"He is the heir—he is the heir!" reiterated Mr. Daw. "I can prove——"

Again came that break in his discourse which had occurred before. Molly resumed—

"Master will be able to tell you better than me, sir, why the property should have went from Master Rupert to Chattaway. It was him that buried the old Squire, sir, and he was at the Hold after, and heard the Squire's will read. Nora told me once that he, the parson, cried shame upon it when he come away. But she was in a passion with Chattaway when she said it, so perhaps it wasn't true. I asked my missis about it one day that we was folding clothes together, but she said she knew nothing about it. She wasn't married then."

"Who is Nora?" inquired Mr. Daw.

"She's the housekeeper and manager at Trevlyn Farm; a sort of relation to 'em. It was where I lived before I come here, sir; four year, turned, I was at that one place. I have always been one to keep my places a good while," added Molly, with pride.

Apparently the boast was lost upon him; he did not seem to hear it. "Not the heir to Trevlyn!" he muttered; "not the heir to Trevlyn! It's a puzzle to me."

"I'm sorry master's out," repeated Molly, with sympathy. "But you can hear all about it to-night. They'll be home by seven o'clock. Twice a year, or thereabouts, they both go over to stop a day with missis's sister. Large millers they be, fourteen mile off, and live in a great big handsome house, and keep three or four indoor servants. The name's Whittaker, sir."

Mr. Daw did not show himself very much interested in the name, or in the worthy millers themselves. He was lost in a reverie. Molly made a movement about the plates and cheese and butter; she insinuated the glass of milk under his very nose. All in vain.

"Not the heir!" he reiterated again; "not the heir! And I have been picturing him in my mind as the heir all through these long years!"

CHAPTER XXI.

THE STRANGER WITH THE RED UMBRELLA.

When Mrs. Chattaway and Cris drove off in the dog-cart, George Ryle did not follow them down the avenue, but turned to pursue his way round the house, which would take him to the fields, a shorter cut to his own land than if he took the road. For a long time after his father's death, George could not bear to go through the field which had been so fatal to him; but he lived down the feeling by the aid of that great reconciler to all things—Time.

Happening to cast his eyes on the ornamental grounds as he skirted them, which lay on this side of the Hold, he saw Rupert Trevlyn. Leaping a dwarf hedge of azaroles, he hastened to him.

"Well, old fellow! Taking a nap?"

Rupert opened his half-closed eyes, and looked round with alacrity. "I thought it was Cris again!" he exclaimed. "He was here just now."

"Cris has gone out with his mother in the dog-cart. I don't like the horse he is driving her with, though."

"Is it that new horse he has been getting?"

"Yes; the one Allen has had to sell."

"What's the matter with it?" asked Rupert. "I saw it carrying Allen one day, and thought it a beautiful animal!"

"It has a vicious temper, as I have been given to understand. And I believe it has never been properly broken-in for harness. How do you feel to-day, Rupert?"

"No great shakes. I wish I was as strong as you, George."

George laughed pleasantly; and his voice, when he spoke, had a soothing sound in it. "So you may be, by the time you are as old as I am. Why, you have hardly done growing yet, Rupert. There's plenty of time for you to get strong."

"What brings you up here, George? Anything particular?"

"I saw Amelia to-day, and brought a message from her to her mamma. Caroline is coming home for the harvest-home, and Amelia wants to come too."

"Oh, they'll let her," cried Rupert. "The girls can do just as they like."

He, Rupert, leaned his chin on his hand, and began thinking

of Amelia Chattaway. She was the oldest of the three younger children, and was at first under the tuition of Maude. But Maude could do nothing with her, the young lady liking to be master and mistress; in fact, she was too old both for Maude's control and her instruction, and it was deemed well to place her at a good school at Barmester, the school at which Caroline Ryle was being educated. Somehow Rupert's comforts were never added to by the presence of Amelia in the house, and he might have given way to a hope that she would not come home, if he had been of a disposition to encourage such feelings.

Octave, who had discerned George Ryle from the windows of the Hold, came out to them, her pink parasol shading her face from the sun. A short while, and Miss Trevlyn came home and joined them; next came Maude and her charges. It was quite a merry gathering. Miss Trevlyn unbent from her coldness, as she could do sometimes; Octave was all smiles and suavity, and every one, except Rupert, seemed at ease. Altogether, George Ryle was beguiled into doing what could not be often charged upon him—spending a good part of an afternoon in idleness.

But he went away at last. And as he was turning into the first field—never called anything but "the Bull field," by the country people, from the hour of Mr. Ryle's accident—he encountered Jim Sanders, eager and breathless.

"What's the matter?" asked George. "What do you want here?"

"I was a-speeding up to the Hold to tell 'em, sir. There have been an accident with Mr. Cris's dog-cart. I thought I'd warn the men up at his place."

"What accident?" hastily asked George, mentally beholding one sole object, and that was Mrs. Chattaway.

"I don't know yet, sir, what it is. I was in the road by the gate, when a horse came tearing along with some broken shafts after it. It was that horse of Allen's which I see Mr. Cris a-driving out an hour ago in his dog-cart, and Madam along of him. So I cut across the fields at once."

