

THE TRIUMPHS OF DUTY.

CHAPTER XLVII

HIGH MASS AND BETHROTHAL.

During Leonora's visit at Gelliot Manor, Lord Stanmore, his wife, Lady Clara, and Miss Campion, had been steadily practising and rehearsing a Mass, simplified from Mozart, and a beautiful modern offertory. They found, however, that a bass voice was required to support Lord Stanmore's tenor, Miss Campion's contralto, and the two sopranos. This they happily obtained from the same religious congregation that supplied the deacon and sub-deacon of the Mass. The organist was a young and modest genius, who taught in the neighborhood and performed on Sundays and other festivals in the chapel of Woolton Court.

Leonora had returned on the sixth of December, and the few remaining touches to be made to the decorations in the chapel she watched with delight, from the private gallery tribune of the duchess. This, so kindly and secretly "taking her at her word," respecting High Mass and Benediction, seemed also to explain a fact, that, with her penetration, she could not fail to perceive, that the family, in league with Squire Gelliot, had some secret withheld from her. While she feared bad news from Vienna this preoccupation of mind, from which she was excluded, had caused her anxiety; but a letter that morning from Lady Clara Chamberlayne, full of minute family details, addressed in confidence to herself, set her heart at rest, and enabled her gratefully to enjoy her favorite and holy recreation.

The early Mass of the feast, with holy communion, was attended, as usual, by the silently devout congregation of the household of Woolton Court. The High Mass was at eleven o'clock; and the happy Leonora by the side of her treasured grandmother in the gallery above, was there with missal and office of the feast, long before the time appointed.

"My divine Redeemer," thus arose part of her aspirations, "how I thank Thee for the grace that makes me love Thee supremely. But for that grace what would become of me, who so much love Thy creatures!"

At the first rising of the united voices in the "Kyrie eleison," Leonora was not the only one to weep. The expressive and devout singing, and the effective organ, in solemn yet modulated tones, seemed to render just the sweet homage due, on that day, to heaven.

"What a pity it is all over!" said Leonora, on re-entering the drawing-room of her grandmother's suite of rooms. "But in the evening there will be the function of the Benediction; so that I shall look forward to that happiness."

"Between the two holy functions," said the duchess, "we are requested to receive our now valued friend the squire of Gelliot Manor, who wishes to introduce his son, Captain Gelliot. This estimable young officer arrived last night, with leave of absence for a month, and to the manor-house."

"Grandmamma," said Leonora, after a little pause, "is Captain Gelliot really 'estimable' as you term him? Because during the whole time I stayed at the manor-house, the squire never would speak of his son. This seemed so mysterious, that I feared it must proceed from that sad conflict of love and displeasure that takes refuge in silence."

The duchess smiled, and thought within herself: "Overcaution is the characteristic of open hearted persons, schooled into prudence." She then said: "I can safely say I know Lord Stanmore, and esteem those he esteems. Young men are judges of each other. These two have become personally acquainted but a few months since; but the qualities of mind and heart

being similar, they have become congenial friends. Captain Gelliot has not only a proper filial regard for his father, but admires him, and delights in his society. This month at home will prove a real holiday to him."

This little explanation occurred just in seasonable time; for a ring at the western door of the long gallery was followed by the inquiry, whether her grace the Duchess of Peterworth, was at leisure to receive a visit from Lord Stanmore, accompanied by Squire Gelliot and his son, Captain Gelliot, of the Life Guards. On the return of a favorable message, the trio entered. Leonora recognized in Gelliot the portrait at the manor-house, and blushed; Captain Gelliot, who had felt so diffident and nervous before the visit, that his father related the anecdote, blushed also; then all the party talked at once. First the amateur choir of the chapel were praised, especially the Offertory, and the soft echo of the word "Immaculata."

