

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

so disturbed Mr. Chattaway in the morning—that of finding Rupert's boots.

"Pray where did you spend last evening?" he began.

"At the parsonage," freely answered Rupert; and Mr. Chattaway detected, or fancied he detected, defiant independence in the voice, which alone, to his ears, must speak of treason. "It was the last evening of Mr. Daw's stay there, and he asked me to spend it with him."

Mr. Chattaway saw no way of entering an opposition to this; he could not abuse him for taking tea at the parsonage; he could not well forbid it to him for the future. "What time did you come home?" he continued.

"It was eleven o'clock," avowed Rupert. "I went with Mr. Daw to the station to see him off, and the train was long behind its time. I thought it was coming up every minute, or I would not have stayed."

Mr. Chattaway had known as much before. "How did you get in?" he asked.

Rupert hesitated for a moment before speaking. "I was let in."

"I conclude you were. By whom?"

"I'd rather not tell, if you please."

"But I choose that you shall tell."

"No," said Rupert. "I can't tell that, Mr. Chattaway."

"But I insist on your telling," thundered Mr. Chattaway. "I order you to tell?"

He lifted his riding-whip, which was in his hand, menacingly as he spoke. Rupert stood his ground fearlessly, the expression of his face showing out calm and firm, as the torchlight fell upon it.

"Do you defy me, Rupert Trevlyn?"

"I don't wish to defy you, sir, but it is quite impossible that I can tell you who let me in last night. It would not be fair, or honourable."

His refusal may have looked like defiance to Mr. Chattaway, but in point of fact it was dictated by a far different feeling—regard for his aunt Edith. Had any one else in the Hold admitted him, he might have confessed to it, under Mr. Chattaway's stern command; but he would have died rather than bring *her*, whom he so loved, into trouble with her husband.

"Once more, sir, I ask you—will you tell me?"

"No, I will not," answered Rupert, with that quiet determination which imparts its own firmness stronger than any

bravado. Better for him that he had told! better even for Mrs. Chattaway.

Mr. Chattaway caught Rupert by the shoulder, lifted his whip, and struck him—struck him not once, but several times. The last stroke caught him in the face, and raised a thick weal across it; and then Mr. Chattaway, his work done, walked quickly away towards his house, never speaking, the whip resting quietly in his hand.

Alas, for the Trevlyn temper! Maddened by the outrage, smarting under the pain, the unhappy Rupert lost all self-command. Passion had never overcome him as it overcame him now. He knew not what he did; he was as one insane; in fact, he was insane for the time being—irresponsible (may it not so be said?) for his actions. With a yell of rage he picked up the torch, then blazing on the ground, dashed into the rick-yard as one possessed, and thrust the torch into the nearest rick. Then, leaping the opposite palings of the yard, he tore away across the fields.

Jim Sanders had been a witness to this: and to describe Jim's consternation would be beyond any pen. He had stood in the obscurity, out of reach of Mr. Chattaway's eyes, and had heard and seen all. Snatching the torch out of the rick—for the force with which Rupert had driven it in kept it there—Jim pulled out with his hands the few bits of hay already ignited, stamped on them, and believed the danger to be over. Next, he began to look for his puppy.

"Mr. Rupert can't have taken it off with him," soliloquized he, pacing the rick-yard dubiously with his torch, his eyes and ears alike on the alert. "He couldn't jump over them palings with that there puppy in his arms. It's a wonder that a delicate one like him could jump 'em at all, and come clean over 'em."

Mr. Jim Sanders was right: it was a wonder, for the palings were high. But it is known how strong madmen are, and I have told you that Rupert was one then.

Jim's search was interrupted by fresh footsteps, and Bridget, the maid you saw in the morning talking to Mr. Chattaway, accosted him. She was a cousin of Jim's, three or four years older than himself; but Jim was uncommonly fond of her, in a rustic fashion, deeming the difference of age nothing, and was always finding his way to the Hold with some mark of good will.

"Now, then! what do you want to night?" cried she, for it

was the pleasure of her life to snub and domineer over him. "Hatch comes in just now, and says, says he, 'Jim Sanders is in the rick-yard, Bridget, a-waiting for you.' I'll make you know better, young Jim, than to send me in them messages before a kitchen-full."

"I've brought you a little present, Bridget," answered Jim, deprecatingly: and it was to make this offering which had taken Jim to the Hold. "It's the beautifullest puppy you ever see—if you'll only accept of him; as black and shiny as a lump of coal. Leastways, I had brought him," he added, in rueful accents. "But he's gone, and I can't find him."

Bridget had a weakness for puppies—as was known to Jim; consequently, the concluding part of his information was not palatable to her. She attacked him in regard to it.

"You have brought me the beautifullest puppy I ever see—and you have lost him and can't find him! What d'ye mean by that, young Jim? Can't you speak sense, so as a body may understand?"

Jim supposed he had worded his communication imperfectly. "There have been a row here," he explained, "and it frightened me so that I dun know what I be saying. The master, he took his riding-whip to Mr. Rupert and horsewhipped him."

"The master!" uttered the girl. "What! Mr. Chattaway?"

"He come through the yard when I was with Mr. Rupert a-showing him the puppy, and they had some words, and the master he horsewhipped him. I stood round the corner of the pales, frightened to death a'most for fear Chattaway should see me. And Mr. Rupert, he must have dropped the puppy somewhere, but I can't find him."

"Where is Mr. Rupert? How did it end?"

"He dashed into the yard and across to them palings, and he leaped 'em clean," responded Jim. "And he'd not have cleared 'em, Bridget, if he'd had the puppy in his arms, so I know it must be about somewhere. And he a'most set that there rick a-fire first," the boy added, lowering his voice to a whisper, and pointing in the direction of the particular rick, from which they had strayed some distance in Jim's search. "I pretty nigh dropped when I saw it catch alight."

