

## THE TRIUMPHS OF DUTY.

CHAPTER XV.

TETE-A-TETE CONVERSATIONS.

The following morning Lord Stanmore and Sir Henry Moorland became personally acquainted; and during a tete-a-tete conversation, which led gradually to the information the former desired to obtain, he said:

"If it be not intrusive, Sir Henry, I should feel much interested to know which of two accounts published is the correct one respecting your loss of sight. At first it was said to have been on the battle-field, then that it was owing to indiscreet bleeding."

"Both are correct," replied the general. "It was at the moment of victory I fell, not from a wound, but from a stroke of apoplexy. I was carried off and carefully tended, but, perhaps, not skilfully. However, these things are in the hand of God. I suffered very little pain. I received the same reward as for the loss of limbs, and—my affianced bride was faithful."

No one better know the truth of that last assertion than he to whom Sir Henry, unconsciously, addressed it. Lord Stanmore, after a little pause, continued:

"All that you described last night in your argument with the marquis, as proving the tension of mind, the anguish of doubt, the final resolve of the general of an army to be equal to that of a minister of state—all that emotion fully accounts for the apoplexy which destroyed your sight. You were seized in the moment of victory: the revulsion of feeling from painful doubt to joyful certainty gave the stroke. The retreat of the enemy from the field of battle was the last your eyes beheld. This is, then, the truth; and I pray God you may preserve in your present cheerful courage, until you behold the final battle of the great Field Marshal, St. Michael, against our common enemy, Lucifer, and hear that band—the nine choirs of angels—sounding victory?"

"Thank you, thank you," said the general, warmly. "And in my turn, let me wish you, my lord, in the opening of your public life, true patriotism, and the same cheerful courage you wish me, with the wisdom of the serpent and the innocence of the dove."

"You speak of the opening of my public life," said Lord Stanmore; "and it is true that the marquis wishes me to represent in parliament the little town of Helkington, near here; but the people know me only through his lordship's report, and may not be disposed to accept me."

"They, virtually speaking, cannot refuse the marquis," said Sir Henry. "He can command the votes: Helkington may be termed a family borough!"

"Why that is called a rotten borough!"

"Exactly so," said the Marquis of S-aham, who had approached just near enough to hear this last exclamation. "Now, would you like to hear me defend a rotten borough?"

"Yes, indeed. I like to hear you grappling with a difficult subject, the more so that I know you have sufficient candor to pardon a listener who remains unconvinced."

"To begin, then; you are aware of all the fundamentals of our glorious constitution, the equilibrium of kings, lords, and commons, in threefold power; and that any undue increase, even involuntary, on one part, must be met by a moral barrier on the part of the two other powers, to stay the progress of this encroachment. Now, rotten boroughs form the barrier on the part of the aristocracy against the encroaching power of the commons;—Helkington is a case in point. My brother, Lord Claud, who is a commoner, and I, who am a peer, agree perfectly in politics; therefore he would, without scruple, accept to be placed, by my

interest, in the house of commons, where he would vote for the same measures as I do in the house of lords, and with all the other members of family boroughs keep the proper equipoise of power against the preponderance of the commons. My brother cannot yet enter parliament. He will be for many years in foreign courts; I have, therefore, thought of you—hoped for you; for in our many conversations together, I have ascertained that we think and feel alike on all subjects likely to engage the attention of parliament."

"And if," said Lord Stanmore, "we should, in the course of the session, find some unexpected subject on which we cannot agree?"

"Why, then, you can pair off with some honorable member of the opposition, and not vote at all."

"And suppose I should discover, as my knowledge and experience extended that we really did differ on very fundamental points?"

"Then I should await the first dissolution of parliament, to advise you to canvass for some other borough, or to stand for a county."

"I have, then, no objection whatever to accept your offer, my lord marquis, and to become a moral barrier in favor of equal rights and privileges as member for Helkington."

