

THE TRIUMPHS OF DUTY.

CHAPTER XXVII.—(CONTINUED)

"I cannot," replied the stranger, "reveal, as you have done, my identity; but as in speaking to Lord Stanmore I may claim the sympathy of a Catholic, I will confess myself to be a man who has greatly offended God, and if, indeed, I have saved you this day from great danger, I entreat, in return, that you will remember me before the altar—especially before the domestic altar—saying, 'God be merciful to him a sinner!'"

"We are told how that prayer was answered," observed Lord Stanmore. "Why do you not also weigh the balance between regret and hope, and choose the latter?"

"Because," replied the melancholy stranger, "although I have received sufficient grace to acknowledge and bewail my sin, I have not corresponded sufficiently to merit a practical and persevering line of conduct. I am but half a penitent; therefore, I need prayers. The prayers of your young bride elect would be most efficacious. I beseech you, recommend me to her prayers."

"I will do so with the greatest pleasure," said Lord Stanmore; "and to make the claim more forcible I will mention that you have this day saved me, not only from danger, but, probably, from death; for a swimmer and diver though I be, I might, with such a sea as this, have been sucked under the vessel."

"Have you a miniature of your betrothed?" inquired the unknown. "I am something of an artist and greatly admire the style of our modern painters."

Lord Stanmore, by the aid of a gold chain, drew forth from a recess near his heart the morocco-case, and opened it to the gaze of his new friend, saying:

"It is very like; although I teased the artist till I wonder he had the patience to finish it. I wished that the eyes should meet mine and yet give an expression that Lady Violet bestowed on heaven alone. She never fixedly looked on any one. I requested the artist to surprise and fix that look; and, I think, he has succeeded."

"Ah, yes," said the stranger, "heavily—seraphic! She will pray even for me: the heart pertaining to such a countenance would pray, like her Divine Model, for her greatest enemy. I thank you, from the depths of a broken heart, Lord Stanmore, for this kind act."

The miniature was again concealed, and, after a long pause, the next remark was on the favorable change in the weather. The sea was calming and the stormy clouds heaping in gigantic masses on the northern horizon, leaving the blue vault and the meridian sun to be first praised and admired, then condemned, as unbearable, by a now full assembly of ladies from below. An awning was suspended, during which process our two friends being roused to make way for poles and ropes, Lord Stanmore perceived that the blue spectacles and long scarf had been resumed. The conversation at length fell back into the serious tone with which it had commenced, and on the stranger's again reverting to his misery in having insufficient moral force to persevere in the sublime penance of the saints, Lord Stanmore said:

"It may be presumptuous in one so much less experienced to offer advice; therefore, I simply utter what must often have occurred to yourself. Why do you not entrench yourself by some religious engagement of a nature to repair, by active good works, instead of fasting, solitude and prayer, those faults of earlier life, which you so sincerely deplore?"

"Your suggestion is good," replied the unknown, "but I want the moral force to persevere in active good works.

I am now returning from a fruitless trial of a novitiate in the south of France; yes, we have been following these three days."

"In what congregation were you?" asked Lord Stanmore.

The stranger immediately mentioned the title of the order, and Lord Stanmore exclaimed, with increased interest:

"Ah! indeed? I know those religious fathers very well. The present superior was my confessor for years. Where was your difficulty?"

"In the odifying precision of their life. I have felt the same in the army. I am a poet and have the waywardness of one. I cannot endure the constraint of a life in community."

"You are a poet—an author!" exclaimed Lord Stanmore.

"I am," replied the stranger, "and, unfortunately, a favorite in the seductive circles of our modern Babylon. I told you that I was but half a penitent; yet could I but know in what manner to expiate my former life I would become a penitent indeed."

"You are a poet," repeated Lord Stanmore, pondering. "To probably your lines, like Lord Byron's, have hitherto been devoted to dangerously graphic descriptions of the loves of earth. Would it not be an acceptable sacrifice to lay your future poems at the foot of the altar?"

