

THE TRIUMPHS OF DUTY.

CHAPTER III.

THE OLD MANOR COURT HOUSE.

Three years after the disclosures made in our first chapters, our young hero, having finished with great success his studies in Paris, and his classical tour with a tutor, then visited England, in the spring of 1853. Some weeks were devoted to pleasant sight-seeing round the coast, some more to investigation of all the principal dock-yards, harbors, and arsenals, then more weeks to manufactures and mining districts, and still Arthur was not wearied.

England continued a land of poetry and romance in contrast to France, which being the country of all the prose reality of his life, he loved in a deep, earnest, and a practical manner, as the Arthur Bryce of Marseilles. This name he was obliged still to retain in its simplicity, for reasons which will declare themselves in due time. London had been seen merely in passing from one railway station to another, but now he was to visit and reside for some months in our immense metropolis, where, after seeing with deliberate attention, the many objects of the great capital, he was to finish his education by the study of as much law, as Mr. Oldham, the family lawyer, might judge proper. This substantial elderly gentleman continued to be the only person to whom Arthur was permitted to give his confidence; for Lord Charleton, anticipating the time when his grandson could select his young friends from his true position in life, bade him content himself for the present with guides, directors, inspectors, and all official persons; and, with the above exception, to outpour his feelings in letters to himself alone. Arthur had been residing in London about four months, when Mr. Oldham imparted to him that, after the most apparently capricious conduct, the present owner of Woolton Court seemed determined to dispose at once of the property, and had requested Mr. Oldham, by letter, to go immediately to confer with him on the spot. "Now, sir," added Mr. Oldham, "I have written, in reply, that I will have the honor of waiting on Mr. Sanderson on the evening of the twenty-fifth of this month of August, and of remaining one whole day at Woolton Court. That as his invitation was to remain ten days or a fortnight, to clear up some complicated affairs, with which request, it was impossible for me to comply in my own person, I proposed bringing with me a gentleman who would remain to act for me, in all that Mr. Sanderson wished to intrust to my skill and zeal.

"And that profound lawyer is Mr. Arthur Bryce?" said our hero, smiling.

"It is," replied Mr. Oldham. "Your grandfather wishes you to see the place, and I think this appears a good opportunity. As for depth of law required in arranging Mr. Sanderson's papers, you have acquired knowledge more profound than those will require; besides, you can write and consult me about any difficulty that may prolong your stay. This is the 10th of the month. In six days, then, I shall have the honor of conducting you to Woolton.

Mr. Oldham departed, and Arthur soliloquized: "Yes, this is England! romantic, dreary England! What an unreal life mine is? Do I wish this to continue, or to end? I know not? I may say with Hamlet, 'To be, or not to be, that is the question.'

A letter from Mr. Oldham to Mr. Bryce, senior, at Marseilles, imparted the approaching visit to Woolton Court. He thus concluded: "It is still quite as necessary as ever, to keep the secret of the name and history of him who wishes to possess the place. Mr. Sanderson is one of those gentlemen, who have a jealous antipathy to those

in a still higher class of society. He has also a nervous dread of being advised and persuaded into any measure; so that, however favorably inclined he may be to a project, he will relinquish it if advised—still more if urged to remain constant to it. I have fully apprized Mr. Arthur Bryce of this bias of character in the present owner of Woolton Court, &c." The next letter received by the venerable merchant of Marseilles was from Arthur, as follows:

