WATSON WILLIAM DAVY

TREVETHLAN: A CORNISH STORY. VOLUME 3

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Watson W.

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Содержание

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CHAPTER I

Menenius. What work's, my countrymen, in hand? Where go you with bats and clubs? The matter? Speak, I pray you.

Citizen. Our business is not unknown to the senate; they have had inkling, this fortnight, what we intend to do, which now we'll show 'em in deeds. They say poor suitors have strong breath: they shall know we have strong arms too.
Shakspeare.

Among the most striking features of the scenery of West Cornwall, are the fantastic piles of bare granite which rise occasionally from the summit of an upland, and to a distant spectator present the exact semblance of a castle, with towers, turrets, and outworks. So a stranger, standing on Cape Cornwall and looking towards the Land's End, might imagine he there beheld the fortress whose sanguinary sieges obtained for that promontory its ancient name of the Headland of Blood. Or again, reclining on the moorland, near the cromlech of Morvah, while the sun was sinking behind Carnyorth, he might fancy that at the red-edged battlements on the ridge, the original inhabitants of the country made their last stand against the invaders from the German Ocean.

Approach soon destroys the illusion. And it is superfluous to observe that the warriors of those times had no notion of the structures which these caprices of nature mimic—the castles of our Plantagenets and Tudors. Their real fortresses still exist to afford employment to the antiquary, and inspiration to the poet; and to one of them we now invite the reader to accompany us.

Castle Dinas occupies the crest of the highest ground between the picturesque village of Gulvall and the pilchard-perfumed town of St. Ives, and commands an uninterrupted view both of Mount's Bay and of the Irish Sea. Two concentric ramparts of unhewn stones, flung together more rudely than a Parisian barricade, exhibiting the science of fortification in its very infancy, inclose a circular area of considerable extent. From it the ground slopes, not very rapidly, on all sides; and as there are no screens, an occupant of the camp can see an approaching friend or enemy some time before he arrives. Within the inner circle some prosaic favourer of picnics has erected a square *folly*, with a turret at each angle, not harmonizing very well with local associations, but convenient in case of a shower of rain.

Around the folly, on the night which followed the departure of the orphans of Trevethlan from the home of their fathers, was pacing a stalwart man of weather-beaten aspect, with an impatient and irregular gait. The sun had sunk below the horizon, and all the south and west quarters of the sky were covered with heavy masses of cloud, from behind which, at intervals, came the low mutterings of distant thunder. Flashes of lightning followed one another in quick succession, becoming more and more brilliant as the shades of evening grew deeper. They broke from various quarters of the horizon, but particularly from the point of sunset. The light seemed to flit or be reflected all round the sky. Sometimes it was a lambent flame of blue, sometimes a flush of faint rose colour; sometimes the dark clouds were displayed in bold relief against a bright sheet of yellow or white. So far the sea was still calm, and the air close and heavy. But at length there came a motion in the hot atmosphere. The surface of the water was crisped. A sigh wailed along it, as if the spirit of the tempest mourned over his mission; and then the storm, whose advent had been foreseen by Randolph and Helen, during their last visit to Merlin's Cave, advanced rapidly up the sky.

And a tempest scarcely less fierce raged in the breast of Gabriel Denis, as he paced hurriedly within those old ramparts. He was expecting an assembly almost as tumultuous as that of the warriors

whose battle shouts once resounded there, and he was resolved that it should not disperse in the same innocuous manner as former meetings of the same character. One by one, and two by two, as the darkness deepened, his promised adherents arrived, and the ancient camp became filled with an excited mob, anxious for mischief, ignorant what to do.

Well might Randolph caution Edward Owen that in joining such musters as these he might easily be carried much further than he intended to go. A fretting population always contains inflammable materials, and it is far less difficult to kindle than to extinguish its fury. The consciousness of this fact frequently deters mob-leaders from urging their followers into a course where there will be no subsequent control.

And crimes of this nature are among the greatest that can be committed, especially in a free state. An idea prevails that there is a sort of heroism in defying public authority, no matter how trivial the occasion, nor how impotent the assailant. Defeated and punished, the criminal is not seldom regarded as a martyr. He is considered the victim of his own conscientiousness. Antecedent cases of successful sedition are quoted to justify subsequent failures. But all this is false and mischievous. There is never heroism in fool-hardiness: the so-styled martyr may witness to no truth: the conscientiousness may be of the kind which calls property a theft. And former successes are rather warnings than examples. Precedent cannot avail against the powers that be.

The assembly at Castle Dinas, however, was rather riotous than seditious, and uncertain in what direction to vent its desire for mischief. There was plenty of tinder, but no one to throw the spark; until Gabriel Denis, burning with the desire of revenge for the spoiling of his house and the death of his wife, joined the counsels of the malcontents, and brought into them the energy they had previously wanted. He now flung a firebrand among the rabble, and dozens of hands were stretched to seize it. It was just suited to the mood of the moment.

"To Lelant!" the smuggler shouted. "Why loiter we here on the hill, doing nothing either of good for ourselves or of ill for those who would put us down? Are we not many, and they few? To Lelant, I say. Let us turn the tables on the revenue thieves. They have plenty of mine in their stores; but I want not that. Drink it, lads, free of duty and free of charge. But there is a desolate home yonder on the bank. What stain is that on the floor?—there shall be a redder in the storehouse at Lelant. Ay, lads, let us to Lelant."

There was a great stir in the crowd: not a few voices echoed the smuggler's watchword—To Lelant: some of the men pressed forward as if eager to start: Gabriel himself turned to lead the way. But another voice arose: it came from the midst of a small and compact party on the outskirts of the meeting.

