

been exemplary, and she did not remain insensible to the fact ; but she was one of those second wives (there are such in the world) who feel an instinctive dislike—a jealousy—of their step-children. Very bitter, for Treve's sake, was the jealousy that burnt in her heart now.

"I will come in and see you another day, Rupert," she said, starting up. "I am too vexed to remain longer this morning."

"What are you vexed about, Aunt Ryle?"

"I was in hopes that Treve—failing you—would have been made the heir of Trevlyn Hold."

Rupert opened his eyes in wonder. "Treve?—while Maude lives! Not he. I can tell you what I think, Aunt Ryle; that Treve, had there been no Maude, would never have come in for the Hold. I don't fancy Uncle Rupert would have left it to him."

"To whom then would he have left it, do you fancy?"

"Well—I suppose," slowly answered Rupert, turning the matter over in his mind—"I suppose, in that case, it would have been my aunt Diana. But there *is* Maude, Aunt Ryle, and we need not talk about it. George and Maude will have it, and their children after them."

"Poor boy!" she said, with a touch of compassionate feeling; "it is a sad fate for you! Not to live to be the heir!"

A gentle smile rose to his face, and he pointed upwards. "There's a better heirship for me, Aunt Ryle."

It was upon returning from this memorable interview with Squire Trevlyn, that Mrs. Ryle encountered Octave Chattaway. She stopped to speak.

"Are you getting pretty well settled, Octave?"

"Tolerably so. Mamma says she shall not be straight in six months to come. Have you been to the Hold?" continued Octave.

"Yes," replied Mrs. Ryle, turning her determined face full on Octave. "Have you heard the news? That the Squire has chosen his heir?"

"No," breathlessly rejoined Octave. "We have heard that Rupert is entirely beyond hope; but we have heard nothing else. It will be Maude, I conclude."

"It is to be George Ryle."

"George Ryle!" repeated Octave, in amazement.

"Yes. I suppose it will be left to him, not to Maude. But it will be all the same. He is to marry her, and to assume the name of Trevlyn. George never told me of this. He just said

to me to-day that he was going to live at the Hold; but he never said it was as Maude's husband and the Squire's heir. How prospects have changed!"

Changed! Ay, Octave felt it to her inmost soul, as she leaned against the gate, and gazed in thought after Mrs. Ryle. Gazed without seeing or hearing, deep in her heart's tribulation, her hand pressed upon her bosom, her pale face shivering as it was turned to the winter sky.

CHAPTER LXI.

IN THE CHURCH AT BARBROOK.

BENDING in tenderness over the couch of Rupert Trevlyn was Mrs. Chattaway. Madam Chattaway no longer; she had quitted that distinctive title when she quitted Trevlyn Hold. It was a warm day in early May, and Rupert had lingered on; the progress of his disease being so gradual, so imperceptible, that even the medical men were deceived; and now that the end (as was soon to be seen) had come, they were still saying that he might last until the autumn.

Rupert had been singularly favoured: some, stricken by this dire malady, are so. Scarcely any of its painful features were apparent; and Mr. Daw wrote them word that they had not been in his father. There was scarcely any cough, scarcely any pain, and though the weakness was certainly great, Rupert had not for one single day taken to his bed. Until within two days of this very time, when you see Mrs. Chattaway leaning over him, he had gone out in the carriage whenever the weather permitted. He could not sit up much; he chiefly lay on the sofa as he was lying now, facing the window, which he liked to have open to the warm noon-day sun. The room was the one you have seen frequently before, the former sitting-room of Mrs. Chattaway. When the Chattaways left the Hold, Rupert had changed to their rooms; he seemed to have a fancy for them, and would sit there and watch the visitors who came up the avenue.

