

and he said, on his word of honour, not only that he did not know where Rupert was, but where he was likely to be: the thing was to him a complete mystery. Bowed nodded. In Bowen's opinion the notion of his being concealed in any house was all moonshine.

The days went on and on, and it did appear very mysterious where Rupert could be, or what had been his fate. His clothes, his effects, all remained unclaimed and uncalled for at Trevlyn Hold. When Mrs. Chattaway came unexpectedly upon anything that had belonged to him, she turned quite sick with the fears that darted across her heart. A faint hope arose within her at times, that Rupert had gone, as Mr. Chattaway loudly, and perhaps others more secretly, surmised, to Mr. Daw in his far-off home in the Pyrenees, but it was rejected almost as soon as felt. She knew, none better, that Rupert had no means, no money to carry him thither. Oh, how often, how often did she wish in her heart of hearts, that they had never usurped Trevlyn Hold! It seemed that they were beginning to reap all the bitter fruits, which had been so long ripening.

But this supposition was soon to be set aside. Two letters arrived from Mr. Daw: one to Mr. Freeman, the other to Rupert himself; and they completely did away with the idea that had been obtaining—that Rupert Trevlyn had found his way thither.

It appeared that Rupert had written an account to Mr. Daw of these unhappy circumstances; of his setting the rick on fire in his passion, and his being arrested for it. He had written it on the evening of the day he was discharged from custody. And by the contents of his letter, it was evident that he then contemplated returning to the Hold.

"These letters from Mr. Daw settle the question—that Rupert has not gone there," observed Mr. Freeman. "But they make the mystery, of where he can be, greater."

Yes, they did. And the news went forth to the neighbourhood that Rupert Trevlyn had written a letter subsequent to the examination at Barmester, wherein he stated that he was going straight home to the Hold. Gossip never loses in the carrying, you know.

Jim Sanders, who had given his testimony as to what he saw of the setting of the rick on fire, and was discharged and at work again, became quite the lion of the day. He had never been made so much of in his life. Tea here, supper there, sups of ale everywhere. Everybody was asking Jim the particulars of

that later night, and Jim, nothing loth, gave them, with the addition of his own comments.

And the days went on, and the ferment and the doubts increased.

CHAPTER XLV.

AN APPLICATION TO A MAGISTRATE.

THE ferment increased. The arguments obtaining in the neighbourhood were worthy of being listened to, if only from a curiously logical point of view. If Rupert Trevlyn in his own handwriting had stated that he was going home to the Hold on the termination of the day's proceedings at Barmester; and if Rupert Trevlyn (as was evident) never did get to the Hold, clearly it was Mr. Chattaway who had killed and buried him. Absurd as the deduction may be to you, my calm readers, judging from a sensible, dispassionate point of view, to those excited gentry, the public, it appeared not only a feasible but a certain conclusion. The thing could not rest; interviews were held with Mr. Peterby, who was supposed to be the only person who could take up the matter on the part of the missing and ill-used Rupert; and that gentleman bestirred himself to make inquiries. Which he set about in secret.

One dark night, between eight and nine, the inmates of the lodge were disturbed by a knocking at their door—a loud imperative knocking, as if the applicant brought with him both impatience and authority. Ann Canham—trying her poor eyes over some dark sewing by the light of the small and solitary candle—started from her chair, and remarked that her heart had leaped into her mouth.

Which may have been a reason, possibly, for her standing still, face and hands uplifted in consternation, instead of answering the knock. It was repeated, and more imperatively.

Old Canham turned his head and looked at her. He was smoking his last evening pipe over the fire. "Thee must open it, Ann."

Ann, seeing no help for it, went meekly to the door, wringing her hands. What she expected might be at the door, or what she feared, was best known to herself; but in point of

fact, since Bowen, the superintendent, had pounced upon her a few days before, as she was going by the police-station, had handed her inside, and put her through sundry questions as we put a boy through his catechism, she had lived in a state of tremor. She may have concluded it was Bowen at the door now, with the fellow-pair of handcuffs to those which had been fitted on Jim Sanders.

