

## CHAPTER VI

### OWEN DAVIES AT HOME

Owen Davies tramped along the cliff with a light heart. The wild lashing of the rain and the roaring of the wind did not disturb him in the least. They were disagreeable, but he accepted them as he accepted existence and all its vanities, without remark or mental comment. There is a class of mind of which this is the prevailing attitude. Very early in their span of life, those endowed with such a mind come to the conclusion that the world is too much for them. They cannot understand it, so they abandon the attempt, and, as a consequence, in their own torpid way they are among the happiest and most contented of men. Problems, on which persons of keener intelligence and more aspiring soul fret and foam their lives away as rushing water round a rock, do not even break the placid surface of their days. Such men slip past them. They look out upon the stars and read of the mystery of the universe speeding on for ever through the limitless wastes of space, and are not astonished. In their childhood they were taught that God made the sun and the stars to give light on the earth; that is enough for them. And so it is with everything. Poverty and suffering; war, pestilence, and the inequalities of fate; madness, life and death, and the spiritual wonders that hedge in our being, are things not to be inquired into but accepted. So they accept them as they do their dinner or a tradesman's circular.

In some cases this mental state has its root in deep and simple religious convictions, and in some it springs from a preponderance of healthful animal instincts over the higher but more troublesome spiritual parts. The ox chewing the cud in the fresh meadow does not muse upon the past and future, and the gull blown like a foam-flake out against the sunset, does not know the splendour of the sky and sea. Even the savage is not much troubled about the scheme of things. In the beginning he was "torn out of the reeds," and in the end he melts into the Unknown, and for the rest, there are beef and wives, and foes to conquer. But then oxen and gulls are not, so far as we know, troubled with any spiritual parts at all, and in the noble savage such things are not cultivated. They come with civilization.

But perhaps in the majority this condition, so necessary to the more placid forms of happiness, is born of a conjunction of physical and religious developments. So it was, at least, with the rich and fortunate man whom we have seen trudging along the wind-swept cliff. By nature and education he was of a strongly and simply religious mind, as he was in body powerful, placid, and healthy to an exasperating degree. It may be said that it is easy to be religious and placid on ten thousand a year, but Owen Davies had not always enjoyed ten thousand a year and one of the most romantic and beautiful seats in Wales. From the time he was seventeen, when his mother's death left him an orphan, till he reached the age of thirty, some six years from the date of the opening of this history, he led about as hard a life as fate could find for any man. Some people may have heard of sugar drogers, or sailing brigs, which

trade between this country and the West Indies, carrying coal outwards and sugar home.

On board one of these, Owen Davies worked in various capacities for thirteen long years. He did his drudgery well; but he made no friends, and always remained the same shy, silent, and pious man. Then suddenly a relation died without a will, and he found himself heir-in-law to Bryngelly Castle and all its revenues. Owen expressed no surprise, and to all appearance felt none. He had never seen his relation, and never dreamed of this romantic devolution of great estates upon himself. But he accepted the good fortune as he had accepted the ill, and said nothing. The only people who knew him were his shipmates, and they could scarcely be held to know him. They were acquainted with his appearance and the sound of his voice, and his method of doing his duty. Also, they were aware, although he never spoke of religion, that he read a chapter of the Bible every evening, and went to church whenever they touched at a port. But of his internal self they were in total ignorance. This did not, however, prevent them from prophesying that Davies was a "deep one," who, now that he had got the cash, would "blue it" in a way which would astonish them.

But Davies did not "excel in azure feats." The news of his good fortune reached him just as the brig, on which he was going to sail as first-mate, was taking in her cargo for the West Indies. He had signed his contract for the voyage, and, to the utter astonishment of the lawyer who managed the estates, he announced that he should carry it

out. In vain did the man of affairs point out to his client that with the help of a cheque of £100 he could arrange the matter for him in ten minutes. Mr. Davies merely replied that the property could wait, he should go the voyage and retire afterwards. The lawyer held up his hands, and then suddenly remembered that there are women in the West Indies as in other parts of the world. Doubtless his queer client had an object in this voyage. As a matter of fact, he was totally wrong. Owen Davies had never interchanged a tender word with a woman in his life; he was a creature of routine, and it was part of his routine to carry out his agreements to the letter. That was all.

