

## **EPILOGUE. - A MORNING CALL.**

### **I.**

THE newspapers have announced the return of Lord and Lady Holchester to their residence in London, after an absence on the continent of more than six months.

It is the height of the season. All day long, within the canonical hours, the door of Holchester House is perpetually opening to receive visitors. The vast majority leave their cards, and go away again. Certain privileged individuals only, get out of their carriages, and enter the house.

Among these last, arriving at an earlier hour than is customary, is a person of distinction who is positively bent on seeing either the master or the mistress of the house, and who will take no denial. While this person is parleying with the chief of the servants, Lord Holchester, passing from one room to another, happens to cross the inner end of the hall. The person instantly darts at him with a cry of "Dear Lord Holchester!" Julius turns, and sees--Lady Lundie!

He is fairly caught, and he gives way with his best grace. As he opens the door of the nearest room for her ladyship, he furtively consults his watch, and says in his inmost soul, "How am I to get rid of her before the others come?"

Lady Lundie settles down on a sofa in a whirlwind of silk and lace, and becomes, in her own majestic way, "perfectly charming." She makes the most affectionate inquiries about Lady Holchester, about the Dowager Lady Holchester, about Julius himself. Where have they been? what have they seen? have time and change helped them to recover the shock of that dreadful event, to which Lady Lundie dare not more particularly allude? Julius answers resignedly, and a little absently. He makes polite inquiries, on his side, as to her ladyship's plans and proceedings--with a mind uneasily conscious of the inexorable lapse of time, and of certain probabilities which that lapse may bring with it. Lady Lundie has very little to say about herself. She is only in town for a few weeks. Her life is a life of retirement. "My modest round of duties at Windygates, Lord Holchester; occasionally relieved, when my mind is overworked, by the society of a few

earnest friends whose views harmonize with my own--my existence passes (not quite uselessly, I hope) in that way. I have no news; I see nothing--except, indeed, yesterday, a sight of the saddest kind." She pauses there. Julius observes that he is expected to make inquiries, and makes them accordingly.

Lady Lundie hesitates; announces that her news refers to that painful past event which she has already touched on; acknowledges that she could not find herself in London without feeling an act of duty involved in making inquiries at the asylum in which Hester Dethridge is confined for life; announces that she has not only made the inquiries, but has seen the unhappy woman herself; has spoken to her, has found her unconscious of her dreadful position, incapable of the smallest exertion of memory, resigned to the existence that she leads, and likely (in the opinion of the medical superintendent) to live for some years to come. Having stated these facts, her ladyship is about to make a few of those "remarks appropriate to the occasion," in which she excels, when the door opens; and Lady Holchester, in search of her missing husband, enters the room.

## II.

There is a new outburst of affectionate interest on Lady Lundie's part--met civilly, but not cordially, by Lady Holchester. Julius's wife seems, like Julius, to be uneasily conscious of the lapse of time. Like Julius again, she privately wonders how long Lady Lundie is going to stay.

Lady Lundie shows no signs of leaving the sofa. She has evidently come to Holchester House to say something--and she has not said it yet. Is she going to say it? Yes. She is going to get, by a roundabout way, to the object in view. She has another inquiry of the affectionate sort to make. May she be permitted to resume the subject of Lord and Lady Holchester's travels? They have been at Rome. Can they confirm the shocking intelligence which has reached her of the "apostasy" of Mrs. Glenarm?

Lady Holchester can confirm it, by personal experience. Mrs. Glenarm has renounced the world, and has taken refuge in the bosom of the Holy Catholic Church. Lady Holchester has seen her in a convent at Rome. She is passing through the period of her probation; and she is resolved to take the veil. Lady Lundie, as a good Protestant, lifts her hands in horror--declares the topic to be too painful to dwell on--and, by way of varying it, goes straight to the point at last. Has Lady I Holchester, in the course of her continental experience, happened to meet with, or to hear of--Mrs. Arnold Brinkworth?

"I have ceased, as you know, to hold any communication with my relatives," Lady Lundie explains. "The course they took at the time of our family trial--the sympathy they felt with a Person whom I can not even now trust myself to name more particularly--alienated us from each other. I may be grieved, dear Lady Holchester; but I bear no malice. And I shall always feel a motherly interest in hearing of Blanche's welfare. I have been told that she and her husband were traveling, at the time when you and Lord Holchester were traveling. Did you meet with them?"

