

THE TRIUMPHS OF DUTY.

CHAPTER XXXVII

MATRIMONIAL ARRANGEMENTS AND A DEATH.

On the 2d of September a small, confidential and happy circle were together rejoicing at Marsden Park, with much to recount and still more to anticipate. The following day business was transacted in the marquis' private study between himself and Lord Stanmore, the open letters of the Earl of Charleton lying on the table before them, with legal documents, already signed by the earl. In the afternoon of that day, in the presence of witnesses, and in due form, other signatures were attached. Business thus over, all hearts were ready to enjoy the brief fortnight of Lord Stanmore's visit, and the joyful news of the fall of Sebastopol on the fifth. Then came a parting, in which hope forbade sorrow, and our hero was *en route* for Westmorland, until the twentieth of the following month, when he was to return and claim his bride.

Two years only had passed since the scenes our hero was approaching were all new and of interest to him chiefly on his grandfather's account. He had had no personal memories at that date connected with Woolton Court. But how much of thought and feeling had been crowded into those two years! What mental vicissitudes connected with the halls of his sires! Therefore, on the first evening of his return, when the earl and his grandson sat alone, watching the varied outline of the circling mountains against the sunset glow, the deep hereditary love, so felt by the grandaunt, passed into the breast of the heir and he exclaimed:

"Yes! it is the return to a place that makes one love it. It is the remembrance clinging round favored spots that so endears them. I could not have believed that I should ever love this place as now I do. I valued it for your sake, my lord; but my own heart was more on the shores of Provence.

"You have hitherto, you say, my dear Arthur, loved this property for my sake. I can almost say the same with respect to you. Very soon they will be also in the sweet girl who is to become my granddaughter. You could not have made a choice more acceptable to me."

"Thank you, my dear lord. Heaven has made the choice, it seems, not I. But after many wayward feelings, I can at length say with you, that a choice more acceptable to me could not have been made."

"These are precious assurances to my heart," said Lord Charleton. "Lady Violet would have attracted you at once had not your admiration been previously engaged by her aunt. The circumstance of your having first known Lady Clara involves no fault on your part. You have suffered; but you have not sinned. From all that I have observed or known you have been faithful to your engagement. You have done your duty. God will reward you by a constantly increasing affection for your lovely and faithful Violet."

"Yes!" exclaimed Arthur, "she has, indeed, been faithful. More faithful than I to her. I do not here refer to my worship of Lady Clara; but to the horror I felt when the blot on the family was made known to me—a blot, a stain that could affect Lady Violet alone, of the whole family; for she only had the blood of the unfortunate Marchioness of Seaham. I felt so indignant at the apparent concealment practised towards me that I determined to break off the engagement. I was withheld solely by the power Lady Clara possessed over me. She, more than the Duchess of Peterworth, has made this marriage. Still was I hoping for some honorable means of escape, when the attempt became

serious of our younger branch to nullify my existence as your heir and turn me into a foreign peasant. At that crisis the constancy of Violet's attachment, the fidelity of her heart to me, in my adversity, so won my admiration and my gratitude that I renewed, before God, my betrothal by vow."

"And now," inquired the grandsire, as he looked his full approval, "when 'the elder and the younger angel' are together before you, to whom does your heart incline?"

"I have not dared to investigate too closely," replied Lord Stanmore, "but, as you have so well observed, to comfort me, *I can suffer without sin!*"

"And, during the short interval that will now occur before your marriage," continued the earl, "were you to find that Lady Clara had become a widow, how would you relish the having renewed your betrothal by vow?"

"Lady Clara," replied Lord Stanmore, "considers me so truly as if already united to her treasured niece, and is so assured of Violet's affection for, and trust in me, that the event of Sir Henry's death would arrive too late to cause any change in my position. Even were I capable of deserting Violet, I should find no sympathy in the aunt: for she would accept no tribute to herself at the expense of my honor, and the happiness of her niece."

"I am comforted to be thus reassured," said Lord Charleton; "for the life of Sir Henry Moorland has been considered most precarious."