As a last resource, the lawyer suggested that Mr. Davies should make a will.

"I do not think it necessary," was the slow and measured answer. "The property has come to me by chance. If I die, it may as well go to somebody else in the same way."

The lawyer stared. "Very well," he said; "it is against my advice, but you must please yourself. Do you want any money?"

Owen thought for a moment. "Yes," he said, "I think I should like to have ten pounds. They are building a theatre there, and I want to subscribe to it."

The lawyer gave him the ten pounds without a word; he was struck

speechless, and in this condition he remained for some minutes after the door had closed behind his client. Then he sprung up with a single ejaculation, "Mad, mad! like his great uncle!"

But Owen Davies was not in the least mad, at any rate not then; he was only a creature of habit. In due course, his agreement fulfilled, he sailed his brig home from the West Indies (for the captain was drowned in a gale). Then he took a second-class ticket to Bryngelly, where he had never been in his life before, and asked his way to the Castle. He was told to go to the beach, and he would see it. He did so, leaving his sea-chest behind him, and there, about two hundred paces from the land, and built upon a solitary mountain of rock, measuring half a mile or so round the base, he perceived a vast mediæval pile of fortified buildings, with turrets towering three hundred feet into the air, and edged with fire by the setting sun. He gazed on it with perplexity. Could it be that this enormous island fortress belonged to him, and, if so, how on earth did one get to it? For some little time he walked up and down, wondering, too shy to go to the village for information. Meanwhile, though he did not notice her, a well-grown girl of about fifteen, remarkable for her great grey eyes and the promise of her beauty, was watching his evident perplexity from a seat beneath a rock, not without amusement. At last she rose, and, with the confidence of bold fifteen, walked straight up to him.

"Do you want to get the Castle, sir?" she asked in a low sweet voice, the echoes of which Owen Davies never forgot.

"Yes--oh, I beg your pardon," for now for the first time he saw that he was talking to a young lady.

"Then I am afraid that you are too late--Mrs. Thomas will not show people over after four o'clock. She is the housekeeper, you know."

"Ah, well, the fact is I did not come to see over the place. I came to live there. I am Owen Davies, and the place was left to me."

Beatrice, for of course it was she, stared at him in amazement. So this was the mysterious sailor about whom there had been so much talk in Bryngelly.

"Oh!" she said, with embarrassing frankness. "What an odd way to come home. Well, it is high tide, and you will have to take a boat. I will show you where you can get one. Old Edward will row you across for sixpence," and she led the way round a corner of the beach to where old Edward sat, from early morn to dewy eve, upon the thwarts of his biggest boat, seeking those whom he might row.

"Edward," said the young lady, "here is the new squire, Mr. Owen Davies, who wants to be rowed across to the Castle." Edward, a gnarled and twisted specimen of the sailor tribe, with small eyes and a face that reminded the observer of one of those quaint countenances on the handle of a walking stick, stared at her in astonishment, and then cast a look

of suspicion on the visitor.

"Have he got papers of identification about him, miss?" he asked in a stage whisper.

"I don't know," she answered laughing. "He says that he is Mr. Owen Davies."

"Well, praps he is and praps he ain't; anyway, it isn't my affair, and sixpence is sixpence."

All of this the unfortunate Mr. Davies overheard, and it did not add to his equanimity.

"Now, sir, if you please," said Edward sternly, as he pulled the little boat up to the edge of the breakwater. A vision of Mrs. Thomas shot into Owen's mind. If the boatman did not believe in him, what chance had he with the housekeeper? He wished he had brought the lawyer down with him, and then he wished that he was back in the sugar brig.

"Now, sir," said Edward still more sternly, putting down his hesitation to an impostor's consciousness of guilt.

"Um!" said Owen to the young lady, "I beg your pardon. I don't even know your name, and I am sure I have no right to ask it, but would you mind rowing across with me? It would be so kind of you; you might introduce

me to the housekeeper."

Again Beatrice laughed the merry laugh of girlhood; she was too young to be conscious of any impropriety in the situation, and indeed there was none. But her sense of humour told her that it was funny, and she became possessed with a not unnatural curiosity to see the thing out.

