

## A RACE FOR A WIFE!

## CHAPTER III.

(CONTINUED.)

The son thought the advantages of such an alliance would be so transparent in a worldly point of view to Harold Denison that he would be a willing coadjutor in the scheme from the moment it was proposed to him; but when he saw the old family pride that would be up in arms against him the instant he mooted the idea.

But he said to himself: 'I have had much to do with Harold Denison, and should know him thoroughly. He is selfish at heart to the core. In all those troublous days of his, when I was settling his affairs, I never knew him dwell upon what the results might be to his wife and daughter. It was over what he had to give up. He'll scout this proposal with indignation when I first mention it to him; but he'll come round to it in time. As for the girl, that Sam's affair, but when Denison has once made up his mind to her marrying him, he's as likely a man as I know to turn on the domestic screw heavily. I've seen that oracle worked more than once, and it's generally pretty efficacious. They run away with somebody else afterward, occasionally, but that's the fault of the husbands not keeping them within bounds. Yes; I'll ride over and see Denison to-morrow. It won't be a very pleasant job, I doubt, but I'm used to that.'

The owner of Glinn felt that slight nervous perturbation that invariably attends the call of a large creditor. The noise of the carriage-wheels had merely produced a feeling of startled curiosity, but the announcement that Mr. Pearman wanted to see him made the squire's pulse quicken, and it was with an anxiety he was unable to disguise that he welcomed him in his own peculiar slow tones.

'Sit down, Pearman. Take that arm-chair, and make yourself comfortable. I hope to Heaven you haven't come to make me the reverse?'

'Not at all, Mr. Denison. My visit is not a business one, though I have something I should like just to talk to you a little about presently. Shocking weather we're having. Bad for the farmers—very, isn't it?'

'God, you may say that. Nothing we have to sell seems to be worth anything. All farm produce is a drug in the market. How's Coriander going on? It looks like your gathering a tolerable harvest in April at Newmarket, anyhow. The horse is doing well, I suppose?'

'Yes, I believe so. You know, Mr. Denison, I'm getting too old myself to see after such things. I leave all that to Sam; but he tells me the horse will run well for the Guinea, bar accidents.'

'Bar accidents! Bar accidents! Why, bar accidents, he must win,' cried the over-sanguine Denison. 'I never let now, as you say, but in the old days I should have had a thousand on him.'

'Ah, well,' said the old lawyer, 'there's where it is. You always would believe in certainties in racing. I never myself got further than believing a horse would run well.'

'Yes,' laughed the squire; 'and in consequence you made a fortune while I lost one. I'm afraid, too, it would be the same thing over again if I could begin once more.' Pearman shot a keen look at him from under his grizzled brows, and thought most assuredly that it would be so, and how very much he would facilitate his present design if the squire was a little involved in that way at present. He of course knew the main part of Harold Denison's entanglements, but even so, though his principal man of business, did not know how bad things really were. It would have given him more confidence to unfold the object of his embassy had he been possessed of such knowledge.

'Well, Pearman,' continued the squire, 'I'm afraid I have no money left to put upon Coriander. Those old days are gone. Yes, said Denison, bitterly, 'halfpence are more account to me now than sovereigns were then. But what is it you want to talk me about. Nothing to my advantage, I'll be bound.'

'I'm afraid not, not but that it might be. I've never been able Mr. Denison, to

honor of being your pecuniary adviser, I have never held butters to your lips, when I deemed any thing more palatable would meet the exigencies of the case?'

The squire nodded assent. He certainly had a confused idea that Pearman had made a pretty good thing out of the adjustment of his affairs, but it had always been by the suaviter in modo process.

'Now,' continued the attorney, 'I see a way in which you may be relieved from all immediate embarrassment connected with money matters, and by which Miss Denison may be the eventual mistress of Glinn, in its original integrity.'

