

CHAPTER LVI.

DOUBTS CLEARED AT LAST.

MANY a painting has been handed down to posterity whose features bore not a tithe of the interest that was presented at that moment in the old hall of the Trevlyns. The fine figure of the stranger, standing with the air of a chieftain, of a master, of one who is conscious of his own power of right; the keen gaze of Miss Diana, regarding him with puzzled equanimity; the gradual backing of the servant, as one scared, who will not leave the scene, and yet scarcely dares stay in it; and the slow horror of conviction that was rising to the face of Mr. Chattaway. And there, behind all, stealing into the hall by a side-door, came the timid steps, the pale questioning looks of Mrs. Chattaway, not certain yet whether the intruder was an earthly or a ghostly visitor.

Mr. Chattaway was the first to recover himself. He looked at the stranger with a face that strove to be a haughty one: he would have given the whole world to possess the calm equanimity of the Trevlyns, the unchanged countenance of Miss Diana; but his leaden face wore its worst and greenest tinge, and his lips had a quiver in them as he spoke—and he was conscious of it.

"Whom do you say you are? Squire Trevlyn? He has been in his grave long ago. We do not tolerate impostors here."

"I hope you do not," was the reply of the stranger, turning his face full on the speaker. "I will not in future, I can tell you that. True, James Chattaway: one Squire Trevlyn is in his grave; but he lives again in me. I am Rupert Trevlyn, and the Squire of Trevlyn Hold."

Yes, it was Rupert Trevlyn. The young Rupert Trevlyn of the old days; the runaway heir. He, whom they had so long mourned as dead (though perhaps there had not been much mourning in it), never had been dead, and now had come home, after all these years, to claim his own.

Mr. Chattaway backed against the wall, and stood there staring with his livid face. To contend was impossible. To affect to believe that it was not Rupert Trevlyn and the true heir, the next in legal succession to his father, the old Squire

would have been utter child's play. The well-remembered features of Rupert, the heir, grew upon his memory one by one. Putting aside that speaking likeness to the Squire, to the Trevlyns generally, Mr. Chattaway, now that the first moments of surprise were over, would have recognized him himself. He needed not the acknowledgment of Miss Diana, the sudden recognition of his wife, who darted forward, uttering her brother's name, and fell sobbing in his arms, to convince him that it was indeed Rupert Trevlyn, the indisputable master from henceforth of Trevlyn Hold.

He leaned against the wall, and took in all the despair of his position. The latent fear, nay, the conviction, so long seated in his heart, that he would some time lose Trevlyn Hold, had never pointed to *this*. Mr. Chattaway, in some far-away corner of his mind, had looked vaguely forward to lawsuits and contentions between him and its claimant, poor Rupert, son of Joe. He had surmised that the lawsuits might last for years, he meanwhile keeping possession, perhaps up to the end. He had never expected to have it suddenly wrested from him by indisputable and lawful right; he had never believed that he himself was the usurper; that a nearer heir, and a direct one, the Squire's son, was in existence. Poor Rupert, whom he had plotted against, had never yet been the heir. Joe Trevlyn, the dead, had never been the heir. Rupert, the elder son, had been all the time in existence. He had now come, not as a claimant, not as the heir, but as the master; and he, Chattaway, could not gainsay it. The Squire's will, leaving Trevlyn Hold to his eldest son, had never been cancelled. The codicil gave it to Chattaway only in the event of his death and his brother Joe's. Chattaway only came in *after* them.

There is an old adage to the effect that misfortune never comes from the quarter in which it is looked for. Most certainly Mr. Chattaway had never looked for it from this. He had dreaded, as you know, poor Rupert; he had cast impossible doubts on the will of Squire Trevlyn; he was not sure, but a vague thought had been sometimes upon him that, some time or other, public feeling would so rise against him as to force him to abdicate in favour of Rupert; but never, in his wildest imaginings, had he cast a thought to the possibility of the direct owner, Rupert Trevlyn, being alive. He had believed him as certainly dead as the old Squire whom he had seen nailed down in his coffin.

