WATSON WILLIAM DAVY

TREVETHLAN: A CORNISH STORY. VOLUME 1

William Watson

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Содержание

William Davy Watson
Trevethlan: A Cornish Story. Volume 1 (of 3)

CHAPTER I

"What, am I poor of late?
'Tis certain, greatness, once fallen out with fortune,
Must fall out with men too. What the declined is,
He shall as soon read in the eyes of others,
As feel in his own fall: for men, like butterflies,
Show not their mealy wings but to the summer;
And not a man, for being simply man,
Hath any honour; but honour for those honours
That are without him, as place, riches, favour,
Prizes of accident as oft as merit."

Shakspeare.

Late in September, some thirty years ago, Henry Trevethlan lay dying in the state-bedchamber of Trevethlan Castle; in Cornwall. It was a large and lofty apartment, indifferently lighted by Gothic casements overlooking the sea, and wearing a gloomy and desolate aspect. Old hangings of tapestry, much faded and worn, covered the walls; the furniture was scanty and inconvenient; the floor was bare, and the dark oak had lost its polish; the very logs in the spacious chimney seemed damped by the cheerlessness of the room, and threw a dull red glare over the prodigious bed, where death was silently counting the few sands yet remaining in the upper half of his hour-glass.

As soon as he found himself seriously ill, Mr. Trevethlan had solemnly charged his medical attendant to warn him of the first approach of danger; and immediately that the announcement was made, he caused himself to be removed from the smaller but more commodious apartment which he usually occupied, to the dreary greatness of the state-chamber, taking no heed of the remonstrance that the change would probably hasten his dissolution.

"Pshaw!" said he. "What matter a few days? The Trevethlans always die in the state-rooms."

Accordingly their present representative was duly observing the custom. Four days had elapsed since his removal, and he had sunk so rapidly, that it was now doubtful whether as many more hours remained to him; but his mental faculties were still clear and unclouded. His son and daughter watched mournfully by his bedside.

"Helen," he said, "Helen Trevethlan, I wish to speak with your brother. Leave us for a while."

The girl rose silently, and glided out of the room. As soon as she had closed the door, the dying man turned feebly upon his pillows, fixed his still bright eyes upon his son, and spoke in low but distinct accents:

"Randolph, I leave you a beggar and a Trevethlan! May my curse cling to you, if ever you suffer poverty to tamper with pride. Employment will be open to you: may your appointment be your death-warrant. Ay, methinks it may raise my ghost, if Randolph Trevethlan accept a favour from Philip Pendarrel. Live, sir, here, as I have lived. Marry, sir, as I married. Rear an heir to the castle, as I have reared you. Bequeath him the same legacy, which I bequeath you. But there is my fear. How much of your mother's blood runs in your veins? What base leanings may you not have inherited from her? Feel you not a love for your peasant relatives? Gratifying my revenge by engrafting a wild bud on a

noble stem, I forgot that the fruit might degenerate. Speak, sir, is it so? Do the honours of Trevethlan descend upon a dastard? Say it, that a father's curse may embitter the remainder of your days."

"Oh, my father," said the young man, in deep and earnest tones, "never shall our name be degraded while it belongs to me. But may I not strive to restore it to splendour? Must Trevethlan ever be desolate? Shall the successors of our race wander in these halls, only to mourn over their decay? And is the livery of office the sole passport to the means of renovation? Have I not hands, and a head, and heart?"

"What would you, sir?" exclaimed the father. "Hands! would you dig? There speaks your peasant mother. Head! learning! profession! What portrait has its face turned to the wall in yonder gallery? Mr. Justice Trevethlan, attaint of corruption. Heart! arms! Ay, but not in peace. No Trevethlan wears a sword to adorn a levee. And now, sir, the source of your commission would make it a disgrace."

"My father," Randolph again said, "to no patron will I be indebted for advancement. On myself alone I rely. May I not exert the powers I derive from nature? I thought not of the army: a uniform has no temptations for me. But, gazing on the back of that picture, might I not hope to wipe out the stain incurred in a corrupt age, by rising to be an example in purer times?"

"Shall a Trevethlan descend among the paltry Chiquanous?" said the dying man, with great bitterness. "Shall that name be mingled with the low trickery of the modern forum; exposed to the risk of failure, and to the mockery of upstart talent? Shall Esther Pendarrel smile at the rude eloquence of her rejected suitor's heir, and exult over the unretrieved ruin of his house? No, sir. Think it not. Starve, sir, here in Trevethlan Castle."

"But my father," the young man urged, "if means could be found whereby all such risk should be avoided; if success might restore our house, while failure could not degrade it; might I not venture on a career so guarded?"

"How, sir, is such a course practicable?"

"By permitting me, my father, for a time to wear a mask," answered Randolph. "The name of Trevethlan may be supposed to be wandering abroad, while the estates are recovering themselves at home; and the real bearer of the name, assuming one less known, may live obscurely in London, struggling honourably for an independence. If he fail, the pilgrim returns: if he succeeds, he brings new honour to Trevethlan Castle."

Mr. Trevethlan made no answer to this proposition for a considerable time; and his son might see by the varying expression of his sharpened features, the struggle which agitated his mind. At length he spoke, in tones milder and more parental than he had used previously.

"Randolph, I consent. I have watched you well, and, in spite of the taunts which break from my soured heart, I believe you are worthy of your name."

"Father," said the son, "my life must show my gratitude: it shall be passed, as if you still beheld it."

Again there was a long silence in the gloomy chamber. Then the dying man spoke anew, in accents still tenderer than his last.

"Randolph, I mentioned Esther Pendarrel. You know her not by sight. She was once, or I fancied she was, very dear to me. She coquetted with me, discarded me, and wedded my kinsman. I never forgave her; and, except on one provision, I now forbid all future intercourse with her or hers. But I have sometimes thought I was not so indifferent to her, as she, in her contempt, pretended. If it were so, she has avenged me on herself, and has my pardon. You know my dying will. As I have consented to the temporary obscuration of our race, so do you promise, with the qualification I mentioned, to have no friendly relations with the family of Philip Pendarrel."

