

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 post-

A LETTER FOR MR. CHATTAWAY.

man 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

they were the agents of Peterby and Jones, of Barmester, and the matter was solved in her mind: some law matters, she supposed, connected with the estate.

Miss Diana swept to her place at the head of the breakfast-table. It was filled, with the exception of two of its seats. The arm-chair opposite to her own was vacant, Mr. Chattaway's; and Cris's seat on the side. Cris was not down, but Mr. Chattaway had gone out to the men. Mrs. Chattaway was in her place next Miss Diana. She had used rarely to be down in time to begin breakfast with the rest, but that was altered now. Since these late fears concerning Rupert, it seemed that she could not rest in her bed, and would quit it with morning light.

Mr. Chattaway came in as Miss Diana was pouring out the tea, and she passed the letter down to him. Glancing casually at it as it lay by his plate, he began helping himself to some cold partridge. Cris was a capital shot, and the Hold was generally well supplied with game.

"It is from Connell and Connell," remarked Miss Diana.

"From Connell and Connell!" repeated Mr. Chattaway, in a tone of bewilderment, as if he did not recognize the name.

"Connell, Connell, and Ray, it is now," returned Miss Diana. "The firm of the old days comes more familiar to me than the later one."

"What should they be writing to me about?" cried Mr. Chattaway. But he was too busy with the partridge just then to ascertain.

"About some local business, I conclude," observed Miss Diana. "Octave, send me a small piece of that bacon. They are Peterby's agents, you know."

"And what if they are?" retorted Mr. Chattaway. "Peterbys have nothing to do with me."

That was so like Mr. Chattaway! To cavil as to what might be the contents of the letter, rather than to put the question at rest by opening it. However, when he looked off from his plate to stir his tea, he took it up and tore open the envelope.

He tore open the envelope, and cast his eyes on the letter. Miss Diana happened to be looking at him. She saw him gaze at it with an air of bewilderment; she saw him go over it again—there were apparently but some half-dozen lines—and then she saw him turn green. You may cavil at the expression if you like, but it is a correct one. The leaden complexion with

which nature had favoured Mr. Chattaway did assume a green tinge in moments of especial annoyance.

"What's the matter?" questioned Miss Diana.

Mr. Chattaway replied by a half-muttered word, and dashed the letter down. "I thought we had had enough of that folly," he presently said.

"What folly?"

He did not answer, although the query was put by Miss Diana Trevlyn. She pressed it, and Mr. Chattaway flung the letter across the table to her. "You can read it, if you choose." With some curiosity Miss Diana took it up, and read as follows:—

"SIR,

"We beg to inform you that the true heir of Trevlyn Hold, Rupert Trevlyn, is about to put in his claim to the estate, and will in a short period require to take possession of the Hold. We have been requested to write this intimation to you, and we do so in a friendly spirit, that you may be prepared to quit the house, and not be taken unawares, when Mr. Trevlyn—henceforth Squire Trevlyn—shall arrive at it.

"We are, sir, your obedient servants,

"CONNELL, CONNELL, AND RAY.

"James Chattaway, Esquire."

"Then Rupert's not dead!" were the first words that broke from Miss Diana's lips. And the exclamation, and its marked tone of satisfaction, proved of what nature had been her fears for Rupert.

Mrs. Chattaway started up with white lips. "What of Rupert?" she gasped; believing nothing else than that discovery had come.

Miss Diana, without in the least thinking it necessary to consult Mr. Chattaway's pleasure first, handed her the letter. She read it rapidly, and her fears calmed down.

"What an absurdity!" she exclaimed. Knowing what she did know of the helpless position of Rupert, the contents sounded not only absurd, but impossible. "Some one must have written it mischievously; on purpose to frighten you, James."

"Yes," said Mr. Chattaway, compressing his thin lips; "it comes from the Peterby quarter. A felon threatening to take possession of Trevlyn Hold!"

