

FOURTEENTH SCENE.--PORTLAND PLACE.

CHAPTER THE FORTY-SIXTH. - A SCOTCH MARRIAGE.

IT was Saturday, the third of October--the day on which the assertion of Arnold's marriage to Anne Silvester was to be put to the proof.

Toward two o'clock in the afternoon Blanche and her step-mother entered the drawing-room of Lady Lundie's town house in Portland Place.

Since the previous evening the weather had altered for the worse. The rain, which had set in from an early hour that morning, still fell. Viewed from the drawing-room windows, the desolation of Portland Place in the dead season wore its aspect of deepest gloom. The dreary opposite houses were all shut up; the black mud was inches deep in the roadway; the soot, floating in tiny black particles, mixed with the falling rain, and heightened the dirty obscurity of the rising mist. Foot-passengers and vehicles, succeeding each other at rare intervals, left great gaps of silence absolutely uninterrupted by sound. Even the grinders of organs were mute; and the wandering dogs of the street were too wet to bark. Looking back from the view out of Lady Lundie's state windows to the view in Lady Lundie's state room, the melancholy that reigned without was more than matched by the melancholy that reigned within. The house had been shut up for the season: it had not been considered necessary, during its mistress's brief visit, to disturb the existing state of things. Coverings of dim brown hue shrouded the furniture. The chandeliers hung invisible in enormous bags. The silent clocks hibernated under extinguishers dropped over them two months since. The tables, drawn up in corners--loaded with ornaments at other times--had nothing but pen, ink, and paper (suggestive of the coming proceedings) placed on them now. The smell of the house was musty; the voice of the house was still. One melancholy maid haunted the bedrooms up stairs, like a ghost. One melancholy man, appointed to admit the visitors, sat solitary in the lower regions--the last of the flunkies, mouldering in an extinct servants' hall. Not a word passed, in the drawing-room, between Lady Lundie and Blanche. Each waited the appearance of the persons concerned in the coming inquiry, absorbed in her own thoughts. Their situation at the moment was a solemn burlesque of the situation of two ladies who are giving an evening party, and who are waiting to receive their guests. Did neither of them see this? Or, seeing it, did they shrink from acknowledging it? In similar positions, who does not shrink? The occasions are many on

which we have excellent reason to laugh when the tears are in our eyes; but only children are bold enough to follow the impulse. So strangely, in human existence, does the mockery of what is serious mingle with the serious reality itself, that nothing but our own self-respect preserves our gravity at some of the most important emergencies in our lives. The two ladies waited the coming ordeal together gravely, as became the occasion. The silent maid flitted noiseless up stairs. The silent man waited motionless in the lower regions. Outside, the street was a desert. Inside, the house was a tomb.

The church clock struck the hour. Two.

At the same moment the first of the persons concerned in the investigation arrived.

Lady Lundie waited composedly for the opening of the drawing-room door. Blanche started, and trembled. Was it Arnold? Was it Anne?

The door opened--and Blanche drew a breath of relief. The first arrival was only Lady Lundie's solicitor--invited to attend the proceedings on her ladyship's behalf. He was one of that large class of purely mechanical and perfectly mediocre persons connected with the practice of the law who will probably, in a more advanced state of science, be superseded by machinery. He made himself useful in altering the arrangement of the tables and chairs, so as to keep the contending parties effectually separated from each other. He also entreated Lady Lundie to bear in mind that he knew nothing of Scotch law, and that he was there in the capacity of a friend only. This done, he sat down, and looked out with silent interest at the rain--as if it was an operation of Nature which he had never had an opportunity of inspecting before.

The next knock at the door heralded the arrival of a visitor of a totally different order. The melancholy man-servant announced Captain Newenden.

Possibly, in deference to the occasion, possibly, in defiance of the weather, the captain had taken another backward step toward the days of his youth. He was painted and padded, wigged and dressed, to represent the abstract idea of a male human being of five-and twenty in robust health. There might have been a little stiffness in the region of the waist, and a slight want of firmness in the eyelid and the chin. Otherwise there was the fiction of five-and twenty, founded in appearance on the fact of five-and-thirty--with the truth invisible behind it, counting seventy years! Wearing a flower in his buttonhole, and carrying a jaunty little cane in his hand--brisk, rosy, smiling, perfumed--the captain's appearance brightened the dreary room. It

was pleasantly suggestive of a morning visit from an idle young man. He appeared to be a little surprised to find Blanche present on the scene of approaching conflict. Lady Lundie thought it due to herself to explain. "My step-daughter is here in direct defiance of my entreaties and my advice. Persons may present themselves whom it is, in my opinion, improper she should see. Revelations will take place which no young woman, in her position, should hear. She insists on it, Captain Newenden--and I am obliged to submit."

The captain shrugged his shoulders, and showed his beautiful teeth.

Blanche was far too deeply interested in the coming ordeal to care to defend herself: she looked as if she had not even heard what her step-mother had said of her. The solicitor remained absorbed in the interesting view of the falling rain. Lady Lundie asked after Mrs. Glenarm. The captain, in reply, described his niece's anxiety as something--something--something, in short, only to be indicated by shaking his ambrosial curls and waving his jaunty cane. Mrs. Delamayn was staying with her until her uncle returned with the news. And where was Julius? Detained in Scotland by election business. And Lord and Lady Holchester? Lord and Lady Holchester knew nothing about it.

There was another knock at the door. Blanche's pale face turned paler still. Was it Arnold? Was it Anne? After a longer delay than usual, the servant announced Mr. Geoffrey Delamayn and Mr. Moy.

