

FOURTH BOOK.

Chapter XXVIII. Mr. Randal Linley.

Winter had come and gone; spring was nearing its end, and London still suffered under the rigid regularity of easterly winds. Although in less than a week summer would begin with the first of June, Mr. Sarrazin was glad to find his office warmed by a fire, when he arrived to open the letters of the day.

The correspondence in general related exclusively to proceedings connected with the law. Two letters only presented an exception to the general rule. The first was addressed in Mrs. Linley's handwriting, and bore the postmark of Hanover. Kitty's mother had not only succeeded in getting to the safe side of the lake--she and her child had crossed the German Ocean as well. In one respect her letter was a remarkable composition. Although it was written by a lady, it was short enough to be read in less than a minute:

"MY DEAR MR. SARRAZIN--I have just time to write by this evening's post. Our excellent courier has satisfied himself that the danger of discovery has passed away. The wretches have been so completely deceived that they are already on their way back to England, to lie in wait for us at Folkestone and Dover. To-morrow morning we leave this charming place--oh, how unwillingly!--for Bremen, to catch the steamer to Hull. You shall hear from me again on our arrival. Gratefully yours,

"CATHERINE LINLEY."

Mr. Sarrazin put this letter into a private drawer and smiled as he turned the key. "Has she made up her mind at last?" he asked himself. "But for the courier, I shouldn't feel sure of her even now."

The second letter agreeably surprised him. It was announced that the writer had just returned from the United States; it invited him to dinner that evening; and it was signed "Randal Linley." In Mr. Sarrazin's estimation, Randal had always occupied a higher place than his brother. The lawyer had

known Mrs. Linley before her marriage, and had been inclined to think that she would have done wisely if she had given her hand to the younger brother instead of the elder. His acquaintance with Randal ripened rapidly into friendship. But his relations with Herbert made no advance toward intimacy: there was a gentlemanlike cordiality between them, and nothing more.

At seven o'clock the two friends sat at a snug little table, in the private room of a hotel, with an infinite number of questions to ask of each other, and with nothing to interrupt them but a dinner of such extraordinary merit that it insisted on being noticed, from the first course to the last.

Randal began. "Before we talk of anything else," he said, "tell me about Catherine and the child. Where are they?"

"On their way to England, after a residence in Germany."

"And the old lady?"

"Mrs. Presty has been staying with friends in London."

"What! have they parted company? Has there been a quarrel?"

"Nothing of the sort; a friendly separation, in the strictest sense of the word. Oh, Randal, what are you about? Don't put pepper into this perfect soup. It's as good as the gras double at the Cafe Anglais in Paris."

"So it is; I wasn't paying proper attention to it. But I am anxious about Catherine. Why did she go abroad?"

"Haven't you heard from her?"

"Not for six months or more. I innocently vexed her by writing a little too hopefully about Herbert. Mrs. Presty answered my letter, and recommended me not to write again. It isn't like Catherine to bear malice."

"Don't even think such a thing possible!" the lawyer answered, earnestly. "Attribute her silence to the right cause. Terrible anxieties have been weighing on her mind since you went to America."

"Anxieties caused by my brother? Oh, I hope not!"

"Caused entirely by your brother--if I must tell the truth. Can't you guess

how?"

"Is it the child? You don't mean to tell me that Herbert has taken Kitty away from her mother!"

"While I am her mother's lawyer, my friend, your brother won't do that. Welcome back to England in the first glass of sherry; good wine, but a little too dry for my taste. No, we won't talk of domestic troubles just yet. You shall hear all about it after dinner. What made you go to America? You haven't been delivering lectures, have you?"

"I have been enjoying myself among the most hospitable people in the world."

Mr. Sarrazin shook his head; he had a case of copyright in hand just then. "A people to be pitied," he said.

"Why?"

"Because their Government forgets what is due to the honor of the nation."

"How?"

"In this way. The honor of a nation which confers right of property in works of art, produced by its own citizens, is surely concerned in protecting from theft works of art produced by other citizens."

"That's not the fault of the people."

"Certainly not. I have already said it's the fault of the Government. Let's attend to the fish now."

Randal took his friend's advice. "Good sauce, isn't it?" he said.

The epicure entered a protest. "Good?" he repeated. "My dear fellow, it's absolute perfection. I don't like to cast a slur on English cookery. But think of melted butter, and tell me if anybody but a foreigner (I don't like foreigners, but I give them their due) could have produced this white wine sauce? So you really had no particular motive in going to America?"

"On the contrary, I had a very particular motive. Just remember what my life used to be when I was in Scotland--and look at my life now! No Mount Morven; no model farm to look after; no pleasant Highland neighbors; I can't

go to my brother while he is leading his present life; I have hurt Catherine's feelings; I have lost dear little Kitty; I am not obliged to earn my living (more's the pity); I don't care about politics; I have a pleasure in eating harmless creatures, but no pleasure in shooting them. What is there left for me to do, but to try change of scene, and go roaming around the world, a restless creature without an object in life? Have I done something wrong again? It isn't the pepper this time--and yet you're looking at me as if I was trying your temper."

The French side of Mr. Sarrazin's nature had got the better of him once more. He pointed indignantly to a supreme preparation of fowl on his friend's plate. "Do I actually see you picking out your truffles, and putting them on one side?" he asked.

"Well," Randal acknowledged, "I don't care about truffles."

Mr. Sarrazin rose, with his plate in his hand and his fork ready for action. He walked round the table to his friend's side, and reverently transferred the neglected truffles to his own plate. "Randal, you will live to repent this," he said solemnly. "In the meantime, I am the gainer." Until he had finished the truffles, no word fell from his lips. "I think I should have enjoyed them more," he remarked, "if I had concentrated my attention by closing my eyes; but you would have thought I was going to sleep." He recovered his English nationality, after this, until the dessert had been placed on the table, and the waiter was ready to leave the room. At that auspicious moment, he underwent another relapse. He insisted on sending his compliments and thanks to the cook.

"At last," said Randal, "we are by ourselves--and now I want to know why Catherine went to Germany."