

THE TRIUMPHS OF DUTY.

CHAPTER IX.
MORE MYSTERIOUS SECRETS.

The marquis enjoyed his *tete-a-tete* evening extremely; the more so that he was secure from all intrusion. He had even forbidden that any letters should be forwarded from Rockley; and now, extending his limbs before the genial blaze, he fully entered into his favorite pastime of drawing largely on the mental funds of his companion. Arthur could supply abundantly and freely, so the night insensibly advanced, and wine was brought, and servants retired for the night, and Boucher, the marquis' valet, was informed that his services would be dispensed with. This with any other but the marquis might have excited some curiosity; but the valet was accustomed to his lord's vigils, and on this occasion glided into the room with some quires of paper and other requisites for despatches, also with night-slippers and scent bottle. It was now considerably past eleven o'clock: in a short time every domestic in the house would be asleep, and the marquis observed that it was full time to withdraw his thoughts from the insurrection in New Zealand to affairs at home.

"Are we to use these pretty little weapons?" demanded he, taking up one of the pair of pocket-pistols which lay already loaded on the chimney-piece.

"No," replied Arthur, "I keep these by me on the defensive against house-breakers, or other assailants; but I think a good cudgelling is all we need inflict to-night on the musicians of the south-west wing."

"Are you certain that the entrance by the little passage has been effected without causing suspicion?"

"I think so. I took care to throw that clearance on Grainger, without entering into that part of the house myself. I told him to enable me to assure Lord Charleton in my letter of this evening that his suite of rooms was restored to what he remembered them. Grainger informed me, just before we sat down to dinner, that the closet had been cleared away, and the rubbish removed by the workmen, adding that it was by that time getting too dark for any woman alone, or in company, to be prevailed on to undertake the final purification of the corridor. But I should not dislike having caused a little alarm, because then you will hear the sounds."

"Come, then," said the marquis, "I will follow you in silence, with this good cane, holding my taper in the left hand."

"Stay, my lord," said Arthur, "a taper is soon blown out by a concealed adversary. My French habits have fortunately provided me with a little lamp; the glass globe will protect the flame. One will suffice for both. I will precede you, as in duty bound."

Accordingly the two friends left the library by a door which communicated with stairs leading to the suite of rooms above, at the northwest end of the mansion, one of which was occupied by the marquis. Thence they passed through galleries and corridors, by the top of the great staircase, to the one principal communication with the southwest end of the dwelling. They had scarcely closed the double-baized door which divided this large passage from the centre of the house, when both stopped and looked significantly at each other then proceeded with still greater caution, while the soft tremulous sounds became more and more distinct, to the great satisfaction of Lord Stanmore, and the excited wonderment of his visitor. They soon stood at the entrance, so long concealed, of the little private passage belonging to the suite of rooms once occupied by the lord of the mansion, and with redoubled interest penetrated through it to the actual region of the mysterious plaint,—a

room, or loft, immediately above the mortuary chamber, both being at the back of the sanctuary of the chapel. The two friends cast searching glances around, while the sweet, melancholy sounds wafted across them, as they stood amazed. Suddenly their eyes fell on the same object, and they simultaneously grasped each other's hand. It was a long coffin, placed on low trossels, uncovered by any pall, and without inscription. Arthur knelt by the side, and commenced some prayers for the dead, amid the sympathetic strains, while the marquis, seizing the lamp, continued the investigation of every part of the room with still greater minuteness. The window was placed beyond his reach; a ladder or steps would be needed, which could only be brought by the servants in the full daylight. There was also a shallow closet with shelves. On one of these was a portfolio leaning against the back of the closet, and in good preservation. As Arthur rose from his knees the marquis made a sign for him to take possession of what might prove a clue to the mysteries of the place. They then ascertained that this room had once been used as a sort of tribune, or private gallery to the chapel, in case of indisposition or late rising; for a window-shutter, fastened with nails, was on the chapel side. Here, for the time, terminated their discoveries, and in a few minutes the Marquis of Seaham and Lord Stanmore were stirring the fire in the library, and pledging each other in a glass of Madeira.

