
THE LEGEND OF DUNBLANE.

IN TWO CHAPTERS. CHAPTER I.

"It was in the year 1793," said my uncle, "that I made the acquaintance of William Dunblane, afterwards Lord Dunblane, at the University of St. Andrews. His bachelor uncle, the then lord, was not a very rich man, and he was a stingy one. William's father, too, was still alive, so that the young man was somewhat straitened as to money. We were just of an age, and my father was very liberal to me. Our relative positions, therefore, were more equal at that time than they afterwards became; and, in spite of the great difference of rank, Dunblane singled me out to be his favourite companion. I cannot say why this was, unless it may have been that I was a more patient listener than many other young fellows, to his long stories about his ancestry, and that while I always endeavoured to tell him the truth, I was more indulgent to this weakness of family pride than the rest were. They used to laugh at him, at first; but that, he soon showed them, he would never stand. He was very strong, and very passionate; and his face at such moments

became as that of one possessed with a devil."

It was in these words that my uncle, Mr. Carthews, senior partner in the firm of Carthews and Bontor, of Aberdeen and Calcutta, used generally to begin the following strange narrative. Like many Scotchmen of his day, he had a somewhat inordinate reverence for rank; but it was balanced, in his case, by a business-like appreciation of the value of money. What is of more import, however, to the matter in hand, was his strict and fearless adherence to truth, joined to an extremely kind nature. These characteristics were conspicuous in every transaction of a long life. He was a shrewd, upright man, universally respected in the city where he passed the best part of his life: "stiff in opinions," occasionally prolix, but of a sound, clear judgment, and unimpeached honesty. In the narrative, therefore, which I shall try to give, as far as possible, in my uncle's own words, there is, I am confident, no wilful misrepresentation, no jot or tittle added to the facts, as he believed them to be. And his opinion of those facts, I take it, was formed very deliberately. I heard him tell the story repeatedly, yet it never varied in the smallest particular; and I know it invariably impressed his hearers with a sense of horrible reality. Imagine that the ladies have left the room; three or four men are seated round the polished mahogany; my uncle, a white-haired, keen-eyed man of seventy, bids us draw our chairs nearer the fire, and, passing round a magnum of his fine old port, he thus continues the story, of which I have given the opening words, with that incisive Scotch accent, and in that measured phrase, which seems to weigh each word in the balance, and reject it if found wanting.

Dunblane was an unpopular man. Men could not make him out. His manner was often disagreeable, and he was subject to moody fits, when he would speak to no one. He was capable of kind and generous acts, but implacable in his dislikes; and he never forgot an injury. I could manage him better than any one, and he would generally stand the truth from me; but his rage was a terrible thing to witness. I have never seen anything like it. Men used to say, "Keep clear of Dunblane when the fit is on him; he will stick at nothing."

The French Revolution was then at its height. Dunblane was a hot royalist, and used to be thrown into fresh transports of fury with the news of every act subversive

of the king's authority. One night a man, in my room, who professed Republican sentiments, defended the conduct of the Assembly in imprisoning the royal family. Dunblane got up and flung a bottle at his head. There was a fine row, and it was arranged that the two men must fight the next morning. I secretly gave notice to the authorities, however, who interfered, and some sort of peace was patched up; but Dunblane never spoke to his antagonist again as long as he was in the university. I mention this, as I happen to recal the circumstance, just to give you an idea of the man's violence, and of the depth of his resentment.

I can remember, too, a conversation we had one day about marriage. He had been complaining of his poverty, but said that, nevertheless, he meant to marry early.

"You see, it is necessary that I should have an heir, lest the direct line become extinct. There is no one, after me."

"Do nothing in a hurry," I replied. "It would be a great misfortune, no doubt, that the title and estates should pass away to another branch of the family, but it would be a still greater one to have your whole life embittered by an unhappy marriage. You are young; you have life before you. Be quite sure it is for your happiness, ere you take such a step as this."

His reply was very characteristic.

"Oh," he said, "it is all very well for you to talk, who have plenty of money, and have no great name as an inheritance. We trace back our descent for six hundred years; it is a duty we owe to the country to keep up the family. If I was fortunate enough to be in your position, I should please myself. But, as it is, everything else is of secondary importance. My lord is always telling me so, and I suppose he is right. I must marry a woman with money, and I must have an heir. You don't know," he added, with the black look gathering on his brow, "*how* essential this is."

I assured him that I fully recognised the obligations which a great name and title entail, but that I could not think that to contract a hasty, ill-considered marriage could ever answer in the long run.

"Ah!" he said. "Then you have never heard the old prophecy in the family:

When five Dunblanes have had no son,
Then shall the line direct be run.

My uncle is the *fourth* lord who has had no son. If he should survive my father, and that I should succeed him, I shall be the

fifth. You see now how necessary it is I should marry early."

"On account of a foolish distich!" I replied. His superstition almost amounted to an insanity; and I never would give in to it, though I confess that I have known more curious cases of such prophecies being fulfilled than any sceptical Englishman would believe. However, that has nothing to say to the matter in hand. Dunblane repeatedly referred to this prediction, which had evidently taken a hold upon his mind, not to be shaken by any words of mine. He would brood for hours over this and similar subjects. And among them, I have little doubt was one to which he never referred at that time, seeing that I treated his superstitions with unbecoming levity—a subject of which I had no knowledge for many years afterwards, but which was destined to have a fatal influence on his life.

