

Farmer Williams and his Bride;

Or,

The Matrimonial Agency
by Andrew Forrester, Jr.

SHORTLY after that eminent person Sir Cresswell Cresswell was placed at the head of the new court for the settlement of matrimonial causes, under and by virtue of an Act of Parliament which destroyed the rich man and woman's monopoly on divorce, and brought that luxury or privilege within the reach of chimney as well as other sweeps, costermongers, mechanics, and labourers, I was waited upon by a young farmer, who cultivated somewhere about two hundred acres of land, not far from Rochester in the county of Kent, and instructed to trace, if I could, the whereabouts and mode of life of a lady who had, under very peculiar circumstances, obtained authority to wear his name and pledge his credit for all things within the scope of that agency with which the law invests every man's wife, or the lady who may be held out to the world by him as his wife.

The lady, who shall hereafter be known to the reader as Mrs. Williams, had indeed been lawfully married to my instructor, at the church of St. Dunstan, in Fleet Street, London, about three years before I heard of the circumstance; but her husband had only shared with her the felicities of matrimony about a month after the ceremony, and had been compelled to pay a very high price, in money and trouble, for these transient delights. Within ten days after the clergyman had declared the couple to be indissolubly united—and had solemnly forbidden any man to put asunder those whom, according to the ritual, God had joined together—incidents of that kind gently described as the results of incompatibility of temper were manifested, and the bridal moon partook more of the flavor of vinegar than honey.

Young Farmer Williams, in fact, told me in language betokening the agricultural mind, that on the fourth day he ascertained the idol of his heart to be a regular termagant. He had well baited his matrimonial trap, and had caught a perfect female tartar.

What has been rather improperly, I think, called the source of all evil in this sublunary world, embittered what should have been the dawn of their domestic bliss. Mrs. Williams displayed a love of dress, appetital requirements, and other tastes, which her spouse thought rather too lofty, wide, and nice for a woman in her station; although he assured me that he was far from niggardly, and had the means as well as the inclination to provide all things fitted to maintain her as she ought to have been maintained.

This lavish expenditure was not the only financial vexation which the young farmer had to endure. He discovered very early that he had wedded himself to debts and liabilities of considerable extent. The spinster's creditors were not slow to put in force their remedies at law against the married woman's husband. Lawyers' letters, five or six in number, were delivered at the farm in rapid successions. Writs followed in the usual order of events. Messrs. Suction and Leech, of the fourth storey at No. 3 1/2 Old Inn, on behalf of their clients—the Benevolent Loan Society—issued out of Her Majesty's Court of Common Pleas at Westminster a process demanding £55, and interest thereupon from the date of dishonour, with costs of suit upon a long

overdue bill of exchange; and the same firm also served upon the farmer a demand, and then a trader-debtor summons in bankruptcy.

This formidable-looking and terribly effective document explained upon the back of it that he was to appear before Mr. Commissioner Bane, at the establishment in Basinghall Street, London, on a day named.

He was then and there before the high, mighty, and cantankerous big-wig, to either admit the demand, or make an affidavit that he had a good legal defense to the claim, or submit to be made a bankrupt after seven days from the day on which he received the polite invitation of the Court to pay, secure, or compound with the Benevolent Loan Society—an institution, by the way, it seemed, wrapped up or embodied in the sole person of one Christian usurer.

What to do in this awful case young Farmer Williams did not know; so, after scratching his head, swearing perhaps a little to himself, but about another person, and having what he called “a flare up” with Mrs. Williams, he went off to London, to ask the Lord Mayor what he should do.

To get at a Lord Mayor is not easy. The janitors who guard the avenues, and the crowds who surround his judgment-seat, are an impassable series of obstacles to the all but the initiated, who have learned the art and mystery of threading the byways of the Mansion House.

A cool, shrewd-looking policeman, eyeing the farmer, inquired his business.

The farmer explained it.

The officer said he thought the Lord Mayor wouldn't listen to the case, or, if he did, would say that it was out of his power to interfere. The constable thought the farmer had better consult a sharp attorney, who would be just the sort of man to get him out of the mess.

The farmer muttered something unlike a general compliment to the legal profession, looked puzzled, scratched the side of his head,—an infallible stimulant to wisdom—and added, that if the policeman really thought it desirable, he would speak to a lawyer about the case.