Mrs. Chattaway has been stopping at the Hold since the previous Tuesday, for Maude is away from it. Maude left it with George Ryle on that day, but they are coming home this even-

ing, Saturday, for both are anxious not to be long away from Rupert. Rupert sadly wanted to attend the wedding, and Squire Trevlyn and Mr. Freeman strove to invent all sorts of schemes for warming the church; but the edifice persisted in remaining cold and damp, and Rupert was not allowed to venture into it. He sat with them, however, at the breakfast afterwards, and but for his attenuated form and the peculiar hectic that excitement brought to his otherwise white and hollow cheeks, might have passed very well for a guest. George, with his marriage, has taken the name of Trevlyn, for the Squire insisted upon it; he will come home to the Hold to-day and take up his permanent abode in it—Mr. Ryle Trevlyn. Miss Diana received mortal offence at the wedding-breakfast, and sat at the table cold and impenetrable, for the Squire requested his eldest sister to preside in right of her birthright, and Miss Diana had long considered herself of far more importance than Mrs. Ryle, and had expected to be chief on that occasion herself.

"Shall we invite Edith or Diana to stay here with you while Maude's away?" the Squire had inquired of Rupert. And a flush of pleasure came into the wan face as he answered, "My aunt Edith. I should like to be again with Aunt Edith."

So Mrs. Chattaway had remained with him, and passed the time as she was doing now—hovering round his couch, giving him all her care, caressing him in her loving, gentle manner, whispering of the happy life on which he was about to enter.

She had some eau-de-cologne in her hand, and was pouring it on a handkerchief to pass it lightly over his brow and temples. In doing this a drop went into his eye.

"Oh, Rupert, I am so sorry! How awkward I am!"

It smarted very much, but Rupert smiled bravely. "Just a few minutes' pain, Aunt Edith, and it will all be gone. Do you know what I have got to think lately?"

She put the cork into the long narrow green bottle, and sat down on the chair close to his sofa. "What, dear?"

"That we must be blind, foolish mortals to fret ourselves so much under misfortunes. A little patience, a little time, and they are sure to pass away."

"It would be better for us all if we had more patience, more trust," she answered. "If we could leave things more entirely to God."

Rupert lay with his blue eyes cast upwards, blue as the sky he looked at. "I would have tried to put that great trust in

God, had I lived," he said, after a pause. "Do you know, Aunt Edith, at times I do wish I could have lived."

"I wish so, too," she murmured.

"At least, I should wish it but for this great feeling of fatigue that is always upon me. I shan't feel it up there, Aunt Edith."

"No, no," she whispered.

"When you get near death, knowing for certain that it is coming upon you, as I know it, I think you obtain clearer views of the *reality* of things. It seems to me, looking back on the life I am leaving, as if it were of no consequence at what period we die; whether we die young or live to be old; and yet how dreadful a calamity death is looked upon by people in general."

"It needs sorrow or illness to reconcile us to it, Rupert. Most of us must be tired of this life ere we can bring ourselves to anticipate another, and to look for it."

"Well, I have not had so happy a life here," he unthinkingly remarked. "I ought not to murmur at exchanging it for another."

No, no, he had not. The words had been spoken without thought of wounding her, were quite innocent of intentional reproach; but she was feeling them to the very depths of her long-bruised heart. Mrs. Chattaway was not famous for the control of her emotions, and she broke into a flood of tears as she rose and bent over him.

"The recollection of the past is upon me night and day, Rupert. Say that you forgive me! Say it now, ere the time for it shall have gone by."

He looked surprised. "Forgive you, dear Aunt Edith? I have never had anything to forgive you; and others I have forgiven long ago."

"I lie awake at night and think of it, Rupert," she said, the tones of her voice betraying how great was her emotion. "Had you been differently treated, you might not have died just as your rights are recognized. You might have lived to be the inheritor as well as the heir of Trevlyn."

Rupert lay pondering the proposition. "But I must have died when the end came," he said. "I might not have been any the better for it. Aunt Edith, it seems to me to be just this. I am twenty-one years of age, and a life of some sort is before me, a life *here*, or a life *there*. At my age it is only natural that I should look forward to the life here, and I did so until I grew sick with the weariness of lying in pain. But now, if that

life is the better and happier one—and if it were not, what forlorn, hopeless creatures we should all be!—does it not seem a favour to be taken to it before my time? Aunt Edith, I say that as death comes on, I believe we see things as they really are, not as they seem. I was to have inherited Trevlyn Hold; but I shall exchange it for a better inheritance. Let this comfort you.”

