," asked the sweet girl, "was the happiest moment of your life?" "The happiest moment of my life," answered the old bachelor, "was when the jeweller took back an engagement-ring and gave me sieve-links in exchange."

The Farm

THE MAN AND THE COW.

Two things on the dairy farms of this country seriously need improvement. First, the man of the farm; second, the cows of the farm. A large proportion of the farmers do not believe that they need any improvement. They do not believe that they have wrong ideas of cow and farm management. They are satisfied with themselves and their way of doing things. Of course, as long as they are in that state of mind no improvement can come to them, or their cows, or their soil, or their profits.

No man does any better as long as he thinks he is doing his best. Unless he knows what better work is he will never try to reach it. Unless he wants to know he never will know. There is a great host of men who are keeping cows to-day who do not know that they are "way behind the light house" in their ideas of cows and dairy farming. The cows they have, the returns they get from them, prove that. The tremendous difference in the profits of one man over another, right in the same neighborhood, patrons of the same creamery, proves it.

Now, how shall these men improve themselves in their business. How shall they improve their cows, make them more profitable, get more profit out of the business.

First, they must come out from that cover of wrong notions, wrong conceits, they have been hiding behind. They ought to see that something is wrong somewhere. They are not making the money out of cows that intelligent men are making. Then face the question courageously and ask frankly: "Am I as intelligent on this dairy question as I ought to be? Have I not been doing my work with wrong ideas, wrong judgment? Would I have such poverty-stricken results as I am getting if I were as well informed a man in dairying as I ought to be?"

Now, right here is the reason why this great host of dairy farmers do not improve. They never ask themselves such questions? The pockets tell a plain story? There is no lying there. But they will not look that way. Yet there is where all the trouble lies. And until dairy farmers commence asking themselves those very questions, until they are willing to admit and see that they have been following wrong ideas about themselves, their cows and the conduct of their farms, they cannot improve.

A wise man, a brainy man, will always question himself severely? He will admit that he is liable to be ignorant, and so will seek knowledge. But what can be said of the farmer who keeps poor, unprofitable cows year after year and don't know it and will not try to know it? Can he improve? Can he make more money in dairying?

THE FARM NEEDS SHEEP.

Sheep are oftentimes spoken of as a nuisance by some people, but wise land owners give them credit as being great renovators of run-down or worn out farms, and even call them fertility conservers.

They are the latter and more too. The life and habits of sheep make them not only conservers of fertility, but distributors of it where needed, if given an opportunity. Though sheep are averse to water and always seek an elevation for their resting place, they do like the succulent growth, even though it be weeds, found in a lowland of a field or pasture which has been enriched by the washings from the higher surrounding land.

These two peculiarities of sheep once came under my observation. I turned some sheep into a clover field and they at once sought out the spots where the clover did not catch and eagerly devoured any weeds or pigeon grass that had taken possession of the spaces. They then sought the weeds and succulent grass in the low places and run in the fields, leaving the clover on the high land, where most needed to enrich the soil, untouched, only touching this grass when practically everything else had been eaten.

More than this, when night came the sheep sought the higher portion of the field for their resting places, and their droppings there deposited the fertility gathered during the day from the lower lands thus conveying through the process of nature and cultivation. A farm upon which sheep are kept ought to be not only fertile, but also evenly fertile, which is a much desired condition.

Farms are very few which cannot with profit keep sheep.

LIVE STOCK NOTES.

If a calf's ankles begin to swell and the ligaments begin to thicken, go slow, and give him less work, or there will be permanent injury.

If your horse begins to hang his tongue out of his mouth when driving have the teeth examined. The trouble is usually caused by short teeth. Attend to it or it may become a habit. Hensh bits will also cause this habit.

In May hens get insects, gravel stones, all sorts of seeds, pure air and water. Corn or dough will fatten a flock of hens, but if you want them to lay you must give them something else. A bit of fresh meat now and then, some scraps, ground bones, ashes and sand to roll in, and a warm, dry house where the sun comes, are as good as anything to make hens lay.