

XXI. 'UPON THE HILL HE TURNED'

Having entered into this solemn compact with his son, the elder Loveday's next action was to go to Mrs. Garland, and ask her how the toning down of the wedding had best be done. 'It is plain enough that to make merry just now would be slighting Bob's feelings, as if we didn't care who was not married, so long as we were,' he said. 'But then, what's to be done about the victuals?'

'Give a dinner to the poor folk,' she suggested. 'We can get everything used up that way.'

'That's true' said the miller. 'There's enough of 'em in these times to carry off any extras whatsoever.'

'And it will save Bob's feelings wonderfully. And they won't know that the dinner was got for another sort of wedding and another sort of guests; so you'll have their good-will for nothing.'

The miller smiled at the subtlety of the view. 'That can hardly be called fair,' he said. 'Still, I did mean some of it for them, for the friends we meant to ask would not have cleared all.'

Upon the whole the idea pleased him well, particularly when he noticed the forlorn look of his sailor son as he walked about the place, and

pictured the inevitably jarring effect of fiddles and tambourines upon Bob's shattered nerves at such a crisis, even if the notes of the former were dulled by the application of a mute, and Bob shut up in a distant bedroom--a plan which had at first occurred to him. He therefore told Bob that the surcharged larder was to be emptied by the charitable process above alluded to, and hoped he would not mind making himself useful in such a good and gloomy work. Bob readily fell in with the scheme, and it was at once put in hand and the tables spread.

The alacrity with which the substituted wedding was carried out, seemed to show that the worthy pair of neighbours would have joined themselves into one long ago, had there previously occurred any domestic incident dictating such a step as an apposite expedient, apart from their personal wish to marry.

The appointed morning came, and the service quietly took place at the cheerful hour of ten, in the face of a triangular congregation, of which the base was the front pew, and the apex the west door. Mrs. Garland dressed herself in the muslin shawl like Queen Charlotte's, that Bob had brought home, and her best plum-coloured gown, beneath which peeped out her shoes with red rosettes. Anne was present, but she considerably toned herself down, so as not to too seriously damage her mother's appearance. At moments during the ceremony she had a distressing sense that she ought not to be born, and was glad to get home again.

The interest excited in the village, though real, was hardly enough to

bring a serious blush to the face of coyness. Neighbours' minds had become so saturated by the abundance of showy military and regal incident lately vouchsafed to them, that the wedding of middle-aged civilians was of small account, excepting in so far that it solved the question whether or not Mrs. Garland would consider herself too genteel to mate with a grinder of corn.

In the evening, Loveday's heart was made glad by seeing the baked and boiled in rapid process of consumption by the kitchenful of people assembled for that purpose. Three-quarters of an hour were sufficient to banish for ever his fears as to spoilt food. The provisions being the cause of the assembly, and not its consequence, it had been determined to get all that would not keep consumed on that day, even if highways and hedges had to be searched for operators. And, in addition to the poor and needy, every cottager's daughter known to the miller was invited, and told to bring her lover from camp--an expedient which, for letting daylight into the inside of full platters, was among the most happy ever known.

While Mr. and Mrs. Loveday, Anne, and Bob were standing in the parlour, discussing the progress of the entertainment in the next room, John, who had not been down all day, entered the house and looked in upon them through the open door.

'How's this, John? Why didn't you come before?'

'Had to see the captain, and--other duties,' said the trumpet-major, in a tone which showed no great zeal for explanations.

'Well, come in, however,' continued the miller, as his son remained with his hand on the door-post, surveying them reflectively.

'I cannot stay long,' said John, advancing. 'The Route is come, and we are going away.'

'Going away! Where to?'

'To Exonbury.'

'When?'

'Friday morning.'

'All of you?'

'Yes; some to-morrow and some next day. The King goes next week.'

'I am sorry for this,' said the miller, not expressing half his sorrow by the simple utterance. 'I wish you could have been here to-day, since this is the case,' he added, looking at the horizon through the window.

Mrs. Loveday also expressed her regret, which seemed to remind the

trumpet-major of the event of the day, and he went to her and tried to say something befitting the occasion. Anne had not said that she was either sorry or glad, but John Loveday fancied that she had looked rather relieved than otherwise when she heard his news. His conversation with Bob on the down made Bob's manner, too, remarkably cool, notwithstanding that he had after all followed his brother's advice, which it was as yet too soon after the event for him to rightly value. John did not know why the sailor had come back, never supposing that it was because he had thought better of going, and said to him privately, 'You didn't overtake her?'

'I didn't try to,' said Bob.

'And you are not going to?'

'No; I shall let her drift.'

'I am glad indeed, Bob; you have been wise,' said John heartily.

Bob, however, still loved Matilda too well to be other than dissatisfied with John and the event that he had precipitated, which the elder brother only too promptly perceived; and it made his stay that evening of short duration. Before leaving he said with some hesitation to his father, including Anne and her mother by his glance, 'Do you think to come up and see us off?'

