

—so these are under my care at present."

"Which," said Lady Malcolm, "I hope will not be long. Well, my dear children, I am overjoyed at your good fortune; and now our gaiety must cease for a time, which I shall not in the least regret."

Lord Malcolm, who had passed hitherto as a poor Scotch nobleman, about to commit great folly in marrying a country squire's daughter, failed not to acquaint two or three of his most confidential friends with his intended wife's great accession of fortune, the news of which he knew would travel post haste through the clubs in London.

"Oh, demmit!" exclaimed the Captain to Lord Henry Bayntum, as he was lounging at the club window in St. James' street, "that fellow Malcolm has picked up one worth having, after all—just two hundred thousand yellow boys—pon honor, what a prize!"

"What do you mean, Markham?" inquired Lord Henry.

"That Lady Constance, Will Beauchamp's sister, has had that amount left her by the Earl of Annandale, and she is engaged to Malcolm."

"I'll bet you a pony it is all chaff," replied Lord Henry.

"Done, Bayntum—make it fifty, or a hundred, if you like."

"No, a pony will do; but how is the bet to be decided?"

"Doctors' Commons, old fellow—read the will—no mistake there."

Lord Ayrshire, although experiencing great relief in the disappearance of Miss Douglas from the fashionable world after his rejection, could not suppress his curiosity, on meeting Lord Malcolm, to know the truth of the reports in circulation, and congratulated him on his good fortune. "You have kept things very close, Malcolm, between yourself and Miss Beauchamp, although I suspected how the case stood."

"You forget my warning in Tattersall's yard—that Miss Beauchamp was certainly bespoken, if not Miss Douglas also; but a 'wilt' mon maun have his way," as we say in Scotland, and had you followed my advice, you would have spared yourself the disagreeable necessity of being further enlightened on this matter."

"Oh, then, I suppose Mr. Harcourt has informed you what occurred in your absence?"

"No, Ayrshire, not a word has escaped Mr. Harcourt's lips, that I am aware of, on this subject; but Lady Malcolm has of course confided to me your proposal for my cousin, which you may feel assured will go no further."

"I thank you, Malcolm, for this kind consideration, as you know it would not be very agreeable to have this little affair going the round of the clubs. But may I know to whom your too lovely cousin is engaged, for such I am told is the case?"

"You expect me to keep your secret, Ayrshire, and ask me at the same time to reveal another's; is this consistent?"

"No, my dear fellow, obviously not; but my reason for inquiring is, that were the thing not definitely arranged, I should be disposed to renew my suit to the young lady herself."

"And that would unquestionably be attended with the same result," added Lord Malcolm, which at once put a stop to further questions.

The second morning after this explanation, while Mr. Harcourt was busily engaged reading the debates in the House of Commons, the footman brought in a card, saying the gentleman was waiting in the hall.

"Mangle!" exclaimed Mr. Harcourt; "I don't know any such person—why did you admit him?"

"He stepped in before I could shut the door, sir," replied the man, "although I said you were not at home."

"Most extraordinary conduct," muttered Mr. Harcourt, fusing and fuming with nervous trepidation; "but I suppose, my dear,

—as you represent this gentleman to be," replied Mr. Harcourt, now gaining courage, "the property was entailed both in the male and female line to the descendants of the elder branch of the family, and therefore, my niece is undoubtedly heiress at law, as the only child of Mr. Cameron Douglas."

"I think, sir, we shall be able to show that the deed of entail was not properly registered according to Scotch law, and is therefore invalid. But my present object, sir, in calling upon you, is to state that we have directed our agent in Scotland to serve notices on the tenants of the property, not to pay any more rents to yourself or any person on behalf of Miss Douglas; but as our client does not wish to press heavily on his cousin, I am further instructed to say that if, on producing the evidence requisite to establish his claim, immediate possession of the estates is surrendered, he will forego his right to the reimbursement of the rents and profits received by you for her use since her father's decease."

"Very well, sir," replied Mr. Harcourt, writing his solicitors' address on a card; "these are the names of my legal advisers, to whom I must refer you for any further communication on this most extraordinary business;" hearing which, Mr. Mangle, with a stiff bow, made his exit.

CHAPTER XLII.

"A pleasant piece of intelligence, truly," exclaimed Mrs. Harcourt, when the door closed; "so we are to refund all the money we have received on account of that wilful, perverse girl, who would have married Lord Danby and been off our hands by this time, if you had exercised your authority as her guardian ought to have done, and not given way to her ridiculous fancies about love and such nonsense."

"You know very well, Mrs. Harcourt, I could not compel her to marry against her inclination; but as she is now under Mrs. Gordon's protection, I shall resign my guardianship in favor of that lady; that is, in the event of this young man establishing his claim to the property, or producing any documents likely to prove it; this is the course, my dear, I shall adopt."

"And a very wise one, too, Mr. Harcourt, and the sooner that is done the better."

"Well, my dear, I will order the carriage directly—go first into the city to see my solicitors, and prepare them for a visit from this Mr. Mangle, and then call in Grosvenor Square, to apprise Lady Malcolm and Mrs. Gordon of what has occurred."