The policeman thought this was only judicious. A sharp lawyer would be sure to “pull him through” such a little affair as that. Now Mr. Loosetongue—who was in the court, and at that very moment, with a vehemence akin to ferocity, was defending a pickpocket, by cross-examining the prosecutrix (a highly respectable young lady, the daughter of an Oxford-Street tradesman,) as to how she got her living, her chastity, and other cognate and pertinent subjects—was the police constable's ideal man for such a case as that of Farmer Williams and his wife. The farmer, after listening to Mr. Loosetongue's subsequent speech on behalf of his “unfortunate client,” thought “the chap was indeed a devilish clever fellow,” and he resolved to commit all his troubles to the arrangement of that well-known attorney, although, as a matter of fact, the reader may be informed, that the Loosetongue skill and eloquence did not save the pickpocket from the doom prescribed by law for his offence.

A hasty consultation took place—as soon as the pickpocket had been removed to the cells—between the policeman, the farmer, and the attorney. The two last gentlemen then adjourned to Mr. Loosetongue’s offices.

After taking stock of the client, and listening to so much of the story as my instructor was willing to tell him, the attorney informed the farmer that he knew all the parties—that is to say, he was intimately acquainted in his profession with Suction and Leech, with Mr. Gripe (the Benevolent Loan Society), and perhaps with another name—that of a man—on the bill of exchange which led to the proceedings. A long discussion took place between attorney and client, in which the former quite conscientiously advised that, unless he could successfully show that no consideration had been given for the bill, it would be useless to try and resist the claim. The best plan was to pay it at once, if that were possible; and if it were not now possible, he might be able—indeed, he had no doubt he could—get time allowed, by paying extra for that additional accommodation.

The farmer could pay in a few days, and he scorned to ask any favour from “the thieves,” as he called the plaintiff and his attorneys.

It was therefore arranged that Mr. Loosetongue should enter an appearance to the writ, as he had the right to do, and that Farmer Williams should avail himself of a privilege which the bankrupt law awards to the candid. He signed and filed an admission to the debt on the day appointed for him to see Mr. Commissioner Bane, and then got seven days’ further time to pay that debt and the costs.

It is needless to explain in detail the nature of the other demands. There was a claim of £105 upon an IOU for money lent by a lady to Miss Frances Smith. There was a demand of £57 for millinery. There was a dressmaker’s bill amounting to £135. There was a jeweler’s bill, the amount of which I have forgotten. There were several claims for board and lodging, with smaller sums of money lent, which together amounted to about £200.

As each demand came in, it is perhaps needless to explain that there was “a scene” at the farm. The farmer’s moral system, I presume, gave way; for he confessed to me that he never swore so much in his life, putting the oaths and years in a lump, as he did to that woman while they lived together.

There was no use in resisting. Mrs. Williams confessed to her indebtedness, and in a tornado of passion, real or assumed, averred that she had been scandalously betrayed and deceived. Her husband’s conduct she denounced as mean, contemptible, and infamous.

She thought she was about to marry a man of fortune and a gentleman—not a mean-spirited fellow, who was either almost a pauper, or quite a miser! Of course she owned the money—the little paltry sums as she called them—which had been demanded of him. No, it was not strange that they should all come upon him at once! She had told her creditors that she was going to be married. They had gone on trusting her, in the belief that when she got married, her husband would pay them. She wound-up by throwing the heaviest hard substance or thing at her husband’s head, and in a grand display of hysterics.

Mr. Loosetongue, on being from time to time consulted, told his client, quite truly, that there was no earthly use in attempting to resist the payment of either of these demands. The money must be paid. There was also no ground for a divorce disclosed by either of these claims. This the farmer considered to prove a grave defect in our statute law. The only thing to be done was to pay the money, and keep the wife. If her conduct had rendered her society distasteful, perhaps, Mr. Loosetongue suggested, she might be willing to separate from him; but, if he might judge of her character, expectations, hopes, and wishes, she would not consent to do so without an allowance.

