

'And you may say that Nothing we have to sell seems to be worth anything. All farm produce is a drug in the market. How's Coriander going on? It looks like your gathering a tolerable harvest in April at Newmarket, anyhow. The horse is doing well, I suppose?'

'Yes, I believe so. You know, Mr. Denison, I'm getting too old myself to see after such things. I leave all that to Sam; but he tells me the horse will run well for the Guinea, by accidents.'

'Run well! Bar accidents! Why, bar accidents, he must win,' cried the ever-sanguine Denison. 'I never let now, as you know; but in the old days I should have had a thousand on him.'

'Ah well,' said the old lawyer, 'there's where it is. You always would believe in certainties in racing. I never myself got further than believing a horse would run well.'

'Yes,' laughed the squire; 'and in consequence you made a fortune while I lost one. I'm afraid, too, it would be the same thing all over again if I could begin once more.' Pearman shot a keen look at him from under his grizzled brows, and thought most assuredly that it would be so, and how very much it would facilitate his present design if the squire was a little involved in that way at present. He of course knew the main part of Harold Denison's entanglements, but even he, though his principal man of business, did not know how bad things really were. It would have given him more confidence to unfold the object of his embassy had he been possessed of such knowledge.

'Well, Pearman,' continued the squire, 'I am afraid I have no money left to put upon Coriander. Those old days are gone. Yes, and Denison, bitterly, 'halfpence are of more account to me now than sovereigns were then. But what is it you want to talk to me about. Nothing to my advantage, I'll be bound.'

'I'm afraid not—not but that it might be. But I've never been able, Mr. Denison, to induce you to listen to anything to your own advantage.'

'God, sir, I can call to mind very few of your propositions that tended that way. A few hundreds to be saved here and there, at the cost of total abandonment of my social position—cases in which the saving was incommensurate with the sacrifice.'

'You judge me hardly, Mr. Denison. On the occasions to which you allude, pardon me if I say that it was an overstrained delicacy on your part which prevented matters being brought to a more satisfactory conclusion. It is the way with you all,' muttered the old lawyer, musingly. 'You forget these scruples when they might be of use to you, and hamper us, who have to put your affairs straight, with them afterward.'

'A Denison of Glinn, sir, is not to be included in the same category as a bankrupt trader. I presume,' remarked the squire haughtily.

'No—but it would be better both for him and his creditors if it could be so. You repudiate the idea of all compromise, and say, 'In time, everybody will be paid in full.' The result is, you never get clear, and the creditors are never satisfied.'

'But they will be in time,' returned Harold Denison, and the uncertain tone in which he uttered the words were a stringent commentary on his previous speech.

'It's just about that,' said Pearman, 'that I'm wishing to talk to you now. It's a cruelty that a fine old property like Glinn should be broken up. A good deal of it, you see, has fallen into my hands.'

'You need not remind me of that,' interrupted Harold Denison. 'I am quite aware of the price I am paying for the follies of my younger days.'

'It is not likely I should recall such disagreeable facts to memory, if I had not something to propose with regard to their being to a considerable extent wiped out. You will do me the justice, I think, Mr. Denison, to admit that, since I have had the

now Miss Denison has arrived at a marriageable age, her great personal attractions have claimed the attention of a good many young men in the country.'

The attorney paused, but his auditor looked grimly at the fire, and expressed his feelings by neither word nor gesture.

'Well, a young gentleman of considerable property, and still better expectations, who has had the privilege of meeting Miss Denison, is so struck with her charms and accomplishments that he has commissioned me to ask your permission to try whether he cannot succeed in inducing her to accept him as a husband. On the point of family he is quite aware that he has no pretensions to Miss Denison's hand; but, as regards income, I think there would be nothing to be desired.'

'Who the devil do you mean?' broke in the squire. 'Has Maude given him any encouragement, that you come with this story to me?'

'My dear sir, his acquaintance with Miss Denison is far too slight for anything of that kind ever to have been even thought of on her part. He is merely anxious to have your permission to try his luck. Without that, believe me, he would never dare to aspire to your daughter's hand.'

All this show of deference induced the squire to listen to the proposition, at all events quietly. Who on earth Pearman could have in his eye he had no idea. That he could mean his son all this time never entered Harold Denison's head. He certainly knew he had a son, but, mixing so little as he did in the county now, he had barely seen him, nor had he, but at odd times, even heard of him.

'But who is it, man? Let's know the name of this bashful suitor? God, it's a quality one sees little enough of these days.'

'My son, Mr. Denison, is the gentleman who solicits your permission to do his best to win your daughter.'

'Your son! Why, d—n it all!' and here the squire stopped, perfectly thunderstruck. It was a levelling age, he knew; that the tide of democracy, was at the flood, he was aware; that our cherished institutions were looked on with disdain, that there were people who saw no virtue in coronets, and thought an Established Church a worn-out institution that it would be as well to do away with, he had heard; but that the son of a confounded money-lending attorney should presume to dream of mating with a Denison of Glinn was a *bouleversement* of his world that he had never contemplated. For a few minutes he was literally speechless; then all the pride of race surged up. He came of a line of whom it had been often said that their tongues were as sharp and ready as their swords.

