

welcome end of her labours had arrived. She bade the ostler get out the dog-cart, as if she were the Queen of Sheba going to visit Solomon. She went marching up to her sister's room, announcing her approach with a more than ordinarily accurate rendering of "Oh, the men of merry, merry England!" so that a stranger might have fancied that he heard the very voice of Harry Trelyon, with all its unmelodious vigour, ringing along the passage.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE EXILE'S RETURN.

PERHAPS you have been away in distant parts of the earth, each day crowded with new experiences and slowly obscuring the clear pictures of England with which you left; perhaps you have only been hidden away in London, amid its ceaseless noise, its strange faces, its monotonous recurrence of duties; let us say, in any case, that you are returning home for a space to the quiet of northern Cornwall.

You look out of the high window of a Plymouth hotel early in the morning; there is promise of a beautiful autumn day. A ring of pink mist lies around the horizon; overhead the sky is clear and blue; the white sickle of the moon still lingers visible. The new warmth of the day begins to melt the hoar-frost in the meadows, and you know that out beyond the town the sun is shining brilliantly on the wet grass, with the brown cattle gleaming red in the light.

You leave the great world behind, with all its bustle, crowds, and express engines, when you get into the quiet little train that takes you leisurely up to Launceston, through woods, by the sides of rivers, over great valleys. There is a sense of repose about this railway journey. The train stops at any number of small stations—apparently to let the guard have a chat with the station-master—and then jogs on in a quiet, contented fashion. And on such an autumn day as this, that is a beautiful, still, rich-coloured, and English-looking country through which it passes. Here is a deep valley, all glittering with the dew

and the sunlight. Down in the hollow a farm-yard is half hidden behind the yellowing elms; a boy is driving a flock of white geese along the twisting road; the hedges are red with the withering briers. Up here, along the hillsides, the woods of scrub oak are glowing with every imaginable hue of gold, crimson, and bronze, except where a few dark firs appear, or where a tuft of broom, pure and bright in its green, stands out among the faded brackens. The gorse is profusely in bloom—it always is in Cornwall. Still further over there are sheep visible on the uplands; beyond these again the bleak brown moors rise into peaks of hills; overhead the silent blue, and all around the sweet, fresh country air.

With a sharp whistle the small train darts into an opening in the hills; here we are in the twilight of a great wood. The tall trees are becoming bare; the ground is red with the fallen leaves; through the branches the blue-winged jay flies, screaming harshly; you can smell the damp and resinous odours of the ferns. Out again we get into the sunlight; and lo! a rushing, brawling, narrow stream, its clear flood swaying this way and that by the big stones; a wall of rock overhead crowned by glowing furze; a herd of red cattle sent scampering through the bright-green grass. Now we get slowly into a small white station, and catch a glimpse of a tiny town over in the valley; again we go on by wood and valley, by rocks, and streams, and farms. It is a pleasant drive on such a morning.

In one of the carriages in this train Master Harry Trelyon and his grandmother were seated. How he had ever persuaded her to go with him to Cornwall by train was mysterious enough; for the old lady thoroughly hated all such modern devices. It was her custom to go travelling all over the country with a big, old-fashioned phaeton and a pair of horses; and her chief amusement during these long excursions was driving up to any big house she took a fancy to, in order to see if there was a chance of its being let to her. The faithful old servant who attended her, and who was about as old as the coachman, had a great respect for his mistress; but sometimes he swore—inadvisably—when she ordered him to make the usual inquiry at the front door of some noble lord's

country residence, which he would as soon have thought of letting as of forfeiting his seat in the House of Peers or hopes of heaven. But the carriage and horses were coming down all the same to Eglosilyan, to take her back again.

"Harry," she was saying at this moment, "the longer I look at you, the more positive I am that you are ill. I don't like your colour; you are thin, and careworn, and anxious. What is the matter with you?"

"Going to school again at twenty-one is hard work, grandmother," he said. "Don't you try it. But I don't think I'm particularly ill; few folks can keep a complexion like yours, grandmother."

