stock of learning were such as would have gladdened Farmer Apperley's heart.

One Saturday, when George had been there about three weeks, and when the day was drawing near for the indentures to be signed, binding him to the business for years, Mr. Chattaway rode up in the very costume that was the subject of Farmer Apperley's ire, when worn by those who ought not to afford to wear it. The hounds had met that day near Barmester, had found their fox, and been led a round-about chase, the fox bringing them back to their starting-point, to resign his brush; and the master of Trevlyn Hold, on his splashed but fine hunter, in his scarlet coat, white smalls and boots, splashed also, rode through Barmester on his return, and pulled up at the door of Wall and Barnes. Giving his horse to a street boy to hold, he entered the shop, whip in hand.

The scarlet coat, looming in unexpectedly, caused a flutter in the establishment. Saturday was market-day, and the shop was unusually full. The customers looked round in admiration, the shopmen with envy. Little chance was there, thought those hard-worked, unambitious young men, that they should ever wear a scarlet coat, and ride to cover on a blood hunter. Mr. Chattaway, of Trevlyn Hold, was an object of consideration just then. He shook hands with Mr. Wall, who came forward from some remote region; he turned and shook hands condescendingly with George.

"And how does he suit?" blandly inquired Mr. Chattaway. "Can you make anything of him?"

"He does his best," was the reply of Mr. Wall. "Awkward at present; but we have had others who have been as awkward at first, I think, and who have turned out valuable assistants in the long-run. I am willing to take him."

"That's all right, then," said Mr. Chattaway. "I'll call in and tell Mrs. Ryle. Wednesday is the day he is to be bound, I think?"

"Wednesday," assented Mr. Wall.

"I shall be here. I am glad to take this trouble off Mrs. Ryle's hands. I hope you like your employment, George."

"I do not like it at all," replied George. And he spoke out fearlessly, although his master stood by.

"Oh, indeed!" said Mr. Chattaway, with a false-sounding laugh. "Well, I did not suppose you would like it too well at first."

Mr. Wall laughed also, a hearty, kindly laugh. "Never yet was there an apprentice liked his work too well," said he. "It's their first taste of the labour of life. George Ryle will like it better when he is used to it."

"I never shall," thought George. But he supposed it would not quite do to say so; neither would it answer any end. Mr. Chattaway shook hands with Mr. Wall, gave a nod to George, and he and his scarlet coat loomed out again.

"Will it last my life?—will this dreadful slavery last my life?" burst from George Ryle's rebellious heart.

CHAPTER IX.

EMANCIPATION.

On the following day, Sunday, George walked home: Mrs. Ryle had told him he might come and spend the day at the Farm. All were at church except Molly, and George went to meet them. Several groups were coming along; and presently he met Cris Chattaway, Rupert Trevlyn, and his brother Treve, walking together.

"Where's mamma?" asked George.

"She stepped indoors with Mrs. Apperley," answered Treve. "She said she'd follow me on directly."

"How do you relish linen-drapering?" asked Cris Chattaway, in a chaffing sort of manner, as George turned with them. "Horrid, isn't it?"

"There's only about one thing in this world more horrid," answered George.

"My father said you expressed fears before you went that you'd find the air at the shop stifling," went on Cris, not asking what the one exception might be. "Is it hopelessly so?"

"Isn't it!" returned George. "The black hole in Calcutta must have been cool and pleasant in comparison with it."

"I wonder you are alive," continued Cris.

"I wonder I am," said George, equably. "I was quite off in a faint one day, when the shop was at the fullest. They thought they must have sent for you, Cris; that the sight of you might bring me to again."

"There you go!" exclaimed Treve Ryle. "I wonder it

you two *could* let each other alone if you were bribed to do it?"

"Cris began it," said George.

"I didn't," said Cris. "I *should* like to see you at your work, though, George! I'll come some day. The Squire paid you a visit yesterday afternoon, he told us. He says you are getting to be quite the polite cut; one can't serve out yards of calico without it, you know."

George Ryle's face burnt. He knew that Mr. Chattaway had been speaking of him with ridicule at Trevlyn Hold, in connection with his new occupation. "It would be a more fitting situation for you than for me, Cris," said he. "And now you hear it."

Cris laughed scornfully. "Perhaps it might, if I wanted one. The master of Trevlyn won't need to go into a linen-draper's shop, George Ryle."

"Look here, Cris. That shop is horrid, and I don't mind telling you that I find it so; that not an hour in the day goes over my head but I wish myself out of it; but I would rather bind myself to it for twenty years, than be master of Trevlyn Hold, if I came to it as you will come to it—by wrong."

Cris broke into a shrill, derisive whistle. It was being prolonged to an apparently interminable length, when he found himself rudely seized from behind.

"Is that the way you walk home from church, Christopher Chattaway? Whistling!"

Cris looked round and saw Miss Trevlyn. "Goodness, Aunt Diana! are you going to shake me?"

"Walk along as a gentleman should, then," returned Miss Trevlyn.

