Volume VIII

The Standard,

OR FRONTIER GAZETTE.

No. XXIIII

Price 15s.] SAINT ANDREWS, NEW BRUNSWICK, FRIDAY MORNING, JUNE 18, 1841. [17s. 6d. by Mail.

THE DEED OF SEPARATION.

A TALE.

BY MRS. ASDY.

Emma Wilmot, a blooming sprightly girl of eighteen, was reading the newspaper to her mother and uncle in the boudoir of the former, and had just finished the account of an alarming fire in London. "Uncle," she said, "I think there are very few sights you have not seen; pray were you ever present at a tremendous fire?"

"Yes, Emma," replied Major Hervey; "I was once present at a fire tremendous enough even to gratify a young lady's taste for horrors; it was the most awful description of fire, because it was the work of an incendiary, and combustibles had been laid to give its progress artificial rapidity; it was not a London fire either, where the spring of a watchman's rattle acts as the wave of an enchanter's wand in procuring engines and assistance from every quarter. It took place in a retired country situation, ten miles from any town, and, to sum up the horrors, it was at the house of my most dear and valued friends."

"Will you tell me the particulars, uncle?" said Emma "that is, if it will not make you sad to do so."

"It will not make me sad, Emma, for that fire is connected with the most pleasurable event in my life, and most happy am I, for the sake of my friends, that it took place."

"Perhaps your friends were poor," said Emma; "had insured their house much beyond its value, and were glad of the additional money?"

"No, Emma, you are wrong; the house of my friend was certainly insured, but the insurance was beneath its value, and they lost many little articles of use and ornament endeared to them by circumstances, and which no money could replace; however, they found an article more precious than any they had lost."

"Oh! now I guess the mystery—they discovered a concealed treasure in the ruins."

"You are at once right and wrong: they certainly gained a treasure, or rather they regained it, for they had possessed it once, and wantonly cast it away."

"Now uncle, you speak in riddles: do pray tell me the story."

Major Hervey looked at Lady Wilmot, who gave a nod and smile of assent, and he began his narrative.

"About twenty years ago, Emma, I went to pay a visit to a young married couple, for whom I had a sincere regard; they lived in a beautiful country-house, surrounded by spacious grounds. It was spring; the whole neighborhood seemed one sheet of blossoms, and the clustering branches of the lilac and laburnum gave beauty and fragrance to my walk through the avenue leading to the residence of Sir Edgar and Lady Falkland. They were young, handsome, wealthy, intellectual, and yet my visit to them was of a melancholy nature. They did not live happily together. They had decided on a separation, and the purpose of my journey was to inspect and witness a deed of separate maintenance."

"How very shocking!" said Emma; "nothing can justify the separation of a married couple."

"I do not agree with you there, my dear," said her uncle; "there may be circumstances which justify this painful measure; such, however, were not the circumstances of my friends; the moral conduct of each was unimpeachable, and they were free from extravagance and dissipation; but they were unfortunately too much alike in respects where it would have been most desirable that they should have differed; they were both haughty, exacting, irritable, impatient of slights, and nervously perceptible of slights where no one else would have descried them. I think the faults were as nearly as possible equal on each side. The lady complained of the want of the attentions of a lover in her husband, and the gentleman complained that his wife would not condescend to dress, sing, or smile for his gratification alone, as she was wont to do in the days of courtship. They became contradictory, peevish, and sullen, and a fatal want of confidence ensued on every affair of life, whether trifling or important."

"How different from my dear father and mother," said Emma, "who can never keep anything a moment from each other?"

"The confidence which they withheld from each other," pursued Major Hervey, "they reposed in various quarters, and several of the friends thus injudiciously distinguished made use of the idle and common-place phrase, 'When married people cannot live happily together, it is best for them to separate.'—This advice had an effect which sounder advice often fails in having. It was accepted by each of the parties, and carried into execution. An eminent lawyer was directed to prepare a deed of separation, and, when once signed and witnessed, Lady Falkland was to quit the residence of her husband, and to return to that of her parents. My friends, as you may imagine, were not sitting together. I was shown into the study of Sir Edgar, and I spared no pains or arguments to prevail on him to reconsider his determination, and to endeavour to bear with the little imperfections of his wife, and to persuade her to bear with his own. He would not, however, admit that he had given her any provocation; he seemed thoroughly convinced of her coldness and want of attachment to him. After some cross-questioning, I succeeded in getting him to allow that he was occasionally a little irritable; but such irritability, he said, would soon disappear, were it not kept alive by the provoking and taunting remarks of his wife."

