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

gown and tore it as I was going up to bed last night, and I went to the housemaid's room to borrow a needle and cotton to mend it. I was going back across the passage with my candle in my hand, when I saw Mr. Rupert at the end of the corridor turning into his chamber." So far, true. But Bridget did not think it necessary to add that she had remained a good half-hour gossiping with the housemaid, before going back with the needle and cotton. Mr. Chattaway, however, might have guessed that, for he demanded to know the time, and Bridget confessed that it had gone eleven.

Gone eleven! The whole house, himself excepted, had gone upstairs at half-past ten, and Rupert was then not in. How had he got in? Who had admitted him?

"Which of you servants opened the door to him?" thundered Mr. Chattaway.

"I shouldn't think any of us did, sir. I can answer for me and cook and Mary. We never heard Mr. Rupert ring at all last night: and if we had heard him, we shouldn't have went down to let him in after your forbidding it. I said to cook when I got back to our room that Mr. Rupert had come in, and she said she supposed master had opened the door to him."

The girl was evidently speaking truth, and Mr. Chattaway was thrown into perplexity. He believed as she did—that not a servant would dare to go down and admit Rupert in the face of his command to the contrary. Who *had* admitted him? Could it have been Miss Diana Trevlyn? Scarcely. Miss Diana, had she so taken it in her head, would have admitted him without the least reference to the feelings of Mr. Chattaway; but then she would not have done it in secret. Had it pleased Miss Diana to come down and admit Rupert, she would have done it openly; and what puzzled Mr. Chattaway more than anything, was the silence with which the admission had been accomplished. He had sat with his ears open, and not the faintest sound had reached them. Was it Maude? No: he felt sure that Maude would be even more chary than the servants of disobeying him. Then who was it? A half-suspicion of his wife suggested itself to him, only to be flung away the next moment. His submissive, timorous wife! She would be the last, he thought, to array herself against him.

But the minutes were getting on, and Mr. Chattaway had no time to waste. The fair commenced early, its business being generally over before mid-day. He went round to the stables,

found his horse ready for him, and rode away, the disobedience he had just discovered filling his mind to the exclusion of every other annoyance.

He soon came up with company. Riding out of the fold-yard of Trevlyn Farm as he passed it, came George Ryle and his brother Treve. They were bound for the same place as Mr. Chattaway, and the three horses fell in abreast.

"Are you going?" exclaimed Mr. Chattaway to Trevlyn, some surprise in his tone.

"Of course I am," answered Treve. "There's always some fun at Whitterbey fair. George is going to initiate me to-day into the mysteries of buying and selling cattle."

"Against you set up for yourself?" remarked Mr. Chattaway, some cynicism in his tone.

"Just so," said Treve, who detected it. "I hope you'll find me as good a tenant as you have found George."

George was smiling. "He is about to settle down into a steady-going farmer, Mr. Chattaway."

"When?" asked Mr. Chattaway.

George opened his mouth to speak, but appeared to hesitate.

He glanced at Trevlyn, as if waiting for the answer to come from him.

"At once," said Treve, readily. "There's no reason why it should not be told. I am home for good, Mr. Chattaway: I don't intend to leave it again."

"And Oxford?" returned Mr. Chattaway, surprised at the news. "You had another term to keep."

"Ay, but I shall not keep it. I have had enough of Oxford. One can't keep straight there, you know: there's no end of expense to be gone into; and my mother is tired of it."

"Tired of the bills," said Mr. Chattaway.

"Yes. Not but that the paying them has been George's concern, more than hers. No one can deny that it has been; but George is a good fellow, and *he* has not complained."

"Are there to be two masters on Trevlyn Farm?" questioned Mr. Chattaway.

"No," cried Treve, before George could speak. "I know my place better, I hope, than to put my incompetent self above George—whatever my mother may wish. So long as George is on Trevlyn Farm, he is its sole master. But he is going to leave us, he says."

