

It was at this juncture that the awkward knock came to the door. "Come in!" called out Mrs. Chattaway.

Either her gentle voice was not heard, for Cris and his sister were disputing just then, or the boy's modesty would not allow him to respond. He knocked again.

"See who it is, Cris," came forth the ringing voice of Miss Trevlyn.

Cris did not choose to obey. "Open the door, Maude," said he.

Maude did as she was bid: she had little chance allowed her in that house of doing otherwise. Opening the door, she saw the boy standing there. "What is it, Bill?" she asked in surprise.

"Please, is the Squire in there, Miss Maude?"

"No," answered Maude. "He has gone to bed: he is not well."

This appeared to be a poser for Bill, and he stood considering. "Is Madam in there?" he presently asked.

"Who is it, Maude?" came again in Miss Trevlyn's commanding tones.

Maude turned her head. "It is Bill Webb, Aunt Diana."

"What does he want?"

Bill stepped in. "Please, Miss Diana, I came to tell the Squire the news. I thought he might be angry of me if I did not, seeing as I knowed of it."

"The news?" repeated Miss Diana, looking imperiously at Bill.

"The mischief what the bull have done. He have gone and gored Farmer Ryle."

The words arrested the attention of all. They came forward, as with one impulse. Cris and his sister, in their haste, upset the backgammon-board.

"What do you say, Bill?" gasped Mrs. Chattaway, with white face and faltering tongue.

"It's true, ma'am," said Bill. "The bull set on him this afternoon, and tossed him into the ditch. Master George found him there a short while a-gone, groaning awful."

There was a startled pause. Maude broke the silence with a sob of pain, and Mrs. Chattaway, in her consternation, seized the arm of the boy. "Bill, I—I—hope he is not much injured!"

"He says as it's his death, ma'am," answered Bill. "John Pinder and others have brought a bed, and they be carrying of him home on it."

"What brought Mr. Ryle in that field?" asked Miss Diana.

"He telled me, ma'am, as he was a-coming up here to see the Squire, and took that way to save time."

Mrs. Chattaway fell back a little. "Cris," said she to her son, "go down to the farm and see what the injury is. I cannot sleep in the uncertainty. It may be fatal."

Cris tossed his head. "You know, mother, I'd do almost anything to oblige you," he said, in his smooth accent, which seemed to carry a false sound with it, "but I can't go to the farm. Mrs. Ryle might insult me: there's no love lost between us."

"If the accident happened this afternoon, how was it that it was not discovered when the bull was brought in from the field to his shed to-night?" cried Miss Trevlyn, speaking as much to herself as to any one else.

Bill shook his head. "I dun know," he replied. "For one thing, Mr. Ryle was right down in the ditch, and couldn't be seen. And the bull, maybe, had went to the top o' the field then, Miss Diana, where the groaning wouldn't be heard."

"If I had only been listened to!" exclaimed Mrs. Chattaway, in wailing accents. "How many a time have I asked that the bull should be parted with, before he did some fatal injury. And now it has come!"

CHAPTER IV.

LIFE OR DEATH?

MR. RYLE was carried home on the mattress, and laid on the large table in the sitting-room, by the surgeon's directions. Mrs. Ryle, clear-headed, and of calm judgment, had sent for medical advice even before sending for her husband. The only doctor available for immediate purposes was Mr. King, who lived about half-way between the farm and the village. He attended at once, and was at the house before his patient. Mrs. Ryle had sent also to Barmester for another surgeon, but he could not arrive just yet. It was by Mr. King's direction that the mattress was placed on the large table in the parlour.

"Better there; better there," acquiesced the sufferer, when he heard the order given. "I don't know how they'd get me up the stairs."

Mr. King, a man getting in years, was left alone with his patient. The examination over, he came forth from the room and sought Mrs. Ryle, who was waiting for the report.

"The internal injuries are extensive, I fear," he said. "They lie chiefly here"—touching his chest and right side.

"Will he *live*, Mr. King?" she interrupted. "Do not temporize, but let me know the truth. Will he live?"

"You have asked me a question that I cannot yet answer," returned the surgeon. "My examination has been hasty and superficial: I was alone, and I knew you were anxiously waiting. With the help of Mr. Benage, we may be able to arrive at some more decisive opinion. I fear the injuries are serious."

Yes, they were serious; and nothing could be done, as it seemed, to remedy them or alleviate the pain. Mr. Ryle lay helpless on the bed, giving vent to his regret and anguish in somewhat homely phraseology. It was the phraseology of this simple farmhouse; that to which he had been accustomed; and he was not likely to change it now. Gentlemen by descent, he and his father had been content to live as plain farmers only, in speech as well as in work.

He lay groaning, lamenting his imprudence, now that it was too late, in venturing within the reach of that dangerous animal. The rest waited anxiously and restlessly the appearance of the surgeon. For Mr. Benage of Barmester had a world-wide reputation, and such men seem to bring consolation with them. If any one could apply healing remedies to the injuries and save his life, it was Mr. Benage.

