

CHAPTER LIV.

A GHOST FOR OLD CANHAM.

TREVLYN HOLD was a fine place, the cynosure and envy of the neighbourhood around; and yet it would perhaps be impossible in all that neighbourhood for any family to be found so completely miserable as that which inhabited the Hold. The familiar saying is a very true one: "All is not gold that glitters."

Enough has been said of the trials and discomforts of Mrs. Chattaway; they had been many and varied; but never had trouble accumulated upon her head as it had now. The terrible secret that Rupert was within hail, wasting unto death, was torturing her brain by night and day. It seemed that the whole weight of it lay upon her; that she was responsible for his weal and woe: if he died would reproach not lie at her door, be cast upon her by the world; would remorse not be her portion for ever? It might be thrown in her teeth then that she should have disclosed the secret, and not have left him there to die.

But how disclose it? Since the second letter received from Connell, Connell, and Ray, Mr. Chattaway had been doubly bitter against Rupert—if that was possible; and there could be no manner of doubt that to disclose to him Rupert's hiding-place would only be to consign him to a prison. Mr. Chattaway was another who was miserable in his home. Suspense, anticipation, are far worse than reality; and the present master of Trevlyn Hold would never realize in his own heart the cruel evils attendant on being turned from the Hold (should that consummation arrive) as he was realizing them now. Suspense, dread, uncertainty, are hard to bear; and his days were one prolonged scene of torture. Miss Diana Trevlyn partook of the general discomfort: for the first time in her life a sense of ill oppressed her. She knew nothing of the secret regarding Rupert; she somewhat scornfully threw away the vague ideas imparted by the letters from Connell and Connell; and yet Miss Diana was conscious of being oppressed with a sense of ill, which weighed her down, and made her life a burden.

The evil had come at last. Retribution, which they too surely invoked when they diverted God's laws of right and

justice from their direct course years ago, was working itself out now. Retribution is a thing that *must* come; though tardy, as it had been in this case, it is sure. Look around you, you who have had much of life's experience, who may be drawing into its "sear and yellow leaf." It is impossible but that you must have gathered up in the garner of your mind instances that you have noted in your career. In little things and in great, the working of evil inevitably brings forth its reward. Years, and years, and years may first elapse; so many, that the hour of vengeance seems to have rolled itself away under the glass of time; but we need never hope that, for it cannot be. In your time, ill-doer, or in your children's, it will surely come.

The agony of mind, endured now by the inmates of Trevlyn Hold, seemed punishment enough for a whole lifetime and its misdoings. Should they indeed be turned from it, as these mysterious letters seemed to indicate, that open, tangible punishment would be as nothing to what they were mentally enduring now. And they could not speak of their griefs one to another, and so lessen them in ever so slight a degree. Mr. Chattaway would not speak of the dread that was tugging at his heart-strings—for it seemed to him that only to speak of the *possibility* of being driven forth, might bring it the nearer; and his unhappy wife dared not so much as breathe the name of Rupert, and the fatal secret she held.

She, Mrs. Chattaway, was puzzled more than all by these letters of Connell and Connell's. Mr. Chattaway could trace their source (at least he strove to do so) to the malicious mind and pen of Rupert; but Mrs. Chattaway knew that Rupert it could not well be. Nevertheless, she had been staggered on the arrival of the second to find it explicitly stated that Rupert Trevlyn had written to them to announce his speedy intention of taking possession of the Hold. "Rupert had written to them!" What was she to think? If it was not Rupert, somebody else must have written to them in his name; but who would be likely to trouble themselves now for the lost Rupert?—regarded as dead by three parts of the world. Had Rupert written? Mrs. Chattaway determined again to ask him, and to set the question so far at rest.

But she did not do this immediately after the arrival of the letter; not for two days after. She waited the answer which Mr. Flood wrote up to Connell and Connell, spoken of in the last chapter. As soon as that came, and she found that it

afforded no elucidation whatever, then she resolved to question Rupert upon her next stolen visit to him. That same afternoon, as she returned home on foot from Barmester, she contrived to slip unseen into the lodge.