"Yes," said the old lady, rather pleased, "many's the time they said that about me, that there wasn't much to complain of in my looks; and that's what a girl thinks of then, and sweethearts, and balls, and all the other men looking savage when she's dancing with any one of them. Well, well, Harry; and what is all this about you and the young lady your mother has made such a pet of? Oh, yes, I have my suspicions; and she's engaged to another man, isn't she? Your grandfather would have fought him, I'll be bound; but we live in a peaceable way now—well, well, no matter; but hasn't that got something to do with your glum looks, Harry?"

"I tell you, grandmother, I have been hard at work in London. You can't look very brilliant after a few months in London."

"And what keeps you in London at this time of the year?" said this plain-spoken old lady. "Your fancy about getting into the army? Nonsense, man; don't tell me such a tale as that. There's a woman in the case; a Trelyon never put himself so much about from any other cause. To stop in town at this time of the year! Why, your grandfather and your father, too, would have laughed to hear of it. I haven't had a brace of birds or a pheasant sent me since last autumn—not one. Come, sir, be frank with me. I'm an old woman, but I can hold my tongue."

"There's nothing to tell, grandmother," he said. "You just about hit it in that guess of yours—I suppose Juliott told you. Well, the girl is engaged to another man; and what more is to be said?"

"The man's in Jamaica?"

"Yes."

"Why are you going down to-day?"

"Only for a brief visit: I've been a long time away."

The old lady sat silent for some time. She had heard of the whole affair before; but she wished to have the rumour confirmed. And at first she was sorely troubled that her grandson should contemplate marrying an innkeeper's daughter, however intelligent, amiable, and well-educated the young lady might be; but she knew the Trelyons pretty well, and knew that, if he had made up his mind to it, argument and remonstrance would be useless. Moreover, she had a great affection for this young man, and was strongly disposed to sympathise with any wish of his. She grew in time to have a great interest in Miss Wenna Rosewarne; at this moment the chief object of her visit was to make her acquaintance. She grew to pity young Trelyon in his disappointment, and was inclined to believe that the person in Jamaica was something of a public enemy. The fact was, her mere liking for her grandson would have converted her to a sympathy with the wildest project he could have formed.

"Dear, dear," she said, "what awkward things engagements are when they stand in your way. Shall I tell you the truth? I was just about as good as engaged to John Cholmondeley when I gave myself up to your grandfather—but there, when a girl's heart pulls her one way, and her promise pulls her another way, she needs to be a very firm-minded young woman, if she means to hold fast. John Cholmondeley was as good-hearted a young fellow as ever lived—yes, I will say that for him; and I was mightily sorry for him; but—but you see, that's how things come about. Dear, dear, that evening at Bath—I remember it as well as if it was yesterday—and it was only two months after I had run away with your grandfather. Yes, there was a ball that night; and we had kept very quiet, you know, after coming back; but this time your grandfather had set his heart on taking me out before everybody, and you know, he had to have his way. As sure as I live, Harry, the first man I saw was John Cholmondeley, just as white as a ghost—they said he had been drinking hard and

gambling pretty nearly the whole of these two months. He wouldn't come near me. He wouldn't take the least notice of me. The whole night he pretended to be vastly gay and merry; he danced with everybody; but his eyes never came near me. Well, you know what a girl is—that vexed me a little bit; for there never was a man such a slave to a woman as he was to me—dear, dear, the way my father used to laugh at him, until he got wild with anger. Well, I went up to him at last, when he was by himself, and I said to him, just in a careless way, you know, 'John, aren't you going to dance with me to-night?' Well, do you know, his face got quite white again; and he said—I remember the very words, all as cold as ice—'Madam,' says he, 'I am glad to find that your hurried trip to Scotland has impaired neither your good looks nor your self-command.' Wasn't it cruel of him?—but then, poor fellow, he had been badly used, I admit that. Poor young fellow, he never did marry; and I don't believe he ever forgot me to his dying day. Many a time I'd like to have told him all about it; and how there was no use in my marrying him if I liked another man better; but though we met sometimes, especially when he came down about the Reform Bill time—and I do believe I made a red-hot Radical of him—he was always very proud, and I hadn't the heart to go back on the old story. But I'll tell you what your grandfather did for him—he got him returned at the very next election, and he on the other side too; and after a bit a man begins to think more about getting a seat in Parliament than about courting an empty-headed girl. I have met this Mr. Roscorla, haven't I?"