And this was the explanation of the letters from Connell,

Connell, and Ray, which had so annoyed Mr. Chattaway and puzzled his wife. "Rupert Trevlyn was about to take up his own again—as Squire of Trevlyn Hold." True; but it was this Rupert Trevlyn, not that. It may be that Mr. Chattaway's harsh feeling towards poor Rupert, the dependant, was somewhat softened by the thought of how powerless he had been to work him any harm in his possessions—as powerless as he himself now was to work harm to the returned fugitive, henceforth the legal owner of Trevlyn.

The explanation he might have entered into, that returned man, is of little moment to us; the bare fact is sufficient—that he had come, in life. It was an explanation he gave but partially to those around, descending to no details. It was true that he had been shipwrecked at the time of his supposed death, and he knew that an account of his death had been sent home. Why he had suffered it to remain uncontradicted he did not explain; and they could only surmise that the crime in which he had been a suspected sharer tied his tongue. However innocent he knew himself to be, whilst others at home believed him guilty he was not safe, and he had never known until recently that his reputation had been cleared. So much he did say. He had been half over the world, he said, but had lived chiefly in South America, where he had made a handsome fortune.

"And whose children are these?" he asked, as he passed into the drawing-room, where the sea of wondering faces was turned upon him. "*You* should be James Chattaway's daughter," he cried, singling out Octave, "for you have the face of your father over again."

"I am Miss Chattaway," she repellently answered, drawing from him with a scornful gesture. "Papa," she whispered, going up to the cowed, shrinking figure, who had followed in the wake of the rest, "who is that man?"

"Hush, Octave! He has come to turn us out of our home."

Octave gazed as one suddenly blinded. She saw the strange likeness to the Trevlyns, and it flashed into her mind that it must be the Uncle Rupert, risen from the supposed dead, of whom she had heard so much. She saw him notice her two sisters; she saw him turn to Maude, lift her face with his hands, and gaze on it.

"You should be a Trevlyn. A softer and fairer face than Joe's, but the same outlines. What is your name, my dear?"

"Maude Trevlyn, sir."

"Ay. Joe's child. Have you any brothers or sisters?"
"One brother."

Squire Trevlyn—we must give him his title henceforth—looked round the room, as if in search of the brother. "Where is he?"

Maude shivered; but he waited for an answer, and she gave it. "He is not here, sir."

"And now tell me a little of by-gones," he cried, wheeling round on his sister Diana. "Who is the reigning master of Trevlyn Hold?"

She indicated Mr. Chattaway with her finger. "He is."

"He! Who succeeded my father—in my place?"

"He did. Mr. Chattaway."

"Then where was Joe?"

"Joe was dead. He had died a few months previously."

"Leaving—how many children did you say—Two?"

"Two—Maude and Rupert."

"The latter still an infant, I presume, at the time of my father's death?"

"Quite an infant."

"Nevertheless, he was the Squire of Trevlyn Hold, failing me. Why did he not succeed?"

There came no answer. He looked at them all in succession: but even Miss Diana Trevlyn's undisturbable equanimity was shaken for the moment. It was Mr. Chattaway who plucked up courage to reply, and he put on as bold a front as he could.

"Squire Trevlyn judged it well to will the estate to me. What would a child in long petticoats do, reigning at Trevlyn Hold?"

"He might have reigned by deputy. Where is Rupert? I must see him?"

But had they been keen observers they might have detected that Squire Trevlyn put the questions not altogether with the tone of a man who seeks information through ignorance. In point of fact he was as wise as they were as to the principal events which had followed on the Squire's death. He had remained in London two or three weeks since landing; had gathered all the information that could be afforded him by Connell and Connell, and had himself dictated the letters which had so upset Mr. Chattaway; more than that, he had, this very morning, halted at Barmester, on his way to Trevlyn Hold, had seen Mr. Peterby, and gleaned many details. One

thing Mr. Peterby had not been able to tell him, whether the unfortunate Rupert was living or dead.