They had seemed to have been long away; but it was scarcely one o'clock in the morning. Time is spun out when much is done and felt, as objects at various intervals in a landscape increase the prospective distance.

"Oh! no, I cannot yet go to bed," replied the marquis to an offer from Arthur to that effect. "We will lay our heads down in an hour from this time. Much can be done in an hour. That coffin must contain the remains of—who?"

"My great-grand uncle, Tristram Woolton," said Arthur.

"Exactly so. I had arrived at the same conclusion. The body was never found in the lake. It was suspected that he never went to America, but kept himself concealed on the old premises. What we have seen to-night corroborates all this."

Arthur then related the carpenter's narrative, and found that the confusion made in the history of the two brothers had led to the belief that Tristram had drowned himself in the lake, and that his restless spirit haunted the house.

"There are, doubtless, two living witnesses in the gardener and carpenter, to prove that the body of Uncle Tristram lies in that coffin," observed Lord Stanmore, "and thus free his memory from the stigma of suicide. Ah! what a victim he must have been to the dominant spirit and unprincipled mind of his brother Gilbert. Let us look into the portfolio." But the contents, although interesting, disappointed Lord Stanmore with respect to the personal history of his collateral ancestor. There were the long pedigrees and alliances of the Wooltons, and several portraits in water-colors and pencil. One very beautifully executed of the two brothers, Gilbert and Tristram, one in the arms and the other leaning on the knee of their young mother, the second wife of the seventh Earl of Charleton.

"Can anything be more sad and affecting," said the marquis, "than to watch the innocent faces of children who are destined to break the hearts or ruin the fortunes of their families?"

"They are not destined to do this," objected Arthur.

"Let the word pass for to-night," continued the marquis. "Look at that villain Gilbert. What an eye! what a mouth! And so these old men remember him, with all this seductive beauty, and with the addi-

tional curse given him of expensive tastes without principle of restraint—I will not say without *power* of restraint, for fear of a second amendment from the noble lord opposite, on my proposition in favor of fatalism."

"He was the Benjamin of his father's old age, I conclude," said Arthur; "or, more correctly, the Joseph; and Tristram the Benjamin. With an aged father and a young mother, these beautiful boys were spoiled. Gilbert was the more mischievous, because he had more mental power; he must have overawed and governed the weaker Tristram."

"Who is this, think you?" said the marquis, turning over another and equally well executed portrait. "This is evidently by the same artist; and as it represents a fine youth, while the others are young children, it must be their elder brother by the first marriage; your great-grandfather, the eighth Earl of Charleton."

"Yes," said Arthur, "I recognize the features, although the picture my grandfather took abroad with him is of a man advanced in life. We must be thankful that the loving and confiding elder brother died ignorant of the conduct of the younger. How placid is that brow, how serene that smile!"

"Here we differ," observed the marquis; "better that the brow be knit and furrowed, and the mouth compressed with grief and indignation, than that he should have left so fatal a will."

"Ah, yes, you are right," said Arthur; "we do not differ. Had my great-grandfather known the truth in time to have altered his will in favor of other guardians to his heir, how smoothly all would have glided on at Woolton Court. However," added he, gayly, "it is perhaps by great crimes—certainly by great misfortunes—that great virtues are brought to light. Therefore I will regret nothing that has made the present Earl of Charleton what he is. All I have to pray for is, that prosperity may not spoil his heir."

"We have had one good damper to-night to the pride of success," observed the marquis. "We cannot make out this ghostly music."

"But we will to-morrow—or rather to-day, by sunlight," replied Lord Stanmore. "Let us now go to rest, and rise with that in view before your ride back to Rockley."

"Not my ride back, but *our* ride back," said the marquis. "Are you not to return with me?"

"Ah, no; my duty lies here. I am hoping to welcome here all the dear inmates of Rockley, to assist me in fitly receiving the long absent lord of Woolton. Will you promise me that it shall be so arranged. Will you, dear marquis, select the suites of rooms for the ladies Clara and Violet?"