Rashly and wrongfully the son gave the pledge wrongfully and deliberately required by the father, and soon afterwards summoned his sister back to her place beside the bed of death. The following morning the blinds were not raised in the windows of the castle, and the ragged flag which

waved over the loftiest watch-tower, floated from the middle of its staff. The last sand of the hour-glass had run, and Henry Trevethlan was numbered with his fathers.

Trevethlan Castle was an extensive pile of Tudor architecture, situate on a bold headland projecting into the sea between the Lizard and Marazion. The state apartments stretched along the cliff, and commanded a fine view of Mount's Bay and the surrounding uplands; while the other buildings of the castle, strengthened at intervals by lofty towers, enclosed an irregular court-yard. The remains of walls and ruined turrets, sweeping inland, marked the circuit of what had once been the base-court—a spacious area, where Owen Trevethlan mustered his vassals to pursue Perkin Warbeck's rebels, obtaining for his services on that occasion the title of baron. This honour had, however, been allowed to lapse; and, although it was stated to be easily recoverable, no subsequent head of the family had chosen to moot the question. Perhaps they thought their name sufficiently distinguished without any addition: perhaps the fact that, being a crotchetty race, they were almost always in opposition to the Crown, made them loth to seek even the shadow of a favour.

But the days of feudal violence and civil dudgeon were long gone by; and instead of the clang of arms and the tramp of soldiers, the base-court of Trevethlan Castle now echoed no sound more military than the occasional crack of a fowling-piece; and its silence was more generally broken by the mower sharpening his scythe, or the gardener trailing a roller. Sooth to say, even these peaceful noises had been very rare for a long time previous to the opening of this tale: the garden which occupied the old place of arms had fallen into neglect; the ivy, which might have been ornamental to the ruined walls and outworks, stifled the trees and shrubs in its oppressive embrace; the flowers struggled hard for life amidst a host of weeds; the grass of the lawn, unmown since the summer, when it was cut for hay, was rusty and patchy; the gravel walks were green and mouldy. One little plot of ground, however, was an oasis in the general desert: it occupied an angle of the castle, having a southern aspect, and was screened from the sea-breezes by the wall along the cliff: here trim flower-beds were cut in a small expanse of turf, and displayed, even at this advanced season, not a few gems of horticulture.

And two or three windows, looking from the first floor on this still blooming garden, presented no less striking a contrast to the rest of the castle, than the garden itself afforded to the remainder of the great court. Their florid decorations were sharp and fresh; their glass was bright and clear; and white curtains within might temper the radiance of the mid-day sun. But, everywhere else, the progress of decay was manifest: the Gothic tracery was crumbling away; panes were frequently wanting in the casements; and when they were perfect, the winter spray and summer dust had rendered them nearly opaque. Weeds grew between the stones and on the ledges of the walls; and long creeping-plants hung from the battlements, and waved mournfully in the wind. Desolation reigned paramount over Trevethlan Castle.

Nor did the interior of the building belie its external aspect. The state bed-chamber was a sample of all the rest. In many of the rooms the dust had been undisturbed for nearly thirty years. But two were exceptions to the general neglect: one, the gallery to which Mr. Trevethlan referred, where hung the portraits of the family, generation after generation, from the days of Holbein to those of Reynolds. This was the favourite walk of Mrs. Griffith, the wife of the steward, whose office had been hereditary in his family almost from the earliest of those portraits. Mrs. Griffith used to spend much of her spare time in the gallery, walking to and fro with a long flapper of feathers in her hand, gently and reverentially brushing the dust from the pictures, and never passing that which was turned to the wall without a deep sigh.

The last Mrs. Trevethlan—a new Griselda—had been treated with civil neglect by her husband, and died under the weight of her position, after bearing him the son and daughter already introduced. She was the child of a small tenant upon the estate; and Mr. Trevethlan, having attained the only object of his marriage, checked some presumption of her family with marked disdain. The maternal care and early education of his children devolved upon Mrs. Griffith, and the portrait-gallery was their usual school-room. Here they learned the history of their family as the history of England: not

a bad *memoria technica*, but one attended with some risk. However, it may easily be guessed that they had no hard task-mistress, and that battledore-and-shuttlecock often interrupted the story of Queen Elizabeth's maid-of-honour, or of the colonel who fell in endeavouring to rally Fairfax's horse at Marston Moor.

And whatever family pride might be acquired in this gallery was chastened in the other apartment exempted from the general desolation. This was the library, the especial domain of Polydore Riches, the chaplain of the castle. Riches held a fellowship at Cambridge, but had incurred, no matter how, the dislike of his superiors; being somewhat timid and retiring, he thereupon gave up residence, and accepted Mr. Trevethlan's offer of his chaplaincy and the curacy of the hamlet. And when that gentleman's affairs became inextricably involved, the worthy clergyman declined a release from his duties, and continued to reside at Trevethlan, maintaining himself on the proceeds of his fellowship. The people at the village said he might sometimes be seen in the dusk of evening, leaning on the tombstone in their churchyard which marked the resting-place of Rose Griffith, a relation of the steward. It was also said that he had positively refused to perform the marriage ceremony between his patron and Margaret Basset; and it was true. For once, Mr. Trevethlan respected a pride that was equal to his own, and contented himself with a sarcasm on the eccentricity of poverty.

Polydore had now resided nearly thirty years at the castle, and was more than fifty in age. But time sat light upon him, and he looked much younger. From Mrs. Griffith he received as pupils his patron's children, and the library took the place of the picture gallery. Polydore was enthusiastic, and children love enthusiasm: there was a tinge of sadness in his demeanour, and childish pity is more akin to affection than that of older persons. It was not wonderful that Randolph and Helen were frequently glad to escape from the presence of the cold and stern man whom they called father, to the teaching of the tender and gentle being who ruled in the library. Nor was it more strange that with such an instructor they made rapid proficiency in whatever pursuit he directed.