"Of course you have."

"A good-looking man rather, with a fresh complexion and grey hair?"

"I don't know what you mean by good looks," said Trelyon, shortly. "I shouldn't think people would call him an Adonis. But there's no accounting for tastes."

"Perhaps I may have been mistaken," the old lady said; "but there was a gentleman at Plymouth Station who seemed to be something like what I can recall of Mr. Roscorla—you didn't see him, I suppose."

"At Plymouth Station, grandmother?" the young man said, becoming rather uneasy.

"Yes. He got into the train just as we came up. A neatly-dressed man, grey hair, and a healthy-looking face—I must have seen him somewhere about here before."

"Roscorla is in Jamaica," said Trelyon, positively.

Just at this moment the train slowed into Launceston Station, and the people began to get out on the platform.

"That is the man I mean," said the old lady.

Trelyon turned and stared. There, sure enough, was Mr. Roscorla, looking not one whit different from the precise, elderly, fresh-coloured gentleman who had left Cornwall some seven months before.

"Good Lord, Harry," said the old lady, nervously looking at her grandson's face, "don't have a fight here!"

The next second Mr. Roscorla wheeled round, anxious about some luggage, and now it was his turn to stare in astonishment and anger—anger, because he had been told that Harry Trelyon never came near Cornwall, and his first sudden suspicion was that he had been deceived. All this had happened in a minute. Trelyon was the first to regain his self-command. He walked deliberately forward, held out his hand, and said—

"Hillo, Roscorla; back in England again? I didn't know you were coming."

"No," said Mr. Roscorla, with his face grown just a trifle greyer, "no, I suppose not."

In point of fact he had not informed any one of his coming. He had prepared a little surprise. The chief motive of his return was to get Wenna to cancel for ever that unlucky letter of release he had sent her, which he had done more or less successfully in subsequent correspondence; but he had also hoped to introduce a little romanticism into his meeting with her. He would enter Eglosilyan on foot. He would wander down to the rocks at the mouth of the harbour, on the chance of finding Wenna there. Might he not hear her humming to herself, as she sat and sewed, some snatch of "Your Polly has never been false, she declares"—or was that the very last ballad in the world she would now think of singing? Then the delight of regarding again the placid, bright face and earnest eyes, of securing

once more a perfect understanding between them, and their glad return to the inn.

All this had been spoiled by the appearance of this young man: he loved him none the more for that.

"I suppose you haven't got a trap waiting for you?" said Trelyon, with cold politeness. "I can drive you over, if you like."

He could do no less than make the offer; the other had no alternative but to accept. Old Mrs. Trelyon heard this compact made with considerable dread.

Indeed, it was a dismal drive over to Eglosilyan, bright as the forenoon was. The old lady did her best to be courteous to Mr. Roscorla and cheerful with her grandson; but she was oppressed by the belief that it was only her presence that had so far restrained the two men from giving vent to the rage and jealousy that filled their hearts. The conversation kept up was singular.

"Are you going to remain in England long, Roscorla?" said the younger of the two men, making an unnecessary cut at one of the two horses he was driving.

"Don't know yet. Perhaps I may."

"Because," said Trelyon, with angry impertinence, "I suppose if you do you'll have to look round for a house-keeper."

The insinuation was felt; and Roscorla's eyes looked anything but pleasant as he answered—

"You forget I've got Mrs. Cornish to look after my house."

"Oh, Mrs. Cornish is not much of a companion for you."

"Men seldom want to make companions of their house-keepers," was the retort, uttered rather hotly.

"But sometimes they wish to have the two offices combined, for economy's sake."

At this juncture Mrs. Trelyon struck in, somewhat wildly, with a remark about an old ruined house, which seemed to have had at one time a private still inside: the danger was staved off for the moment.

"Harry," she said, "mind what you are about; the horses seem very fresh."

"Yes, they like a good run; I suspect they've had precious little to do since I left Cornwall."

Did she fear that the young man was determined to throw them into a ditch or down a precipice, with the wild desire of killing his rival at any cost? If she had known the whole state of affairs between them—the story of the emerald ring, for example—she would have understood at least the difficulty experienced by these two men in remaining decently civil towards each other.