George Ryle had taken up his station at the garden gate. His hands clasped, his head lying lightly upon them, he was listening for the sound of the gig which had been despatched to Barmester. Nora at length came out to him.

"You'll catch cold, George, stopping there in the keen night air."

"The air won't hurt me to-night. Listen, Nora! I thought I heard something. They might be back again by this."

He was right. The gig was bowling swiftly along, containing the well-known surgeon and the messenger despatched for him. The surgeon, a little man, quick and active, was out of the gig before it had well stopped, passed George and Nora with a nod, and entered the house.

A short time and the worst was known. There would be but a few more hours of life for Mr. Ryle.

Mr. King would remain, doing what he could to comfort, to

soothe pain. Mr. Benage must return to Barmester, for he was wanted there; and the horse was put to the gig to take him back again. Refreshment was offered him, but he declined it. Nora waylaid him in the garden as he was going down, and caught him by the arm.

"Will the master see to-morrow's sun, sir?"

"It's rising, he may. He will not see its setting."

Can you picture to yourselves what that night was for the house and its inmates? In the parlour, gathered round the table on which lay the dying man, were Mrs. Ryle, George and Trevlyn, the surgeon, and sometimes Nora. In the outer room was collected a larger group: John Pinder, the men who had borne him home, and Molly; with a few others whom the news of the accident had brought together.

Mrs. Ryle stood near her husband. George and Trevlyn seemed scarcely to know where to stand, or what to do with themselves; and Mr. King sat in a chair in the recess of the bay window. They had placed a pillow under Mr. Ryle's head, and covered him with blankets and a counterpane; a stranger would have thought him lying on a bed. He looked grievously wan, and the surgeon administered something in a glass from time to time.

"Come here, my boys," he suddenly said. "Come close to me."

They approached, as he said, and leaned over him. He took a hand of each. George swallowed down his tears in the best way that he could. Trevlyn looked scared and frightened.

"Children, I am going. It has pleased God to cut me off in the midst of my career, just when I had least thought of death. I don't know how it will be with you, my dear ones, or how it will be with the old home. Chattaway can sell up everything if he chooses; and I fear there's little hope but he'll do it. If he would let your mother stop on, she might keep things together, and get clear of him in time. George will be growing up more of a man every day, and he may soon learn to be useful in the farm, if his mother thinks well to trust him. Maude, you'll do your best for them? For him, as for the younger ones?"

"I will," said Mrs. Ryle.

"Ay, I know you will. I leave them all to you, and you will act for the best. I think it's well that George should be upon the farm, as I am taken from it; but you and he will see to that. Treve, you must do the best you can in whatever

station you may be called to. I don't know what it will be. My boys, there's nothing before you but work. Do you understand that?"

"Fully," was George's answer. Treve seemed too bewildered to give one.

"To work with all your might; your shoulders to the wheel. Do your best in all ways. Be honest and single-hearted in the sight of God; work for Him whilst you are working for yourselves, and then He will prosper you. I wish I had worked for Him more than I have done!"

A pause, broken only by George, who could no longer control his sobs.

"My days seem to have been made up of nothing but struggling, and quarrelling, and care. Struggling to keep my head above water, and quarrelling with Chattaway. The end seemed far-off, ages away, something as heaven seems. And now the end's come, and heaven's come—that is, I must set out upon the journey that leads to it. I misdoubt me but the end comes to many as suddenly; cutting them off in their carelessness, and their sins. Do not spend your days in quarrelling, my boys; be working on a bit for the end whilst time is given you to do it. I don't know how it will be in the world I am about to enter. Some fancy that when once we have entered it, we shall see what is going on here, in our families and homes. For that thought, if for no other, I would ask you to try and keep right. If you were to go wrong, think how it would grieve me! I should always be saying that I might have trained you better, and had not done so. Oh, children! it is only when we come to lie here that we see all our shortcomings. You would not like to grieve me, George?"

"Oh, papa, no!" said George, his sobs deepening. "Indeed I will try to do my best. I shall be always thinking that perhaps you are watching me."

"There's One greater than I always watching you, George. And that is God. Act well in His sight; not in mine. Doctor, I must have some more of that stuff again. I feel a queer sinking."

Mr. King rose, poured some drops into a wine-glass of water, and administered them. The patient lay a few moments, and then took his sons' hands, as before.

"And now, children, for my last charge to you. Reverence and love your mother. Obey her in all things. George, she is not your own mother, but you have never known another,

and she has been as one to you. Listen to her always, and she will lead you aright. If I had listened to her, I shouldn't be lying where I am now. A week or two ago I wanted the character of that outdoor man from Chattaway. 'Don't go through the field with the bull in it,' she said to me before I started. 'Better keep where he *can't* touch you.' Do you remember it, Maude?"

Mrs. Ryle simply bowed her head in reply. She was feeling the scene deeply, but emotion she would not show.

