"And so you were starting for Blackstone!" returned Miss Diana. "Would it have done any good, child? But that is just like you, Maude. You will act upon impulse to the end of life."

Mrs. Chattaway bent forward with her sweetest smile. "He is not injured, Maude; he is on his way home, alive and well. I am sorry that you should have heard what you did."

"It seems to me that the whole parish has heard it," ejaculated Mr. Chattaway.

Room was made for Maude beside Mrs. Chattaway, and the pony-carriage went on. It had gone only a few paces when the Reverend Mr. Daw came in sight. Was the man gifted with ubiquity! But an hour or two, as it seemed, and he had been bearding Mr. Chattaway at the mine. He lifted his hat as he passed, and Miss Diana and Maude bowed in return. He did not approach the carriage, or attempt to stop it; but went on with long strides, as does one in a hurry.

Mr. Chattaway, who had never looked towards the man, never moved a muscle of his face, turned his head to steal a glance at him when he deemed he was at a safe distance. There stood Mr. Daw, talking to George Ryle, one hand stretched out in the heat of argument, the other grasping the red umbrella, which was turned over his shoulder.

"Treason, treason!" mentally ejaculated the master of Trevlyn Hold, and he raised his handkerchief to wipe the moisture that was gathering on his face. "How I might have laughed at them now, if—if—if that had turned out to be true about Rupert!"

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE OLD TROUBLE AGAIN.

From ten days to a fortnight went by, and affairs were resuming their ordinary routine. All outward indications of the accident at the pit were gone; the bodies of the poor sufferers were buried; the widows, mothers, orphans, had begun to realize their destitution. It was not all quite done with, however. The inquest, adjourned from time to time, was not yet concluded; and popular feeling ran high against Mr. Chattaway. Certain precautions, having reference to the miners' safety, which ought to have been observed in the pit, had not been observed; and hence the calamity had arisen. Other owners of mines in the vicinity had caused these precautions to be put in use long ago; but Mr. Chattaway, whether from inertness, or regard to expense, had not done so. People spoke out freely now, not only in asserting that these means of safeguard must no longer be delayed—and of that Mr. Chattaway was himself sensible, in a disbelieving, sullen sort of way—but also that it was incumbent on him to do something for the widows and orphans. A most distasteful hint to a man of so near a disposition as Mr. Chattaway. Miss Diana Trevlyn had gone down to the desolate homes and rendered them glad with her bounty; but to make anything like a permanent provision for them was Mr. Chattaway's business, and not hers. The sufferers believed that Mr. Chattaway was not likely to make even the smallest for them; and they were not far wrong. His own hurt, the sprained ankle, had speedily recovered, and was now well again.

And the officious stranger, and his interference for the welfare of Rupert? That also was falling to the ground, and he, Mr. Daw, was now on the eve of departure. However well meant these efforts of his had been, they could only be impotent in the face of Squire Trevlyn's will. Mr. Daw himself was at length convinced of the fact, and he began to doubt whether his zeal had not outrun his discretion. Messrs. Peterby and Jones angrily told him that it had, when he acknowledged, in answer to their imperative question, that he had had no grounds whatever to go upon, save goodwill to Rupert. Somewhat of this changed feeling may have prompted him to call at Trevlyn Hold to pay a farewell visit of civility; which he did do, and got into hot water.

He asked for Miss Diana Trevlyn. But Miss Diana happened to be out, and Octave, who was seated at the piano when he was shown in, whirled round upon the stool in anger. She had taken the most intense dislike to this officious man: possibly a shade of the same dread which filled her father's heart had penetrated hers.

"Miss Trevlyn! If Miss Trevlyn were at home, she would not receive you," was her haughty salutation, as she rose from her stool. "It is impossible that you can be received at the Hold. Unless I am mistaken, sir, you had an intimation of this from Squire Chattaway."