Geoffrey, slowly entering first, saluted the two ladies in silence, and noticed no one else. The London solicitor, withdrawing himself for a moment from the absorbing prospect of the rain, pointed to the places reserved for the new-comer and for the legal adviser whom he had brought with him. Geoffrey seated himself, without so much as a glance round the room. Leaning his elbows on his knees, he vacantly traced patterns on the carpet with his clumsy oaken walking-stick. Stolid indifference expressed itself in his lowering brow and his loosely-hanging mouth. The loss of the race, and the circumstances accompanying it, appeared to have made him duller than usual and heavier than usual--and that was all.

Captain Newenden, approaching to speak to him, stopped half-way, hesitated, thought better of it--and addressed himself to Mr. Moy.

Geoffrey's legal adviser--a Scotchman of the ruddy, ready, and convivial type--cordially met the advance. He announced, in reply to the captain's inquiry, that the witnesses (Mrs. Inchbare and Bishopriggs) were waiting

below until they were wanted, in the housekeeper's room. Had there been any difficulty in finding them? Not the least. Mrs. Inchbare was, as a matter of course, at her hotel. Inquiries being set on foot for Bishopriggs, it appeared that he and the landlady had come to an understanding, and that he had returned to his old post of headwaiter at the inn. The captain and Mr. Moy kept up the conversation between them, thus begun, with unflagging ease and spirit. Theirs were the only voices heard in the trying interval that elapsed before the next knock was heard at the door.

At last it came. There could be no doubt now as to the persons who might next be expected to enter the room. Lady Lundie took her step-daughter firmly by the hand. She was not sure of what Blanche's first impulse might lead her to do. For the first time in her life, Blanche left her hand willingly in her step-mother's grasp.

The door opened, and they came in.

Sir Patrick Lundie entered first, with Anne Silvester on his arm. Arnold Brinkworth followed them.

Both Sir Patrick and Anne bowed in silence to the persons assembled. Lady Lundie ceremoniously returned her brother-in-law's salute--and pointedly abstained from noticing Anne's presence in the room. Blanche never looked up. Arnold advanced to her, with his hand held out. Lady Lundie rose, and motioned him back. "Not yet, Mr. Brinkworth!" she said, in her most quietly merciless manner. Arnold stood, heedless of her, looking at his wife. His wife lifted her eyes to his; the tears rose in them on the instant. Arnold's dark complexion turned ashy pale under the effort that it cost him to command himself. "I won't distress you," he said, gently--and turned back again to the table at which Sir Patrick and Anne were seated together apart from the rest. Sir Patrick took his hand, and pressed it in silent approval.

The one person who took no part, even as spectator, in the events that followed the appearance of Sir Patrick and his companions in the room--was Geoffrey. The only change visible in him was a change in the handling of his walking-stick. Instead of tracing patterns on the carpet, it beat a tattoo. For the rest, there he sat with his heavy head on his breast and his brawny arms on his knees--weary of it by anticipation before it had begun.

Sir Patrick broke the silence. He addressed himself to his sister-in-law.

"Lady Lundie, are all the persons present whom you expected to see here to-day?"

The gathered venom in Lady Lundie seized the opportunity of planting its first sting.

"All whom I expected are here," she answered. "And more than I expected," she added, with a look at Anne.

The look was not returned--was not even seen. From the moment when she had taken her place by Sir Patrick, Anne's eyes had rested on Blanche. They never moved--they never for an instant lost their tender sadness--when the woman who hated her spoke. All that was beautiful and true in that noble nature seemed to find its one sufficient encouragement in Blanche. As she looked once more at the sister of the unforgotten days of old, its native beauty of expression shone out again in her worn and weary face. Every man in the room (but Geoffrey) looked at her; and every man (but Geoffrey) felt for her.

Sir Patrick addressed a second question to his sister-in-law.

"Is there any one here to represent the interests of Mr. Geoffrey Delamayn?" he asked.

Lady Lundie referred Sir Patrick to Geoffrey himself. Without looking up, Geoffrey motioned with his big brown hand to Mr. Moy, sitting by his side.

Mr. Moy (holding the legal rank in Scotland which corresponds to the rank held by solicitors in England) rose and bowed to Sir Patrick, with the courtesy due to a man eminent in his time at the Scottish Bar.

"I represent Mr. Delamayn," he said. "I congratulate myself, Sir Patrick, on having your ability and experience to appeal to in the conduct of the pending inquiry."

Sir Patrick returned the compliment as well as the bow.

"It is I who should learn from you," he answered. "I have had time, Mr. Moy, to forget what I once knew."

Lady Lundie looked from one to the other with unconcealed impatience as these formal courtesies were exchanged between the lawyers. "Allow me to remind you, gentlemen, of the suspense that we are suffering at this end of the room," she said. "And permit me to ask when you propose to begin?"

Sir Patrick looked invitingly at Mr. Moy. Mr. Moy looked invitingly at Sir Patrick. More formal courtesies! a polite contest this time as to which of the two learned gentlemen should permit the other to speak first! Mr. Moy's modesty proving to be quite immovable, Sir Patrick ended it by opening the proceedings.

"I am here," he said, "to act on behalf of my friend, Mr. Arnold Brinkworth. I beg to present him to you, Mr. Moy as the husband of my niece--to whom he was lawfully married on the seventh of September last, at the Church of Saint Margaret, in the parish of Hawley, Kent. I have a copy of the marriage certificate here--if you wish to look at it."

Mr. Moy's modesty declined to look at it.

"Quite needless, Sir Patrick! I admit that a marriage ceremony took place on the date named, between the persons named; but I contend that it was not a valid marriage. I say, on behalf of my client here present (Mr. Geoffrey Delamayn), that Arnold Brinkworth was married at a date prior to the seventh of September last--namely, on the fourteenth of August in this year, and at a place called Craig Fernie, in Scotland--to a lady named Anne Silvester, now living, and present among us (as I understand) at this moment."

Sir Patrick presented Anne. "This is the lady, Mr. Moy."

