

## THE TRIUMPHS OF DUTY.

CHAPTER XVII.  
MACHINATIONS.

By the first of February the London residences were occupied by those who were to conduct England with honor, and in strict alliance with France, through the approaching war in the Crimea; and the quaint old drawing room in Downing Street now heard repeated the names, since become historical, of the royal and military heroes of that gallant and victorious, yet chequered campaign.

The short Easter holidays were passed by the family of the Marquis of Seaham at Richmond, whither he went from St. James's Square as often as possible. It had been an agreement, before the marriage of Lady Clara Chamberlayne to Sir Henry Moorland, that she should never cease to be mistress of her brother's house until one of three events should occur: the second marriage of the marquis, the sufficiently matured age of the Lady Violet, or the marriage and residence in England of the younger brother, Lord Claud Chamberlayne.

After Easter the Parliamentary season commenced in earnest. Richmond was relinquished in favor of James's Square, the hereditary residence of the Marquis. The Duke of Peterworth and family were in the same square, with the exception of the dowager duchess, who occupied the mansion assigned to the widows of that ducal house, in Stanhope Street, Mayfair.

The London residence of the Earls of Charleton had been sold to satisfy the creditors more than fifty years before, and a house had been bought to supply the loss in Carlton Gardens, to which the Earl came soon after Easter week, at the earnest entreaty of the Marquis of Seaham, that the venerable nobleman might be presented without delay by himself and the Duke of Peterworth to the house of Lords. Lord Charleton, who had been rather indisposed, would have postponed this public presentation for a few days, but his friend became so nervously irritable at the bare mention of delay, that the earl yielded, and was warmly greeted by his peers on the 20th April, 1854.

On their return from the house all three dined together, not at either of their homes, but at the Clarendon hotel, at the earnest request of the marquis, that no interruption might occur to the confidential and important topic he had to lay before his two friends. During the dinner, of which he scarcely partook, he became so abstracted, that on the duke asking him whether he patronized South African wines, he replied:

"I patronize such a complication of villany! No, duke."

At which the duke, highly amused by this reply, at cross purposes, observed to Lord Charleton that they had better postpone any reference to the most noble marquis, until the privacy he sought for was more complete. This was soon effected by the withdrawal of the waiters, when the marquis, still absorbed by his one subject, exclaimed:

"Yes, I repeat it—complication of villany! All this came to my knowledge during the last month I was in office for the colonies; not that I was made officially acquainted with the ultimate view this colonial personage had in coming to England, but I was applied to, as the head of the colonial department, to befriend and patronize this Mr. Gerard Woolton. Lord Charleton, are you aware that you have such a relation—a grandson of your precious uncle Gilbert, consequently a first cousin, once removed, to yourself, and, in the same way, second cousin to Stanmore. Are you aware of his existence?"

"Of his existence, yes, but of little further. Is he not contented to be one of the richest planters in Jamaica?"

"It appears not. He is getting up a formidable attack against the existence of a far better man than himself; not by means of poniard, pistol, or poisoned bowl, but by decision of the supreme court, that there exists no such person as Viscount Stanmore!"

"His exertions are useless," observed Lord Charleton; "every formality was fulfilled, every document most carefully preserved relating to the birth of my grandson."

"He does not pretend to deny the birth. He found, as you state, that documents existed too powerful to enable us to call in question the birth; but he pretends to have in his possession the still more powerful document of the death."

"The death!" exclaimed both auditors.

"Yes; he pretends that the nurse's infant that died at Dieppe, in Normandy, was, in truth, the little Arthur Dieudonne Bryce Woolton, Viscount Stanmore; and that, consequently, he, Gerard Woolton, is heir presumptive to the title and estates of the Earls of Charleton."

"Something more than mere assertion would be required for him to obtain even a patient hearing," said Lord Charleton, quietly.

"Can you remember the nurse?"

