her! He drew her hand in his, he bent his face—almost as hectic with excitement as the unhappy Rupert's, hard by, was with fever—near to hers.

"Maude! what will you give me for the news that I have heard? I can give you tidings of Rupert. He is not dead! He is not very far away!"

For an instant her heart stood still. But George glanced round as with fear, and there was a sadness in his tone.

"He is taken!" she exclaimed, her pulses bounding on.

"No. But care must be observed if we would prevent it. He is, in that sense, at liberty, and very near to us. But it is not all sunshine, Maude; he is exceedingly ill."

"Where is he?" she gasped.

"Will you compose yourself if I take you to him? But we have need of great caution; we must make sure that no prying eyes are spying at us."

Her very agitation proved how great had been the strain upon her nervous system; for a few minutes he thought she would faint, there, leaning against the trees as she stood. "Only take me to him, George," she murmured. "I will bless you for ever."

Into the lodge and up old Canham's narrow and perpendicular staircase he led her. She entered the room timidly, not with the eager bound of hope fulfilled, but with slow and hesitating steps, almost as she had once entered into the presence of the dead, that long ago night at Trevlyn Farm.

He lay as he had lain when George went out: the eyes fixed, the head beginning to turn restlessly, the one hand picking at the coarse brown sheet. "Come in, Maude; there is nothing to fear; but he will not know you."

She went in with her trembling hands, her changing cheeks. She stood for a moment gazing at him who lay there, as though it required time to take in the scene, and then she fell on her knees in a strange burst, half joy, half grief, and kissed his hands, and his fevered lips.

"Oh, Rupert, my brother! My brother Rupert."

CHAPTER XLVIII.

DANGER.

THE residence of the surgeon, Mr. King, was situated on the road to Barbrook, not far from the parsonage. It was a small, square, red-brick house, only two storeys high, with a great bronze knocker on the door, which was particularly narrow and modest. If you wanted to enter, you could either raise this knocker, which would most likely bring forth Mr. King himself in answer; or, ignoring ceremony—for ceremony was not much in fashion in that remote locality—you could turn the handle and walk in of your own accord, as George Ryle did, and admitted himself into the strip of a passage. On the right was the parlour, quite a fashionable room, with a tiger-skin stretched out by way of hearth-rug; on the left was a small apartment fitted up with bottles and pill-boxes, where Mr. King saw his patients. One sat there as George Ryle entered, and the surgeon turned round, as he poured some liquid from what looked like a jelly-glass with a spout, into a half-pint green glass bottle.

Now, of all the disagreeable *contretemps* that could have occurred, to meet that particular patient George felt to be about the worst. Ann Canham had not been more confounded at the sight of Policeman Dumps's head over the hedge, than George was at Policeman Dumps himself—for it was no other than that troublesome officer who sat in the patient's chair, the late afternoon's sun streaming on his head. George's active mind hit on a ready excuse for his own visit.

"Is my mother's medicine ready, Mr. King?"

"The medicine ready! Why, I sent it three good hours ago!"

"Did you? I understood them to say—— But there's no harm done; I was coming down this way. What a nice warm afternoon it is!" he exclaimed, throwing himself on a chair as if he would take a little rest. "Have you been having a tooth drawn, Dumps?"

"No, sir, but I've got the face-ache awful," was the reply of the policeman, who was holding a handkerchief to his right cheek. "It's what they call tic-douloureux, I fancy, for it comes on by

fits and starts. I be out of sorts altogether, and I thought I'd ask Doctor King to make me up a bottle of physic."

So the physic was for Dumps. Mr. King seemed a long time over it, measuring this liquid, measuring that, shaking it all up together, and gossiping the while. George, in his impatience, thought it was never coming to an end. Dumps seemed to be in no hurry to go, Mr. King in no hurry to dismiss him. They talked over half the news of the parish. They spoke of Rupert Trevlyn and his prolonged absence, and Mr. Dumps gave it as his opinion that "if he warn't in hiding somewhere, he were gone for good." Whether Mr. Dumps meant gone to some foreign terrestrial country, or into a celestial, he did not particularize. But George liked not the tone given to the words "in hiding;" he fancied it too significant a one.

Utterly out of patience he rose and left the room, standing outside against the door-post, as if he would watch the passers-by. Perhaps the movement imparted an impetus to Mr. Dumps, for he also rose and took his bottle of medicine from the hands of the surgeon. But he lingered yet: and George thought he *never was* coming forth.

That desirable consummation did arrive at last. The policeman departed, and paced away on his beat with his official tread. George returned indoors.

"I fancied you were waiting to see me," observed Mr. King. "Is anything the matter?"