Denison started. To be released from the harassing strain that lies on him now with regard to pounds, shillings, and pence—that the old property should once more cumulate in his daughter—opened a gorgeous prospect to his eyes. It was a piece of good fortune that he had never dreamed of. But he knew his man by this time well. What was the price he was to pay for this? He said nothing, but inwardly his brain was busy in vain conjecture as to what Pearman would demand as his guerdon for producing such a transformation scene. The idea of that worthy solicitor ever doing any thing without an ulterior motive was one he never entertained for an instant. What would he want? What did he mean? A silence of some five minutes ensued between the two men; the old lawyer was anxious that the tempting bait he held out should be thoroughly gorged before he was called upon to state on what terms all this might be brought. His best experience of men told him that there was no such mistake in life as hurrying the andante—an axiom most of us learn, though generally too late, but to derive minor advantages therefrom.

'This sounds too good to be true, Pearman,' at length remarked the squire. 'If it can be done, you must have some infernal rider to the proposition that it is hardly possible I should assent to.'

'It is not likely that this can be brought about without some valuable assistance from yourself, rejoined the solicitor. 'But will you bear steadfastly in your mind the great advantages that will accrue immediately to yourself, and ultimately to Miss Denison? Will you, moreover, be good enough to hear me patiently to the end?'

The squire nodded an impatient assent.

'You must, of course, be quite aware that, now Miss Denison has arrived at a marriageable age, her great personal attractions have claimed the attention of a good many young men in the country.'

The attorney paused, but his auditor looked grimly at the fire, and expressed his feelings by neither word nor gesture.

'Well, a young gentleman of considerable property, and still better expectations, who has had the privilege of meeting Miss Denison, is so struck with her charms and accomplishments that he has commissioned me to ask your permission to try whether he cannot succeed in inducing her to accept him as a husband. On the point of family he is quite aware that he has no pretensions to Miss Denison's hand; but, as regards income, I think there would be nothing to be desired.'

'Who the devil do you mean?' broke in the squire. 'Has Maude given him any encouragement, that you come with this story to me?'

'My dear sir, his acquaintance with Miss Denison is far too slight for anything of that kind ever to have been even thought of on her part. He is merely anxious to have your permission to try his luck. Without that, believe me, he would never dare to aspire to your daughter's hand.'

All this show of deference induced the squire to listen to the proposition, at all events quietly. Who on earth Pearman could have in his eye he had no idea. That he could mean his son all this time never entered Harold Denison's head. He certainly knew he had a son, but, mixing so little as he did in the county now, he had barely seen him, nor had he, but at odd times, even heard of him.

'But who is it, man? Let's know the name of this bashful suitor? God, it's a quality one sees little enough of these days.'

'My son, Mr. Denison, is the gentleman who solicits your permission to do his best to win your daughter.'

'Yes, yes. Why, did you not all and here

that possession of all the gold in California does not constitute a gentleman, or entitle a man to claim alliance with gentle blood! The old solicitor's lips quivered, and his lean fingers played nervously with his watch chain, as he replied:

'I did not come here to argue our mutual social position. I came here to afford an embarrassed man, for whom I have a sincere regard, in spite of all the hard names he heaps upon me, an opportunity of freeing himself from those entanglements. I advanced a proposition which gave him a chance of in some way repairing the evil that the early follies of his youth had entailed on his child, destined to pay her full share of such indiscretions. The days of such prejudices are past, I tell you, Mr. Denison; and once more I ask you not to give me an answer now, but to reflect upon the proposal I have made to you.'

'You do us too much honor, Mr. Pearman. Permit me to observe that I must decline all further consideration of the subject. I am perfectly convinced the alliance you propose with such a delicious oblivion of all status of society would be extremely unsuitable. Allow me to make Miss Denison's acknowledgments for the distinction you would have conferred upon her, and to ring for your carriage.'

'Very good, sir—very good,' cried the old attorney, as he rose in his wrath; 'the time will come, maybe, when you'll think that old Sam Pearman would have been a good man to have had at your back. I say nothing, Mr. Denison, but you'll find that you have not made many greater mistakes in your career than this morning's work.'

And, muttering to himself, the irate old gentleman left the room.

'By God!' murmured Harold Denison, 'I wonder what the world is coming to! The idea of a child of mine marrying the son of a money-lending solicitor. Curse his impudence!'

Then his thoughts reverted to that ten-thousand-pound mortgage, and the angry words of the old man at parting, and he reflected, moodily, that there was little likelihood of much time being granted ament the payment of the interest in future; indeed, it was more than probable that Pearman in his anger would call in his money. All which considerations harassed Harold Denison's mind not a little, and he thought, if it had to be done again, he would reject the old lawyer's proposal with rather more courtesy.