Mr. Chattaway turned to George, as if seeking confirmation or denial to the words. "Yes," answered George, quietly; "I

shall try to take a farm on my own account. You have one soon to be vacant that I should like, Mr. Chattaway."

"I have?" exclaimed Mr. Chattaway. "There's no farm of mine likely to be vacant that would suit your pocket. You *can't* mean that you are casting your ambitious eyes to the Upland?" he added, after a moment's pause.

"Yes, I am," replied George. "I must have a talk with you about it. I should like the Upland Farm."

"Why, it would take——"

George did not wait to hear the conclusion of the sentence.

They were at that moment passing the parsonage, and Mr. Freeman, in a velvet skull-cap and slippers, was leaning over the gate. George turned to it, and checked his horse.

"Well, did he get safe off last night?" asked Mr. Freeman.

"Yes, at last. The train was forty minutes behind time."

"Ah! it's a shame they don't arrange matters so as to make that ten-o'clock train more punctual. Passengers have to be there at ten o'clock, because once in a way it *is* up to time; and often they are kept waiting half-an-hour. Did you and Rupert remain to see him off?"

"Yes," replied George.

"Then Rupert would be late home," observed the clergyman, turning to Mr. Chattaway, who had also reined in, and was sitting all ears open. "I hope you excused him, Mr. Chattaway, under the circumstances."

Mr. Chattaway said something in answer, very indistinctly, and the clergyman took it to imply that he *had* excused Rupert. George said good morning, and turned his horse onwards; they must make good speed, unless they would be "a day too late for the fair."

Not a syllable of the above conversation had Mr. Chattaway understood; it had been as Hebrew to him. He did not like the allusion of the clergyman to his "excusing the lateness of Rupert's return," for it proved that his harsh rule, touching Rupert's entrance at night, had become public property.

"I did not quite take Mr. Freeman," he said, turning equably to George, and speaking in careless accents. "Were you out last night with Rupert?"

"Yes. We spent the evening at the parsonage with Mr. Daw, and then went to see him off by the ten-o'clock train. It is a shame, as Mr. Freeman says, that the train is not made to keep better time. It was Mr. Daw's last night here."

"And therefore you and Rupert must spend it with him! It is a sudden friendship."

"I don't know that there's much friendship in the matter," replied George. "Rupert, I believe, was at the parsonage by appointment, but I called in accidentally. I did not know until I went in that Mr. Daw was leaving."

"Is he returning to France?"

"Yes. He crosses the Channel to-night. We shall never see him again, I expect; he said he should never more quit his home, so far as he believed."

"Is he a madman?"

"A madman!" echoed George Ryle. "Certainly not."

"He talked enough folly and treason for one."

"Run away with by his zeal, I suppose," remarked George. "No one paid any attention to him. Mr. Chattaway, do you think we Barbrook people could not raise a commotion about the irregularity of that ten-o'clock train, and so get it rectified?"

"Its irregularity does not concern me," returned Mr. Chattaway.

"It would if you had to travel by it; or to see friends off by it as I and Rupert had last night. Nearly forty-five minutes were we cooling our heels on the platform of the station. It must have been eleven o'clock when Rupert reached the Hold. I suppose he was let in."

"It appears he did get let in," replied Mr. Chattaway, in a tone which was by no means a genial one. "I don't know by whom yet; but I will know before to-night."

"If any one locked me out of my home, I should break the first window handy," cried bold Treve, who had been brought up by his mother in direct defiance of Mr. Chattaway, and would a great deal rather show him contempt than civility. "Rupert's a muff that he doesn't do it."

George urged on his horse. Words between Treve and Mr. Chattaway would not be agreeable, and the latter gentleman's face was turning fiery. "I am sure we shall be late," he cried. "Let us see what mettle our steeds are made of."

It diverted the anticipated dispute. Treve, who was impulsive at times, dashed on with a spring, and Mr. Chattaway and George followed. Before they reached Whitterbey, they fell in with other horsemen, farmers and gentlemen, bound on the same errand as themselves, and got separated.