"Where is Maude?" he suddenly asked.

Maude stepped forward, somewhat surprised.

"Not you, child. One who must be thirty good years older than you. My sister, Maude Trevlyn."

"She married Thomas Ryle, of the Farm, Rupert," answered Miss Diana, who had rapidly determined to be the best of friends with her brother. "It was not a proper match for her, and she entered upon it without our consent; nay, in defiance of us all. She lives there still; and—here—she—is!"

For once in her life Miss Diana was startled into betraying surprise. There, coming in at the door, was her sister Maude, Mrs. Ryle; and she had not been at Trevlyn Hold for years and years.

Nora, keen-witted Nora, had fathomed the mystery as she walked home. That one, so strangely resembling old Squire Trevlyn, must be very closely connected with him, she doubted not, and she worked out the problem. It must be Rupert Trevlyn, come (may it not be said?) to life again. Before she entered, his features had been traced on her memory, and she hastened to acquaint Mrs. Ryle.

That lady lost no time in speeding to the Hold. George accompanied her. There was no agitation on her face; it was a true Trevlyn's in its calm impassivity, but she greeted her brother with words of welcome.

"I have not been in this house, Rupert, my brother, since its master died; I would not enter it while a usurper reigned in it. Thank Heaven, you are come. It will end all heart-burnings."

"Heart-burnings? of what nature are they? But who are you?" he broke off, looking at George. And then he raised his hand to lay it on his shoulder, and gazed into his face. "Unless I am mistaken, you are your father's son."

George laughed at his quaintness. "My father's son, I believe, sir, and people tell me I am like him; but yet more like my mother. I am George Berkeley Ryle."

"Is he here?—with you? I and Tom Ryle were good friends once."

"Here!" uttered George, with emotion that he could not wholly suppress. "He has been dead for many years. He was killed."

Squire Trevlyn lifted his hands. "It will all come out to

me bit by bit, I suppose: one record of the past, one calamity, after another. Maude"—turning to his sister—"I was inquiring of the past. If the Trevlyns have held a name for nothing else in the county, they have held one for justice; and I want to know how it was that my father—my father and yours—willed away his estate from poor Joe's boy. Good Heavens, Maude," he abruptly broke off, as he caught sight of her face in the red light of the declining sun, "how wonderfully you have grown like my father! More so even than I have!"

It was so. As Mrs. Ryle stood there, haughty, self-possessed, they might have deemed it the old Squire over again. "You want to know why my father willed away his estate from Joe's son?" she said. "Ask Chattaway; ask Diana Trevlyn," with a sweep of the hand to both. "Ask them to tell you who kept it from him that a son was born to Joe. *They* did. The Squire made his will, went to his grave, never knowing that young Rupert was born. Ask them to tell you how it was that, when in accordance with this ignorance the will was made, my father constituted his second daughter's husband his heir, instead of my husband; mine, his eldest daughter's. Ask it them, Rupert."

"Heart-burnings? Yes, I can understand that there have been heart-burnings," murmured Squire Trevlyn.

"Ask *him*—Chattaway—about the two thousand pounds debt to Mr. Ryle," she continued, never flinching from her stern gaze, never raising her voice above its calm tones of low, concentrated indignation. "You have just said that you and Tom Ryle were friends, Rupert. Yes, you were friends; and had you reigned after my father, he, my husband, would not have been hunted to his death."

"Maude! What are you saying?"