Julius and his wife looked at each other. Lord Holchester is dumb. Lady Holchester replies:

"We saw Mr. and Mrs. Arnold Brinkworth at Florence, and afterward at Naples, Lady Lundie. They returned to England a week since, in anticipation of a certain happy event, which will possibly increase the members of your family circle. They are now in London. Indeed, I may tell you that we expect

them here to lunch to-day."

Having made this plain statement, Lady Holchester looks at Lady Lundie. (If that doesn't hasten her departure, nothing will!)

Quite useless! Lady Lundie holds her ground. Having heard absolutely nothing of her relatives for the last six months, she is burning with curiosity to hear more. There is a name she has not mentioned yet. She places a certain constraint upon herself, and mentions it now.

"And Sir Patrick?" says her ladyship, subsiding into a gentle melancholy, suggestive of past injuries condoned by Christian forgiveness. "I only know what report tells me. Did you meet with Sir Patrick at Florence and Naples, also?"

Julius and his wife look at each other again. The clock in the hall strikes. Julius shudders. Lady Holchester's patience begins to give way. There is an awkward pause. Somebody must say something. As before, Lady Holchester replies "Sir Patrick went abroad, Lady Lundie, with his niece and her husband; and Sir Patrick has come back with them."

"In good health?" her ladyship inquires.

"Younger than ever," Lady Holchester rejoins.

Lady Lundie smiles satirically. Lady Holchester notices the smile; decides that mercy shown to this woman is mercy misplaced; and announces (to her husband's horror) that she has news to tell of Sir Patrick, which will probably take his sister-in-law by surprise.

Lady Lundie waits eagerly to hear what the news is.

"It is no secret," Lady Holchester proceeds--"though it is only known, as yet to a few intimate friends. Sir Patrick has made an important change in his life."

Lady Lundie's charming smile suddenly dies out.

"Sir Patrick is not only a very clever and a very agreeable man," Lady Holchester resumes a little maliciously; "he is also, in all his habits and ways (as you well know), a man younger than his years--who still possesses many of the qualities which seldom fail to attract women."

Lady Lundie starts to her feet.

"You don't mean to tell me, Lady Holchester, that Sir Patrick is married?"

"I do."

Her ladyship drops back on the sofa; helpless really and truly helpless, under the double blow that has fallen on her. She is not only struck out of her place as the chief woman of the family, but (still on the right side of forty) she is socially superannuated, as The Dowager Lady Lundie, for the rest of her life!

"At his age!" she exclaims, as soon as she can speak.

"Pardon me for reminding you," Lady Holchester answers, "that plenty of men marry at Sir Patrick's age. In his case, it is only due to him to say that his motive raises him beyond the reach of ridicule or reproach. His marriage is a good action, in the highest sense of the word. It does honor to him, as well as to the lady who shares his position and his name."

"A young girl, of course!" is Lady Lundie's next remark.

"No. A woman who has been tried by no common suffering, and who has borne her hard lot nobly. A woman who deserves the calmer and the happier life on which she is entering now."

"May I ask who she is?"

Before the question can be answered, a knock at the house door announces the arrival of visitors. For the third time, Julius and his wife look at each other. On this occasion, Julius interferes.

"My wife has already told you, Lady Lundie, that we expect Mr. and Mrs. Brinkworth to lunch. Sir Patrick, and the new Lady Lundie, accompany them. If I am mistaken in supposing that it might not be quite agreeable to you to meet them, I can only ask your pardon. If I am right, I will leave Lady Holchester to receive our friends, and will do myself the honor of taking you into another room."

He advances to the door of an inner room. He offers his arm to Lady Lundie. Her ladyship stands immovable; determined to see the woman who has supplanted her. In a moment more, the door of entrance from the hall is thrown open; and the servant announces, "Sir Patrick and Lady Lundie. Mr.

and Mrs. Arnold Brinkworth."

Lady Lundie looks at the woman who has taken her place at the head of the family; and sees--ANNE SILVESTER!

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