"Lonely," he exclaimed one day, when Randolph, then sixteen, inquired if he did not feel so in the solitude of the castle, "lonely with a library like this! Lonely in the society of those around me! Of Park, first beholding the Niger! Of Columbus, seeing the light from the poop of his ship! Of Watt, contemplating one of our Cornish engines! Of Newton, observing the fall of the apple! Of Luther, taking his stand at the Diet of Worms! Of Shakspeare, giving

> 'to airy nothing
> A local habitation and a name!'

Of Bacon, writing 'Thus thought Francis of Verulam!' Lonely amidst the triumphs of enterprise, art and science; of history, poetry and philosophy! Lonely, where whatever science has discovered, and art applied, and enterprise accomplished; what history has recorded, and poetry exalted, and philosophy ordered, is visibly presented! Where power, skill, and understanding, memory, fancy, and wisdom have written their greatest names, their mightiest deeds, their noblest thoughts! No, Randolph Trevethlan, there is no loneliness in such society as this."

It was his own feeling, perhaps, that Randolph expressed in the inquiry which extracted this speech from the chaplain. For to the buoyancy of youth, the castle might well seem a dreary abode. When a man gives up the world, the world generally returns the compliment; and in this instance Mr. Trevethlan's violation of the bienséances in his marriage widened the breach. No friend or relation visited him during the last years of his life. And, indeed, their entertainment would have been a serious burden on the finances of their host. It is probable that the steward was a much richer man than his master; it is not impossible that all the expenses of Trevethlan did not fall upon its lord.

Yet the establishment had gradually declined to the lowest point. An old porter, named Jeffrey, who occupied the entrance lodge to the inner court, and cultivated a small kitchen garden, was the only male domestic: his wife, and two or three maid-servants performed all the other offices of the

castle. People often wondered that Mr. Griffith did not leave such a falling house. But Mr. Griffith was not a rat. He had lived there more than half a century, and was prepared to continue as long again.

Nor let it be supposed that this devotion was entirely due to the place. Proud and reserved as had been its recent master, he was far from being wholly unamiable; even his children, to whom he behaved with uniform harshness, regarded him with as much affection as awe; and his dependents, whom he treated with almost as constant kindness, served him with real attachment. Well did Griffith recollect the day, although it was five and thirty years past, and he was scarcely twenty at the time, when Mr. Trevethlan galloped into the court-yard with his horse in a foam, on his return from Pendarrel, ordered his carriage, paced impatiently up and down the great hall while it was being prepared, and departed to London without uttering another word. Well, too, did the steward remember his father's grief, as missive after missive came to Trevethlan in the few following years, of which the constant burden was "money, money." Mortgage Tresylty, sell Penrevil, fell Withewood; so it went on, until the extensive domain, once appended to the castle, was reduced to its immediate precincts. Then Mr. Trevethlan came home, and lived during the remainder of his days in the secluded manner, which has already been sufficiently described.

CHAPTER II

"Strange is it, that our bloods,
Of colour, weight, and heat, poured all together,
Would quite confound distinction, yet stand off
In differences so mighty."

Shakspeare

Randolph Trevethlan was just of age when his father died; his sister, two years younger. Their singular education had impressed peculiarities upon each of them; but, trained so entirely together, their habits and dispositions had grown into a conformity almost perfect. Their pursuits, their wishes, their attachments were always the same. Their father never allowed them to set foot on any ground which had been alienated from the castle; and as such surrounded it at a short distance, their inland walks were restricted within a very narrow cordon. But the beach, no man's land, was open to their rambles: a winding stair led from the castle to a portal cut in the face of the rock on which it stood, and a flight of steps descended from this doorway to the shingles, washed by the waves which rolled eternally from the farthest Atlantic. Not far to the south, the rock formed a narrow promontory of inconsiderable height, but running out some distance into the sea. The rough granite afforded good footing, and with a little exertion, it was not difficult to reach the extremity, where there was a small cave. Randolph smoothed the ruggedness of the way, and this recess, which they called Merlin's Cave, became the favourite resort of himself and Helen. From it, they looked straightforward past Mousehole and the Logan Rock to the meeting of sea and sky, while a turn to the right, showed them St. Michael's Mount and the beautiful woods over Penzance. Here, in the warm season, they often sat for many hours together, reading the legends of Cornubia, and of Armorica across the waters. Here, in the winter, when the wind blew heavily from the west, they came to admire the huge swell of the ocean thundering idly on the granite beneath their feet. It might be thought that such a life would produce a dreamy and feeble turn of mind, ill-calculated to withstand the buffets of the world. And it will be found, in fact, that this result did in some degree follow. But the lessons and conversation of Polydore Riches, and the cold cynicism of Mr. Trevethlan, furnished a partial antidote to its enervating tendency. It made the brother and sister highly enthusiastic, but it did not entirely substitute romance for reality. They knew very little of the world, yet the castles which they built in the air, were of brick and mortar, not of crystal and vapour. The plan which Randolph disclosed to his dying father, had been often discussed between himself and Helen. An old edition of Blackstone's Commentaries, and one, equally out of date of Burn's Justice, which he found in the library, attested by their wear and tear, the diligence of the young student, who little thought of the depth to which he must dive, to find the sands of the legal Pactolus. To go to London, to take some suburban lodging, to dwell in frugal retirement, was the scheme arranged by Randolph and Helen *Morton*. Mr. Griffith and Polydore would be their only confidants; the former would introduce Randolph to the family lawyer, of course in his feigned name, who would procure his admission at an Inn of Court; five years—that was the bitter in the cup—five long years would qualify him for the bar: and then, he should stretch forth his hand and collect the golden grains. When a sufficiency of the commodity was stored up, Randolph and Helen *Trevethlan* would arrive one fine day at Trevethlan Castle, which would have been gradually restored to receive them, and there would be ringing of bells and firing of cannon; a new flag would fly from the lofty watch-tower; Griffith and his wife would weep for joy; Polydore would give them his blessing; and the sun of Trevethlan, long hidden by clouds, would shine out with a glory never to be again obscured.