"Oh, very well," she said, "I will come."

The boat was pushed off and very soon they reached the stone quay that bordered the harbour of the Castle, about which a little village of retainers had grown up. Seeing the boat arrive, some of these people sauntered out of the cottages, and then, thinking that a visitor had come, under the guidance of Miss Beatrice, to look at the antiquities of the Castle, which was the show place of the neighbourhood, sauntered back again. Then the pair began the zigzag ascent of the rock mountain, till at last they stood beneath the mighty mass of building, which, although it was hoary with antiquity, was by no means lacking in the comforts of modern civilization, the water, for instance, being brought in pipes laid beneath the sea from a mountain top two miles away on the mainland.

"Isn't there a view here?" said Beatrice, pointing to the vast stretch of land and sea. "I think, Mr. Davies, that you have the most beautiful house in the whole world. Your great-uncle, who died a year ago, spent more than fifty thousand pounds on repairing and refurbishing it, they



say. He built the big drawing-room there, where the stone is a little lighter; it is fifty-five feet long. Just think, fifty thousand pounds!"

"It is a large sum," said Owen, in an unimaginative sort of way, while in his heart he wondered what on earth he should do with this white elephant of a mediæval castle, and its drawing room fifty-five feet long.

"He does not seem much impressed," thought Beatrice to herself, as she tugged away at the postern bell; "I think he must be stupid. He looks stupid."

Presently the door was opened by an active-looking little old woman with a high voice.

"Mrs. Thomas," thought Owen to himself; "she is even worse than I expected."

"Now you must please to go away," began the formidable housekeeper in her shrillest key; "it is too late to show visitors over. Why, bless us, it's you, Miss Beatrice, with a strange man! What do you want?"

Beatrice looked at her companion as a hint that he should explain himself, but he said nothing.

"This is your new squire," she said, not without a certain pride. "I

found him wandering about the beach. He did not know how to get here, so I brought him over."

"Lord, Miss Beatrice, and how do you know it's him?" said Mrs. Thomas.

"How do you know it ain't a housebreaker?"

"Oh, I'm sure he cannot be," answered Beatrice aside, "because he isn't clever enough."

Then followed a long discussion. Mrs. Thomas stoutly refused to admit the stranger without evidence of identity, and Beatrice, embracing his cause, as stoutly pressed his claims. As for the lawful owner, he made occasional feeble attempts to prove that he was himself, but Mrs. Thomas was not to be imposed upon in this way. At last they came to a dead lock.

"Y'd better go back to the inn, sir," said Mrs. Thomas with scathing sarcasm, "and come up to-morrow with proofs and your luggage."

"Haven't you got any letters with you?" suggested Beatrice as a last resource.

As it happened Owen had a letter, one from the lawyer to himself about the property, and mentioning Mrs. Thomas's name as being in charge of the Castle. He had forgotten all about it, but at this interesting juncture it was produced and read aloud by Beatrice. Mrs. Thomas took

it, and having examined it carefully through her horn-rimmed spectacles, was constrained to admit its authenticity.

"I'm sure I apologise, sir," she said with a half-doubtful courtesy and much tact, "but one can't be too careful with all these trampses about; I never should have thought from the look of you, sir, how as you was the new squire."

This might be candid, but it was not flattering, and it caused Beatrice to snigger behind her handkerchief in true school-girl fashion. However, they entered, and were led by Mrs. Thomas with solemn pomp through the great and little halls, the stone parlour and the oak parlour, the library and the huge drawing-room, in which the white heads of marble statues protruded from the bags of brown holland wherewith they were wrapped about in a manner ghastly to behold. At length they reached a small octagon-shaped room that, facing south, commanded a most glorious view of sea and land. It was called the Lady's Boudoir, and joined another of about the same size, which in its former owner's time had been used as a smoking-room.

"If you don't mind, madam," said the lord of all this magnificence, "I should like to stop here, I am getting tired of walking." And there he stopped for many years. The rest of the Castle was shut up; he scarcely ever visited it except occasionally to see that the rooms were properly aired, for he was a methodical man.