"My visit, young lady, was not to Mr. Chattaway, but to

Miss Trevlyn. So long as the Hold is Miss Trevlyn's residence, her friends must call at it—although it may happen to be also that of Mr. Chattaway. I am sorry she is out: I wish to say a word to her before my departure. I leave to-night for good."

"And a good thing too," said angry Octave, forgetting her manners. But this answer had not conciliated her, especially the very pointed tone with which he had called her father *Mr.* Chattaway.

She rang the bell loudly to recall the servant. She did not ask him to sit, but stood with her finger pointed to the door; and Mr. Daw had no resource but to obey the movement and go out—somewhat, it must be confessed, ignominiously.

In the avenue he met Miss Trevlyn, and she was more civil to him than Octave had been. "I leave to-night," he said to her. "I go back to my residence abroad, never in all probability again to quit it. I should have been glad to serve poor Rupert by helping him to his rights—Miss Trevlyn, I cannot avoid calling them so—but I find the law and Mr. Chattaway are stronger than my wishes. It was, perhaps, foolish of me ever to take up the notion, and I feel half inclined to apologize to Mr. Chattaway."

"Of all visionary notions, that was about the wildest I ever heard of," said Miss Diana.

"Yes; one utterly vain and useless. I see it now. I do not the less feel Rupert Trevlyn's position, you must understand; the injustice dealt out to him lies with as keen a sense on my mind as it ever did: but I do see how hopeless, and on my part how foolish, was any attempt at remedy. I should be willing to say this to Mr. Chattaway if I saw him, and to tell him I had done with it for ever. Mr. Freeman hints to me that I was not justified in thus attempting to disturb the peace of a family, and he may be right. But, Miss Trevlyn, may I ask you to be kind to Rupert?"

Miss Trevlyn threw back her head. "I have yet to learn that I am not kind to him, sir."

"I mean with a tender kindness. I fancy I see in him indications of the same disease that was so fatal to his father. It has been on my mind to invite him to go back home with me, and try what the warmer climate may do for him; but the feeling (amounting almost to a prevision) that the result in his case would be the same as it was in his father's, withholds me. I should not like to take him out to die: neither would

I charge myself with the task of nursing one in a fatal malady."

"You are very good," said Miss Diana, somewhat stiffly. "Rupert will do well where he is, I have no doubt: and for myself, I do not anticipate any such illness for him. I wish you a pleasant journey, Mr. Daw."

"Thank you, madam. I leave him to your kindness. It seems to me only a duty I owe to his dead father to mention to you that he *may* need extra care and kindness; and there's none so fitting to bestow it upon him as you—the guardian appointed by his mother."

"By the way, I cannot learn anything about that document," resumed Miss Diana. "Mr. Chattaway says that it never came to hand."

"Madam, it must have come to hand. If the letter in which it was enclosed reached Trevlyn Hold, it is a pretty good proof that the document also reached it. Mr. Chattaway must be mistaken."

Miss Diana did not see how, unless he was wilfully mistaken—was falsely denying the fact. "A thought struck me the other day, which I wish to mention to you," she said aloud, quitting the subject for a different one. "The graves of my brother and his wife—are they kept properly in order?"

"Quite so," he answered. "I see to that."

"Then you must allow me to repay to you any expense you may have been put to. I——"

"Not so," he interrupted. "There is no expense—or none to speak of. The ground was purchased for ever, *à perpétuité*, as we call it over there, and the shrubs planted on the site require little or no care to keep them in order. Now and then I do a half-day's work there myself, for the love of my lost friends. Should you ever travel so far—and I should be happy to welcome you—you will find their last resting-place well attended to, Miss Trevlyn."

"I thank you much," she said in heartier tones, as she held out her hand. "And I regret now that circumstances have prevented my extending hospitality to you."

And so they parted amicably. And the great ogre which Mr. Chattaway had feared would eat him up, had subsided into a very harmless man indeed. Miss Diana stepped on to the Hold, deciding that her respected brother-in-law *was* a booby for having been so easily frightened into terror.