But in spite of the scorn he strove to throw into his manner;

in spite of the indomitable resolution within him to bring Rupert to punishment when he did appear—and a felon could not contend for Trevlyn Hold, Mr. Chattaway was right there; in spite of even his wife, Rupert's best friend, acknowledging the absurdity of this letter, it did disturb him in no measured degree. He stretched out his hand for it, and read it again, pondering every word; he pushed his plate from him, as he gazed on it. He had had enough breakfast for one day; he gulped down his tea, and declined to take more. Yes, it was shaking his equanimity to its centre; and the Miss Chattaways and Maude, only imperfectly understanding what was amiss, looked at each other, and at him.

Mrs. Chattaway began to feel indignant that poor Rupert's name should be thus made use of; only, so far as she could see, for the purpose of exciting Mr. Chattaway further against him. "But Connells' is a most respectable firm," she said aloud, following out her thoughts; "I cannot comprehend it."

"I say it comes from Peterby," roared Mr. Chattaway. "He and Rupert are in league. I dare say Peterby knows where he's concealed."

"Oh no, no; you are mistaken," burst incautiously from the lips of Mrs. Chattaway.

"No! Do you know where he is, pray, that you speak so confidently?"

The taunt recalled her to a sense of the danger. "James, what I meant to say was this: that it is scarcely likely Rupert would be in league with any one against you," she said in low tones. "I think he would rather try to conciliate you."

"If you think this letter emanates from Peterby's house, why don't you go down and demand of them what they mean by writing it?" interposed Miss Diana Trevlyn, in her straightforward, matter-of-fact tone.

He nodded his head significantly. "I shall not let the grass grow under my feet before I am there."

"I cannot think it's Peterby and Jones," resumed Miss Diana. "They are quite as respectable as the Connells, and I don't believe they would league themselves with Rupert, after what he has done. I don't believe they would league themselves secretly to work mischief against any one. Anything they may have to do, they'd do openly."

Had Mr. Chattaway prevailed with himself so far as to put his temper and his prejudices aside, this might not have been far from his own opinion. He had always, in a resentful sort

of way, deemed Mr. Peterby to be an honourable man; he had never cared to be in his presence—as mean-spirited, false-hearted men, conscious of their own deficiency of truth, do shrink from upright ones. But if Peterby was not at the bottom of this, who was? Connell, Connell, and Ray were his town agents.

The very uncertainty only made him the more eager to get to them and set the matter at rest. He knew it was of no use attempting to see Mr. Peterby before ten o'clock, but he would see him then. He ordered his horse to be ready, and rode into Barmester attended by his groom. As ten o'clock struck, he was at their office-door.

A quarter-of-an-hour's detention, and then he was admitted to Mr. Peterby's room. That gentleman was sweeping a heap of open letters into a corner of the table at which he sat, and the master of Trevlyn Hold shrewdly suspected that his waiting had been caused by Mr. Peterby's opening and reading of these letters. He proceeded at once to the business that brought him there, and taking his own letter out of his pocket, handed it to Mr. Peterby.

"Connell, Connell, and Ray are your agents in London, I believe? They used to be."

"And are still," said Mr. Peterby. "What is this?"

"Be so good as to read it," replied Mr. Chattaway.

The lawyer ran his eyes over it, carelessly, as it seemed to those eyes watching him. Then he looked up. "Well?"

"In writing this letter to me—I received it, you perceive, by post this morning, if you'll look at the date—did they, Connell and Connell, get instructions for it from you?"

"From me!" echoed Mr. Peterby. "Not they. I know nothing at all about it. I can't make it out."

"You are a friend of Rupert Trevlyn's, and they are your agents," remarked Mr. Chattaway, after a pause.

"My good sir, I tell you I know nothing whatever of this. Connells are our agents; but I never sent any communication to them with regard to Rupert Trevlyn in my life; never had cause to send one. If you ask me my opinion, I should say that if the lad—should he be still living—entertains hopes of coming into Trevlyn Hold after this last escapade of his, he must be a great simpleton. I expect you'd prosecute him, instead of giving him up the Hold."