To this the farmer stoutly objected. It is useless to deny or conceal the truth that the farmer was a man of rude, not to say coarse nature. He grimly smiled as he suggested that she had cost him so much that he wasn't going to drive her away. He certainly wouldn't pay more than he was obliged—for nothing, too. He wasn't, he said, such a fool (with an adjective) as that.

Get the money to settle all the debts and all the costs of legal proceedings. How was this to be done?

He hadn't got enough money for that.

Mr. Loosetongue advised the farmer to petition the Court for the Relief of Insolvent Debtors, adding, by way of good cheer, that the deception practiced upon him would entitle and secure him the sympathy of even Mr. Commissioner Jaw, if he should have the ill-luck to get sent before his tribunal. Or there were the Maidstone and Canterbury County Courts, in either of which the whitewashing could be done. There was the disadvantage to Mr. Williams that these institutions were near his home, else Canterbury was a nice place for insolvents. The judge was such a reasonable man. He never favoured harsh creditors in their oppositions. Canterbury was in such good odour with debtors, that numerous clients of Mr. Loosetongue, weary and heavily laden with debt, had made pilgrimage to that shrine, where generous legislation, administered by a kindly judge, always gave them the relief they sought.

Farmer Williams did not like the notion of insolvency.

Mr. Loosetongue thought the farmer wiser than he was.

Bankruptcy, suggested the attorney, had advantages, no doubt; and a farmer was eligible for that process.

To show that he was not ignorant of his profession, he explained what the advantages were. Bankruptcy was dearer than insolvency.

The reader will, perhaps, if he does not know the fact, thank us for pausing to explain that the two rival establishments of Portugal Street and Basinghall Street are now united, and that although the competition has ceased, the process of whitewashing is reduced to next to nothing.

Bankruptcy was not more pleasant to the mind of the farmer than insolvency.

The farm cultivated by the unlucky bridegroom was part of it his own freehold. He was lawyer enough to know that he would have to surrender that to his wife's creditors, and in fact that he was neither insolvent nor bankrupt, although without ready money.

Mr. Loosetongue was, before this interview closed, instructed to get £750 on mortgage of the farm. Out of this amount the debts were paid; the lawyers of the several claimants were satisfied; and Mr. Loosetongue, in compensation for the exercise of his brilliant and laborious services, also took a rather heavy percentage. Farmer Williams, who thought of replacing at his bank the ready cash already drawn out to meet the expenses before and after his wedding, found that impossible, as he had only a few pounds to draw from his eloquent and learned advisor.

When these heavy bills had been settled, the farmer, smarting under the affliction, told his wife the amount of her ante-nuptial debts had already cost him. This of course led to another quarrel, in which she upbraided him for meanness, and further deception, declared that he had plenty of money, but was too mean to spend it, boasted that she was glad he had been compelled to part with some of his miserly hoard, and so forth. She made the gratuitous and unnecessary announcement that she didn't care a pin for him, and, for his further comfort, assured him that he had not paid quite all yet. There were a few things she said he had not heard of, but should do so. She promised to write to all the rest of her creditors, and threatened to get in debt whenever she could, if only to punish him for his villainy to her.

Some letters were posted by Mrs. Williams next day in Rochester, and within a week, half a dozen or so of lawyers' letters came down to the farm. These letters exasperated the farmer beyond measure. He stormed, swore, raved, and was near the commission of a personal outrage on his wife. A scuffle did ensue. She flew at him, and somehow in the affray the bosom of her dress was torn partially open, so as to disclose one corner of the envelope of a letter concealed near her breast.

The husband's eyes were lighted up by a fiendish glare! In an instant he seized her with an iron grasp. Her strength was soon expended, and she could offer no resistance.

He drew from his pocket a huge clasp-knife, intending to rip open her dress, and tear out the concealed letter.

She saw the knife. She thought he intended to murder her in his rage. She trembled, threw herself on her knees, shrieked, and implored mercy!

"Give me the letter!" he exclaimed, as he brandished the knife, and malignantly delighted in her groundless fears.

"What letter?" she replied.

"That I saw in your bosom just now!"

"I have no letter! Oh! my God! no—don't ask for that! It does not concern you;—believe me, it does not!"

“Give it me!”

Again the polished steel of the broad blade passed before her eyes.