"The truth. Wherever that man Chattaway could lay his hand of oppression, he has laid it. He pursued my husband incessantly during his life; it was through that pursuit—inadvertently, I admit—that he met his death. The debt of two thousand pounds, money which had been lent to Mr. Ryle, he, my father, cancelled on his death-bed; he made my husband a present of it; he would have handed him the bond then and there, but it was in Chattaway's possession, and he said he would send it to him. It never was sent, Rupert; and the first use Chattaway made of his new power when he came into the Hold, was to threaten to sue my husband upon

the bond. The Squire had given my husband his word to renew the lease on the same terms, and *you* know that his word was never gone from. The second thing Chattaway did was to raise the rent. It has been nothing but uphill work with us."

"I'll right it now, Maude," he cried, with all the generous impulse of the Trevlyns. "I'll right that, and all else."

"We have righted it for ourselves," she answered proudly. "By dint of perseverance, and hard work, not on my part, but on *his*"—pointing to George—"we have paid it off. Not many days ago, the last instalment of the debt and interest was handed to Chattaway. May it do him good! *I* should not like to grow rich upon unjust gains."

"But where is Rupert?" repeated Squire Trevlyn. "I must see Rupert."

Ah, there was no help for it, and the whole tale was poured into his ear. Between Mrs. Ryle's revelations on the one side, and Chattaway's denials on the other, it was all poured into the indignant but perhaps not surprised ear of the new master of Trevlyn. The unkindness and oppression dealt out to Rupert through his unhappy life, its terrible ending of the burning of the rick, of the strange disappearance of Rupert. He gave no token that he had heard it all before. Mrs. Ryle spared nothing. She told him of the suspicion so freely dealt out by the neighbourhood that Chattaway had made away with Rupert. Even then the Squire returned no sign that he knew of the suspicion as well as they did.

"Maude," he said, "where is Rupert? Diana, *you* answer me—where is Rupert?"

They were unable to answer. They could only say that he was absent, and they knew not how or where.

It may be that Squire Trevlyn feared the suspicion might be too true a one; for he turned suddenly on James Chattaway, his eye flashing with a severe light

"Tell me where the boy is."

"I don't know where he is," said Mr. Chattaway.

"He may be dead!"

"He may—for all I can tell to the contrary."

Squire Trevlyn paused. "Rupert Trevlyn is my heir," he slowly said, "and I will have him found. James Chattaway, I insist on your producing Rupert."

"Nobody can insist upon an impossibility."

"Then listen. You don't know much of me, but you knew

my father; and you may remember that when he *willed* a thing, he did it: that same spirit is mine. Now I register a vow that if you do not produce Rupert Trevlyn, or tell me where I may find him, dead or alive, I will publicly charge you with the murder."

"I have as much cause to charge you with it, as you have to charge me," returned Mr. Chattaway, his anger rising. "You have heard them tell you of my encounter with Rupert on the evening following the examination before the magistrates. I declare on my sacred word of honour——"

"*Your* word of honour!" scornfully apostrophized Mrs. Ryle.

"That I have never seen Rupert Trevlyn since the moment when I left him on the ground," he continued, turning his dark looks on Mrs. Ryle, but never pausing. "I have sought in vain for him since; the police have sought; and he is not to be found."

"Very well," said the Squire. "I have given you the alternative."

Mr. Chattaway opened his mouth to reply; but to the surprise of all who knew him, suddenly closed it again, and left the room. To describe the trouble that the man was in would be impossible. Apart from the general perplexity brought to him by this awful arrival of a master for Trevlyn Hold, there was the minor doubt as to what should be his own conduct. Should it be abject submission? or war to the knife? Mr. Chattaway's temper would have inclined him decidedly to the latter course; but he feared it might be bad policy for his self-interest; and self-interest had always been paramount with James Chattaway. Should he dispute for Trevlyn Hold with this new-comer? or should he submissively yield? He stood outside the house, where he had wandered, and cast his eyes on the fine old place, on the fair domain stretching around. Right in face of him was the rick-yard, which had given rise to so much discomfort, trouble, and ill-feeling. Oh, if he could only dispute it successfully, and retain possession of it! But there lay a conviction in his heart, that even to attempt such would be the height of folly. That he, thus returned, was really the true Rupert Trevlyn, who had decamped in his youth, now grown into a middle-aged man, was apparent as the sun at noon-day. It was clearly apparent to him, Mr. Chattaway: it would be apparent to the world. The returned wanderer had remarked that his identity would be established