"Yes, perfectly well. It is only twenty-one years and a few months since I first saw her at Dover. Madame de Courtrai had met with her at Calais while awaiting the vessel to cross over to her daughter."

"Can you also remember her child?"

"Yes; I remember the infant. He was seven weeks older than my grandson, and might then have passed for his elder twin-brother, so great was the resemblance. A resemblance to be accounted for in the accidental likeness of the two young mothers."

"Mr. Gerard Woolton asserts that the Comtesse de Courtrai took advantage of this likeness between the two infants to substitute the living child of the nurse for your dead heir, after a most mysterious visit that the two ladies paid to the sea-side, without the nurse. What imprudent things women will do! Have you any recollection of this circumstance? for, on its truth rests the main hinge of Mr. Woolton's accusations. He has now in London this former nurse, once Sophie Bauvin, now Madame Pierre Boule, married a second time to a hotel-keeper at Versailles. He has either convinced or highly bribed this woman to be a terribly powerful witness in his favor. Have you any notes, memoranda, or letters that could be produced to nullify those accusations?"

"I have kept all the letters of my daughter-in-law," said Lord Charleton. "I will refer to the date of her residence at Versailles; for it must have been thence that the excursion was made to the sea side."

"Are these letters in England?"

"They are. But, my dear marquis, do not permit this attack to annoy you. All will be explained, and set at rest."

"Well, I hope so, but this Gerard Woolton is a clever man, and not scrupulous about bribes. There is a man brought over from Versailles who, it seems, lived as lady's footman with your daughter-in-law and her family, and accompanied the ladies to Dieppe; also a woman who was lady's maid at the time, and of this fatal party. They pretend, and of course will swear, to have overheard various sentences which will be all in favor of Mr. Woolton's assertion, that the child who died was the little heir."

"What were the overheard sentences?"

"Oh, mamma! that I should have lived to see this hour of woe. 'Calm yourself, my child,—leave it all to me,—I will arrange it all. Oh! I can

never face Sophie again, or let her see the child.' There are several more such sentences; but at this moment I can remember only these. I have seen a list of them, for the use of the advocates on their side. However, they cannot refuse in court for their witness to answer the interrogatories of the counsel for the defence, and he may probably insist on receiving all these expressions as the natural outpouring of a delicate and wounded honor, at having taken the child from its mother, to share in the benefit of the sea-air, and having then lost it. The sentences will quite bear this interpretation, as well as the other point I now remember,—the inconsolable weeping of Lady Stanmore over the dead child, and refusing to look even at the living one, until reproved by her mother."

"All that you have hitherto mentioned," observed the duke, "will bear the best interpretation."

"And all perfectly in keeping with the generous and impetuous character of my daughter-in-law," added Lord Charleton. "The least likely person I ever knew to lend herself to any deception; besides she was so young! When we had returned from Dover, and I consented to remain a few weeks at Versailles, I used to watch with pleasure the natural effect of time in restoring to Celeste the playfulness of her character. She and the peasant wet-nurse would play at hide and seek with the two infants, and I have occasionally been interrupted in my writing or reading with, 'Oh! permettez papa,' and one or other little bundle placed, on my knees, or behind me in my chair, as a temporary hiding place. Ah! my poor little Celeste."

"I conclude," said the duke, "that you secure the first counsel on your side, and also look after a few useful swearers. The medical man, for instance, at Versailles, who recommended this trip to the sea, and still better, the medical practitioner at Dieppe."

"Your grace is right," said Lord Charleton; "I will send my own trusty valet, Julien, a native of France, to both those places, with written directions for himself alone."

"Yes, for himself alone," observed the marquis; "that is wise. We must at present seem to be doing nothing; above all, do not let anything transpire to Stanmore: he is to make his maiden speech on or about the 28th, 'On the importance of Peace with France.' He chose that from a variety of subjects I offered him. He will come off brilliantly."