The consternation of these two ladies, when informed by Mr. Harcourt that a claimant had arisen to dispute their niece's right to her father's property, may be imagined. They sat in mute astonishment and dismay, as that gentleman proceeded in his narrative; when, at its close, Mrs. Gordon exclaimed, "It is all a trick, Mr. Harcourt, a vile imposition, as my brother was never married to that woman until a few weeks previous to his death, and his youngest child a daughter, was then two years old."

"But how can you prove this, Mrs. Gordon?—that is the question."

"By the servant who lived with him at that time, as nurse to his children, and afterwards returned to this country with the woman he had made his wife."

"And where is she to be found, Mrs. Gordon?"

"Somewhere in Scotland; but where I cannot tell, although two years ago she wrote to me for money, which I sent to the address she gave me—Janet Maclean, Stranraer."

"Then, Mrs. Gordon, it is necessary to ascertain without delay if this Janet Maclean still lives, and her place of abode, as she will be a most important witness, and on her evidence our chief dependence rests. If we

"You are too hasty, my dear Blanche, in taking the claim so impudently advanced by these unprincipled people as a just and legal one; pray do nothing hastily, and promise me not to offer such an insult to William Beauchamp's love and high sense of honor, as you propose. We shall have the lawyer's opinion in a few days, and then it will be time enough to determine how we ought to act."

The next day, Mr. Mangle, having made an appointment with Mr. Harcourt's solicitors, which Macvittie attended, produced the alleged marriage certificate of Archibald Douglas to Susan Monkton, which Messrs. Borum and Teagle having carefully scanned, pronounced to be apparently an authentic document.

"So far then, so good," chuckled Mr. Mangle, "and we shall be prepared to prove by Mrs. Archibald Douglas, and other witnesses, the birth of a son, ten months after the date of this certificate, which I conclude will be quite sufficient to establish our claim."

"Not quite, I think," observed Mr. Teagle; "there are some other points to be considered."

"Pray may I be permitted to have a look at that little document?" inquired Macvittie, in the most insinuating manner.

"On whose behalf, sir?" demanded Mr. Mangle.

"Lord Malcolm, sir; Miss Douglas' cousin, who is interested in the family property, failing Miss Douglas."

"Oh, certainly," replied Mr. Mangle, "although I do not trust it out of my own hands."

"I do not covet it, my dear sir," replied Macvittie, adjusting his spectacles on his nose with great deliberation; "pray keep it in your own hand, which will do very well—just a trifle more to the light, my dear sir, as my eye-sight is rather dim. Thank you, thank you do."

"Well, sir," asked Mr. Mangle, "you are also, I conclude, quite satisfied?"

"Yes, my dear sir, perfectly, that the little piece of paper in your hand is not worth a straw."

The countenance of Mangle at this announcement underwent a change, which the keen eye of Macvittie instantly detected. "Ah, my dear sir, very prettily executed, but

"What?" demanded Mr. Mangle, impatiently thrusting the paper into his side pocket.

"I do not attach any very great importance to your case, Mr. Mangle—that is all."

"Will you state your objections, then?"

"No, Mr. Mangle; I must decline doing so at present."

"Very well, gentlemen; then I must wish you good morning, and we shall at once proceed to trial."

On Mr. Mangle's departure, Teagle asked "What flaw did you see in that paper, Macvittie? I could detect none whatever."

"The figure 5 has been altered into 3—and I am quite satisfied, by the change in his face, Mangle knows it. Yet it is so cleverly done, that not one man in a hundred would notice the very slight, almost imperceptible to the naked eye, difference in the color of the ink."

"This after all is a very slender thread to build a frame-work upon," remarked Borum; "and if they bring forward witness to prove the marriage, and the birth of a son as well, we are done for."

"Ay, if they do," replied Macvittie, "that little word if will decide the case; but my impression is, they will not get over that alteration in the figure."

Scarcely had Macvittie turned the corner of Broad Street, in the City, where Borum and Teagle occupied spacious offices, than Mr. Harcourt drew up his carriage, and was immediately shown into Mr. Borum's private room.

"Well, my good sir," began the lawyer,

favourable account of his interview with the lawyer, who, he said, strongly advised a compromise. "Only think, my dear madam, addressing Mrs. Gordon, 'of having to make good all the money expended on your niece's account, for which we are jointly liable.'"

"Excuse me, Mr. Harcourt, you can only be responsible for the appropriation of the rents, which you alone have received, without consulting me in any matter whatever relating to the property; but surely the expenditure has not exceeded one-third of the incomes?"

"You forgot Mrs. Gordon, we have taken a house in town, for the benefit of the best masters, several seasons in succession, which we should not have done on our own account; have kept extra horses and servants for her use, with an expensive governess also, who had a carriage at her command; not to mention dress and other necessary items. Then the outlay for repairs and draining on the property, with the agent's salary has amounted to a large sum annually. But I shall be ready to give an account of my stewardship when required; the point for our present consideration is, whether we should not attempt to make terms with our opponents, before we are forced into a court of law where all may be lost."

