TREVLYN HOLD.

CHAPTER I.

THE SCARLET CRAVAT.

THE fine summer had faded into autumn, and the autumn would soon be fading into winter. All signs of harvest had disappeared. The farmers had gathered the golden grain into their barns; the meads looked bare, and the partridges hid themselves in the stubble left by the reapers.

Perched on the top of a stile which separated one field from another, was a boy of some fifteen years. Several books, a strap passed round to keep them together, were flung over his shoulder, and he sat throwing stones into a pond close by, softly whistling as he did so. The stones came out of his pocket. Whether stored there for the purpose to which they were now being put, was best known to himself. He was a slender, well-made boy, with finely-shaped features, a clear complexion, and eyes dark and earnest. A refined face; a good face—and you have not to learn that the face is the outward index of the mind within. An index that never fails for those gifted with the power to read the human countenance.

Before him at a short distance, as he sat on the stile, lay the village of Barbrook. A couple of miles beyond the village was the large town of Barmester. But you could reach the town without taking the village *en route*. As to the village itself, there were several ways of reaching it. There was the path through the fields, right in front of the stile where that schoolboy was sitting; there was the green and shady lane (knee-deep in mud sometimes); and there were two high-roads. From the signs of vegetation around—not that the vegetation was of the richest kind—you would never suspect that the barren and bleak lands of coal-fields lay so near. Only four or five miles

away in the opposite direction—that is, behind the boy and the stile—the coal-pits flourished. Farmhouses were scattered within view, had the young gentleman on the stile chosen to look at them; a few gentlemen's houses, and many cottages and hovels. To his left hand, glancing over the field and across the upper road—the road which did not lead to Barbrook, but to Barmester—on a slight eminence, rose the fine but old-fashioned mansion called Trevlyn Hold. Rather to the right, behind him, was the less pretentious, but comfortable dwelling, called Trevlyn Farm. Trevlyn Hold, formerly the property and residence of Squire Trevlyn, had passed, with that gentleman's death, into the hands of Mr. Chattaway, who now lived in it; his wife having been the Squire's second daughter. Trevlyn Farm was tenanted by Mr. Ryle; and the boy now sitting on the stile was Mr. Ryle's eldest son.

There came, scuffling along the field-path from the village, a wan-looking, under-sized girl, as fast as her dilapidated shoes permitted her. The one shoe was tied on with a piece of rag; the other, not being tied on with anything, constantly came off, and impeded her progress. She had almost gained the pond, when a boy considerably taller and stronger than the one on the stile came flying down the field on the left, and planted himself in her way.

"Now then, you little toad! Do you want another buffeting?"

"Oh, please, sir, don't stop me!" she cried, beginning to sob unnecessarily loudly. "Father's a-dying, and mother said I was to run and tell them at the farm. Please let me go by."

"Did I not order you yesterday to keep out of these fields?" asked the tall boy. "There's the lane and there are the roads open to you; how dare you come here? I promised you I'd shake the inside out of you if I caught you here again, and now I'll do it."

"I say," called out at this juncture the lad on the stile, "you keep your hands off her."

The child's assailant turned sharply at the sound. He had not seen that any one was there. For one moment he relaxed his hold of the girl, but the next appeared to change his mind, and began to shake her. She turned her face, in all its tears and its dirt, towards the stile.

"Oh, Master George, make him let me go! I'm a-hasting on to your house, Master George. Father, he's lying all

white upon the bed; and mother said I was to come off and tell of it."

George leaped off the stile, and advanced. "You let her go, Cris Chattaway!"

Cris Chattaway turned his anger upon George. "Mind your own business, you beggar! It is no concern of yours."

"It is, if I choose to make it mine. Let her go, I say. Don't be a coward."

"What's that you call me?" asked Cris Chattaway. "A coward? Take that."

He had picked up a hard clod of earth, and dashed it in George Ryle's face. The boy was not one to stand a gratuitous blow, and Mr. Christopher, before he knew what was coming, found himself on the ground. The girl, released, flew to the stile and scrambled over it. George stood his ground, waiting for Cris to get up; he was less tall and strong, but he would not run away.