"Not with me. I want to put you upon your honour, doctor," continued George, a momentary smile crossing his lips. And it may as well be remarked, for the benefit of hypercritics, that the salutation "doctor" was universally used in Barbrook to Mr. King, as it is in many rural districts to general practitioners. The poor used it, believing it to be his proper title; the rich, from familiar custom.

"To put me upon my honour!" echoed the surgeon, staring at George.

"I wish to let you into a secret; but you must give me your word of honour that you will be a true man, and not betray it. In short, I want to enlist your sympathies, your kindly nature, heartily in the cause."

"I suppose some of the poor have got into trouble?" cried Mr. King, not very well knowing what to make of the words.

"No," said George. "Let me put a case to you. One who is under the ban of the law and of his fellow-men, whom a word from them could betray to years of punishment—this one is lying in sore need of medical skill; if he cannot obtain it he may soon be past its aid. Will you be the good Samaritan, and give it; and faithfully keep the secret?"

Mr. King regarded George attentively, slowly rubbing his bald head: he was a man of six-and-sixty now. "Are you speaking," he asked, "of Rupert Trevlyn?"

George paused, perhaps rather taken aback; but the surgeon's face was a kindly one, its expression benevolent. "What if I were? Would you be true to *him?*"

"Yes, I would: and I am surprised that you thought it needful to ask. George, were the greatest criminal on earth lying in secret, and wanting my aid as a doctor, I would give it and be silent. I go as a healing man; I don't go as a policeman. Were a doctor, taken to a patient under such circumstances, to betray trust, I should consider that he had violated his duty. Medical men are not informers."

"I felt that we might trust you," said George. "It is Rupert Trevlyn. He took refuge that night at old Canham's, it seems, and has been ill ever since, growing worse and worse. But they fear danger now, and thought fit this afternoon to send for me. Rupert scrawled a few lines himself, but before I could get there he was delirious."

"Is it fever?"

"Low fever, Ann Canham says. It may go on to worse, you know, doctor."

Mr. King nodded his head. "Where can they have concealed him at Canham's? There's no place for it."

"He is upstairs in a bed-closet. The most stifling hole! I felt ill whilst I stayed there. It is a perplexing affair altogether. That place of itself is enough to kill any one in a fever, and there's no chance of removing him from it. There's hardly a chance of getting you in to see him: it must be accomplished in the most cautious manner. Were Chattaway to see you going in, who knows what it might lead to? If he should, by ill luck, see you," added George, after a pause, "your visit is to old Canham, remember."

Mr. King gave his head its short, emphatic nod; his frequent substitute for an answer. "Rupert Trevlyn at Canham's!" he exclaimed. "Well, you have surprised me!"

"I cannot tell you how I was surprised," returned George. "But we had better be going; I fear he is in danger."

"Ay. Delirious, you say?"

"I think so. He was quiet, but he evidently did not know me. He did not know Maude; I met her as I was leaving the lodge, and thought it only kind to tell her of the discovery. It has been a most anxious time for her."

"There's another that it's an anxious time for; and that's Madam Chattaway," remarked the surgeon. "I was called in to see her a few days ago. But I can do nothing for her: the malady is on the mind. Now I am ready."

He had been putting one or two papers in his pocket, probably containing some cooling powder or other remedy for Rupert. George walked with him: he wished to go in with him if it could be managed, he was very anxious to hear his opinion of Rupert. They pursued their way unmolested, meeting no one of more consequence than Mr. Dumps, who appeared to be occupied in nursing his cheek.

"So far so good," cried George, as they came in sight of the lodge. "But now comes the tug of war. my walking with you, if seen, is nothing; but to be seen entering the lodge with you might be a great deal. There seems no one about."

Ah! unlucky chance! By some untoward fatality the master of Trevlyn Hold emerged in sight, coming quickly down the avenue, at the moment that Mr. King had his feet on the lodge steps to enter. George suppressed a groan of irritation

"There's no help for it, doctor: you must have your wits about you," he whispered. "*I* shall go straight on as if I had come to pay a visit to the Hold."

Mr. King was not perhaps the best of men to "have his wits about him" on a sudden emergency, and almost as the last breathed word left George's lips, Mr. Chattaway was upon them.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Chattaway," said George. "Is Cris at home?"

George continued his way as he spoke, brushing past Mr. Chattaway without stopping. You know what a very coward is self-consciousness. The presence of Chattaway at that ill-omened moment set them all inwardly trembling. George, the surgeon, old Canham sitting inside, and Ann peeping from the corner of the window, felt one and all as if Chattaway must divine some part of the great secret locked within their breasts.

"Cris? I don't think Cris is at home," called out Mr. Chattaway to George. "He went out after dinner."

"I am going to see," replied George, looking back to speak. The little delay had given the doctor time to collect himself,

and he strove to look and speak as much at ease as possible. He stood on the lodge step, waiting to greet Mr. Chattaway. It would never do for him to make believe he was not going into the lodge, as George did, for Mr. Chattaway had seen him step up to it.