It proved to be Mr. Peterby. Ann looked surprised, but lost three parts of her tremor. Dropping her humble curtsey, she was about to ask his pleasure, when he brushed past her without ceremony, and stepped into the kitchen.

"Shut the door," were his first words to her. "How are you, Canham?"

Mark had risen, and stood with doubtful gaze, wondering, no doubt, what the visit could mean. "I be but middlin', sir," he answered, pushing his pipe in the corner of the hearth. "We ain't none on us too well, sir, I reckon, with this uncertainty hanging over our minds, as to poor Master Rupert."

"It is the business I have come about. Sit down, Ann Canham," Mr. Peterby added, settling himself on the bench opposite Mark. "I want to ask you a few questions."

"Yes, sir," she meekly answered. But her hands shook so that she nearly dropped the work she had taken up.

"There's nothing to be afraid of," cried Mr. Peterby, noticing the emotion. "I am not going to accuse you of putting him out of sight, as it seems busy tongues are accusing somebody else. On the night that this took place, the encounter spoken of between Mr. Chattaway and Rupert Trevlyn, you were passing, I believe, near the spot. You must tell me all you saw. First of all, as I am told, you encountered Rupert."

Ann Canham raised her shaking hand to her brow, and wiped the moisture that had gathered there. Mr. Peterby had begun his questioning in a hard, matter-of-fact tone, as if he were examining a witness in court, and it did not tend to reassure her. Ann Canham was often laughed at for her timidity. She gave him the account of her interview with Rupert as correctly as she could remember it.

"He said nothing to you of his intention of going off anywhere?" asked Mr. Peterby, when she had finished.

"Not a word, sir. He said he had nowhere to go to; if he went to the Hold, Mr. Chattaway might be for horsewhipping him again. He said he thought he should lie down under the trees till morning."

"Did you leave him there?"

"I left him sitting on the stile, sir, eating the bread. He had complained of hunger, and I got him to take a part of a cake which Mrs. Freeman had given me for my father."

"You told Bowen, the superintendent at the police-station, that you asked him to take refuge in the lodge for the night?"

"Yes, sir," she replied, after a slight pause. "Mr. Bowen, he put a heap of questions to me, and what with being confused at 'em, and the fright of his calling me into the place, I didn't well know what I said in answer to him."

"But you did ask Rupert Trevlyn?"

"I asked him if he'd be pleased to take shelter in the lodge till the morning, as he seemed to have nowhere to go to. But he spoke out quite sharp, like, at my asking it, and said, did I think he wanted to get me and father into trouble with Mr. Chattaway? So I went away, sir, leaving him there."

"Well, now, just tell me whom you met afterwards."

"I hadn't got above three-parts up the field, sir—it's up-hill, you know—when I met Mr. Chattaway. I stood aside off the narrow path to let him pass, and wished him good night, but he didn't answer me: he went on. Just about as I came close to the road-stile, I see Jim Sanders coming over it, so I asked him where he had been, and how he had got back again, having heard that he'd not been found all day, and he answered rather impertinently that he'd been up in the moon. The moon was uncommon bright that night, sir, which perhaps made him think to say it," she simply added.

"Was that all Jim Sanders said?"

"Yes, sir, every word. He went on down the path as if he was in a hurry."

"In the same direction that Mr. Chattaway had taken?"

"Just the same. There is but that one path, sir."

"And that was the last you saw of them?"

Ann Canham stopped to snuff the candle before she answered. "That was all, sir. I was hastening to get back to father, knowing he'd be wanting me, for I was late. Mr. Bowen, he kep' on telling me it was strange I heard nothing of the encounter, but I never did. I must ha' been out of the field long afore Mr. Chattaway could get up to Master Rupert."

"Pity but you had waited and gone back," observed Mr. Peterby, musingly. "It might have prevented what occurred."

"Pity, perhaps, but I had, sir. But it never once came into my head that anything bad would come of their meeting."

Since, after I came to know what did happen, I wondered I had not thought of it. But if I had, sir, I shouldn't have dared to go back after Mr. Chattaway. It wouldn't have been my place."