by indisputable proof; but Mr. Chattaway felt that there was no proof necessary to establish it. What, then, would be the use of his holding out? And yet! to quit this fine possession, to sink into poverty and obscurity in the face and eyes of the local world—that world which had been ready enough, as it was, to cast its contempt on the master of Trevlyn Hold—would be as the very bitterest fate that ever fell upon man. In that cruel moment, when it was pressing upon his imagination with fearfully vivid colours, it seemed that death would be as a boon in comparison.

While he was thus standing, torn with contending emotions, Cris ran up in excitement from the direction of the stables. He had been leaving his horse there on his return from Blackstone, and some vague and confused version of the affair had been told to him. "What's this, father?" he asked, in demonstrative anger. "They are saying that Rupert Trevlyn has come boldly back, and is laying claim to the Hold. Have you given him into custody?"

Mr. Chattaway raised his dull eyes. The question only added to his misery. "Yes, Rupert Trevlyn has come back," he said; "but——"

"Is he in custody?" impatiently interrupted Cris. "Are the police here?"

"It is another Rupert Trevlyn, Cris; not that one."

Something in his father's manner, more than the words, struck unpleasantly on the senses of Cris Chattaway, subduing him considerably. "Another Rupert Trevlyn!" he repeated, in a hesitating tone. "What are you saying?"

"The Rupert Trevlyn of old; the Squire's runagate son; the heir," said Mr. Chattaway, as if it were a comfort to tell out all the bitter truth. "He has come back to claim his own, Cris—Trevlyn Hold."

And Mr. Cris fell against the wall, side by side with his father, and stared in dismayed consternation. "Come back to claim his own!" he mechanically repeated. "Come back to claim Trevlyn Hold!"

CHAPTER LVII.

A VISIT TO RUPERT.

AND what were the emotions of Mrs. Chattaway? They were of a mixed nature. In spite of the slight comfort which possession of the Hold had brought herself individually; in spite of the feeling of usurpation, of *wrong*, which had ever rested unpleasantly upon her; she would have been superior to frail human nature, had not a sense of dismay struck upon her at its being thus suddenly wrested from them. She knew not what her husband's means might be; whether he had anything or nothing, by saving or otherwise, that he could call his own, apart from the revenues of the Hold: but she did know enough to be sure that it could not be a tithe enough to keep them; and where were they to go with their helpless daughters? That these unpleasant considerations floated through her mind in a vague, confused vision was true; but far above them came a rush of thought, of care, closer to the present hour. Her brother had said—and there was a determination not to be mistaken in his tone—that unless Mr. Chattaway produced Rupert Trevlyn, he should publicly charge him with the murder. Nothing but the strongest control exercised upon herself could have restrained Mrs. Chattaway from starting forward and avowing all, when she heard this. Mr. Chattaway was a man not held in the world's favour, but he was her husband; and in her eyes his faults and failings had ever appeared in a venial light. She would have given much to stand out and say, "You are accusing my husband wrongfully; Rupert is alive, and I am concealing him."

But she did not dare to do this. That very husband would have replied, "Then I order Rupert into custody—how dared you conceal him?" She took an opportunity of whispering a question to George Ryle of the meaning of the warning he had despatched to her by Nora. George himself could not explain it. He had met Bowen accidentally, and the officer had told him in confidence that they had received a mysterious hint that Rupert Trevlyn was not far off—hence George's warning to Mrs. Chattaway. It was to turn out that the *other* Rupert Trevlyn had been spoken of; but neither Bowen nor George knew this.