In '96 I left college, and was sent out to our branch house in Calcutta. I heard the following year of Dunblane's marriage to a Miss Cameron, an orphan of good family, though not noble, said to possess both wealth and beauty; and I heard no more. He never wrote to me, nor did I expect it. Our lines of life were now quite different, and though I knew that he would always retain a friendly recollection of me, correspondence was another matter. I was a man of business, and engrossed in affairs in which he could take no interest; while I, on the other hand, knew nothing of the persons and the circumstances by which he was surrounded. I shall always regret that he did *not* write to me during those years; though probably no written words of mine could have been of any avail in arresting him: but I have occasionally found, in life, that the truth, though discarded at the time, will come back at some unexpected moment and give the devil the lie. Now the devil had it all his own way with Dunblane for years. His father, to whom I think he was really attached, was dead; his uncle, whom he disliked and feared, would not die. The uncle, I am told, proposed this marriage to him, and though Dunblane was indifferent—or more than indifferent—to the lady, he consented to marry her. This was the fatal error which nothing could retrieve. It was the first step down-hill, after which the descent became more and more rapid every year.

In 1803 Lord Dunblane did, at last, die, and, a few months later, my own father's death recalled me to Aberdeen, where I took his place as head of the house. One

day, about a year after my return, George Pilson (you remember Pilson and Pilson, the attorneys? very respectable firm) was in my office, and chanced to speak of Dunblane Castle, where he had lately been. His father, I found out, was Lord Dunblane's man of business; and I questioned George as to his lordship's present condition and mode of life. His answer was far from satisfactory.

"His lordship's strangeness, and his violent ebullitions of temper have increased very much upon him of late," he said. "It is supposed that this is greatly owing to the fact that after nearly eight years of marriage there is no heir to the title. Then his wife is a person singularly unsuited to him in all ways. Her ladyship is handsome, but wanting in common-sense, garrulous in the extreme, laughing immoderately in and out of season, and, if I may be allowed to express an opinion on such a point, deficient in the dignity befitting her station. These things are perpetual blisters, I fancy, to his lordship. Her ladyship, in a word, is what may be called a 'provoking woman,' and as his lordship is not the most patient of men you may guess the consequences."

I replied that I was more sorry than surprised: from what I knew of Lord Dunblane I never expected that such a marriage—one purely of interest—could turn out well. "And yet," I added, "if he had fallen into other hands, I think he might have become a very different man. There were germs of good in him."

At this George Pilson remained silent for a few moments, a silence which I thought most eloquent. He then proceeded to speak of the castle, which he described as one of the finest monuments of the fifteenth century remaining in the country.

"His lordship is very justly proud of it," he said, "though with his pride is mingled a certain superstitious awe, as, no doubt, you know? I dare say he has often spoken to you of the secret room in the castle?"

"No," I replied, "I do not remember that he ever did. What is there special about this room?"

He replied, "No one knows exactly where it is except the owner, the heir, and one other person; who happens, at present, to be my father. The family superstition concerning this room is very strong, and I believe they shrink from speaking of it."

"But what does it arise from?" I inquired.

He said, "The legend runs that some

former Lord of Dunblane sold himself to the devil in this room; the plain English of which is, I imagine, that he committed some foul crime there. At all events, this room has remained shut up for centuries; and it was predicted by one of those sibyls, who were given to such utterances, that, if ever the secret were made known the ruin of the house would follow."

"Why," I exclaimed, "this is the second prophecy that has been made about the Dunblanes! One pays dearly for belonging to these great families if one is to be subject to all these superstitions. Do you know if the room is ever opened?"

"Yes, I believe so, once a year; when, if possible, the three who are in possession of the secret meet here. My father never speaks on the subject, of course, nor does Lord Dunblane."

I asked who the heir-at-law was. He told me they had had difficulty in finding him out. He was in some office in London, and in very poor circumstances, being descended from a younger branch of the Dunblanes, who had gone to settle in England in the beginning of the last century.

After some further conversation, Pilson took his leave, and I thought very little more about Lord Dunblane and his affairs, having concerns of my own which fully occupied my thoughts at that time.

Some weeks later I received, to my surprise, a letter from Lord Dunblane, saying that he had just heard from his man of business, Mr. Pilson, that I was returned from India, and living in Aberdeen; and that it would give him great pleasure to see me again, if I would pay him a visit at Dunblane Castle. He named a day when he was expecting a party; but added that if this time was not convenient to me, I could write myself, and propose some later date. It would have been ungracious to have refused such an invitation. Indeed, I was fully sensible of the honour, though I anticipated but little pleasure from this visit, under the present circumstances. A press of business retained me in Aberdeen just then, but I promised to write, and I did write, some weeks later, to his lordship, proposing to accompany Mr. Pilson, who informed me that he was going to Dunblane Castle: for I reflected that as the stage would take me no further than Nairn, we could share a post-chaise together, which would lighten the cost of a journey, in which business had no part. His lordship replied, in a few lines, to say I should be welcome; and accordingly, on the tenth of April, 1804, Pilson and I left Aberdeen

by the stage, which started at six A.M., and reached Dunblane Castle late that afternoon. It was getting dusk as we drove up to this magnificent remnant of the feudal age—a pile which impressed one with a sense of the power which must have belonged to the Dunblanes in past ages, and heightened their claim to consideration, in my eyes at least, more than the finest modern palace could have done. It was the grandest specimen of this style of architecture I ever saw, of vast extent, its sky-outline bristling with pointed turrets, its grey walls crowning a steep height covered with venerable Scotch firs, a dry moat surrounding it, and a gateway leading into a courtyard, which occupied nearly an acre, and round which the castle was built.

