"I know, I know," he answered. "I know how *you* will feel it." And George, utterly unmanned, burst into tears also.

It was Mrs. Chattaway.

CHAPTER VI.

THE ROMANCE OF TREVLYN HOLD.

It is impossible to go on without a word of retrospect. The Ryles, gentlemen by descent, had once been rich men, but they were openhanded and heedless, and in the time of George's grandfather, the farm (not called the farm then) passed into the possession of the Trevlyns of the Hold, who had a mortgage on it. They named it Trevlyn Farm, and Mr. Ryle and his son remained on it as tenants; as tenants where they had once been owners.

After old Mr. Ryle's death, his son married the daughter of the curate of Barbrook, the Reverend George Berkeley, familiarly known as Parson Berkeley. In point of fact, the parish knew no other pastor, for its Rector was an absentee. Mary Berkeley was an only child. She had been petted, and physicked, and nursed, after the manner of only children, and grew up sickly as a matter of course. A delicate, beautiful girl in appearance, but not strong. People (who are always fond, you know, of settling everybody else's business for them) deemed that she made a poor match in marrying Thomas Ryle. It was whispered, however, that he himself might have made a greater match, had he chosen—no other than Squire Trevlyn's eldest daughter. There was not so handsome, so attractive a man in all the country round as Thomas Ryle.

Soon after the marriage, Parson Berkeley died—to the intense grief of his daughter, Mrs. Ryle. He was succeeded in the curacy and parsonage by a young clergyman just in priest's orders, the Reverend Shafto Dean. A well-meaning man, but opinionated and self-sufficient in the highest degree, and before he had been one month at the parsonage, he and Squire Trevlyn were at issue. Mr. Dean wished to introduce certain new fashions and customs into the church and parish; Squire Trevlyn held to the old. Proud, haughty, overbearing, but honourable and generous, Squire Trevlyn had known no master, no

opposer; *he* was lord of the neighbourhood, and was bowed down to accordingly. Mr. Dean would not give way, the Squire would not give way; and the little seed of dissension grew and spread. Obstinacy begets obstinacy. That which a slight yielding on either side, a little mutual good-feeling, might have removed at first, became at length a terrible breach, the talk of a county.

Meanwhile Thomas Ryle's fair young wife died, leaving an infant boy—George. In spite of her husband's loving care, in spite of having been shielded from all work and management, so necessary on a farm, she died. Nora Dickson, a humble relative of the Ryle family, who had been partially brought up on the farm, was housekeeper and manager. She saved all trouble to young Mrs. Ryle: but she could not save her life.

The past history of Trevlyn Hold was a romance in itself. Squire Trevlyn had five children: Rupert, Maude, Joseph, Edith, and Diana. Rupert, Maude, and Diana were imperious as their father; Joseph and Edith were mild, yielding, and gentle, as had been their mother. Rupert was of course regarded as the heir, intended to be so: but the property was not entailed. An ancestor of Squire Trevlyn's coming from some distant part—it was said Cornwall—bought it and settled down upon it. There was not a great deal of grass land on the estate, but the coal-mines in the distance made it valuable. Of all his children, Rupert, the eldest, was the Squire's favourite: but poor Rupert did not live to come into the estate. He had inherited the fits of passion characteristic of the Trevlyn's; he was of a thoughtless, impetuous nature; and he fell into trouble and ran away from his country. He embarked for a distant port, which he did not live to reach. And Joseph became the heir.

Very different, he, from his brother Rupert. Gentle and yielding, like his sister Edith, the Squire half despised him. The Squire would have preferred him passionate, haughty, and overbearing—a true Trevlyn. But the Squire had no intention of superseding him in the succession of Trevlyn Hold. Provided Joseph lived, none other would be its inheritor. *Provided.* Joseph—always called Joe—appeared to have inherited his mother's constitution; and she had died early, of decline.

Yielding, however, as Joe Trevlyn was naturally, on one point he did not prove himself so—that of his marriage. He chose Emily Dean; the pretty and lovable sister of Squire Trevlyn's *bête noire,* the obstinate parson. "I would rather

you took a wife out of the parish workhouse, Joe," the Squire said, in his anger. Joe said little in reply, but he held to his choice; and one fine morning the marriage was celebrated by the obstinate parson himself in the church at Barbrook.