"How d'ye do, Mr. Chattaway? Fine weather this!"

"We shall have a change before long; the glass is shifting. Anybody ill here?" continued Mr. Chattaway.

"Not they, I hope!" returned the surgeon with a laugh. "I give old Canham a look in now and then, when I am passing and can spare the time, just for a dish of gossip and to ask after his rheumatism. I suppose you thought I had quite forgotten you," he added, turning to the old man, who had risen now, and stood leaning on his crutch, looking, if Mr. Chattaway could but have understood it, half frightened to death. "It's a long while since I was here, Mark."

He sat down on the settle as he spoke, as if to intimate that he intended to take a dish of gossip then. Mr. Chattaway—ah! can he suspect? thought old Mark as he entered the lodge; a thing he did not do once in a year. Conscience does make cowards of us—and it need not be altogether a guilty conscience to do this—and it was rendering Ann Canham as one paralyzed. She would have given the whole world to leave the room and go up to Rupert, and guard, so far as her presence could guard, against any noise he might make; but she feared the construction that might be put upon it, the suspicion it might excite. Foolish fears! Had Rupert not been there, Ann Canham would have passed in and out of the room unrestrainedly, without fearing its conveying any suspicion to Mr. Chattaway.

"Madam Chattaway said you were ill, I remember," said he to Mark Canham. "Fever, I understood. She said something about seeing your fever mixture at the chemist's at Barmester."

Ann Canham turned hot and cold. She did not dare to even glance at her father, still less could she prompt him; but it so happened that she, willing to spare him unnecessary worry, had not mentioned the little episode of meeting Mrs. Chattaway at Barmester. Old Mark was cautious, however.

"Yes, Squire. I've had a deal o' fever lately, on and off. Perhaps Doctor King could give me some'at for't, better nor them druggists gives."

"Perhaps I can," said Mr. King. "I'll have a talk with you presently. How is Madam to-day, Mr. Chattaway?"

"She's as well as usual, except for grumbling," was the ungracious answer. And the master of Trevlyn Hold, perhaps not finding it particularly lively there, went out as he delivered it, giving a short adieu to Mr. King.

Meanwhile, George Ryle reached the Hold. Maude saw his approach from the drawing-room window, and came herself to the hall-door and opened it. "I wish to speak to you," she softly whispered.

He followed her into the room; there was no one in it. Maude closed the door, and spoke in a gentle whisper.

"May I dare to tell Aunt Edith?"

George looked dubious. "That is a serious question, Maude."

"It would raise her, as may be said, to renewed life," returned Maude, her tone one of impassioned earnestness. "George, if this suspense is to continue, she will sink under it. It was very, very bad for me to bear, and I am young and strong; and I fear my aunt gets the dreadful doubt upon her now and then whether—whether—that is not true that was said of Mr. Chattaway; whether Rupert was not killed that night. Oh, George, let me tell her!"

"Maude, I should be as pleased for her to know it as you. My only doubt is, whether she would *dare* to keep the secret from her husband, Rupert being actually within the precincts of the Hold."

"She can be stronger in Rupert's cause than you deem. I am sure that she will be safe as you—as I."

"Then let us tell her, Maude."

Maude's eyes grew bright with satisfaction. Taking all circumstances into view, there was not much cause for congratulation; but, compared with what had been, it seemed as joy to Maude, and her heart was light. The young are ever sanguine; illness wears not a dangerous aspect to them, and this of Rupert's brought to her little fear.

"I shall never repay you, George," she cried, with enthusiasm, lifting her eyes gratefully to his. "I shall never repay you for allowing me to tell my poor aunt Edith."

George laughed, and made a sudden prisoner of her. "I can repay myself, now, Maude."

And Mrs. Chattaway was told.

In the dusk of that same evening, when the skies were grey to darkness, and the trees on either side the lonely avenue were damp and gloomy, there glided one by them with timid and

cautious step. It was Mrs. Chattaway. A soft black shawl was thrown over her head and shoulders, and her gown was black; good precautions, rendering her less easy to be observed; and curious eyes might be about. She kept close to the trees as she stole along, ready to conceal herself amidst them if necessary.

And it was necessary. Surely there was a fatality clinging to that spot this evening, or else Mr. Chattaway was haunting it, perhaps in suspicion. One moment more, and he would have met his wife; but she heard the footsteps in time.

Her heart beating, her hands pressed upon her bosom, she waited in her dark hiding-place until he had gone past. She waited until she believed he was in safety in the Hold, and then she went on.

The shutters were closed at the lodge, and Mrs. Chattaway knocked softly at them. Alas! alas! I tell you there was certainly some untoward fate in the ascendant. In the very act of doing so she was surprised by Cris. He was running in at the gate.