"What are ye about?" the speaker said. "Why go among the cutlasses and carbines? Is it the drink ye would have—the drink and the sport? Ye can get them cheaper than at Lelant. Look to our great houses. Does Gabriel say they have spoiled his? Let us spoil one of theirs. What say ye to Pendar'l?"

A shout, much more enthusiastic than that which hailed the smuggler's proposition, greeted this burst of eloquence.

"See!" continued the orator, "there's a storm coming up from the sea. It will hide our advance; and the soldiers are called away to the 'sizes. Let us disperse, and meet again on the grass of Pendar'l."

So said, so done. As the crowd moved off, it might be noted that there were some audible murmurs of "Trevethlan for ever!" "Hurrah for Trevethlan!" showing that at least a portion of the assembly were thinking of what had happened in that hamlet a few hours before. And then the multitude divided itself spontaneously into various parties, some proceeding by the lanes and other byways, and some boldly crossing the country in twos and threes;—silent, but not so regular, as an army of ants. Meantime the storm, driven along by a high wind, came up the sky, and before the foremost of the marauders had reached the park wall of Pendarrel, the rain was falling in torrents, and the thunder rolling overhead. But these were trifles to the hardy assailants, who were now fairly

on fire, and had a definite object before their eyes. They scaled the wall wherever they first found it, and advanced through the grounds towards the hall, scaring the deer with the unwonted invasion. At length they found themselves re-united for the most part in a semicircle, investing all one side of the house. Fair and stately it stood amidst the trim pleasure-grounds, reflecting the vivid flashes of lightning from its white walls and many windows, and offering, alas! too tempting a prize to the lawless band around it. Within, the household were collected about their fire-sides, listening to the uproar of the storm, and little deeming that a more terrible enemy was at hand.

CHAPTER II

When tumult lately burst his prison door,
And set plebeian thousands in a roar,
When he usurped authority's just place,
And dared to look his master in the face,
Liberty blushed, and hung her drooping head,
Beheld his progress with the deepest dread,
Blushed that effects like these she should produce,
Worse than the deeds of galley-slaves let loose:
She loses in such scenes her very name,
And fierce licentiousness must bear the blame.

Cowper.

"What can make the dogs bark in this manner?" exclaimed Mrs. Pendarrel to her husband and daughter. "Surely not the thunder."

"I cannot tell what it is, my dear," answered her spouse, who was nearly asleep after his return from Bodmin, in spite of the external uproar. "I wish they and the thunder would both be quiet."

Mildred went behind the curtains of a window. Thick as they were, the flashes of lightning had yet gleamed through them.

"What a tremendous night!" she exclaimed.

"Come from the window, Mildred," said Mrs. Pendarrel; "it is dangerous to stand there."

"Ha!" cried the daughter, "there is fire. It cannot be the lightning! Mamma! Papa!"

The urgency of her tone brought them both to the window. A red glare streamed over the lawn, and shone bright upon the dripping trees. Fire was there indeed.

Gabriel Denis, by this time wild with passion and excitement, had soon discovered the means of gratifying his turbulent desires. A range of farming offices, with some ricks, stretched to the west, and therefore to windward, of the hall. Let these be once kindled, and inactivity would soon give way to riot and confusion. The smuggler had not forgotten his tinder-box. He crept down into the homestead, found a convenient nook, and soon lighted a flame, which nothing but the speediest and most energetic exertion could hinder the furious wind from converting into a great conflagration.

Unhappily the tempest, closing doors and fastening shutters, prevented an immediate discovery of the blaze, and the heavy rain was powerless to check its progress under the fanning of the gale. The interior of the corn-stack, fired by Gabriel, rapidly became a furnace, while volumes of steam and smoke rolled from the wetted thatch, and were shortly followed by jets of flame bursting from the inside. Then masses of burning straw were lifted aloft by the wind and cast on the neighbouring ricks and wooden barns, and in scarcely more time than is occupied by this description, the homestead was evidently doomed to destruction, and the safety of the hall was become very problematical.

It was just then that Mildred summoned her father and mother to the window.

"Hark!" she said, "Was not that a shout? See, there are people running across the lawn, and under the trees. But, oh, what a light!"

Terrified domestics rushed into the parlour.

"The house is beset—hundreds of men—What can be done? What can be done?"

These exclamations were mingled with loud cries of "fire," from within and without the mansion. In the confusion, Esther Pendarrel seemed alone to preserve her presence of mind.

"Done!" she said. "The engine! The horses! Ride! Run! To Helston, and to Marazione! Raise the people! Bring down the soldiers! Away with you; and let us see where the fire is. And you, sir, look to your arms. Beset! Nonsense!"

So saying, Esther proceeded to the wing of the hall next to the farm offices, which could not be seen from the living rooms, while her husband hurriedly distributed his fire-arms among the few servants who remained, when their fellows had departed to endeavour to fulfil the injunctions of their mistress.

Mildred accompanied her mother. "Fie," said the latter, seizing by the wrist one of a group of maids who were crying in terror, "fie, girl! Be silent; let us have no confusion. We want all our nerve."

One glance from the window to which she went showed Esther the full extent of the calamity. Long tongues of fire, bending and quivering in the fierce wind, were licking the roof of a low range of outhouses which connected the farm-yard with the hall. Esther remembered that there was a door of communication between these buildings and the house itself. Unless they could be pulled down, and that instantly, the mansion would be in imminent peril. And besides, behind them were the ricks and barns, vomiting a perfect sea of fire, from which large flakes were ever and anon borne by the gale over the hall. One such struck the window where Mrs. Pendarrel stood with her daughter, and made them start back for a moment. And what hope was there of help? By the red glare they could see men clustered about, either gazing on the flames with indifference, or exhibiting exultation in their gestures and movements. Amidst the crackling of the fire and the thunder of the storm, they could hear the savage hurrahs of the incendiaries. Whence, then, could come help?