She saw it was of no use attempting to hold it, and as he dropped the knife upon the floor, she fell back, and allowed him to take it from her.

It did not reveal the secret he expected, but another, not much, if any, more agreeable to a young husband. It was from the proprietor or keeper of a cheap boarding school in Berkshire, demanding payment on account of the maintenance of a child of which she was the mother, and her husband was certainly not the father.

This letter went on to complain that the time by which she promised to discharge all arrears had so long passed without anything having been remitted, that the writer—who had learned from her friends of her marriage—would have to send the little girl home to the farm, and hand the bill over to his lawyer, that Mr. Williams might pay it.

Here was a discovery! Farmer Williams had the mare put to his gig at once, and set off for London where he arrived that night. Next day he consulted Mr. Loosetongue. He told him that the woman was unbearable. It was impossible to live with her. She was more wicked, he thought, than the prince of the nether world; at least she was more fit to be a queen in the infernal regions than the wife of an honest English farmer. He must get rid of her.

There was another lot of letters from her creditors' lawyers. There was a letter! Would Mr. Loosetongue read that? Wasn't he astonished? Couldn't he now get a divorce? Wouldn't that, if got “right off at once, stop the actions?”

The attorney explained that the little ante-nuptial irregularity would not, *per se*, be a ground for divorce; and, on the other hand, his client would have to maintain the child of his wife. All the debts yet owing by her he must be understood, in law, as having agreed to pay when he completed the civil contract of marriage in the vestry of St. Dunstan's. It was impossible to successfully resist—it was highly inexpedient to delay—time would entail expense. The result of this interview was, that Mr. Loosetongue was instructed to prepare a second mortgage on the farm, and out of the proceeds to settle the demands.

The magnitude of the evil, the prospect he thought he saw before him, calmed the irascibility of the farmer; but if the temper of his indignation was not so fiery as it had been, its strength had increased as it cooled.

He reached the farm full of strong decision—with a resolution to inflict humiliating punishment on his wife.

She had fled. Where she took herself off to, her husband could not learn. She booked at Rochester by the railway to Gravesend, and from there hastened, by way of Tilbury, to London. She was lost to pursuit in that wilderness of brick and mortar—the Great Metropolis.

I never ascertained, nor could I ever form a satisfactory theory in my own mind as to the cause of this abrupt departure. I should have thought that the woman who could have braved the discovery of so many other peccadilloes would have faced the consequences of the last disclosure. It may have been that pertinacity and unscrupulousness abruptly stopped at this point. It may have been, after all, a nobler feeling yet latent in this designing woman's breast. Perhaps she could bear to be known as a wantonly extravagant and scheming matrimonial adventuress, and yet not be able to bear the imputation, or proof, of her unchastity. It may have been that she dreaded that the farmer's knife would cut short the term of her wicked life. It may have been that she dreaded the harshness and cruelty of a rude, unwilling father, or protector, towards her child. There is a quickening atom of love in every heart; perhaps that in Mrs. Williams belonged to her daughter.

This was the story I had from the lips of the farmer when he called upon me about three years after the last event described.

I noticed throughout the narrative—which the reader has in briefer form than I originally had it—that he was evidently half afraid or ashamed to tell me how he made the acquaintance of this interesting and very amiable lady. I knew I must have it, but was content to wait for its disclosure; so I allowed him to rattle on with his curious story up to this point. Here I felt it desirable to ask him the important question—

“How did you get acquainted with Miss Jones—your wife—Mr. Williams?”

“Ah,” said he, “of course you must know that.”

“Yes,” I rejoined.

“Well, this way. I saw an advertisement in one of our county papers, the *Kentish Firelight*, of a concern they called the Matrimonial Agency—you know, up there in — Street—and I wrote for a prospectus, enclosing half-a-crown in postage stamps for that precious bit of paper. When I got the prospectus, I found that I must pay one guinea for the registration of my name in the books of the association. So I sent that money, with my photograph, and I got a note from the fellow who called himself the secretary, acknowledging the receipt of the picture and the money, and was told that upon payment of a further sum of five pounds, I might inspect a gallery of female portraits in the offices of the society. I came to London, and paid five pounds, saw the miniatures of nearly a hundred ladies, and selected one who, I was told, was that of a Miss Frances Jones.”