"He should have been married to such a woman as my dear mamma," said Emma; "she is so mild and patient, that she would soften the most irritable temper in the world."

"Do not praise your mother quite so enthusiastically, my love," said Lady Wilmot, smiling; "it is almost as bad as praising yourself."

"When I found," continued Major Hervey, "that all my persuasions were in vain, I was obliged tacitly to consent to the introduction of Mr. Chambers, the lawyer, with the deed of separation; he produced this document out of a tin box, which appeared to me more fatal than the box of Pandora, since Hope could not be supposed to repose at the bottom of it. When the deed, however, was read to me, I could not but do justice to the liberality of Sir Edgar; the fortune brought to him by his wife was small, and had been settled on herself for pin-money, but the allowance he proposed making to her was large, even in proportion to his extensive income. He expressed every wish for her comfort and happiness. Her father and mother were to come to the Hall on the ensuing day to witness the deed of separation, and to take their daughter to their home. He asked me whether I thought they would be satisfied with the liberality of his provision for her, and I unhesitatingly answered in the affirmative; although, knowing their kind, tender, and feeling natures, my very heart was wrung at the anticipation of their visit. I proceeded from Sir Edgar's apartment to that of Lady Falkland, and vainly hoped that I might be more successful with her than I had been with her husband. I had known and loved her from her earliest youth; I had stood by the altar when her hand was joined with that of Sir Edgar, and deep was my sorrow to think that aught but death should dissolve that holy union. I could not, however, bend or soften her haughty spirit. 'She was undervalued, she said—'she was despised by her husband; she had always met with fondness and affection under the roof of her parents, and thither she would return.' I wished her to request a private interview with Sir Edgar; this she declined. She had not, she said, for many weeks seen him, except in the presence of a third person; but she promised me that, in honour of my arrival, she would dine at the table that day. It was a formal and melancholy dinner, and Mr. Chambers, who made the fourth of our little party, was the only unembarrassed person among us."

"O that terrible lawyer!" said Emma, "how I should have detested the sight of him!"

"Then you would have felt very unjustly, my dear girl," said Major Hervey; "he was a worthy and upright man; he could not refuse to draw up the deed in question when required to do so, and as he was only professionally acquainted with Sir Edgar and Lady Falkland, and not a private friend of either party, it would have been unreasonable to expect that he should look very unhappy about the matter. We are apt to exact too much from lawyers and medical men; we should reflect that long familiarity with scenes of distress, if it fail to harden, the feelings, will at all events subdue the outward expression of them. They grieve like other men for the misfortunes of their friends and relatives; but if they gave a tribute of ardent sympathy to the sufferings of every client or patient, they would be living in a state of perpetual excitement, highly unfavourable to the cool deliberate self-possession so requisite in each of their professions. Lady Falkland quitted us soon after dinner. Mr. Chambers and I joined her in the drawing-room, but Sir Edgar had retired to his study. Lady Falkland was sad and silent; in fact, the whole room presented a dreary appearance, her harp and piano-forte were in packing cases ready for removal; a table near the window, which used to be covered with engravings, books in gay bindings, and a splendid album, was now despoiled of all its ornaments; her writing desk and work-box were not in their accustomed places, and a beautiful portrait of herself, taken before her marriage, was removed.

"Mr. Chambers retired early. I made one more attempt to work on the feelings of Lady Falkland. I even appealed to the weakness of her character, by endeavouring to represent to her the consequence and responsibility of the situation she was deserting, and the insignificant station in society held by a separated wife; but Lady Falkland was not worldly or ambitious, she was only vain and exacting; she persevered in her resolution, and I sorrowfully bade her good night. All that now remained in my power, was fervently to entreat the heavenly disposer of events, in my prayers, to have pity on this poor deluded young couple, to change their proud hearts, to bow their headstrong spirits, and to lead them at some future time again to find comfort and happiness in each other. I remained wrapt in thought for about an hour, looking with dread to the events of the morrow, and at length fell asleep.

