"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;

and the place, in short, to use an ordinary expression, was turned inside out.

There was more than usual to be done this year: for, mendings and alterations had to be made in sundry curtains, and the upholstering woman, named Brown, had been at Trevlyn Farm the last day or two, getting forward with her task. The ruse made use of by Nora in the court at Barmester, to wile Farmer Apperley to a private conference, had really held some point in it, for negotiations were going on with that industrious member of the upholstering society, through Mrs. Apperley, who had recommended her to Nora.

Mrs. Brown sat in the centre of a pile of curtains, plying her needle steadily: the finishing stitches were being put to the work; at least, they would be before night should fall. Mrs. Brown, a sallow woman with a chronic cold in her head, preferred to work in outdoor costume; a black poke bonnet and faded woollen red plaid shawl crossed over her shoulders. Nora stood by her in a very angry mood, her arms folded, just as though she had nothing to do: which would be a circumstance to be recorded in these cleaning times.

For Nora never let the grass grow under her feet, or under any one else's feet, when there was work to do. By dint of beginning hours before daylight, and keeping at it hours after nightfall—in point of fact, by making that one day in the year four-and-twenty hours long instead of twelve—she succeeded in getting it all over in the day. Herself, Nanny, and Ann Canham put their best energies into it, one or two of the men were set to rub up the mahogany furniture, and Mrs. Ryle had to dispense almost entirely with being waited upon. And Nora's present anger arose from the fact that Ann Canham, by some extraordinary mischance, had not made her appearance.

It was bringing things almost to a standstill, as Nora complained to Mrs. Brown. The two cleaners of the rooms were Nanny and Ann Canham. Nanny was doing her part, but what was to become of the other part? And where could Ann Canham be? Nora kept her eyes turned to the window, as she talked and grumbled, watching for the return of Jim Sanders, whom she had despatched to see after Ann.

Presently she saw him approaching, and went to the door and threw it open long before the lad could reach it. "She can't come," he called out, at length.

"Not come!" echoed Nora, in wrathful consternation, looking as if she felt inclined to beat Jim for bringing the message. "What on earth does she mean by that?"

"Well, she said her father was poorly, and she couldn't leave him," returned Jim

Nora could scarcely speak for indignation. Old Canham, as was known to all the neighbourhood, had been ailing for years, and it had never kept Ann at home before. "I don't believe it," said she, in her perplexity.

"I don't think I do, neither," returned Jim. "I'm a'most sure that old Canham was sat right afore the fire, a-smoking his pipe as usual. She drawed the door to behind her, all in a hurry, while she talked to me, but not afore I see old Canham there. I be next to certain on it."

Nora could not understand the state of affairs. Ann Canham, humble, industrious, grateful for any day's work offered to her, had never failed to come, when engaged, in all Barbrook's experience. What was to be done? The morrow was Saturday, and, to have the cleaning extend to that day (as it inevitably would, failing the help of Ann Canham), would have upset the farm's regularity and Nora's temper for a month. In fact, there was a doubt of its being done, as it was; for Ann ought to have been there and at work hours before.

Nora took a sudden resolution. She snatched her bonnet and shawl from the pegs where they hung, and set off for the lodge, determined to bring Ann Canham back willing or unwilling, or to know the reason why This *contretemps* in the yearly cleaning would never be forgotten by Nora during life.

Without any superfluous ceremony of knocking, Nora proceeded to open the door and enter when she reached the lodge. But the door was locked. "What can that be for?" ejaculated Nora—for she had never known the lodge door to be locked in the daytime. "She expects I shall come after her, and thinks she'll keep me out!"

Without the intervention of an instant, Nora's face was at the window, to reconnoitre the interior. She saw the smock-frock of old Mark disappearing through the opposite door, as quickly as was consistent with his rheumatic state. Nora rattled at the handle of the door with one hand, and knocked sharply on its panel with the other. Ann opened it.

"Now then, Ann Canham, what's the meaning of this?" she began, pushing past Ann, who stood in the way, almost as if she would have kept her out.

