A LEGAL SECRET.

CHAPTER I.

The house in Lincoln's Inn Fields, from which the firm of Trench, Pilkington and Trench addressed their numerous clients, was getting quite antiquated. It had stood there a century or more. Discreetly placed a little distance back from the roadway, like most of the legal houses in Lincoln's Inn, its angular architecture somewhat resembled a tumble-down house of cards; there were balconies, outside barred windows, upon which no one ever ventured to trust his weight, and there were stunted gables half-hidden by projecting walls. Upon the topmost gable was a weathercock; and this vane, pointting towards the north-west, reminded one that a gust of wind from that quarter might any day blow the old house down, as it had threatened to do already more than once; and would have done but for the support of a more modern building on each side.

There had been changes since the first deed of partnership between Trench, Pilkington, and Trench had been signed; for sometimes a Pilkington was senior partner, sometimes a Trench. But the designation of this legal firm had always remained unaltered. It had been known as Trench, Pilkington and Trench time out of mind, and so it was still described. There had always been a trustworthy representative—always bearing either the name of Trench or of Pilkington, and always gifted with an acute ear for confiding clients.

For a day seldom passed but what some one driving up in his carriage brought with him a weighty secret; and the head of the house, whether young or old, was always there with his wits about him prepared to accept the trust. Before one partner showed any sign of superannuations, as it was shrewdly observed, another was skilfully trained to step into his place; so you might confide your secrets to the firm of Trench, Pilkington and Trench with the same sense of security which you experienced when placing your money in the bank.

The senior's partner's room was large and oblong in shape, and with three dismal windows in a row; for these windows had iron bars, and the dust upon them was an efficient substitute for blinds. Between the bars could be seen a blurred forest of distorted chimneys. At the end of the room was a huge fireplace; and before the fire, which was burning brightly, was a great brass guard. It was an ideal chamber for the safe deposits of secrets; the walls were hidden by shelves, and on these shelves stood deed-boxes, some with names in full, others with the initials only painted upon them. At a desk between the barred windows and the guarded hearth, sat an old man.

If any one ever looked like a living embodiment of secrecy that could not be tampered with, this lawyer looked it from head to foot. His white shaggy eyebrows hung over his eyes and seemed almost to hidef them; it was difficult to get more than an occasional flash from them—difficult to judge whether they were small or large. His nose was narrow, long, and hooked like a hawks'; and the thin lips were pressed together as if they had been sealed. He seemed at least fourscore years of age. The expression on his face appeared to imply that he had chosen the same motto as the Prince de Conde, and had based his character on the word "Listen!"

It was growing dusk. As the lawyer placed his hand upon the bell at his side, the door opened, and in came a young man whose frank face was in striking contrast to the senior' partner's. The old lawyer leaned back in his chair, and although he did not open his lips or even look up, his face plainly expressed these words: "Well—what is it? I am listening."

The young man Sidney Trench, held a letter in his hand. He glanced at it as he stood over the fire, and then at Mr. Pilkington. "I have a little matter to settle," said he, "in Chancery Lane. I will not keep you waiting, sir; the carriage is at the door." The old lawyer was Sidney's guardian. Mr. Pilkington's villa, in one of the suburbs, was the young man's home; it had been his home since boyhood. Again Sidney looked at the letter, and then handed it to the senior partner.

It was quite dusk now. Mr. Pilkington turned his back to the window, sat with his face towards the fire. He took the letter and said: "What is this?" He bent his head over it. Could he read by that uncertain light? The expression on his face seemed to darken; the eyebrows contracted, and there was a slight trembling of the lips. Or was it the changeful *reflection of the fire* that appeared even to draw the colour from his cheeks? "What is this?" he repeated.

"We are short of clerks," Sidney explained, "and I have heard of one living near Chancery Lane, who is likely to suit. This is a letter strongly recommending him."

Mr. Pilkington tossed the letter angrily upon the table. "We have enough—too many clerks already. Make them come earlier; keep them later at their desks!"