Mr. Peterby sat looking at Ann, as she thought. In point of fact, he was so buried in reflection as to see nothing. He rose from the settle. "And this is all you know about it! Well, it amounts to nothing beyond establishing the fact that all three—Rupert Trevlyn, Mr. Chattaway, and the boy—were on the spot at that time. Good night, Canham. I hope your rheumatism will get easier."

Ann Canham opened the door to him, and wished him good night. When he was fairly gone she slipped the bolt, and stood with her back against the door, either for extra security, or to recover her equanimity.

"Father, my heart was in my mouth all the time he were here," she repeated. "See,"—holding out her shaking hands—"see the twitter I be in."

"More stupid you!" was the sympathizing answer of old Canham.

The public ferment, I say, did not lessen, and the matter was at length carried before the magistrates; in so far as that the advice of one of them was asked by Mr. Peterby. It happened that Mr. Chattaway had gone this very day to Barmester. He was standing at the entrance to the inn-yard where he generally put up, when his solicitor, Mr. Flood, approached, evidently in a state of excitement.

"What a mercy that I found you!" he exclaimed, out of breath. "Jackson told me you were in town. Come along!"

"Why, what's the matter?" asked Mr. Chattaway.

"Matter? There's enough the matter. Peterby's before the magistrates at this very moment preferring a charge against you for having murdered Rupert Trevlyn. I got a word of it dropped to me in the oddest manner, and——"

"*What* do you say?" interrupted Mr. Chattaway, his face in a blaze, as he stood stock still, and refused to stir another step without an answer.

"Come along, I say. There's some application being made to the magistrates about you, and my advice is—— Mr. Chattaway," added the lawyer, in a deeper, almost an agitated tone, as he abruptly broke off his words, "I assume that you are innocent of this. You *are*?"

"Before Heaven, I am innocent!" thundered Mr. Chattaway. "What do you mean, Flood?"

"Then make haste. My advice to you is, go right into the midst of it, and confront Peterby. Don't let the magistrates hear only one side of the question, by which they would pre-judge it. Make your explanation to them, and let these nasty rumours be set at rest. It is my opinion that you ought to have done so at first."

Apparently eager as himself now, Mr. Chattaway strode along. They found on reaching the courts that some indifferent cause was being heard by the magistrates, nothing at all connected with Mr. Chattaway. But the explanation was obtained. Mr. Peterby was in a private room with one of the Bench only—a Captain Mynn. With scant ceremony the interview was broken in upon by the intruders.

There was no formal complaint being made, no accusation being lodged, or warrant applied for. Mr. Peterby, who was on terms of intimacy with Captain Mynn, was laying the case before him unofficially, and asking his advice as a friend. A short explanation on either side ensued, and Mr. Peterby turned to Mr. Chattaway.

"I have had this forced upon me," he said. "I have been urged for days and days past to apply for a warrant against you, and I have declined. But the thing is going so far, public opinion is becoming, I may say, so urgent, that I find if I don't act, it will be taken out of my hands, and given to those who have less scruple than I. I resolved, therefore, to adopt a medium course; and I came here asking Captain Mynn's opinion as a friend—not as a magistrate—whether I should have sufficient grounds for acting. For myself, I honestly confess I think them very slight; and I assure you, Mr. Chattaway, that I am no enemy of yours, although it may look like it at this moment."

"By whom have you been urged to this?" coldly asked Mr. Chattaway.

"By more than I should care to name: the public, to give them a collective term. But how the wonder you obtained cognizance that I was here, I can't make out," he added, turning to Mr. Flood. "Not a soul knew of my coming."

"As we have met here, we had better have it out," was Mr. Flood's answer, disregarding the question. "It is my advice to Mr. Chattaway, and he wishes it. If Mr. Mynn hears your side unofficially he must, in justice, hear ours. That's fair, all the world over."