Rupert was sitting up. Mr. King had given it as his opinion that to lie constantly in bed, as he was doing, was worse for him than anything else; and in truth Rupert need not have been entirely confined to it had there been any other place for him. Old Canham's chamber opposite was more confined, more stifling, inasmuch as when the builder put in the one pane that lighted it from the roof, he had forgotten to make it to open. A small casement opened from the landing, but it did not give air to the rooms. Look at Rupert now, as Mrs. Chattaway enters! He has managed to struggle into his clothes, which hang upon him like bags, and he sits uncomfortably on a small rush-bottomed chair. Rupert's back looks as if it were broken; for he is bent nearly double with weakness, and his lips are white, and his cheeks are hollow, and his poor, weak hands tremble with joy as they are feebly raised in greeting to Mrs. Chattaway. Think what it was for him! lying for long hours, for days, in that stifling room, a prey to his fears, sometimes seeing no one for two whole days—for it was not every evening that an opportunity could be found of entering the lodge. What with the Chattaway's passing and repassing outside the lodge, and Ann Canham's grumbling visitors inside it, I can tell you that an entrance for those, who might not be seen to enter it, was not always within the range of possibility. Look at poor Rupert; at the lighting up of his eye, at the kindling hectic of his cheek!

Mrs. Chattaway contrived to squeeze herself between Rupert and the door, between the wall and the bed, and sat down on the edge of the latter as she took his hand in hers. "I am so glad to see that you have made an effort to get up, Rupert!" she whispered.

"I don't think I shall make it again, Aunt Edith. You have no conception how it has tired me. I was a good half-hour getting into my coat and waistcoat."

"But you will be all the better for it."

"I don't know," said Rupert, in a spiritless tone. "I feel as if there would never be any 'better' for me again."

She began telling him of what she had been purchasing for him at Barmester—a tongue dressed in jelly, a box of sardines, some potted meat, and similar things found in the provision

shops. They were not precisely the dishes suited to Rupert's weakly state; but since the accident to Rebecca he had been fain to put up with what could be thus procured. And then Mrs. Chattaway opened gently upon the subject of the letters.

"It seems so strange, Rupert, quite an inexplicable thing, but Mr. Chattaway has had another of those curious letters from that firm in London, Connell and Connell."

"Has he?" answered Rupert, with apathy.

Mrs. Chattaway looked at him with all the fancied penetration she possessed—in point of fact she was just one of those persons who possess none—but she could not detect the faintest sign of consciousness. "Was there anything about me in it?" he asked wearily.

"It was all about you. It said that you had written to Connell and Connell, stating your intention of taking immediate possession of the Hold."

This a little aroused him. "Connell and Connell have been writing that to Mr. Chattaway! Why, what queer people they must be!"

"Rupert! You have *not* written to them, have you?"

He looked at Mrs. Chattaway in surprise; for she had evidently asked the question seriously. "I am not strong enough to play jokes, Aunt Edith. And if I were, I should not be so senseless as to play *that* joke. What end would it answer?"

"I thought not," she murmured; "I was sure not. Setting everything else aside, Rupert, you are not well enough to write."

"No, I don't think I am. I don't suppose I could get down a side of note-paper if I tried. I could hardly scrawl those lines to George Ryle some time ago—but then the fever was upon me. No, Aunt Edith: the only letter I have written since I became a prisoner here was the one I wrote to Mr. Daw, the night I first took shelter here, just after the encounter with Mr. Chattaway, and Ann Canham posted it at Barmester the next day. What on earth can possess Connell and Connell?"

"Diana argues that Connell and Connell must be receiving these letters, or they would not write to Mr. Chattaway in the manner they are doing. For my part, I can't make it out."

"What does Mr. Chattaway say?" asked Rupert, when a fit of coughing was over. "Is he angry?"