Mr. Moy bowed, and made a suggestion. "To save needless formalities, Sir Patrick, shall we take the question of identity as established on both sides?"

Sir Patrick agreed with his learned friend. Lady Lundie opened and shut her fan in undisguised impatience. The London solicitor was deeply interested. Captain Newenden, taking out his handkerchief, and using it as a screen, yawned behind it to his heart's content. Sir Patrick resumed.

"You assert the prior marriage," he said to his colleague. "It rests with you to begin."

Mr. Moy cast a preliminary look round him at the persons assembled.

"The object of our meeting here," he said, "is, if I am not mistaken, of a twofold nature. In the first place, it is thought desirable, by a person who has a special interest in the issue of this inquiry" (he glanced at the captain--the captain suddenly became attentive), "to put my client's assertion, relating to Mr. Brinkworth's marriage, to the proof. In the second place, we

are all equally desirous--whatever difference of opinion may otherwise exist--to make this informal inquiry a means, if possible, of avoiding the painful publicity which would result from an appeal to a Court of Law."

At those words the gathered venom in Lady Lundie planted its second sting--under cover of a protest addressed to Mr. Moy.

"I beg to inform you, Sir, on behalf of my step-daughter," she said, "that we have nothing to dread from the widest publicity. We consent to be present at, what you call, 'this informal inquiry,' reserving our right to carry the matter beyond the four walls of this room. I am not referring now to Mr. Brinkworth's chance of clearing himself from an odious suspicion which rests upon him, and upon another Person present. That is an after-matter. The object immediately before us--so far as a woman can pretend to understand it--is to establish my step-daughter's right to call Mr. Brinkworth to account in the character of his wife. If the result, so far, fails to satisfy us in that particular, we shall not hesitate to appeal to a Court of Law." She leaned back in her chair, and opened her fan, and looked round her with the air of a woman who called society to witness that she had done her duty.

An expression of pain crossed Blanche's face while her step-mother was speaking. Lady Lundie took her hand for the second time. Blanche resolutely and pointedly withdrew it--Sir Patrick noticing the action with special interest. Before Mr. Moy could say a word in answer, Arnold centred the general attention on himself by suddenly interfering in the proceedings. Blanche looked at him. A bright flash of color appeared on her face--and left it again. Sir Patrick noted the change of color--and observed her more attentively than ever. Arnold's letter to his wife, with time to help it, had plainly shaken her ladyship's influence over Blanche.

"After what Lady Lundie has said, in my wife's presence," Arnold burst out, in his straightforward, boyish way, "I think I ought to be allowed to say a word on my side. I only want to explain how it was I came to go to Craig Fernie at all--and I challenge Mr. Geoffrey Delamayn to deny it, if he can."

His voice rose at the last words, and his eyes brightened with indignation as he looked at Geoffrey.

Mr. Moy appealed to his learned friend.

"With submission, Sir Patrick, to your better judgment," he said, "this young gentleman's proposal seems to be a little out of place at the present stage of

the proceedings."

"Pardon me," answered Sir Patrick. "You have yourself described the proceedings as representing an informal inquiry. An informal proposal--with submission to your better judgment, Mr. Moy--is hardly out of place, under those circumstances, is it?"

Mr. Moy's inexhaustible modesty gave way, without a struggle. The answer which he received had the effect of puzzling him at the outset of the investigation. A man of Sir Patrick's experience must have known that Arnold's mere assertion of his own innocence could be productive of nothing but useless delay in the proceedings. And yet he sanctioned that delay. Was he privately on the watch for any accidental circumstance which might help him to better a case that he knew to be a bad one?

Permitted to speak, Arnold spoke. The unmistakable accent of truth was in every word that he uttered. He gave a fairly coherent account of events, from the time when Geoffrey had claimed his assistance at the lawn-party to the time when he found himself at the door of the inn at Craig Fernie. There Sir Patrick interfered, and closed his lips. He asked leave to appeal to Geoffrey to confirm him. Sir Patrick amazed Mr. Moy by sanctioning this irregularity also. Arnold sternly addressed himself to Geoffrey.

"Do you deny that what I have said is true?" he asked.

Mr. Moy did his duty by his client. "You are not bound to answer," he said, "unless you wish it yourself."

Geoffrey slowly lifted his heavy head, and confronted the man whom he had betrayed.

"I deny every word of it," he answered--with a stolid defiance of tone and manner.

"Have we had enough of assertion and counter-assertion, Sir Patrick, by this time?" asked Mr. Moy, with undiminished politeness.

After first forcing Arnold--with some little difficulty--to control himself, Sir Patrick raised Mr. Moy's astonishment to the culminating point. For reasons of his own, he determined to strengthen the favorable impression which Arnold's statement had plainly produced on his wife before the inquiry proceeded a step farther.

"I must throw myself on your indulgence, Mr. Moy," he said. "I have not had enough of assertion and counter-assertion, even yet."

Mr. Moy leaned back in his chair, with a mixed expression of bewilderment and resignation. Either his colleague's intellect was in a failing state--or his colleague had some purpose in view which had not openly asserted itself yet. He began to suspect that the right reading of the riddle was involved in the latter of those two alternatives. Instead of entering any fresh protest, he wisely waited and watched.

Sir Patrick went on unblushingly from one irregularity to another.

"I request Mr. Moy's permission to revert to the alleged marriage, on the fourteenth of August, at Craig Fernie," he said. "Arnold Brinkworth! answer for yourself, in the presence of the persons here assembled. In all that you said, and all that you did, while you were at the inn, were you not solely influenced by the wish to make Miss Silvester's position as little painful to her as possible, and by anxiety to carry out the instructions given to you by Mr. Geoffrey Delamayn? Is that the whole truth?"

"That is the whole truth, Sir Patrick."