Lord Dunblane met us in the hall. The nine years which had elapsed since we had parted had wrought changes in us both, no doubt; but in the man I saw before me I should scarcely have recognised my fellow-student had I met him in the streets of Aberdeen. He was grown very large, and on his face, which was lined far beyond his years, the hard, wild look which had been transient formerly, had settled down, apparently, into its habitual expression. He received me kindly, but there was no smile, as he shook my hand. The light had died out of the face, never to be rekindled. He told me I should have but a dull visit, he feared. "Had you come six weeks ago when I wanted you, you would have met a country gathering: not that I like that sort of thing: I hate it; but you and I were always very different, Carthews. Now you will find no one; and I have a good deal of business with Mr. Pilson, so that I must leave Lady Dunblane to entertain you." I assured him that I should be perfectly happy, exploring the beauties of the park and adjoining forest, and begged him not to consider me for a moment. After that he led me up-stairs to the drawing-room, where Lady Dunblane was seated alone.

The first impression produced on every one by her ladyship's beauty could not but be favourable. She was a brunette; tall, with lively eyes and brilliant teeth, which she showed a great deal when she laughed, and dark brown hair, cut short and dishevelled in loose waves over her head. Upon this occasion, however, I saw nothing but a curl or two; for she wore a species of helmet, much affected, as I afterwards learnt, by women of condition, in that day, whose husbands commanded regiments of yeomanry, as did Lord Dunblane. Being

the first head-gear of the kind which I had seen, its singularity struck me; but her ladyship carried this curious erection of buckram, fur, and tinsel, with a grace which forbade a thought of ridicule. Her beautiful figure was set off by a spenser of scarlet cloth, and a tight-fitting skirt of some white material which appeared to have been damped, it clung so close to her person. It was evident that her ladyship was not neglectful of her appearance, nor unmindful of the impression she made upon even a humble individual like myself. She came forward and greeted me with infinite suavity, saying:

"It is amiable of you, Mr. Carthews, to come and take pity on our solitude. We see no one from one week's end to another in this castle of Otranto (you have read Mr. Walpole's romance?), where all is so gloomy and mysterious that, as I tell my lord, I am really alarmed sometimes at the sound of my own voice!"

"I wish that occurred rather oftener," muttered his lordship. She continued, laughing, "Our only society are the ghosts. You don't mind them, I hope? They are all of the oldest families, for we are mighty select here, you must know. If they visit you, you must esteem it a great honour, Mr. Carthews."

I replied in the same strain, that I felt myself to be wholly unworthy of that honour; but that, if they came, I would try and receive them with becoming courtesy.

"Like my parrot," cried her ladyship, laughing. "He and my spaniel sleep in my room; and sometimes, in the dead of night, he calls out, 'Pray, come in, and take a chair!' which startles me from my sleep, and frightens me out of my senses!"

His lordship said something about her having no senses to be frightened out of, I believe, and something about "brutes." She caught up the word, with a laugh.

"Brutes? Oh, yes; one gets accustomed to the society of brutes of *any* sort, when one has nothing else all day."

Such amenities passed between the two were of constant occurrence, I suppose, for they produced little effect beyond deepening the scowl on his lordship's face. As to me, I felt very uncomfortable, and the charm of Lady Dunblane's beauty had already melted away. Though not a stupid woman, I saw she was a very foolish one. How she dared to aggravate a man of such a temperament as her husband's amazed me. It was just like a child handling fire. She rattled away and laughed all that even-

ing with little intermission. Lord Dunblane scarcely opened his lips. Over the wine Pilson and I talked; but his lordship stared moodily at the fire, and said nothing. I began to think I had made a mistake in coming all the way from Aberdeen for this. To play the part of chorus to a matrimonial duet of the most discordant character was not pleasant; and if my former friend was so self-absorbed as to be unable to speak to me, the sooner I left him the better. I suppose something of this sort struck him, for he said, as he wished me good night, "You must not mind my silence and absence of mind, Carthews. I am very glad to see you here; but my present position gives me many anxieties. I am irritated and worried until, by Heaven! I feel at times as if I should go mad."

Well, I went to bed, and slept soundly. I never was an imaginative man, you see, or the room I was in might have conjured up some of those spiritual visitants her ladyship had joked about, evidently to her lord's annoyance. Not that it was any worse than the other rooms in the castle. I take it they were all oak-panelled, with hideous family portraits grinning from the wall upon the occupants of the vast draperied beds, in one of which I slept without waking, until the servant brought in my hot water for shaving. It was a bright morning, and at breakfast I found my host in better spirits than he had seemed the previous evening. I could not help speculating whether this could be in consequence of Lady Dunblane's absence. She never came down to breakfast, I found. Her maid, a most formidable-looking female, with red hair, and the muscles of a gillie, came in, I remember, with a tray, and took her ladyship's chocolate up to her. This person, I was afterwards told, had been born on the estate, and was devoted to Dunblane. She had been ill spoken of as a girl; but Dunblane's mother had befriended and made this Elspie her body servant, and Dunblane had insisted, when he married, on her filling the same office to his wife, much to that lady's annoyance, who wished for a modish waiting-woman from Edinburgh or London. So much for this ill-favoured specimen of her sex, to whom I never spoke in my life, but who impressed me very unfavourably whenever I saw her. After breakfast his lordship took me over the castle, and gave me all the historical associations connected with it, showing me, with great pride, the bed in which Queen Mary had slept, a yew tree, said to have been planted by Robert