"He is worse than angry," she seriously answered; "he is troubled. He thinks that you are writing them."

"No! Why, he might know that I shouldn't dare to do it: he might know that I am not well enough to write them."

"Nay, Rupert, you forget that Mr. Chattaway does not know you are ill."

"To be sure; I forgot that. But *troubled*? I can't believe that of Mr. Chattaway. How could a poor, weak, friendless chap, such as I, contend for the possession of Trevlyn Hold? Aunt Edith, I'll tell you what it must be. If Connells are not playing this joke themselves, to annoy Mr. Chattaway, somebody must be playing it on them."

Mrs. Chattaway acquiesced in the conclusion: it was the only one at which she could arrive.

"Oh, Aunt Edith, if he would only forgive me!" sighed Rupert. "When I get well—and I should get well, if I could go back to the Hold to Aunt Diana's nursing, and get this fear out of me—I would work night and day to pay him back the cost of the ricks. If he would only forgive me!"

Ah! none knew better than Mrs. Chattaway how vain was the wish! With the walls freshly placarded—as they had been—with further bills offering their reward for the incendiary Rupert Trevlyn; with the bitter animosity rankling in the heart of Mr. Chattaway, bitter and more bitter since that last letter, she could have told Rupert how worse than vain was any hope of forgiveness. She could have told him, had she chosen, of an unhappy scene of the past night, when she, Edith Chattaway, urged on by the miserable state of existing things and her tribulation for Rupert, had so far forgotten prudence as to all but kneel to her husband and beg him to forgive that poor incendiary; and Mr. Chattaway had been excited by it to the very depths of anger; had demanded of his wife whether she were mad or sane, that she should dare to ask it.

"Yes, Rupert," she meekly said, "I wish it also, for your sake. But, my dear, it is just an impossibility."

"If I could be got off safely out of the country, I might go to Mr. Daw for a time, and get up my strength there."

"Yes, *if* you could. But in your weak state discovery would be the result before you were clear from these walls. You cannot take flight of your own accord, and run away in the night. Every one knows you: and the police, we have heard, are keeping their eyes open."

"I'd bribe Dumps, if I had money——"

Rupert's voice dropped. A sort of commotion had arisen suddenly downstairs, and, his fears ever on the alert touching the police and Mr. Chattaway, he put up his finger to enjoin caution, and bent his head to listen. But no strange voice could be distinguished: only those of old Canham and his daughter. A short time, and Ann came up the stairs, looking strange.

"What's the matter?" panted Rupert, who was the first to catch sight of her face.

"I can't think whatever's come to father, sir," she returned. "I was in the back place, a-washing up, and I heard a sort o' cry from him, so I ran in. There he was a-standing with his hair all on end in mortal fright, and afore I could speak he began saying that he see a ghost go past. He's a-staring out o' window and saying of it still. I trust his senses are not a-leaving him!"

To hear this queer assertion from sober-minded, matter-of-fact old Canham, certainly did impart a suspicion that his senses must have deserted him. Mrs. Chattaway rose from her low seat to descend; not on this score, but that she had already lingered longer with Rupert than was prudent. She found old Canham as Ann had described him, with that peculiarly scared look on the face which some people deem equivalent to "the hair standing on end." He was staring with a fixed expression towards the Hold.

"Has anything happened to alarm you, Mark?"

Mrs. Chattaway's gentle question recalled him to himself. He turned towards her, leaning heavily on his stick, the expression of his eyes one of vague terror.

"It happened, Madam, as I had got out o' my seat, and was a-standing to look out o' winder, thinking how fine the a'ter-noon was, and how bad the land wanted rain, when he come in at the gate with a fine silver-headed stick in his hand, a-turning of his head about from side to side as if (but that have struck me since) he was taking note of the old place again to see what changes there might be in it. I was struck all of a heap when I saw his figure; 'twas just the figure it used to be, only maybe a bit younger, less stout like, but when he moved his head this way and looked full at me, I felt as one turned to stone. It was his face, ma'am, if I ever saw it."

