

A MAN OF HIS WORD.

(Continued.)

But in a moment of weakness he consented to depart for once from the safe ground of *sic volo, sic jubeo*, and said, "Poverty has nothing to do with it. For the matter of that, I should rather prefer a poor man to a rich one, provided he was honest and hard-working, and didn't give himself airs. Offer me such a son-in-law as that, and I sha'n't ask him to make any settlements. Nobody has ever called me grasping."

"Then it must be his rank that offends you, and that is most unjust; because, after all, it is no fault of his that he is a gentleman. I dare say he would have made quite as good a grocer as other people, if he had been called to that state of life."

"He would have made nothing of the sort," retorted Mr. Hobday, warmly, a horrid suspicion crossing his mind that his daughter, in spite of her grave face, was laughing at him; "he would have made an infernally bad grocer. There's no stuff in the man, I tell you. He's a butterfly—a fine gentleman—a good-for-nothing fellow! But I'm a fool to go on excusing myself like this. Once for all, I don't mean you to marry him, and you'll oblige me by dropping the subject."

"Papa," said Josephine, rising, and laying her head upon her father's arm, "I love him."

Mr. Hobday hardly knew what to say. Such contumacy was without a parallel in his experience. It had happened occasionally to him, as to other men, to meet with opposition to his wishes; but he had always had the whip hand to those who had opposed him, and therefore, when he had said, "Oblige me by dropping the subject," the subject had been dropped like a hot potato. Yet here was his own daughter, a mere child, paying no more attention to his request than if it had never been uttered. "Josephine," he said severely, "you ought to be ashamed of yourself. What business have you to talk about loving a man whom I have forbidden you to marry? It's impertinent and disobedient. Indulgent too," added Mr. Hobday, bethinking himself of a more appropriate adjective.

"I am not ashamed of saying that I love him," answered the girl. "Why should I be, when I know that he loves me? You have given me no reason why I should not love him, nor why I should not marry him."

"I have given you the best of all reasons why you should not marry him," returned Mr. Hobday, "and that is that I don't choose it. I suppose you know that I am a man of my word, and that you have no more chance of marrying Denne now than you have of marrying the Emperor of China. If you see nothing to be ashamed of in loving a man whom you can't marry, you have been uncommonly badly brought up, and that old tabby of a schoolmistress has robbed me of my money. Now you had better go away and think over what I've said. In future I hope you will know better than to waste time in arguing after you've got your orders."

"Yes, papa," answered Josephine, quietly. "I shall know better in future."

Thereupon she retired, leaving Mr. Hobday with an uneasy feeling in his mind, that, notwithstanding this sudden submission, she had not yet spoken her last word.

IV.

The truth is that a man must be very hard-hearted, as well as very thick-skinned, to endure domestic estrangements with equanimity. Mr. Hobday's skin was thick enough for anything; but, unfortunately for himself, his heart was far less hard than his words. He was ever ready for a fight, and, indeed, rather enjoyed fighting; but when once the quarrel was over—that is to say, when he had carried his point—he was willing and anxious to make friends again. Josephine absolutely refused to make friends. She did not sulk; she showed a smiling face at mealtimes, and was somewhat exaggeratedly obedient to her father's slightest wish; yet she held him at arm's-length and altogether ignored his advances. When Mr. Hobday heard that Egbert had actually left the neighborhood without making any attempt to see Josephine again he became more than ever eager to blot out all memory of the past, and went up to London for the express purpose of buying a peace-offering for his daughter. Josephine rewarded him with a rather disdainful smile and a ceremonious word or two of thanks. She hardly deigned to glance at the diamond-and-ruby bracelet, which she at once laid down upon the table, and Mr. Hobday had the mortification of seeing the velvet case in the same spot for three consecutive days, it having evidently remained there untouched since the moment of its presentation.

"I wouldn't leave valuable jewelry lying about like that if I were you," he growled out at last. "Do you know what that bracelet cost?"

"A thousand pounds," asked Josephine, carelessly.

"A thousand pounds for a bracelet! The girl's off her head!"

"A hundred pounds, then!—ten pounds? I never thought of valuing presents by their price before, but as this one is so precious, I had better go and lock it up."

And she suited the action to the word before her father could make any rejoinder.

She was not often so outspoken as in this matter of the bracelet—the gift of which, it must be owned, argued a deplorable lack of discrimination on the part of the donor. An equivocal phrase or two, an occasional touch of sarcasm, a determination to be interested in nothing—these are hardly offences of which any overt notice can be taken; but they served the purpose, which they were doubtless intended to serve, of making Mr. Hobday restless and uncomfortable. He complained of the girl's behavior bitterly to Staveley, whom he made the recipient of his confidence with regard to the whole affair.