Bruce, and the suit of armour borne by Dunblane of Dunblane at the battle of Bannockburn. He dilated on the glories of his house with more animation than I had yet observed: then suddenly the cloud came over him. "And to think," he said, "that all this must pass into another line—into hands that have been debased by trade" (which was not polite to me; but he entirely forgot my presence for the moment, I am sure); "to think that people who have hardly a drop of old blood in their veins, who have intermarried for generations with Smiths and Browns, and plebeian names of that kind, should come to inherit *this*, which they have no feeling for, no pride in—by G—d, it is enough to wring one's heart!"

And this was the way he went on, from time to time, bursting out in imprecations on his fate in having no heir, and upon the evil star which had risen over his house. It was in vain that I pointed out that he was young still, and in good health, and must not abandon hope. He shook his head gloomily. "The prophecy is against me: it is no use.

When five Dunblanes have had no son,
Then shall the line direct be run.

It is clear enough, is it not? I am doomed. I should have known it. When did such a prophecy ever come wrong? What a cursed fool I was to marry!"

So I thought; to marry, that is to say, as he had done; but I abstained from saying so. By-and-by his lordship took Mr. Pilson to his study, where they were engaged for some hours over business; and I was left alone to ramble about the castle, inside and out, as I would.

Remembering the story I had heard of a secret room, I counted all the windows outside, and then, returning to the castle, traversed every passage, mounted every turret, and opened every door I could, to see if the number of windows corresponded. With the help of the serving man whom I met on the stairs, and who knew all the rooms in the castle, he said, I accounted for each window satisfactorily. And after two hours' diligent endeavour to solve this mystery, I arrived at the conclusion that there could be no room—it was all humbug. I was at a time of life, you see, when over-confidence in one's own powers is apt to lead one to very false conclusions.

At luncheon Lady Dunblane appeared, and an incident, which left a painful impression on my mind, took place on that occasion. Dunblane had a peculiar aversion to her ladyship's spaniel. Strict

orders were given that he was to be confined to her ladyship's own suite of rooms, and on no account to be allowed beyond them. But some door had inadvertently been left open, and, while we were at luncheon, the spaniel ran barking into the room, round and round the table, and finally straight between his lordship's legs, who was at that moment smarting under one of his wife's sallies. He roared out in a voice of thunder:

"How often have I told you, ma'am, to keep that infernal little beast in your own room?" and he kicked out so viciously, that he sent the poor animal spinning along the oak floor to the further end of the room, where he lay howling. His mistress ran up, and seized him in her arms; the creature's leg was broken. Her ladyship shrieked, and stamped, and my lord swore; and, thoroughly sickened with the whole scene, I rose and left the room. Pilson joined me in the hall.

"What is to be the end of all this?" I said to him.

His answer was, "I am afraid to think."

"Lord Dunblane," I said, "seems to me to be losing all self-restraint. If he goes on thus, what will become of him?"

Pilson looked round him, then leaned forward and whispered, "He will end his days in a madhouse." Dunblane shut himself into his room for the rest of the afternoon. By-and-by her ladyship drove out in her coach and four, and carried her dog in her arms to a veterinary surgeon some miles off. At dinner she appeared in as brilliant spirits as ever. How much of this was real I cannot say; nor, supposing her hilarity to be assumed, whether it was done for the purpose of aggravating her lord. It certainly succeeded, if so. His moroseness was enlivened by several ferocious sallies. The conversation turned upon France, I remember, and on the probabilities of the First Consul's being made emperor, a subject that engrossed all minds just then.

"How I admire that little man!" exclaimed her ladyship. "How much greater to found a dynasty, as he is doing, than to inherit all the crowns in Europe! I begin to wish I was a Frenchwoman!"

"I begin to wish you were!" cried my lord. "There is not another British peeress who would disgrace herself by uttering such a sentiment."

She laughed aloud, and replied, "Oh! because they are less frank than I am. All women admire Le Petit Caporal in their hearts. What fun it will be if he comes

over here, and conquers us! It will be much nicer being the subjects of a great hero, instead of the subjects of a mad old king who ——"

"Hold your tongue, ma'am!" shouted Dunblane, bringing his fist down upon the table with a force which made the glasses clatter: "or, if you will talk your low treasonous rubbish, go and talk it in the kitchen. You shall *not* talk it here!"

She only laughed in reply. She certainly seemed to take a delight in provoking him; and, as she knew his sensitive points, this was not difficult. I found an opportunity, over a game of cribbage, later in the evening, of asking her why she acted thus. No doubt this was somewhat of a liberty, considering our short acquaintance; but I felt I could not remain longer in the house without trying to amend matters.

"Oh!" she said, "anything for a little excitement in this horridly monotonous life. I should die of ennui if it wasn't for the tiffs with my lord."