Christopher Chattaway slowly gathered himself up. He *was* a coward; and fighting, when it came to close quarters, was not to his mind. Stone-throwing, or water-squirting, or pea-shooting—any annoyance that might be safely carried on at a distance—he was an adept in; but hand-to-hand fighting—Cris did not relish that.

"See if you don't suffer for this, George Ryle!"

George laughed good-humouredly, and sat down on the stile as before. Cris was dusting the earth off his clothes.

"You have called me a coward, and you have knocked me down. I'll enter it in my memorandum-book, George Ryle."

"Do," equably returned George. "I never knew any *but* cowards set upon girls."

"I'll set upon her again, if I catch her using this path. There's not a more impudent little wretch in all the parish. Let her try it, that's all."

"She has a right to use this path as much as I have."

"Not if I choose to say she shan't use it. *You* won't have the right long."

"Oh, indeed!" said George. "What is to take it from me?"

"The Squire says he shall cause this way through the fields to be closed."

"*Who* says it?" asked George, with marked emphasis—and the sound grated on Cris Chattaway's ear.

"The Squire says so," he roared. "Are you deaf?"

"Ah," said George. "But Mr. Chattaway can't close it. My father says he has not the power."

"*Your* father!" contemptuously rejoined Cris Chattaway. "He would like his leave asked, perhaps. When the Squire says he shall do a thing, he means it."

"At any rate, it is not done yet," was the significant answer. "Don't boast, Cris."

Cris had been making off, and was some distance up the field. He turned to address George.

"You know, you beggar, that if I don't go in and polish you off it's because I can't condescend to tarnish my hands. When I fight, I like to fight with gentlepeople." And with that he turned tail, and decamped quicker than before.

"Just so," shrieked George. "Especially if they wear petticoats."

A sly shower of earth came back in answer. But it happened, every bit of it, to steer clear of him, and George kept his seat and his equanimity.

"What has he been doing now, George?"

George turned his head; the question came from some one behind him. There stood a lovely boy of some twelve years old, his beautiful features set off by dark blue eyes and silky curls of a bright auburn.

"Where did you spring from, Rupert?"

"I came down by the hedge. You did not hear me. You were calling after Cris. Has he been beating you, George?"

"Beating me!" returned George, throwing back his handsome face with a laugh. "I don't think he would like to try that on, Rupert. He could not beat me with impunity, as he does you."

Rupert Trevlyn laid his cheek on the stile, and fixed his eyes on the clear blue evening sky—for the sun was drawing towards its setting. He was a sensitive, romantic, strange sort of boy; gentle and loving by nature, but given to violent fits of passion. People said he inherited the latter from his grandfather, Squire Trevlyn. Others of the Squire's descendants had inherited the same. Under happier auspices, Rupert might have learnt to subdue these bursts of passion. Had he possessed a kind home and loving friends, how different might have been his destiny.

"George, I wish papa had lived!"

"The whole parish has need to wish that," returned George. "I wish you stood in his shoes! That's what I wish."

"Instead of Uncle Chattaway. Old Canham says I ought to stand in them. He says he thinks I shall, some time, because justice is almost sure to come uppermost in the end."

"Look here, Rupert!" gravely returned George Ryle. "Don't you go listening to old Canham. He talks nonsense, and it will do neither of you good. If Chattaway heard only a tithe of what he sometimes says, he'd turn him from the lodge, neck and crop, in spite of Miss Diana. What *is*, can't be helped, you know, Rupert."

"But Cris has no right to inherit Trevlyn over me."

"He has the right of law, I suppose," answered George; "at least, he will have it. Make the best of it, Ru. There are lots of things that I have to make the best of. I had a caning yesterday for another boy, and I had to make the best of that."

Rupert still looked up at the sky. "If it were not for Aunt Edith," quoth he, "I'd run away."

"You little stupid! Where would you run to?"

"Anywhere. Mr. Chattaway gave me no dinner to-day."

"Why not?"

"Because Cris carried a tale to him. But it was false, George."

"Did you tell Chattaway it was false?"

"Yes. But where's the use? He always believes Cris before me."

"Have you had no dinner?"