The draperies and ornaments then received their share of encomium, during which subordinate topic Captain Gelliot ventured a few words to Leonora in the inquiry whether the two families united at dinner on such a festival? Leonora informed him that Lord Stanmore and his friends always dined with the Earl of Charleton on Sundays and festivals; and therefore, they were all expected by him and the duchess, at seven o'clock, after Benediction. This opening made, the conversation continued, and was interrupted only by the squire claiming his usual companion for a walk. Leonora's look towards the old gentleman, as she gracefully accepted his escort, was so expressively beautiful, that the son began to consider himself in the way to become a very happy man, provided he could prove himself worthy of the prize placed within his reach. So, after a few words of compliment to the duchess, he quickly followed his father to the gardens.

Before the month's leave of absence was over, Captain Gelliot and Leonora were engaged, conditionally on the consent of the parents. To obtain this consent, it is well known that the duchess had only to write one of her emphatic and persuasive letters, and full consent would arrive. This proved true with one stipulation; that the granddaughter of Sir Howard Whyne and of the Dukes of Peterworth should not be married from the roof of any, however respected nobleman, who was not of her own blood. The parents, therefore, requested the duchess to return for the marriage to her own property of Eagle Crag. For although the step-grandmother, she was the dowager duchess, and descended from the same ancestors as the Dukes of Peterworth. Colonel and Lady Emily Whyne regretted their inability to return at present to England; and each wrote a letter of parental affection to Leonora, as "their good child, who had never, from her birth, given them one moment's uneasiness but from her delicate health!" What wonderful tenderness a marriage brings forth! These letters bedewed with tears, were laid beneath the pillow of the neglected child, and brought balm to her timid heart.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

PARTINGS ALLEVIATED.

Between the feast of the eighth of December and Christmas, the Marquis of Seaham, Lady Clara Moorland and family, according to good old custom, were to be at their residence, Marsden Park. On the twentieth, therefore, all the inmates of Woolton Court dined together in the eastern residence; and as partings belonged exclusively to this vale of tears, and are, however, salutary, but little festive, Lady Clara, for the first time, arranged that the little twins, Claudia and Violet, should enter with the dessert to keep up the gaiety of the family party. They were now two years old, and presented themselves with an almost exact cast of features, to which likeness the similarity of their

pretty baby toilet contributed. They were soon each on a knee of their uncle; the one shy, but merry; the other calmly regarding the circle of faces. They soon began, however, to play and laugh with each other, and create the merriment desired.

"Duchess," said their uncle, "which of these little beauties is to be the youngest Duchess of Peterworth?"

"Any daughter of Lady Clara," replied she, "would be welcomed for her mother's sake; but she alone can know the, perhaps, opposite dispositions of these dear infants. George is like his father, a fine, warm-hearted boy, and at present warm tempered. He studies well, and has a great sense of duty. He is ten years old; just eight years in advance of these pets. Truly, a royal betrothal of the middle ages! Anna would prize a niece of yours, marquis."

"Well, Clara," said he, "which is the best tempered of these two babies? For, as our little Marquis of Cheshunt is excitable, he must marry his contrast."

"You mean to ask me, I conclude," replied Lady Clara, "which of the two has naturally the wildest temper? but that will not prove that at seventeen or eighteen she will possess that advantage over her sister; for I have observed that where God permits, by nature, certain defects, He bestows strength of mind—moral courage to conquer these defects; so that, even here below, a reward is given in the love and approval of those who can appreciate the conquest."

"Come, Clara," persisted the marquis, "which is to be the conqueror?"

"I never will reveal to any one," said she, "the natural dispositions of my children, for the reasons I have already mentioned. I think it cruel that certain tendencies, which fidelity to grace would conquer or turn to good, should be known in childhood, and remembered in after life, by persons who could not have a mother's feeling, and who might mar the happiness of a young girl, by whispering, 'I knew her as a child, and was told she had such or such a fault.'"

"Very right, Clara. I have been saying, 'very right, Clara,' half my life." Still the scrutinizing uncle endeavored to penetrate the secrets of the soft brown eyes that looked confidently on him.

"Yes, marquis, your sister is quite right," said the duchess; "and I will perfectly trust to her decision, should God prolong my life fifteen years, which of your beautiful, accomplished, and virtuous nieces is at seventeen to marry the future Duke of Peterworth, and which Sir Henry Moorland."