It was, doubtless, a not very usual, perhaps not an orthodox,

mode of proceeding; but I can tell you that things far more unorthodox than that, are done in local courts every day. Mr. Mynn knew by public rumour all particulars of the suspicion, just as well as Mr. Peterby could state them, but he listened attentively, as in civility bound. Mr. Chattaway did not deny the encounter with Rupert: he never had denied it. He acknowledged that they were neither of them very cool; that Rupert was the first to strike, and that he, Rupert, fell down, or was knocked down. Immediately upon that, he, Mr. Chattaway, heard a noise, went to see what it was, and found they had had an eavesdropper, who was then making off across the field, on the other side the grove. He, Mr. Chattaway, angry at the fact, gave pursuit, in the hope of identifying the intruder (whom he had since discovered to be Jim Sanders), but was unable to catch him, the pursued proving himself considerably the fleetest runner. When he got back to the spot, Rupert was gone.

"How long may you have been absent?" inquired Captain Mynn of Mr. Chattaway.

"About six or seven minutes, I think. I ran to the other end of the field, and looked into the lane, but the boy had escaped out of sight, and I then walked back again. It would take about seven minutes; the field is large."

"And after that?"

"I found, as I tell you, that Rupert had disappeared, and I re-traversed the ground over the lower field, and went on to Barbrook, where I had business. I never saw Rupert Trevlyn after I left him on the ground. The inference, therefore—nay, the absolute certainty—is, that he must have taken the opportunity of my absence to get up and escape."

A pause. "You did not get home, I believe, until twelve at night, or thereabouts," remarked Captain Mynn. "Some doubts have been raised—of which you are, no doubt, aware—as to where you could have spent your time."

And this question led to the very core of the suspicion. Mr. Chattaway appeared to feel that it did, and he hesitated. He had spoken in a free, open manner enough, quite different from the ungracious and sullen one that generally characterized him; but he hesitated now.

"Strange to say," he resumed, "I could not account for the whole of my time that evening. That is, if I were called upon to account for it by proof, I am not sure that it could be furnished. I was very anxious to see Hurnall, the agent for the

Boorfield mines, and that's where I went. My son had brought me home news from Blackstone, that they were going to force me to make certain improvements in my pit, and I wanted to consult Hurnall about it. He is up to every trick and turn, and knows what they can compel an owner to do, and what they can't. When I reached Hurnall's house, he was out; might return home immediately, the servant said, or might not be home till very late. She asked me if I could go in and wait; but I had no fancy for sitting in a close room, after being stifled all day in the close court *here*, and I said I would walk about. I walked about for two mortal hours before Hurnall came; and then I went indoors with him. That's the whole truth, I'll swear."

"Then I'd have avowed it before, had I been you," cried Mr. Peterby. "It's your want of self-defence that has done half the mischief, and given colouring to the suspicions."

"Self-defence!" cried Mr. Chattaway, throwing his head back. "When a man's accused of murder by a set of brainless idiots, it is punishment he'd like to give them, not self-defence."

"Ah!" said the lawyer, "but we can't always do as we like: if we could, the world might be better worth living in."

Mr. Chattaway turned to the magistrate. "I have told you the whole truth, so far as I know it; and you may judge whether these unneighbourly reports have not merited all my contempt. You can question Hurnall, who will tell you where he met me, and how long I stayed with him afterwards. As to Rupert Trevlyn, I have no more idea where he is than Mr. Peterby himself has. He will turn up some time, there's not the least doubt about it; and I solemnly declare that I'll then bring him to justice, should it be ten years hence."

There was nothing more for Mr. Chattaway to say or to wait for, and he went out with his solicitor. Mr. Peterby turned to Captain Mynn with a questioning glance.

The magistrate shook his head. "My opinion is that you cannot proceed with this, Mr. Peterby. Were you to bring the matter officially before the Bench, I for one would not entertain it; neither, I am sure, would my brother-magistrates. Mr. Chattaway is no favourite of ours, but he must receive justice. That there are points of suspicion connected with the case, I can't deny; but every one may be explained away. If what he says be true, they are explained away."

"All but the two hours, when he says he was walking about, waiting for Hurnall."