"You mean that there still exists a tendency to blood in the head?"

"Yes. You are aware that a court-martial has been held on a Major Roderic, and that Sir Henry's opinion was unfavorable to the acquittal?"

"I have simply known of the court-martial; and that Sir Henry and Lady Clara quitted Marsden about a week before my arrival there from France."

"Then I have to announce to you the fact of a second stroke of apoplexy."

"How strange!" exclaimed Lord Stanmore, "that I should thus, by one day, have missed hearing the bad news at Marsden, to be informed of it here, so far north."

"The news reached me," said Lord Charleton, "just when I was expecting your arrival. The son of our nearest neighbor, Captain Gelliot, on leaving the court-martial, travelled direct to his father, to remain with him some weeks. Squire Gelliot immediately wrote to announce to me the fatal termination of the attack."

"The fatal termination! Then General Sir Henry Moorland is really dead? Then Lady Clara is actually a widow?"

"Yes, my dear Arthur, it is really thus. The Mass to-morrow will be for the repose of his soul."

"Oh!" cried Lord Stanmore, "I must go to her. Where is she?"

"Squire Gelliot's letter does not mention; but we will send Grainger to ascertain."

Accordingly, in one of the lighter carriages, and driven swiftly, Mr. Grainger, the butler, visited Gelliot Manor, and returned within two hours, accompanied by Captain Gelliot. This young officer recounted, with much animation and feeling, the scene of the court-martial; the investigation; General Sir Henry Moorland's vote of disapprobation of the conduct of Major Roderic; the stroke of apoplexy; the being bled immediately and copiously, but without return of consciousness till a few hours before his death, which had taken place in the early morning of that very day. Lady Clara Moorland was in a villa near Chatham, awaiting the funeral, which was to be at the royal expense, and on a magnificent scale. Captain Gelliot had seen Lady Clara on the previous evening. He had been the youngest of three officers sent from headquarters to congratulate her on the return of consciousness to Sir Henry.

"Her ladyship received us most courteously," continued Captain Gelliot, "and with great calm of manner. She expressed her gratitude for the return of reason; because Sir Henry would then fulfil all those religious duties that he had desired should occupy his last moments. She had herself no hope of his recovery. There were two fine babies seated on the table before her—twin girls of a year old. They were literary 'pulling caps' and frolicking till they made us all smile. On Colonel Fanshaw's lamenting that one was not a boy, to carry on the baronetcy, Lady Clara informed us that her husband's heir and namesake was the little son of a cousin lately deceased. Then Colonel Fanshaw asked the little beauties which of them would smile on the cousin, and wed without changing her name: when each seized a moustache till he laughed outright—for he was in high spirits, taking quite a different view of Sir Henry's case to the true result foreseen by the wife. Colonel Fanshaw and the General had been old brothers in arms; and when he awoke this very morning, to be told that the General had been dead some hours, he was nearly having a stroke himself, and had to be bled."

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

A FUNERAL, AND THE MARRIAGE OF ARTHUR AND VIOLET.

At daybreak Lord Stanmore and his faithful attendant, Mr. Temple, were on the cross-road to meet the London train, and to be conveyed as far as the Chatham line. This immediate arrival, from so great a distance, was duly appreciated by the mourner; and as the Marquis of Seaham, whom Lord Stanmore met at the villa, could not remain with his sister more than a few hours, our hero devoted himself to her plans and wishes in every respect until within a week. The funeral being over, he escorted the mother, children and servants to their cordially-invited home at Marsden Park.

"Let not my widow's weeds defer the date of the marriage," pleaded Lady Clara. "I shall not be visible, but shall view the ceremony from the chapel gallery. Our Violet's other aunt has accepted the invitation, and will be the chief lady present."

The request was sincere, like everything proceeding from Lady Clara; and at length the marquis, who had proposed to add the delay of a month to the first date assigned, compromised for a fortnight's addition to the interval before Lord Stanmore's return to Marsden. This would bring the wedding-day to the 20th of November, 1855.