These visions were interrupted by Mr. Trevethlan's illness and death. The preparations necessary for the funeral devolved upon the steward and his wife. Mrs. Griffith produced some velvet which had once been black, wherewith to hang the state chamber, and a few tapers lighted up the solemn mockery. The orphan brother and sister sat afar in those rooms, which have been already described as overlooking a small flower garden. The blinds, lowered reverentially, debarred the occupants from beholding the prospect, and seemed to sever them from all communion with the world. They leant against each other in sad silence, as if they were too feeble to sustain themselves apart, and required mutual support. Little had they thought how much the loss, even of their father, could add to the loneliness of Trevethlan Castle. And the scheme on which they had so long and so often dwelt in Merlin's Cave, and which then seemed so simple and feasible, now assumed a hard and perplexing aspect. The edifice, which at a distance looked fair and stately, presented on a nearer view the whited wall of the sepulchre.

Wrapped in such reverie, with their arms twined around each other, they were sitting side by side, the day preceding that appointed for the funeral, when the chaplain entered with a letter in his hand. Very rare, indeed, was the arrival of such a missive at the castle, and Polydore's appearance roused the mourners from their lethargy. He delivered the epistle to Randolph, and retired with delicate kindness. It was dated from May Fair, London, and was to the following effect:—

> "My Dear Nephew,
>
> "The estrangement, which has so long and so unhappily divided our families, cannot deter me from offering you and my niece, the sincere condolence both of Mrs. Trevethlan Pendarrel and of myself, on the recent melancholy event.
>
> "Most deeply do I regret that a pressure of engagements will prevent me from attending the last obsequies of my lamented relative; but Mrs. Trevethlan Pendarrel intends to have the pleasure of calling at Trevethlan Castle before many days have elapsed, and of making the acquaintance of her nephew and niece.
>
> "Fearing that circumstances may render the funeral an embarrassment, and awaiting a satisfactory arrangement for the comfort of yourself and your sister, I have ventured to direct my bankers, Messrs.–, to honour the drafts of Mr. Randolph Trevethlan to the amount of £500.
>
> "Mrs. Trevethlan Pendarrel unites in the regard with which
>
> *"I am,*
> *"My dear nephew,*
> *"Yours very affectionately,*
> *"P. Trevethlan Pendarrel."*

Helen watched her brother's face as he read this effusion of sympathy, and was almost alarmed at the change which came over it. He held the letter at arm's length, and gazed upon it: the lessons of the portrait-gallery crowded thickly upon him, and those of the library were forgotten.

"May I read it, Randolph?" his sister asked, timidly laying her hand on his extended arm.

"Read it!" he repeated. "Ay, read it, Helen; read it, and learn what we have become! Well might our father say that a favour received from Philip Pendarrel would disturb him in his grave."

"Was it not kindly meant?" Helen said, gently, after perusing the letter.

"Is insult ever kind?" asked her brother in reply. "Think they the spirit of our house is extinct, that they come in such hot haste to exult over its decay? Helen, the letter gives me heart. Why have we desponded of our scheme? We are not yet absolutely beggars. The last moveable in the castle shall be sold, the last farthing spent, in the struggle for independence. And if it fail, we will come back to our cold hearth, and here, for the last time, our hearts shall beat together as they do now. But, Helen, my dearest sister, we will not fail."

"And this promised visit?" his sister said, after a pause.

"Mrs. Pendarrel must return as she comes," said Randolph. "She does not cross the threshold of Trevethlan Castle while I am its master.—Come, let us take a turn in the gallery."

Helen sighed as she took her brother's arm for the walk he proposed. The conflict which restored his spirit, saddened hers. It seemed a presage of evil, that the first step of the orphans should involve them in a quarrel with their nearest relations. The rowan bends wailing under the breeze which the oak defies. Several times had the length of the gallery been traversed in silence, when Randolph produced a small miniature, and showed it to his sister.

"See, Helen," he said: "they found this upon him. I imagine it is her likeness—Mrs. Pendarrel's."

"It is very beautiful," Helen remarked.

"Very beautiful," repeated her brother, "at first sight. But is it not a beauty rather to fear than to love? There is strong expression in the face—but of what? Is hatred or affection most apparent in those inscrutable dark eyes? Is it good-humour or disdain that curls those lips?"

"And why," Helen asked, "do you think it is a portrait of Mrs. Pendarrel?"

"Because, my dear sister, our poor father told me she was once very dear to him: she encouraged him, he said, and refused him. When they brought me this picture, it recalled his words. There is a key to the history which we have dimly heard."

Again the orphans made several turns in the gallery, musing in silence. Then Randolph spoke:—

"Yes, Helen!—that was the beauty destined to be the ruin of our house. In each successive crash that broke upon his head, our father hoped to find forgetfulness of the past. But it was too deeply written on his heart. And when the desolation was complete, he came back here to hide anguish under pride, to cover tenderness with stern reserve. Hence that cold demeanour which kept even his children at a distance, and, seeming to reject their affection, checked, but did not stifle, its growth. The story has made him more dear to me than ever before. And now she, who broke his heart and drove him to ruin, insults us with her sympathy and her wealth."

"She must herself be old," said Helen. "Perhaps she, too, has had sorrows. I would fain believe you misinterpret that letter."

"Your wish is what it should be," observed Randolph: "I should be glad to think it well founded. Forgive me, dear sister, if, for once, I differ from you. We must not see Mrs. Pendarrel."

The next day Randolph Trevethlan followed his father's remains to the vault in the village churchyard. It was but a short space from the gates of the base-court, and within the precinct still appertaining to the castle. Polydore Riches performed the funeral rites, and the grave closed over the dead.