Rupert shook his head. "I took a bit of bread off the tray as they were carrying it through the hall. That's all I have had."

"Then I'd advise you to make double-quick haste home to your tea," said George, jumping over the stile, "as I am going to do to mine."

George ran swiftly across the back fields towards his home. Looking round when he was well on his way, he saw the lad, Rupert, still leaning on the stile with his face turned upward.

Meanwhile the little tatterdemalion of a girl had scuffled along to Trevlyn Farm—a very moderately-sized house, with a rustic porch covered with jessamine, and a large garden, more useful than ornamental, intervening between it and the high-road. The garden path, leading to the porch, was straight and narrow; on either side rose alternately cabbage-rose-trees and hollyhocks. Gooseberries, currants, strawberries, raspberries, and other plain fruit-trees, grew amidst vegetables of various

sorts. A productive garden, if not an elegant one. At the side of the house the fold-yard palings and a five-barred gate divided it from the public road, and behind the house were the barns and other outdoor buildings belonging to the farm.

From the porch the entrance led direct into a room, half sitting-room, half kitchen. It was called "Nora's room." Nora generally sat in it; George and his brother did their lessons in it; the actual kitchen being at the back. A parlour opening from this room on the right, whose window looked into the fold-yard, was the general sitting-room of the family. The best sitting-room, a really handsome apartment, was on the other side of the house. As the girl scuffled up to the porch, an active, black-eyed, talkative little woman, of five or six-and-thirty, from the window of the best kitchen, saw her approaching. It was Nora. What with the child's ragged frock and tippet, her broken straw bonnet, her slipshod shoes, and her face smeared with dirt and tears, she looked wretched enough. Her father, Jim Sanders, was carter to Mr. Ryle. He had been at home ill the last day or two; or, as the phrase ran in the farm, was "off his work."

"If ever I saw such an object!" was Nora's exclamation. "How *can* her mother keep her in that state? Just look at that Letty Sanders, Mrs. Ryle!"

Sorting large bunches of sweet herbs on a table at the back of the room, was a tall, upright woman. Her dress was plain, but her manner and bearing bespoke the lady. Those familiar with the district would have recognized in her handsome, but somewhat masculine face, a likeness to the well-formed, powerful features of the late Squire Trevlyn. She was that gentleman's eldest daughter, and had given mortal umbrage to her family when she quitted Trevlyn Hold to become the second wife of Mr. Ryle. George Ryle was not her son. She had only two children: Trevlyn, a boy two years younger than George; and a little girl of eight, named Caroline.

Mrs. Ryle turned round, and glanced at the garden path and at Letty Sanders. "She *is* an object! See what she wants, Nora."

Nora, who had no patience with idleness and its signs, opened the door with a fling. The girl halted a few paces off the porch, and dropped a curtsey.

"Please, father be dreadful bad," began she. "He be lying on the bed and he don't stir, and he have got nothing but

white in his face; and, please, mother said I was to come and tell the missus, and ask her for a spoonful o' brandy."

"And how dare your mother send you up to the house in this trim?" demanded Nora. "How many crows did you frighten as you came along?"

"Please," whimpered the child, "she haven't had time to tidy me to-day, father's been so bad, and t'other frock was tored in the washin'."

"Of course," assented Nora. "Everything is 'tored' that she has to do with, and it never gets mended. If ever there was a poor, moithering, thriftless thing, it's that mother of yours. She has no needles and no thread, I suppose, and neither soap nor water?"

Mrs. Ryle came forward to interrupt the colloquy. "What is the matter with your father, Letty? Is he worse?"

Letty dropped half-a-dozen curtseys in succession. "Please, 'm, it's his inside as have been bad again, but mother's afeared he's dying. He has fell back upon the bed, and he don't stir nor breathe. She says, will you please send him a spoonful o' brandy?"

"Have you brought anything to put it in?" inquired Mrs. Ryle.

"No, 'm."

"It's not likely," chimed in Nora. "Meg Sanders wouldn't think to send so much as a cracked teacup. Shall I put a drop in a bottle, and give it to her?" continued Nora, turning to Mrs. Ryle.