Sidney Trench deliberated a moment before making any reply.

"This man, Abel Norris," he then ventured to plead, "is a most deserving character. Besides," he added, "the poor fellow is almost destitute"—

"Sidney," interrupted Mr. Pilkington, "how old are you now?"

"Twenty-four."

"Ah! At twenty-one I became a partner.—Do you know that I shall be eighty this spring?

"Yes; and I often think that you need more rest."

"How can I take rest?" replied Mr. Pilkington—"how can I think of retiring, while you are so young?—I do not mean in years," he hastened to add—"I mean in worldly wisdom. You are too soft-hearted, Sidney, too easily impressed."

Sidney smiled, but made no answer.

"When your grandfather died, placing me so early in life at the head of this firm, do you suppose I occupied myself with the troubles of destitute clerks? No, sir; I gave my mind to the affairs of clients; I listened to their troubles—family troubles, Sidney of a very grave nature. I will listen to them day after day." Mr. Pilkington paused. For a moment, leaning his head against his hand, he looked as if all the accumulated troubles of distinguished clients to whom he had given ear for more than half a century were crowding upon him and bowing him down. "To save great families from ruin—often from disgrace," he presently resumed, "is our business. Talk to me about that, Sidney, if you will; that is a subject which concerns us, not so your destitute clerks.

From an intimate acquaintance with the aristocracy and their private affairs, ever since he was a young man, Mr. Pilkington had learnt to worship rank. There were so many great families in the United Kingdom, so many members of the Upper House, whose secrets were locked up in his brain. But he had never been known to display indifference for the condition of those equal or beneath him in station; and Sidney Trench was puzzled to discover call. Sidney was too busy to see him; an adequate reason for his present attitude. It was so trivial a subject. A clerk, Abel Norris, had been asked to but he had promised to look in upon the man after business hours. No motive, except the wish to aid a deserving character, had entered into his calculations. He hardly knew how to excuse his purpose to his senior where no excuse appeared requisite.

"I merely mentioned the clerk, sir," said the young man in a conciliatory tone, "as a reason for not driving back with you this evening. There is sometimes business connected with our clients upon which you wish to converse with me on our way home."

But Mr. Pilkington made no reply; he appeared lost in thought. Never had Sidney perceived a sign of mental abstraction in the old lawyer before. Men who are keenly occupied in the business of life are seldom absent-minded. The senior partner, from years of training, had an unlimited power of attention. Nothing was ever known to escape him. Again the young man regarded him with surprise and perplexity.

Presently, Mr. Pilkington looked up. "Come to me in the library after dinner," said he; "we will have some talk together there." Then he suddenly added: "I suppose this clerk has a large family dependent upon him?"

"No; only one daughter."

Deeper shadows seemed to gather over the old man's face. But the shadows of night were also gathering outside, and the senior partner's room would have been almost dark but for the fire which was still burning though less brightly.

"Have the kindness," said he as Sidney went towards the door, "to send send some one to light my lamp."

When Mr. Pilkington's lamp had been lighted and he was once more alone, he grew still more thoughtful. But at length he roused himself, tied up the documents on his desk, and rose from his chair. There was a green baize door opposite the windows. Mr. Pilkington stepped softly towards this door and placed his hand upon the nob. He had to exert some effort to open it; for it fitted so compeltely that no voice, no conversation, could penetrate beyond. It opened with a muffled sound; and just behind was another door of dark oak. This he also opened and entered a small octagonal chamber. It was an anteroom leading out upon the principal staircase; it was here that clients with matters for the senior's private ear waited his pleasure. But there was no one waiting now. The secrets of that day were all confided and locked away. It was now night, but not dark without; for through the window, barred blindless like the windows in Mr. Pilkington's room, the light from the crescent moon looked in over the crooked chimneys and down upon the senior partner as he took a bunch of keys from his pocket and opened a black deed-box standing amongst a number of others on the shelf.