"Goodness, mother! who was to know you in that guise? Why, what on earth are you shaking at?"

"You have startled me, Cris. I did not know *you;* I thought it some strange man running in upon me."

"What are you doing down here?"

Ah! what was she doing? What was she to say? what excuse to make? She choked down her throbbing breath, and strove to speak plausibly.

"Poor old Canham has been so ailing, Cris. I must just step in to see him."

Cris tossed his head in scorn. To make friendly visits to sick old men was not in *his* line. "I'm sure I should not trouble myself about that old Canham if I were you, mother," cried he.

He ran on as he spoke, but had not gone many steps when he found his mother's arm gently laid on his.

"Cris, dear, oblige me by not saying anything of this at home. Your papa has prejudices, you know; he thinks as you do; and perhaps he would be angry with me for coming. But I like to visit those who are ill, to say a kind word to them; perhaps because I am so often ill myself."

"I shan't bother myself to say anything about it," was Cris's ungracious response. "I'm sure you are welcome to go, mother, if it affords you any pleasure. Ugh! fine fun it must

be to sit with that rheumatic old Canham! But as to his being ill, he is not—if you mean worse than usual: I have seen him about to-day."

Cris finally went off, and Mrs. Chattaway returned to the door, which was gingerly opened about an inch by Ann Canham. "Let me in, Ann! let me in!"

She did not wait, she pushed her way in; and Ann Canham, all in a tremor, shut and bolted the door. Ann Canham's tactics were uncertain: she was not aware whether or not it was known to Mrs. Chattaway. That lady's first words enlightened her, spoken as they were in the lowest whisper.

"Is he better to-night? What does Mr. King say?"

Ann Canham lifted her hands in an access of trouble. "He's not better, Madam; he seems worse. And Mr. King said it would be necessary that he should visit him once or twice a day: and how can he dare venture? It passed off very well his saying this afternoon that he just called in in passing to see old father; but he couldn't make that excuse to Mr. Chattaway a second time."

"To Mr. Chattaway!" she quickly repeated. "Did Mr. Chattaway see Mr. King here?"

"Worse luck, and he did, Madam. He came in with him."

A fear that almost seemed ominous arose to the heart of Mrs. Chattaway. "If we could only get him from here to a safe distance!" she exclaimed. "There would be less danger then."

But it could not be. Rupert was too ill to be moved. Mrs. Chattaway was turning to the stairs, when a gentle knocking was heard at the outer door.

It was only Mr. King. Mrs. Chattaway eagerly accosted him with the one anxious question—was Rupert in danger?

"Well, I hope not: not in actual danger," was the surgeon's answer. "But—you see—circumstances are against him."

"Yes," she said, hesitatingly, not precisely understanding to what circumstances he alluded. Mr. King resumed.

"Nothing is more essential in these cases of low fever than plenty of fresh air and generous nourishment. The one he cannot get, lying where he does; to obtain the other may be almost as difficult. If these low fevers cannot be checked, they go on very often to—to——"

"To what?" she rejoined, a terrible dread upon her that he meant to say, "to death."

"To typhus," quietly remarked the surgeon.

"Oh, but that is dangerous!" she cried, clasping her hands. "*That* sometimes goes on to death."

"Yes," said Mr. King; and it struck her that his tone was significant.

"But you must try and prevent it, doctor—you must prevent it, and save him," she cried; and her imploring accent, her trembling hands, proved to the surgeon how great was her emotion.

He shook his head: the issues of life and death were not in his power. "My dear lady, I will do what I am enabled to do; more, I cannot. We poor human doctors can only work under the hand of God."

CHAPTER XLIX.

A RED-LETTER DAY AT TREVLYN FARM.

THERE are some happy days in the most monotonous, the least favoured life; periods on which we can look back always, even to the life's end, and say, "That was a red-letter day!"

Such a day had arisen for Trevlyn Farm. Perhaps never, since the unhappy accident which had carried away its master, had so joyful a one dawned for Mrs. Ryle and George—certainly never one that brought half the satisfaction; for George Ryle was going up to the Hold that day to clear off the last instalment of the debt to Mr. Chattaway.

It was the lifting of a heavy tax; the removal of a cruel nightmare—a nightmare that had borne them down, that had all but crushed them with its cruel weight. How they had toiled, and striven, and persevered, and saved, George and Nora alone knew. They knew it far better than Mrs. Ryle; she had joined in the saving, but very little in the work. To Mrs. Ryle the debt seemed to have been cleared off quickly—far more quickly than had appeared likely at the time of Mr. Ryle's death. And so it had been. George Ryle was one of those happy people who believe in the special interposition and favour of God; and he believed that God had shown favour to him, and helped him with prosperity. It could not be denied that Trevlyn Farm had been favoured with remarkable prosperity since George's reign at it. Season after