I told her she did not know what harm she was doing; and I asked if she never felt afraid of irritating a man so passionate as his lordship.

"Bless you, no," was her reply. "It is he who is afraid, *really*, of me — of my tongue, you see. Ha, ha! No one ever answered him before; his mother, his servants, his friends, why, — you yourself, I daresay, you never contradicted him? Now, I *always* do, and I always say just what I like. He hates me, of course, but he is afraid of me, Mr. Carthews. Ha, ha, ha!"

Good heavens! I thought to myself, and these two people are tied to each other for life. Both have a fair chance of living for the next forty years. What a prospect! Even before we separated for the night she had stung him with another of her irritating speeches. There had been some talk of the steward's boy, who had tumbled from a tree, and had broken his leg. . . . "Children are a horrid bore," said Lady Dunblane. "Thank Heaven, I have no brat to be tumbling from trees, and worrying one's life out."

I dare say she did not mean it. It is hardly possible that, under the circumstances, she should not have wished for a child. The devil was in the woman, constantly prompting something to aggravate her husband. His back was towards me, on this occasion, and he said nothing, so I could only judge of the effect produced upon him by his instantly lighting a chamber candlestick and leaving the room. We saw him no more that night.

The next day and the day following only further developed the hopeless condition of affairs between Lord and Lady Dunblane. I tried once to speak to him on the subject, but I found it was in vain. An ineradicable hatred of his wife had grown up in him, which he did not attempt to conceal. When alone with him, he would occasionally converse; in her presence he seemed to be perpetually on the look-out for what might drop from her irrepressible tongue. The fourth day of my stay at the castle—the day before I was obliged to return to Aberdeen — arrived, and with it came a guest, who, although expected, was evidently anything but welcome. This was Mr. James Dunblane, the heir-at-law, who had only lately been traced, and between whom and Lord Dunblane certain communications had passed by letter. This was his first visit to the castle—a visit which, as I afterwards learnt, was a matter almost of necessity. He seemed to feel the awkwardness of his position. I do not remember much about the young man, except that he was plain in person, and very quiet. Lord Dunblane received him coldly, but politely. Lady Dunblane, after the usual fashion, plunged at once into the subject of all others his lordship shrunk from any notice of.

"So you are come, as heir-at-law, to be let into the secret of this famous room, are you? Why, it is as bad as being made a freemason! . . . Can you keep a secret, Mr. Dunblane? because, if not, untold misfortunes are to befall us." And the laugh with which she concluded sounded to me like the screech of an owl forboding evil. Lord Dunblane looked as if he could have stabbed her, but he only muttered an oath under his breath, and clenched his fist—a movement which no one saw but myself. Every incident of that evening is fresh in my recollection. I remember how she returned again and again to that subject, as though it had a fatal fascination for her, but more likely, I fear, because she saw that her husband writhed under it. She ridiculed the prophecy, and laughed at all those superstitions, which his lordship cherished as his religion. It was distressing to watch him the while. He was far quieter than usual, scarcely spoke, but sat, his arms crossed, staring at the fire, with eyes which burnt, themselves, like coals, and when he swore, which he did once or twice, it was in a suppressed voice, contrasting strangely with his usual violence. But there was a vibration in the tone which showed how strongly he was stirred. At last, it was late in the evening, and we were sitting

round her ladyship's tea-table, when she committed her crowning act of folly by offering to lay a wager with any one that she would find out the secret room herself. I need hardly say no one accepted the challenge. But she was not to be discouraged. She had seen her husband's face go white, and the look which he had shot at her gave a zest to her audacious scheme. She repeated her declaration that she would penetrate this wonderful mystery. Such things were well enough to frighten old women with in the middle ages, but how any one could believe in predictions and other rubbish of this kind in the present day passed her comprehension. For her part she had no faith in anything of the kind, and to prove what folly it was, she should leave no stone unturned to discover this room about which such a fuss was made: after which the secret, she declared, should remain one no longer. I tried to stop her; Pilson tried to stop her: it was all no use. She had got the bit between her teeth, so to speak, and away she went, partly to show off, and partly out of spite, regardless what she said, provided it produced an effect and inflamed my lord yet more. She pictured, laughingly, the cob-webbed condition of the room, and how she would turn in the housemaid with broom and duster; after which she would give an evening party there, and invite all the ghosts to come, if they chose—"indeed the black gentleman himself!" Poor woman, she little knew what she was invoking. No one laughed. Even the heir, who, being shy, always smiled when required, looked too stupefied to comply with the demand on this occasion. To glance at Lord Dunblane's face was enough to check any inclination to hilarity. I have never forgotten its expression. I had witnessed his ungovernable passion scores of times, prompting him to sudden acts of violence. But now, there was a certain admixture of *fear* (she had divined rightly, I saw, when she said he was afraid of her) with the rage which trembled through his whole frame, the like of which I have never beheld but once since in my life. I saw a beast-tamer enter the hyenas' den at the show last year. The aspect of their malignant fury cowed by terror, but watching for its opportunity to burst forth, the savage hissing wherewith they received the lash and showed their fangs, recalled to me Dunblane's demeanour as he listened to his wife. . . . At

last, I could stand it no longer, and made up my mind to tell a lie.