As Mr. Daw passed the lodge, old Canham was airing him-

self at the door, Ann being out at work. The gentleman stopped.

"You were not here when I passed just now," he said. "I looked in at the window, and opened the door, but could see no one."

"I was in the back place, maybe, sir. When Ann's absent, I has to get my own meals, and wash up my cups and things."

"I must say farewell to you. I leave to-night."

"Leave the place! What, for good, sir?"

"Yes," replied Mr. Daw. "In a week's time from this, I hope to be comfortably settled in my own home, some hundreds of miles away."

"And Master Rupert? and the Hold?" returned old Canham, the corners of his mouth considerably drawn down. "Is he to be rei'stated in it?"

Mr. Daw shook his head. "I did all I could, and it did not succeed: I can do no more. My will is good enough—as I think I have proved; but I have no power."

"Then it's all over again, sir—dropped through, as may be said?"

"It has."

Old Canham leaned heavily on his crutch, lost in thought. "It won't drop for ever, sir," he presently raised his head to say. "There have been something within me a long, long while, a whispering that Master Rupert's as safe to come to his own afore he dies, as that I be to go into my grave. When this stir took place, following on your arrival here, I thought the time had come then. It seems it hadn't; but come it *will*, as sure as that I be saying it—as sure as that he's the true heir of Squire Trevlyn."

"I hope it will," was the warm answer. "You will none of you rejoice in it more truly than I. My friend Freeman has promised to write occasionally to me, and——"

Mr. Daw was interrupted. Riding his shaggy pony in at the lodge gate—a strong, brisk little Welsh animal bought a week ago for him by Miss Diana, was Rupert himself. Upon how slender a thread do the great events of life turn! The reflection is so trite that it seems the most unnecessary reiteration to repeat it! but there are times when it is brought to the mind with an intensity that is positively startling.

Mr. Chattaway, by the merest accident—as it appeared to him—had forgotten a letter that morning when he went to Blackstone. He had written it before leaving home, intending

to post it on his road, but left it on his desk. It was drawing towards the close of the afternoon before he remembered it. He then ordered Rupert to ride home as fast as possible and post it, so that it might be in time for the evening mail. And this Rupert had now come to do. All very simple, you will say: but I can tell you that but for the return of Rupert Trevlyn at that hour, the most tragical part of this history would in all probability never have taken place, and you must have gone without the cream of the story.

"The very man I was wishing to see!" exclaimed Mr. Daw, arresting Rupert and his pony in their career. "I feared I should have to leave without wishing you good-bye."

"Are you going to-day?" asked Rupert.

"To-night. You seem in a hurry."

"I am in a hurry," replied Rupert, as he explained about the letter. "If I don't make haste, I shall lose the post."

"But I want to talk to you a bit. Do you go back to Blackstone?"

"Oh no; not to-day."

"Suppose you come in to the parsonage for an hour or two this evening?" suggested Mr. Daw. "Come to tea. I am sure they'll be glad to see you."

"All right; I'll come," cried Rupert, cantering off.

But a few minutes, and he cantered down again, the letter in his hand. Old Canham was alone then. Rupert looked towards him, and nodded as he went past. There was a receiving-house for letters at a solitary general shop, not far beyond Trevlyn Farm, and to this Rupert went, posted the letter, and returned to Trevlyn Hold. Sending his pony to the stable, he began to put himself to rights for his visit to Mr. Freeman's—a most ill-fated visit, as it was to turn out.

They took tea at the parsonage at six, as he knew, and he had to hasten to be in time. He had made his scanty dinner, as usual, at Blackstone. In descending the stairs from his room, he encountered Mrs. Chattaway in the lower corridor.

"Are you going out, Rupert?"

"I am going to the parsonage, Aunt Edith. Mr. Daw leaves this evening, and he asked me to go in for an hour or two."

