Miss Diana Trevlyn, and stopped to shake hands with her. "You have been paying your rent, I suppose," she said.

"My rent and something else," replied George, in high spirits—and the removal of that incubus which had so long lain on him had sent them up to fever heat. "I have handed over the last instalment of the debt and interest, Miss Diana, and have the receipt safe here"—touching his breast-pocket. "I have paid it under protest, as I have always told Mr. Chattaway; for I fully believe that Squire Trevlyn cancelled it."

"If I thought that my father cancelled it, Mr. Chattaway should never have had my approbation in pressing it," severely spoke Miss Diana. "Is it true that you think of leaving Trevlyn Farm? Rumour says so."

"Quite true. It is time I began life on my own account. I have been asking Mr. Chattaway to let me have the Upland."

"The Upland! You!" There was nothing offensive in Miss Diana's exclamation: it was spoken in simple surprise.

"Why not?" said George. "I may be thinking of getting a wife; and the Upland is the only farm in the neighbourhood that I would take her to."

Miss Diana smiled in answer to his joke, as she thought it. "The house on the Upland Farm is quite a mansion," she returned, keeping up the jest. "Will no inferior one suffice her?"

"No. She is a gentlewoman born and bred, and must live as such."

"George, you speak as if you were in earnest. Are you really thinking of being married?"

"If I can get the Upland Farm. But——"

George was quite startled from the conclusion of his sentence. Over Miss Diana's shoulder, gazing at him with a strangely wild expression, was the face of Octave Chattaway, her lips apart, a crimson glow on her cheeks.

CHAPTER L.

A DILEMMA IN MORE WAYS THAN ONE.

About ten days elapsed, and Rupert Trevlyn, lying in concealment at the lodge, was both better and worse. A contradiction, you will say; and it does sound so. The prompt remedies applied by Mr. King had effected their object in abating the fever; it had not gone on to brain-fever or to typhus, and the tendency to delirium was stopped; so far he was better. But these dangerous symptoms had been replaced by others that might prove not less dangerous in the end: great prostration, alarming weakness, and what appeared to be a settled cough. The old tendency to consumption was showing itself more plainly than it had ever shown itself before.

He had had a cough often enough, which had come and gone again, as coughs do come to a great many of us; but the experienced ear of Mr. King detected a difference in this one. "It has a nasty sound in it," the doctor privately remarked to George Ryle. Poor Ann Canham, faint at heart lest this cough should be the means of betraying his presence, pasted up with paper all the chinks of the door, and kept it hermetically closed when any one was downstairs. Things usually go by contrary, you know; and it seemed that the lodge had never been so inundated with callers as it was now.

Two great cares were upon those cognizant of the secret: to keep Rupert's presence in the lodge from the knowledge of the outside world, and to supply him with nourishing food. Upon none did the first care—it may be more appropriate to call it fear—press so painfully as upon Rupert himself. His anxiety was incessant; his dread, lest his place of concealment should get to the knowledge of Mr. Chattaway, never ceasing. When he lay awake, his ears were on the strain for what might be happening downstairs, for who might be coming in; if he dozed—as he did several times in the course of the day—he would be haunted by dreams of pursuers, and start wildly up in bed, fancying he saw Mr. Chattaway entering the room, the police at his heels. For twenty minutes afterwards he would lie bathed in perspiration, unable to get the fright or the vision from his mind.

There was no doubt that this contributed to increase his

weakness and to keep him back. Some of you may know what those sudden attacks of perspiration are, and how they tend to make weaker the already weakened frame. By night and by day, sleeping and waking, was the never-ceasing dread of discovery upon Rupert; there was the ever-present vision of the future that must succeed that discovery—the felon's exposure and punishment. Let Rupert Trevlyn's future be what it might; let the result be the very worst, one thing was certain—the actual punishment could not be worse than this its anticipation. Imagination is more vivid than reality. He would lie and go through the whole ordeal of his future trial. He would see himself in the dock, not before the lenient magistrates of Barmester, but before one of the scarlet-robed judges of the realm; he would listen to the damnatory evidence of Mr. Chattaway, of Jim Sanders, bringing home to him the crime and all its shame; he would hear the irrevocable sentence from those grave presiding lips—that of penal servitude. Nothing could be worse for Rupert than these visions. And there was no help for them. Not all the skill that the faculty can put forth, not all the drugs known to science, can prevent the diseased vagaries of the imagination. Had Rupert been in strong bodily health, he might have been able to shake off some of these haunting fears; lying as he did in his weakness, they took almost the form of morbid disease, certainly adding greatly to the sickness of body.

His ear strained, he would start up whenever a footstep was heard to enter, from without, the downstairs room, start up breathing softly to Ann Canham, or to whoever might be sitting with him, "Is that Chattaway?" And Ann would cautiously peep down the ladder of a staircase, or bend her ear to listen, and then tell him who it really was. But sometimes several minutes would elapse before she could find out; sometimes she would be obliged to go down and enter the room upon some plausible errand, and look, and then come back and tell him. The state that Rupert would fall into during these moments of suspense no pen could adequately describe: his heart wildly bounding, the cold perspiration pouring from him; he feeling sick almost unto death. It was little wonder that Rupert grew weaker.