"On the day when you went to Craig Fernie, had you not, a few hours previously, applied for my permission to marry my niece?"

"I applied for your permission, Sir Patrick; and you gave it me."

"From the moment when you entered the inn to the moment when you left it, were you absolutely innocent of the slightest intention to marry Miss Silvester?"

"No such thing as the thought of marrying Miss Silvester ever entered my head."

"And this you say, on your word of honor as a gentleman?"

"On my word of honor as a gentleman."

Sir Patrick turned to Anne.

"Was it a matter of necessity, Miss Silvester, that you should appear in the assumed character of a married woman--on the fourteenth of August last, at the Craig Fernie inn?"

Anne looked away from Blanche for the first time. She replied to Sir Patrick quietly, readily, firmly--Blanche looking at her, and listening to her with eager interest.

"I went to the inn alone, Sir Patrick. The landlady refused, in the plainest terms, to let me stay there, unless she was first satisfied that I was a married woman."

"Which of the two gentlemen did you expect to join you at the inn--Mr. Arnold Brinkworth, or Mr. Geoffrey Delamayn?"

"Mr. Geoffrey Delamayn."

"When Mr. Arnold Brinkworth came in his place and said what was necessary to satisfy the scruples of the landlady, you understood that he was acting in your interests, from motives of kindness only, and under the instructions of Mr. Geoffrey Delamayn?"

"I understood that; and I objected as strongly as I could to Mr. Brinkworth placing himself in a false position on my account."

"Did your objection proceed from any knowledge of the Scottish law of marriage, and of the position in which the peculiarities of that law might place Mr. Brinkworth?"

"I had no knowledge of the Scottish law. I had a vague dislike and dread of the deception which Mr. Brinkworth was practicing on the people of the inn. And I feared that it might lead to some possible misinterpretation of me on the part of a person whom I dearly loved."

"That person being my niece?"

"Yes."

"You appealed to Mr. Brinkworth (knowing of his attachment to my niece), in her name, and for her sake, to leave you to shift for yourself?"

"I did."

"As a gentleman who had given his promise to help and protect a lady, in the absence of the person whom she had depended on to join her, he refused to leave you to shift by yourself?"

"Unhappily, he refused on that account."

"From first to last, you were absolutely innocent of the slightest intention to marry Mr. Brinkworth?"

"I answer, Sir Patrick, as Mr. Brinkworth has answered. No such thing as the thought of marrying him ever entered my head."

"And this you say, on your oath as a Christian woman?"

"On my oath as a Christian woman."

Sir Patrick looked round at Blanche. Her face was hidden in her hands. Her step-mother was vainly appealing to her to compose herself.

In the moment of silence that followed, Mr. Moy interfered in the interests of his client.

"I waive my claim, Sir Patrick, to put any questions on my side. I merely desire to remind you, and to remind the company present, that all that we have just heard is mere assertion--on the part of two persons strongly interested in extricating themselves from a position which fatally compromises them both. The marriage which they deny I am now waiting to prove--not by assertion, on my side, but by appeal to competent witnesses."

After a brief consultation with her own solicitor, Lady Lundie followed Mr. Moy, in stronger language still.

"I wish you to understand, Sir Patrick, before you proceed any farther, that I shall remove my step-daughter from the room if any more attempts are made to harrow her feelings and mislead her judgment. I want words to express my sense of this most cruel and unfair way of conducting the inquiry."

The London lawyer followed, stating his professional approval of his client's view. "As her ladyship's legal adviser," he said, "I support the protest which her ladyship has just made."

Even Captain Newenden agreed in the general disapproval of Sir Patrick's conduct. "Hear, hear!" said the captain, when the lawyer had spoken. "Quite right. I must say, quite right."

Apparently impenetrable to all due sense of his position, Sir Patrick addressed himself to Mr. Moy, as if nothing had happened.

"Do you wish to produce your witnesses at once?" he asked. "I have not the least objection to meet your views--on the understanding that I am permitted to return to the proceedings as interrupted at this point."

Mr. Moy considered. The adversary (there could be no doubt of it by this time) had something in reserve--and the adversary had not yet shown his hand. It was more immediately important to lead him into doing this than to insist on rights and privileges of the purely formal sort. Nothing could shake the strength of the position which Mr. Moy occupied. The longer Sir Patrick's irregularities delayed the proceedings, the more irresistibly the plain facts of the case would assert themselves--with all the force of contrast--out of the mouths of the witnesses who were in attendance down stairs. He determined to wait.

"Reserving my right of objection, Sir Patrick," he answered, "I beg you to go on."

To the surprise of every body, Sir Patrick addressed himself directly to Blanche--quoting the language in which Lady Lundie had spoken to him, with perfect composure of tone and manner.

"You know me well enough, my dear," he said, "to be assured that I am incapable of willingly harrowing your feelings or misleading your judgment. I have a question to ask you, which you can answer or not, entirely as you please."

Before he could put the question there was a momentary contest between Lady Lundie and her legal adviser. Silencing her ladyship (not without difficulty), the London lawyer interposed. He also begged leave to reserve the right of objection, so far as his client was concerned.

Sir Patrick assented by a sign, and proceeded to put his question to Blanche.

"You have heard what Arnold Brinkworth has said, and what Miss Silvester has said," he resumed. "The husband who loves you, and the sisterly friend who loves you, have each made a solemn declaration. Recall your past experience of both of them; remember what they have just said; and now tell me--do you believe they have spoken falsely?"

Blanche answered on the instant.

"I believe, uncle, they have spoken the truth!"

Both the lawyers registered their objections. Lady Lundie made another attempt to speak, and was stopped once more--this time by Mr. Moy as well as by her own adviser. Sir Patrick went on.

"Do you feel any doubt as to the entire propriety of your husband's conduct and your friend's conduct, now you have seen them and heard them, face to face?"