"How old is the little baronet?" asked Lord Stanmore.

"He is nearly eight years old," replied Lady Clara.

"Claudia and Violet, look at this," said the duchess, holding up a jewelled bauble to attract their attention. The infant girls looked first at the speaker, then at the jewels, while she looked steadily at each.

All the dinner party then moved to the drawing rooms, where the duchess said, in a low tone, to Lady Clara, "To you alone I utter the prophecy, that you will train Claudia to become Duchess of Peterworth, and Violet, Lady Moorland."

"You know them apart, then," said the mother, taking Claudia in her arms.

"Yes; not perhaps in features, but the expression. Claudia is the most calm; she is also the eldest, by ten minutes. These united claims fit her to become the wife of my impetuous George, Marquis of Cheshunt, and future Duke of Peterworth."

"Oh, you lovely and loving little godchild!" exclaimed Lady Violet, taking her little namesake a joyous dance in her arms through the rooms. "What a smile, and what dimples, you little beauty! Oh, papa, what early

betrothals! They far exceed mine. We should be arranging matrimonially for Philip Henry, were not his future wife in the chaos of expectation. This is my first godchild. I am so proud of the honor—an honor most honorary; for, with such a mother, what has a godmother to do, but to dance and kiss her dearest little cousin."

"Violet, tell me," said the persevering diplomatist, "how do you distinguish between these very young children? I see clearly their mother does."

"I cannot read as deeply, papa; but it seems to me that this, my little namesake, is more sensitive than Claudia. She will, therefore, have more to suffer."

"Ah! just so," said the marquis; "now I have a clue."

The sleepy little innocents were then taken to their beds, and the father and daughter remained in confidential interchange of parting words.

It was well for Lady Violet, the following day, that she was called upon, almost immediately on the departure of her father, to attend to the approaching Christmas festivities, which were celebrated with due honor, and brought joy into the hearts of all.

After New Year's Day, the duchess, her ladies, the bride-elect, and suite, removed to Eagle Crag, where, after the Epiphany, the bridal guests assembled from Woolton Court and Gelliot Manor; the squire being welcomed with honor day and night, but the affianced son being compelled, by etiquette, to be received, at night, into the best room of the nearest farmhouse. The wedding of Leonora Whyne was just suited to the pious, affectionate and unambitious bent of her disposition. Surrounded by high titles, she was content to become Mrs. Willoughby Gelliot, and to anticipate a life chiefly spent in the routine of the old manor house, where, loving and beloved, she hopes to render her duties worthy to become a store for heaven.

On the return of the inmates of Woolton Court, they dined together in the western residence, and in the evening Lord Stanmore and Lady Violet received the congratulations of the venerable couple, on the skill and prudence with which they had united two persons so well suited to each other.

"This is not the only inspiration Violet has had, the credit of which she either shares with, or totally resigns to, others," said Lord Stanmore, looking beamingly towards his wife. "The Rev. Dr. Rollings has assured me that, shocked as he was at the wild revels at Marsden Park, he could not see his way in the least, till after an interview, which Violet requested—an interview which she had sought, by inspiration, after fervent prayer."

"But Arthur," said Violet, "I could only introduce Leonora and the squire together. It must have been her good angel who caused her to make that pretty little blunder about the picture, that ended so well. And it was you who carried on the correspondence with Captain Gelliot, and who not only so appreciated Leonora's character, but were also able, from your gift of eloquence, to place all her characteristics in the fairest light, so that highly valuing your opinion, he came resolved to gain the prize."

"And now, Violet, my dear child," said Lord Charleton, "that you have mentioned your husband's gift of eloquence, has it occurred to you that, for him, this happy country life must be drawing to a close? Do you wish to remain here with our little Philip Henry, until the real London season commences, and the weather becomes more congenial for travelling?"

"O, grandpapa," she exclaimed, "is it not my first duty to follow my husband?"

"Unless he should decree otherwise," replied the earl.