

AMERICAN HONOUR.

A TALE OF 1875.

ABOUT one hundred years ago, there was at Philadelphia, in Pennsylvania, a family consisting of several members. It belonged to the middle class—that is to say, contained barristers, bankers, merchants, solicitors, and so on—all of them animated, at least so far as appears, by a high sense of honour and integrity. But noble sentiments are no certain guarantee against poverty. One of the members of the family in question became embarrassed, borrowed £1000 of one of his relatives, but lost his memory soon after, and, having so remained for years, died, leaving behind him a widow with several children. He could bequeath them no property, instead of which they received as their inheritance high principles, and a strong affection for the memory of their father. The widow also was, in this respect, perfectly in harmony with her sons. By dint, therefore, of prudence, industry, and economy, they amassed among them the sum of £400, which they rigidly appropriated to the payment of a part of their father's debt. The widow had, indeed, called them together around her death bed, and told them that, instead of a fortune, she left them a duty to perform; and that if it could not be accomplished in one generation, it must be handed down from father to son, until the descendants of the Bonds had paid every farthing to the descendants of the Sydney Smiths.

While matters stood in this predicament, the creditor part of the family removed to England, and the debtors remained at Philadelphia, struggling with difficulties and embarrassments, which not only disabled them from paying the paternal debt, but kept them perpetually in honourable poverty. Of course, the wish to pay in such minds survived the ability. It would have been to them an enjoyment of a high order to hunt out their relatives in England, and place in their hands the owing £600. This pleasure, which they were destined never to taste, often formed the subject of conversation around their fireside; and the children, as they grew up, were initiated into the mystery of the £600.

But that generation passed away, and another succeeded to the liability; not that there existed any liability in law, for though a deed had been executed, it had lapsed in the course of time, so that there was really no obligation but that which was the strongest of all—an ineradicable sense of right. Often and often did the Bonds of Philadelphia meet and consult together on this famous debt, which every one wished, but no one could afford, to pay. The sons were married, and had children, whom it was incumbent on them to support; the daughters had married, too, but their husbands possibly did not acquire with their wives the chivalrous sense of duty which possessed the breast of every member, male and female, of the B. family, and inspired them with a wish to do justice when fortune permitted.

It would be infinitely agreeable to collect and peruse the letters and records of consultations which passed or took place between the members of this family on the subject of the £600. These documents would form the materials of one of the most delightful romances in the world—the

romance of honour, which never dies in some families, but is transmitted from generation to generation like a treasure above all price. When this brief notice is read in Philadelphia, it may possibly lead to the collection of these materials, which, with the proper names of all the persons engaged, should, we think, be laid before the world as a pleasing record of hereditary nobility of sentiment.

After the lapse of many years, a widow and her three nephews found themselves in possession of the necessary means for paying the family debt. Three quarters of a century had elapsed. The children and the children's children of the original borrower had passed away; but the honour of the B. family had been transmitted intact to the fourth generation, and a search was immediately commenced to discover the creditors in England. This, however, as may well be supposed, was no easy task. The members of the S. family had multiplied and separated, married and intermarried, become poor and wealthy, distinguished and obscure by turns, changed their topographical as well as their social position, and disappeared entirely from the spot they had occupied on their first arrival from America.

But honour is indefatigable, and by degrees a letter reached a person in Kensington, who happened to possess some knowledge of a lady of the S. family, married to a solicitor practising with great success and distinction in London. When the letter came to hand, she at first doubted whether it might not be a sort of grave hoax, intended to excite expectation for the pleasure of witnessing its disappointment. However, the English solicitor, accustomed to the incidents of life, thought there would at least be no harm in replying to the letter from Philadelphia, and discovering in this way the real state of the affair.

Some delay necessarily occurred, especially as the B. family in America were old world sort of people, accustomed to transact business slowly and methodically, and with due attention to the minutest points. But at length a reply came, in which the writer observed, that if a deed of release was drawn up, signed by all the parties concerned in England, and transmitted to America, the £600 should immediately be forwarded for distribution among the members of the S. family. Some demur now arose. Some of the persons concerned growing prudent as the chances of recovering the money appeared to multiply, thought it would be wrong to send the deed of release before the money had been received. But the solicitor had not learned in the practice of his profession, to form so low an estimate of human nature. He considered confidence in this case to be synonymous with prudence, and at any rate resolved to take upon himself the entire responsibility of complying with the wishes of the Americans. He accordingly drew up the necessary document, got it signed by as many as participated in his views, and sent it across the Atlantic, without the slightest doubt or hesitation. There had been something in the rough, blunt honesty of Mr. B.'s letter that inspired in the man of law the utmost reliance on his faith, though during the interval which elapsed between the transmission of the deed and the reception of an answer from the States, several of his friends exhibited a disposi-