Blanche answered again, with the same absence of reserve.

"I ask them to forgive me," she said. "I believe I have done them both a great wrong."

She looked at her husband first--then at Anne. Arnold attempted to leave his chair. Sir Patrick firmly restrained him. "Wait!" he whispered. "You don't know what is coming." Having said that, he turned toward Anne. Blanche's look had gone to the heart of the faithful woman who loved her. Anne's face was turned away--the tears were forcing themselves through the worn weak hands that tried vainly to hide them.

The formal objections of the lawyers were registered once more. Sir Patrick addressed himself to his niece for the last time.

"You believe what Arnold Brinkworth has said; you believe what Miss Silvester has said. You know that not even the thought of marriage was in the mind of either of them, at the inn. You know--whatever else may happen in the future--that there is not the most remote possibility of either of them consenting to acknowledge that they ever have been, or ever can be, Man and Wife. Is that enough for you? Are you willing, before this inquiry proceeds any farther to take your husband's hand; to return to your husband's protection; and to leave the rest to me--satisfied with my assurance that, on the facts as they happened, not even the Scotch Law can prove the monstrous assertion of the marriage at Craig Fernie to be true?"

Lady Lundie rose. Both the lawyers rose. Arnold sat lost in astonishment. Geoffrey himself--brutishly careless thus far of all that had passed--lifted his head with a sudden start. In the midst of the profound impression thus produced, Blanche, on whose decision the whole future course of the inquiry now turned, answered in these words:

"I hope you will not think me ungrateful, uncle. I am sure that Arnold has not, knowingly, done me any wrong. But I can't go back to him until I am first certain that I am his wife."

Lady Lundie embraced her step-daughter with a sudden outburst of affection. "My dear child!" exclaimed her ladyship, fervently. "Well done, my own dear child!"

Sir Patrick's head dropped on his breast. "Oh, Blanche! Blanche!" Arnold heard him whisper to himself; "if you only knew what you are forcing me to!"

Mr. Moy put in his word, on Blanche's side of the question.

"I must most respectfully express my approval also of the course which the young lady has taken," he said. "A more dangerous compromise than the compromise which we have just heard suggested it is difficult to imagine. With all deference to Sir Patrick Lundie, his opinion of the impossibility of proving the marriage at Craig Fernie remains to be confirmed as the right one. My own professional opinion is opposed to it. The opinion of another Scottish lawyer (in Glasgow) is, to my certain knowledge, opposed to it. If the young lady had not acted with a wisdom and courage which do her honor, she might have lived to see the day when her reputation would have been destroyed, and her children declared illegitimate. Who is to say that circumstances may not happen in the future which may force Mr. Brinkworth or Miss Silvester--one or the other--to assert the very marriage which they repudiate now? Who is to say that interested relatives (property being concerned here) may not in the lapse of years, discover motives of their own for questioning the asserted marriage in Kent? I acknowledge that I envy the immense self-confidence which emboldens Sir Patrick to venture, what he is willing to venture upon his own individual opinion on an undecided point of law."

He sat down amidst a murmur of approval, and cast a slyly-expectant look at his defeated adversary. "If that doesn't irritate him into showing his hand," thought Mr. Moy, "nothing will!"

Sir Patrick slowly raised his head. There was no irritation--there was only distress in his face--when he spoke next.

"I don't propose, Mr. Moy, to argue the point with you," he said, gently. "I can understand that my conduct must necessarily appear strange and even blameworthy, not in your eyes only, but in the eyes of others. My young

friend here will tell you" (he looked toward Arnold) "that the view which you express as to the future peril involved in this case was once the view in my mind too, and that in what I have done thus far I have acted in direct contradiction to advice which I myself gave at no very distant period. Excuse me, if you please, from entering (for the present at least) into the motive which has influenced me from the time when I entered this room. My position is one of unexampled responsibility and of indescribable distress. May I appeal to that statement to stand as my excuse, if I plead for a last extension of indulgence toward the last irregularity of which I shall be guilty, in connection with these proceedings?"

Lady Lundie alone resisted the unaffected and touching dignity with which those words were spoken.

"We have had enough of irregularity," she said sternly. "I, for one, object to more."

Sir Patrick waited patiently for Mr. Moy's reply. The Scotch lawyer and the English lawyer looked at each other--and understood each other. Mr. Moy answered for both.

"We don't presume to restrain you, Sir Patrick, by other limits than those which, as a gentleman, you impose on yourself. Subject," added the cautious Scotchman, "to the right of objection which we have already reserved."

"Do you object to my speaking to your client?" asked Sir Patrick.

"To Mr. Geoffrey Delamayn?"

"Yes."

All eyes turned on Geoffrey. He was sitting half asleep, as it seemed--with his heavy hands hanging listlessly over his knees, and his chin resting on the hooked handle of his stick.

Looking toward Anne, when Sir Patrick pronounced Geoffrey's name, Mr. Moy saw a change in her. She withdrew her hands from her face, and turned suddenly toward her legal adviser. Was she in the secret of the carefully concealed object at which his opponent had been aiming from the first? Mr. Moy decided to put that doubt to the test. He invited Sir Patrick, by a gesture, to proceed. Sir Patrick addressed himself to Geoffrey.

"You are seriously interested in this inquiry," he said; "and you have taken no part in it yet. Take a part in it now. Look at this lady."

Geoffrey never moved.

"I've seen enough of her already," he said, brutally.

"You may well be ashamed to look at her," said Sir Patrick, quietly. "But you might have acknowledged it in fitter words. Carry your memory back to the fourteenth of August. Do you deny that you promised to marry Miss Silvester privately at the Craig Fernie inn?"

"I object to that question," said Mr. Moy. "My client is under no sort of obligation to answer it."