The Squire and Thomas Ryle were close friends, and the former was fond of passing his evenings at the farm. The farm was not a productive one. The land, never of the richest, had become poorer and poorer: it wanted draining and manuring; it wanted, in short, money laid out upon it; and that money Mr. Ryle did not possess. "I shall have to leave it, and try and take a farm in better condition," he said at length to the Squire.

The Squire, with all his faults and his overbearing temper, was generous and considerate. He knew what the land wanted; money spent on it; he knew Mr. Ryle had not the money to spend, and he offered to lend it him. Mr. Ryle accepted it, to the amount of two thousand pounds. He gave a bond for the sum, and the Squire on his part promised to renew the lease upon the present terms, when the time of renewal came, and not to raise the rent. This promise was not given in writing: but none ever doubted the word of Squire Trevlyn.

The first of Squire Trevlyn's children to marry, had been Edith: she had married, some years before, Mr. Chattaway. The two next to marry had been Maude and Joseph. Joseph, as you have heard, married Emily Dean; Maude, the eldest daughter, became the second wife of Mr. Ryle. A twelvemonth after the death of his fair young wife Mary, Miss Trevlyn of the Hold stepped into her shoes, and became the step-mother of the little baby boy, George. The youngest daughter, Diana, never married.

Miss Trevlyn, in marrying Thomas Ryle, gave mortal offence to some of her kindred. The Squire himself would have forgiven it; nay, perhaps have grown to like it—for he never could do otherwise than like Thomas Ryle—but he was constantly incited against it by his family. Mr. Chattaway, who had no great means of living of his own, was at the Hold on a long, long visit, with his wife and two little children, Christopher and Octavia. They were always saying they must leave; but they did *not* leave; they stayed on. Mr. Chattaway made himself useful to the Squire on business matters, and whether they ever would leave was a question. She, Mrs. Chattaway, was too

gentle-spirited and loving to speak against her sister and Mr. Ryle; but Chattaway and Miss Diana Trevlyn kept up the ball. In point of fact, they had a motive—at least, Chattaway had—for making permanent the estrangement between the Squire and Mr. Ryle, for it was thought that Squire Trevlyn would have to look out for another heir.

News had come home of poor Joe Trevlyn's failing health. He had taken up his abode in the south of France on his marriage: for even then the doctors had begun to say that a more genial climate than this could alone save the life of the heir to Trevlyn. Bitterly as the Squire had felt the marriage, angry as he had been with Joe, he had never had the remotest thought of disinheriting him. He was the only son left: and Squire Trevlyn would never, if he could help it, bequeath Trevlyn Hold to a woman. A little girl, Maude, was born in due time to Joe Trevlyn and his wife; and not long after this, there arrived the tidings that Joe's health was rapidly failing. Mr. Chattaway, selfish, mean, sly, covetous, began to entertain hopes that *he* should be named the heir; he began to work on for it in stealthy determination. He did not forget that, were it bequeathed to the husband of one of the daughters, Mr. Ryle, as the husband of the eldest, might be considered to possess most claim to it. No wonder then that he did all he could, secretly and openly, to incite the Squire against Mr. Ryle and his wife. And in this he was joined by Miss Diana Trevlyn. She, haughty and imperious, resented the marriage of her sister with one of inferior position, and willingly espoused the cause of Mr. Chattaway as against Thomas Ryle. It was whispered about, none knew with what truth, that Miss Diana made a compact with Chattaway, to the effect that she should reign jointly at Trevlyn Hold with him and enjoy part of its revenues, if he came into the inheritance.

Before the news came of Joe Trevlyn's death—and it was some months in coming—Squire Trevlyn had taken to his bed. Never did man seem to fade so rapidly as the Squire. Not only his health, but his mind failed him; all its vigour seemed gone. He mourned poor Joe excessively. In rude health and strength, he would not have mourned him; at least, would not have shown that he did so; never a man less inclined than the Squire to allow his private emotions to be seen: but in his weakened state, he gave way to lamentation for his heir (his *heir*, note you, more than his son) every hour in the day. Over and over again he regretted that the little child, Maude,

left by Joe, was not a boy. Nay, had it not been for his prejudice against her mother, he would have willed the estate to her, girl though she was. Now was Mr. Chattaway's time: he put forth in glowing colours his own claims, as Edith's husband; he made golden promises; he persuaded the poor Squire, in his wrecked mind, that black was white—and his plans succeeded.