The chief mourner had been too much absorbed in his own emotions during the ceremony to notice the bystanders; but when it was over, he looked round to thank such as were known to him, for their sympathy and respect. While so engaged, he happened to turn his eye on a couple, who stood a little apart, beneath the shade of an old yew tree. They were a young man about his own age, and a decrepit old woman. They returned his look with an air which might be termed insolent, and which, under other circumstances, might have provoked his anger. But the features of the youth, although coarse and sinister, seemed vaguely to resemble some with which Randolph was familiar, and as he gazed upon them, he asked the chaplain if he knew who the stranger was. Before Polydore could reply, the old woman answered, having seen, not heard, the question.

"Who am I? Thy mother's mother: thy grandmother. Who is this? Thy mother's sister's son: thy cousin. We were not asked to the burying, but we came. To weep for a son-in-law? To weep for an uncle? Did he weep for his wife? Na, na."

Randolph was inexpressibly shocked.

"I dreamt not of this," he said to the chaplain in a low tone. "Something must be done. Are they in distress?"

"Na, na," said the old woman with a frightful grin, again interpreting the motion of his lips, "we want nothing of you, Mr. Randolph Trevethlan. We belong to Pendar'l now. And so will Trevethlan.

'When the castle a bride from the cot shall claim,
Pendar'l and Trevethlan shall own one name.'

Margaret Basset's mother seeks not from a son the help which a husband refused."

Polydore put his arm through Randolph's, and drew him away. The late Mr. Trevethlan's marriage had been a prohibited subject at the castle, and all that his children knew concerning it, was, that their mother had been of humble birth. So this was his son's first introduction to his maternal relations. "It is thus," thought the chaplain, "that the sins of the fathers are visited upon the children."

The resemblance which Randolph had detected in the young man's features, was to himself. It was of that vague character which the eye often discovers in an unknown portrait, depending not on complexion, or lineaments, or even expression, and difficult, therefore, to make visible to another's perception. So now a third person would probably have failed to see the likeness, recognised at once by the heir of Trevethlan. For while candour and courage distinguished Randolph's countenance, cunning and meanness lurked in the aspect of Michael Sinson.

The development of such traits in the peasant might be owing to his early life. When Margaret Basset sorrowfully obeyed the order which seemed to make her mistress of Trevethlan Castle, her family conceived great hopes from her elevation, instead of sympathising in her grief. Her nephew, Michael, was trained in the habits they fancied most likely to conciliate the favour of their lord, vulgar obsequiousness and fawning dissimulation. For some time after Mrs. Trevethlan's death, he was allowed to hang about the castle, enjoying the benefit of Polydore's instruction, and encouraged in the idea, that he might grow to be the confidant and companion of the youthful heir. Those who thought so, little knew Mr. Trevethlan. Pride hates the sycophancy which is acceptable to vanity. He was simply disgusted by the offered homage; and at once perceiving its drift, excluded his wife's relations from all connexion with his household, and ejected them from their little farm. They settled upon the neighbouring estates of Pendarrel, cherishing a natural enmity against their late landlord, and beholding his ruin with a certain exultation. They also chose to consider that poor Margaret had been aggrieved by the compulsion in which they themselves participated, and thus sharpened craft and malice with the feeling of injury. With such spiteful mind old Maud Basset came to the funeral, and flung in Randolph's teeth a prophecy, which had been much recited of late years among the peasantry of the neighbourhood.

And now Trevethlan Castle re-assumed its usual appearance. One of Randolph's first cares after the funeral was to warn Jeffrey, the porter, that all visitors whatsoever who might present themselves at the gates, were to be informed neither he nor his sister was at home, and were not to be admitted on any pretence. Archbishop Secker is reported to have said, that the *first* person who used this excuse told a lie. It sorely puzzled old Jeffrey's notions of morality.

"Not at home, Master Randolph," he said; "and are ye and my young lady to leave us so soon?"

"No, Jeffrey," was the answer; "we are not going away immediately. But we desire to see no company, and this is the usual mode of saying so."

"Good truth, Master Randolph, 'twill be a strange thing for company to come to Trevethlan," said the porter. "And where shall I say you are gone?"

"Nowhere," replied Randolph. "Say no more than that we are not at home; and do not open the gates, whoever may ask."

"Trust old Jeffrey to obey a Trevethlan," the retainer said as his master retired; "and faith, we want no fine folks here spying out the nakedness of the land. Jeffrey will send them away with a flea in their ear."

CHAPTER III

"Nature never framed a woman's heart
Of prouder stuff than that of Beatrice:
Disdain and scorn ride sparkling in her eyes,
Misprising what they look on; and her wit
Values itself so highly, that to her
All matter else seems weak."

Shakspeare.

The gentleman so addressed put down an untasted glass of wine with which he was about to give zest to his luncheon, and he looked towards the lady who spoke. She was reading a newspaper.

"Did you observe this?" she continued. "We regret to announce the death of Henry Trevethlan, Esq., of Trevethlan Castle!"

"My poor nephew!" exclaimed the gentleman.

The lady flung a glance upon him, which made him lower his eyes, and read on. "He is succeeded in his estates—his estates!—by his son Randolph Trevethlan, Esq., who, with his sister, is now at the castle."

Mr. Pendarrel, probably thinking of the look which had just rebuked him, made no further observation.

"Have you nothing to remark upon this intelligence?" asked his wife. "No commiseration for your great nephew and niece, as well as their father?"

"They must be very poor," her husband answered. "Anything I can do—"

"Anything you can do, Mr. Trevethlan Pendarrel!" the lady exclaimed, interrupting him sharply. "You must buy me the castle, and they may live on the price.

'Pendar'l and Trevethlan shall own one name!'"

She laid aside the newspaper, and rising, walked to and fro in the apartment, speaking in a tone free from the irony and scorn which had given an unfeminine expression to her previous words.