"No," replied Mrs. Ryle. "I must know what's the matter with him before I send brandy. Go back to your mother, Letty. Tell her I shall be going past her cottage presently, and will call in."

The child turned and scuffled off. Mrs. Ryle resumed to Nora:

"Should it be another attack of inward inflammation, brandy would be the worst thing he could take. He drinks too much, does Jim Sanders."

"His inside's like a barrel—always waiting to be filled," remarked Nora. "He'd drink the sea dry if it ran beer. What with his drinking, and her untidiness, small wonder that the children are in rags. I am surprised the master keeps him on!"

"He only drinks by fits and starts, Nora. His health will not let him do more."

"No, it won't," acquiesced Nora. "And I misdoubt me but this bout may be the ending of him. That hole was not dug for nothing."

"Nonsense," said Mrs. Ryle. "Find Treve, will you, Nora; and get him ready."

"Treve," a young gentleman given to have his own way, and to be kept very much from school on account of "delicate health," a malady more imaginary than real, was found somewhere about the farm, and put into visiting condition. He and his mother were invited to take tea at Barbrook. In point of fact, the invitation had been for Mrs. Ryle only; but she could not bear to stir anywhere without her darling boy Trevlyn.

They had barely departed when George entered. Nora had then spread the tea on the table, and was standing cutting bread-and-butter.

"Where are they all?" asked George, depositing his books upon a small sideboard.

"Your mamma and Treve are off to tea at Mrs. Apperley's," replied Nora. "And the master, he rode over to Barmester this afternoon, and is not back yet. Sit down, George. Would you like a taste of pumpkin pie?"

"Try me," responded George. "Is there any?"

"I saved it you from dinner," said Nora, bringing forth a plate from a closet. "It is not much. Treve's stomach is as craving for pies as Jim Sanders's is for beer; and Mrs. Ryle would give him all he wanted, if it cleared the dish——. Is that somebody calling?" she broke off, going to the window. "George, it's Mr. Chattaway! See what he wants."

A gentleman on horseback had reined in close to the gate: a spare man, rather above the middle height, with a pale, leaden sort of complexion, small, cold light eyes, and mean-looking features. George ran down the path.

"Is your father at home, George?"

"No. He is gone to Barmester."

A scowl passed over Mr. Chattaway's brow. "That's the third time I have been here this week, and cannot get to see him. Tell your father, George, that I have had another letter from Butt, and that I'll trouble him to attend to it. Tell your father I will not be pestered with this business any longer, and if he does not pay the money right off, I'll make him pay it."

Something not unlike an ice-shaft shot through George

Ryle's heart. He knew there was trouble between his house and Mr. Chattaway; that his father was, in pecuniary matters, at Mr. Chattaway's mercy. Was this move, this message, the result of his recent encounter with Cris Chattaway? A hot flush dyed his face, and he wished—for his father's sake—that he had let Mr. Cris alone. For his father's sake he was now ready to eat humble-pie to Mr. Chattaway, though there never lived a boy less inclined to eat humble-pie in a general way than George Ryle. He went close up to the horse and raised his honest eyes fearlessly.

"Has Christopher been complaining to you, Mr. Chattaway?"

"No. What has he to complain of?"

"Not much," answered George, his fears subsiding. "Only I know he does carry tales."

"Were there no tales to carry he could not carry them," coldly remarked Mr. Chattaway. "I have not seen Christopher since dinner-time. It seems to me that you are always trying to suspect him of something. Take care that you deliver my message correctly, sir."

Mr. Chattaway rode away, and George returned to his pumpkin pie. He had scarcely eaten it—with remarkable relish, for the cold dinner he took with him to school daily was little more than a lunch—when Mr. Ryle entered. He came in by the back-door, having been round to the stables to leave his horse there. He was a tall, fine man, with light curling hair, mild blue eyes, and a fair countenance pleasant to look at in its honest simplicity. George delivered the message left by Mr. Chattaway.

"He left me that message, did he?" cried Mr. Ryle, who, if he could be angered by one thing, it was on this very subject—Chattaway's claims against him. "He might have kept it in until he saw me himself."

"He bade me tell you, papa."