Marsden Park was a superb place in its own style; a style strongly contrasted to Woolton Court. It had the fine old timber of ages, a luxuriance of smaller foliage, a limpid winding river, and all that modern art could desire and supply in conservatories, orange-ries, aviaries, fish-ponds, labyrinths, bridges, temples, and hermitages; but—this objective monosyllable had presented itself to our hero, as, on the first evening of his arrival, turning his admiring gaze from the rich groups of oak, beech, and lime trees, he looked around the whole visible domain. It was a dead flat. "The moon had climbed the highest hill;" directly her beams fell beyond the raised flower-beds on the lawn; but, then—what flower-beds! and what a lawn!

"Do you love Marsden or Rockley best?" demanded Lord Stanmore of Lady Violet, as they stood together after breakfast in the conservatory, the day following his most peaceful, non-contested election to the borough of Helkington.

"Papa has given me Rockley," said she, "because I cannot inherit Marsden. This old place is strictly entailed on the male heirs, and, therefore, has remained to the Chamberlaynes ever since the first grant of the lands. I was born at Marsden; I have passed almost all my life here, and yet it must pass from me. It is very profitable to live in a place that must pass from you."

"Why?"

"Because it is a type constantly before you of all earthly possessions, and all earthly—"

"Why do you hesitate? All earthly what?"

"All earthly affections, that are not fit to be eternal. This I have been long taught by Dr. Rollings, our chaplain."

"He has an apt pupil; but all your affections, Lady Violet, are fit to be eternal. Woo be to him who would dare to engage them only for time. But, you have not yet told me which place you love the best."

"I love both."

"That is not an answer."

"Both places have remembrances."

"Very true. Who do you remember in connection with Rockley?"

"I remember the dear Duchess of Peterworth; she is my godmother. Did you know that?"

"No, indeed, I did not. That accounts for the sort of authority with which she made me the happiest of men. She made it impossible that I should be totally forgotten in the many remembrances of Rockley. But for

her, perhaps, I should have become but as a ripple of the Lake of Windermere, broken and lost in the succeeding wave."

"Oh, no," said Violet, at length, believing her companion to be very much in earnest; "I do not remember you because the duchess wishes it, although I love and respect her very much. I have my own individual being. Every one's soul is an independent creation of God, with its own faculties, and feelings, and preferences. This soul of mine must love God supremely, and then—"

"And then me."

"If you really wish it."

"If I wish it. Oh! Violet can you doubt me? This place of your birth may pass from you, but Woolton Court and the heart of its owner shall honor and adore you."

"Oh, that is too French!" cried she; "do not use that word to a poor mortal. I prefer you to any one I have ever seen; but I cannot interest and occupy your heart yet, I am so young. I try to find out the things you like, and I learn them. I have learned to draw for some time, and now I wish to paint; for I see you love paintings. But above all, I try to profit by all the wise and learned things I constantly hear from papa and his friends; for papa says you have one of the most intelligent minds he ever met with. He did not say this to please me. He said it in a low voice to the present prime minister, and I was tuning my harp; but I heard it. And now you are to enter parliament, and influence the multitude to all that is great and good. I shall read all your speeches; and, above all, I shall like to hear your first speech. If you outlive the Earl of Charleton, and speak in the house of lords, I shall always go into the peeress' box to listen. I admire eloquence and argument. I was very much interested the other night in hearing papa and Sir Henry Moreland on the respective merits of diplomacy and war. But why were you so silent?"

"Because, sweetest Violet, like you, I am very young. I am often encouraged by my superiors in age and wisdom to give my opinion on various points, and I then, being so invited, give it freely. But I cannot venture to decide weighty matters that involve responsibility, and pronounce on a theory without experience."

"If you would never willingly talk to any woman until she is five-and-twenty," said Violet, "it will be almost eleven years before my conversation can have any charms for you; and oh! what a long while that appears. What a pity to be so young."