"I should," quietly answered Mr. Chattaway. "But what do Connell and Connell mean by sending me such a letter as this?"

"It is more than I can tell you, Mr. Chattaway. We have received a communication from them ourselves this morning upon the subject. I was opening it when you were announced to me as being here."

He bent over the letters previously spoken of, selected one, and held it out to Mr. Chattaway. Instead of being written by the firm, it was a private letter from Mr. Ray to Mr. Peterby. It merely stated that the true heir of Squire Trevlyn, Rupert, was about shortly to take possession of his property, the Hold, and they (Connell, Connell, and Ray) should require Mr. Peterby to act as local solicitor in the proceedings, should a solicitor be necessary.

Mr. Chattaway began to feel cruelly uneasy. Rupert had committed that great fault, and was in danger of punishment for it—*would* be punished for it by his country's laws; but in this new uneasiness that important fact seemed to lose half its significance. "And you have not instructed them?" he repeated.

"Nonsense, Mr. Chattaway! it is not likely. I cannot make out what they mean, any more than you can. The nearest conclusion I can come to is, that they must be acting from instructions received from that half-parson who was here, that Mr. Daw."

"No," said Mr. Chattaway, "I think not. Miss Trevlyn heard from that man this morning, and he appears to know nothing of Rupert. He asks for news of him."

"Well, it is a curious thing altogether. I shall write by to-night's post to Ray, and inquire what he means."

Mr. Chattaway, suspicious Mr. Chattaway, pressed one more question. "Have you any notion at all where Rupert is likely to be? That he is in hiding, and accessible to some people, is evident from these letters from Connell's house."

"I have already informed you that I know nothing whatever of Rupert Trevlyn," was the lawyer's answer. "Whether he is alive or whether he is dead I know not. You cannot know less of him yourself than I do."

Mr. Chattaway was obliged to be contented with the answer. He went out and proceeded direct to Mr. Flood's, and laid the letter—his letter—before him. "What sort of thing do you call that?" he intemperately uttered, when it was read. "Connell and Connell must be infamous men to write it."

"Stop a bit," said Mr. Flood, who had his eyes strained on the letter. "There's more in this than meets the eye."

"You don't think it's a joke—done to annoy me?"

"A joke! Connell and Connell would not lend themselves to a joke. No, I don't think it's that."

"Then what do you think?"

Mr. Flood was several minutes before he replied, and his silence drove Mr. Chattaway to the verge of exasperation. "It is difficult to know what to think," said the lawyer presently. "I should be inclined to say they have been brought into personal communication with Rupert Trevlyn, or with somebody acting for him: perhaps the latter is the most probable. And I should also say they must have been convinced, by documentary or other evidence, of there existing a good foundation for Rupert's claims to the Hold. Mr. Chattaway—if I may speak the truth to you—I should dread this letter."

Mr. Chattaway felt as if a bucket of cold water had been suddenly flung over him, and was running down his back. "Why is it that you turn against me?"

"Turn against you! I don't know what you mean. I don't turn against you; quite the opposite. I am willing to act for you; to do anything I legally can to meet the fear."

"Why do you fear?"

"Because Connell, Connell, and Ray are keen and cautious practitioners as well as honourable men, and I do not think they would write a letter so decided as this, unless they knew they were fully justified in doing so, and were prepared to follow it out."

"You are a pretty Job's comforter," gasped Mr. Chattaway.

CHAPTER LII.

A DAY OF MISHAPS.

REBECCA the servant was true. She was true and crafty in her faithfulness to her mistress, and she contrived to get various dainties prepared and conveyed unsuspectingly under her apron, watching her opportunity, to the sitting-room of Madam, where they were hidden away in a closet, and the key turned upon them. So far, so good. But that was not all: the greatest difficulty lay in transporting them to Rupert.

The little tricks and ruses that the lodge and those in its