"We will be here. We will do all in our power to show respect and honor where it is so due," replied Lord Seaham; "but I decline selecting any suites of rooms, having perfect reliance on the good taste of our host."

It was late in the forenoon before the friends again met; and when they did so, and coolly talked the matter over, they each felt a delicacy in introducing servants and workmen into a room where lay the body of the unfortunate Tristram. It was agreed to lock the room until the arrival of the Earl of Charleton.

The next few days were agreeably occupied in giving hospitable welcome to that true friend of the Wooltons, Mr. Oldham, and in signing the documents mentioned in the letter of the Earl of Charleton.

CHAPTER X. THE WELCOME HOME.

While many interesting preparations occupied the mind of the heir of Woolton, the venerable merchant of Marseilles, having carefully terminated all his worldly affairs in that city, was

returning thanks to Heaven for having blessed his many years of toil, and opened a bright path for his return to his native land. His obarities had always been commensurate with his increasing wealth; and now, in farewell, he left to each public institute a two-fold donation, and still a larger bequest to the fund for "those who had known better days." This class of deserving persons had, in attracting his especial sympathy, partaken the most largely of his charity.

After a farwell visit to the bishop, and a parting dinner to his late brother merchants of the city, the long exiled Englishman bent his steps, on the eve of his departure from Marseilles, to the shrine of Notre Dame de la Garde. Besides rich benefactions, he now bore a votive offering in the form of the seal with which, during thirty years, he had secured all his mercantile correspondence. The duplicate of this seal he intended to take with him to England, as a remembrance of his labors, and of God's blessing on them. It was a beautiful southern evening, the 28th of October, 1853. Even on the heights, where stood the chapel, the gentlest of zephyrs played. Vessels of every size lay on the calm azure of the life-like sea: the sunset glow tinting the white sails pink, and the brown sails a still warmer hue. One of these vessels, just entering the port, had been his; and he smiled as he watched it, saying: "He maketh their corn and wine and oil to increase." He had often ascended during his adversity to the friendly beacon of Our Lady de la Garde, and had gained strength at that once poor and humble altar. Now, like himself, the chapel had become enriched, and a band of holy missionaries ministered within its strengthened and decorated walls. The devout merchant had aided in this, as in most other good works in the city of Marseilles, and with thankful heart descended the slopes, and wended his solitary way to the hotel, there to await the hour of departure. He had already visited the tomb, in the cathedral, of his daughter-in-law, the mother of Arthur, for whom he had ever felt a strong and justly deserved parental affection and esteem.

The next hour of solitary emotion was spent in the church at Caen, by the vault where lay his wife and her parents, with his infant children, recalling those first years of exile, when domestic affections and congenial friends had lulled him into an indolently happy life, forgetful of past or future. Passing then to Calais, he had to unite action to prayer. Twenty-one years had passed since he had laid his only son in the grave, but he had long resolved to raise the coffin, and bear it with him to the vaults of his ancestral home. As this intention had been previously signified to the authorities, and the exact date adhered to, Lord Charleton found all in readiness. He went on board in the early morning of the 6th of November, the body of the late viscount having been placed in its allotted cabin during the night.

The passage was calm and rapid, and the living and the dead proceeded to London, and thence to Lancaster with the same speed. Here by previous arrangement, in the mortuary chapel of the Catholic burying ground, the body was to remain until sent for from Woolton Court. From this town the earl travelled on, accompanied by his faithful personal attendant, Monsieur Julien.

"They that sow in tears shall reap in joy. Going they went and wept, casting their seed; but returning they shall come with joy, bearing their sheaves."

These were the joyful words of the chorus, that, borne on a favorable wind, were at first faintly distinguishable, then heard in accents loud and full, as a carriage and four at full speed, brought the long-exiled Earl of Charleton to his home, on the 8th of November, 1853. The avenue, and still more, the old gateway, with open portals, was in a blaze of light and as