"But whose?" asked Mrs. Chattaway, smiling at his incoherence.

Old Canham glanced round before he spoke; he glanced at Mrs. Chattaway, with a half-compassionate, half-inquiring glance, as if not liking to speak. "Madam, it was the old Squire, my late master."

"It was—who?" demanded Mrs. Chattaway, less gentle than usual in her great surprise.

"It was Squire Trevlyn; Madam's father."

Mrs. Chattaway could do nothing but stare. She thought old Canham's senses were decidedly gone.

"There never was a face like his. Miss Maude—that is, Mrs. Ryle now—have his features exact; but she's not as tall and portly, being a woman. Ah, Madam, you may smile at me, but it was Squire Trevlyn."

"But, Mark, you know it is an impossibility."

"Madam, 'twas him. He must ha' come out of his grave for some purpose, and is a-visiting his own again. I never was a believer in them things afore, or thought as the dead come back to life."

Ghosts have gone out of fashion; therefore the enlightened reader will not be likely to endorse old Canham's belief. But I can tell you this much: that when Mrs. Chattaway, turning quickly up the avenue on her way to Trevlyn Hold, saw, at no great distance from her, a gentleman standing to talk to some one whom he had encountered, she stopped, as one in sudden terror, and seemed about to fall or faint. Mrs. Chattaway did not believe in "the dead coming back" any more than old Canham had believed in it; but in that moment's startled surprise she did think she saw her father.

She gazed at the figure standing there, her lips apart, the bright complexion of her face fading to an ashy paleness. Never had she seen so extraordinary a likeness. The tall, fine form, somewhat less full perhaps than of yore, the distinctly-marked features with their firm and haughty expression, the fresh tints of the clear skin, the very manner of his handling that silver-headed stick, spoke in unmistakable terms of Squire Trevlyn.

Not until they parted, the two who were talking, did Mrs. Chattaway observe that the other was Nora Dickson. Nora came down the avenue towards her; the stranger went on with his firm step and his firmly-grasped walking-stick. Mrs. Chattaway was advancing then.

"Nora, who is that?" she gasped.

"I am trying to collect my wits, if they are not scared away

for good," was Nora's response. "Madam Chattaway, you might just have flung me down with a feather. I was walking along, thinking of nothing, except my vexation that you were not at home—for Mr. George charged me to bring this note to you, and to deliver it instantly into your own hands, and nobody else's—when I met him. I didn't know whether to face him, or to scream, or to turn and run; one doesn't like to meet the dead; and I declare to you, Madam Chattaway, I believed, in my confused brain, that it was the dead. I believed it was Squire Trevlyn."

"Nora, I never saw two persons so strangely alike," she breathed, mechanically taking the note from Nora's hand. "Who is he?"

"My brain's at work to discover who he can be," returned Nora, dreamily. "I am trying to put two and two together, and I can't do it; unless the dead shall have come to life—or those whom we have believed dead."

"Nora! you cannot mean my father!" exclaimed Mrs. Chattaway, gazing at her with a strangely perplexed face. "You know that he lies buried in Barbrook churchyard. What did he say to you?"

"Not much. He saw me staring at him, I suppose, and he stopped and asked me if I belonged to the Hold. I answered, no; I did not belong to it; I was Miss Dickson, of Trevlyn Farm. And then it was his turn to stare at me. 'I think I should have known you,' he said. 'At least, I do now that I have the clue. You are not much altered. Should you have known me?' 'I don't know you now,' I answered: 'unless you are old Squire Trevlyn come out of his grave. I never saw such a likeness.'"

"And what did he say?" eagerly asked Mrs. Chattaway.

"Nothing more. He laughed a little at my speech, and went on. Madam Chattaway, will you open the note, please, and see if there's any answer. Mr. George said it was important."

She opened the note, which had lain unheeded in her hand, and read as follows:

"Do not attempt further visits. Suspensions are abroad.