"It may have been so. No; upon these very slight grounds, it is of no use to press for a warrant against Mr. Chattaway. The very enormity of the crime would almost be its answer. A gentleman of position and property, a county magistrate, guilty of the crime of murder in these enlightened days! Nonsense, Mr. Peterby!"

And Mr. Peterby echoed the words in his own mind; and went forth prepared to echo it to those who had urged him on to ask whether the charge could be made.

CHAPTER XLVI.

A FRIGHT FOR ANN CANHAM.

So the magistrates declined to interfere, and Mr. Chattaway went about a free man. But not an untainted one; for the neighbourhood was still free in its comments, and openly accused him of having made away with Rupert. Mr. Chattaway had his retaliation: he offered a reward for the recovery of the incendiary Rupert Trevlyn, and the walls for miles round were placarded with handbills. The police, urged to it by him, recommenced their search with vigour, and Mr. Chattaway actually talked of sending to the metropolis for an experienced detective. One thing was indisputable—that if Rupert were in life he must keep himself from the neighbourhood of Trevlyn Hold. Nothing could save him from the law, if taken the second time. Jim Sanders would not be kidnapped again, to prevent his proving the firing of the rick; he had already testified to it officially; and Mr. Chattaway's vengeance was athirst for satisfaction.

Take it for all in all, it was well-nigh breaking the heart of Mrs. Chattaway. Looking at it in any light, it was bad enough. The fear touching her husband, not the less startling and terrible from its excessive improbability, was dissipated, for he had succeeded in convincing her that he was, so far, innocent; but her fears for Rupert kept her in a perpetual state of inward terror. Miss Diana publicly condemned Rupert. This hiding from justice (if he was hiding) she regarded as only in a degree less reprehensible than the crime itself; as did Mrs. Ryle; and had Miss Diana met Rupert returning home some fine day, she would have laid her hand upon him as effectually as Mr. Dumps himself, and said, "You shall not go again." Do not mistake

Miss Diana: it would not have pleased her to see Rupert—a Trevlyn—standing at the bar of a public tribunal to be judged by the laws of his country. What she would have done was, to take Rupert home to the Hold, marshalled by her hand, and say to Chattaway, "Here he is, but you must forgive him: you must forgive him, because he is a Trevlyn; and a Trevlyn cannot be brought to disgrace." Miss Diana had full confidence in her own power to command this. Others wisely doubted whether any amount of interference on any part would avail now with Mr. Chattaway. His wife felt that it would not. She felt that were poor Rupert to venture home, even twelve months to come, trusting that time and clemency had effected his pardon, he would be sacrificed: between Miss Diana's and Mr. Chattaway's opposing policies, he would inevitably be sacrificed. Altogether, Mrs. Chattaway's life was more painful now Rupert had gone than it had been when he was at home.

Cris was against Rupert; Octave was bitterly against him; Maude went about the house with a white face and shrinking heart, her health and spirits giving way under the tension. Suspense is, of all evils, the worst to bear: and they who loved Rupert, Maude and her aunt Edith, were hourly and daily victims to it. The bow was always strung. On the one hand was the latent doubt that he had come to some violent end that night, in spite of Mr. Chattaway's denial; and they could not divest themselves of it, try as they would, or of the wretched speculation it brought in its train. On the other hand, was the lively dread that he was but concealing himself, and might be discovered by the police any day that the sun rose. They had speculated so much upon where he could be, that the ever-recurring thought brought now only its heart-sickness; and Maude had the additional pain of hearing petty shafts launched at her because she was his sister. Mrs. Chattaway prayed upon her bended knees that, hard to be borne as the suspense was, Rupert might not come back until time should have softened the heart of Mr. Chattaway, and the grievous charge pending against Rupert be done away with for the want of a prosecutor.

Nora was in the midst of bustle at Trevlyn Farm. And Nora was also in a temper. It was the annual custom there, when the busy time of harvest was quite over, to institute a general house-renovating: summer curtains were taken down, and winter ones were put up, carpets were shaken, floors and paint scoured;