As for Beatrice, she went home, still chuckling, to receive a severe reproof from Elizabeth for her "forwardness." But Owen Davies never forgot the debt of gratitude he owed her. In his heart he felt convinced that had it not been for her, he would have fled before Mrs. Thomas and her horn-rimmed eyeglasses, to return no more. The truth of the matter was, however, that young as was Beatrice, he fell in love with her then and there, only to fall deeper and deeper into that drear abyss as years went on. He never said anything about it, he scarcely even gave a hint of his hopeless condition, though of course Beatrice divined something of it as soon as she came to years of discretion. But there grew up in Owen's silent, lonely breast a great and overmastering desire to make this grey-eyed girl his wife. He measured time by the intervals that elapsed between his visions of her. No period in his life was so wretched and utterly purposeless as those two years which passed while she was at her Training College. He was a very passive lover, as yet his gathering passion did not urge him to extremes, and he could never make up his mind to declare it. The box was in his hand, but he feared to throw the dice.

But he drew as near to her as he dared. Once he gave Beatrice a flower, it was when she was seventeen, and awkwardly expressed a hope that she would wear it for his sake. The words were not much and the flower was not much, but there was a look about the man's eyes, and a suppressed passion and energy in his voice, which told their tale to the keen-witted girl. After this he found that she avoided him, and bitterly regretted his boldness. For Beatrice did not like him in that way. To

a girl of her curious stamp his wealth was nothing. She did not covet wealth, she coveted independence, and had the sense to know that marriage with such a man would not bring it. A cage is a cage, whether the bars are of iron or gold. He bored her, she despised him for his want of intelligence and enterprise. That a man with all this wealth and endless opportunity should waste his life in such fashion was to her a thing intolerable. She knew if she had half his chance, that she would make her name ring from one end of Europe to the other. In short, Beatrice held Owen as deeply in contempt as her sister Elizabeth, studying him from another point of view, held him in reverence. And putting aside any human predilections, Beatrice would never have married a man whom she despised. She respected herself too much.

Owen Davies saw all this as through a glass darkly, and in his own slow way cast about for a means of drawing near. He discovered that Beatrice was passionately fond of learning, and also that she had no means to obtain the necessary books. So he threw open his library to her; it was one of the best in Wales. He did more; he gave orders to a London bookseller to forward him every new book of importance that appeared in certain classes of literature, and all of these he placed at her disposal, having first carefully cut the leaves with his own hand. This was a bait Beatrice could not resist. She might dread or even detest Mr. Davies, but she loved his books, and if she quarrelled with him her well of knowledge would simply run dry, for there were no circulating libraries at Bryngelly, and if there had been she could not have afforded to subscribe to them. So she remained on good terms with him,

and even smiled at his futile attempts to keep pace with her studies. Poor man, reading did not come naturally to him; he was much better at cutting leaves. He studied the Times and certain religious works, that was all. But he wrestled manfully with many a detested tome, in order to be able to say something to Beatrice about it, and the worst of it was that Beatrice always saw through it, and showed him that she did. It was not kind, perhaps, but youth is cruel.

And so the years wore on, till at length Beatrice knew that a crisis was at hand. Even the tardiest and most retiring lover must come to the point at last, if he is in earnest, and Owen Davies was very much in earnest. Of late, to her dismay, he had so far come out of his shell as to allow himself to be nominated a member of the school council. Of course she knew that this was only to give him more opportunities of seeing her. As a member of the council, he could visit the school of which she was mistress as often as he chose, and indeed he soon learned to take a lively interest in village education. About twice a week he would come in just as the school was breaking up and offer to walk home with her, seeking for a favourable opportunity to propose. Hitherto she had always warded off this last event, but she knew that it must happen. Not that she was actually afraid of the man himself; he was too much afraid of her for that. What she did fear was the outburst of wrath from her father and sister when they learned that she had refused Owen Davies. It never occurred to her that Elizabeth might be playing a hand of her own in the matter.

From all of which it will be clear, if indeed it has not become so already, that Beatrice Granger was a somewhat ill-regulated young woman, born to bring trouble on herself and all connected with her. Had she been otherwise, she would have taken her good fortune and married Owen Davies, in which case her history need never have been written.