So they passed over the high and wide moors, until far ahead they caught a glimpse of the blue plain of the sea. Mr. Roscorla relapsed into silence; he was becoming a trifle nervous. He was probably so occupied with anticipations of his meeting with Wenna that he failed to notice the objects around him—and one of these, now become visible, was a very handsome young lady, who was coming smartly along a wooded lane, carrying a basket of bright-coloured flowers.

"Why, here's Mabyn Rosewarne! I must wait for her."

Mabyn had seen at a distance Mrs. Trelyon's grey horses; she guessed that the young master had come back, and that he had brought some strangers with him. She did not like to be stared at by strangers. She came along the path, with her eyes fixed on the ground; she thought it impertinent of Harry Trelyon to wait to speak to her.

"Oh, Mabyn," he cried, "you must let me drive you home! And let me introduce you to my grandmother. There is some one else whom you know."

The young lady bowed to Mrs. Trelyon; then she stared, and changed colour somewhat, when she saw Mr. Roscorla; then she was helped up into a seat.

"How do you do, Mr. Trelyon?" she said. "I am very glad to see you have come back. How do you do, Mr. Roscorla?"

She shook hands with them both, but not quite in the same fashion.

"And you have sent no message that you were coming?" she said, looking her companion straight in the face.

"No—no, I did not," he said, angry and embarrassed by the open enmity of the girl. "I thought I should surprise you all—"

"You have surprised me, any way," said Mabyn, "for how can you be so thoughtless? Wenna has been very ill

—I tell you, she has been very ill indeed, though she has said little about it, and the least thing upsets her. How can you think of frightening her so? Do you know what you are doing? I wish you would go away back to Launceston, or London, and write her a note there, if you are coming, instead of trying to frighten her!”

This was the language, it appeared to Mr. Roscorla, of a virago: only viragoes do not ordinarily have tears in their eyes, as was the case with Mabyn, when she finished her indignant appeal.

“Mr. Trelyon, do you think it is fair to go and frighten Wenna so?” she demanded.

“It is none of my business,” Trelyon answered, with an air as if he had said to his rival, “Yes, go and kill the girl! You are a nice sort of gentleman, to come down from London to kill the girl!”

“This is absurd,” said Mr. Roscorla, contemptuously, for he was stung into reprisal by the persecution of these two; “a girl isn’t so easily frightened out of her wits. Why, she must have known that my coming home was at any time probable.”

“I have no doubt she feared that it was,” said Mabyn, partly to herself: for once she was afraid of speaking out.

Presently, however, a brighter light came over the girl’s face.

“Why, I quite forgot,” she said, addressing Harry Trelyon; “I quite forgot that Wenna was just going up to Trelyon Hall when I left. Of course, she will be up there. You will be able to tell her that Mr. Roscorla has arrived, won’t you?”

The malice of this suggestion was so apparent that the young gentleman in front could not help grinning at it; fortunately, his face could not be seen by his rival. What he thought of the whole arrangement can only be imagined.

And so, as it happened, Mr. Roscorla and his friend Mabyn were dropped at the inn; while Harry Trelyon drove his grandmother up and on to the Hall.

“Well, Harry,” the old lady said, “I am glad to be able to breathe at last; I thought you two were going to kill each other.”

“There is no fear of that,” the young man said; “that

is not the way in which this affair has to be settled. It is entirely a matter for her decision—and look how everything is in his favour. I am not even allowed to say a word to her; and even if I could, he is a deal cleverer than me in argument. He would argue my head off in half-an-hour.”

“But you don’t turn a girl’s heart round by argument, Harry. When a girl has to choose between a young lover and an elderly one, it isn’t always good sense that directs her choice. Is Miss Wenna Rosewarne at all like her sister?”