Geoffrey's rising temper--ready to resent any thing--resented his adviser's interference. "I shall answer if I like," he retorted, insolently. He looked up for a moment at Sir Patrick, without moving his chin from the hook of his stick. Then he looked down again. "I do deny it," he said.

"You deny that you have promised to marry Miss Silvester?"

"Yes."

"I asked you just now to look at her--"

"And I told you I had seen enough of her already."

"Look at me. In my presence, and in the presence of the other persons here, do you deny that you owe this lady, by your own solemn engagement, the reparation of marriage?"

He suddenly lifted his head. His eyes, after resting for an instant only on Sir Patrick, turned, little by little; and, brightening slowly, fixed themselves with a hideous, tigerish glare on Anne's face. "I know what I owe her," he said.

The devouring hatred of his look was matched by the ferocious vindictiveness of his tone, as he spoke those words. It was horrible to see him; it was horrible to hear him. Mr. Moy said to him, in a whisper, "Control yourself, or I will throw up your case."

Without answering--without even listening--he lifted one of his hands, and looked at it vacantly. He whispered something to himself; and counted out

what he was whispering slowly; in divisions of his own, on three of his fingers in succession. He fixed his eyes again on Anne with the same devouring hatred in their look, and spoke (this time directly addressing himself to her) with the same ferocious vindictiveness in his tone. "But for you, I should be married to Mrs. Glenarm. But for you, I should be friends with my father. But for you, I should have won the race. I know what I owe you." His loosely hanging hands stealthily clenched themselves. His head sank again on his broad breast. He said no more.

Not a soul moved--not a word was spoken. The same common horror held them all speechless. Anne's eyes turned once more on Blanche. Anne's courage upheld her, even at that moment.

Sir Patrick rose. The strong emotion which he had suppressed thus far, showed itself plainly in his face--uttered itself plainly in his voice.

"Come into the next room," he said to Anne. "I must speak to you instantly!"

Without noticing the astonishment that he caused; without paying the smallest attention to the remonstrances addressed to him by his sister-in-law and by the Scotch lawyer, he took Anne by the arm, opened the folding-doors at one end of the room--entered the room beyond with her--and closed the doors again.

Lady Lundie appealed to her legal adviser. Blanche rose--advanced a few steps--and stood in breathless suspense, looking at the folding-doors. Arnold advanced a step, to speak to his wife. The captain approached Mr. Moy.

"What does this mean?" he asked.

Mr. Moy answered, in strong agitation on his side.

"It means that I have not been properly instructed. Sir Patrick Lundie has some evidence in his possession that seriously compromises Mr. Delamayn's case. He has shrunk from producing it hitherto--he finds himself forced to produce it now. How is it," asked the lawyer, turning sternly on his client, "that you have left me in the dark?"

"I know nothing about it," answered Geoffrey, without lifting his head.

Lady Lundie signed to Blanche to stand aside, and advanced toward the folding-doors. Mr. Moy stopped her.

"I advise your ladyship to be patient. Interference is useless there."

"Am I not to interfere, Sir, in my own house?"

"Unless I am entirely mistaken, madam, the end of the proceedings in your house is at hand. You will damage your own interests by interfering. Let us know what we are about at last. Let the end come."

Lady Lundie yielded, and returned to her place. They all waited in silence for the opening of the doors.

Sir Patrick Lundie and Anne Silvester were alone in the room.

He took from the breast-pocket of his coat the sheet of note-paper which contained Anne's letter, and Geoffrey's reply. His hand trembled as he held it; his voice faltered as he spoke.

"I have done all that can be done," he said. "I have left nothing untried, to prevent the necessity of producing this."

"I feel your kindness gratefully, Sir Patrick. You must produce it now."

The woman's calmness presented a strange and touching contrast to the man's emotion. There was no shrinking in her face, there was no unsteadiness in her voice as she answered him. He took her hand. Twice he attempted to speak; and twice his own agitation overpowered him. He offered the letter to her in silence.

In silence, on her side, she put the letter away from her, wondering what he meant.

"Take it back," he said. "I can't produce it! I daren't produce it! After what my own eyes have seen, after what my own ears have heard, in the next room--as God is my witness, I daren't ask you to declare yourself Geoffrey Delamayn's wife!"

She answered him in one word.

"Blanche!"

He shook his head impatiently. "Not even in Blanche's interests! Not even for Blanche's sake! If there is any risk, it is a risk I am ready to run. I hold to my own opinion. I believe my own view to be right. Let it come to an appeal to the law! I will fight the case, and win it."

"Are you sure of winning it, Sir Patrick?"

Instead of replying, he pressed the letter on her. "Destroy it," he whispered. "And rely on my silence."

She took the letter from him.

"Destroy it," he repeated. "They may open the doors. They may come in at any moment, and see it in your hand."

"I have something to ask you, Sir Patrick, before I destroy it. Blanche refuses to go back to her husband, unless she returns with the certain assurance of being really his wife. If I produce this letter, she may go back to him to-day. If I declare myself Geoffrey Delamayn's wife, I clear Arnold Brinkworth, at once and forever of all suspicion of being married to me. Can you as certainly and effectually clear him in any other way? Answer me that, as a man of honor speaking to a woman who implicitly trusts him!"

She looked him full in the face. His eyes dropped before hers--he made no reply.

"I am answered," she said.

With those words, she passed him, and laid her hand on the door.

He checked her. The tears rose in his eyes as he drew her gently back into the room.

"Why should we wait?" she asked.

"Wait," he answered, "as a favor to me."

She seated herself calmly in the nearest chair, and rested her head on her hand, thinking.

He bent over her, and roused her, impatiently, almost angrily. The steady resolution in her face was terrible to him, when he thought of the man in the next room.

"Take time to consider," he pleaded. "Don't be led away by your own impulse. Don't act under a false excitement. Nothing binds you to this dreadful sacrifice of yourself."