"I beg a humble pardon, ma'am, a hundred times," was the

low, deprecating answer. "I'd do anything a'most, rather nor disappoint—such a thing I'm sure as never happened to me yet—but I'm obliged. Father, he's too poorly for me to leave him."

Nora surveyed her critically. The woman was evidently in a state of discomfort, if not of terror. She was trembling visibly, in spite of her efforts to suppress it, and her lips were white.

"I got a boy to run down to Mrs. Sanders's this morning at daylight, and ask her to go in my place," resumed Ann Canham. "Until Jim came up here a short while agone, I never thought but what she had went."

"What's the reason *you* can't come?" demanded Nora, her tone one of uncompromising sternness.

"I'd come but for father. He——"

"You needn't peril your soul with deliberate untruths," interrupted angry Nora. "A woman at your age ought to fear 'em, Ann Canham. There's nothing the matter with your father; nothing that need hinder your coming out. If he's well enough to be here in the house place, smoking his pipe, he's well enough for you to leave him. He *was* smoking. Haven't I got the smoke now in my nostrils? and what's that?"—pointing to the pipe which her quick eyes had detected, pushed into a corner of the hearth.

Ann Canham stood the picture of confusion and helplessness under the reproach. She stammered out that she "daredn't leave him: he wasn't hisself to-day."

"He was enough himself to make off to avoid seeing me," said angry Nora. "What's to become of my cleaning? Who's to do it if you don't? I insist upon your coming, Ann Canham?"

It appeared almost beyond Ann Canham's courage to bring out a second refusal, and she burst into tears as she spoke it. She had never offended afore, and she hoped, if forgiven this time, never to offend again: but to leave her father that day was impossible.

And Nora had to take the refusal, and make the best of it. She went away, searching for the woman's motive, and came to the conclusion, wanting a better, that she must have some sewing in hand which she was compelled to finish; but, that Mark's illness was detaining her, she believed not. Still, she could not comprehend it. Ann had always been so eager to oblige, so simple, so open-minded. Had sewing really detained her, she

would have brought it out to show Nora; she would have told the truth, not have laid the excuse to her father's state of health. Nora was puzzled, and that was a thing she hated. Ruminating upon all this as she walked along, she met Mrs. Chattaway. Nora, who, when suffering under a personal grievance, must dilate upon it to every one, favoured Mrs. Chattaway with an account of Ann Canham, her extraordinary conduct, and her ingratitude.

"Rely upon it, her father is ill," was the answer of Mrs. Chattaway. "I will tell you why I think so, Nora. Yesterday I was at Barmester with my sister, and as we pulled up at the chemist's where I had business, Ann Canham came out with a bottle of medicine in her hand. I asked her who was ill, and she said it was her father. I remarked to the chemist afterwards that I supposed Mark Canham had a fresh attack of rheumatism, but he replied that it was fever."

"Fever!" echoed Nora.

"I exclaimed as you do: but the chemist persisted that, by Ann Canham's account, Mark must be suffering from a species of low fever. As we returned, my sister stopped the pony-carriage at the lodge, and Ann came out to us. She explained it differently from the chemist. What she had meant to imply when she went for the medicine was, that her father was feverish—but he was better then, she said. Altogether, I judge that he is a little worse than usual, and it may be that she was afraid to leave him to-day."

"Well," said Nora, "all I can say is, that I saw old Canham stealing out of the room when I knocked at it, just as though he did not want to be seen. He was smoking, too. I can't make it out."

Mrs. Chattaway was neither so speculative nor so curious as Nora; perhaps not so keen: she viewed it as nothing extraordinary that Mark Canham should be rather worse than usual, or that his daughter should decline to go out and leave him.