"Lady Dunblane," I said, "like most Scotchmen, I am a trifle superstitious. This is my last night under your hospitable roof, and I am sure you would not willingly disturb its rest. You are so happily constituted as to be above fear of *any kind*. Others are weaker. Let me earnestly advise you to leave all the superstitions connected with Dunblane Castle alone. Believe me, 'there are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in your ladyship's philosophy.'"

She burst out a-laughing, as usual. "Oh, Mr. Carthews, I'm ashamed of you. But I see what it is. You are afraid, not of the ghosts and the predictions, but of my lord. Well, I shall see you in May, when I pass through Aberdeen on my way south, and I shall tell you all about it then; for, depend upon it, I shall have found out the secret by that time."

And so, in the insolence of youth and high spirits and an indomitable will, she bade me good-night, poor woman, and I never saw her again.

Dunblane had left the room. Whether it was pre-arranged that Pilson and the young heir were to join him in his study, and that later in the night the door of the secret room should be unclosed, I know not. I am inclined, from one or two circumstances, to think that it was so; but, again, there are other things which have made me doubt it. At all events, when we three bade each other good-night, neither Pilson nor young Dunblane dropped anything which should lead me to suppose they were not going straight to their own rooms. They were not to leave the castle till the day after me. It was quite possible, therefore, that the chamber was to be unlocked after my departure.

THE LEGEND OF DUNBLANE.

IN TWO CHAPTERS. CHAPTER II.

I SLEPT soundly during the first part of the night. But about three o'clock I woke suddenly—I might almost say, I started from my sleep. I had not been dreaming; I was not conscious of having heard any noise; but my sleep, somehow or other, was broken suddenly, and I sat up in my bed with a sense of undefined alarm. I listened:

all was still: the souging of the wind among the Scotch firs below the rampart-wall was the only thing I heard. But, feeling restless, I jumped out of bed, went to the window and opened it. There was no moon, but it was a light night. I could distinguish the ivy on the wall beneath; the little door in the angle of the turret opposite, and the dusky forms of the owls that flew past the window. Almost immediately beneath it was a curious old well said to be of wonderful depth, but long since unused. If one dropped a stone in there an interval which seemed like half a minute elapsed before a faint splash told that it had reached the bottom.

I had been at the window a few minutes when the door in the turret opposite opened, with a slight grating sound which attracted my attention. A figure glided forth, and ran swiftly towards the well. I distinguished that it was a woman by the long drapery, and as she came under the window I could just make out that she carried some sort of vessel in her hand. Whatever it was she threw it in, and waited, leaning over the side, until she caught the distant thud of the object as it met the water. Then she returned rather more leisurely than she had come, the door was shut, and, though I waited at the window a full hour, I saw and heard no more.

I do not know that at any other place, at any other time, this circumstance would have aroused my curiosity. As it was, I could not get to sleep again for thinking of it, and speculating what could have been the motive that induced any female of the establishment to rise in the dead of night in order to cast something into the well.

I had to be stirring very early, and I was at my solitary breakfast when Lord Dunblane entered. He looked ghastly, so much so, that I could not help asking if he was ill. He turned fiercely round upon me, demanding why I asked.

"Because you look as if you had not slept," I said.

"And you? Pray how did *you* sleep?" he inquired, knitting his brows. "You were not disturbed? You had no nightmare after Lady Dunblane's conversation last night?"

I had resolved to say nothing of what I had seen, and replied that I had rested pretty well. I was then proceeding to express my thanks to him for his hospitality, when he interrupted me. "If you wish to show yourself a friend, say as little as possible about your visit here to any one. I am

going abroad at once. I have made up my mind that Lady Dunblane can live here no longer. You have heard enough to know how she hates the place—and it disagrees with her, moreover. She has had several epileptic attacks—a severe one this very night; it is evident that the climate does not suit her, and I am recommended to take her to Italy. My lady and I can never agree here. She does all she can to goad me to madness—and perhaps she has succeeded: who can say? People will gossip, Carthews, when we are gone. Prove yourself a friend, and say nothing about our quarrels while you have been here."

I was a good deal surprised at the tenor of this speech, but thought it reasonable upon the whole. There was something in his eye, nevertheless, which disquieted me. Coupling it with Pilson's words, two days previously, and with my own observations, I could not avoid the conviction that the fate to which he himself had just now alluded was imminent. It might be warded off, perhaps, by change of scene, and the removal of the causes of irritation; but it was impossible to look at him steadily, and to doubt that incipient insanity was there. I begged him to act upon his determination of going abroad without loss of time; and then, shaking his hand, I stepped into the chaise, and drove off.

Well, I returned to Aberdeen; and some days after this Pilson called on me. I asked what news he brought of Lord and Lady Dunblane.

"They are gone abroad. I suppose it is the best thing he could do. Her ladyship had a succession of such severe fits that she was unable to leave her room, or to see any one but her maid after you left. I *did* see her once at the window, and her look quite alarmed me. His lordship was much calmer, but he scarcely spoke. His wife's sudden prostration, after all their violent bickerings, affected him a good deal. He is in a bad way, I think, Carthews. I mean that I am very much afraid"—and he pointed significantly to his head.

I told him that I fully shared his apprehensions, and then asked him more particularly to describe the change in Lady Dunblane's appearance.

"The morning I left I was walking round the rampart when I heard one of the windows rattle. I looked up, and there was Lady Dunblane, her head pressed against the panes, and with such a terrible expression of agony in her face as I shall never forget. She kept opening her

mouth, and making the most hideous grimaces at me, so that it was clear that she was not quite in her right senses at the moment. She disappeared suddenly."

