

XIV.—CALUMNY.

“There’s noan sa blind but they can see
Sum fawts i’ other men ;
I’ve sometime met wi’ folk ’at thought
They saw sum i’ theirsens.”

Occupation is the best armour of the soul, and these affairs had kept Edith busy during the first weeks of her separation from Joe. At the very time when that fateful journey to Manchester took place, she had been trying to decide upon some plan for the summer.

But the first decision Edith came to, when she was left to her own decisions, was, that she must remain in her home. Under her own roof, with such protection as her husband’s relatives could give her, she felt sure no one would dare to interfere in her personal affairs or darken her good name.

Her very position made her fearless of offence on this ground. Over her manor her sway was in a measure absolute. No one had ever presumed to discuss her doings. Even her marriage had provoked no adverse criticisms. She could scarcely imagine people interfering in her private affairs, much less making her in any way conscious that they had been guilty of such presumption.

And in another way, Amos was quite as proud and comfortable. It was a well understood thing in his circle that those who meddled with Amos Braithwaite would be apt to get more than they looked for. Amos never forgave such interferences, and he had arrived at a position which generally enabled him to make prompt and severe reprisals. If Luke Bradley had been alive in those days, he would have found a quarrel with Amos Braithwaite a very serious matter. So Amos, during these summer months, had gone on re-furnishing his house, and devoting all his spare hours to his daughter-in-law, without any idea that people were expressing themselves in no very flattering terms concerning them.

True, Perkins had told him what Arneliff had said, and even intimated that others had ventured on similar opinions; but Amos had understood that all such adverse criticism referred to Joe; and he was not very sure but Joe deserved it; though he always concluded such a private admission with the muttered threat—“Let me hear tell o’ them saying aught against Joe. My word! but I’ll mak’ ’em sorry for it.”

However, when the summer was over, when the rector and his wife returned from Norway, and Lady Wilson from the Rhine, and Lady Charlton from the Scotch Highlands, and other lesser social lights from the English watering places, it was not long before Edith was compelled to notice how far she had fallen in the sight of such exclusives.

And, as it happened, the first Sunday when Edith met all these