The anxious expression which Mr. Pilkington often had occasion to observe on the faces of his clients was now upon his face. It appeared as if some secret of his own oppressed him. Was that possible? Was it possible that this man, who had listened all his life to the secrets of other people without a sign of emotion, had a secret of his own? His hand trembled as he unlocked the deed-box, a box on which the name "Rosamond Gage" was written; and in that moment of agitation the thought doubtless crossed his mind of how much others had suffered while waiting here in this here anteroom—waiting to be received by him; how bitterly many of them must have reviewed the irrevocable past—a past that contained all the painful details that these clients were ever eager to place before him! It was their business to save as he had declared to Sidney Trench, great families from disgrace was Mr. Pilkington meditating as to the best means of saving himself from being stigmatised by his family? He took from the box a bundle of letters and went back in his noiseless manner to his own room. Suddenly his agitation turned to anger. He raised his arm, as if an impulse to burn the packet had seized upon him. But the intervening guard, which had protected many a legal paper from the flames, seemed to recall him. "No," he muttered, with a stern look on his face, as though he were forcing an acknowledgment upon himself; "she is not dead; it is not too late even now."

For a moment he stood with his lips compressed and his shaggy eyebrows tightly contracted; and that intense listening look once more came over his face. Was he listening to his own conscience at last?

As the lawyer drove home through the west-end, where his clients lived in great squares and gardens, he sat in the corner of his carriage with his head bent, in a stern and brooding attitude. He took no heed of these mansions, with their brilliantly lighted rooms and aristocratic assemblies; tonight they brought no expressive smile to his face as he passed; he was not thinking about these people's secrets—secrets which if revealed might have filled the guests with consternation, and put every one to flight—he had other matters to ponder.

Mr. Pilkington did not even glance out of the window until his carriage reached an open heath. He then lowered the sash and drew a deep breath, as if the silence and moonlight which surrounded him were best suited to his present mood. The carriage presently reached the gates, which led through a winding avenue to the lawyer's villa. Upon a pedestal, on each side of the gateway, reposed a stony sphinx; and the lamps in front threw an uncertain light upon these grotesque figures. Even this old lawyer's face scarcely expressed more solemnity than the faces of these sphinxes; he might have caught their look and kept it, as fitted to his peculiar mental condition.

At a later hour of the same evening, as he sat in his easy-chair by the drawing-room fire, the lawyer's mood appeared but slightly changed. His eyebrows were still sternly knit; but there was a less compressed expression about his mouth, as if he were endeavouring to force himself to unlock some secret storeroom in his brain.

At an escritoire, on which there stood a shaded lamp, was seated a handsome woman. Glancing towards her, at last Mr. Pilkington said: "My dear, will you give me your attention for a few minutes?"

Mrs. Pilkington at once put down her pen and wheeled her chair nearer the hearth. And as she bent her beautiful dark eyes upon the old man—some forty years her senior—there was a look in them of trust and devotion.

"I was thinking on my way home to-night," Mr. Pilkington began in an unusually serious tone, "about an incident which happened this afternoon. It appeared at first trivial; but it may be no such slight affair; it may lead to very painful disclosures. But much, will depend, my dear, on your attitude. That is my opinion; much will depend upon that."

An intensely troubled look came over the wife's face. She waited for Mr. Pilkington to continue. She was too overcome to question him. The colour had left her cheeks; and although her lips were parted, as if she were listening with suddenly awakened dread, she scarcely drew breath.

But the lawyer seemed to expect no reply; he stopped only to ponder his own words. He did not raise his eyes—it was not Mr. Pilkington's way, except on the rarest occasions.

"There is nothing, believe me, that need alarm you," he presently resumed, as if conscious of her agitation; "for when I observe that much will depend upon you, my dear, I ought to feel reassured; to feel otherwise would be to doubt your goodness of heart—to doubt even your readiness to forgive."

As he spoke, Mr. Pilkington drew from his pocket the packet of letters which he had taken from the deed-box in the moonlit anteroom that very evening.