"Let me see. Seventeen, ninety-six-seven—Randolph must be just of age. And Helen a year or two younger. Poor! Indeed they must be poor. The castle will be very ornamental as a ruin. Already it is more picturesque than habitable. They will be relieved to have it taken off their hands. And we can be generous. If not, what do they know? Why, Randolph has never slept away. They must be as wild as mountain-goats. And their society! What ideas can they have formed of life? Yet we may be generous; if they like, friendly. There is a pleasant cottage on the shore under Pendarrel: comfortable; suitable for straitened means; in wild scenery, like Trevethlan. They might have it at an easy rent; or in part purchase of the castle."

Thus, Alnaschar-like, Mrs. Pendarrel accomplished in reverie what had long been the settled purpose of her mind. Such was the vision that rose from her basket of crockery. She was a woman of genius, and knew it, and loved the knowledge.

"Mr. Trevethlan Pendarrel, have you yet finished your luncheon? Then follow me to the library. You must write to Randolph; and I shall go down to Cornwall next week, and visit him and his sister."

In the library the lady dictated the letter which the reader has already perused. When her husband looked over what he had written, he ventured to remonstrate.

"Do you not think, my dear Esther, this is rather, just a little, the least in the world; you know what I mean."

"No, I do not, Mr. Trevethlan Pendarrel. I am not initiated in the mysteries of your office, where they use language to conceal their thoughts."

"Nay, I know it is not your intention," continued her husband; "but might it not be supposed? It would be quite wrong, of course. Still, perhaps, they might think—people do form such curious ideas."

"Your ideas seem very curious indeed," said the lady. "What on earth do you mean?"

"Why, my dear Esther, might not this letter, quite undesignedly, quite—might it not wound Mr. Randolph Trevethlan's feelings?"

"Not if I appreciate them rightly, Mr. Trevethlan Pendarrel," answered his wife; "and it will furnish me with a key to his character. If, as I fully expect, that offer is regarded as kind, and gratefully accepted, the heir of Trevethlan becomes my humble dependent. If, as I think very unlikely, the letter is resented as an affront, then I know that the old spirit still animates the old ruin, and I prepare accordingly. Is it sealed? Well: remember to give the instruction to Messrs–."

And so saying, the lady withdrew. Her husband was the brother of the late Henry Trevethlan's father, and, therefore, great-uncle to Randolph; but having been born more than twenty years after his elder brother, he was but little older than his nephew, and was brought up in companionship with him at Trevethlan Castle. Rivalry for the hand of Esther Pendarrel disturbed their affection soon after Henry succeeded to the estates, and it gave place to hatred, when Philip carried off the prize and assumed his wife's name. Rumour said, that nothing but Henry's positive refusal to submit to this condition, led to his rejection.

For once rumour was probably right. The families of Trevethlan and Pendarrel had long lived in the usual friendship of neighbours, frequently intermarrying, but never united under one head. When, however, circumstances made Esther sole heiress of her house, it seemed likely that this might at last occur, and that the name of Pendarrel might merge in that of Trevethlan. The lady's own attention was attracted to this contingency by a little altercation she happened to overhear between two peasants, respecting the prophecy already quoted.

"Well, Jem," said one, "ye see Pendar'l's like to come to Trevethlan without a bride from under the thatch. 'T is a bonny lady whereby they'll own one name."

"Do not ye think it, Robin," answered the other. "The saying's as old as Carn Dew. My lady's not one to sink her name: there's that in her eye tells another tale."

When Esther heard these remarks, the first rustic seemed to be much nearer the truth than the second; for Henry Trevethlan was so close an attendant upon her, that it could not be supposed that his assiduity was unwelcome. But she had been trained in a sufficiently high sense of her own importance; and the peasant's words made her ponder, and roused the pride which had almost been laid to sleep by love. She quarrelled with Henry, and married Philip.

Her first lover endeavoured to forget his disappointment in the excitement of play. She, always hoping to realize the prediction in her own sense, rejoiced in adding the estates which he sold, one after another, to the already extensive domains of Pendarrel. By degrees, she thus drove the enemy into his citadel, and beleaguered him on all sides, trusting at last to starve him into submission. And now that the defence had fallen into young and inexperienced hands, she rushed eagerly to the assault, heralding it with the demand for a capitulation, contained in the letter she caused her husband to write.

He, poor man, did not count for much in his wife's arrangements. At home, he was nearly a nonentity; abroad, he held a subordinate place of some importance under Government. His official consequence consoled him for his domestic insignificance; and some such comfort he needed; for he had no will of his own whenever Esther interfered, so rigorous was the sway wherewith the strong mind ruled the weak.

Their family—a sore point was this with Mrs. Pendarrel, who foresaw that in some shape her own manœuvre must be repeated—consisted of two daughters, Gertrude and Mildred. Gertrude was nearly thirty, married, but without offspring: Mildred was not quite twenty. In appearance, they both

resembled their mother, and might be imagined to exhibit traces of the ancient people said, in some legends, to have founded Marazion.

Esther lost no time in fulfilling her purpose of visiting the orphans. As soon as possible after the despatch of the letter, she started for Pendarrel Hall, which, unlike Trevethlan Castle, was a modern mansion, surrounded by a large park. The day after her arrival, she drove to perform her errand.

Old Jeffrey had pondered much on the novel instructions received from his young master; and every sound of the gate-bell roused him to a great display of vigilance. First, he reconnoitred the party seeking admission, through a loop-hole: if that scrutiny were satisfactory, he opened a slit in the wicket, and held a parley: if this proved equally free from danger, he unclosed the wicket itself, and allowed the visitor to enter. Hitherto, he had not been called upon to pronounce the message of exclusion.

But the sound of an approaching carriage awoke all the caution of the old warder. Mrs. Pendarrel's chariot wound heavily up the now rugged road, which led through the base-court to the main gateway of the castle. The lady looked from side to side, and viewed the surrounding desolation with some secret triumph, as betokening a necessity which must be glad to accept relief. At length her carriage drew up in front of the arched portal, and a servant alighted, and rang the bell with correct violence.

Old Jeffrey had sufficient shrewdness to know that such an attack as this could not be repelled from the loop-hole; so he descended to parley through the opening in the wicket.

"Now, sir," said the invading servant, "how long is my lady to wait?"