Bridget felt awed, startled, but yet uncertain. "How could he set a rick a-fire, stupid?" she cried.

"With the torch. I had lighted it to show him the puppy, and he had it in his hand; he had it in his hand when Chattaway began to horsewhip him, but he dropped it then; and

when Chattaway went away, Mr. Rupert picked it up and pushed it into the rick."

"I don't like to hear this," said the girl, shivering. "Suppose the rick-yard had been set a-fire! Which rick was it? It mayn't—"

"Just hush a minute, Bridget!" suddenly interrupted Jim. "There he is!"

"There's who?" asked she, peering around her in the growing darkness. "Not master!"

"Law, Bridget! I meant the puppy. Can't you hear him? Them squeaks is his."

Guided towards the sound, Jim at length found the poor little animal. It was lying close to the spot where Rupert had leaped the palings. The boy took it up, fondling it almost as a mother would have fondled a child.

"See his pretty glossy skin, Bridget! just feel how sleek it is! He'll lap milk out of a saucer now! I tried him afore I brought him out; and if you——"

A scream from Bridget. Jim seemed to come in for nothing but shocks to his nerves this evening, and he almost dropped the puppy again. For it was a loud, shrill, prolonged scream, one carrying a strange amount of terror to the ear, as it went forth in the still night air.

Meanwhile Mr. Chattaway had entered his house. Some of the children who were in the drawing-room heard him come in, and went forth to the hall to welcome him after his long day's absence. But they were startled by the pallor of his countenance; it looked perfectly livid as the light of the hall-lamp fell upon it. Mr. Chattaway could not inflict such chastisement on Rupert without its emotional effects telling upon himself. He took off his hat, and laid his whip upon the table.

"We thought you would be home before this, papa."

"Where's your mamma?" he rejoined, paying no attention to their remark.

"She is upstairs in her sitting-room."

Mr. Chattaway turned to the staircase and ascended. Mrs. Chattaway was not in her room; but the sound of voices in Miss Diana's guided him to where he should find her. This sitting-room, devoted exclusively to Miss Diana Trevlyn, was on the side of the house next the rick-yard and farm buildings, which it overlooked.

The apartment was almost in darkness; the fire in the grate

had dimmed, and neither lamp nor candles had been lighted. Mrs. Chattaway and Miss Diana sat there conversing together.

"Who is this?" cried the former, looking round. "Oh, is it you, James? I did not know you were home again. What a fine day you have had for Whitterbey!"

Mr. Chattaway growled something about the day not having been particularly fine.

"Did you buy the stock you thought of buying?" asked Miss Diana.

"I bought some," he said, rather sulkily. "Prices ran high to-day."

"You are home late," she resumed.

"I came round by Blackstone."

It was evident by his tone and manner that he was in one of his least genial humours. Both the ladies knew from experience that the wisest plan at those times was to leave him to himself, and they resumed their own converse. Mr. Chattaway stood with his back to them, his hands in his pockets, his eyes peering out into the dusky night. Not in reality looking at anything, or attempting to look: he was far too deeply busied with his thoughts to pay attention to outward things.

He was beginning very slightly to repent of the horsewhipping, to doubt whether it might not have been more prudent had he abstained from inflicting it. As do many more of us, when we awake to reflection after some act committed in passion. If Rupert *was* to be dreaded; if he, in connection with others, was hatching treason, this outrage would only make of him a more bitter enemy. Better, perhaps, not to have gone to the extremity.

But it was done; it could not be undone; and to regret it were worse than useless. Mr. Chattaway began thinking of the point which had led to it—the refusal of Rupert to say who had admitted him. This at least Mr. Chattaway determined to ascertain.

"Did either of you let in Rupert last night?" he suddenly inquired, looking round.

"No, we did not," promptly replied Miss Diana, answering for Mrs. Chattaway as well as for herself, which she believed she was perfectly safe in doing. "He was not in until eleven, I hear; we went up to bed long before that."

"Then who did let him in?" exclaimed Mr. Chattaway.

"One of the servants, of course," rejoined Miss Diana.

"But they say they did not," he answered.

"Have you asked them all?"

No. Mr. Chattaway remembered that he had not asked them all, and he came to the conclusion that one of them must have been the culprit. He turned to the window again, standing sulkily as before, and vowing in his own mind that the offender, whether man or woman, should be turned summarily out of the Hold.

"If you have been to Blackstone, you have heard that the inquest is over, James," observed Mrs. Chattaway, anxious to turn the conversation from the subject of last night. "Did you hear the verdict?"

"I heard it," he growled.

"It is not an agreeable verdict, Chattaway," remarked Miss Diana. "Better that you had made these improvements in the mine—as I urged upon you long ago—than wait to be forced to do them."

"I am not forced yet," retorted Chattaway. "They must—Holloa! What's that?"

His sudden exclamation called them both to the window. A bright light, a blaze, was shooting up into the sky. At the same moment a shrill scream of terror—the scream from Bridget—arose with it.

"The rick-yard! the rick-yard!" exclaimed Miss Diana. "It is on fire!"

Mr. Chattaway stood for an instant as one paralyzed. The next he was leaping down the stairs, something like a yell bursting from him.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE BLAZE.

THERE is a terror, which, from its very suddenness, shakes man's equanimity to its foundation—and that terror fell upon Trevlyn Hold. At the twilight hour of the evening—for it was not yet quite dark—its inmates were sitting mostly in idleness; the servants gossiping quietly in the kitchen, the young ladies lingering over the fire in the drawing-room; when those awful sounds of fear interrupted them—the cry of their father in the room above; the cry, shrill and prolonged, from outside the house. With a simultaneous movement, all flew to the