"And solidly," added the duke. "Let us drink to his success, and when I will tell you my own experience of good swearing on the part of faithful servants." After a short pause, he resumed—"My step-mother, whom I call 'mother'—for I have always felt her to be such—was also, indeed, primarily my effective friend during a most trying twelvemonth of my younger life. She became my father's second wife when I was three years old; my sisters were then aged four, seven, and nine. Poor Augusta died unmarried; she was the youngest. The present duchess dowager was first cousin to my father, and in case of my death, the whole affair would go to her own brother, Lord Dartfort, and to his son. I mention this to show that flesh and blood did not move her fidelity to me. My own mother had declared, on her death-bed, in presence of this cousin, and of several female servants, that I was not the son of the duke, her husband." Lord Charleton gave a suppressed cry of horror. "Well, my lord, the hired nurse reported this death-bed declaration. It was not to be denied. Five persons heard it; the nurse more than once. I alone never knew the report. Lord Dartfort made no move. All seemed to die off, when my father's death induced the Dartfort family to begin a private amicable

arrangement. I was then twelve years old. I was taking a lesson in painting, when the lawyer, on the Dartfort side, broke the news to me. I felt so stunned and bewildered, that I went on painting. My master had retired; the lawyer, after saying some civil things, also withdrew. My step-mother came to me, and exclaimed—"Oh! George, are you caring more for your painting than for all that is hanging over you? I replied—'No, mamma, but I shall still go on painting; for if I am duke, it will always be an agreeable pastime, and if I am no duke, I will be an artist.' This private arbitration was closed in my favor, owing to the irrefragable life of my mother, to her having always retained about her person the same female servants, who could vouch for every hour of her married life, and from the zeal and intelligence of the present duchess, in giving the best solution to the extraordinary turn of the delirium under which my mother had pronounced such a decree against me. Among the prayer-books constantly on the sick-bed, the present dowager had found a little book of fairy tales that must have been left by one of the children at a visit from the nursery. In this collection there was a tale of a prince, brought up by a certain duke as his son, the which prince, assisted by a fairy, goes in the end to reign over his own principality, having married the daughter of the duke. In my mother's mind I had become identified with the prince of the story. My wise step-mother had kept this book locked up with a memorandum of several things uttered by my mother; amongst the rest, 'Does he not look like a prince?' These were produced by her, and obtained the sentence in my favor."

"These investigations to clear the innocent are most deeply interesting," observed Lord Charleton. "Well done, Emma."

"So much so," continued the duke, "that I have sat up whole nights reading the collections of 'Proofs of Innocence,' after circumstantial evidence had gone against the victims of a false suspicion. As I had nearly been one of those victims myself, I felt bound to give all the support in my power in the upper house to do away altogether with the capital punishment, which was then a question before parliament. These collections had been made in support of the question, and were most powerful in aiding the good cause; I will now do all in my power for young Stanmore."

"Thank you, my lord duke, for this promise, and for your personal narrative. My own first proceedings must be to send to Woolton Court for my private letters, and to dispatch my faithful Julien to France."

CHAPTER XVIII.  
A STYEN.

The unconscious Arthur was enjoying himself extremely during the early part of the London season, among the friends of the Duchess of Peterworth and of the Chamberlayne family, who had become his. He particularly liked the youngest daughter, or rather step-daughter, of the duchess, the Lady Emily Whyne, and accepted with pleasure an invitation to her house, on the night following the revelations made to Lord Charleton. The ball of Lady Emily's was preceded by a dinner at the Duchess of Peterworth's, consisting of those young persons who are likely to enjoy that species of festivity. One or two mammas, or grandmammas, completed the staff of chaperons. All the young couples started for the ball, fully engaged among themselves, and our hero, involved in happiness three deep. These triple engagements did not prevent him, however, from becoming extremely interested in a certain young person, who, first as vis-a-vis, then placed at the side next him in the quadri'es, recalled to him most forcibly the sunny south. Perhaps she was in him reminded of the same; for certain glances quickly withdrawn,