"I have no wish to be mysterious," the lawyer went on; "but it has been my fortune in life—my destiny—to be the caretaker of other people's mysteries or misfortunes. Yes; it has been my fate. And yet, what lesson have I learnt? None. Is it not enough that I am forced to keep the secrets of our clients? It should seem so. But no; I must needs keep a secret of my own'—Mr. Pilkington tapped the packet in his hand—'and it is contained in these letters. They will explain all that you have a right to know. And when you have read them—and I fear you will be deeply pained by the perusal—I shall ask you to listen, as I am sure you will, while I express my contrition, for I never can justify my conduct."

With a trembling hand Mr. Pilkington held the packet towards his wife. She took it with manifest reluctance. The look of trust had not yet left her face. It was evident that more than mere words even from her own husband's lips were needed in order to destroy the confidence she had placed in him ever since their marriage some fifteen years ago.

"I ewill not read them," said she, holding the packet impulsively toward him. "If you have thought it wiser to keep this secret from me, my dear husband, these letters are better placed among those deeds which do not belong to our life. For some good reason, I can never doubt, you have kept this secret. Let it be forgotten; let it be between us as if you had never referred to this subject. I shall always think of you, as I always have done, as a man of honour to whom every one places the utmost reliance. Why do you try to shake my belief in you?"

"For your own sake," was the lawyer's reply; "for your own happiness."

(To Be Continued.)

A WARNING TO HUSBANDS.

A story is going the rounds of the English newspapers about a gentleman who, finding a smoking concert wearisome, left early and finished the evening at a musical comedy theater. He sat near the stall door, and as it was chilly, he kept on his overcoat. A lady in a private box by accident dropped an earring of no great value, but the trinket struck against the edge of the box front and dropped into the open top pocket of the gentleman's overcoat. The guileless man went home, when his wife, always carefully inclined, turned out his coat pockets. The sequel to this pretty story is not told, though its moral is obvious. It is unwise, as it is mean and ungallant, to go to the opera without your wife.

A JAPANESE PRISON.

The prison, six miles from Tokio, seems to be a model in its perfect management. We approached a lot of handsome buildings, and I asked if they did not belong to the university. "No; the prison where we are going," the guide said, and we entered the beautiful grounds, laid off artistically and planted with flowers. The buildings are of brick, one story high, and are filled with many comforts. Every prisoner saluted us. In the shops all are required to work and are supplied with all necessary materials by the government. Some do exquisite cloisonne and wood carving; others make useful articles, such as shoes, buckets, baskets, etc., until you can find almost any article you wish. The articles are sold for just what the material cost.

Mrs. Lambshed's Will.

He had hardly realised the situation until this caught his eye in the paper. He said nothing to any one, but crammed the Times into his pocket and drove to Lincoln's Inn. He could not put the thought which oppressed his brain into words. Mr. Slimp was engaged when he reached the office; but on hearing who the visitor was, sent to request that he be admitted into his presence.

"I am somewhat disappointed with the reading of this advertisement, Mr. Slimp," said Mr. Dottleson, abruptly, "and fear that it will not have the desired effect."

"With your permission I'll issue a new one, which may do more than this one," said Mr. Slimp.

"Do what you think best; but for mercy's sake let me know the very moment you hear whether that permission I gave you is in time."

Mr. Slimp promised compliance, and saw his client to the door; then he went back into his room and set himself to draw up another advertisement, which we may as well show the reader at once;

"If Miss K. D. of No. 21 Blakewood Square, South Kensington, will apply to Messrs. Starbone and Smuggles, Lincoln's Inn, she will receive the written permission she requires. She must apply personally."

The London dailies gave due publicity to this announcement the following morning, with singularly prompt results. Mr. Dottleson called at Lincoln's Inn about eleven o'clock to ask for news, and was informed that Miss Dottleson had come to the office an hour previously, and having inspected the document her father had signed, and received assurance that it was legally what it purported to be, had gone away in the direction of the West End—probably to Blakewood Square.