“Did they make no representations about her?” I asked.

“Yes,” he replied, “they read me a written description of the lady. She was described as twenty-three years of age—which was under the mark—of fair complexion, auburn hair, and rather slender form.”

“Was that all?” I asked, as I did not like to put the plain question—“Were you looking after a wife with a fortune?”

“I think,” he added, after a slight pause, “they said something about her being a lady-like and well-educated young woman.”

“Did they say nothing about her family, friends, connections, situation, or circumstances in life?”

“Well, no,” he replied; “I thought I would see to all that myself.”

I saw that he was trying to deceive me on one point, and humbugging himself.

“Mr. Williams,” I said, “I am afraid that you misunderstand me, or else you are hardly treating me with that confidence I have a right to expect, and which, I think, is essential to the success of my labours for you.”

“What do you want me to tell you?” he inquired, with an embarrassed air.

“I want to know the whole truth. Were you told that she belonged to a wealthy or a respectable family, that she had property or money, or anything of that sort?”

I saw that he was getting uncomfortable, and although I really wanted this information, I liked to witness his confusion, so I added the interrogatory—

“Did you, or did you not, apply to the Association for a wife with money?”

“Well, in fact, I did say, that as I had a little property of my own—a rather snug farm, part freehold, you know—that I should like my wife to have a little property also, because, as I have heard my father say, good looks are all very well, but beauty won’t keep the pot boiling, or fill the stomach.”

“Proceed, sir,” I said.

“They did not tell me anything,” he continued, “about her family, or her friends, but they said that she was a lady who had a fortune in her own right—somewhere about £4,000 in the Funds—which would become her husband’s on her marriage.”

“That,” I observed “would have been a nice little addition to your estate. It would have enabled you to farm your land to the best advantage. It is not many farmers who have such a capital.”

“The vagabonds! I believe they knew they were duping me,” he said; “although they threw me off my guard by stipulating in honour for a commission of five per cent nett of the girl’s pretended fortune.”

“They took care to make a market of you, as it was,” I observed. “Why, they had over £5 out of you before you saw the lady.”

“More than that!” he ejaculated. “After I had said I liked the looks of the lady, and had listened to the secretary’s tale about her fortune, they told me I had better go home, and leave all the rest

to them. They would require to prepare Miss Jones for my introduction, as she was rather shy, although, like all other single ladies, very anxious to be married; and the preliminary negotiations, as experience had told them, required the utmost delicacy and care in their management, or ladies would get offended and break off.”

He stopped a moment, and, to lead him on through my instructions—which, although full, were very entertaining—I merely drew the cork from a bottle of port in my cupboard, poured him out a glass, and took one myself.

In continuation, he said, “A day or two afterwards I had from the secretary a letter to say that the matter appeared to him to be going on as satisfactorily as possible, and that they would—if not troubling me too much—like to see me. I came to town at once. The secretary then informed me that Miss Jones had been rather pleased with my portrait, and was on the whole satisfied with their explanations about me; but until she had had time for a little further reflection, she would not consent to an interview. He said he could see our matrimonial negotiation would be a tedious affair to the agency, as its officers could only treat the affair as a pure matter of business, and they were unable to participate in the pleasant anxieties of the lovers whose interests and happiness they promoted. The fellow uttered this in tones of such gravity, that for a moment I thought he had persuaded himself he was a philanthropist, working for the benefit of the human race, and without a thought for himself. This notion was, however, removed by his adding that he should gladly give up the case, only he felt that would be neither fair to me nor to Miss Jones, still he thought if I wished him to proceed in the affair, he must ask me for another fee—say a £10 note.

“This took me a little by surprise. I said that I thought he ought to be satisfied for the present with the money I had given them. They were to have a percentage on the fortune I should have with the lady, and I thought that should also be enough for their payment hereafter; but I would not object to make the five per cent. into something more—say seven and a-half per cent.

“To this the secretary observed, that no doubt it appeared a little distrustful of me, but as he had said, the agency must treat the affair as a matter of business to some extent, and be guided by the light of experience. They would leave their compensation mainly on the security of my honour, but they must take care to guard themselves against total loss of time and personal expenses where the negotiations were protracted and so delicate as to call for the exercise of their very best skill.