"Yes!" exclaimed the stranger. "At length I see my way, I thank you for it. I will henceforth write in expiation."

"It will be certainly far more in the usual and easy course of Divine Providence," continued Lord Stanmore, "that you devote to God the heavenly gift of poetry, than to place yourself in a life unsuited to all your former habits. What made you decide on an active congregation? Oh! I remember, it was because you shrank from the austerities of the old cloisters. But there are some, even of the most ancient, where there are no corporal macerations, because the silence and the solitude of their institute are considered by the Church surpassing austerities. In these cloisters you could welcome your holy muse, without danger of interruption from a frivolous world. My thoughts are more especially reverting to la Grande Chartreuse—to the Sons of St. Bruno—the Carthusians. You would have two small rooms and a little garden to yourself; access to a fine library; plenty of wood firing; your meals brought to you, and meat permitted to an Englishman. The sublimity of the scenes would bear your thoughts aloft, and your laborious hours would be devoted to your pen."

"Are you serious, Lord Stanmore?"

"I am so, indeed. I know the spot. After the classical tour made with my tutor, I visited, with an esteemed friend, the most celebrated monasteries of France and Italy. Were I a poet, I would, with your feelings of compunction and dread of the world's further seductions, become a Carthusian monk. Will you not at least try? I will keep the secret that an unknown traveller, without landing from the shores of France, returned thither through Paris, Lyons and Grenoble, to lead the only penitential life possible to him—that of calm seclusion, and the labors of the pen for God."

An hour later the advice had practically prevailed. The luggage of the unknown had been transferred from the vessel just arrived at Folkestone to that about to start for Boulogne; and Lord Stanmore, instead of proceeding by the express train to London, accompanied his new friend to the deck of the latter vessel, and some last words were exchanged thus:

"I have, to encourage me," said the unknown, "the example of the most lovely and delicate of her sex—one whose purgatory, self-inflicted, must have procured her an immediate admittance to the vision of her reconciled God.

"Will you not write to me?" said Lord Stanmore. "Will you not give me some account of your feelings amid the eternal snows? You can sign by whatever poetic name may suit you."

The stranger grasped Lord Stanmore's hand, while his eyes overflowed.

"If I persevere," said he, "angelic young man! you shall hear from me, and by the name I have disgraced. And now, Lord Stanmore, in return for holy advice, for which a saint in Heaven will bless you, let me venture to caution you, by the result of sad experience. You are about to espouse a young, innocent creature, whose first earthy affections are yours. Happy man! Do not politely neglect her for the stirring arena of politics. Do not permit that the void of your absence shall be filled by male guests, whose tastes assimilate with hers in the sister arts. I have heard that Lady Violet Chamberlayne is an unusually fine performer on the harp, and sings most sweetly. Be more enthusiastic than any other man about these natural gifts or acquired talents. Above all, do not let poets hang around her, whispering adulation in her ear. Be yourself the lover, and your home will continue blessed. I suppose that Lady Violet has still retained her governess?"

"Yes," said Lord Stanmore; "Miss Campion is still with her."

"Then do prevail on that estimable lady to remain as companion. Occasional female visitors are not sufficient; neither are the most faithful servants. The beautiful young wife of a man forced from her by public affairs should be protected by an elder female relative, or by the confidential instructress of her childhood."

"All that you have so wisely and kindly said," replied Lord Stanmore, "shall be entered to night on the blank pages of my pocket-book; and shall be referred to in future years."

Some more last words, and the final grasp of hands was given. Lord Stanmore would have embraced the future inmate of the Chartreuse; but he meekly drew back, saying:

"You might hereafter regret it."

Still, as Lord Stanmore turned to give a last look, on leaving the vessel, he caught so beaming an expression of heavenly hope issuing from the woe-cut lines of the stranger's face, that he passed on rejoicing in spirit, and completely occupied by the occurrence of the day, till, guided by a porter, he entered the hotel at Folkestone.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF SERVANTS.