"I heeded what your mother said, and went up to Chattaway's by the roadway, avoiding the fields," resumed Mr. Ryle. "This last afternoon, when I was going up again and had got to the field gate, I turned to it, for it cut off a few steps, and my temper was up. I thought of what your mother would say, as I swung in, but I didn't let it stop me. It must have been that red neckerchief that put him up, for I was no sooner over the gate than he bellowed savagely and butted at me. It was all over in a minute; I was in the ditch, and he went on, bellowing and tossing and tearing at the cloth. If you go there to-morrow, you'll see it in shreds about the field. Children, obey your mother; there'll be double the necessity for it when I am gone."

The boys had been obedient hitherto. At least, George had been. Trevlyn was too much indulged to be perfectly so. George promised that he would be so still.

"I wish I could have seen the little wench," resumed the dying man, the tears gathering on his eyelashes. "But maybe it's for the best that she's away, for I should hardly have borne to part with her. Maude! George! Treve! I leave her to you all. Do the best you can by her. I don't know that she'll be spared to grow up, for she's a delicate little mite: but that will be as God pleases. I wish I could have stopped with you all a bit longer—if it's not sinful to wish contrary to God's will. Is Mr. King there?"

Mr. King had resumed his seat in the bay window, and was partially hidden by the curtain. He came forward. "Is there anything I can do for you, Mr. Ryle?"

"I should be obliged if you'd just write out a few directions. I should like to write them myself, but it can't be; you'll put down the sentences just as I speak them. I have not made my will. I put it off, and put it off, thinking I could do it at any time; but now the end's come, and it is not done. Death surprises a great many, I fear, as he has surprised me. It

seems that if I could only have one day more of health, I would do many things that I have left undone. You shall write down my wishes, doctor. It will do as well; for there's only themselves, and they won't dispute one with the other. Let a little table be brought, and pen, ink, and paper."

He lay quiet while these directions were obeyed, and then began again.

"I am in very little pain, considering that I am going; not half as much as when I lay in that ditch. Thank God for it! It might have been that I could not have left a written line, or said a word of farewell to you. There's sure to be a bit of blue sky in the darkest trouble; and the more implicitly we trust, the more blue sky we shall find. I have not been what I ought to be, especially in the matter of disputing with Chattaway—not but what it's Chattaway's hardness that has been in fault. But God is taking me from a world of care, and I trust he will forgive all my shortcomings for our Saviour's sake. Is the table ready?"

"It is all ready," said Mr. King.

"Then leave me alone with the doctor a short time, dear ones," he resumed. "We shall not keep you out long."

Nora, who had brought in the things required, held the door open for them to pass through. The pinched look that the face, lying there, was assuming, struck upon her ominously.

"After all, the boy was right," she murmured. "The hole, scratched before this house, was not meant for Jim Sanders."

CHAPTER V.

LOOKING ON THE DEAD.

THE sun rose gloriously, dispersing the early October frost, and shedding its beams upon the world. But the beams fall upon dark scenes sometimes; perhaps more often than on bright ones.

George Ryle was leaning on the fold-yard gate. He had strolled out without his hat, and had bent his head down in his grief. Not that he was shedding tears now. He had shed plenty during the night; but tears cannot flow always, even from an aching heart.

LOOKING ON THE DEAD.

Hasty steps were heard approaching down the road, and George raised his head. They were Mr. Chattaway's. He stopped suddenly at sight of George.

"George, what is this about your father? What has happened? Is he dead?"

"He is dying," replied George. "The doctors are with him. Mr. King has been here all night, and Mr. Benage has just come again from Barmester. They have sent us out of the room; me and Treve. They let mamma stop."

"But how on earth did it happen?" asked Mr. Chattaway. "I cannot make it out. The first thing I heard when I woke this morning, was, that Mr. Ryle had been gored to death by the bull. What brought him near the bull?"

"He was going through the field up to your house, and the bull set on him—"

"But when? when?" hastily interrupted Mr. Chattaway.

"It was yesterday afternoon. Papa came in directly after you rode away, and I gave him your message. He said he would go up then to the Hold, and speak to you; and he took the field way instead of the road."

"Now, how could he take it? He knew that way was hardly safe for strangers. Not but what the bull ought to have known him."

"He had a scarlet cravat in his hand, and he thinks it was that that excited the bull. He was tossed into the ditch, and lay there, undiscovered, until past ten at night."

"And he is badly hurt?"

"He is dying," replied George, "dying now. I think that is why they sent us from the room."

Mr. Chattaway paused in dismay. Though a hard, selfish man, who had taken delight in quarrelling with Mr. Ryle and putting upon him, he did possess some feelings of humanity as well as his neighbours; and the terrible nature of the case naturally called them forth. George strove manfully to keep down his tears; speaking of the circumstances was almost too much for him, but he did not care to give way before the world, especially before that unit in it represented by Mr. Chattaway. Mr. Chattaway rested his elbow on the gate, and looked down at George.

"This is very shocking, lad. I am sorry to hear it. Whatever will the farm do without him? How shall you all get on?"

"It is thinking of that which has been troubling him all