“I did not like parting with more money, but I confess that I was getting very eager to meet the lady, whose graceful carriage, beauty, conversational powers, and accomplishments the secretary had dexterously referred to in the course of this interview.

“I paid the secretary another ten-pound note, and he promised to use his best offices to bring about an immediate interview, and a consummation that by this time it would be absurd for me to say I did not devoutly wish.”

“‘Well,’ I interrupted, ‘then you will see the lady, I suppose, within a day or two?’

“‘Not quite so soon,’ the secretary said.

“I imagine,” Mr. Williams said, with a sardonic grin, “that it was one of the devices of the agency to work up the tender anxieties of their clients (as they called them) by procrastination and disappointment. I got no letter for a week. I was uneasy, and wrote to know how they were getting on with the affair. I received an answer begging me not to be impatient, or my hurry might prove fatal to the negotiation. Another week rolled away, and no further letter came, so I wrote again to ask how the negotiation was proceeding? I got a reply this time, stating that in a day or two I might, they thought, do well to come to town again, first apprising them of the day and the hour I would call at the agency.”

“This time you saw your hesitating inamorata?” I said.

“No, not this time. A letter had been received by the secretary, suggesting in modest terms, and in a very neat handwriting, the timidity she felt at the proposed interview in the presence of third parties, and at so short a notice. I told the secretary that I thought he had better just give me the lady’s address, and let me write to her, or call, after an appointment. To this he had an unconquerable aversion, but said, that as she seemed willing to spare the agency trouble, he would, after the first meeting, be indeed very glad to leave us to arrange all our courtship and marriage as we liked.

“That word courtship I hated. It looked as if, after paying all my money, and going through all this bother with the agency, I should still have a year or two of fiddle-faddling before I got a wife.”

“And £4,000,” I ventured to add.

“I mentioned something of this to the secretary, who advised me not to ‘pull in my line until my fish was fairly hooked, and then to draw it on safe dry ground as quick as possible.’ So I made up my mind to insist upon speedy marriage after the ice had been broken at the first interview with my lady-love. I had, however, to return home once more, bitterly tormented with disappointment, and to await another summons to London.

“Two days after this, I was urged to come up next day, as a letter awaited me at the agency from Miss Jones, which the secretary thought it desirable not to post. Of course I obeyed the summons. The note was unsealed, and had been read by the people of the agency.

“It proposed a meeting on the afternoon of my arrival at three o’clock. The trysting-place was the Mall of St. James’s Park, and the signal, I am told, was one of the most old-fashioned since the daughters or Eve learned the use of white lawn handkerchiefs.

“We met. My lady blushed a great deal, I believe,—although she was veiled—as she ought to have blushed, at any rate. She tremulously held my arm, and betrayed many signs of real or affected timidity. If I never loved her before or long afterwards, I swear that I loved her then with all my heart and soul.

It was refreshing to hear the enthusiasm, and sentimentality of my instructor. I merely said “I have no doubt you did, sir,” just to encourage him in getting to the end of the narrative requisite for me, and he proceeded.

“In the course of that interview it was agreed that we should get married as soon as the proper arrangements could be very well made.”

“That was rather hasty, was it not?” I asked.

“Not so very, I think,” he replied, “because I thought the agency had made all proper enquiries for me about her, and she expressed herself quite satisfied with the account she had of me from the secretary.”

“I suppose, in fact,” I continued “that you unconsciously assisted her scheme by *your* eagerness to get the affair settled.”

“Perhaps I did.”

“At all events you were married?”

“Within a month—at St. Dunstan’s.”

“Who procured the license and made the little arrangements for the wedding?”

“I went with the secretary to Doctors’ Common, and made the oath, and got the licence, and he did all the rest, but he charged me stiffly, and I had to pay beforehand. I met my wife near the Church, as it had been agreed with him, and she now had friends with her. But the affair was all conducted as privately as possible.”

“It was an odd mode of picking up a wife, Mr. Williams,” I here remarked, “and I am not astonished that your matrimonial experiment turned out badly. However, your story is now, I suppose, nearly at an end.”

“Nearly. I have not set eyes upon my wife since that day I left the farm to see Mr. Loosetongue about the letter.”