"We are lost, my child!" Esther said quietly. "But I presume they do not intend to burn us as well as the hall. Courage, dear."

She threw her arm round Mildred's waist, and led her back to the main stairs. There they found Mr. Pendarrel, and two or three men-servants, armed, but undetermined what to do.

"Husband," Esther whispered, "in five minutes all the west wing will be in flames. Nothing can save us, unless the troops arrive in time. Where are the girls? They must all be here."

The last words were spoken aloud.

"I will call them, mother," Mildred said; and she ran back to the offices.

"We have no chance," Esther continued as before, "unless the ruffians should turn–Hush! Hark!"

There was a clatter of steps to the door of the hall, succeeded by a loud knocking.

"Be ready," said Esther. "Let us not be outraged."

"Shall we not escape?" her husband asked. "By the back windows–"

"Are the maids all here? Where's Mildred?"

"I am here, dear mother," was the breathless reply, "and so are they."

"Then let us go," said Esther sadly. "Go through the drawing-rooms. To meet at the chief lodge. And you, my friends, will guard us as best you may. But for the fire, we might do more. All now would be in vain."

Bare-headed, the little party went out into the storm. Esther stoutly maintained her own heart, but she had much ado to keep up the courage of her companions. With quick but faltering steps they made their way through the shrubbery, in the direction Mrs. Pendarrel had indicated; looking back with hasty glances, and perceiving that the flames were now flying over the roof of the mansion, the west wing having already become their spoil. A little more delay, and perhaps escape had been impossible. And there were other dangers besides the fire.

The fugitives had just turned round the corner of a thick clump of laurels, when they found themselves in the presence of a crowd of men, who immediately surrounded them, preventing their further progress, insulting them both with words and gestures. Mr. Pendarrel, bewildered, fired a pistol, and the rabble rushed in upon him and those with him, incensed and excited beyond all control. It was a moment of despair. Esther pressed her daughter to her breast, and opposed herself to the

assailants. Her husband, also, and the men-servants maintained a manful struggle. But numbers were prevailing, when the ruffians were themselves attacked in the rear. A throng of country people, apparently acting in concert, charged them suddenly, and with the first attack, drove them clear of their intended victims.

"Fly, madam," then said a voice beside Mrs. Pendarrel. "Fly. There are none now but friends in the way. And remember Edward Owen."

And Esther acted instantly on the advice, knowing that, whether true or false, it afforded the only hope for safety.

In the mean time, the hall-door had yielded to its assailants, and ruffianism triumphed through the mansion. Some fellows made their way to the cellars, and drank desperately, while others rioted through the various apartments in search of more valuable booty. Not a few quarrels arose for the possession of some portable trinket, upon which two of the marauders might have seized at once. Shouts and screams, and execrations resounded on all sides. And above them all rose the crackle of the advancing flames, not unlikely to inflict a well-merited doom upon some of those who exulted in them.

But many of the country-folks, aroused by the emissaries who escaped from the hall at the first alarm, had thronged to render assistance in subduing the flames. They were, however, disconcerted at finding themselves intercepted by a mob, whose intentions were precisely the reverse of their own. Coming singly or in small knots, without any community of action, they were unable to make any impression upon the banded ruffians, and they either departed to seek further aid, or became passive spectators of the ruin that was befalling Pendarrel.

There was one, however, of a different mood. Edward Owen, although he had attended the meeting at Castle Dinas, and accompanied the mob, shuddered at the devastation before him. So soon did he experience the truth of Randolph's words. Recoiling too late, but desirous to atone if possible for what was past, he hovered on the skirts of the crowd, and soon collected a tolerably formidable body of the well-disposed, with which to repress further outrage. They made their first show of prowess in rescuing the fugitive family: but beyond this their efforts were unavailing: the fire had obtained too great a head to be withstood.

The main fury of the storm had now passed; the rain had nearly ceased, and the wind had fallen; the lightning still flashed, and the thunder muttered in the east, while the western sky was once more becoming clear. But the flashes were too faint to be seen, and the muttering too low to be heard, in the bright glare and loud crackling of the flames that were devouring Pendarrel Hall. All the centre of the mansion, containing the great stairs and principal apartments, was in full conflagration. From window after window, as the glass flew under the heat, a long stream of fire shot forth, joining the ruddy blaze that broke from the roof. Once, a human form appeared in the midst of such a torrent, flinging its arms about in wild supplication for a few moments, and disappearing, either within or without. Above the house curled vast volumes of smoke, black, white, and yellow, filled with sparkling fragments, and glowing in the light of the flames. A flock of pigeons fled to and fro over the bright vapour, and every now and then a bird dashed into it, and dropped as if shot. Round about, on all sides, as near as the heat permitted, rushed the incendiaries, exulting in the destruction they had accomplished, and hailing every fresh burst of fire with frantic acclamations. Behind, at a little distance, the trees, still streaming with the recent rain, reflected the red glare from every branch. Farther off, a cottage window or a white wall, lighted more dimly, might denote the rising ground of the neighbourhood. And over all, were the dark clouds of the retreating tempest, the fury of which had that night caused no catastrophe so disastrous as was here wrought by the hand of man.

The family, so rudely driven from their home, succeeded in reaching the lodge designated by Esther for their rendezvous. Faint with excitement—even Mrs. Pendarrel's spirit failed her when she was safe from immediate peril—exhausted by their flight, deluged with the rain, they met together in a small room of the cottage, round a window which looked towards their late abode. With a sort

of vacant despair they watched the flames which rose above the intervening trees, and showed the progress of ruin. The hall itself they could not see. Mildred sat, leaning upon her mother's shoulder, and holding her hand, while Mr. Pendarrel rested against the side of the casement. Not a word was spoken; and the only sounds that broke the silence of the lodge, were the subdued noise of the flames, and the shouts of the marauders.