She went on. Miss Chattaway walked by her side, not deigning to cast a word or a look to the boys as she swept past. Gliding up behind them, holding the hand of Maude, was gentle Mrs. Chattaway. They all wore black silk dresses and white silk bonnets: the apology for mourning assumed for Mr. Ryle. But the gowns were not new; and the bonnets were the bonnets of the past summer, with the coloured flowers taken out.

Mrs. Chattaway slackened her pace, and George found himself at her side. She seemed to linger, as if she would speak with him unheard by the rest.

"Are you pretty well, my dear?" were her first words. "You look taller and thinner, and your face is pale."

"I shall look paler ere I have been much longer in the shop, Mrs. Chattaway."

Mrs. Chattaway glanced her head timidly round with the air of one who fears she may be heard. But they were alone now.

"Are you grieving, George?"

"How can I help it?" he passionately answered, feeling that he could open his heart to Mrs. Chattaway, as he could to no one else in the wide world. "Is it a proper thing to put me to, dear Mrs. Chattaway?"

"I said it was not," she murmured. "I said to Diana that I wondered Maude should place you there."

"It was not mamma: it was not mamma so much as Mr. Chattaway," he answered, forgetting possibly that it was Mr. Chattaway's wife to whom he spoke. "At times, do you know, I feel as though I would almost rather be—be——"

"Be what, dear?"

"Be dead, than stop."

"Hush, George!" she cried, almost with a shudder. "Random figures of speech never do any good! I have learnt it. In the old days, when——"

She suddenly broke off what she was saying and glided forward without further notice. She caught in hers, as she passed, the hand of Maude, who was then walking by the side of the boys. George looked round for the cause of desertion, and found it in Mr. Chattaway. That gentleman was coming along with a quick step, one of his younger children in his hand.

The Chattaways turned off towards Trevlyn Hold, and George walked on with Treve. "Do you know how things are going on at home, Treve, between mamma and Chattaway?" asked George.

"Chattaway's a miserable screw," was Treve's answer. "He'd like to grind down the world, and he doesn't let a chance escape him of doing it. Mamma says it's a dreadful sum he has put upon her to pay yearly, and she does not see how the farm will do it, besides keeping us. I wish we were clear of him! I wish I was as big as you, George! I'd work the farm barren, I'd work my arms off, but what I'd get together the money to pay him!"

"They won't let me work," said George. "They have thrust me away from the farm."

"I wish you were back at it; I know that! Nothing goes on as it used to, when you were there and papa was alive. Nora's cross, and mamma's cross; and I have not a

soul to speak to. What do you think Chattaway did this week?"

"Something mean, I suppose!"

"Mean! We killed a pig, and while it was being cut up, Chattaway marched in. 'That's fine meat, John Pinder,' said he, when he had looked at it a bit; 'as fine as I ever saw. That was a good plan of Mr. Ryle's, keeping his pigs clean. I should like a bit of this meat; I think I'll take a sparerib; and it can go against Mrs. Ryle's account with me.' With that, he laid hold of a fine sparerib, the finest of the two, and called a boy who was standing by, and sent him up with it at once to Trevlyn Hold. What do you think of that?"

"Think! That it's just the thing Chattaway would be doing every day of his life, if he could. Mamma should have sent for the meat back again."

"And anger Chattaway? It might be all the worse for us if she did."

"Is it not early to begin pig-killing?"

"Yes. John Pinder killed this one on his own authority; never so much as asking mamma. She was so angry. She told him, if ever he acted for himself again, without knowing what her pleasure might be, she should discharge him. But it strikes me John Pinder is fond of doing things on his own head," concluded Treve, sagaciously; "and that he will do them, in spite of mamma, now there's no master over him."

The day soon passed. George told his mamma how terribly he disliked being where he was placed; worse than that, how completely unsuited he believed he was to the business. Mrs. Ryle coldly said we all had to put up with what we disliked, and that he would get reconciled to it in time. There was evidently no hope for him; and he returned to Barmester at night, feeling that there was not any.

On the following afternoon, Monday, some one in deep mourning entered the shop of Wall and Barnes, and asked if she could speak to Master Ryle. George was at the upper end of the shop. A box of lace had been accidentally upset on the floor, and he had been called to set it to rights. Behind him hung two shawls, and, hidden by those shawls, was a private desk, belonging to Mr. Wall. The visitor approached George and saluted him.

"Well, you *are* busy!"

George lifted his head at the well-known voice—Nora's. Her attention appeared chiefly attracted by the box of lace.

"What a mess it is in! And you don't go a bit handy to work, towards putting it tidy."

"I shall never be handy at this sort of work. Oh, Nora! I cannot tell you how I dislike it!" he exclaimed, with a burst of feeling that betrayed its own pain. "I would rather be with papa in his coffin!"

"Don't talk nonsense!" said Nora.

"It is not nonsense. I shall never care for anything again in life, now they have put me here. It was Chattaway's doing; you know it was, Nora. Mamma never would have thought of it. When I remember that papa would have objected to this for me just as strongly as I object to it myself, I can hardly *bear* my thoughts. I think how he will be grieved, if he can see what goes on in this world. You know he said something about that when he was dying—the dead retaining their consciousness of the doings here."

"Have you objected to be bound?"