“Ah, that reminds me,” I said, “to what circumstances I am indebted for the honour of your introduction and business? Why did you not consult your lawyer?”

He explained that the attorney’s charges had been, he thought, too high for the work that had been done. I told him that my charges would, in all probability, be much higher. He said, however, that he did not care, for he was quite certain from what he had heard about me that I should do my work conscientiously and efficiently.

He went on to explain that he wanted a divorce. There resided in a town, not twenty miles from his farm, a widow, whose husband had departed this life about three months before the date of

his present interview with me, leaving her no children as the memorials of his affection, but money enough to tempt suitors of the class my instructor was a type of.

“You see,” he said, “this thing wouldn’t press so much, because I can’t get married for some nine months to come, as Mrs. Tompkins (my wife that is to be) don’t, she says, think it decent, and, therefore, she won’t have me till her dear Tompkins has been in his grave a year, but the other d—I won’t let me alone. See here.”

He produced a letter from his pocket. I had my clue. This was a case I had no doubt about getting through of my own intuition; but, with the clue of this letter, I saw that all was right.

The letter was an application by a lawyer for £60, for Mrs. Williams’ board and lodging for three months, during an illness at Teignmouth. The attorney carried on business at Plymouth.

I sent the farmer to a respectable London attorney, who, in order to facilitate me, did not threaten a defence outright, but merely wrote about the hardship of the case to his unfortunate client, and asked for consideration, which of course he and I both knew very well he would not get if he wanted it.

I went off to Plymouth next day and put up at “The Royal.” There I soon got the measurement of the attorney who wrote the letter for payment, but could learn no more. I wrote to London, and desired my solicitor to get me if he could the address of the creditor. The Plymouth attorney was obliged to give this, because having had the impudence to issue a writ at once, my solicitor, as attorney for the defendant, took out a summons for the address and occupation of the plaintiff, which he procured for me. These were telegraphed to me in cipher. I took the next train to Teignmouth within an hour, and paid a visit to the street in which the plaintiff, a lady, lived. It was a street of lodging houses, and it excited no surprise that, after another visit to “The Royal,” at Plymouth (where I telegraphed for one of my men to come down), I was again early seen engaging lodgings, as an invalid, within thirty yards of the front of the plaintiff’s house. My parlour had a bay window that commanded a view of my opposite neighbours, and the plaintiff’s house was, of course, not difficult to keep under close observation. In order to do this effectually, and without interruption, I showed signs of bad temper all day, got the dislike of the servant-of-all-work, who never came to me unless I rang for her, and I daresay hated me very cordially. At night, once or twice, I found my imaginary neuralgia less tormenting, and was good-natured. I asked my landlady (a widow) to do me the honour of having a glass of wine, or a glass of grog with me; and she doubly honoured me by accepting both. Of course, she talked as she drank. I got from her, voluntarily, the whole history of the entire street, and learned that two persons, the plaintiff, and a friend or hers, were thought by everybody no better than they ought to be. That friend pretended to be the wife of a commercial traveller, but people said he was a gambler, who made his living by cheating the young officers he could pick up at Plymouth. As for my hostess, she didn’t believe they were married at all, nor did she think the world was unjust in saying the hard things it did about both the reputed husband and wife.

A description of the plaintiff’s friend led me to suspect that she was the veritable farmer’s wife. Her present reputed husband was, I thought, the concoctor of the plot, to get a little more money

out of the pocket of the farmer. The plaintiff's aid in this scheme having been secured, no doubt, by a prospect of a share in the product of the swindle.

I was correct. Farmer Williams sent me in a parcel the photograph which he had obtained from the Matrimonial Agency. I now grew bolder in my proceedings. My man, who had arrived, was lucky enough to find lodgings to let in the house of the reputed commercial traveller's house. We met in the street, quite as by accident, near his door. He invited me in, and we spent a cozy evening. It happened that the traveller was at home, and, perhaps, having an eye to business (in the card line), he ventured to ask if my man, who had proved himself a very amiable fellow, would have a hand at whist—as also his friend—with Mr. and Mrs. Howard. We assented.

