

the innumerable hues of character imprint upon the human face divine, are their study. Their convictions are the slow and patient fruits of intense observation and great logical accuracy. Carefully noting down every lineament and feature—their change, their action, and their development—they track a lurking motive with the scent of a blood-hound, and run down a growing passion with an unrelenting speed. I have been in the witness box, exposed to the licensed badgering and privileged impertinence of a lawyer; winked, leered, frowned, and sneered at, with all the long practiced tact of a *nisi prius* torturer; I have stood before the cold, fish-like, but searching eye of a prefect of police, as he compared my passport with my person, and thought he could detect a discrepancy in both: but I never felt the same sense of total exposure as when glanced at by the half cautious, half prying look of a worthy father or mother, in a family where there are daughters to marry, and “nobody coming to woo.”

“You’re early, Charley,” said Mr. Blake, with an affected mixture of carelessness and warmth. “You have not had breakfast?”

“No, sir. I have come to share a part of yours; and, if I mistake not, you seem a little later than usual.”

“Not more than a few minutes. The girls will be down presently; they’re early risers, Charley; good habits are just as easy as bad ones; and, the Lord be praised! my girls were never brought up with any other.”

“I am well aware of it, sir; and indeed, if I may be permitted to take advantage of the *apropos*, it was on the subject of one of your daughters that I wished to speak to you this morning, and which brought me over at this uncivilized hour, hoping to find you alone.”

Mr. Blake’s look for a moment was one of triumphant satisfaction: it was but a glance, however, and repressed the very instant after, as he said, with a well got-up indifference—

“Just step with me into the study, and we’re sure not to be interrupted.”

Now, although I have little time or space for such dallying, I cannot help dwelling for a moment upon the aspect of what Mr. Blake dignified with the name of his study. It was a small apartment with one window, the panes of which, independent of all aid from a curtain, tempered the daylight, through the medium of cobwebs, dust, and the ill-trained branches of some wall-tree without.

Three oak chairs and a small table were the only articles of furniture; while around, on all sides, lay the *disjecta membra* of Mr. Blake’s hunting, fishing, shooting, and coursing equipments—old top boots, driving whips, old spurs, a racing saddle, a blunderbuss, the helmet of the Galway light horse, a salmon-net, a large map of the county, with a mar-

ginal index to several mortgages marked with a cross, a stable lantern, the rudder of a boat, and several other articles, representative of his daily associations; but not one book, save an odd volume of Watty Cox’s Magazine, whose pages seemed as much the receptacle of brown hackles for trout fishing as the resource of literary leisure.

“Here we’ll be quite cosy, and to ourselves,” said Mr. Blake, as, placing a chair for me, he sat down himself, with the air of a man resolved to assist, by advice and counsel, the dilemma of some dear friend:

After a few preliminary observations, which, like a breathing canter before a race, serve to get your courage up, and settle you well in your seat, I opened my negotiation by some very broad and sweeping truism about the misfortunes of a bachelor existence, and discomforts of his position, his want of home and happiness, the necessity for his one day thinking seriously about marriage: it being in a measure almost as inevitable a termination of the free and easy career of his single life as transportation for seven years is to that of a poacher. “You cannot go on, sir,” said I, “trespassing for ever upon your neighbour’s preserves; you must be apprehended sooner or later; therefore, I think, the better way is to take out a license.”

Never was a small sally of wit more thoroughly successful. Mr. Blake laughed till he cried, and when he had done, wiped his eyes with a snuffy handkerchief, and cried till he laughed again. As, somehow, I could not conceal from myself a suspicion as to my friend’s mirth, I merely consoled myself with the French adage, that he laughs best who laughs last; and went on—

“It will not be deemed surprising, sir, that a man should come to the discovery I have just mentioned more rapidly by having enjoyed the pleasure of intimacy with your family; not only by the example of perfect domestic happiness presented to him, but by the prospect held out that a heritage of the fair gifts which adorn and grace married life, may reasonably be looked for among the daughters of those, themselves the realization of conjugal felicity.”

Here was a canter with a vengeance; and as I felt blown, I slackened my pace, coughed, and resumed:

“Miss Mary Blake, sir, is then the object of my present communication; she it is, who has made an existence that seemed fair and pleasurable before, appear blank and unprofitable without her. I have, therefore—to come at once to the point—visited you this morning, formally to ask her hand in marriage; her fortune, I may at once observe, is perfectly immaterial—a matter of no consequence; (so Mr. Blake thought also) a competence fully equal to every reasonable notion of expenditure—”

“There—there; don’t,” said Mr. Blake, wiping his eyes with a sob like a hiccup, “don’t speak of