"We ought, first, Mr. Harcourt, to have the opinion of the best counsel, before making any overtures, and to be guided by their advice. Lord Malcolm is gone to consult with his solicitor on these matters at my request, and I hope the case is not quite so desperate as you imagine."

"Well, my dear madam," said Mr. Harcourt, rising, "I shall be glad to know as soon as possible how you decide to act, although I anticipate almost certain defeat."

CHAPTER XLIII.

Blanche, who had been present during the latter part of this controversy, after Mr. Harcourt had left, retired to her own room, and locking her door, sat down and wrote a few hurried lines to Beauchamp, acquainting him with what had occurred, and releasing him from his engagement to herself.

She had just sealed the letter and given it to her maid to post herself, when Mrs. Gordon entered the room, telling her that Malcolm had returned with a very different story to Mr. Harcourt's and wished to see her in the drawing-room; "so dry your tears; for, my dearest child, depend upon it, Mr. Harcourt has been frightening us to serve his own purpose, in dread of having to refund all the money he has received."

Malcolm having repeated his conversation he had with Macvittie, and his opinion of the marriage certificate, turning to Blanche, said, "Now, my dear girl, I think Beauchamp will be offended if I do not write him full particulars, as in your present position he ought to be consulted as to our future proceedings."

"Our position is now so completely altered, dear Charles," replied Blanche, bursting into tears, "that I have already released him from his engagement, which I felt bound in honor to do."

"And when, my dear girl, did you write to tell Will Beauchamp that Blanche Douglas was no longer worthy of his love, because a rascally impostor had claimed her property?"

"This afternoon, Charles."

"Is the letter posted, my sensitive little cousin?"

"Yes, I gave it to Alice, to post herself."

"Well, my love, then you have saved me the trouble of using pen and ink; for if Beauchamp, on the receipt of that little document, does not post up to London as fast as four horses can convey him, without stopping day or night, then, my love, I know nothing of

the subject, concluded the conversation by expressing her hopes that she might not be placed under the necessity of offending her cousin by a refusal. "The contingency will not, I trust, ever arrive, my dear girl; and in the meantime, pray raise no further objection to Charles."

There was another point upon which she was equally resolved to break off her engagement with Beauchamp, and she implied her aunt to spare her the agony of an interview with him, should he arrive in London. Four days had now passed; Blanche, from distress of mind and excessive agitation, became restless and nervous to an alarming degree; she could scarcely be prevailed upon to touch anything either at breakfast or dinner; she would see no one but her immediate relations, and sat for hours together in her own room, in dread of Beauchamp's arrival. "Oh, dear aunt," she exclaimed on the fourth evening, "why does he not come? what detain him? Oh, now I wish your next interview with him was over; I shall feel more resigned when that is past; I shall indeed, aunt."

"I fear not, my poor child, and dread your sinking into hopeless despondency; and he, poor fellow! what misery awaits him!"

At this moment, a loud knock at the door reverberated through the hall, on which Blanche sprang from her chair; "Oh, aunt, he is come, that is his knock; pray be quick, and return to me as soon as possible."

Mrs. Gordon descended to the drawing-room, where, pale and haggard, stood Beauchamp, talking to Lady Malcolm and his sister. At her entrance he turned quickly round, and grasping her hand, inquired hastily, "Where is Blanche?"

"In her own room, dear William, and I am sorry to say, so very unwell that I fear you cannot see her."

"Then, if not now, I can see her to-morrow morning?"

Mrs. Gordon was silent.

"Does she refuse to see me at all, then?" he exclaimed, in amazement.

"It is even so, dear William; but come with me into the other room, and I will tell you what I am commissioned to say."

In vain Mrs. Gordon urged all her niece's arguments to avoid an interview which would be so painful to both; in vain she spoke of their altered position, and Blanche's resolution to break off her engagement, unless she was restored to her rightful inheritance.

Beauchamp paced up and down the room in a state of mind bordering on distraction, for some few moments, then confronting Mrs. Gordon, said, in a firm tone, "Cease, dear aunt, this mockery of my woe, and tell Blanche Douglas from me, that I will not quit this roof until I have a refusal from her own lips, see her, I must and will this night."

Mrs. Gordon still attempting to dissuade him from his purpose, he frantically exclaimed: "Go, dear aunt, this moment, and tell Blanche, if she will not see me now, we shall never in this world meet again."

"Well, then, if I bring her down with me, promise to be more calm, for she is in a dreadfully nervous state."

"Yes, aunt, I will be calm; but, mind, see her I will once more."

Mrs. Gordon having explained the state in which she had left her lover, and told Blanche what she dreaded from his words, prevailed on her to see him, and she entered the room in which he was still pacing to and fro, leaning on her aunt's arm, trembling and almost fainting from agitation and exhaustion.

Beauchamp advanced to meet her, and seeing her almost sinking, caught her in his arms, saying, "Come, dear Blanche, come, my heart once more, even if it be for the last time;" and she fell nearly senseless on his breast, sobbing convulsively.

To be Continued.