"Very well. Remember me kindly to Mrs. Freeman. And, Rupert—my dear——"

"What?" he asked, arresting his hasty footsteps and turning to speak.

"You will not be late?"

"No, no," he answered, his careless tone a contrast to her almost solemn one. "It's all right, Aunt Edith."

But for that encounter with Mrs. Chattaway, the Hold would have been in ignorance of Rupert's movements that evening. He spent a very pleasant one. It happened that George Ryle called in also at the parsonage on Mr. Freeman, and was induced to remain. Mrs. Freeman was hospitable, and put before them a good supper, to which Rupert at least did justice.

The up-train was due at Barbrook station at ten o'clock, and George Ryle and Rupert accompanied Mr. Daw to it. The parson did not: he did not care to go out at night, unless called forth by duty. They reached the station five minutes before the hour, and Mr. Daw took his ticket and waited for the train.

Waited a long time. Ten o'clock struck, and the minutes went on and on. George, who was pacing the narrow platform with him, drew Rupert aside and spoke.

"Should you not get back to the Hold? Chattaway may lock you out again."

"Let him," carelessly answered Rupert. "I shall get in somehow, I dare say."

It was not George's place to control Rupert Trevlyn, and they paced the platform as before, talking with Mr. Daw. Half-past ten, and no train! The porters stood about, looking and wondering; the station-master was fidgety: he wanted to get home to bed."

"Will it come at all?" asked Mr. Daw, whose patience appeared exemplary.

"Oh, it 'll come, safe enough," was the reply of one of the two porters. "It never keeps its time, this train don't: but it's not often as late as this."

"Why does it not keep its time?"

"'Cause it have got to wait at Layton's Heath for a cross-train; and if that don't keep its time—and it never do—this un can't."

With which satisfactory explanation, the porter made a dash into a shed, and appeared to be busy with what looked like a collection of dark lanthorns.

"I shall begin to wish I had taken my departure this afternoon, as I intended, if this delay is to be much prolonged," remarked Mr. Daw.

Even as he spoke, there were indications of the arrival of the train. At twenty minutes to eleven it came up, and the station-master gave some sharp words to the guard. The guard returned them in kind; its want of punctuality was not his fault. Mr. Daw took his seat, and George and Rupert hastened away to their respective homes. But it was nearly eleven o'clock, and Rupert, in spite of his boasted bravery, did fear the wrath of Mr. Chattaway.

The household had retired to their rooms, but that gentleman was sitting up, looking over some accounts. The fact of Rupert's absence was known to him, and he experienced a grim satisfaction in reflecting that the keys were turned upon him—that he was locked out for the night. It is impossible for me to explain to you why this should have imparted satisfaction to the mind of Mr. Chattaway; there are things in this world not easily explained, and you must be contented with the simple fact that it was so.

But Mrs. Chattaway? She had gone to her chamber sick and trembling, feeling that the old trouble was about to be renewed this night. If the lad was not allowed to come in, where could he go? where find a shelter? Could *she* let him in, was the thought that hovered in her mind. She would, if she could accomplish it without the knowledge of her husband. And that might be practicable to-night, for he was shut up and absorbed by those accounts of his.

Gently opening her dressing-room window, she watched for Rupert: watched until her heart failed her. You know how long the time seems in this sort of waiting. It appeared to her that he was never coming—as it had recently appeared to Mr. Daw, with regard to the train. The distant clocks were beginning to chime eleven when he arrived. He saw his aunt; saw the signs that she made to him, and contrived to hear and understand her whispered words.

"Creep round to the back-door, and I will let you in."

So Rupert crept softly round; walking on the grass: and Mrs. Chattaway crept softly down the stairs without a light, undid the bolt of the door silently, and admitted Rupert.

"Thank you, dear Aunt Edith. I could not well help being late. The train——"

"Not a word, not a breath!" she interrupted, in a terrified whisper. "Take off your boots, and go up to bed without noise."