But Mr. Pendarrel, with his ear against the wall, has now caught another sound; regular, rhythmical, advancing along the road. Nearer it came, and nearer, and before the listener had changed his position, a squadron of dragoons passed the lodge on a hand-gallop, and were followed by fire-engines. Alas! why came they no sooner?

The messengers who had made their way from the hall at the first discovery of the fire, sped fast away to Helston, looking back at intervals towards the light in the sky. The distance was about five miles; the road was slippery with the wet; the flood of rain was almost blinding: a full hour had elapsed before the first of the runners shouted "fire" in the deserted streets of the little borough. The inhabitants were at rest, but few were asleep, the din of the storm preventing slumber. Night-capped heads peeped timidly from windows, and demanded—where? The messenger learned the officers' quarters. There was some little demur. False alarms had been given before. But the bugle soon sounded to horse. The drowsy firemen equipped their engines; and when once the cavalcade had started, rattling over the stony street, a very short space sufficed to bring it to the gates of Pendarrel.

The greater portion of the marauders, struck with consternation at the sight of the soldiery, fled among the trees of the park, to be denounced, perhaps, at a future day, by informing comrades. But a few, maddened by intoxication and excitement, offered a futile resistance, and were captured on the spot, to answer for their ruffianism, not improbably with their lives.

As for the engines, they could effect nothing. The well-disposed of the country people, who were by this time assembled in great numbers, assisted in bringing them into play, and water was obtained from an ornamental reservoir in the garden; but fire was master of the hall. To save a small quantity of furniture from the lower rooms in the eastern wing, and to collect articles which lay scattered on the lawns, was all that the utmost exertion could accomplish. The whole of the mansion had fallen in, and the burning would continue as long as there remained anything to furnish fuel. Blackened walls, open to the sky, containing nothing but smoking and smouldering ruin, would be all the morning sun would shine upon of Pendarrel Hall.

CHAPTER III

The Hall of Cynddylan is gloomy this night,
Without fire, without bed—
I must weep awhile, and then be silent.

The Hall of Cynddylan is gloomy this night,
Without fire, without candle—
Except God doth, who will endue me with patience?

Llywarch Hen, by Owen.

The destruction of Pendarrel Hall was the crowning outrage of the riotous. It was a crime for which a severe retribution was certain to be exacted. On information, given partly by the prisoners taken at the fire, partly by volunteers who hoped to screen themselves, the civil and military authorities swept the country far and wide, and arrested numbers of suspected individuals. The hamlet of Trevethlan felt the visitation, and among its accused was the unfortunate Edward Owen. Many people, shuddering at the consciousness of guilt, fled for shelter to the wild moors and desolate carns, or lurked in the caverns of the sea-shore, obtaining a scanty and precarious nourishment from venturous friends or kindred. The prime mover of all the mischief, Gabriel Denis, had been captured on the spot; and there was scarcely a cottage between the two seas, which did not miss from the family circle some son or brother now lying in prison or lurking in the waste.

On the night of the disaster, the Pendarrels were at last persuaded to seek repose in such accommodation as was afforded by the lodge; but sleep was out of the question. Jaded and sad, they met in the morning, and went forth to survey the ruins of their home. Melancholy enough was the mere destruction of the edifice, yet that was the least among their sorrows. Wealth might restore the house to all its former splendour, but other losses were irreparable. All the relics of bygone days; the pledges of friendship and of love, the trinkets associated with old personal reminiscences, the memorials of travel and adventure, the rarities collected with their own hands, the family heir-looms, the toys of one childhood laid by to amuse another, the books of early lessons and early leisure, the sketches and drawings, the portraits and miniatures of the dead,—all of these had perished, and could never be replaced; for Pendarrel was their home, their old familiar dwelling-place, the storehouse of all things dear,—their cradle and their grave. Other houses they had, but none like Pendarrel.

Even the stern pride of Esther might bend a little under so great a calamity. Only the morning before she had been exulting over the humiliation of Trevethlan, and now her own hearth was desolate. In the terror of the night she had been surprised into an unusual display of tenderness towards her daughter. But any such feelings were merely transitory. Tale-bearers soon brought to her ear the shouts of "Hurrah for Trevethlan," which had been heard among the rioters. She thought of the scornful silence with which her invitation of yesterday had been received at the Castle, and permitted herself to suspect that the night's outrage might have had more than empty sympathy from its inmates.

She perceived also, with impatience, that the event would necessarily postpone the marriage of her daughter, and require it to be celebrated in London. Both the delay and the place was obnoxious, because the watchful mother still feared that Mildred's outward docility covered a strong resolve, and she was sorry to restore her to the protecting influence of Mrs. Winston. Such were the cold and harsh thoughts, which in Mrs. Pendarrel succeeded to the first depression occasioned by the calamity. But coming so suddenly on her triumph, it would be strange indeed if it were wholly unfelt, and the sequel may show that its effects were more considerable than Esther suspected at the time.

The exiles selected one from a host of offers of hospitality, but only availed themselves of the shelter for a single night; setting out the following morning on their way to town, and arriving in May Fair in due course. Mrs. Winston awaited their coming. She had her full share of the recent catastrophe. True it was she had made another home for herself, but much of her heart remained at Pendarrel. Even in a lately-written letter Mildred had mentioned their partnership in books. In fact, the fire might long be remembered in the annals of the family, becoming an epoch to date from, like that commemorated among the Jews by the spot left bare in the decoration of their walls, "the memory of desolation."

In the first *tête-à-tête* between the sisters, they turned from their own misfortunes to that which had befallen their cousins of Trevethlan, and when Gertrude had mentioned the invitation which she had already despatched to Helen, Mildred suffered herself to be drawn into a confession of all that had passed under the hawthorns on the cliff.