"My dear grandfather, to know that you will read with emotion the fact, that I am at Woolton Court, gives me a sympathetic feeling, from the reverence and affection I bear you. From your description, I have identified many parts of the house and grounds. It all strikes me as solidly grand, and noble, and worthy of you. As for myself, as connected with this place, I cannot believe it. The future is too uncertain—the present too unreal. But I must relate the facts of our arrival. Mr. Oldham, and 'Mr. Arthur Bryce, an intelligent lawyer,' recommended by him, travelled together from London by railway, as far as Congledon. Thence in a vehicle, misnamed a 'Fly,' to the entrance lodge of Woolton Court. We had ascended gradually for the last mile or more, and now we descended still more slowly the inner side of the mountain, or hill, into the little valley of Woolton—a scene of great beauty. Alternate rock and verdure; higher mountains in the distance; the peaceful little lake, nestling in the depths; a great variety of fine timber; and, abruptly rising from the valley, on a platform rock of its own, the mansion of Woolton Court. The natural causeway from this rock to the side of the mountain, which we were descending, brought us on level ground, and our poor little fly then flew with some speed, till we found ourselves before the huge portals of the outer archway of the court. We were expected, and immediately admitted, through inner courts, and halls, and ante-rooms, to the comfortable little parlor, wherein sate the domestic trio of Mr. Sanderson and his two sisters. Rather pleasant and kind people, especially the elder sister. But there is in the house a most charming person; a daughter or sister of the Marquis of Seaham, who lives near, and comes from time to time to Woolton, to copy some of the pictures in this gallery, for her own family seat in Cheshire. The cottage they have on Windermere, is, I hear, very well worth seeing. You have, I think, mentioned that family when talking of old times. The family name is Chamberlayne. I leave Mr. Oldham to report progress, should there be any, towards the re-possession of this place. The conversation last night seemed favorable; but this morning Mr. Oldham's looks did not betoken much advance; indeed, he was so inwardly fretted that he was compelled to vent it on his dry toast at breakfast, by scraping and stabbing it, as though it had been the effigy of Mr. Sanderson's irresolute self-will. In a few days I will write again, &c."

On the third morning of Arthur's visit to Woolton, he rose early, and with some vague feeling of expected pleasure in viewing the living as well as departed beauties in the great picture gallery, bent his steps that way. He perceived Lady Clara Chamberlayne already seated at her easel, and he gradually made his way towards her, preserving, however, after the first compliments of respectful greeting, a profound silence. Lady Clara had passed that first bloom which is supposed to hover between fifteen and five-and-twenty, but a consequent increase of intelligence and dignity, had given to her beauty a still greater charm. Amongst her many talents the art of portrait painting in oils had been one of the most cultivated, and Arthur beheld with admiration the fidelity with which she conveyed to her own

canvas the lovely original, a Lady Sybilla Woolton, in the costume and style of Sir Peter Lely. At length the natural polite inquiry of whether his admiring gaze on her work were intrusive occurred to Arthur, and received the courteous reply, that it would be very acceptable to an amateur to hear the observations of one who, from his visits to foreign galleries, and the instructions he had received from the first masters, must be a good judge of pictures, especially heads. Then followed an animated conversation on the comparative merits of the galleries of Dresden and Florence, in the first of which Lady Clara had studied, in the latter, Arthur. At length he ventured to observe that, beautiful as was the picture her ladyship was copying of the fair Sybilla, there were others in the gallery that he would have preferred to possess.

"I do not copy the Lady Sybilla because she is beautiful, but because she belongs to our family as well as the Wooltons, and ought to hang in our gallery at Marsden. She is labelled here the Lady Sybilla Woolton, for Sir Peter Lely must have painted her when very young. She afterwards married my great grandfather, the fifth Marquis of Seaham, and there is a melancholy pleasure in securing that all shall not be forgotten of the Earls of Charleton."

"That is very kind, very generous in you, Lady Clara," exclaimed the young man, energetically. "You are not one to trample on the fallen. The line of Woolton can boast of dauntless courage, of heroic endurance. I have heard of the last of that race—the last known in England. My grandfather was intimate with him abroad. Oh! how I wish you knew him."

Lady Clara looked at the speaker with a smile of intelligence, then laying aside her brush, she gave a small book open into his hand, saying, as she pointed to the various names of the owner on the blank leaf. "I thank you much for the perusal of this work. I would have detained it longer, had I not already thought it better to warn you, that, although to the world in general, Arthur William Bryce may be the more obvious interpretation of the initial 'W.', yet in this house, especially in this gallery, where the Wooltons can never be forgotten, you risk the discovery of your secret."

"Have I a secret?" said Arthur, prudently.

Lady Clara replied, "You had better trust me. You will never repent it."