"Who did you want to see?" asked the porter in turn.

"Open the gates, sir: let us drive to the hall-door."

"Troth," said Jeffrey, "this is the hall-door just now. Who did ye want to see?"

Mrs. Pendarrel, slightly impatient, repeated her servant's demand from the window of the carriage: Jeffrey met it with the same question.

"Mr. Trevethlan," said the lady.

"Mr. Trevethlan's not at home," said the obstinate warder.

"Not at home, sir! What do you mean? Where is he?"

"He's not at home," Jeffrey repeated.

Mrs. Pendarrel mused for a moment.

"Miss Trevethlan is at home, I suppose?" she asked.

"Miss Trevethlan is not at home," was again the reply.

"This is insolence," the lady said. "Do you know, sir, who I am?"

"I think I know the Pendar'l liveries," answered Jeffrey.

"Home," said Mrs. Pendarrel to her servant. And the carriage rattled down the descent.

A young man was leaning on the gate of the base-court: as the chariot approached, he opened it, and stood cap in hand while the lady drove through. She pulled the check-string, and beckoned the stranger to the window.

"Do you belong to the castle?" she asked, when he drew near.

"No, in good truth, ma'am," the youth replied with a peculiar smile: "I am a tenant of Pendar'l."

"What is your name?"

"Sinson, ma'am; Michael Sinson at your service, ma'am; grandson of old Maud Basset."

"What!" exclaimed the lady hastily, "a relation–"

"The late Mrs. Trevethlan's nephew, ma'am," said Michael.

"Come to the hall to-morrow," Mrs. Pendarrel said; "I may be able to employ you."

Michael made a cringing bow, and the carriage drove on.

"So," mused its occupant, "it is war. The old spirit does animate the old ruin. A pleasant pastime, Henry Trevethlan, have you bequeathed to your children. Long shall your race rue the day, when you took a woman at her first word. Was not Esther Pendarrel worth asking twice? Was it impossible

to conciliate her pride, except by the sacrifice of your own? Was no allowance to be made for the petulance of a girl nursed by flattery? Was there no middle course? Might not Trevethlan have been preserved, yet Pendarrel not extinguished? I smiled when you left me: I smiled when I saw your rapid gallop down the avenue: I smiled still, when I heard you were departed to London. No falconer's voice, methought, will be required, 'to lure my tassel-gentle back again.' A week—and another, and another—and no news. A month, and news. His kinsman comes. To intercede for him? Ah, no. To tell me of his folly, and to plead for himself. 'There is no fury like a woman scorned.' I listened, but it was long before I consented. A bold wooer truly was my worthy lord! Did he not venture to urge, that his nephew's passion was so ardent, it would prevent him from any other union? That therefore the castle would descend to him? That so the properties would be united in my name? That he loved me more—oh, cant and hypocrisy, how I loathed you at the time! Yet I listened, and listened, and in my wrath and for my sorrow, consented. Did I drive you to ruin, Henry Trevethlan? Did I embitter your days? Alas! mine have been equally dark. Proud man, I ask again, why did you trample on me? Why might we not minister to our mutual happiness, instead of running a race for revenge? I could not, you knew I could not, unasked, revoke my words. Might I not have had the opportunity? And should I submit to my doom in patience?

"And you have bequeathed your hatred to your children. To the children of Margaret Basset. And, verily, they seem worthy of the trust. But they shall find their match in Esther Pendarrel. And now the plan of the campaign. I must learn the nature of the ground. Then, sound trumpets, and no quarter."

The following morning young Sinson fulfilled Mrs. Pendarrel's behest, by calling at the hall, where he had an interview of some length with its mistress. One of the park lodges, Wilderness gate, happened to be vacant at the time, and was assigned to Michael as a residence, in consideration of services, either past or to come, which were a mystery to the retainers of the family, among whom some jealousy was created by the preference.

Within a few days afterwards, Mrs. Pendarrel returned to London.

CHAPTER IV

"But can the noble mind for ever brood,
The willing victim of a weary mood,
On heartless cares that squander life away,
And cloud young genius brightening into day?
Shame to the coward thought that e'er betrayed
The noon of manhood to a myrtle shade!"

Campbell.

The Trevethlans, it has already been remarked, were a crotchetty race. One of their peculiarities was displayed in the disposition of their property. No portion had been entailed within the memory of man, and the whole had very frequently descended simply by inheritance. Wills were of rare occurrence among the family muniments, and marked the existence of disagreement. And now that cause was active, and produced its effect. A few days after Mr. Trevethlan's funeral, his children were summoned by the chaplain to hear the last desires of their parent, Mr. Griffith being also present with his account books.

The will which Polydore produced was very short and simple. The testator merely appointed the Rev. Polydore Riches and Mr. Edward Griffith, to be the guardians of his children, in case he died before they were of age, leaving his property to descend by inheritance. A short silence ensued when the chaplain finished reading the document: it was first broken by the steward.

"It is but a small patrimony," he said, "Mr. Trevethlan, that you inherit. A very small patrimony for the owner of this castle. And a sad trust is this for me, who can remember, when from the top of the watch-tower, we saw little that was not ours."

"Mr. Griffith," Randolph said, "we must think of the present and the future, not of the past. But if the trust is unwelcome, do not undertake it."

"The trust is not unwelcome, Randolph," observed the chaplain, with a slight accent of reproof. "The sadness of which our friend speaks is caused by the lightness, not the oppressiveness, of our duty. We promised to undertake it, and we shall feel pleasure in fulfilling it, so as most effectually to promote your welfare in every respect."

"I know it," said the heir. "I am sure of it; I did not mean to doubt Mr. Griffith's good will."

"Here," the steward said, opening one of his books, "here are the accounts of the last few years: and here is an abstract or estimate, which I have prepared from them, showing the probable receipts and the necessary expenses for the future."

Randolph took the paper from Mr. Griffith's hands, and perused it attentively, his sister also looking over him.