"Ah, Mildred," her sister said, shaking her head in gentle reproof, "remember that while I will do anything to save you from a union you dislike, I will do nothing to promote one which our parents disapprove. And that I fear will be the case as regards this gentleman. Count nothing, my dear, from my invitation to his sister. I should, perhaps, have hesitated to give it, had I known the state of the case."

But Mildred heard this little lecture without much heeding its warning. She was meditating on designs of her own, which she had no intention of confiding even to her sister. Her mother was not at all unlikely to find that she had raised a devil which she would be unable to lay.

Mildred rejoiced, however, at one circumstance: her unwelcome suitor did not immediately follow her to London. He had not been present at the fire; for although his domains joined those of Pendarrel, the houses were very far apart; and there was sufficient uncertainty at Tolpeden respecting the locality of the flames to excuse the indolent coxcomb from proceeding to assist, an excuse of which he readily availed himself in the midst of such a storm. He was greatly vexed when he heard the truth in the morning, and he paid a visit of polite condolence to the family, at which, however, he was not favoured with the company of Mildred.

And he was far from impatient to accompany her to town. The gossips at Mrs. Pendarrel's party had indeed exaggerated his embarrassments, but they were sufficiently heavy. Returning unable to fulfil his undertaking to his creditors, he should awaken a hundred sinister suspicions. The fire would be but a bad excuse for the delay, where all excuses prolonged the chapter of accidents. So Melcomb dreaded to make his appearance until everything was definitively arranged, and he could meet his foes with renewed promises of satisfaction.

To his unsuspected rival the fire was a godsend. It sent his patroness to London, exactly when with a doubting heart, Sinson was preparing to visit her in Cornwall, and thus enabled him to hold down his bondman Everope, with one hand, while with the other he preferred his audacious suit. Could Mrs. Pendarrel have read what was passing in her servant's heart, when he came cringing before her with congratulations on the result of the trial and condolence for the ruin of her house mingled in equal proportions, she would have cursed the hour when she took the fawning rustic into her service. He was now manœuvring to induce the wretched Everope to go abroad, in order that his last fears might be laid to sleep. But the spendthrift was not at all willing to accede to the proposition. And after all, Sinson thought, what did it matter? A little space would disclose the whole of his plot. And when his patroness was once implicated, there would be no danger of exposure. Should circumstances make it necessary, the Trevethlans might be quietly re-instated in their small patrimony, and Michael would be perfectly contented with the domain of Pendarrel. Everope might do as he pleased.

And now Esther had the mortification—for such it was to her—of receiving condolence from all the circle of her acquaintance. The burning of her house made no little stir in the metropolis. In public it was not unreasonably mentioned as affording a good ground for the general alarm. It might figure considerably in the Parliamentary debates—we need not specify the volume of Hansard—it

might occupy some space in the reports of secret committees; it might have a green bag all to itself. It was the topic of the day, and became a source of so much exasperation to the mistress of the ruined mansion, that she would almost have rejoiced to sink Pendarrel in some fathomless pool off the Lizard. It is so difficult to condole in a manner at all sufferable. Rarely is it pleasant to be pitied. People are apt to lavish their sorrow on what they think they would have most regretted themselves, and to forget the real weight of the calamity, in considering some detail which strikes their particular fancy. So Angelina might remember the gold fish in the garden, and hope they were not killed when the water was needed for the engines. Now as Esther really loved her home, and deeply deplored its ruin, it sometimes cost her an effort to answer her friends' sympathy with polite equanimity. For the condolers mean kindly, and must be kindly met.

But she was gratified also at times. Some hardy spirit would venture to approach her with a sarcasm. The town, that is to say such men as Winesour, could recollect the late Mr. Trevethlan, at the time he was squandering his fortune; when his companions called him a fool, and were very fond of his society. Such people remembered him with a certain kind of attachment, and heard of the final ruin of his supposed children with a certain sort of regret. And some of them were half aware of the old love-passages between the lord of the castle and the lady of the hall, and guessed for themselves the cause of Henry Trevethlan's desperation. And so with polished incivility, they contrived to compare the fire and the law-suit, and to send a diamond-headed shaft home to Mrs. Pendarrel's heart.

Now this Esther liked. It exasperated her, but it put her upon her mettle; and enabled her to exhibit a wit, delicate and keen as any that attacked her. And she wanted something of the kind. Disguise it as she would, she was bitterly humiliated by the catastrophe of that terrible night.

"Pendar'l and Trevethlan would own one name,"

when there was no place of the former appellation to claim its share in the prediction. The prophecy itself seemed to mock her. The fretfulness induced by these conflicting emotions, restrained abroad, vented itself at home, and fell heavily upon poor Mildred.

And now London was very full. The brilliant froth was bubbling and foaming over the edges of the cup. And so a perpetual round of gaiety invited the votaries of fashion, like the whirling dance about the funeral pyre of Arvalan. Into the fascinating circle Mrs. Pendarrel led her daughter, and took pains to let every one know, that the fillet was already bound round the victim's brow. But the latter was as little likely to succumb in patience to the intended doom, as the German poet's Bride of Corinth.

And was Esther at all mindful of her defeated adversaries? She heard of their answering her trembling invitation by a precipitate abandonment of their ancient home, and she took little heed of their further proceedings. She did not yet know the full extent of her triumph, and left the effects of the verdict to be developed in the dens of the lawyers.

CHAPTER IV

O Primavera, gioventù del' anno,
Bella madre de' fiori,
D'erbe novelle, e di novelli amori,
Tu torni ben, ma teco
Non tornano i sereni
E fortunati di delle mie gioje:
Tu torni ben, tu torni,
Ma teco altro non torna,
Che del perduto mio caro tesoro
La rimembranza misera e dolente.

Guarini.