'Excuse me,' he remarked; 'I was not aware that the times were so far advanced that our daughters were regarded as saleable commodities out of their own class of life. I was not aware that the social gap between myself and my solicitor was so effectually bridged over. Your son, sir, will have to take his chance with the young man from the butcher's, and Mr. Muffatee, who keeps the draper's establishment in Kminster. I shall not presume to influence Miss Denison in her choice.'

Old Pearman had many times in the course of his career moralized upon the weakness of losing one's temper about anything, but the squire's sneer brought the blood to his pale temples.

'You take a high hand, sir—a high hand. I asked you to listen to me patiently, and you insult me. I spoke to you humbly enough to start with; but I tell you now that wealth chooses its mate from blood in these days, and that many as well-born as Miss Denison have married not a bit better lineage than mine.'

'Perhaps so. People forget themselves in all classes, and forget their social status; but, by Heaven, it's getting time for money-grubbers to learn one thing, and that is—

lawyer's proposal with rather more courtesy.

CHAPTER IV.

THE FIRST TURN OF THE SCREW.

The solicitor drove away, fuming with indignation. 'Pompous, poverty-stricken fool!' were the epithets he applied to the squire, in these first moments of his wrath. Even a usurious solicitor is possessed of pride of some kind, and, though he may hold it in tolerable subjection during the early stages of his career, like other men's, it waxes fat and thrives wonderfully under the accumulation of wealth. Harold Denison had trampled it remorselessly under foot. Then the irritation subsided, and the astute old head once more began to reckon up the chances of the game. He played it all over again in his own mind. 'No,' he muttered; 'don't think I made any mistakes. I was a fool to lose my temper, though. Hadn't I made up my mind, all along, that he'd take it pretty much in that way to start with? 'Lord,' chuckled the old man, 'when I think how many of 'em I've seen run rusty about their family names, places, and plate! It was foolish—ay, very foolish—to be annoyed at Denison's tantrums. Names!—bah!' continued the old man, contemptuously. 'If it came all the way from the Conqueror, is worth on stamped paper is the only valid test.'

'Yes,' he continued, still turning the subject over in his mind. 'He's on his stilts just now, and has not had time to grasp the solid advantages that will accrue to him. He's been a mad spendthrift, has Harold Denison; but he was a man who, in those days, even thought more of his own personal comforts and convenience than he ever did of his wife's. Selling Mannersley hurt his pride; but I don't think he ever gave a thought as to how he was curtailing his daughter's inheritance. It'll work! only give it time. I've often said pike-fishing is the only sport worth studying. It's the game of life in miniature. You have to use the gudgeons to tempt the big fish. I have kept little men afloat in their difficulties, to induce those who really had property to come to me. 'Give them plenty of time to gorge,' too, is another good maxim; and never put too much strain on the line. Yes,' chuckled the cynical old attorney once more. 'Men are good deal like pike in their rapacity and foolishness. Something tells me that Harold Denison will swallow the bait. Only wait patiently, and things generally come round. Those that can't afford, or haven't patience, to wait, are bound to suffer.'

Sam Pearman, when he heard the result of his father's mission, took rather a different view of it from his progenitor. As a younger man he lacked patience; and then, moreover, was there not the blow to his self-esteem? Between twenty and thirty we feel that acutely; from thirty to forty, with a sort of modified soreness; at fifty the conceit has been taken out of most of us, and we are no longer astonished at finding that the world rates us a little lower than our own valuation. Electroplate may pass for gold for a short season, in these days, but society is pretty certain to detect the ring of false metal ere very long.

Samuel the junior had so far been a fortunate man in pursuit of his ambition. Though not so successful as he could have wished, yet, to a certain extent, he had worked his way into the county society. There were many houses that he was occasionally to, as an odd bachelor to make up. But here he thought to establish his position by a *coup de main*. Despite all his father had said at the time, a man with Sam Pearman's eye to the main chance could not conceive a man in Harold Denison's position rejecting a proposal so very much to his own advantage. He might recognise a cer-

tainly was passed, that his ships were hurt and himself defeated. He knew, too well, that to raise that ten thousand anywhere else would result in an exposure of his affairs tantamount to ruin. He was quite aware that Pearman was equally conversant with the fact. He prepared himself for the impending crash.

But there is a certain amount of notice requisite on the calling-in of a mortgage, and this gave Harold Denison time to reflect; whether for good or evil the readers of the story must determine. Had the blow fallen at once, he would have abandoned Glinn, grimly, and set up his lowly tent in some remote watering-place. But the crafty solicitor had measured the strength of his prey with great accuracy. It was not without design that the notice of the foreclosure of the mortgage had been delayed. 'Give it time—give it time,' quoth that fisher of feeble humanity. He was right; and day after day did Harold Denison ponder over the old fisherman's term's; at first contemptuously, then moodily, until at last he began to think it was his duty to retain Glinn at all hazards. Once arrived thus far, the speciousness of the reasoning became easy and rapid. 'The lands I received from my ancestors it is my duty to transmit to my descendants.' A fine country-gentleman's sentiment, that would have invariably insured a round of applause at the farmer's ordinary in any market-town of respectable dimensions. No, of course, it was all plain sailing morally. As a personal matter, the meanest lodgings at Hastings or St. Leonards would have sufficed. It were better so than to see a Denison of Glinn so vilely mated. But there were other ties to be considered. He, Harold Denison, had undoubtedly betrayed the trust of a long line of ancestors, played the devil with the property, and made the ancient name of Denison a byword with the children of Israel. There was but one way to restore all this, and that was contained in Pearman's proposition. He did not dwell much upon that as a practical suggestion, but kept theoretically soothing his mind with its being an acknowledged, normal, and every-day fact, that the union of rank with riches was clearly designed by a beneficent Providence.