On the young viscount's return to Woolton Court he found that his grandfather had carried out his long-proposed plan of a division, into two parts, of the mansion of Woolton Court. The great entrance remained to both divisions, but different sides of the court conducted to the now separated habitations of the Earl of Charleton and Viscount Stanmore. No exterior sign of this division appeared, excepting that it explained the occupation of a hitherto small court by a magnificent flight of steps on the eastern side of the mansion, destined for the bride's and bridegroom. The long picture-gallery of the north facade, with its door at either end, was the medium of communication between the dwellings. The south front, to the gardens and lake, was divided equally to both families. The earl retained the dining-room and library, but ceded the great banquet-hall, for a dining-room, to Lord Stanmore, and suite of drawing-rooms. Arthur found that his grandsire had relinquished too much; but Lord Charleton assured him that the division thus made was the result of deliberate thought, adding:

"When you wish to give a ball in the banquet-hall you and your friends must dine with me; you are also invited to dine with me every Sunday

and great festival, while I will accept your invitations four times in a year."

Lord Stanmore laughed and gayly accepted this most methodical arrangement, that reminded him of the punctual habits of Marseilles. How was himself fully occupied in directing fancy artists and other work-people in renowned decorations for the drawing-rooms and the Lady Violet's own boudoir, and had the satisfaction of seeing all fully to his taste on the eve of his departure with the Earl of Charleton for Marsden Park, where, on their arrival, they found a really "select party" assembled for the bridal ceremony.

The customs of the continent, more than those of England, prevailed, in one respect, at the marriage of Viscount Stanmore and the Lady Violet Chamberlayne. Instead of the maiden bridesmaids, was the one especial matron to support and counsel the bride. This matron was the younger Duchess of Peterworth. Fifteen years before she had herself stood a bride in that very chapel, the same reverend celebrant officiating, when the supporting matron was her own sister, the late Marchioness of Seaham. The duchess had never revisited Marsden Park since the flight of her unfortunate Ethel; yet the same devoted attachment to the memory of her sister that had aroused her from her sick couch in London to present Lady Violet at court, now braced her nerves to venture once more to Marsden Park.

Violet felt and appreciated all this energetic love in her usually languid aunt. She also, and still more gratefully remembered, with tender, confiding affection, the widowed aunt concealed, but fondly gazing on her from the trellised gallery of the chapel. Her father, however, was paramount in her thoughts. She was now old enough, and had read and pondered enough to be aware of how acutely, how intensely, he had suffered; and she was to leave him! But he wished this marriage. He loved Arthur almost as paternally as he loved herself; and she had begun to perceive how, apart from his appreciation of Lord Stanmore, her father must feel consoled to see the daughter of the wife who had fled from him well married. These were Violet's precursive thoughts; but when the Rev. Dr. Rollings commenced the introit of the Mass—the bridal Mass—her whole attention was concentrated on the sacrament of marriage: its indissoluble character, comprising much of suffering as of joy; ardent prayer that all the graces bestowed might fall on the good ground of a prepared heart. All these for Arthur as for herself; while he, concentrated on the sacred obligations contracted by the ceremony, deserved, like herself, the nuptial benediction that closed the function.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

LONG-DEFERRED HOPES FULFILLED.

After the departure of the bridal pair from Marsden Park to St. Leonards, on the Sussex coast, the Earl of Charleton returned to Woolton Court. The day following he ordered his close carriage and four, and was conducted, without further expression of his wishes, to Eagle Crag, the residence of the dowager Duchess of Peterworth. On entering the accustomed sitting-room he found his old friend seated before an open letter, with a handkerchief to her eyes.

"How is this?" said he.

"Ah!" cried the duchess, "for the first time, these nearly fifty years, I must refuse my good George his Christmas invitation. I cannot invite him here; because he scrupulously remains at Polhill Towers throughout the Christmas holidays to give the example of a good lord of the manor to all on that estate, for the love of God and man. I can no longer make long journeys; I must remain here. But it is not the corporeal weakness I lament. I am ashamed that I, who so much love solitude, do not love the