"I awoke again; it was still dark, and I was immediately sensible of a decided smell of fire. I was thoroughly alarmed; several fires had lately taken place in that neighborhood, which were supposed to be the work of a man of low character and habits, who had rendered himself offensive to many of the surrounding families; and this man, the garrulous old steward had informed me on the preceding day, had been threatened by Sir Edgar with a prosecution for poaching, and he had been heard to avow that he would be revenged on him. I instantly aroused Sir Edgar; we gave the alarm to the servants, and finding that the fire had only reached a part of the building, and that we had plenty of time for our operations, I dismissed some of them to the neighbouring farm-houses for assistance, and employed others to rescue whatever was most valuable and important from the flames.

First of all, however, I spoke to Lady Falkland's own maid, telling her to awaken her gently and quietly, to explain to her that the flames were yet far from the part of the house where she slept; and having assisted her to dress, to conduct her to a large covered summer-house at the bottom of the garden, where I desired all the females of the family to assemble for the present. Sir Edgar, and I were actively employed for some time in directing the labours of the servants, who removed many articles from the house; at length the flames spread with such rapidity, that we were compelled to desist, and I walked down to the summer-house to console and reassure Lady Falkland. Imagine my surprise at discovering that she was not there; her maid informed me that on entering her room she found it vacant, her bed had not been slept on, nor were any of her clothes to be discovered; it was evident that she had been awake, and was sitting up at the time of the alarm, and had provided for her own safety by flight.

"I must say that I felt more angry with Lady Falkland than terrified about her, for I supposed that, unwilling to identify herself with the interests of her household, or to run the risk of any communication with the husband she was about to leave, she had sought refuge in one of the farm-houses in the vicinity. I thought it right, however, to inform Sir Edgar of her absence, and was returning to the front of the house with that purpose, when I was startled by a piercing shriek from Lady Falkland's maid, who followed me. I looked up in the direction to which she pointed, and at the window of a little apartment above the drawing-room, what was my horror to behold Lady Falkland making despairing signs for assistance! This little room had been a great favourite with Sir Edgar and herself during the early months of her marriage, on account of the extensive prospect it commanded; she had fitted it up with bookshelves, a guitar, and painting materials, and they passed much of their time there. It afterwards appeared that, unable to sleep, the idea had struck Lady Falkland that she would take a last farewell of this room, endeared by so many early and tender remembrances: she sat down on a low ottoman there, her own peculiar seat, rested her head on the chair usually occupied by Sir Edgar, and gave vent to her grief in repeated and passionate sobs, till at length she fell into that dull and heavy sleep so often the result of continued weeping.

"She awoke to a scene of awful danger: she attempted to open the door, but the flames and smoke that assailed her immediately drove her to the window; it was two stories from the ground; death would be the result of an endeavour to leap from it. One of the servants immediately ran to a neighbouring farm, where, he said, was a ladder of sufficient length to reach the window; but how poor appeared this prospect of relief, when the danger was so immediate and imminent! the staircase was in flames; who could venture to ascend it? I offered large pecuniary rewards to the person who should save her life. One of the under-gardeners, tempted by my munificence, advanced a few steps into the house, and then returned.

"'I shall be suffocated in the attempt,' he said, 'and what will become of my widow and fatherless children?'

"At that moment Sir Edgar, who had been giving directions in a different part of the premises, made his appearance, and, more by gestures than by words, we pointed out to him the situation of his wife. I shall never forget his agonised cry of distress; but he did not waste a moment in deliberation: he snatched from me my military cloak, and rushed into the house. The old steward, who had been in the family at the time of his birth, endeavoured to hold him back.

"'You are rushing to certain death, dear Sir Edgar,' he cried; 'pray return.'

But Sir Edgar shook him off.