Mr. Dottleson rushed out of the office and called a cab; his excitement was rising again, for in half an hour he was to know where Mrs. Lamshed's money was to go. Kate was standing at the dining-room window when he drove up and came to open the door.

"When were you married?" he demanded excitedly the instant he was inside the house.

"Married?" echoed his daughter. "I'm not married. Who said I was?"

Mr. Dottleson sank limply into a chair, and gaped at her for three minutes before he found speech. Then he pulled himself together to perform his duty.

"Explain where you have been ever since Tuesday. What have you been doing? Where is that scoundrel Lakeworth?"

The extreme simplicity of Miss Dottleson's explanation goaded her father almost to madness. She had been staying with her old governess, Miss Simcox, at Dover, for a day or two. It was very slow indeed down there; she did absolutely nothing. She wasn't quite sure where Dr. Lakeworth was; but he said on Tuesday that he was going to Highgate for a short time· no doubt he would write when he saw the advertisement.

And this was what he had magnified into an elopement! We will not dwell upon Mr. Montague Dottleson's wrath: we will not relate how he tried to get that paper back from Mr. Slimp, and how the melancholy man as executor, would not give it up. We say that we will not speak of these things; we leave them to the reader's imagination. It was a long time before our friend recognized that he was beaten, and might as well give in gracefully; but he did so at last and Charles Lakeworth married Kate Dottleson with her father's blessing.

Dr. Lakeworth has now a large practice at the West End, and Kate sometimes complains that he devotes more attention to his work than to her. Nevertheless, they are a very happy couple; and old Mr. Dottleson frankly admits that his daughter's choice was a wise one, though he looks grave when you ask him about her little visit to Dover.

(The End.)

A HELPFUL WIFE.

Women who think wifehood and motherhood an obstacle to the "higher life" should read the sketch of Sarah Austin, published among the "Open Letters" of the Century. She was the mother of Lady Duff Gordon, whose letters from Egypt are a classic, and the wife for nearly fifty years of John Austin, an English lawyer, who, in the opinion of Lord Brougham, had the finest legal intellect of his time.

He lacked, however, the qualities which win success, and failed as a writer, teacher and practitioner of law. He died in 1859, destined, apparently, to remain unknown, or to be remembered as a man of great talents whose life was resultless. Ten years later his name became one of the most prominent in the history of English law. "A woman was the leader of the deed." Mrs. Austin made her husband famous by publishing his "Lectures on Jurisprudence" in three volumes.

Wives who make their husbands usually keep in the shade, standing under the shadow of the man's name. Mrs. Austin modestly claimed only to have edited her husband's writings. What she really did was to collect all her husband's writings—an old law-book out of print; a few lectures to which few had listened when delivered; hundreds of marginal annotations in books he had read, and scores of scraps scrawled in an almost illegible hand. These she put together with such literary skill that they grew into the rational system of jurisprudence which worked a revolution in the study of English law.

The wife and mother was enabled to do this great work because she had been interested in her husband's studies, and for fifty years his constant inspiration. They spent their days in an almost unbroken tete-a-tete. He read and talked to her on the legal subjects which engrossed his mind, and accepted such assistance as she could render.

There was nothing masculine about this appreciative, helpful wife; on the contrary, she was so feminine that her friends spoke of her as "the most womanly of women." Her literary labors were abundant, and earned for many years most of the Austin daily bread. The best men of the time, Englishmen, Frenchmen and Germans, frequented her fireside. Guizot wrote to her as a son to a mother, and discussed with her his statecraft. Bentham, Macaulay, Mill, Southey, Jeffrey and Gladstone were also among her correspondents.

But the delight of associating with great and good men, and of hearing her writings praised, was subordinated to her one ambition—to be John Austin's helpmate. Her distinction is that she realized her idea of helpful wifehood.