Spring and Favonius were rapidly loosening the bonds of winter, when Randolph and his sister returned to their old quarters at Hampstead, with feelings very different from those which had attended their first arrival there. Six months had revolutionized their existence. And when in the tumult of emotion which followed the trial at Bodmin, the disinherited heir conceived the idea of seeking the roof which had sheltered his brief studentship, it was rather in that mockery with which despair often tries to delude itself, than with a serious purpose of fulfilling the design. He cast a sneering and scornful glance upon his sojourn in London, and thought of resuming it as a bitter jest. But come what might, he was resolved to quit Trevethlan, and that instantly. Where then could he go? Where find a home for Helen?—questions which Randolph answered by accepting in earnest the plan which he had conceived in irony. Let their old host and hostess enjoy a nine days' wonder.

So to Hampstead the orphans went, making a more leisurely journey than before, and arriving, free from fatigue, in the evening. They were received with warm cordiality.

"What!" said Peach to Randolph, when Helen had retired, "you slept last night at Basingstoke! Not disturbed, I hope, by any of the monk of Croyland's adversaries. Hear Fœlix concerning the foes of monastic rest, as Camden reports his very middling hexameters—

'Sunt aliqui quibus est crinis rigidus, caput amplum,
Frons cornuta, gena distorta, pupilla coruscans,
Os patulum, labra turgentia, dens peracutus—
Nonnulli quibus est non horrida forma, sed ipse
Horror, cum non sint scelerati, sed scelus ipsum.'"

Cornelius loved to hear himself talk, and this was a favourite quotation with him. Randolph assured him the inn at Basingstoke was quite free from the plagues of Croyland Abbey. And then, in a few brief sentences he acquainted Mr. Peach with his real quality. His landlord was amused with the romance.

"Why," said he, "you are like my Lord Burleigh, wooing his peasant-love under the guise of a painter."

A short time before, the remark would have occasioned a severe twinge, but now there was no room for any. Randolph was surrounded by a sea of troubles, and knew not in which direction to strike. And the full effect of the verdict was as yet unperceived by him. He had not observed that by dissolving all ties between himself and his father, it would deprive him not merely of his real estate, the castle and its precincts, but also of all the personal property which he possessed in the world. The

next of kin would follow the heir-at-law. In this case they were combined in the same person. Would any mercy be shown? Would it be accepted if it were? The orphans were literally beggars. Nay, they were even in debt. For a rigorous account might be exacted of every farthing of property, which the late Mr. Trevethlan left behind him at his death. And thus opprobium, immediate and inevitable, was hanging over Randolph's head.

The lawyers, of course, were well aware of this. But Mr. Truby, about whom there was nothing of the pettifogger, was in no hurry to advise his client to rush to extremities. He remembered the judge's observation at the trial, that additional evidence would probably be forthcoming before very long, and was not anxious to bear on the defeated party, in a manner which might afterwards be termed oppressive. He always hated sharp practice. He felt bound to mention the state of the case to Mr. Pendarrel, and that gentleman of course communicated it to his wife. Esther started at the news, but perceiving that every day would only involve the orphans more deeply, she was contented to let her advantage rest for a while.

On the other hand, Mr. Winter did not feel it on any account necessary to point out his real position to Randolph. Being certain that injustice had been done, although at present unable to see his way to its reversal, he was loth to risk the disclosure to one of so passionate and obstinate a temper as his client. And in truth the latter's condition required no aggravation. Randolph was in the plight, most harassing to a hot and impatient mood, when there is nothing immediately to be done, and the spirit chafes and rages at its forced inertness.

He sought his friend and counsel, Rereworth, but without obtaining any consolatory information. Seymour was endeavouring to trace the witness whose testimony had overthrown his friend. But hitherto wholly without success. Everope had disappeared entirely from all his former haunts. His chambers were perpetually closed, and the old woman, who acted as his laundress, knew nothing at all concerning her master's movements. Yet this was the quest which Rereworth thought held out the best hope of success; for if the spendthrift's evidence were bought, there were many circumstances conceivable, under which he might be induced to confess.

Very few days had elapsed after the arrival of the orphans at Hampstead, when they were joined by Polydore Riches. He brought them all the details of the conflagration at Pendarrel. And with wrath and indignation Randolph learned that it was pretty generally regarded in the country as a reprisal for the verdict at Bodmin. Not such was the retaliation he desired. The chaplain also grieved his old pupils with an account of the numerous arrests which had been made among the dependents of the castle. It seemed as though their own ruin involved that of many besides.

There was another circumstance connected with this intelligence which was of deep interest to Randolph. The Pendarrels had returned to London. He again breathed the same air with Mildred. Now he had almost rejoiced in the idea that this would not be the case. He was glad that in the dreary interval devoted to the recovery of his rights, during which he had vowed to see her no more, distance would remove any temptation to break the resolution. But she was again within his reach. Any day, in walking through the streets of the metropolis, she might cross his path. He would be in continual expectation of such a meeting. An instant might overthrow all his determination. It was another element to mingle in the turbulence of his emotions.

And the chaplain bore a missive also, which was a source of considerable discussion; namely, Mrs. Winston's letter to Helen, containing the invitation to her house. Gertrude had written with great tact, and with a full consciousness of the delicacy which might revolt from accepting an obligation from the daughter of Esther Pendarrel. She went so far as to say that her offer would probably be disagreeable to her mother if it were known, but she hoped to prevent that, until some fortunate discovery had re-instated her cousins in their just rights. And she infused into her whole letter a warmth of kindness and sympathy which she trusted would not be without its effect. For in truth she wrote from her heart.