"You can go on," said George; "some of the men will be about. Should you see Miss Diana, or any of the young ladies, take care that you say nothing to them. Do you hear?"

"I'll mind, sir."

Jim Sanders hastened out of the field on his way to the back premises of the Hold, and George flew onwards. When he gained the road, he looked up and down, but could see no

traces of the accident. Nothing was in sight. Which way should he turn? Where had it occurred? He began reproaching himself for not asking Mr. Jim Sanders which way the horse had been coming from. As he halted in indecision, some one suddenly came round the turning of the road lower down. It was Mr. Cris Chattaway, with a rueful expression of countenance, and a gig-whip in his hand.

George made but few strides towards him. "What is the worst, Cris? Let me know it."

"I'll have him taken in charge and prosecuted, as sure as a gun," raved Cris. "I will. It's infamous that these things should be allowed in the public road."

"What—the horse?" exclaimed George.

"Horse be hanged!" politely returned Cris, whose irritation was excessive. "It wasn't the horse's fault. Nothing could go steadier and better than he went all the way and back again, as far as this——"

"Where's Mrs. Chattaway?" interrupted George.

"On the bank, down there. She's all right; only shaken a bit. The fellow's name was on the thing, and I have copied it down, and I've sent a man off for a constable. I'll teach him that he can't go about the country, plying his trade and frightening gentlemen's horses with impunity."

In spite of Cris's incoherence and passion, George contrived to gather an inkling of the facts. They had taken a short, easy drive down the lower road and through Barbrook, the horse going (according to Cris) beautifully. But on the road home, in that lonely part between the Hold and Trevlyn Farm, there stood a razor-grinder with his machine, grinding a knife. Whether the whirr of the wheel did not please the horse; whether it was the aspect of the machine; or whether it might be the razor-grinder himself, a somewhat tattered object in a fur cap, the animal no sooner came near, than he began his favourite dance on the hind legs and backed towards the ditch. Cris did his best. He was a good whip, and a fearless one; but he could not conquer. The horse turned Mrs. Chattaway into the ditch, relieved his mind by a few kicks, and started off with part of the shafts behind him.

"Are you much hurt, dear Mrs. Chattaway?" asked George, tenderly, as he bent over her.

She looked up with a smile, but her face was of a death-like whiteness. Fortunately, the ditch, a wide ditch, was dry; and she sat on the sloping bank, her feet resting in it. The

dog-cart lay near, and several gazers, chiefly labouring men, stood around, staring helplessly. The razor grinder was protesting *his* immunity from blame, and the hapless machine remained in its place untouched, drawn close to the pathway on the opposite side of the road.

"You need not look at me so anxiously, George," Mrs. Chattaway replied, the smile still on her face. "I don't believe I am hurt. One of my elbows is smarting, but I really feel no pain anywhere. I am shaken, of course; but that's not much. I wish I had taken your advice, not to sit behind that horse."

"Cris says he went beautifully, until he was frightened."

"Did Cris say so? It appeared to me that he had trouble with him all the way; but Cris knows, of course. He has gone to the Hold to bring the carriage for me, but I don't care to sit here to be stared at longer than I can help," she added, with a half-smile.

George leaped into the ditch, and partly helped and partly lifted her up the bank, and took her on his arm. She walked slowly, however, and leaned heavily upon him. When they reached the lodge, old Canham was gazing up and down the road, and Ann came out, full of consternation. They had seen the horse with the broken shafts gallop past.

"Then there's no bones broke, thank Heaven!" said Ann Canham, with tears in her meek eyes.

She drew forward her father's armchair before the open door, and Mrs. Chattaway sat down in it. She felt that she must have air, she said. "If I had but a drop o' brandy for Madam!" cried old Canham, as he stood near her and leaned all his weight on his stick.

George caught up the words. "I will go to the Hold and get some." And before Mrs. Chattaway could stop him, or say that she would prefer not to take the brandy he was away.

Almost at the same moment they heard the fast approach of a horse, and the master of Trevlyn Hold rode in at the gates. To describe his surprise when he saw his wife sitting, an apparent invalid, in old Canham's chair, and old Canham and Ann standing near in evident consternation, almost as pale as she was, would be a difficult task. He reined in so quickly that his horse was flung back on its haunches.

"Is anything the matter? Has Madam been taken ill?"

"There has been an accident, sir," answered Ann Canham, with a meek curtsey. "Mr. Christopher was driving out Madam in the dog-cart, and they were throwed out."

Mr. Chattaway got off his horse. "How did it happen?" he asked of his wife, an angry expression crossing his face. "Was it Cris's fault? I hate that random driving of his!"

"I am not hurt, James; only a little shaken," she replied, with gentleness. "Cris was not to blame. There was a razor-grinder in the road, grinding knives, and it frightened the horse."

"Which horse was he driving?" demanded Mr. Chattaway.

"A new one. One he bought from Allen."

The reply did not please Mr. Chattaway. "I told Cris he should not buy that horse," he angrily said. "Is the dog-cart injured?"