## CHAPTER IV.

## THE FIRST TURN OF THE SCREW.

The solicitor drove away, fuming with indignation. 'Pompous, poverty-stricken fool!' were the epithets he applied to the squire, in these first moments of his wrath. Even a usurious solicitor is possessed of pride of some kind, and though he may hold it in tolerable subjection during the early stages of his career, like other men's, it waxes fat and thrives wonderfully under the accumulation of wealth. Harold Denison had trampled it remorselessly under foot. Then the irritation subsided, and the astute old head once more began to reckon up the chances of the game. He played it all over again in his own mind. 'No,' he muttered, 'don't think I made any mistakes. I was a fool to lose my temper, though. Hadn't I made up my mind, all along, that he'd take it pretty much in that way to start with? Lord, chuckled the old man, 'when I think how many of 'em I've seen run rusty about their family names, places, and plate! It was foolish—say, very foolish—to be annoyed at Denison's tantrums. Names!—bah! continued the old man, contemptuously. 'If it came all the way from the Conqueror, is worth on stamped paper is the only valid test.'

'Yes,' he continued, still turning the subject over in his mind. 'He's on his stilts just now, and has not had time to grasp the solid advantages that will accrue to him. He's been a mad spendthrift, has Harold Denison; but he was a man who, in those days, even thought more of his own personal comforts and convenience than he ever did of his wife's. Selling Mannersley hurt his pride, but I don't think he ever gave a

tain amount of difficulty on the part of the lady, but men of his age are not wont to be diffident about their own powers of attraction on those occasions, and Sam Pearman was one of the last to entertain apprehensions on that score.

'He don't know what's good for him, and that's about the size of it!' was the gentleman's remark, as his sire retailed the account of his interview with Denison. 'We shall have to exercise a little gentle pressure. I'm not going to be coked off my game, at all events in this stage of the proceedings. Invalids often require coercion to make them take the tonics necessary for their existence, and it will be for you to make Denison understand that he will cease to be Denison of Glinn, at all events, unless he is prepared to welcome me as a son-in-law.'

'Leave it to me, Sam, and don't be in a hurry. I made up my mind about it the other night. I don't say all, my boy, but a good many things I have made up my mind to have come to pass in course of time. Leave me alone to work the oracle just now, and, depend upon it, I'll give you due notice when its time for you make a move.'

The son acquiesced. If at times he thought his father was getting a little slow at turf tactics—a pursuit from which he had in a great measure withdrawn—he still held a firm belief that his parent was difficult to beat in the great game of life, more especially when he held a winning card or two in his hand.

Some two or three weeks elapsed; and then one spring morning, Harold Denison received a letter, bitter as the blooming of the blackthorn, to the effect that Mr. Pearman of Mannersley, felt it incumbent on himself to call in his money lent on mortgage, a more favorable opportunity for investment, etc., having offered.

That this would probably be the result of their last interview, the squire had foreseen. Yet, as days went by without any such notice, he began fondly to hope that the attorney had seen the presumption he had been guilty of, and that things would still jog quietly along in their old way. How ephemeral that way had now become, under almost any circumstances, he still kept locked within his own breast. But as he read the letter the squire knew well that the Rubicon was passed, that his ships were burnt and himself defeated. He knew, too well, that to raise that ten thousand anywhere else would result in an exposure of his affairs tantamount to ruin. He was quite aware that Pearman was equally conversant with the fact. He prepared himself for the impending crash.