"From this," he said at length, "I perceive that our total income is something under seven hundred pounds a year, and the needful outgoings something more than two; leaving us a clear revenue of four hundred. Why, Helen, we are rich!"

"They are young," the steward observed aside to Polydore.

The brother and sister conferred together for a few minutes in an under tone. Then Randolph spoke aloud:—

"Mr. Riches, the expenditure of the castle household, as here set down, is very small. Surely it does not include—" He stopped.

"I know what you would say, Randolph," the chaplain remarked. "The services of Mr. Griffith and myself have already been remunerated far in advance. There is nothing due on our account, nor will there be for a long time."

Metaphorically, this might be true. Randolph looked incredulous.

"Mr. Trevethlan," said the steward, "I hope you will not press us into a difficulty. That statement is made up strictly from my books; and unless you desire to alter the establishment–"

"Oh, no, certainly not," Randolph exclaimed. "I wish everything to go on as hitherto."

"And have you formed any plan for the future?" the chaplain asked. "Do you propose to live here in retirement, or to go into the world?"

This question was not answered immediately. Randolph's heart was full. He rose from his seat and walked to a window of the apartment, where he leant his forehead against the glass, and gazed upon the sea. A mist clouded his eyes. Helen came softly to his side, and laid her hand on his shoulder, but he turned not towards her, for it was of her loneliness that he was thinking.

"'Tis a hard question for him, Mr. Riches," said Griffith.

"He will answer it as he ought," observed the chaplain.

"Randolph," Helen whispered in the mean time, "is this our firmness? Who said, 'we will not fail?' See, it is my turn now."

He turned and looked at her, meeting a smile so full of hope, that his momentary irresolution vanished at once. The castle rose again in the air, firm and substantial. He led his sister back to her seat, and resuming his own, said:—

"You, Mr. Riches, and you, my good sir, will not smile at a scheme which has been often discussed by my sister and myself, and to which our poor father assented almost with his parting words. If we are visionaries, you will be gentle in removing the illusion. This then is our plan."

And at some length, Randolph unfolded the design with which the reader is already acquainted. Both the chaplain and the steward listened with great interest, although the latter could not avoid smiling to himself, as he perceived the little artifices by which the speaker blinded his eyes to the difficulties of his proposition. Polydore was willing to be also blind to them.

"And now, my friends," Randolph concluded, having talked himself into cheerfulness, "we will leave you to deliberate on our romance. Helen and I will go to the flower-garden, and await the reply of the oracle. Let it be at least decisive."

So saying, he took Helen's arm upon his, and led her from the room. Griffith looked at the chaplain, and repeated his previous observation, "they are young."

"Youth and imprudence are not necessarily connected, Mr. Griffith," answered Polydore.

"And are you disposed to sanction this scheme?" the steward asked. "Do not you see its difficulties? Are fortunes to be found now as in nursery tales? And at the bar, of all ways? Even in my narrow experience, what failures have I known! and with fairer prospects than Mr. Randolph's. It is a lottery, Mr. Riches; a mere lottery."

"It is not the chance of a prize," said the chaplain, "upon which I reckon. I hate lotteries. It is the price which must in this instance be paid for a chance, and which I believe Randolph is prepared to pay, that reconciles me to the speculation."

"You mean the labour bestowed and the knowledge acquired," observed Griffith. "Is it of the best kind? Might not better be obtained here?"

"You interpret my meaning rightly but not completely, Mr. Griffith," the chaplain said. "I include in the term knowledge, knowledge of the world; that knowledge, without which we cannot love the world. A recluse may fancy that he loves his race, but it is not until he has actually felt their kindness, ay, and their unkindness, that he can realize the affection. A man is worthless until he has experienced some of the buffeting of the world."

"And do you think Mr. Randolph qualified to withstand it to advantage?" the steward inquired.

"Do I, Mr. Griffith?" exclaimed Polydore. "I should take shame to myself if I did not. He may not succeed at the bar. He may return to Trevethlan Castle as poor as he quits it. As poor, I mean, in worldly goods. But he will return to enjoy life: not to mope away a miserable time of idleness amongst these gray walls: not to pine for what is unattainable, and sicken with ever-increasing discontent: not

to vanish from the stage an unprofitable supernumerary. No, the habits he will have acquired will accompany him in his retreat; in his solitude he will still be active; he will give his thoughts to the world; he will be a benefactor to his race. Let him go, Mr. Griffith. The very chivalry of the idea is charming in my eyes. Believe me, his portrait will one day be an honour to our gallery."

The steward was infected with Polydore's enthusiasm. He shook the chaplain's hand with great warmth.

"Mr. Riches," he said, "I know how much Trevethlan owes to you; and your words inspire me with hope. Yet, Miss Helen, is the scheme equally adapted for her?"

"And why not, my good sir?" answered the chaplain. "Where can she be better than with her brother? What can cheer his studies, no trifle, Mr. Griffith, like her company when they are over? What would not I have given for a sister to make my tea at college? She will be his comfort and his stay; his light and his hope; his joy and his pride. Let them go, my friend; we shall see a dance at Trevethlan yet."

Griffith, a quiet and thoughtful man, was entirely carried away by the increasing animation of the chaplain. In silence he assented to Polydore's conclusion. "Come," said the latter, "let us seek them in their garden;" and he took the steward's arm and led him thither. On their way prudential considerations again beset the man of business, and he stopped the man of letters to speak of their wards' inexperience.

"Inexperience!" echoed the divine; "and how shall they gain experience? Staying here, they will always be inexperienced. No fear, my friend; give them a good introduction to Winter, and they'll do. Winter's the very personification of prudence."

Randolph and his sister were watching the bees on a bed of mignionette, one of the pleasantest pastimes afforded by a garden in autumn. The eye is gratified by the unceasing flutter of the busy insects; the ear rejoices in the perpetual murmur accompanying their industry; a delicious fragrance arises from the gently agitated florets; and some observers may, perhaps, remember a moral they were taught to lisp in childhood, and cast a fond retrospect over their early years.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.