To the will which had bequeathed the estate to the eldest son, dead Rupert, the Squire added a codicil, to the effect that, failing his two sons, James Chattaway was the inheritor. But all this was kept a profound secret.

During the time the Squire lay ill, Mr. Ryle went to Trevlyn Hold, and succeeded in obtaining an interview. Mr. Chattaway was out that day, or he had never accomplished it. Miss Diana Trevlyn was out. All the Squire's animosity departed the moment he saw Thomas Ryle's long-familiar face. He lay clasping his hand, and lamenting their estrangement; he told him he should cancel the two-thousand-pound bond, giving the money as his daughter's fortune; he said his promise of renewing the lease of the farm to him on the same terms would be held sacred, for he had left a memorandum to that effect amongst his papers. He sent for a certain box, in which the bond for the two thousand pounds had been placed, and searched for it, intending to give it to him then; but the bond was not there, and he said that Mr. Chattaway, who managed all his affairs now, must have placed it elsewhere. But he would ask him for it when he came in, and it should be destroyed before he slept. Altogether, it was a most pleasant and satisfactory interview.

But strange news arrived from abroad ere the Squire died. Not strange, certainly, in itself; only strange because it was so very unexpected. Joseph Trevlyn's widow had given birth to a boy! On the very day that little Maude was twelve months old, exactly three months after Joe's death, this little fellow was born. Mr. Chattaway opened the letter, and I'll leave you to judge of his state of mind. A male heir, after he had made everything so safe and sure!

But Mr. Chattaway was not a man to be balked. *He* would not be deprived of the inheritance, if he could by any possible scheming retain it, no matter what wrong he dealt out to others. James Chattaway had as little conscience as most people. The whole of that day he never spoke of the news; he kept it to himself; and the next morning there arrived a

second letter, which rendered the affair a little more complicated. Young Mrs. Trevlyn was dead. She had died, leaving the two little ones, Maude and the infant.

Squire Trevlyn was always saying, "Oh, that Joe had left a boy; that Joe had left a boy!" And now, as it was found, Joe *had* left one. But Mr. Chattaway determined that the fact should never reach the Squire's ears to gladden them. Something had to be done, however, or the little children would be coming to Trevlyn. Mr. Chattaway arranged his plans, and wrote off hastily to stop their departure. He told the Squire that Joe's widow had died, leaving Maude; but he never said a word about the baby boy. Had the Squire lived, perhaps it could not have been kept from him; but he did not live; he went to his grave all too soon, never knowing that there was a male heir born to Trevlyn.

The danger was over then. Mr. Chattaway was legal inheritor. Had Joe left ten boys, they could not have displaced him. Trevlyn Hold was his by the Squire's will, and could not be wrested from him. The two little ones, friendless and penniless, were brought home to the Hold. Mrs. Trevlyn had lived long enough to name the infant "Rupert," after the old Squire and the heir who had run away and died. Poor Joe had always said that if ever he had a boy, it should be named after his brother.

There they had been ever since, these two orphans, aliens in the home that ought to have been theirs; lovely children, both of them; but Rupert had the passionate Trevlyn temper. It was not made a systematically unkind home for them; Miss Diana would not have allowed that; but it was a very different home from that they ought to have enjoyed. Mr. Chattaway was at times almost cruel to Rupert; Christopher exercised upon him all sorts of galling and petty tyranny, as Octave Chattaway did upon Maude; and the neighbourhood, you may be quite sure, did not fail to talk. But it was not known abroad, you understand, except to one or two, that Mr. Chattaway had kept the fact of Rupert's birth from the Squire.