But there is a certain amount of notice requisite on the calling-in of a mortgage, and this gave Harold Denison time to reflect; whether for good or evil the readers of the story must determine. Had the blow fallen at once, he would have abandoned Glinn, grimly, and set up his lowly tent in some remote watering-place. But the crafty solicitor had measured the strength of his prey with great accuracy. It was not without design that the notice of the foreclosure of the mortgage had been delayed. 'Give it time—give it time,' quoth that fisher of feeble humanity. He was right; and day after day did Harold Denison ponder over the old fisherman's term's; at first contemptuously, then moodily, until at last he began to think it was his duty to retain Glinn at all hazards. Once arrived thus far, the speciousness of the reasoning became easy and rapid. 'The lands I received from my ancestors it is my duty to transmit to my descendants.' A fine country-gentleman's sentiment, that would have invariably insured a round of applause at the farmer's ordinary in any market-town of respectable dimensions. No, of course, it was all plain sailing morally. As a personal matter, the meanest lodgings at Hastings or St. Leonards would have sufficed. It were better so than to see a Denison of Glinn so vilely mated. But there were other ties to be considered. He, Harold Denison, had undoubtedly betrayed the trust of a long line of ancestors, played the devil with the property, and made the ancient name of Denison a byword with the children of Israel. There was but one way to restore all this, and that was contained in Pearman's proposition. He did not dwell

ruin inevitable, as far as their still continuing the possessors of Glinn went.

'Yes, Nellie, it's all over,' said the squire. 'I'm bent on it last. Dear old Glinn must go through the hands of the auctioneer, and become the property of whatever greasy trader happens to have most money at his disposal just now. It's hard lines for you to have to leave the place wherein I installed you as mistress so many years ago.'

'Don't think of me,' replied Mrs. Denison tearfully. 'I shall always be happy as long as I have you and Maude with me. It will be sad to leave all my old cottagers and attendants to the tender mercies of others; but oh! it will fall heaviest on you, Harold, to give up what has been the home of your people for so many generations!'

'I don't deny it. It will be a dreadful wrench to think of Glinn passing to strangers, but I suppose it must be so. The follies of your youth, Nell, smite us sharply as we grow old. We shall have to end our days in some cheap Continental town.'

Very sad was Maude when she heard the evil tidings, and that she had but a short time to look upon the grand old chestnut, the groves of laurel, and the soft, pleasant, turf vistas amid which she had been born. Bitterly she thought how the loss of all the accustomed surroundings would be felt by the gentle mother she adored, and well she divined what would be her father's sensations when, having left the home of his ancestors, he should find himself exposed to the monotonous existence of some watering-place, or dull Continental town. How would brood over the extinction of the Denisons of Glinn, none realized more fully than Maude. She knew her father thoroughly, she was a clever girl, and truly recognized his foibles and weaknesses. She comprehended the shock it would be to his vanity pride—what the loss of country parades would be to him; what it would be to find himself a mere Mr. Denison on straitened means in some quiet place where gossip ran rife, and your social status was pretty nearly gauged by the bills incurred at the butcher's and the wine merchant's. And then the thought, sorrowfully, how little she could do to alleviate all this. To her mother—ah, yes! she could do much to lighten her troubles, and be a comfort to her, but for her father, nothing—and the tears trickled through Maude's long lashes as she thought how little she could be to him.

Such, so far, were the results of the calculations of that experienced 'fisher of men,' Mr. Pearman, on the unfortunate family of Glinn.

I have told the ingenious process of reasoning by which Harold Denison had, at last, not only soothed his conscience, but arrived at the conclusion that, like the grim old Grecian, his duty required him to sacrifice his daughter. I often think the old story's grand allegory. Agamemnon sacrificed Iphigenia, even yet, pretty constantly at St. George's Hanover Square. We substitute the ring for the knife, and the wedding breakfast for the smoking sacrifice; and wreath ourselves with flowers and silver raiment as we offer up our maidens at the shrine of Plutus. Who shall say that, after all, that was not the meaning of the fable?

But Harold Denison was conscious of an inward feeling that the newly-formed idea was an extremely awkward subject to broach either to his wife or daughter. That he had never even alluded to Pearman's proposal need scarcely observe, and that it looked still less pleasant to touch upon now he had made up his mind to be an active supporter thereof, must be equally obvious. Still, the clouds were gathering so quick so thick over the house of Glinn, that no time was to be lost, and at last the squire nerve himself to the task, and sought his wife's board, having previously ascertained that his daughter was out of the house.

'I want to talk something over with you, Nellie,' he observed, as he entered. 'I don't think that it will be quite pleasant to hear, but, at all events, it shan't distress you, as you will have the power of deciding as you like about it.'

Mrs. Denison raised her face anxiously to her husband's. Denison, on any point, was painful to her, and she was too well aware, from former experience, that this was but the prelude to some scheme in which her