Arthur seized the hand she extended to him, and pressed it to his lips, exclaiming, "I do trust you; I am a Woolton;" then added, "but tell me, how do you know me?"

"I own that I am puzzled," replied Lady Clara. "The last Lord Charleton has been traced—not in the spirit of bailiffs and constables, but with the purest motives of friendship—to Caen, to Paris. The marriage of his son, as Viscount Stanmore, proved that the earl still lived in 1831. But that son died childless in 1832. His bereaved father can no longer be traced. I must suppose you to be the descendant of one of the two younger sons of the ninth Earl of Charleton, who fled to America in the beginning of this century, as is recorded in certain family annals at our old place in Cheshire, setting forth how Gilbert Woolton wooed a certain Lady Jacqueline Chamberlayne, and how the gay deceiver fled from his word and his love to the woods and wilds of America; and how the Lady Jacqueline wrote verses, Oh! Gilbert, Gilbert, in rhyme to Gilbert, and far-fetched Mecklin to Jacqueline, giving a clue to otherwise mysterious emblems in her portrait at Marsden."

"The scoundrel!" cried Arthur, "he is even worse than I thought him. Thank heaven, I am not descended from him."

"You shall tell me from whom at another time," said Lady Clara, suddenly resuming her painting. "The present owners of Woolton Court will expect Mr. Bryce, the lawyer, to attend the breakfast table. The bell is sounding, and my most punctual attendant is advancing with my little tray."

"But when," demanded Arthur, "shall we again meet without interruption? Will you finish your sketch from the lake this evening?"

"I will provided I can prevail upon my hospitable friends here to have an early dinner. You shall row me to the spot. Of course, you can row, and swim and dive, like a proper Ligurian!"

"Do you wish me to perform all those feats?" inquired Arthur, laughing; "because if you do, I should like to be in proper costume."

"Mr. Bryce," said Lady Clara, with a grave warning look, as the maid arrived by the easel, "I will accept with pleasure your professional assistance, but only for the first point mentioned; and I beg you will receive my thanks for the information you have already conveyed to me in this book." Arthur, recalled to prudence, bowed with respect, and received his little book of legal hints, which might, or might not, be discovered by readers in general in Lamartine's beautiful poems. With spirits raised by the conversation of the morning, and its hoped-for renewal in the evening, he descended to the family breakfast.

CHAPTER IV.

INDICATION.

It was more than a week since the return of Mr. Oldham to London, during which our hero had to undergo the penalty of being so able and rising a young lawyer, by remaining closeted each day, after breakfast, with Mr. Sanderson, during a couple of hours, looking over the same papers, and hearing the same observations.

A few days more, however, and from some domestic cause, unknown beyond the family trio, the owner of the dwelling determined to remove; and commissioned Mr. Oldham by letter to close with the offer made by his correspondent, the English gentleman in France. Arthur had to make a copy of this letter—a light task he performed most willingly; and with greater courage foresaw another wet day that would postpone the row on the lake, the sketch, and the history of the three last heirs of the estate.

The following day, still a soft interminable rain, Arthur buried himself in the library, for Lady Clara had deserted the picture gallery. The evenings, however, were always pleasant, and as Arthur was convinced that Mr. Oldham would reply by return of post, he obeyed with alacrity the summons on the following morning to the study, where he found the expected letter open in the hand of Mr. Sanderson.

"So—well, pray Mr. Bryce, have you received any letter yourself from Mr. Oldham? No—really—because I do not much relish the fast way in which he is driving on, just as if I had definitely made up my mind to the thing. Here he is respectfully offering his congratulations on the unheard-of offer he has closed with for Woolton Court-house and lands. Why, sir, no one can force me to sign the transfer against my will. There is nothing done without my signature. Why, sir, no one can force me to sell the place!"

"Most assuredly not," said Mr. Bryce.

"It seems exactly," continued Mr. Sanderson, "as if the old families of the neighborhood had combined to get one of their own set into the place, and were helping him with the cash to make a tempting offer."

"This might possibly occur with reason to you, sir," observed the confidential lawyer, "had you been the