The miller answered for them all, and said that of course they would come. 'But you'll step down again between now and then?' he inquired.

'I'll try to.' He added after a pause, 'In case I should not, remember that Revalley will sound at half past five; we shall leave about eight. Next summer, perhaps, we shall come and camp here again.'

'I hope so,' said his father and Mrs. Loveday.

There was something in John's manner which indicated to Anne that he scarcely intended to come down again; but the others did not notice it, and she said nothing. He departed a few minutes later, in the dusk of the August evening, leaving Anne still in doubt as to the meaning of his private meeting with Miss Johnson.

John Loveday had been going to tell them that on the last night, by an especial privilege, it would be in his power to come and stay with them until eleven o'clock, but at the moment of leaving he abandoned the intention. Anne's attitude had chilled him, and made him anxious to be off. He utilized the spare hours of that last night in another way.

This was by coming down from the outskirts of the camp in the evening, and seating himself near the brink of the mill-pond as soon as it was quite dark; where he watched the lights in the different windows till one appeared in Anne's bedroom, and she herself came forward to shut the casement, with the candle in her hand. The light shone out upon the

broad and deep mill-head, illuminating to a distinct individuality every moth and gnat that entered the quivering chain of radiance stretching across the water towards him, and every bubble or atom of froth that floated into its width. She stood for some time looking out, little thinking what the darkness concealed on the other side of that wide stream; till at length she closed the casement, drew the curtains, and retreated into the room. Presently the light went out, upon which John Loveday returned to camp and lay down in his tent.

The next morning was dull and windy, and the trumpets of the --th sounded Reveille for the last time on Overcombe Down. Knowing that the Dragoons were going away, Anne had slept heedfully, and was at once awakened by the smart notes. She looked out of the window, to find that the miller was already astir, his white form being visible at the end of his garden, where he stood motionless, watching the preparations. Anne also looked on as well as she could through the dim grey gloom, and soon she saw the blue smoke from the cooks' fires creeping fitfully along the ground, instead of rising in vertical columns, as it had done during the fine weather season. Then the men began to carry their bedding to the waggons, and others to throw all refuse into the trenches, till the down was lively as an ant-hill. Anne did not want to see John Loveday again, but hearing the household astir, she began to dress at leisure, looking out at the camp the while.

When the soldiers had breakfasted, she saw them selling and giving away their superfluous crockery to the natives who had clustered round; and

then they pulled down and cleared away the temporary kitchens which they had constructed when they came. A tapping of tent-pegs and wriggling of picket-posts followed, and soon the cones of white canvas, now almost become a component part of the landscape, fell to the ground. At this moment the miller came indoors and asked at the foot of the stairs if anybody was going up the hill with him.

Anne felt that, in spite of the cloud hanging over John in her mind, it would ill become the present moment not to see him off, and she went downstairs to her mother, who was already there, though Bob was nowhere to be seen. Each took an arm of the miller, and thus climbed to the top of the hill. By this time the men and horses were at the place of assembly, and, shortly after the mill-party reached level ground, the troops slowly began to move forward. When the trumpet-major, half buried in his uniform, arms, and horse-furniture, drew near to the spot where the Lovedays were waiting to see him pass, his father turned anxiously to Anne and said, 'You will shake hands with John?'

Anne faintly replied 'Yes,' and allowed the miller to take her forward on his arm to the trackway, so as to be close to the flank of the approaching column. It came up, many people on each side grasping the hands of the troopers in bidding them farewell; and as soon as John Loveday saw the members of his father's household, he stretched down his hand across his right pistol for the same performance. The miller gave his, then Mrs. Loveday gave hers, and then the hand of the trumpet-major was extended towards Anne. But as the horse did not absolutely stop, it



was a somewhat awkward performance for a young woman to undertake, and, more on that account than on any other, Anne drew back, and the gallant trooper passed by without receiving her adieu. Anne's heart reproached her for a moment; and then she thought that, after all, he was not going off to immediate battle, and that she would in all probability see him again at no distant date, when she hoped that the mystery of his conduct would be explained. Her thoughts were interrupted by a voice at her elbow: 'Thank heaven, he's gone! Now there's a chance for me.'

She turned, and Festus Derriman was standing by her.

'There's no chance for you,' she said indignantly.

'Why not?'

'Because there's another left!'

The words had slipped out quite unintentionally, and she blushed quickly. She would have given anything to be able to recall them; but he had heard, and said, 'Who?'

Anne went forward to the miller to avoid replying, and Festus caught her no more.

'Has anybody been hanging about Overcombe Mill except Loveday's son the

soldier?' he asked of a comrade.

'His son the sailor,' was the reply.

'O--his son the sailor,' said Festus slowly. 'Damn his son the sailor!'