"Excitement! Sacrifice!" She smiled sadly as she repeated the words. "Do you know, Sir Patrick, what I was thinking of a moment since? Only of old times, when I was a little girl. I saw the sad side of life sooner than most children see it. My mother was cruelly deserted. The hard marriage laws of this country were harder on her than on me. She died broken-hearted. But one friend comforted her at the last moment, and promised to be a mother to her child. I can't remember one unhappy day in all the after-time when I lived with that faithful woman and her little daughter--till the day that parted us. She went away with her husband; and I and the little daughter were left behind. She said her last words to me. Her heart was sinking under the dread of coming death. 'I promised your mother that you should be like my own child to me, and it quieted her mind. Quiet my mind, Anne, before I go. Whatever happens in years to come--promise me to be always what you are now, a sister to Blanche.' Where is the false excitement, Sir Patrick, in old remembrances like these? And how can there be a sacrifice in any thing that I do for Blanche?"

She rose, and offered him her hand. Sir Patrick lifted it to his lips in silence.

"Come!" she said. "For both our sakes, let us not prolong this."

He turned aside his head. It was no moment to let her see that she had completely unmanned him. She waited for him, with her hand on the lock. He rallied his courage--he forced himself to face the horror of the situation calmly. She opened the door, and led the way back into the other room.

Not a word was spoken by any of the persons present, as the two returned to their places. The noise of a carriage passing in the street was painfully audible. The chance banging of a door in the lower regions of the house made every one start.

Anne's sweet voice broke the dreary silence.

"Must I speak for myself, Sir Patrick? Or will you (I ask it as a last and greatest favor) speak for me?"

"You insist on appealing to the letter in your hand?"

"I am resolved to appeal to it."

"Will nothing induce you to defer the close of this inquiry--so far as you are concerned--for four-and-twenty hours?"

"Either you or I, Sir Patrick, must say what is to be said, and do what is to be done, before we leave this room."

"Give me the letter."

She gave it to him. Mr. Moy whispered to his client, "Do you know what that is?" Geoffrey shook his head. "Do you really remember nothing about it?" Geoffrey answered in one surly word, "Nothing!"

Sir Patrick addressed himself to the assembled company.

"I have to ask your pardon," he said, "for abruptly leaving the room, and for obliging Miss Silvester to leave it with me. Every body present, except that man" (he pointed to Geoffrey), "will, I believe, understand and forgive me, now that I am forced to make my conduct the subject of the plainest and the fullest explanation. I shall address that explanation, for reasons which will presently appear, to my niece."

Blanche started. "To me!" she exclaimed.

"To you," Sir Patrick answered.

Blanche turned toward Arnold, daunted by a vague sense of something serious to come. The letter that she had received from her husband on her departure from Ham Farm had necessarily alluded to relations between Geoffrey and Anne, of which Blanche had been previously ignorant. Was any reference coming to those relations? Was there something yet to be disclosed which Arnold's letter had not prepared her to hear?

Sir Patrick resumed.

"A short time since," he said to Blanche, "I proposed to you to return to your husband's protection--and to leave the termination of this matter in my hands. You have refused to go back to him until you are first certainly assured that you are his wife. Thanks to a sacrifice to your interests and your happiness, on Miss Silvester's part--which I tell you frankly I have done

my utmost to prevent--I am in a position to prove positively that Arnold Brinkworth was a single man when he married you from my house in Kent."

Mr. Moy's experience forewarned him of what was coming. He pointed to the letter in Sir Patrick's hand.

"Do you claim on a promise of marriage?" he asked.

Sir Patrick rejoined by putting a question on his side.

"Do you remember the famous decision at Doctors' Commons, which established the marriage of Captain Dalrymple and Miss Gordon?"

Mr. Moy was answered. "I understand you, Sir Patrick," he said. After a moment's pause, he addressed his next words to Anne. "And from the bottom of my heart, madam, I respect you."

It was said with a fervent sincerity of tone which wrought the interest of the other persons, who were still waiting for enlightenment, to the highest pitch. Lady Lundie and Captain Newenden whispered to each other anxiously. Arnold turned pale. Blanche burst into tears.

Sir Patrick turned once more to his niece.

"Some little time since," he said, "I had occasion to speak to you of the scandalous uncertainty of the marriage laws of Scotland. But for that uncertainty (entirely without parallel in any other civilized country in Europe), Arnold Brinkworth would never have occupied the position in which he stands here to-day--and these proceedings would never have taken place. Bear that fact in mind. It is not only answerable for the mischief that has been already done, but for the far more serious evil which is still to come."

Mr. Moy took a note. Sir Patrick went on.

"Loose and reckless as the Scotch law is, there happens, however, to be one case in which the action of it has been confirmed and settled by the English Courts. A written promise of marriage exchanged between a man and woman, in Scotland, marries that man and woman by Scotch law. An English Court of Justice (sitting in judgment on the case I have just mentioned to Mr. Moy) has pronounced that law to be good--and the decision has since been confirmed by the supreme authority of the House of Lords. Where the persons therefore--living in Scotland at the time--have

promised each other marriage in writing, there is now no longer any doubt they are certainly, and lawfully, Man and Wife." He turned from his niece, and appealed to Mr. Moy. "Am I right?"

"Quite right, Sir Patrick, as to the facts. I own, however, that your commentary on them surprises me. I have the highest opinion of our Scottish marriage law. A man who has betrayed a woman under a promise of marriage is forced by that law (in the interests of public morality) to acknowledge her as his wife."

"The persons here present, Mr. Moy, are now about to see the moral merit of the Scotch law of marriage (as approved by England) practically in operation before their own eyes. They will judge for themselves of the morality (Scotch or English) which first forces a deserted woman back on the villain who has betrayed her, and then virtuously leaves her to bear the consequences."