But the proposal led to great demur. Randolph abhorred the idea of accepting anything like favour from any of his enemy's house; and was not disposed to admit Mrs. Winston's view of her independence. Yet, being married, she might be considered as no longer involved in the quarrel. And Randolph was very anxious to find his sister a home. She was in his way. He felt it with no want of affection. But whenever in his reveries he looked forward to the career he should adopt, as soon as he had re-established the good fame of his family, his sister always recurred to his mind as an obstacle in his path. Sketching for himself an adventurous course in some far-distant land, he was always recalled from the vision by the thought of her he should in such case be compelled to leave unprotected, behind. A very short glimpse into the future would have spared him much fruitless speculation.

Helen, with that gentle longing for a reconciliation which she showed in the very opening of this narrative, read Mrs. Winston's letter with pleasure, and desired to accept the invitation. In answer to her brother's peevish dissatisfaction, she urged that her visit might be very short, but that it would be ungrateful, uncharitable, every way perverse, to reject what was offered with such true kindness. She should be entirely private,—should, of course, hold no intercourse with Mr. or Mrs. Pendarrel, and could see Randolph as often and as freely as he pleased.

The chaplain supported Helen's argument with all his power. And in the end the brother yielded, little thinking to what a train of circumstances the visit would give rise. And so Miss Trevethlan removed to Cavendish-square, where Gertrude's winning demeanour soon put her completely at her ease, and where she walked through those same rooms, in which she might remember that Randolph encountered Mrs. Pendarrel face to face, and made the avowal which cut short his career as a student of the law.

He himself escorted her, and quivered a little as he stood in the well-remembered drawing-room. But he only staid a few minutes before returning to Hampstead, through the long and squalid suburb which then lay at the foot of the hill. The stuccoed terraces of the Regent's-park were still in the brain or the portfolio of the architect. The realization of Darwin's prophecy,

> "Soon shall thy arm, unconquered Steam, afar
> Drag the slow barge, or drive the rapid car,"

although it had taken place on one element, seemed as far distant on shore as when the poet wrote. What wonders have been wrought in these thirty years of peace! And is it possible to think, that once more our progress may be arrested by war, and that the energies which have so long been devoted to the cause of civilization—that great cause of the whole human race, in which nations may fraternize without reciprocal encroachment, which is identical with the advance of true liberty, and of the only equality which mortals can attain, that of virtue—is it possible that these energies can once more be required for self-defence, that the death-drum may again summon us to repel a foreign foe, or that symbols and watchwords may divide ourselves, and our ancient flag find a rival standard unfurled by the sons of those who fought the battle of freedom? Rather let us hope that the convulsions around us may be found to have cleared the air, and brought the day more near,

> "When the drum shall throb no longer, and the battle-flag be furled,
> In the parliament of man, the federation of the world."

The coming of Polydore Riches was an event of some interest to the worthy couple of the peachery. Clotilda, in common with most spinsters of her age, was much in the habit of criticising the mien and aspect of clergymen, and formed her own idea of the appearance of the chaplain from the respect and affection with which Helen always spoke of him. And it must be owned she was a little disappointed. She had expected rather a portly man, with white hair, and a commanding presence. She encountered a slight figure and a pale face, the habitual pensiveness of which was now deepened

by anxiety, and which was shaded by locks wherein silver had as yet but little share. Miss Peach allowed that Polydore was "interesting," but she had expected something more.

But Randolph was quite right in predicting that the chaplain and Cornelius would agree together admirably. The two old bachelors speedily conceived a high mutual esteem. Their tastes were very similar. In each there was the same simplicity of character. Polydore was more refined and enthusiastic; Cornelius more humorous and practical. The worthy host soon prevailed on his new friend to join him in a pipe, a luxury in which the chaplain had scarcely indulged since he quitted the classic shades of Granta. And they exhaled the fragrant fumes, due to Peach's ancient friend Sir Walter, so long, that the old clerk fell into a rhapsody on the perfections of that creature of his dreams, Mabel; and actually extracted from Polydore a murmured panegyric on that treasure of his memory, Rose Griffith. And then might a spectator have been amused to observe how the names of Mabel and Rose alternated with the puffs of smoke, and were often sighed forth in concert, with a pathos that might have done honour to the unworthily-used Malvolio.

CHAPTER V

Margaret. To me what's title when content is wanting?
Or wealth, raked up together with much care,
And to be kept with more, when the heart pines,
In being dispossessed of what it longs for
Beyond the Indian mines? Or the smooth brow
Of a pleased sire, that slaves me to his will,
Leaving my soul nor faculties nor power
To make her own election?

Allworth. But the dangers
That follow the repulse,–

Margaret. To me they're nothing:
Let Allworth love, I cannot be unhappy.

Massinger.

As Mr. Winston's suggestion to his wife, that she should ask Miss Trevethlan to their house, seemed suddenly to improve their mutual understanding, so did Helen's acceptance of the invitation make them still better known to each other. Among the commonest and worst features of unions like theirs, is a prejudice on one side or the other that happiness is impossible, which closes every avenue to amelioration. The discontented parties have eyes only for defects. The heart which accepted the match with ill-disguised repugnance, is subsequently too proud to admit it was in error. It will not resign the privilege of complaint. It insists on continually galling itself with what it calls its chains. It hugs the satisfaction of considering itself ill-used. For the world, it would not allow itself, even in reverie, to be at ease. Yet, when there is no real deficiency either in character or temper, a hopeful spirit will probably soon find grounds for esteem, and esteem will be likely to ripen into affection. And then the very contrasts of disposition which at first appeared to preclude sympathy, will really promote it, by furnishing opportunities for good-humoured mirth, instead of objects for silent peevishness.

