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Lyttelton, George <Lord>

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XI. Titus Vespasianus - Publius Cornelius Scipio Africanus.

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voluntarily degraded themselves to the level of the vulgar. And if scandalous tongues have unjustly aspersed their fame, the way to clear it is not by an *affassination*.

CHRISTINA.

Oh! that I were alive again, and restored to my throne, that I might punish the insolence of this hoary traitor!—But, see! he leaves me, he turns his back upon me with cool contempt!—Alas! do I not deserve this scorn? In spite of myself I must confess that I do.—O vanity, how short-lived are the pleasures thou bestowest! I was thy votary: thou wast the god for whom I changed my religion. For thee I forsook my country and my throne. What compensation have I gained for all these sacrifices, so lavishly, so imprudently made? Some puffs of incense from authors, who thought their flattery due to the rank I had held, or hoped to advance themselves by my recommendation, or, at best, over-rated my passion for literature, and praised me, to raise the value of those talents with which they were endowed. But in the esteem of *wise men* I stand very low; and *their esteem alone is the true measure of glory*. Nothing, I perceive, can give the mind a lasting joy, but the consciousness of having performed our duty in that station, which it has pleased the divine Providence to assign to us. The glory of virtue is solid and eternal: all other will fade away like a thin vapoury cloud, on which the casual glance of some faint beams of light has superficially imprinted their weak and transient colours.



DIALOGUE XI.

TITUS VESPASIANUS.—PUBLIUS CORNELIUS SCIPIO AFRICANUS.

TITUS.

NO—Scipio, I can't give place to you in this.—In other respects I acknowledge myself your inferior, though I was emperor of Rome, and you only her consul. I think your triumph

umph over Carthage more glorious than mine over Judæa: but in that I gained over love, I must esteem myself superior to you, though your generosity with regard to the fair Celtiberian, your captive, has been celebrated so highly.

S C I P I O.

Fame has been then unjust to your merit: for little is said of the *continence* of Titus: but mine has been the favourite topic of eloquence in every age and country.

T I T U S.

It has:—and in particular your great historian Livy has poured forth all the ornaments of his admirable rhetoric to embellish and dignify that part of your story. I had a great historian too, Cornelius Tacitus: but either from the brevity which he affected in writing, or from the severity of his nature, which, never having felt the passion of love, thought the subduing of it too easy a victory to deserve great encomiums, he has bestowed but three lines upon my parting with Berenicé, which cost me more pain, and greater efforts of mind, than the conquest of Jerusalem.

S C I P I O.

I wish to hear from yourself the history of that parting, and what could make it so hard and painful to you.

T I T U S.

While I served in Palestine under the auspices of my father, Vespasian, I became acquainted with Berenicé, sister to king Agrippa, and who was herself a queen in one of those Eastern countries. She was the most beautiful woman in Asia; but she had graces more irresistible still than her beauty. She had all the insinuation and wit of Cleopatra, without her coquetry. I loved her, and was beloved: she loved my person, not my greatness. Her tenderness, her fidelity, so inflamed my passion for her, that I gave her a promise of marriage.

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S C I P I O.

What do I hear? A Roman senator promise to marry a queen!

T I T U S.

I expected, Scipio, that your ears would be offended with the sound of such a match. But consider that Rome was very different in my time from Rome in your's. The ferocious pride of our ancient republican senators had bent itself to the obsequious complaisance of a court. Berenice made no doubt, and I flattered myself, that it would not be inflexible in this point alone. But we thought it necessary to defer the completion of our wishes till the death of my father. On that event the Roman empire, and (what I knew she valued more) *my hand*, became due to her, according to my engagements.

S C I P I O.

The Roman empire due to a Syrian queen! Oh Rome, how art thou fallen! Accursed be the memory of Octavius Cæsar, who, by oppressing its liberty, so lowered the majesty of the republic, that a brave and virtuous Roman, in whom was vested all the power of that mighty state, could entertain such a thought! But did you find the senate and people so servile, so lost to all sense of their honour and dignity, as to affront the great genius of imperial Rome, and the eyes of her tutelary gods, the eyes of Jupiter Capitolinus, with the sight of a queen, an Asiatic queen, on the throne of the Cæsars?

T I T U S.

I did not;—they judged of it as you, Scipio, judge; they detested, they disdained it. In vain did I urge to some particular friends, who represented to me the sense of the senate and people, that a Messalina, a Poppæa, were a much greater dishonour to the throne of the Cæsars than a virtuous foreign princess*. Their prejudices were unconquerable; I saw it would be impossible for me to remove them. But I might have

* The character of Berenice in this dialogue is conformable to the idea given of her by Racine, not by Josephus.

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used my authority to silence their murmurs. A liberal donative to the soldiers, by whom I was fondly beloved, would have secured their fidelity, and consequently would have forced the senate and people to yield to my inclination. Berenice knew this, and with tears implored me not to sacrifice her happiness and my own to an unjust prepossession. Shall I own it to you, Publius? My heart not only pitied her, but acknowledged the truth and solidity of her reasons. Yet so much did I abhor the idea of tyranny, so much respect did I pay to the sentiments of my subjects, that I determined to separate myself from her for ever, rather than force either the laws or the prejudices of Rome to submit to my will.

SCIPIO.

Give me thy hand, noble Titus. Thou wast worthy of the empire; and Scipio Africanus honours thy virtue.

TITUS.

My virtue can have no greater reward from the approbation of man. But, o Scipio, think what anguish my heart must have felt, when I took that resolution, and when I communicated it to my dear, my unhappy Berenice. You saw the struggle of Masinissa, when you forced him to give up his beloved Sophonisba. Mine was a harder conflict. She had abandoned him to marry the king of Numidia. He knew that her ruling passion was ambition, not love. He could not rationally esteem her, when she quitted a husband, whom she had ruined, who had lost his crown and his liberty in the cause of her country, and for her sake, to give her person to him, the capital foe of that unfortunate husband. He must, in spite of his passion, have thought her a perfidious, a detestable woman. But I esteemed Berenice: she deserved my esteem. I was certain she would not have accepted the empire from any other hand: and had I been a private man, she would have raised me to her throne. Yet I had the fortitude, I ought, perhaps, to say, the *hardness of heart*, to bid her depart from my sight; depart for ever! What, o Publius,

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was your conquest over yourself, in giving back to her betrothed lover the Celtiberian captive, compared to this? Indeed that was no conquest. I will not so dishonour the virtue of Scipio, as to think he could feel any struggle with himself on that account. A woman engaged to another, engaged by affection as well as vows, let her have been ever so beautiful, could raise in your heart no sentiments but compassion and friendship. To have violated her, wou'd have been an act of brutality, which none but another Tarquin could have committed. To have detained her from her husband, would have been cruel. But where love is mutual, where the object beloved suffers more in the separation than you do yourself, to part with her is indeed a struggle! It is the hardest sacrifice a good heart can make to its duty.

SCIPIO.

I acknowledge that it is, and yield you the palm. But I will own to you, Titus, I never knew much of the tenderness you describe. Hannibal, Carthage, Rome, the saving of my country, the subduing of its rival, these filled my thoughts, and left no room there for those effeminate passions. I do not blame your sensibility: but, when I went to the capitol to talk with *JOVE*, I never consulted him about *love affairs*.

TITUS.

If my soul had been possessed by ambition alone, I might possibly have been a greater man than I was; but I should not have been more virtuous, nor have gained the title I preferred to that of Conqueror of Judaea and emperor of Rome, in being called *the Delight of Humankind*.

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