Beyond a casual view of them now and then in the crowded

fair, Mr. Chattaway did not again see George and Treve until they all met at what was called the ordinary—the one-o'clock dinner. Of these ordinaries there were several held in the town on the great fair day, but Mr. Chattaway and George Ryle had been in the habit of attending the same. Immediately after the meal was over, Mr. Chattaway ordered his horse, and set off home.

It was earlier than he usually left, for the gentlemen liked to sit an hour or two after dinner at these annual meetings, and discuss the state of affairs in general, especially those relating to farming; but Mr. Chattaway intended to take Blackstone on his road home, and that would carry him some miles out of his way.

He did not arrive at Blackstone until five o'clock. Rupert had gone home; Cris, who had been playing at master all day in the absence of Mr. Chattaway, had also gone home, and only Ford was left. That Cris should have left, Mr. Chattaway thought nothing of; but his spirit angrily resented the departure of Rupert.

"It's coming to a pretty pass," he exclaimed, "if he thinks he can go and come at the hours he pleases. What has he been about to-day?"

"We have none of us done much to-day, sir," replied Ford. "There have been so many interruptions. They had Mr. Rupert before them at the inquest, and examined him——"

"Examined *him!*" interrupted Mr. Chattaway. "What about?"

"About the precautions taken for safety, and all that," rejoined Ford, who liked to launch a shaft or two at his master when he might do it without detection. "Mr. Rupert could not tell them much, though, as he was not in the habit of being down in the pit; and then they called some of the miners again."

"To what time is it adjourned?" growled Mr. Chattaway, after a pause.

"It's not adjourned, sir; it's over."

"Oh," said Mr. Chattaway, feeling a sort of relief. "What was the verdict?"

"The verdict, sir? Mr. Cris wrote it down, and took it up to the Hold for you."

"What was it? You can tell me its substance, I suppose."

"Well, it was 'Accidental death.' But there was something also about the absence of necessary precautions in the mine;

and a recommendation was added that you should therefore do something for the widows."

The very verdict that Chattaway had so dreaded! As is the case with many cowards, he *could not* feel independent of the opinion of his neighbours, and he knew the verdict would not be of good odour in their ears. And the suggestion that he should do something for the widows—it positively appalled him. Finding no reply, Ford continued.

"We had some gentlemen in here afterwards, sir. I don't know who they were; strangers: they said they must see you, so they are coming to-morrow. We were wondering whether they were Government inspectors, or anything of that sort. They asked when the second shaft to the pit was going to be begun."

"The second shaft to the pit!" repeated Mr. Chattaway.

"It's what they said," answered Ford. "But it will be a fine expense, if that has to be made."

An expense, the very suggestion of which turned that miserly heart cold. Mr. Chattaway thought the world was terribly against him, certainly, what with one source of annoyance and another, that day had not been one of pleasure. In point of fact, Mr. Chattaway was of too suspicious a nature ever to enjoy much ease. It may be thought that with the departure of the dreaded stranger, he would have experienced complete immunity from the fears which had latterly so shaken him. Not so; the departure had only served to augment them. He had been informed by Miss Diana on the previous night of Mr. Daw's proposed return to his distant home, of his having relinquished Rupert's cause, of his half apology for having ever taken it up; he had heard again from George Ryle this morning that the gentleman had actually gone. Most men would have accepted this as a welcome relief, a termination to the unpleasantness, and been thankful for it; but Mr. Chattaway, in his suspicious nature, doubted whether it did not mean treachery; whether it was not, in short, a ruse of the enemy. Terribly awakened were his fears that day. He suspected an ambush in every turn, a thief behind every tree; and he felt that he hated Rupert with a very bitter hatred.

Poor Rupert at that moment did not look like one to be either hated or dreaded, could Mr. Chattaway have seen him through some telescope. When Mr. Chattaway was sitting in his arm-chair in his office, Ford meekly standing by to be questioned, Rupert was toiling on foot towards Trevlyn Hold.