Rupert obeyed her in silence. They stole upstairs, the one after the other. Mrs. Chattaway turned into her room, and Rupert went on and gained his.

And the master of Trevlyn Hold, bending over his account-books, knew nothing of the disobedience that had been enacted towards him, but sat there expecting and expecting to hear Rupert's ring echoing through the house. Better, far better that he had heard it!

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE NEXT MORNING.

THE full light of day had not come, and the autumn night's gentle frost lingered yet upon the grass, when the master of Trevlyn Hold rose from his uneasy couch. Things were troubling him; and when the mind is not easy, the night's rest is apt to be disturbed.

That business of the mine explosion was not over, neither were its consequences to the pocket of Mr. Chattaway. The old fear in regard to the succession, which for some days had been comparatively buried, had broken out again in his mind, he could not tell why or wherefore; and the defiant disobedience of Rupert, not only in stopping out too late the previous night, but in not coming in at all, angered him beyond everything. Altogether, his bed had not been an easy one, and he arose with the dawn unrefreshed.

It was not the fact of having slept little which got him up at that unusually early hour; that would rather have caused him to lie the longer; but necessity has no law, and he was obliged to rise. A famous autumn fair, held at some fifteen miles' distance, and which he never failed to attend, was the moving power. His horse was to be ready for him, and he would ride there to breakfast; according to his annual custom. Down he went; sleepy, cross, gaping; and the first thing he did was to stumble over a pair of boots at the back-door.

The slightest thing would put Mr. Chattaway out when in his present temper. For the matter of that, a slight thing would put him out at any time. What business had the servants to leave boots about in *his* way? They knew he would be going out at that back-door the first thing in the morning, on his way to the stables. Mr. Chattaway gave the things a kick, unbolted the door, and drew it open. Whose were they?

Now that the light was admitted, he saw at a glance that they

were a gentleman's boots, not a servant's. Had Cris stolen in by the back-door last night and left his boots there? No; Cris came in openly at the front, came in early, before Mr. Chattaway went to bed. And—now that he looked more closely—those boots were too small for Cris.

They were Rupert's! Yes, undoubtedly they were Rupert's boots. What brought *them* there? Rupert could not have entered to leave them: he could not pass through thick walls and barred-up doors. Mr. Chattaway, completely taken back, stooped and stared at the boots as if they had been two curious animals.

A faint noise interrupted him. It was the approach of the first servant coming down to her day's work; a brisk young girl called Bridget, who acted as kitchenmaid.

"What brings these boots here?" demanded Mr. Chattaway, in the repelling tone he generally used to his servants.

Bridget advanced and looked at them. "They are Mr. Rupert's, sir," answered she.

"I did not ask you whose they were: I can see that for myself. I asked what brought them here. These boots are dirty; they must have been worn yesterday."

"I suppose he must have left them here last night; perhaps he came in at this door," returned the girl, wondering what business of her master's the boots could be.

"Perhaps he did not," retorted Mr. Chattaway. "He did not come in at all last night."

"Oh yes, he did, sir. He's upstairs in bed now."

"Who's upstairs in bed?" rejoined Mr. Chattaway, believing the girl was either mistaken or telling him a wilful untruth.

"Mr. Rupert, sir. Wasn't it him you were asking about?"

"Mr. Rupert is not upstairs in bed. How dare you say so to my face?"

"But he is," said the girl. "Leastways, unless he has gone out of it this morning."

"Have you been into his room to see?" demanded Mr. Chattaway, in his ill-humour.

"No, sir, I have not; it's not likely I should presume to do such a thing. But I saw Mr. Rupert go into his room last night; so it's only natural to suppose he is there this morning."

The words confounded Mr. Chattaway. "You say you saw Mr. Rupert go into his room last night? You must have been dreaming, girl."

"No, sir, I wasn't; I'm sure I saw him. I stepped on my