It was apparent from the question that Mr. Chattaway had not passed the *débris* on the road. He must have come the other way, or perhaps across the common. Mrs. Chattaway did not dare to say that she believed the dog-cart was very much injured. "The shafts are broken," she said, "and something more."

"Where did it occur?" growled Mr. Chattaway.

"A little lower down the road. George Ryle came up soon after it happened, and I walked here with him. Cris went on to the Hold to send the carriage, but I shall get home without it."

"It might have been worse, Squire," interposed old Canham, who, as a dependant of Trevlyn Hold, felt compelled sometimes to give the "Squire" his title to his face, though he never would, or did, behind his back. "Nothing hardly happens to us, sir, in this world, but what's more eased to us than it might be."

Mr. Chattaway had stood with his horse's bridle over his arm. "Would you like to walk home with me now?" he asked of his wife. "I can lead the horse."

"Thank you, James. I think I must rest here a little longer. I had only just got here when you came up."

"I'll send for you," said Mr. Chattaway. "Or come back myself when I have left the horse at home. Mr. Cris will hear more than he likes from me about this business."

"Such an untoward thing has never happened to Mr. Cris afore, sir," observed Mark Canham. "There's never a surer nor better driver than him for miles round. The young heir, now, he's different: a bit timid, I fancy, and—— "

"Who?" burst forth Mr. Chattaway, taking his foot from the stirrup, for he was about to mount, and hurling down

daggers at Mark Canham. "The young heir! To whom do you dare apply that title?"

Had the old man purposely launched a sly shaft at the master of Trevlyn Hold, or had he spoken only in inadvertence? He hastened to repair the damage, as he best could.

"Squire, I be growing old now—more by sickness, though, than by age—and things and people gets moithered together in my mind. In the bygone days, it was a Rupert Trevlyn that was the heir, and I can't at all times call to mind that this Rupert Trevlyn is not so: the name is the same, you see. What has set me to make such a stupid mistake this afternoon I can't tell, unless it was the gentleman's words that was here but an hour ago. He kept calling Master Rupert the heir; and he wouldn't call him nothing else."

Mr. Chattaway's face grew darker. "What gentleman was that, pray?"

"I never see him afore in my life, sir," returned old Canham. "He was a stranger to the place, and he asked all manner of questions about it. He called Master Rupert the heir, and I stopped him, saying he made a mistake, for Master Rupert was not the heir. And he answered I was right so far, that Master Rupert, instead of being the heir of Trevlyn Hold, was its master and owner. I couldn't help staring at him when he said it."

Chattaway felt as if his blood were curdling. Was this the first act in the great drama which he had so long dreaded? "Where did he come from? What sort of a man was he?" he mechanically asked, all symptoms of anger dying away in his sudden fear.

Old Canham shook his head. "I don't know nothing about where he's from, sir. He came strolling inside the gates, as folks strange to a place will do, looking about 'em just for curiosity's sake. He saw me a-sitting at the open winder, and he asked what place this was, and I told him it was Trevlyn Hold. He said he thought so, that he had been walking about looking for Trevlyn Hold: and he leaned his arm upon the winder-sill, and put nigh upon a hundred questions to me."

"What were the questions?" eagerly rejoined Mr. Chattaway.

"I should be puzzled to tell you half of 'em, sir, but they all bore upon Trevlyn Hold. About the Squire's death, and the will, and the succession; about everything in short. At last I

told him that I didn't know the rightful particulars myself, and he'd better go to you or Miss Diana."

Mrs. Chattaway stole a glance at her husband. Her face was paler than the accident had made it; with a more alarmed pallor. The impression clinging to her mind, and of which she had spoken to her husband the previous night—that Rupert Trevlyn was on the eve of being restored to his rights—seemed terribly strong upon her now.

"He was a tall, thin, strange-looking man, with a foreign look about him, and a red umberellar," continued old Canham. "A long white beard he had, sir, like a goat, and a odd hat made of cloth or crape, or some mourning stuff. His tongue wasn't quite like an English tongue, either. I shouldn't wonder but he was a lawyer, Squire: no one else wouldn't surely think of putting such a string of questions——"

"Did he—did he put the questions as an official person might put them?" rapidly interrupted Mr. Chattaway.

Old Canham hesitated; at a loss what precise reply to give. "He put 'em as though he wanted answers to 'em," returned he at length. "He said a word or two, sir, that made me think he'd been intimate once with the young Squire, Mr. Joe, and he asked whether his boy or his girl had growed up most like him. He wondered, he said, whether he should know either of 'em by the likeness, when he came to meet 'em, as he should do to-day or to-morrow."

"And what more?" gasped Mr. Chattaway.

"There was nothing more, Squire, in particular. He took his elbow off the winder-sill, and he went through the gates again and down the road. It seemed to me as if he had come into the neighbourhood for some special purpose connected with them questions."

It seemed so to some one else also. When the master of Trevlyn Hold mounted his horse and rode him slowly through the avenue towards home, a lively fear, near and terrible, had replaced that vague dread which had so long lain latent in his heart.