She sat, weeping silently, holding his hand in hers. Rupert said no more, but kept his eyes fixed upwards in thought. Gradually the lids closed, and his breathing, somewhat more regular than when he was awake, told that he slept. Mrs. Chattaway laid his hand on the coverlet, dried her eyes, and busied herself about the room.

About half-an-hour afterwards he awoke. She was sitting down then, watching him. It almost seemed as if her gaze had caused his eyes to open, for she had only just taken her seat.

“Are they come?” were his first words.

“Not yet, Rupert.”

“Not yet! Will they be long? I feel sinking.”

Mrs. Chattaway hastily called for the refreshment which Rupert had until now constantly taken. But he turned his head away as it was placed before him.

“My dear, you said you were sinking!”

“Not *that* sort of sinking, Aunt Edith. Nothing that food will remedy.”

A tremor came over Mrs. Chattaway. She detected a change in his voice, saw the change in his countenance. It has just been said, and not for the first time in this history, that she could not boast of much self-control: and she ran out of the room, shrieking for Squire Trevlyn. He heard her, and came immediately, wondering much. “It is Rupert,” she said in her irrepressible excitement. “He says he is dying.”

Rupert had not said it: though, perhaps, what he did say was almost equivalent to it, and she had jumped to the conclusion. When Squire Trevlyn reached him, he was lying with his eyes closed and the changed look on his white face. A servant stood near the table where the tray of refreshment had been placed, gazing at him.

The Squire hastily felt his forehead, then his hand. “What ails you, my boy?” he asked, subduing his voice as it never was subdued, save to the sick Rupert.

Rupert unclosed his eyes. “Are they come, uncle? I want Maude.”

“They won’t be long now,” looking at his watch. “Don’t you feel so well, Rupert?”

“I feel like—going,” was the answer: and as Rupert spoke he gasped for breath. The servant stepped forward and raised his head. Mrs. Chattaway, who had again come in, broke into a loud cry.

“Edith!” said the Squire, reprovingly. “A pretty one you are for a sick room! If you cannot be calm, you had better keep out of it.”

He quitted it himself as he spoke, called his own groom, and bade him hasten for Mr. King. Rupert looked better when he returned; the spasm, or whatever it was, had passed, and he was holding the hand of Mrs. Chattaway.

“Aunt Edith was frightened,” he said, turning his eyes on his uncle.

“She always was one to be frightened at nothing,” cried the Squire. “Do you feel faint, my boy?”

“It’s gone now,” answered Rupert.

Mrs. Chattaway poured out a cordial, and he drank it without difficulty. Afterwards he seemed to revive considerably, and spoke to them now and then, though he lay so still as to give an idea that all motion had departed from him. Even when the sound of wheels was heard in the avenue he did not stir, though he evidently heard.

“It’s only Ralph,” remarked the Squire. “I sent him out in the gig.”

Rupert slightly shook his head then to express a negative, and a half-smile illumined his face. The Squire also became aware of the fact that what they heard was not the noise of gig-wheels. He went down to the hall-door.

It was the carriage bringing back the bride and bridegroom. Maude sprang lightly in, and the Squire took her in his arms.

“Welcome to your home, my darling! A brave welcome to you, Madam of the Hold!”

Maude laughed and blushed, and the Squire left her and took the hand of George. Yes, it was true: henceforth she was “Madam” of the Hold.

“How is Rupert, sir?”

“Well—he has been famous until half-an-hour ago. Since then there has been a change in him. You had better go up to him at once; he has been asking for you and Maude. I have sent for King.”

George drew his wife’s hand within his arm, and led her up

stairs. No one was in the room with Rupert, except Mrs. Chattaway. He never moved, never stirred, as they advanced and bent over him, Maude throwing off her bonnet; he only gazed up at their faces from his sofa-pillow with a happy smile.