"'I will save her life,' he exclaimed 'or lose my own in the attempt;' and in another moment he disappeared up the blazing staircase. I had scarcely time to hope, before Lady Falkland gave me fresh cause of alarm. The flames were approaching rapidly to the place where she stood; she evidently contemplated the desperate measure of a leap from the window; and I was shuddering at the idea of speedily beholding her mangled form, when I saw her drawn back by a strong hand. Sir Edgar wrapped the cloak around her, and carred her from the window. Once more I venture to breathe; as Sir Edgar had ascended the staircase without material injury, I trusted that he might descend it in the same manner; but at that moment the event so long anticipated took place, the staircase fell with a tremendous crash, and all hopes of retreat were cut off. A dreadful and inevitable death seemed now the portion of these young people; but there was a melancholy consolation in the idea that they should die clasped in each other's arms, and exchanging mutual assurance of forgiveness. My head began to swim, and my eyes to feel dim, and I was on the point of sinking to the ground, when loud shouting voices near me aroused me to preception: a party of men were approaching bearing the expected ladder, and headed by Dennis O'Flagherty, an Irish labourer at the farm. Even at this moment the thought passed through my mind of the strange manner in which we estimate the value of a person according to the existence of local circumstances. I had frequently during my visits at the hall, conversed with Dennis Flagherty and amused myself much with his brogue, his blunders, and his uncouth manners. I knew him to be an honest and good-natured fellow, but it never entered into my head that he could possibly be of use to me in any other point of view than a person to be laughed at; but now when I contemplated his athletic frame, his muscular limbs, and his bold bearing, I felt that the most gifted genius, or the most polished courtier of the age, would be an object of inferior consequence in my eyes to Dennis Flagherty, and the sweetest music would have been less delightful to my ears than the powerful brogue which made itself heard above all the uproar, in vehement commands to his companions to 'waste no time, but set up the ladder quick and steady.' It was speedily put up under Dennis's direction; he was at the top in a moment. Sir Edgar deposited the fainting Lady Falkland in his arms, he speedily bore her down, and Sir Edgar followed in safety. Three loud cheers broke from the assembled spectators as he reached the ground. I could not join in their acclamations, but I silently and fervently offered up a thanksgiving to Heaven for the preservation of my dear young friends, and a prayer that the circumstances attending it might have a beneficial effect on their future lives. Lady Falkland was not hurt by the flames, although weeping and hysterical through alarm: she was immediately borne to the farm, and medical assistance was procured for her. Sir Edgar had not escaped so well; he was severely scorched, and in great pain, but in the midst of his sufferings he could not refrain from telling me of his happiness; the few minutes that elapsed between his entrance into Lady Falkland's room, and the arrival of the ladder, had passed in mutual entreaties for pardon, in the most tender interchange of protestations of affection, and in lamentations over their too probable seperation from each other by death although they had both so recently desired to effect a separation in life. At length the medical man, having left Lady Falkland, took Sir Edgar under his care, and immediately silenced his transports by a composing draught;—fire-engines arrived from the country-town, and in a few hours the house had ceased to blaze; presenting, however, a lamentable spectacle of blakened and smoking ruins.

"Morning came, the father and mother of Lady Falkland were expected, and I rode to meet them, anxious to acquaint them with the happy change in the prospects of their daughter: they were astonished that I should greet them with a smile, still more so when I described the tremendous scene of the preceding night, which seemed little calculated to excite such a token of pleasure; but most grateful were they when I finished my story, and frequently did they return thanks to the gracious Lord, who had thus wonderfully and mysteriously wrought good out of evil.

"I led them to the farm, where they fondly embraced their beloved daughter; she was sitting by the bedside of her husband, who, when no longer supported by temporary excitement, was suffering severely from the effects of his hurts, and a tender and affecting scene ensued. When I left the room, I encountered Mr. Chambers, the lawyer.

"'I am exceedingly sorry,' he said to me, with a look of doleful apology, 'but I have reason to fear that the deed of separation has been destroyed in the flames.'

"'So much the better,' I replied cheerfully; 'Sir Edgar and Lady Falkland are now happily reconciled, and the deed of separation, even if recovered, would be no better than waste paper.'

"Pardon me, Major,' said he, with a provoking curve of the lip; 'you can only conjecture that point—we lawyers are not to be satisfied except with proofs, and time alone can prove that the deed will not be again required.'