Refreshment to the poor body was at length greatly needed; and Lord Stanmore, having thrown himself on a sofa, was rejoicing that he was not likely to be disturbed in any way, when the master of the hotel entered, and, respectfully placing before him a packet of sealed papers, said:

"This packet of letters, or papers, my lord, was enclosed in an envelope to myself, some days ago, with instructions to present it to your lordship immediately on your arrival from France—Lord Edwin Fitzjames, I presume?"

A pause of utter astonishment and dismay.

"I presume I have the honor of addressing Lord Edwin Fitzjames?"

"Certainly not," at length replied our hero. "I refer you, sir, to my valet, Mr. Temple, to know who I am; and as I feel extremely fatigued, I request to be left in perfect quiet until to-morrow."

The mystified master of the hotel withdrew in silence, consulted Mr. Temple, and it was agreed to postpone any further reference to Lord Stanmore until the morrow. In the meantime our young nobleman began to feel such agitating suspicions that he started up and rang the bell. A waiter obeyed the summons:

"I wish to see my servant."

The waiter vanished;—Mr. Temple appeared.

"Who was that gentleman with whom I was conversing nearly the whole day, and whom I accompanied on board the other steamer?"

"Lord Edwin Fitzjames, my lord."

"Is it possible? Are you perfectly certain?"

"Yes, my lord; perfectly certain. But I knew as well that you were quite ignorant of his person. They say that unfortunate nobleman is so gifted with eloquence, and a certain fascination, that few can withstand him. This excuses his victims."

"Oh! if I could but sleep!" exclaimed Lord Stanmore, tossing on the sofa. "I am becoming so excited, so feverish. Temple, you believe in true repentance?"

"Of course, my lord; I believe in the grace of God, and in faithful correspondence to grace. But Lord Edwin has consented to be followed and flattered as the fashionable poet of the day; and to be pitied for his sorrows, as if he were the victim of fate. There is no true repentance in this."

"It is exactly the conviction of how much this conduct must offend God," said Lord Stanmore, "that has induced Lord Edwin Fitzjames to seek a religious seclusion on the continent."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Mr. Temple. "Then it is through your influence, my lord. You will have a rich reward for converting so dangerous a man. But about this packet of letters, my lord; it is in consequence of Lord Edwin's taking your good advice that he has lost it."

"You can inform the master of the hotel," said Lord Stanmore, "that Lord Edwin Fitzjames will sleep at Boulogne to-night. Whether he can be reached in time by the next steamer; or whether, if he shall have left Boulogne, the police can trace his further course, these officials will know far better than I. And, now, Temple, for the future, never mention that unfortunate nobleman to me. As a true penitent, seeking to make reparation for the past, by the sacred effusions of his poetic genius, withdrawn from a seductive world, and persevering in a modest retirement, he will have my prayers; but let his name never pass your lips."

"You may perfectly rely, my lord, on my never intruding such a name on you. To others, as I have already said, I had resolved to keep the secret of this wonderful and unexpected meeting, which I must say, my lord, I looked upon as a most striking event. You have rescued Lord Edwin from a relapse, in which he might have lost the grace of God forever. I know, through authentic sources, that the most killing beauty of the London aristocracy has taken a wager that she will make 'the poet Edwin' smile every time he meets her. From what a snare you, Lord Stanmore, have been the instrument to save him."

"Temple," said Lord Stanmore, "I believe you upper and confidential servants of the aristocracy have a mission to fulfil, far beyond what is ever dreamed of. You surpass the very police in your knowledge of family secrets; and knowledge thus gained involves responsibility. Of course it is through the servants of this foolish beauty, or those of the house in which she uttered this boast, that you possess the knowledge of her interest in Lord Edwin. Perhaps this packet is from her?"

"My lord, I believe it is, and I hope it may never reach him."

"I fervently hope so too. But to return to the responsibility involved in the knowledge gained by servants of family secrets; has the subject ever occurred to your own mind?"

"It has, my lord. I hope I should feel as much the honor and delicacy of such a trust, as if I myself were a nobleman; for noble sentiments are gained more by association than original by birth."