Maude's eyes were swimming; George was startled. Surely death was now, even now, upon him. It had come closer in this little minute between Squire Trevlyn's departure from the room and his return.

He lay passively, his wasted hands in theirs. Maude was the first to give way. "My darling brother! I did not think to find you like this."

"I am going on before, Maude," he breathed, but his voice was so low they had to stoop to catch it. "You will come later."

A wailing cry interrupted him; it came from Mrs. Chattaway. "Oh, Rupert, say you forgive the past! You have not said it. You must not die with unforgiveness in your heart."

He looked at her wonderingly; a look which seemed to ask if she had forgotten his assertion of an hour ago. He laid his hands together, feebly holding them raised. "Pray God bless and forgive all who may have been unkind to me, as I forgive them—as I have forgiven them long ago. Pray God bless and forgive us all, and take us after this world's over to our home in heaven; for the sake of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ."

"Amen!" said the Squire.

The deep silence which fell on them, after the sonorous tones of the one word had died away, was broken only by the sobs of Maude, as she knelt. George laid his hand gently on her head that she might feel its loving protection; he knew how bitter was the moment to her.

The next interruption was caused by Mr. King. He came quietly up to the sofa, glanced at the face of Rupert, and kept his eyes fixed on it for the full space of a minute. Then he turned them meaningly on Squire Trevlyn. The face, though they had known it not, was already the face of the dead. With the sorrows and the joys of this world, Rupert Trevlyn had done for ever.

The long procession of mourners wound down the avenue of Trevlyn Hold. The hearse was first, containing the remains,

but all followers were on foot. With the Squire walked his son-in-law and acknowledged heir, George Ryle—or Ryle Trevlyn, as he was henceforth to be called; and next to them came Mr. Chattaway, and Mrs. Ryle's son, Trevlyn.

Yes! Mr. Chattaway, who—as may be said—had hunted Rupert to death, yet saw fit to attend the funeral. Do you remember that the etiquette touching funerals in this rural neighbourhood was alluded to early in this history? That same etiquette prevailed still; and Mr. Chattaway had not deemed it good manners to refuse when the invitation came. It was not as *James Chattaway* that it was sent to him, but as Edith Trevlyn's husband; and the Squire had a battle with himself ere he could be brought to send one at all. Old Canham, too infirm to walk to the church, stood at the gate in his Sunday clothes, and bared his head as they swept past him, paying his last respects to the dead heir of Trevlyn.

It was a large and goodly company to gather round the grave. Thomas Ryle's funeral, years ago, had been scantily attended; this was different. Many faces familiar to you were among them: the doctors mentioned in the story, the lawyers, Mr. Wall of Barmester, Mr. Apperley and his sons, the clerk Ford from Blackstone; even Policeman Dumps was there. How did Mr. Chattaway like standing amongst them? How did he like to feel that George Ryle, whom he would so have put upon, was from henceforth his master? Suddenly the even flow of Mr. Freeman's voice was marred by a burst of sobs, and many eyes were turned to the quarter, and found the interruption came from Jim Sanders. Mr. Dumps inwardly vowed a chastisement for the breach.

The coffin was lowered into the grave of the Trevlyns, and sorrowful eyes pressed forward to catch a glimpse of its plate. The inscription had been made in accordance with the will and pleasure of Squire Trevlyn:—

RUPERT TREVLYN,

HEIR OF TREVLYN HOLD,

DIED MAY 2ND, AGED TWENTY-ONE.

It was so. The true heir, was he, of Trevlyn Hold, the sole heir of Squire Trevlyn. But God had taken him from his heirship before he could enter upon it. A great calamity, some of those mourners are thinking. No, it was no calamity; for as

Rupert himself had said in his last illness, he had but resigned a poor earthly heirship to enter upon that heavenly one which fades not away.

They left his body to its kindred earth, and wound their way back again. Oh, my friends! may we learn to strive for that true heirship, without which all other heirships will avail us nought! Fare you well!

THE END.

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