And the fears of discovery were not misplaced. Every hour brought its own danger. It was absolutely necessary that Mr. King should visit him at least once a day, and each time he ran the risk of being seen by Chattaway, or by some one

equally dangerous. Old Canham could not feign to be on the sick list for ever; especially, sufficiently sick to require daily medical attendance. George Ryle ran the risk of being seen entering the lodge; as well as Mrs. Chattaway and Maude, who *could not* abandon their stolen interviews with the poor sufferer. "It is my only happy hour in the four-and-twenty; you must not fail to come to me!" he would say to them, imploringly holding out his trembling and fevered hands. Some evenings Mrs. Chattaway would steal there, sometimes Maude, now and then both of them together.

Underlying it all in Rupert's mind was the sense of guilt, of shame, for having committed so desperate a crime. But that its record was there, in the charred spots where the ricks had been, and in his own remembered conviction, he might have doubted that he himself was the perpetrator. Perhaps, apart from those moments of madness, which the neighbourhood had been content for years to designate as the Trevlyn temper, few living men were so little likely to commit the act as Rupert. It may seem an anomaly to say this, but it was so. Rupert was of a mild, kind temperament, of the sweetest disposition in an ordinary way; one of those inoffensive people of whom we are apt to say, they would not hurt a fly. Of Rupert it was literally true; could he have gone out of his way to save harming a fly, he would have done so. Only in these rare fits was he transformed; and never had the fit been upon him as it was that unhappy night.

It was not so much repentance for the actual crime that overwhelmed him, as surprise that he had perpetrated it. He honestly believed that to commit such a crime in his sober senses would be a moral impossibility. Were the temptation held out to him, it seemed that he should flee in horror, that he should do violence to himself rather than succumb to it. "I was not conscious of the act," he would groan aloud; "I was mad when I did it." Yes, perhaps so; but the consequences remained. Poor Rupert! Remorse was his portion, and he was in truth repenting in sackcloth and ashes.

The other care upon them—supplying Rupert with appropriate nourishment—brought almost as much danger and difficulty in its train as concealing him. A worse cook for the sick, or indeed a worse cook of any sort, than Ann Canham, could not well be found. It was her misfortune, rather than her fault. Living in extreme poverty all her life, no opportunity for learning or improving herself in cooking had ever

been afforded her. The greatest luxury that ever penetrated old Canham's lodge was a bit of toasted or boiled bacon.

It was not invalid dishes that Rupert wanted now. As soon as the fever began to leave him, his appetite returned. It may be known to some of you that in certain cases of incipient consumption, the appetite is scarcely to be satisfied; and this unfortunately became the case with Rupert. Part of a roasted fowl twice or thrice a day; a slice or two out of a sirloin of beef; a cut from a leg of mutton; these he craved and required. In short, had he been at the Hold, or in a plentiful home, he would have played his full part at the daily meals, and assisted their digestion with interludes besides.

How was he to get this, or any part of it, at the lodge? Mr. King said he must have full nourishment, with wine, strong broths, and other things in addition. It was the only chance, in his opinion, to stop or counteract the weakness that was growing upon him, and which bid fair soon to attain an alarming height. Mrs. Chattaway, George Ryle, even the doctor himself would have been quite willing to supply the cost; but cost, though it goes a great way generally speaking, is not always everything. It was not so here. Where was the food to be dressed?—who was to do it?—how was it to be smuggled in? This may appear a very trifling difficulty in theory, but I assure you that in practice it was found almost insurmountable.

"Can't you dress a sweetbread?" Mr. King testily asked Ann Canham, when she was timidly confessing her incapability in the culinary art. "I'd easily manage to get it up here."

This was the first day that Rupert's appetite came back to him, just after the turn of the fever. Ann Canham hesitated. "I'm not sure, sir," she said meekly. "Could it be put in a pot and biled?"

"Put in a pot and biled!" repeated Mr. King, nettled at the question. "Much goodness there'd be in it when it came out! It's just blanched; blanched well, mind you, and dipped in egg and crumbs, and toasted in the Dutch oven. That's the nicest way of doing them."

Egg and crumbs in connection with meat dishes were as much of a mystery to Ann Canham as sweetbreads themselves. She shook her head. "And if, by ill luck, Mr. Chattaway come in and saw a sweetbread in our Dutch oven afore our fire, sir; or smelt the savour of it as he passed—what then?" she asked. "What excuse could we make to him?"

This was a phase of the difficulty all round, which had not before presented itself to the surgeon's mind. It was one that could not well be got over; the more he dwelt upon it, the more he became convinced that it could not. George Ryle, Mrs. Chattaway, Maude, all, when appealed to, said it could not. There was too much at stake to permit the risk of exciting any suspicions on the part of Mr. Chattaway; and unusual cooking in the lodge would inevitably excite them.