With that answer, he turned to Anne, and showed her the letter, open in his hand.

"For the last time," he said, "do you insist on my appealing to this?"

She rose, and bowed her head gravely.

"It is my distressing duty," said Sir Patrick, "to declare, in this lady's name, and on the faith of written promises of marriage exchanged between the parties, then residing in Scotland, that she claims to be now--and to have been on the afternoon of the fourteenth of August last--Mr. Geoffrey Delamayn's wedded wife."

A cry of horror from Blanche, a low murmur of dismay from the rest, followed the utterance of those words.

There was a pause of an instant.

Then Geoffrey rose slowly to his feet, and fixed his eyes on the wife who had claimed him.

The spectators of the terrible scene turned with one accord toward the sacrificed woman. The look which Geoffrey had cast on her--the words which Geoffrey had spoken to her--were present to all their minds. She stood, waiting by Sir Patrick's side--her soft gray eyes resting sadly and tenderly on Blanche's face. To see that matchless courage and resignation was to doubt the reality of what had happened. They were forced to look

back at the man to possess their minds with the truth.

The triumph of law and morality over him was complete. He never uttered a word. His furious temper was perfectly and fearfully calm. With the promise of merciless vengeance written in the Devil's writing on his Devil-possessed face, he kept his eyes fixed on the hated woman whom he had ruined--on the hated woman who was fastened to him as his wife.

His lawyer went over to the table at which Sir Patrick sat. Sir Patrick handed him the sheet of note-paper.

He read the two letters contained in it with absorbed and deliberate attention. The moments that passed before he lifted his head from his reading seemed like hours. "Can you prove the handwritings?" he asked. "And prove the residence?"

Sir Patrick took up a second morsel of paper lying ready under his hand.

"There are the names of persons who can prove the writing, and prove the residence," he replied. "One of your two witnesses below stairs (otherwise useless) can speak to the hour at which Mr. Brinkworth arrived at the inn, and so can prove that the lady for whom he asked was, at that moment, Mrs. Geoffrey Delamayn. The indorsement on the back of the note-paper, also referring to the question of time, is in the handwriting of the same witness--to whom I refer you, when it suits your convenience to question him."

"I will verify the references, Sir Patrick, as matter of form. In the mean time, not to interpose needless and vexatious delay, I am bound to say that I can not resist the evidence of the marriage."

Having replied in those terms he addressed himself, with marked respect and sympathy, to Anne.

"On the faith of the written promise of marriage exchanged between you in Scotland," he said, "you claim Mr. Geoffrey Delamayn as your husband?"

She steadily repented the words after him.

"I claim Mr. Geoffrey Delamayn as my husband."

Mr. Moy appealed to his client. Geoffrey broke silence at last.

"Is it settled?" he asked.

"To all practical purposes, it is settled."

He went on, still looking at nobody but Anne.

"Has the law of Scotland made her my wife?"

"The law of Scotland has made her your wife."

He asked a third and last question.

"Does the law tell her to go where her husband goes?"

"Yes."

He laughed softly to himself, and beckoned to her to cross the room to the place at which he was standing.

She obeyed. At the moment when she took the first step to approach him, Sir Patrick caught her hand, and whispered to her, "Rely on me!" She gently pressed his hand in token that she understood him, and advanced to Geoffrey. At the same moment, Blanche rushed between them, and flung her arms around Anne's neck.

"Oh, Anne! Anne!"

An hysterical passion of tears choked her utterance. Anne gently unwound the arms that clung round her--gently lifted the head that lay helpless on her bosom.

"Happier days are coming, my love," she said. "Don't think of me."

She kissed her--looked at her--kissed her again--and placed her in her husband's arms. Arnold remembered her parting words at Craig Fernie, when they had wished each other good-night. "You have not befriended an ungrateful woman. The day may yet come when I shall prove it." Gratitude and admiration struggled in him which should utter itself first, and held him speechless.

She bent her head gently in token that she understood him. Then she went on, and stood before Geoffrey.

"I am here," she said to him. "What do you wish me to do?"

A hideous smile parted his heavy lips. He offered her his arm.

"Mrs. Geoffrey Delamayn," he said. "Come home."

The picture of the lonely house, isolated amidst its high walls; the ill-omened figure of the dumb woman with the stony eyes and the savage ways--the whole scene, as Anne had pictured it to him but two days since, rose vivid as reality before Sir Patrick's mind. "No!" he cried out, carried away by the generous impulse of the moment. "It shall not be!"

Geoffrey stood impenetrable--waiting with his offered arm. Pale and resolute, she lifted her noble head--called back the courage which had faltered for a moment--and took his arm. He led her to the door. "Don't let Blanche fret about me," she said, simply, to Arnold as they went by. They passed Sir Patrick next. Once more his sympathy for her set every other consideration at defiance. He started up to bar the way to Geoffrey. Geoffrey paused, and looked at Sir Patrick for the first time.

"The law tells her to go with her husband," he said. "The law forbids you to part Man and Wife."

True. Absolutely, undeniably true. The law sanctioned the sacrifice of her as unanswerably as it had sanctioned the sacrifice of her mother before her. In the name of Morality, let him take her! In the interests of Virtue, let her get out of it if she can!

Her husband opened the door. Mr. Moy laid his hand on Sir Patrick's arm. Lady Lundie, Captain Newenden, the London lawyer, all left their places, influenced, for once, by the same interest; feeling, for once, the same suspense. Arnold followed them, supporting his wife. For one memorable instant Anne looked back at them all. Then she and her husband crossed the threshold. They descended the stairs together. The opening and closing of the house door was heard. They were gone.

Done, in the name of Morality. Done, in the interests of Virtue. Done, in an age of progress, and under the most perfect government on the face of the earth.