

CHAPTER XXVI.

DISCUSSIONS ON PRACTICAL MORALITY.

"A fashionable three months in this largest capital of Europe, affords unlimited opportunity for ignoring the Ten Commandments, and cultivating the seven deadly sins. I am about to give you a proof of this sentiment, my lord," said the duchess on the following day, "by producing a document, placed in my hands by Colonel Whyne and his wife, which I must render more intelligible by a short and authentic preface." Her grace then recounted the impression on Miss Woolton's mind, that Lord Stanmore had perished in the water; and that, unable to bear a longer removal than to Belgrave square, she had passed the night in dictating to her bosom friend, Georgina Whyne, the letter to his Serene Highness Prince Ernest Wolfonschriedenfol.

Lord Charleton attentively listened, and as attentively perused the "brouillon." At length he drew forth his pocket-book, and produced a letter from Mr. Gerard Woolton, which he handed to the duchess, saying:

"The two letters appear to have a hidden link between them,"

The letter ran thus:—

"MY DEAR LORD—The youthful frolic of Lord Stanmore, in diving into the water from our pleasure boat, has, strange to say, been so maliciously interpreted by a gossiping world, ever craving for excitement, that it has become not only a matter of respectful and affectionate feeling, but one of imperative necessity, for the preservation of our moral standing in the world, that both elder and younger branches of the house of Woolton should prove to be on friendly terms with each other. To effect this, I have arranged for a large dinner-party, at my house in Brook-street, which I trust will be graced by your presence and that of Lord Stanmore. Our mutual friends, Lord Claud Chamberlayne and Colonel Whyne and family, will decline all other engagements, to be present at this happy family reunion, assuring me that from the knowledge they have of your character, you will not refuse this most earnest invitation. Leaving, therefore, your lordship to fix your own day,

"I am, with sincere esteem,
"Your lordship's humble servant and cousin,
"GERARD PHILIP WOOLTON,
"Lower Brook-street, Grosvenor-square,
June 23d, 1854."

The duchess having perused this letter exclaimed:

"What can you do?"

"I can do this," replied Lord Charleton, showing the copy of his reply, which was as follows:—

"MY DEAR SIR—Your kind proposal of a family dinner, in the company of mutual friends, meets with my warmest approval; but as I am the head of the Wooltons, the first meeting ought to be at my house, to which I will invite all those mutual friends, who have judged so kindly of me. Permit me, therefore, to name Tuesday the 28th of June, for welcoming yourself and Miss Woolton to Carlton Gardens; and believe me, &c."

"This admirably postpones the evil day," observed the duchess. "Nothing can be better. The dinner, however, in Lower Brook-street is only deferred. You, are, I am aware, determined not to expose and disgrace your kindred, and we must trust that some event will occur to render your presence there gracefully impossible. In the mean time, your safety and that of Lord Stanmore is not exposed; for a hoped-for banquet of deadly viands is prepared for you both, and father and daughter are biding their time with a determination worthy a better cause. Alas poor Hortense: the Evil One is fascinating her, as she fascinates others. This attainment of something unexpectedly brilliant, and just possible to her ambition, is the bait that has won her."

At this instant Colonel and Lady Emily Whyne were announced, and shortly after Lord Claud Chamberlayne. The short interval before his arrival had been passed in interchange of kind inquiries, and in some arrangement between the duchess and Lady Emily, respecting flower stands in the balcony; but the previous and painful topic that had occupied the private thoughts of all, had taken full possession of the mind of Lord Claud, so much so, that he had scarcely paid his brief respects to her grace, than he commenced with:

"What is a man's duty when a friend is virtually convicted of being a rascal? I should like to have that point cleared up, before I leave London for Vienna. Come, duchess, get Lord Charleton to pronounce; or, if he will not, arrange the difficult matter yourself. Your grace has not only a good head, but has made practical morality your especial study, for which this wicked London ought to be most particularly obliged to you."

The duchess turned to Lord Charleton, who said:

"I suppose that, in the difficult case of a conscientious struggle, between moral rectitude and fidelity to friendship, the decision would greatly depend on the repentance of the erring friend. Let us imagine some cases. Let us suppose a case doubtful as to perfect integrity, on the part of a banker who fails: of the perfect courage and disinterested action of a captain who loses a vessel; of a general who loses a battle, or capitulates a fort; of an ambassador who concludes a disadvantageous treaty; we will suppose in one of these cases, a strong painful doubt in the mind of a hitherto friend, of the strict integrity of the man who has held the high trust. Does that man, suspected, but still prosperous, surrounded by flatterers, and at ease with himself, require no moral support from his former friend—that friend may very well withdraw; but should it, on the contrary, be found that his withdrawal turns the scales against the suspected man, then, I feel, that the friend should return to his side. Remember, that we are supposing a case of suspicion, not conviction. In a case of suspicion of guilt. I repeat, that the repentance of the erring man should bring back his friend."

"There are some minds, unfortunately, that never, humanly speaking, can repent," observed Lord Claud. "The state of their conscience is so warped, so false, that they cannot see the truth. They seem so honest in their false view of things, that they become quite respectable. You begin by lamenting their infatuation, and you end by thinking what good things they can say? What, after all, if they should be right? These persons are particularly prone to assist Divine Providence in adjusting society. They like to have the power over their social chess-board, to move, or even remove, the pieces to win their game. The conquerors of old did so; and great, more than good, men have done so in more modern times. If one or two persons mar an earnestly-desired and desirable adjustment of things, these persons are to be removed. Does not the mind become, at length, quite confused?" (TO BE CONTINUED.)

The Prussian Colonel Von Sobbe, who was a General in the Turkish service, has been dismissed by the Porte, at the request of Emperor William, on account of his conduct in sending to the Porte and to Emperor William a complaint that Prince von Radolin, the German Ambassador, had slighted him.

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