"Did you ever see any indication of a tendency to such a malady in her ladyship?" I asked.

"No. I cannot say I ever did," he replied.

"Was no doctor sent for?"

"Yes, the country apothecary came once."

"And what did he say? Did you speak to him?"

"Yes. I saw him in the hall as he was stepping into his buggy. I asked how he found her ladyship. He said she was much prostrated by the violence of the attack, but he seemed a puzzle-headed fellow. No doubt he was awed by the honour of being sent for to the castle; for I could not get much out of him. He seemed dazed; but muttered something about change being good for her ladyship."

"And who attended her during these attacks?" I inquired.

"No one but his lordship and the maid Elspie. My lord told me that his wife was very violent; but he would not suffer any of the men to be sent for, to hold her. He and Elspie, who is a very powerful woman, managed her between them. He said that he had found it necessary to tie her hands. I do not envy him his journey. They left in the family coach an hour after our departure, and were to travel night and day to Leith, where they took ship for Holland."

He then went on to say that the young heir-at-law had returned to London much depressed with his visit, and that the necessary formalities having now been gone through (which I understand to mean that the secret of the haunted room had been duly communicated to him), Mr. Dunblane would in all probability never see the castle again during my lord's lifetime.

I seldom saw Pilson for some time after this conversation; when I did, he told me what little he knew of the Dunblanes; but months often elapsed without his having any direct communication with my lord, and even then the letters he received were mere bald statements and inquiries, exclusively upon matters of business. These, however, were sufficient to show that his mind had not given way; they were lucid and perspicuous in every detail. There was never any mention of her ladyship, for

the obvious reason, as it transpired after a while, that she and my lord were separated. He was travelling now in Italy, now in Hungary, now in the East, while she remained—no one knew exactly where—in Switzerland. At the end of the third year he returned to Dunblane, and shut himself up there, refusing to see any of the neighbours who called. In reply to every inquiry for her ladyship (more especially those which a distant cousin, her only relation, made about this time), he stated that her ladyship's health obliged her to remain on the Continent; her mind had been much weakened by continued epileptic attacks, and she was unequal to correspondence. He stated, further, that she was under excellent medical care, and that though, by reason of the excitement under which she sometimes laboured, it was not deemed advisable that he should visit her often, he made a point of doing so once a year. This statement seems to have been considered satisfactory. Lady Dunblane's friends—and she had very few—were not suspicious, and the world at large troubled itself but little with the domestic concerns of a couple who had lived in isolated grandeur, with rare exceptions, since his lordship's accession to the title. Pilson went twice to the castle, during that year, and, as far as I know, he was the only guest. He gave a gloomy picture of the solitary man shut up in that big place. We both avoided all mention of her ladyship's name; but I now know that he was no easier than I was on that head.

It was towards the close of 1808 that he called on me one morning, at an unusually early hour. His face, his whole manner, betokened that my grave, quiet friend was unusually perturbed. He looked round the room—this very room where we are sitting—drew his chair close to mine, and said in a whisper:

"Carthews, I have come to you in a very distressing emergency. I hardly know whether I am justified in taking this step, but I do know that I can depend on you, and you may materially help me in a most painful and difficult situation."

Without more ado, he then proceeded to say that a young Frenchman, who gave his name as Jean Marcel, had called upon him the previous night, stating that he had lately come from Geneva, where he was in a wine merchant's office, and had been sent on business to Aberdeen. He was the bearer of a small crumpled note, addressed in nearly illegible characters, to M. Pilson,

Attorney, Aberdeen. He stated that he had come by it thus. Shortly before leaving Geneva, it had been his duty to inspect the "recolte" of various vineyards: among them one belonging to the Château d'Osman some miles distant. The house itself was tenanted by an English lady, who was said to be mad or imbecile. At all events she was never heard to speak, and was closely watched by her attendants night and day. She walked on a terrace overlooking the vineyard, but it was never out of sight of a gaunt woman, who was, no doubt, her keeper. The intendant of the estate, who told Jean Marcel these particulars, walked through the vineyard with him, when they saw the unhappy lady on the terrace above. Her appearance had much interested Marcel. He described her as a handsome woman, but with a fixed, woe-begone expression of face, and wearing a black cloak, which entirely concealed her person. In the course of Marcel's inspection, they stood for some time just under the terrace wall, and he spoke to the intendant of his approaching voyage to Aberdeen. There was no doubt but that he was overheard by the lady on the terrace. She disappeared, but a quarter of an hour later, while they were still near the wall, the two men heard the sound of a running footstep upon the terrace, followed by a plaintive moaning, like that of a wounded bird. They looked up, and there she stood, glancing round with an expression of terror to see if she was followed, and of earnest supplication towards the two men beneath. She opened her mouth wide—a clear proof, the intendant seemed to think, of the poor creature's imbecility—then raised both arms up high, when, to his horror, he perceived that she had lost her right hand. With her left, she then suddenly dropped over the wall a paper with a stone inside, and had scarcely done this, when her gaunt attendant appeared upon the terrace. The poor lady's whole demeanour changed; the old fixed look returned, and she began once more, with slow uncertain steps, to pace the terrace. To gratify her, Marcel picked up the paper, and pocketed it, as he walked away. As soon as he was out of sight he examined it.

