

FIFTH BOOK.

Chapter XXXVIII. Hear the Lawyer.

"Mr. Herbert Linley, I ask permission to reply to your inquiries in writing, because it is quite likely that some of the opinions you will find here might offend you if I expressed them personally. I can relieve your anxiety on the subject of Miss Sydney Westerfield. But I must be allowed to do so in my own way--without any other restraints than those which I think it becoming to an honorable man to impose on himself.

"You are quite right in supposing that Miss Westerfield had heard me spoken of at Mount Morven, as the agent and legal adviser of the lady who was formerly your wife. What purpose led her to apply to me, under these circumstances, you will presently discover. As to the means by which she found her way to my office, I may remind you that any directory would give her the necessary information.

"Miss Westerfield's object was to tell me, in the first place, that her guilty life with you was at an end. She has left your protection--not to return to it. I was sorry to see (though she tried to hide it from me) how keenly she felt the parting. You have been dearly loved by two sweet women, and they have thrown their hearts away on you--as women will.

"Having explained the circumstances so far, Miss Westerfield next mentioned the motive which had brought her to my office. She asked if I would inform her of Mrs. Norman's address.

"This request, I confess, astonished me.

"To my mind she was, of all persons, the last who ought to contemplate communicating in any way with Mrs. Norman. I say this to you; but I refrained from saying it to her. What I did venture to do was to ask for her reasons. She answered that they were reasons which would embarrass her if she communicated them to a stranger.

"After this reply, I declined to give her the information she wanted.

"Not unprepared, as it appeared to me, for my refusal, she asked next if I was willing to tell her where she might find your brother, Mr. Randal Linley. In this case I was glad to comply with her request. She could address herself to no person worthier to advise her than your brother. In giving her his address in London, I told her that he was absent on a visit to some friends, and that he was expected to return in a week's time.

"She thanked me, and rose to go.

"I confess I was interested in her. Perhaps I thought of the time when she might have been as dear to her father as my own daughters are to me. I asked if her parents were living: they were dead. My next question was: 'Have you any friends in London?' She answered: 'I have no friends.' It was said with a resignation so very sad in so young a creature that I was really distressed. I ran the risk of offending her--and asked if she felt any embarrassment in respect of money. She said: 'I have some small savings from my salary when I was a governess.' The change in her tone told me that she was alluding to the time of her residence at Mount Morven. It was impossible to look at this friendless girl, and not feel some anxiety about the lodging which she might have chosen in such a place as London. She had fortunately come to me from the railway, and had not thought yet of where she was to live. At last I was able to be of some use to her. My senior clerk took care of Miss Westerfield, and left her among respectable people, in whose house she could live cheaply and safely. Where that house is, I refuse (for her sake) to tell you. She shall not be disturbed.

"After a week had passed I received a visit from my good friend, Randal Linley.

"He had on that day seen Miss Westerfield. She had said to him what she had said to me, and had repeated the request which I thought it unwise to grant; owing to your brother, however, the motives which she had refused to confide to me. He was so strongly impressed by the sacrifice of herself which this penitent woman had made, that he was at first disposed to trust her with Mrs. Norman's address.

"Reflection, however, convinced him that her motives, pure and disinterested as they undoubtedly were, did not justify him in letting her expose herself to the consequences which might follow the proposed interview. All that he engaged to do was to repeat to Mrs. Norman what Miss Westerfield had said, and to inform the young lady of the result.

"In the intervals of business, I had felt some uneasiness when I thought of

Miss Westerfield's prospects. Your good brother at once set all anxiety on this subject at rest.

"He proposed to place Miss Westerfield under the care of an old and dear friend of her late father--Captain Bennydeck. Her voluntary separation from you offered to your brother, and to the Captain, the opportunity for which they had both been waiting. Captain Bennydeck was then cruising at sea in his yacht. Immediately on his return, Miss Westerfield's inclination would be consulted, and she would no doubt eagerly embrace the opportunity of being introduced to her father's friend.

"I have now communicated all that I know, in reply to the questions which you have addressed to me. Let me earnestly advise you to make the one reparation to this poor girl which is in your power. Resign yourself to a separation which is not only for her good, but for yours.--SAMUEL SARRAZIN."