"Yes; it is no matter to Chattaway how he browbeats me and exposes my affairs. He has been at it for years. Has he gone home?"

"I think so," replied George. "He rode that way."

"I'll stand it no longer, and I'll tell him so to his face," continued Mr. Ryle. "Let him do his best and his worst."

Taking up his hat, Mr. Ryle strode out of the house, disdaining Nora's invitation to tea, and leaving on the table his neck-scarf, a large square of soft scarlet merino, which he had

worn into Barmester. Recently suffering from sore throat, Mrs. Ryle had induced him to put it on when he rode out that afternoon.

"Look there!" cried Nora. "He has left his cravat."

Snatching it up, she ran after Mr. Ryle, catching him when he was half-way down the path. He took it from her with a hasty movement, and went along swinging it in his hand. But he did not attempt to put it on.

"It is just like the master," grumbled Nora to George. "He has had that warm woollen thing on for hours, and now goes off without it! He'll get his throat bad again."

"I am afraid," said George, "papa's gone to have it out with Mr. Chattaway."

"And serve Chattaway right if he is," returned Nora. "It is what the master has threatened this many a day."

CHAPTER II.

THE HOLE IN THE PATH.

LATER, when George was working assiduously at his lessons and Nora was sewing, both by the help of the same candle—for an array of candles was not more common than other luxuries in Mr. Ryle's house—footsteps were heard approaching the porch, and a modest knock came to the door.

"Come in," called out Nora.

A very thin woman, in a washed-out cotton gown, with a thin face and inflamed eyes, came in, curtseying. It was an honest face, a meek face; although it looked as if its owner had a meal about once a week.

"Evening, Miss Dickson; evening, Master George. I have stepped round to ask the missis whether I shall be wanted on Tuesday."

"The missis is out," said Nora. "She has been talking of putting off the wash till the week after, but I don't know that she will. If you sit down a bit, Ann Canham, maybe she'll be in."

Ann Canham seated herself respectfully on the edge of a remote chair. And Nora, who liked gossiping above every earthly thing, began to talk of Jim Sanders's illness.

"He has dreadful bouts, poor fellow!" observed Ann Canham.

"But six times out of the seven he brings them on through his own fault," tartly returned Nora. "Many and many a time I have told him he'd do for himself, and now I think he has done it. This bout, it strikes me, is his last."

"Is he so ill as that?" exclaimed Ann Canham. And George looked up from his exercise-book in surprise.

"I don't know that he is," said Nora; "but——"

Nora broke suddenly off. She dropped her work, and bent her head towards Ann Canham in the distance.

"We have had a strange thing happen here, Ann Canham," she continued, her voice falling to a whisper; "and if it's not a warning of death, never you believe me again. This morning—— George, did you hear the dog in the night?"

"No," answered George.

"Boys sleep sound," she remarked to Ann Canham. "You might drive a coach-and-six through their room, and not wake them. His chamber's back, too. Last night the dog got round to the front of the house," she continued, "and there he was, all night long, sighing and moaning like a human creature. You couldn't call it a howl; it had too much pain in it. He was at it all night long; I couldn't sleep for it. The missis says she couldn't sleep for it. Molly heard it at times, but dropped off to sleep again; those hard-worked servants are heavy sleepers. Well, this morning I was up first, the master next, Molly next; but the master, he went out by the back-way, and saw nothing. By-and-by, I spied something out of this window on the garden path, as if somebody had been digging there; so I went out. Ann Canham, it was for all the world like a grave!—a great hole, with the earth thrown up on either side of it. That dog had done it in the night!"

Ann Canham, possibly feeling herself uncomfortably aloof from the company when graves became the topic, drew her chair nearer the table. George sat, his pen arrested; his large eyes, wide open, were turned on Nora—not with a gaze of fear, but with one of merriment.

"A great big hole, about twice the length of our rolling-pin, and wide in proportion, all hollowed and scratched out," went on Nora. "I called the cow-boy, and asked him what it looked like. 'A grave,' says he, without a minute's hesitation. Molly came out, and they two filled it in again, and trod the path down. The marks have been plain enough all day. The master