"G. B. R."

She had just attempted one, and paid it. Had it been watched? A rush of fear bounded within her for Rupert's sake.

"There's no answer, Nora," said Mrs. Chattaway: and she turned on her way homewards, not unlike one in a dream. Who *was* that man before her? What was his name? where did he come from? Why should he bear this strange likeness to her dead father? Ah, why, indeed! The truth never for one moment penetrated to the mind of Mrs. Chattaway.

He went on: he, the stranger. When he came to the lawn before the house, he stepped on to it and halted. He looked to this side, he looked to that; he gazed up at the house, into every window, just as one loves to look on returning to a beloved home after an absence of years. He stood with his head thrown back; his right hand stretched out, the stick it grasped planted firm and upright on the ground. How many times had the old Squire Trevlyn stood in the selfsame attitude on that same lawn!

There appeared to be no eyes about; the windows were empty; no one saw him, save Mrs. Chattaway, who hid herself amidst the trees, and furtively watched him. She would not have passed him for the world, and she waited until he should be gone. She was unable to divest her mind of a sensation that was akin to the supernatural, as she shrank from this man who bore so wonderful a resemblance in all ways to her father. He, the stranger, did not detect her behind him, and presently he walked across the lawn, ascended the steps, and tried the door.

But the door was fast. The servants would sometimes slip the bolt as a protection against tramps, and they had probably done so to-day. Seizing the bell-handle, the visitor rang such a peal that Sam Atkins, Cris Chattaway's groom, who happened to be in the house and near the door, flew with all speed to open it. Sam had never known Squire Trevlyn; but in this stranger now before him, he could not fail to remark a great general resemblance to the Trevlyn family.

"Is James Chattaway at home?"

To hear the master of the Hold inquired for in that uncere- monious manner, rather took Sam back; but he answered that he was at home. He had no need to invite the visitor to walk in, for the visitor had walked in of his own accord. "What name, sir?" demanded Sam, preparing to usher the stranger across the hall.

"Squire Trevlyn."

This concluded Sam Atkins's astonishment. "*What* name, sir, did you say?"

"Squire Trevlyn. Are you deaf, man? Squire Trevlyn, of Trevlyn Hold."

And the haughty motion of the head, the firm pressure of the lips, might have put a spectator all too unpleasantly in mind of the veritable old Squire Trevlyn, had one who had known him been there to see.

CHAPTER LV.

THE DREAD COME HOME TO MR. CHATTAWAY.

NOTHING could well exceed Mr. Chattaway's astonishment at hearing that George Ryle wished to make Maude Trevlyn his wife. And nothing could exceed his displeasure. Not that Mr. Chattaway had higher views for Maude, or deemed it an undesirable match for her in a pecuniary point of view, as Miss Diana Trevlyn had felt inclined to deem it. Had Maude chosen to marry without any prospect at all, that would not have troubled Mr. Chattaway. But what did trouble Mr. Chattaway was this—that a sister of Rupert Trevlyn should become connected with George Ryle. In Mr. Chattaway's foolish and utterly groundless prejudices, he had suspected, as you may remember, that George Ryle and Rupert had been ever ready to hatch mischief against him; and he dreaded for his own sake any bond of union that might bring them closer together.

There was something else. By some intuitive perception Mr. Chattaway had detected that misplaced liking of his daughter's for George Ryle: and *this* union would not have been unpalatable to Mr. Chattaway. Whatever may have been his ambitious views for his daughter's settlement in life; whatever may have been his dislike to George Ryle, he was willing to forego it all for his own sake. Every consideration was lost sight of in that one which had always reigned paramount with Mr. Chattaway—self-interest. You have not waited until now to learn that James Chattaway was one of the most selfish men on the face of the earth. Some men like, as far as they can, to do their duty to God and to their fellow-creatures; the master of Trevlyn Hold liked to do it only to himself. It had been his motive-spring through life. And what sort of a