

"In troth! but it is a loss, Mr. Bindloose; and what say ye to the loss of a friend?"

This was a possibility which had never entered the lawyer's long list of calamities, and he was at some loss to conceive what the old lady could possibly mean by so sentimental an effusion. But just as he began to come out with his "Ay, ay, we are all mortal; *Vita incerta, mors certissima!*" and two or three more pithy reflections, which he was in the habit of uttering after funerals, when the will of the deceased was about to be opened, Mrs. Dods was pleased to become the expounder of her own oracle.

"I see how it is, Mr. Bindloose," she said? "I maun tell my ain ailment, for you are no likely to guess it; and so, if ye will shut the door, and see that nae of your giggling callants are listening in the passage, I will e'en tell you how things stand with me."

Mr. Bindloose hastily arose to obey her commands, gave a cautionary glance into the Bank-office, and saw that his idle apprentices were fast at their desks—turned the key upon them, as if it were in a fit of absence, and then returned, not a little curious to know what could be the matter with his old friend; and leaving off all further attempts to put cases, quietly drew his chair near her's, and awaited her own time to make her communication.

"Mr. Bindloose," said she, "I am no sure that you may mind, about six or seven years ago, that there were twa daft English callants, lodgers of mine, that had some trouble from auld St. Ronan's about shooting on the Springwell headmoors."

"I mind it as weel as yesterday, Mistress," said the Clerk; "by the same token you gave me a note for my trouble, (which was na worth speaking about,) and bade me no bring in a bill against the puir burns—ye had aye a kind heart, Mrs. Dods."

"May be, and may be no, Mr. Bindloose—that is just as I find folk—But concerning these lads, they baith left the country, and, as I think, in some ill blude wi' ane another; and now the auldest and the doucest of the two came back again about a fortnicht sin syne, and has been my guest ever since."

"A weel, and I trust he is not at his auld tricks again, goodwife," answered the Clerk. "I have na sae mickle to say either wi' the new Sheriff or the Bench of Justices as I used to hae, Mrs. Dods—and the Procurator-fiscal is very severe on poaching; being borne out by the new Association—few of our auld friends of the Killnakeilly are able to come to the sessions now, Mrs. Dods."

"The waur for the country, Mr. Bindloose—they were decent, considerate men, that didna plague a puir herd callant mickle about a moor-fowl or a mawkin, unless he turned common fowler—Sir Robert Ringhorse used to say, the herd lads shot as mony gleds and pyots as they did game.—But new lords new laws—naething but fine and imprisonment, and the game not a feather the plentier.—If I wad hae a brace or two of birds in the house, as every body looks for them, after the twelfth—I ken what they are like to cost me—and what for no?—risk maun be paid for.—There is John Pirner himself has keepit the muir-side thirty years in spite of a' the lairds in the country; that shoots, he tells me, as if he felt a rape about his neck."

"It wasna about any game business, then, that you wanted advice?" said Bindloose, who, though somewhat of a digresser himself, made little allowance for the excursions of others from the subject in hand.

"Indeed, is it no, Mr. Bindloose," said Meg; "but it is e'en about this unhappy callant that I spoke to ye about—Ye maun ken I have cleikit a particular fancy to this lad, Francis Tirl—a fancy that whiles surprises my very sell, Mr. Bindloose, only that there is nae sin in it."

"None—none in the world, Mrs. Dods," said the lawyer, thinking at the same time within his own mind, "Oho! the mist begins to clear up—the young poacher has hit the mark, I see—winged the old barren grey hen—ay, ay—a marriage contract, no doubt—but I maun gie her line.—Ye are a wise woman, Mrs. Dods," he continued aloud, "and can doubtless consider the chances and the changes of human affairs."

"But I could never have considered what has befallen this puir lad, Mr. Bindloose, through the malice of wicked men. He lived then at the Cleikum, as I tell you, for mair than a fortnicht, as quiet as a lamb on a lea-rig—a decenter lad never came within my door—ate and drank aneugh for the gude of the house, and nae mair than was for his ain gude, whether of body or soul—cleared his bills ilka Saturday at u'en, as regularly as Saturday came round."

"An admirable customer, no doubt, Mrs. Dods," said the lawyer.