"She deserves," writes the author of the "Open Letter" from which we have quoted, "to be well known to her latter-day sisters, if for no other reason than as a possible ideal for the newer womanhood."

ITEMS OF INTEREST.

Few Paragraphs That May Prove Worth Reading.

The new mint at Philadelphia will cost $1,652,000.

Excessive coffee-drinking, it is said, impairs the sight.

Nine-tenths of the railroad passengers in England travel third-class.

The Greenland whale, it is said, sometimes attains an age of four hundred years.

Several European railroads have at last adopted the American system of checking baggage.

The favorite beverage of Sarah Bernhardt is warm milk and water. She has never used wine or other intoxicants.

To impart a refreshing odor to an invalid's room, pour some good cologne into a soup plate and set fire to it with a lighted match.

The best quality of maple syrup comes from the north side of the tree, but the flow is not so large as when the tree is tapped on the south side.

In China, the man who lives nearest to the scene of a murder, if the perpetrator is unknown, is suspected of the crime, and is required to prove his innocence.

Domestic troubles caused the coroner at Thenilworth, England, to close his career with his own hand, and a coroner's inquest was held upon the coroner.

Dr. Ellison, of Williamsburg, Ky., owns a cow which lately gave birth to a calf that has two bodies, two tails, and eight legs. The head resembles that of a dog.

An unusual accident, the explosion of a coffee-urn, occurred in a London restaurant. Four girls were severely scalded, and the face of one of them will be permanently disfigured.

Persons intending to select a pup, should permit the pup's mother to make the choice. The one the mother first carries back to their bed is almost certain to become the best dog.

Notwithstanding all the efforts of inventors, no one has been able to discover a substitute, for leather. For shoes, belting, harness, and a thousand other uses, "there's nothing like leather."

Alphonse Bertillon, the French mathematician, advocates that each family with three children be exempted from taxation, and that each family not thus provided be taxed 20 per cent. extra.

A two-story frame house floated away from its foundation, near Dyersburg, Tenn., with all the household furniture. Its owner, J. I. Hopkins, advertises for information of its whereabouts.

An average of fifteen hundred tramps a month made their way through Winnebago County, Wis. The number has been reduced to an average of seventy-five since a law was passed forcing the tramps to go to work.

Noah Raby, who has been an inmate of the poor farm at Piscataway, N.J., for thirty years, is one hundred and twenty-five years old. He has been a smoker for one hundred and twenty years, and his weight is less than one hundred pounds.

Tartini, the great violinist, composed the "Devil's Sonata" under the inspiration of a dream. He fancied that the devil invited him to a trial of skill upon his own instrument, and awoke with the music of the sonata ringing in his ears. He at once traced it on paper.

Eagles are numerous in the vicinity of Esseg, Slavonia. One was shot there a short time ago, and on its neck was a steel collar, bearing the coat of arms of a noble family, and the date 1646, showing that the eagle had worn one collar for two hundred and fifty years.

WHEN BLONDIN WAS AFRAID.

One of the many stories told of Blondin since his recent decease comes from a London correspondent.

One of Blondin's favorite jokes was to offer to carry some distinguished spectator across the rope with him on his back. Everybody naturally refused, and the great equilibrist, with a genial smile, would say, "I am sorry you are afraid I should drop you." But he was hoist once with his own petard.

He was exhibiting in Paris, and was about to cross the Seine on his rope. Cham, the great caricaturist, had come to make a sketch. Blondin, recognizing him, at once invited him to cross with him.

"With pleasure," replied Cham, "but on one condition."

"And that is—?" queried Blondin.

"That I shall carry you on my back," answered Cham.

"Not if I know myself!" answered Blondin.

"Ah!" triumphantly exclaimed Cham. "This time, Monsieur Blondin, it is you who are afraid!"

THE DEADLY PASTRY.

Mrs. Benham—I believe there is a burglar in the pantry where the mince pies are that I made this afternoon.

Benham—Well listen, my dear, and we may catch his last words.