"I was glad to escape from this doubting gentleman to the clamorous rejoicings and congratulations of Dennis O'Flaherty. I gave him a sum of money, which Sir Edgar afterwards trebled, and I resolved in my own mind never to laugh at his blunders again, since he had so happily refrained from blundering in a case of life and death. Lady Falkland attended her husband with the most unremitting tenderness and assiduity during an illness of several weeks; on his recovery they passed some months in travelling, and neither of them made any complaints of want of attention on the part of the other. The house was rebuilt exactly in the same form, but it was more attractive to my eyes than it had ever been, for it had now become a 'Mansion of Peace.'"

"And do you really think it possible, uncle," said Emma "that a couple who were once on the verge of separation, could be thoroughly happy afterwards?"

"It is not only possible, but it is true," said Major Hervey; "they are as happy, Emma, as your own dear father and mother."

"Now, uncle, I cannot believe you; I shall be like your sceptical friend, Mr. Chambers, only satisfied with proofs."

"Then I will give you a proof, Emma, which will be quite satisfactory even to the sceptical Mr. Chambers; it is of your own dear father and mother I have been speaking."

Emma cast a wondering, incredulous glance towards her mother.

"Surely my uncle is jesting?" said she.

"No, my love," answered Lady Wilmot; "he has given you, under imaginary names, a narrative of facts. The awful scene took place 20 years ago, on this very site, and the room where we are now sitting answers to the one in which I stood, momentarily expecting a painful and violent death, and shrinking from the idea of appearing before my Creator with a spirit irritated by angry pride, and a conscience burdened with neglect and deficiance of my duties as a wife and as a Christian. I trust that by the assistance of Providence I have been enabled to correct the faults of my temper, and most happy, my dear Emma, am I to say, that I have never observed any indications of the same imperious and exacting disposition in you; but in case any further alteration in your situation should bring to light defects in your temper hitherto unknown, I am glad that your uncle has told you these particulars of the early wedded life of myself and your father. Your choice, I trust, will be cautious and prudent; but that choice once made, consider that it is equally your duty and interest to bear patiently with the foibles of the object of it, and ever remember that the bonds you assume are not merely light and temporary ties, but are to be worn by yourself, and by the husband of your selection, in fidelity and constancy, 'so long as ye both shall live.'"

Thomas Moore.—Mr. Moore's singing and playing, though remarkably effective at all times, are peculiarly so when the subject is of a plaintive nature. Various instances of his triumph in this way over the human heart have been mentioned to me.—Some years ago, when the present Lord Canterbury was Speaker of the House of Commons, Mr. Moore was in the habit of attending all the parties given by Lady Canterbury, then Lady Manners Sutton. These parties were usually given during the session, on the Wednesday evening; the probabilities being greater that evening, than any other, that there would be no house. On these occasions, when Mr. Moore "favoured the company with a song," which he did almost every night, Lady Manners Sutton, having previously discovered that while Mr. M. was singing his own 'Melodies' the servants were invariably attracted to the door of the drawing-room, by the mingled music of the voice and the touching tones of the piano by which he accompanied it, was latterly in the habit of kindly and considerately throwing open the door entirely, and inviting all her household to listen, in the passages, to the melody which Mr. Moore so sweetly and eloquently discoursed. One of the effects produced by the singing and playing of his own matchless 'Melodies,' some idea may be formed when I mention that all who listened to him, the lords and ladies inside and the lackeys and kitchen maids in the passages, were often to be seen affected even to tears. What greater proof of the merits of Mr. Moore's "Melodies," or his powers as a vocalist and instrumental performer, could be desired than was furnished in the triumphs he thus equally achieved over the most cultivated minds, and over minds which could scarcely be said to have received any cultivation at all? Mr. Moore is a man of great kindness of disposition. He is not only easy of access, but is also ready to do anything in his power to oblige those who ask a favour of him. There is no affectation about him; he never demeans himself as if he supposed that his genius or reputation would justify the assumption of an air of superiority over others. It were well if some authors, without a tithe of his talents or reputation, were to learn a lesson from him in this respect.—*Portraits of public Characters.*

Time is money.

Original issues in Poor Condition
Best copy available