“She’s not such a tomboy,” he said; “but she is quite as straightforward, and proud, and quick to tell you what is the right thing to do. There’s no sort of shamming tolerated by these two girls. But then Wenna is gentle, and quieter, and more soft and lovable than Mabyn—in my fancy, you know; and she is more humorous and clever, so that she never gets into those schoolgirl rages. But it is really a shame to compare them like that; and, indeed, if any one said the least thing against one of these girls, the other would precious soon make him regret the day he was born. You don’t catch me doing that with either of them; I’ve had a warning already, when I hinted that Mabyn might probably manage to keep her husband in good order. And so she would, I believe, if the husband were not of the right sort; but when she is really fond of anybody, she becomes their slave out-and-out. There is nothing she wouldn’t do for her sister; and her sister thinks there’s nobody in the world like Mabyn. So you see——”

He stopped in the middle of this sentence.

“Grandmother,” he said, almost in a whisper, “here she is coming along the road.”

“Miss Rosewarne?”

“Yes: shall I introduce you?”

“If you like.”

Wenna was coming down the steep road, between the high hedges, with a small girl on each side of her, whom she was leading by the hand. She was gaily talking to them; you could hear the children laughing at what she said. Old Mrs. Trelyon came to the conclusion that this merry young lady, with the light and free step, the careless

talk, and fresh colour in her face, was certainly not dying of any love-affair.

"Take the reins, grandmother, for a minute."

He had leapt down into the road, and was standing before her, almost ere she had time to recognize him. For a moment a quick gleam of gladness shone on her face; then, almost instinctively, she seemed to shrink from him, and she was reserved, distant, and formal.

He introduced her to the old lady, who said something nice to her about her sister. The young man was looking wistfully at her, troubled at heart that she treated him so coldly.

"I have got to break some news to you," he said; "perhaps you will consider it good news."

She looked up quickly.

"Nothing has happened to anybody—only some one has arrived. Mr. Roscorla is at the inn."

She did not flinch. He was vexed with her that she showed no sign of fear or dislike. On the contrary, she quickly said that she must then go down to the inn; and she bade them both good-bye, in a placid and ordinary way; while he drove off, with dark thoughts crowding into his imagination of what might happen down at the inn during the next few days. He was angry with her, he scarcely knew why.

Meanwhile Wenna, apparently quite calm, went on down the road; but there was no more laughing in her voice, no more light in her face.

"Miss Wenna," said the smaller of the two children, who could not understand this change, and who looked up with big, wondering eyes, "why does oo tremble so?"

CHAPTER XXXIII.

SOME OLD FRIENDS.

WHEN they heard that Wenna was coming down the road they left Mr. Roscorla alone: lovers like to have their meetings and partings unobserved.

She went into the room, pale and yet firm—there was even a sense of gladness in her heart that now she must

know the worst. What would he say? How would he receive her? She knew that she was at his mercy.

Well, Mr. Roscorla at this moment was angry enough, for he had been deceived and trifled with in his absence, but he was also anxious, and his anxiety caused him to conceal his anger. He came forward to her with quite a pleasant look on his face; he kissed her and said—

"Why, now, Wenna, how frightened you seem! Did you think I was going to scold you? No, no, no—I hope there is no necessity for that. I am not unreasonable, or over-exacting, as a younger man might be; I can make allowances. Of course I can't say I liked what you told me, when I first heard of it; but then I reasoned with myself: I thought of your lonely position; of the natural liking a girl has for the attention of a young man; of the possibility of any one going thoughtlessly wrong. And really I see no great harm done. A passing fancy—that is all."

"Oh, I hope that is so!" she cried suddenly, with a pathetic earnestness of appeal. "It is so good of you, so generous of you to speak like that!"

For the first time she ventured to raise her eyes to his face. They were full of gratitude. Mr. Roscorla complimented himself on his knowledge of women; a younger man would have flown into a fury.

"Oh dear, yes, Wenna!" he said lightly, "I suppose all girls have their fancies stray a little bit from time to time; but is there any harm done? None whatever! There is nothing like marriage to fix the affections, as I hope you will discover ere long—the sooner the better, indeed. Now we will dismiss all those unpleasant matters we have been writing about."

"Then you do forgive me? You are not really angry with me?" she said; and then, finding a welcome assurance in his face, she gratefully took his hand and touched it with her lips.

This little act of graceful submission quite conquered Mr. Roscorla, and definitely removed all lingering traces of anger from his heart. He was no longer acting clemency when he said—with a slight blush on his forehead:

"You know, Wenna, I have not been free from blame either. That letter—it was merely a piece of thoughtless