Gertrude Winston had never thought it worth her while to understand her husband. She married him as a pure negation, preferring King Log to King Stork. He was neither sulky, nor mean, nor selfish; he was not meddlesome, nor fidgety, nor exacting. His wife never heard a sharp word from his lips. Surely she might have taken the trouble to go a little below the surface, and see if his pedantry and apathy concealed no qualities which she might first admire, and then love. But no; she had determined to be a "victim," and resolutely closed both heart and mind against any appreciation of whatever might be endearing in his disposition. And for him,—indolent and even-tempered, having married because people usually married, in the same way as they were born and buried,—he certainly took no pains to display his merits, and allowed his wife to do exactly as she pleased, without let or hinderance.

And Gertrude did not abuse the licence. She would not have asked Helen to her house without consulting her husband. In his ready though measured proposal to that effect, Mrs. Winston felt there was a kindness which she had failed to perceive in all his previous demeanour towards her. And when their guest arrived, he surprised her still more by rousing himself from his monotonous pursuits to find sources of interest and amusement for Miss Trevethlan. Gertrude was far above jealousy, and attributed his attentions to their true motive,—a desire to alleviate the anxiety of their new friend.

Yet was Helen one who might well awaken the domestic fiend. Rather under the average height of woman, but of a full and luxurious form, she moved with that soft and undulating mien which

fascinates even from afar; and if, allured by the figure, you permitted yourself to advance and look upon the face, you would find it was worthy of the shape. You would see a forehead of the purest white, not very high, but broad and serene, shaded by long dark ringlets, and supported by eyebrows of the same colour, rather far apart, and very slightly arched. Under these you would look into eyes also as dark as night, so gentle and so fond, that well would it be for you if they did not haunt your slumbers for many a night to come. Their long lashes drooped over cheeks perhaps a thought too pale, but so transparently fair that they flushed with every transient emotion, and then almost rivalled the full and tempting lips, which lost themselves in dimples at each corner, and showed that the pensiveness usually characterizing the countenance was not unwilling to give place to any gaiety of the hour.

At the present time, however, pensiveness prevailed, and increased the contrast which Helen's beauty always presented to the attractions of her cousins. She might trace in Mrs. Winston a strong resemblance to the features of the miniature found upon her father's heart, which she had since worn upon hers, and whose original she detected at that eventful visit to the opera. There were the same inscrutable dark eyes, like those in which Charles Lamb said lurked the depth of Jael; there were the same haughty will, and the same decision of purpose; but there was, Helen thought, something more of tenderness and less of disdain.

She had been but a very short time in Cavendish-square when she made the acquaintance of Mildred. Having informed her sister of her invitation, Mrs. Winston could scarcely avoid the introduction, although she was cognizant of a certain secret. Helen possessed no corresponding knowledge, yet a gentle confidence grew up between the maidens, and Mildred perhaps regarded her cousin as not unlikely to be more nearly related to her. Naturally also, and unavoidably, she heard not a little concerning Randolph, and listened to such intelligence with no untroubled heart.

Indeed she had begun to think of him more than was prudent; forced into the recollection by her situation at home. She saw that Mrs. Pendarrel was daily proceeding in the same course she had adopted in Cornwall, and that she herself was becoming more and more involved in conduct which she loathed. She found it very difficult to procure an explanation with her mother, for since the short colloquy in which she attempted to remonstrate the morning after the country party, Mrs. Pendarrel had abruptly checked all further efforts of the same sort. At length, half in despair, Mildred thought of appealing, perhaps for the first time in her life, to her father.

It was a very poor prospect. The scheming younger brother had long sunk into the intriguing political hack. Obsequious, cold, worldly-minded, and correct, was Mr. Trevethlan Pendarrel. He would as soon have thought of absenting himself from a division, as of interfering with his wife's domestic rule. He dared not even object to her lavish expenditure, although he was fonder of money than of anything else; and he was too dull a plodder in official harness to understand the jests sometimes made at his expense. He was greatly surprised when his daughter intercepted him one day on his return home, and led him into a parlour.

"Papa," Mildred said, "I am sure you love me."

"Of course, of course," he answered. "But your mamma takes care of all that." He thought she was going to ask for money.

"But pray do hear me, papa. They say … This marriage...."

"Of course, my dear. Your mamma has arranged it all. Very agreeable man, Mr. Melcomb. Calls me Petruchio. Marriage! Why, you'll be the envy of half the ladies in London!"

"But, papa, it cannot be. I have told him so."

"Cannot! I don't understand. You must speak to mamma. She manages it all. There—there—"

So saying, he kissed her cheek hastily and departed. Mildred knew not where to turn. Her mother's tactics defeated the support which she had expected from Mrs. Winston, for although the latter threw all the discredit she could upon the rumours of the approaching marriage, no pretence was afforded for any interference of a more active kind. But Mildred, becoming more and more restless, at length seized an opportunity of telling her mother suddenly, that she would go no more

into society until the report of her engagement was positively contradicted. Mrs. Pendarrel flew into a violent rage. All her plans were very far advanced. Almost every particular was definitely settled. She was flushed with her triumph at Bodmin. Was everything to be undone by the whim of a foolish girl?

"What!" Esther exclaimed, with fury sparkling in her eyes, "have you courage to be openly disobedient? Will you dare to fly in my face? Do you think to make me wanting to my pledged word? Do you imagine I will bear the scoffs and taunts bestowed upon a beaten match-maker? No, Miss Pendarrel. You will marry as I bid you, or—but there is no alternative."

In the heat of her anger, Esther almost gasped for breath. She had for some time observed her daughter's manner with smouldering wrath, and now Mildred's avowal produced a fierce burst of flame. It deprived Mrs. Pendarrel of her prudence.

"And hark!" she cried. "Do you suppose that I am blind? Do you fancy I know nothing about what you call your heart? Have I forgotten who trembled on my arm, when that upstart pretender dared to intrude into society which he could not have entered honestly, and laid claim to a name to which he had no right? Do I not remember whose cheeks were reddened, and whose voice said 'my cousin?'"

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.