There was no mistake about the identity of the lady, who had, according to her story, as related in conversation that night, been twice married, and had two children—one, the eldest, being at boarding school—the other, the youngest, having, poor creature, died within a week of his birth.

That night I lost a little money, as I was obliged to do—somewhere about three pounds, and my man lost a couple of sovereigns at play. This was on a Monday night. On the following Saturday it was arranged, on my invitation, that we should all go on a picnic party for a few miles in the country. I knew the man would thus be secured at home on the day set apart for a little amusement as well as business.

Letters went to London and to the farm, near Rochester, by the early mail next day.

We had our picnic, and a jolly day we made of it. Nobody enjoyed it more than I did, unless it were my man, who appeared to have more than a poet's sense of the beautiful in nature, and more than Epicurus's appreciation of other good material things of earth. Like very respectable people, we got home early, and had a rubber of whist.

While enjoying ourselves in this quiet fashion, a comely rat-tat led me and my man to glance at one another, and led the servant girl to the street door. We were seated in the parlour. The strangers rushed past the girl before she had even time to scream, and in a moment my lawyer, Farmer Williams, and two servants from his farm, crowded the small apartment. There was a scene, and some words; but I prevented, the uproar getting too high by a suggestion to the shrewd Mr. Howard, of the danger he would run if he attempted to make any needless disturbance. All the witnesses to identity having satisfied their curiosity by comparing the Mrs. Howard before their eyes with the Mrs. Williams engraven on the tablets of their memories, we withdrew, and a volley of unaffectionate terms assailed our ears until the outer door closed upon me—the last man—prudence having whispered to Mr. Howard of the inexpediency of following up the pursuit by loud words, or overt acts of retaliation.

To make assurance doubly sure, my solicitor took down the evidence which could be given by my Teignmouth landlady and one or two acquaintances, who could show the relationship in which Mrs. Williams stood to Mr. Howard, and then we all returned to London.

My task was practically accomplished. I knew that, in all probability, my evidence would not be wanted in the case, as so many unprofessional witnesses were available.

Farmer Williams was gratified by the confident opinion of his lawyer that he had now a good defence to the action, and also the materials for a divorce from his wife.

The divorce was immediately afterwards sued for, and eventually obtained; but it cost the farmer a pretty penny, one way and another. He had to pay not only his own costs—including, of course, my charges—but he was constrained by law to pay those at his wife's defence, and the judge granted her (as he was obliged) alimony during the suit, at the rate of £200 a year out of the husband's income, which she was at liberty to spend, and did spend, with Mr. Howard.

There are a few particulars of the lady and the Matrimonial Agency, which the reader may like to know.

She was the daughter of a tradesman who ran away to Australia, leaving his wife, a son, and this daughter, to shift for themselves. The young man turned out steady, and was able to support his mother. For Frances a situation as shopwoman was obtained, but she could not endure the irksomeness of life behind the counter, and a flirtation with one of the male assistants of the establishment caused the abrupt dismissal of them both. What became of her, or how she lived during the next two years, I did not ascertain, but I traced her afterwards living at St. John's Wood under the protection of a gentleman. Being ambitious of escaping from this questionable position, and getting into a sphere of respectability, she adopted an expedient not unlike that of her husband. She was a woman of no mean personal attractions, fair education, and more than ordinary natural ability.

For some time before her marriage she had mainly lived by scheming. She set herself to entrap some wealthy fool into a marriage, in the belief and intention of extracting money enough out of him for housekeeping and what not to pay her debts, and keep the baby, which had been the result of her earliest indiscretion, at the drapery establishment. She had been a victim to the Matrimonial Agency. The secretary of that concern got £25 out of her as the reward for his services in the plot against Farmer Williams.

After quitting the farm, as I have described, she was involved in great trouble. A pawnbroker supplied her with the means of subsistence for a few weeks, but that source then failed. She had no security to offer him, except the clothes necessary to keep up "a decent appearance" with, and she was prepared to make any sacrifice rather than that a life of virtue now demanded. I must not explain the mode in which she consequently procured the money she now fared sumptuously upon, until an accident threw her in the way of Mr. Howard, and the partnership, such as it was, between them was effected.

The Revelations of a Private Detective by Andrew Forrester, Jr. London: Ward and Lock, 1863. 143-71.