But it was not only Mr. Chattaway. Others who possessed noses were in the habit of passing the lodge: Cris, his sisters, Miss Diana, and many more: and some of them were in the habit of coming into it. Ann Canham was giving mortal offence, was causing much wonder, in declining her usual places of work: and many a disappointed housewife, following Nora Dickson's example, had come up, in consequence, to invade the lodge and express her sentiments personally upon the point. Ann Canham, than whom one less able to contend or to hold out against another's strong will could not be, was driven to the very verge of desperation in trying to frame plausible excuses, and she had serious thoughts of making believe to take to her bed herself—had she possessed just then a bed to take to.

No, it was impossible. She could not give out that her father was so poorly "in'ardly" as to render it unsafe to leave him—for all the excuses had to revolve round that one point—or allow her astonished visitors to see a sweetbread egged and crumbed, or any similar dainty, browning delicately in the Dutch oven before the fire. The wonder would have raised a commotion, might spread to the ears of Mr. Chattaway, and one, more cunning than the rest, might connect that unusual dish and Rupert Trevlyn together. At least, it so appeared to those who were interested in him, who lived in daily dread, almost as great as his, lest some untoward discovery should take place.

In the dilemma Mrs. Chattaway came to the rescue. "I will contrive it," she said: "the food shall be supplied from the Hold. My sister does not interfere personally with the preparation of meals, further than to give her orders in the morning, and I know I can manage it."

But, as does many another of us after speaking in impulse, Mrs. Chattaway found she had undertaken what it would scarcely be possible for her to perform. What had flashed across her mind when she spoke was, "The cook is a faithful,

kind-hearted girl, and I know I can trust her." Mrs. Chattaway did not mean trust her with the secret of Rupert, but trust her to cook a few extra dishes quietly and say nothing about it. Yes, she might, she was sure, so far trust her; the girl would cook them and be true. But it now struck Mrs. Chattaway with a sort of horror, to ask herself how she was to get them away when cooked. She could not go into the kitchen herself, have the meat, or fowl, or jelly, or whatever it might be, put in a basin, and walk off with it to the lodge. However, that was an after-care. She spoke to the cook, who was called Rebecca, told her she wanted some nice things dressed for a poor pensioner of *her own*, and nothing said about it. The girl was pleased and willing; all the servants were fond of their mistress; and she readily undertook the task and promised silence.

Mrs. Chattaway saw no reason to doubt the girl; quite the contrary. But nevertheless a strange sense of uneasiness lay upon her own heart, and she felt she had undertaken that which it might be impossible to perform.

CHAPTER LI.

A LETTER FOR MR. CHATTAWAY.

ALTHOUGH an insignificant place, Barbrook and its environs received their letters early. The bags were dropped by the London mail train at Barmester in the middle of the night; and as the post-office arrangements at that town were well conducted—which cannot be said for all towns—by eight o'clock Barbrook had its letters.

Rather before that hour than after it, they were delivered at Trevlyn Hold. Being the residence of chiefest importance in the neighbourhood, the postman was in the habit of beginning his round there; it had been so in imperious old Squire Trevlyn's time, and it was so still. Thus it generally happened that breakfast would be commencing at the Hold when the post came in.

It was a morning of which we must take some notice—a morning which, as Mr. Chattaway was destined afterwards to find, he would have cause to remember, to date from, to his dying day. If Miss Diana Trevlyn happened to see the postman approaching the house, she would most likely walk to the hall-door and receive the letters into her own hands. And it was so on this morning.

"Only two, ma'am," the postman said, as he delivered them to her.

She looked at the address of both. The one was a foreign letter, bearing her own name, and she thought she recognized the handwriting of Mr. Daw; the other bore the London postmark, and was superscribed "James Chattaway, Esquire, Trevlyn Hold, near Barmester."

With an eager movement, somewhat foreign to the cold and stately motions of Miss Diana Trevlyn, she broke the seal of the former; there, at the hall-door as she stood. A thought had flashed into her mind, that the boy Rupert might have found his way at length to Mr. Daw, and that gentleman be conveying intimation of the same—as Miss Diana by letter had requested him to do. It was just the contrary, however. Mr. Daw wrote to beg a line of news from Miss Diana, as to whether tidings had been heard of Rupert. He had visited his father and mother's grave the previous day, he observed, and he did not know whether that had caused him to think more of Rupert; but ever since, all the past night and again to-day, he had been unable to get him out of his head; a feeling was upon him (no doubt a foolish one, he added in a parenthesis) that the boy was taken, or that some other misfortune had befallen him, or was about to befall him, and he presumed to request a line from Miss Diana Trevlyn to put him out of suspense.

She folded the letter when read; pushed it into the pocket of her black watered-silk apron, and returned to the breakfast-room, carrying the one for Mr. Chattaway. As she did so, her eyes happened to fall upon the back of the letter, and she saw it was stamped with the name of a firm—Connell, Connell, and Ray.

She knew the firm by name; they were solicitors of great respectability in London. Indeed, she remembered to have entertained Mr. Charles Connell at the Hold for a few days in her father's lifetime, that gentleman being at the time engaged in some law business for Squire Trevlyn. They must be old men now, she knew; those brothers Connell; and Mr. Ray, she believed to have heard, was son-in-law to one of them.

"What can they have to write to Chattaway about?" marvelled Miss Diana; but the next moment she remembered that