Large tears stood in her eyes, and then overflowed, all the more because Lord Stanmore, in his usual style, as he said, of a prince in a fairy tale, had dropped on one knee, and was alternately looking up at those brimful eyes and covering her hands with kisses.

"I feel so jealous, so painfully jealous of every one who is older than myself, and then such scruples about being jealous; and then to look forward to eleven long years of jealous scruples."

The tears now rained on the hands, and were kissed away, and the question asked—

"When did I say such nonsense?"

"You said it only two days ago."

"And the lady to whom I said it was, of course, past the age of five-and-twenty?"

"Yes, she was."

"Then, sweetest Violet, I think I may rise from my knees."

"Pray rise, my lord, and never think such a posture required by me, however you make me suffer."

"I make you suffer; my angel—my seraph! How?"

"You told Miss Tolman last night that her rich contralto notes would mingle with your dreams."

"What next?"

"And you kissed Lady Mary Pul-toney's hand when she gave you one of the photographs of the late Duke of Wellington."

"What more?"

"When we all go to London, I shall still be too young to be presented. I shall be far less likely to see you. You will be conversing with and dreaming of those intellectual and well stored minds, and deep rich voices, neither of which I yet possess. I will endeavor during these eleven long years—"

"Lady Violet," said Lord Stanmore, very gently, yet very gravely, "so long as you see on this hand the ring of our betrothal, be convinced that I cherish in deep affection, ardent admiration, and fondest hope, all that is promised me by that pledge. When your father placed me at liberty to consider the engagement as merely a frolic of the warm heart and lively imagination of the Duchess of Peterworth, I obtained his consent to consider the betrothal as binding on myself, though I left you free. I have hoped, from beholding on your hand the same pledge, that your affection and respect for the marquis had induced you to listen favorably to my wishes through him. I am but too much flattered by the favorable opinion you have of me; I feel much more touched by your artless fears of having rivals in this heart. Fear nothing from that vague, general admiration of your sex, which in the country that roared me is more demonstrative than in England. As my future wife, I love you alone. Your wonderful humility is such that, perhaps, even a little authority on my part may please instead of displease you. Is it so?"

Her brightened countenance said "Yes," and he continued.

"You have justly imagined that I shall prefer to find in my wife an intelligent and cultivated mind, in preference to a proficiency in superficial accomplishments; but in you, I hope, all these qualities will be blended. I do not wish an overwise and learned wife. It will refresh me more—if, indeed, I am to launch forth into public life—to find, on my return home, a companion who can recreate my mind and please my fancy by those unspeakable graces which are natural to you. From the heated debate or prosy speech of my fellow-men, I—young, gay, impetuous, as I am—shall enjoy, after much constraint, to laugh and play a little with my young wife. After a great deal of ponderous sense, there is nothing better than a little good nonsense."

"Ah!" cried Lady Violet, "there you are, like papa, but he also says that for nine persons who can talk good sense, the tenth only can talk good nonsense. Uncle Claud can, and makes papa laugh till he cries, 'Stop, Claud; now stop.' If you remain here when the other guests are gone, you may hear a fine skirmish of good-natured wit between papa, uncle Claud, aunt Clara, and the Duchess of Peterworth, at the card table; I enjoy it all; I appreciate it all; but if I have wit, it is of a graver sort. I think that if ever I have the happiness to welcome you home from what papa calls over-tension of mind in public life, that you will be the one to talk the good nonsense, and I to laugh."

"That will do admirably well," said Lord Stanmore, "and that happy time will arrive, please God, in two years, for you are past fourteen, and your father exacts no longer delay than that you shall have attained the age of my mother at the epoch of her marriage with my father. She was sixteen, and my father three-and-twenty; exactly the age I shall be in that happy year. Ah, Violet my treasure," cried he again, seizing her hand, "do not shrink from me when I praise you; you are far more fitted to give me lessons in virtue and conduct than I you. You,