Outside was scrawled, "Pour l'amour de Dieu remettez cette lettre à son adresse." Within was the note addressed to Pilson. The intendant laughed at the affair, and tried to persuade Marcel to tear up the note. "All mad people imagine themselves to be sane, and this one no doubt wants to persuade her friends that she is unjustly

confined; but you need only look at her to see that she is a lunatic."

Marcel admitted the probability of this, but he could not bring himself to destroy the paper. Whether she was mad or not, the condition of this maimed unhappy creature had aroused his compassion so deeply, that he declared the first thing he would do on arriving at Aberdeen would be to find out the person to whom this note was addressed. And he had done so.

When he had finished this strange narrative, Pilson laid before me a scrap of paper—evidently the blank page torn out of the end of a book—on which was scrawled:

"Help! for God's sake, help! before they kill me. Oh, save me, Mr. Pilson, save me, as you hope to be saved hereafter. E. DUNBLANE."

We looked at each other for some minutes without speaking. At last Pilson said:

"If I consulted my own interest, I should remain silent, or simply enclose these lines to his lordship. Her ladyship's condition, no doubt, justifies any steps that have been taken. I cannot suspect my lord; and if he discovers that I have interfered in his domestic concerns, he will certainly take the management of his affairs out of my hands. But, on the other hand, does not humanity call for some investigation into this? I could not die at peace, remembering that I had turned a deaf ear to such a cry; but I am puzzled what to do, Mr. Carthews. It has occurred to me that you may have business connexions with Geneva, and might, perhaps, make inquiries which would not compromise you as they would me."

In other words, Pilson was anxious to ease his conscience at as little risk to himself as might be. I did not blame him; my interest was too deeply stirred for me not to follow up the inquiry with the keenest avidity. But then, as Pilson had hinted, it is true that I had nothing to lose. I promised him that I would write that very day to a correspondent at Geneva, and desire him to leave no stone unturned towards discovering the truth.

I had to wait some weeks for the answer. The commission was one the execution of which was beset with difficulties. The village pasteur, the doctor, the intendant of the vineyards, and all the neighbours were applied to, but little additional information could be gathered. At last the maire of the district was induced to investigate the case, upon representations being made to

him that there existed suspicions as to the treatment which the incarcerated lady—whether insane or only imbecile—met with. After a vigorous resistance they forced an entry into the château. The sight that met them was heart-rending. The poor creature lay dying upon her bed, and but for this intervention would have been denied the last consolations of religion. When the pasteur knelt down, however, and questioned her, she only shook her head and moaned. Then, with an effort, she opened her mouth wide, and, to their horror, they perceived that *she had no tongue*.

They implored her to write down the name of the perpetrator of this barbarous crime. But either she had no strength, or else she was praying, poor soul, for grace to forgive her persecutors, rather than for retribution. She listened devoutly to the good pasteur's prayers, and a glorious smile lighted up her tear-worn eyes as the death-film gathered over them. So the unhappy lady passed away. The woman Elspie was, of course, seized, and subjected to a rigorous cross-examination. She declared that the lady who was just dead had been thus mutilated by her husband one night when goaded into a state of insane rage by his wife's discovery of a secret, to which he attached a superstitious importance, and which she threatened to proclaim to all the world. In the struggle to defend herself, her right wrist was also severed. The woman maintained that her mistress had ever since been subject to violent fits of delirium, necessitating restraint. This I do not believe; there is no proof of it whatever. How far the rest of her story was true, it was impossible to say, and will never now be known. There were probabilities in favour of it; but, on the other hand, might not this wretch herself have been the instrument? I did not forget that I had seen her (as I have now no sort of doubt) on that fatal night stealing out to throw *something* into the well. Of her complicity, at all events, there was ample proof, since from the first she was the attendant upon her ill-fated mistress. But the hand of justice, for all that, was stayed.

The very same day that I received the letter containing the foregoing particulars, and while Pilson and I were deliberating what steps must now be taken, the news of an appalling catastrophe, which had

happened thirty - six hours previously, reached us. Lord Dunblane had been burnt in his bed, and the greater part of the castle destroyed. How the fire originated was never known, but it broke out from his lordship's room in the dead of night, and three sides of the quadrangle were burnt to the ground before the flames could be got under. The lovers of coincidences tried afterwards to make out that Lord Dunblane and his wife died the same night; the superstitious even fabricated a theory that, struck with remorse, upon learning, by second sight, of his wife's death, he had himself fired the castle, and resolutely perished in the flames. But all this is purely imaginary. It is sufficiently remarkable that these deaths should have been so near one another; but Lady Dunblane died at least five days before her husband; and as to the supposition of his lordship's self-destruction, the only ground for it was his strange mental condition, which was no worse than it had been for the last four years.

The woman Elspie was set at large by the authorities at Geneva, no one coming forward as her accuser. Mr. Pilson thought, and I believe he was right, that now both Lord and Lady Dunblane were dead it was better this terrible story should not be made public. It oozed out, in the course of time, as almost all such scandals do, but not through me. It was only when I found that all sorts of false or garbled versions of the circumstances were current in society that I ever mentioned what I knew, and that was years afterwards, when, in default of heirs, the title of Dunblane had become extinct.

END OF THE SECOND VOLUME.

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