In his good nature he had left his pony at home for the benefit of Edith and Emily Chattaway. Since its purchase, they had not ceased teasing him to let them try it, and he had this day complied, and walked to Blackstone. He looked pale, worn, weary; his few days of riding to and fro had unfitted him for the walk, at least in inclination, and Rupert seemed to feel the fatigue this evening more than ever.

That day had not brought satisfaction to Rupert, any more than it had to Mr. Chattaway. It was impossible but that his hopes should have been excited by the movement—it may be said the boasts—made by Mr. Daw; slightly, if in no very great degree. And now they were over. That gentleman had taken his departure for good, and the hopes had faded, and there was an end to it altogether. Rupert had felt it keenly that morning as he walked to Blackstone; had felt that he and hope had bid adieu to each other for ever. Was his life to be passed at the work of that dreary mine?—was he never to rise from it? It seemed not. The day, too, was spent even more unpleasantly than usual, for Cris was in one of his overbearing moods, and goaded Rupert's spirit almost to explosion. Had Rupert been the servant of Cris Chattaway, the latter could not have treated him with more complete contempt and unkindness than he did this day. I don't say that Rupert did not provoke him. Cris asked him in a friendly manner enough who let him in to the Hold the previous night, and Rupert answered that it was no business of his. Cris then insisted upon knowing, but Rupert only laughed at him; and so Cris, in his petty spite, paid him out for it, and made the day one long humiliation to Rupert. Rupert reached home at last, and took his tea with the family. He kissed Mrs. Chattaway ten times, and whispered to her that he had kept counsel, and that he would never, never, for her sake, be late again.

CHAPTER XXXV.

AN ILL-OMENED CHASTISEMENT.

It was growing dusk on this same night, and Rupert Trevlyn stood in the rick-yard, talking to Jim Sanders. Rupert had been paying a visit to his pony in the stable, to see that it was alive after the exercise the young ladies had given it,—not a little, by all accounts. The nearest way from the stables to the *front* of the house was through the rick-yard, and Rupert was returning from his visit of inspection when he came upon Jim Sanders, leaning his back against a hay-rick. Mr. Jim had stolen up to the Hold on a little private matter of his own. In his arms was a little black puppy, very very young, as might be known by the faint squeaks it made.

"Halloa, Jim! Is that you?" exclaimed Rupert, having some trouble to discern who it was in the fading light. "What have you got squeaking there?"

Jim displayed the little animal. "He's only a few days old, sir," said he, "but he's a fine fellow. Just look at his ears!"

"How am I to look?" rejoined Rupert. "It's almost pitch dark."

"Stop a bit," said Jim. He produced a sort of torch from underneath his smock-frock, and by some contrivance set it alight. The wood blazed away, sending up its flame in the yard, but they advanced into the wide open space, away from the ricks and from danger. These torches, cut from a peculiar wood, were common enough in the neighbourhood, and were found very useful on a dark night by those who had to go about any job of outdoor work. They gave the light of a dozen candles, and were not liable to be extinguished with every breath of wind. Dangerous things for a rick-yard, you will say: and so they were in incautious hands.

They moved to a safe spot at some distance from the ricks. The puppy lay in Rupert's arms now, and he took the torch in his hand, whilst he examined it. But not a minute had they thus stood, when some one came upon them with hasty steps. It was Mr. Chattaway. He had, no doubt, just returned from Blackstone, and was going in after leaving his horse in the stable. Jim Sanders disappeared, but Rupert stood his ground, the lighted torch still in his one hand, the puppy lying in the other.

"What are you doing here?" angrily demanded Mr. Chattaway.

"Not much," said Rupert. "I was only looking at this little puppy," showing it to Mr. Chattaway.

The puppy did not concern Mr. Chattaway. It could not work him treason, and Rupert was at liberty to look at it if he chose; but Mr. Chattaway would not let the opportunity slip of questioning him on another matter. It was the first time they had met, remember, since that little episode which had