"I have not objected. I don't mean to object. Papa charged me to obey Mrs. Ryle, and not cross her—and I won't forget that; therefore I shall remain, and do my duty to the very best of my power. But it was a cruel thing to put me to it. Chattaway has some motive for getting me off the farm; there's no doubt of it. I shall stay if—if——"

"Why do you hesitate?" asked Nora.

"Well, there are moments," he answered, "when a fear comes over me whether I *can* bear on, and stay. You see, Nora, it is Chattaway and mamma's will balancing against all the hopes and prospects of my life. I know that my father charged me to obey mamma; but, on the other hand, I know that if he were alive he would be pained to see me here; would be the first to take me away. When these thoughts come forcibly upon me, I doubt whether I can stay."

"You must not encourage them," said Nora.

"I don't think I encourage them. But they come in spite of me. The fear comes; it is always coming. Don't say anything to mamma, Nora. I have made my mind up to stop, and I'll try hard to do it. As soon as I am out of my time I'll go off to India, or somewhere, and forget the old life in a new one."

"My goodness!" uttered Nora. But having no good arguments at hand, she thought it as well to leave him, and took her departure.

The day arrived on which George was to be bound. It was

a gloomy Novemoer day, and the tall chimneys of Barmester rose dark and dull and dismal against the outlines of the grey sky. The previous night had been hopelessly wet, and the mud in the streets was ankle-deep. People who had no urgent occasion to be abroad, drew closer to their comfortable firesides, and wished the dreary month of November was over.

George stood at the door of the shop, having snatched a moment to come to it. A slender, handsome boy, with his earnest eyes and his dark chestnut hair, looking too gentlemanly to belong to that shop. Belong to it! Ere the stroke of another hour should have been told on the dial of the church clock of Barmester, he would be irrevocably bound to it—have become as much a part and parcel of it as the silks that were displayed in its windows, as the shawls which exhibited themselves in all their gay and gaudy colours. As he stood there, he was feeling that no fate on earth was ever so hopelessly dark as his: he was feeling that he had no friend either in earth or heaven.

One, two; three, four! chimed out over the town through the leaden atmosphere. Half-past eleven! It was the hour fixed for signing the indentures which would bind him to servitude for years; and he, George Ryle, looked to the extremity of the street, expecting the appearance of Mr. Chattaway.

Considering the manner in which Mr. Chattaway had urged on the binding, George had thought he would be half-an-hour before the time, rather than five minutes beyond it. He looked eagerly to the extremity of the street, at the same time dreading the sight he sought for.

"George Ryle!" The call came ringing on his ears in a sharp, imperative tone, and he turned in obedience to it. He was told to "measure those trimmings, and card them."

An apparently interminable task. About fifty pieces of ribbon-trimmings, some scores of yards in each piece, all off their cards. George sighed as he singled out one and began upon it—he was terribly awkward at the work.

It advanced slowly. In addition to the inaptitude of his fingers for the task, to his intense natural distaste of it—and so intense was that distaste, that the ribbons felt as if they burnt his fingers—in addition to this, there were frequent interruptions. Any of the shopmen who wanted help called to George Ryle; and once he was told to open the door for a lady who was departing. On that cold, gloomy day, the doors were kept closed.

As the lady walked away, George leaned out, and took another gaze. Mr. Chattaway was not in sight. The clocks were then striking a quarter to twelve. A feeling of something like hope, but vague and faint and terribly unreal, dawned over his heart. Could the delay augur good for him?—was it possible that there could be any change?

How unreal it was, the next moment proved. There came round that far corner a horseman at a hand-gallop, his horse's hoofs scattering the mud in all directions. It was Mr. Chattaway. He reined up at the private door of Wall and Barnes, dismounted, and consigned his horse to his groom, who had followed at the same pace. The false, faint hope was over; and George walked back to his cards and his trimmings, as one from whom all spirit has gone out.

A message was brought to him almost immediately by one of the house servants: Squire Chattaway waited in the drawing-room. Squire Chattaway had sent the message himself, not to George, to Mr. Wall. But Mr. Wall was engaged at the moment with a gentleman, and he sent the message on to George. George went upstairs.

Mr. Chattaway, in his top-boots and spurs, stood warming his hands over the fire. He had not removed his hat. When the door opened, he raised his hand to do so; but seeing it was only George who entered, he left it on. He was much given to the old-fashioned use of boots and spurs when he rode abroad.

"Well, George, how are you?"

George went up to the fireplace. On the centre table, as he passed it, lay an official-looking parchment rolled up, a large inkstand with writing materials by its side. George had not the least doubt that the parchment was no other than that formidable document, yclept Indentures.

Mr. Chattaway had taken up the same opinion. He extended his riding-whip towards the parchment, and spoke in a significant tone, turning his eye on George.

"Ready?"

"It is no use attempting to say I am not," replied George. "I would rather you had forced me to be one of the lowest boys in your coal-mines, Mr. Chattaway."

"What's this?" asked Mr. Chattaway.

He was pointing now to the upper part of the sleeve of George's jacket. Some ravellings of cotton had collected there unnoticed. George took them off, and put them on the fire.