"Anybody would think I had been a brute to her, to see the way she treats me," he said. "Yet what are the facts? I've done all for her that any father could do for his daughter, and a deal more than most do. I pay her bills without asking any questions; she has plenty of pocket-money, and if she wants any more, why, there it is for her—any amount of it. I can't call to mind that I ever refused her anything in the whole course of her life till the other day, when I had to tell her—and I did it in the kindest possible way, mind you—that young Denne wouldn't suit me for a son-in-law. Dash it all! a man has some right to choose his own son-in-law, I should hope! The fact is, I've been too indulgent with her."

"Oh, I don't think you ought to reproach yourself with that," Staveley answered. "One should always be indulgent with women, who are proverbially unreasonable, you know. And I think you were very wise to dismiss Egbert Denne. It always looks best to take the initiative in these cases."

"How the initiative? I don't quite follow you," said Mr. Hobday.

"Well, of course you know that his people wouldn't have heard of the match. There is no older blood in England than the Denues', and Lord Rye has rather unusually strong class prejudices."

"Lord Rye be hanged!" interrupted Mr. Hobday, with considerable displeasure. "My daughter's as good as his son any day of the week."

"Not a doubt of it; but you would never convince him of that. Happily, you don't mean to try; and, as I said before, I think you are very wise."

"Stuff and nonsense!" resorted Mr. Hobday, angrily. "If I chose to offer my daughter to Lord Rye to-morrow, he'd marry her himself, and be thankful. Don't tell me!"

Mr. Staveley smiled incredulously, but did not seem disposed to prolong the discussion. He caught sight of Josephine crossing the lawn at that moment, and hurried after her, ostensibly to wish her good-morning, but in reality to whisper to her, "Don't be discouraged, Miss Hobday, and don't judge by appearances; but have a little faith and patience. I think I begin to see my way."

If, however, this good-natured conspirator was counting upon promoting Josephine's marriage by dwelling upon imaginary opposition to it, his scheme was frustrated by an event which took place in the autumn, and which was destined to bring about a serious and public breach between the houses of Denne and Hobday. The sudden death of Colonel Denne not only created a vacancy in the representation of Stillbourne, but found the family, to whom that borough and its voters had always been considered to belong, unprepared with any candidate to put forward in the room of the deceased member. Mr. Hobday had his address out the day after the funeral, and was vigorously conducting his canvass from house to house before Lord Rye so much as knew that any one had had the audacity to think of opposing him. When the news was communicated to that potentate he could hardly believe his ears, and declared that the man must be mad. Nevertheless, he was more angry than sane men generally allow themselves to be with lunatics. He was not predisposed in Mr. Hobday's favor, to begin with. When he had found himself obliged to part with the Sheldon Park estate it had grieved him that a man who had begun life as a grocer's errand boy, should become the purchaser, and his own nearest neighbour; and since that time his agent had reported to him certain trivial claims and disputes in which the aggressiveness of the new proprietor had become conspicuous. "And now, to crown all," cried Lord Rye, indignantly, "the fellow attacks me in a moment of domestic affliction, with the sole purpose of causing me annoyance; for he must be perfectly well aware that his election is a moral impossibility. This comes of selling one's property to tallow-chandlers! Set a beggar on horseback and we all know what the consequences will be."

Lord Rye was an honest and upright, if somewhat narrow-minded, old gentleman, whose temper had been a little soured by the persistent unkindness of fortune. With large estates he had never had a large rent-roll and he was imbued with an unfortunate conviction that it behooved him to avoid all apparent retrenchment. This drove him to make retrenchments which were not apparent, and were therefore the more galling. He had an exalted idea of the importance of his position, and an immense veneration for his family, which, perhaps, hardly deserved so much honor at his hands. The last generation had bequeathed him nothing but embarrassments, and the rising one, *progenies villosior*, bade fair to be the ruin of him. Between the two he stood, a weary Atlas, bearing upon his bowed shoulders a burden of which no kindly Hercules seemed likely to relieve him. Of his sons, the eldest, Lord Grinstead, had urged on a wild career upon the turf for some years, and was now involved in hopeless pecuniary difficulties, while the others had all turned out badly in more or less conspicuous fashion. Egbert was by far the best of them, and even Egbert was rather expensive, besides being too indolent and easy-going to be any comfort to his much-worried father.

Nevertheless, it was to Egbert that application was made when it was found necessary to oppose a legitimate candidate to the audacious Hobday. He and his father were staying at Rye Court, having come down to attend Colonel Denne's funeral, and Egbert was sitting in the library one morning, thinking about Josephine, and wishing that he could meet her by chance, when a message was brought to him that Lord Rye wished to see him at once. He found the agent and the land steward with his father; but these left the room as he entered it, and Lord Rye looked up, with a troubled, preoccupied air, from the paper which he had been perusing.

"Oh, Egbert," he said, "I sent for you to say that, as far as I can see you will have to enter Parliament. You have no objection, I suppose?"

"Well, if it's the same thing to you, I think I would rather not," the young man replied. "You see, I mean to go in for painting rather more seriously than I have done, and that will take up all my time. Couldn't you find somebody else?"