Much later in the day—in fact, when the afternoon was getting on—Ann Canham, with a wild, scared look in her face, turned out of the lodge. She took the road towards Trevlyn Farm. Not in an open, bold manner, as folks do who are not afraid of dogs and policemen, but in a timorous, uncertain, hesitating fashion, that did give the idea that she must dread either the one or the other. Plunging into the fields when she was nearing the farm, she stole along under cover of the hedge, until she reached the one which skirted the fold-yard. Cautiously

raising her face to take a view over it of what might be on the other side, it came almost into contact with another face, which was raised to see anything that might be seen on this—the face of Policeman Dumps.

Ann Canham uttered a shrill scream, and flew away as fast as her legs could carry her. Perhaps of all living beings, Mr. Dumps was about the last she would have preferred to encounter just then. That gentleman made his way to a side-gate, and called after her.

"What be you afeard on, Ann Canham? Did you think it was a mad bull a-looking over at you?"

It occurred to Ann Canham that her starting away in that extraordinary fashion could only be regarded as consistent with the approach of a mad bull, or some other obnoxious animal, and that the policeman might be for setting himself to the work of discovering her motive—for it lay in the nature of a policeman's work to do so. That thought, or some other, made her turn slowly back again, and confront Mr. Dumps.

"What was you afeard on?" he repeated.

"Not of nothing in particular, please, sir," she answered. "It was the suddenness like of seeing a face there that startled me."

Mr. Dumps thought she looked curiously startled still. But that complacent official, being accustomed by the bare fact of his presence to strike terror to the hearts of boys and other parish scapegraces, did not give it a second thought. "Were you looking for anybody?" he asked, simply as an idle question.

"No, sir. I just put my head over the hedge without meaning. I didn't want nothing."

Mr. Dumps, in the lofty manner affected by some of his tribe, turned on his heel without condescending so much as a "good afternoon." Ann Canham pursued her way along the hedge which skirted the fold-yard. Any one observing her closely might have detected indications of trembling about her still. In a cautious and timid manner, she at length turned her head, to obtain a glimpse of Mr. Dumps's movements.

Mr. Dumps—and what had taken him into the fold-yard at Mr. Ryle's, Ann Canham could not guess, unless it might be that he was looking after Nanny—had turned into the road, and was pursuing his way slowly down it. Every step carried him farther from her; and when he was fairly out of sight, the sigh of relief she gave was long and deep.

But of course there was no certainty that he would not be coming back again. Possibly it was that insecurity that caused Ann to take stolen looks into the fold-yard, and then duck her head under the hedge, as if she had been at some forbidden play. But Mr. Dumps did not come back again; and yet she continued her game.

A full hour by the sun had she been at it; and by her countenance, by the occasional almost despairing movement of her hands, it might be inferred that she was growing sadly anxious and weary; when Jim Sanders emerged from one of the outbuildings at the upper end of the fold-yard, and began to traverse it towards the other end. To do this he had to pass within a few yards of the hedge where the by-play was going on; and somewhat to his surprise he heard himself called to in covert tones. Casting his eyes to the spot whence the voice proceeded, he saw the well-tanned straw bonnet, the care-worn brow and weak eyes of Ann Canham above the hedge. She beckoned to him in a mysterious manner, and then all signs of her disappeared.

"If ever I see the like o' that!" soliloquized Jim. "What's up with Ann Canham?" He approached the hedge, and bawled out to know what she wanted.

"Hush—sh—sh—sh!" came forth the warning sound from the other side. "Come round here to me, Jim."

Considerably astonished, thinking perhaps Ann Canham had a litter of live puppies to show him—for, if Jim had a weakness for anything on earth, it was for those charming specimens of the young animal world—he made his way through the gate round to Ann Canham. Ann had no puppies; nothing but a small note in her hand, wafered and pressed with a thimble.

"Is the master anywhere about, Jim?"

"He's just gone into the barn now. The men be thrashing," Ann Canham paused a moment. Jim stared at her.

"Could you just do me a bit o' service, Jim?" she resumed.

Jim, a good-natured lad at all times, replied that he supposed he could if he tried. But he stared still; he was puzzled by this extraordinary behaviour on the part of quiet Ann Canham.

