

CHAPTER V: RETURNING HOME WARD

"A took it very well, then?" said Mail, as they all walked up the hill.

"He behaved like a man, 'a did so," said the tranter. "And I'm glad we've let en know our minds. And though, beyond that, we ha'n't got much by going, 'twas worth while. He won't forget it. Yes, he took it very well. Supposing this tree here was Pa'son Mayble, and I standing here, and thik gr't stone is father sitting in the easy-chair. 'Dewy,' says he, 'I don't wish to change the church music in a forcible way.'"

"That was very nice o' the man, even though words be wind."

"Proper nice--out and out nice. The fact is," said Reuben confidentially, "'tis how you take a man. Everybody must be managed. Queens must be managed: kings must be managed; for men want managing almost as much as women, and that's saying a good deal."

"'Tis truly!" murmured the husbands.

"Pa'son Mayble and I were as good friends all through it as if we'd been sworn brothers. Ay, the man's well enough; 'tis what's put in his head that spoils him, and that's why we've got to go."

"There's really no believing half you hear about people nowadays."

"Bless ye, my sonnies! 't isn't the pa'son's move at all. That gentleman over there" (the tranter nodded in the direction of Shiner's farm) "is at the root of the mischty."

"What! Shiner?"

"Ay; and I see what the pa'son don't see. Why, Shiner is for putting forward that young woman that only last night I was saying was our Dick's sweet-heart, but I suppose can't be, and making much of her in the sight of the congregation, and thinking he'll win her by showing her off. Well, perhaps 'a woll."

"Then the music is second to the woman, the other churchwarden is second to Shiner, the pa'son is second to the churchwardens, and God A'mighty is nowhere at all."

"That's true; and you see," continued Reuben, "at the very beginning it put me in a stud as to how to quarrel wi' en. In short, to save my soul, I couldn't quarrel wi' such a civil man without belying my conscience. Says he to father there, in a voice as quiet as a lamb's, 'William, you are a' old aged man, as all shall be, so sit down in my easy-chair, and rest yourself.' And down father zot. I could fain ha' laughed at thee, father; for thou'st take it so unconcerned at first, and then looked so frightened when the chair-bottom sunk in."

"You see," said old William, hastening to explain, "I was scared to find the bottom gie way--what should I know o' spring bottoms?--and thought I had broke it down: and of course as to breaking down a man's chair, I didn't wish any such thing."

"And, neighbours, when a feller, ever so much up for a miff, d'see his own father sitting in his enemy's easy-chair, and a poor chap like Leaf made the best of, as if he almost had brains--why, it knocks all the wind out of his sail at once: it did out of mine."

"If that young figure of fun--Fance Day, I mean," said Bowman, "hadn't been so mighty forward wi' showing herself off to Shiner and Dick and the rest, 'tis my belief we should never ha' left the gallery."

"'Tis my belief that though Shiner fired the bullets, the parson made 'em," said Mr. Penny. "My wife sticks to it that he's in love wi' her."

"That's a thing we shall never know. I can't onriddle her, nohow."

"Thou'st ought to be able to onriddle such a little chiel as she," the tranter observed.

"The littler the maid, the bigger the riddle, to my mind. And coming of such a stock, too, she may well be a twister."

"Yes; Geoffrey Day is a clever man if ever there was one. Never says

anything: not he."

"Never."

"You might live wi' that man, my sonnies, a hundred years, and never know there was anything in him."

"Ay; one o' these up-country London ink-bottle chaps would call Geoffrey a fool."

"Ye never find out what's in that man: never," said Spinks. "Close? ah, he is close! He can hold his tongue well. That man's dumbness is wonderful to listen to."

"There's so much sense in it. Every moment of it is brimmen over wi' sound understanding."

"A can hold his tongue very clever--very clever truly," echoed Leaf. "A do look at me as if 'a could see my thoughts running round like the works of a clock."

"Well, all will agree that the man can halt well in his talk, be it a long time or be it a short time. And though we can't expect his daughter to inherit his closeness, she may have a few dribblets from his sense."

"And his pocket, perhaps."

"Yes; the nine hundred pound that everybody says he's worth; but I call it four hundred and fifty; for I never believe more than half I hear."

"Well, he've made a pound or two, and I suppose the maid will have it, since there's nobody else. But 'tis rather sharp upon her, if she's been born to fortune, to bring her up as if not born for it, and letting her work so hard."

"'Tis all upon his principle. A long-headed feller!"

"Ah," murmured Spinks, "'twould be sharper upon her if she were born for fortune, and not to it! I suffer from that affliction."