Then he began to think once more of his daughter. He felt compunction at the idea of yielding his handsome Maude to this low-born suitor. But then Maude had never been to him what an only child is to most fathers. He had never quite forgiven the fact of her not being a son, and she had even been more her mother's pet than his. Again, this candidate for her hand had been brought up a gentleman, had the mark of the university stamped on his baser composition, and, in short, had done much to compensate for the deficiency of the birth with which he had entered the world. He had seen young Pearman upon two or three occasions only. That gentleman, though the blood of his father ran strong in his veins, had quite sufficient tact to avoid showing it. He dressed quietly, and abstaining from self-assertion when mixing with the class in which he was so anxious to establish himself. He was naturally too careful of his money to fall into the errors of most parvenues, that of ostentatious display. If he spent money and he would freely at times, there must be a quid pro quo for doing so. The little he knew of him had not jarred on Harold Denison. As to Maude, her affections must be wholly unfettered. If she could be brought to think of this man as a husband, it would really be a good thing for her in the end; and by such reasoning the squire gradually worked himself round to the conviction that it was, at all events, his duty to submit Pearman's proposal to Maude, and, further, to press it strongly on her attention.

But, before Harold Denison had arrived at this conclusion, there had been much grief at Glinn. He had told his wife of the contemplated foreclosure of the mortgage, and explained to her that it meant ruin—that is,

through Maude's long lashes as she thought how little she could be to him.

Such, so far, were the results of the machinations of that experienced 'fisher of men.' Mr. Pearman, on the unfortunate family of Glinn.

I have told the ingenious process of reasoning by which Harold Denison had, at last, not only soothed his conscience, but arrived at the conclusion that, like the grim old Grecian, his duty required him to sacrifice his daughter. I often think the old story a grand allegory. Agamemnon sacrificed Iphigenia, even yet, pretty constantly, at St. George's Hauover Square. We substitute the ring for the knife, and the wedding breakfast for the smoking sacrifice; and we wreath ourselves with flowers and silken raiment as we offer up our maidens at the shrine of Plutus. Who shall say that, after all, that was not the meaning of the fable?

But Harold Denison was conscious of an inward feeling that the newly-formed idea was an extremely awkward subject to broach either to his wife or daughter. That he had never even alluded to Pearman's proposal I need scarcely observe, and that it looked less pleasant to touch upon now he had made up his mind to be an active supporter thereof, must be equally obvious. Still, the clouds were gathering so quick so thick over the house of Glinn, that no time was to be lost; and at last the squire nerved himself to the task, and sought his wife's boudoir, having previously ascertained that his daughter was out of the house.

'I want to talk something over with you, Nellie,' he observed, as he entered. 'I don't think that it will be quite pleasant to hear, but, at all events, it shan't distress you, as you will have the power of deciding as you like about it.'

Mrs. Denison raised her face anxiously to her husband's. Denison, on any point, was painful to her, and she was too well aware, from former experience, that this was but the prelude to some scheme in which her concurrence had already been practically marked out by her lord and master. Harold Denison's consultations, at such times, generally comprised a mere synopsis of his intentions, revealing some minor unpleasantness which he looked to her to carry out. Poor Mrs. Denison might well be diffident about such confidences; as a rule, they had borne but bitter fruit.

'What should you say,' continued the squire, 'if I tell you that it is possible to save Glinn to us yet?'

'Oh, Harold, can it be so?' cried Mr. Denison, with clasped hands and beating heart. 'No, you don't look like it. I see in your face there is more to follow. It is some bare chance, and your sanguine nature has led you astray concerning it.'

'Nellie, don't be foolish. There is a way of arranging all these miserable money-matters that has been submitted to me, and which, should we consent to, there is no doubt, will prove perfectly satisfactory. I have turned it all well over in my mind, and though I have, as yet, come to no determination concerning it, yet I don't deem it altogether impracticable. Will you hear me patiently?'

'Yes, Harold,' was the meek response.

'Well, what I want to talk to you about is this.' The squire hesitated. It was not so easy, after all, to introduce the proposed sacrifice of Iphigenia to the mother who bore her. The old Greek mythology keeps the wife of Agamemnon entirely in the background on that occasion. Still it had to be done. 'Of course you must be aware,' continued the squire, 'that Maude is not only grown-up and handsome, but has arrived at an age when wooers may be expected.'

'Who do you mean?' asked the mother, her pale face flushing, and a half-anxious, half-frightened expression visible in her blue eyes.