"I want this bit of a letter give to him," she said, pointing to what she held. "I want it give to him when he's by hisself like, so that it don't get seen as it's give to him. Could you manage it, Jim?"

"I dare say I could," replied Jim. "What is the letter? What's inside of him?"

"Well, it concerns Mr. Ryle," said Ann Canham, after a perceptible hesitation. "Jim, if you'll do this faithful for me, I won't forget it. Mind you watch your opportunity; and keep the letter inside your smock-frock, for fear anybody should see it."

"I'll do it," said Jim. He took the note from her, put it in his trousers pocket underneath his smock-frock, and went back towards the barn whistling. Ann turned homewards, flying over the ground now as if she were running a race.

Jim had not to wait for an opportunity. He met his master coming out of the barn. The doorway was dark; the thrashing men were at the upper end of the barn, and no eyes were near. Jim could not help some of the mystery which had appeared in Ann Canham's manner from extending to his own.

"What's this?" asked George.

"Ann Canham brought it, sir. She was hiding t'other side the hedge and called to me, and she telled me to be sure to give it when nobody was by."

George took the missive to the door and looked at it. A piece of white paper, which had apparently served to wrap tea in, or something of that sort, awkwardly folded, and wafered down with a thimble. No direction.

He opened it; the wafer was not yet dry; and he saw a few words in a sprawling hand:

"Don't betray me, George. Come to me in secret as soon as you can. I think I am dying."

And in spite of its being without signature; in spite of the scrawled characters, the blotted words, George Ryle recognized the handwriting of Rupert Trevlyn.

CHAPTER XLVII.

SURPRISE FOR GEORGE RYLE.

On the hard flock bed in the upper back room at the lodge, he lay. As George Ryle stood there bending over him, he could have touched any part of the walls around. The explanation of Jim Sanders that it was Ann Canham who had brought the note, guided George naturally to the lodge; otherwise he

would not have known where to look for him. One single question to old Canham as he entered—"Is he here?"—and George bounded up the stairs.

Ann Canham, who was standing over the bed—her head just escaped the low ceiling—turned to George. Trouble and pain were on her countenance as she spoke to him.

"He is in delirium now, sir. I was afeard he would be."

George Ryle was too astonished to make any reply. Never had he cast a shade of suspicion to Rupert's being concealed at the lodge. "Has he been here long?" he whispered.

"All along, sir, since the night he was missed," was the reply of Ann Canham. "After I had got home that night, a quarter-of-an-hour it might be, and I was telling father about Master Rupert's having took the half-loaf in his hunger, he come knocking at the door to be let in. Chattaway and him had met and quarrelled, he told me, and he was knocked down, and his shoulder was hurt, and he felt tired and sick; and he said he'd stop with us till morning, and be away afore daylight, so that we should not get into trouble for sheltering him. He got me to lend him my pen and ink, and he wrote a letter to that there foreign gentleman, Mr. Daw. After that, with a dreadful deal of pressing, sir, I got him to come up to this here bed, and I lay on the settle downstairs for the night. Afore daylight I was up, and had the fire alight, and the kettle on, to make him a cup o' tea afore he started, but he did not come down. I came up here and found him ill. His shoulder was stiff and painful, and he was bruised and sore all over, and he thought he couldn't get out o' bed. Well, sir, he stopped, and he have been here ever since, getting worse, and me just frightened out of my life, for fear he should be found by Mr. Chattaway or them police, and took off to prison. I was sick for the whole day after, sir, that time that Mr. Bowen called me into his station-house and set on to question me."

George was occupied looking at Rupert. There could not be a doubt that he was in a state of partial delirium. George feared there could not be a doubt that he was in a state of danger. The bed was low and narrow, evidently hard, the flock of the mattress collected into lumps; the bolster small and almost as low as the bed. Rupert's head lay on it quietly enough; his hair, which had grown very long since his confinement, fell around him in a wavy mass; his cheeks wore the hectic of fever, his blue eyes were unnaturally bright. There was no speculation in those eyes. They were partially closed,