He stood tolerably well with his fellow-men, did Chattaway. In himself he was not liked; nay, he was very much disliked; but he was owner of Trevlyn Hold, and possessed sway in the neighbourhood. One thing, he could not get the title of Squire accorded to him. In vain he strove for it; he exacted it from his tenants; he wrote notes in the third person, "Squire Chattaway presents his compliments," etc.; or, "the Squire of

Trevlyn Hold desires," etc., etc., all in vain. People readily accorded his wife the title of Madam—as it was the custom to call the mistress of Trevlyn Hold—she was the old Squire's daughter, and they recognized her claim to it, but they did not give that of Squire to her husband.

These things had happened years ago, for Maude and Rupert are now aged respectively thirteen and twelve, and all that time had James Chattaway enjoyed his sway. Never, never; no, not even in the still night when the voice of conscience in most men is so suggestive; never giving a thought to the wrong dealt out to Rupert.

And it must be mentioned that the first thing Mr. Chattaway did, after the death of Squire Trevlyn, was to sue Mr. Ryle upon the bond; which he had *not* destroyed, although ordered to do so by the Squire. The next thing he did was to raise the farm to a ruinous rent. Mr. Ryle, naturally indignant, remonstrated, and there had been ill-feeling between them from that hour to this; but Chattaway had the law on his own side. Some of the bond was paid off; but altogether, what with the increased rent, the bond and its interest, and a succession of ill-luck on the farm, Mr. Ryle had scarcely been able to keep his head above water. As he said to his wife and children, when the bull had done its work—he was taken from a world of care.

CHAPTER VII.

MR. RYLE'S LAST WILL AND TESTAMENT.

ETIQUETTE, touching the important ceremonies of buryings and christenings, is much more observed in the country than in towns. To rural districts this remark especially applies. In a large town people don't know their next-door neighbours, don't care for their neighbours' opinions. In a smaller place the inhabitants are almost as one family, and their actions are chiefly governed by that pertinent remark, "What will people say?" In these narrow communities, numbers of which are scattered about England, it is considered necessary on the occasion of a funeral to invite all kith and kin. Omit to do so, and it would be set down as a premeditated slight; affording the parish a theme of gossip for weeks afterwards. Hence

Mr. Chattaway, being a connection—brother-in-law, in fact, of the deceased gentleman's wife—was invited to follow the remains of Thomas Ryle to the grave. In spite of the bad terms they had been on; in spite of Mrs. Ryle's own bitter feelings against Chattaway and Trevlyn Hold generally; in spite of Mr. Ryle's death having been caused by Chattaway's bull—Mr. Chattaway received a formal invitation to attend as mourner the remains to the grave. And it never would have entered into Mr. Chattaway's idea of good manners to decline it.

An inquest had been held at the nearest inn. The verdict returned was "Accidental Death," with a deodand of five pounds upon the bull. Which Mr. Chattaway had to pay.

The bull was already condemned. Not to annihilation; but to be taken to a distant fair, and there sold; whence he would be conveyed to other pastures, where he might possibly gore somebody else. It was not consideration for the feelings of the Ryle family which induced Mr. Chattaway to adopt this step, and so rid the neighbourhood of the animal; but consideration for his own pocket. Feeling ran high in the vicinity; fear also; the stoutest hearts could feel no security that the bull might not have a tilt at them: and Chattaway, on his part, was as little certain that an effectual silencer would not be dealt out to the bull some quiet night. Therefore, he resolved to part with him. Apart from his misdoings, he was a valuable animal, worth a great deal more than Mr. Chattaway would like to lose; and the bull was dismissed.

The day of the funeral arrived, and those bidden to it began to assemble about one o'clock: that is, the undertaker's men, the clerk, and the carriers. Of the latter, Jim Sanders made one. "Better that he had gone than his master," said Nora, in a matter-of-fact, worldly spirit of reasoning, as her thoughts were cast back to the mysterious hole with which she had gratuitously, and the reader will no doubt say absurdly, coupled Jim's fate. A table of eatables was laid out in the entrance-room: cold round of beef, and bread-and-cheese, with large supplies of ale. To help to convey a coffin to church without being first regaled with a good meal, was a thing that Barbrook had never heard of, and never wished to hear of. The select members of the company were shown to the large drawing-room, where the refreshment consisted of port and sherry, and a plate of "pound" cake. These were the established rules of hospitality at all genteel, well-to-do funerals: wine and