

CHAPTER XIV - The Open "Davy"

Mester Derik

Th' rools is ben broak agen on th' quiet bi them as broak em
afore, i naim no naimes an wudnt say nowt but our loifes is
in danger And more than one, i Only ax yo' tu Wach out. i am

Respekfully

A honest man wi a famly tu fede

The engineer found this letter near his plate one morning on coming down to breakfast. His landlady explained that her daughter had picked it up inside the garden gate, where it had been thrown upon the gravel-walk, evidently from the road.

Derrick read it twice or three times before putting it in his pocket. Upon the whole, he was not unprepared for the intelligence. He knew enough of human nature--such human nature as Lowrie represented--to feel sure that the calm could not continue. If for the present the man did not defy him openly, he would disobey him in secret, while biding his time for other means of retaliation.

Derrick had been on the lookout for some effort at revenge; but so far since the night Joan had met him upon the road, Lowrie outwardly had

been perfectly quiet and submissive.

After reading the letter, Derrick made up his mind to prompt and decisive measures, and set about considering what these measures should be, There was only one certain means of redress and safety,--Lowrie must be got rid of at once. It would not be a difficult matter either.

There was to be a meeting of the owners that very week, and Derrick had reports to make, and the mere mention of the violation of the rules would be enough.

"Bah!" he said aloud. "It is not pleasant; but it must be done."

The affair had several aspects, rendering it un-pleasant, but Derrick shut his eyes to them resolutely. It seemed, too, that it was not destined that he should have reason to remain undecided. That very day he was confronted with positive proof that the writer of the anonymous warning was an honest man, with an honest motive.

During the morning, necessity called him away from his men to a side gallery, and entering this gallery, he found himself behind a man who stood at one side close to the wall, his Davy lamp open, his pipe applied to the flame. It was Dan Lowrie, and his stealthy glance over his shoulder revealing to him that he was discovered, he turned with an oath.

"Shut that lamp," said Derrick, "and give me your false key."

Lowrie hesitated.

"Give me that key," Derrick repeated, "or I will call the gang in the next gallery and see what they have to say about the matter."

"Dom yore eyes! does tha think as my toime 'll nivver coom?"

But he gave up the key.

"When it comes," he said, "I hope I shall be ready to help myself. Now I've got only one thing to do. I gave you fair warning and asked you to act the man toward your fellows. You have played the scoundrel instead, and I have done with you. I shall report you. That's the end of it."

He went on his way, and left the man uttering curses under his breath. If there had not been workers near at hand, Derrick might not have gotten away so easily. Among the men in the next gallery there were some who were no friends to Lowrie, and who would have given him rough handling if they had caught him just at that moment, and the fellow knew it.

Toward the end of the week, the owners came, and Derrick made his report. The result was just what he had known it would be. Explosions had been caused before by transgressions of the rules, and explosions were expensive and disastrous affairs. Lowrie received his discharge,

and his fellow-workmen a severe warning, to the secret consternation of some among them.

That the engineer of the new mines was a zealous and really amiable young man, if rather prone to innovations, became evident to his employers. But his innovations were not encouraged. So, notwithstanding his arguments, the blast-furnaces held their own, and "for the present," as the easy-natured manager put it, other matters, even more important, were set aside.

"There is much to be done, Derrick," he said; "really so much that requires time and money, that we must wait a little. 'Rome, etc'."

"Ah, Rome!" returned Derrick. "I am sometimes of the opinion that Rome had better never been built at all. You will not discharge your imperfect apparatus for the same reason that you will discharge a collier,--which is hardly fair to the collier. Your blast-furnaces expose the miners to as great danger as Lowrie's pipe. The presence of either may bring about an explosion when it is least expected."

"Well, well," was the good-natured response; "we have not exploded yet; and we have done away with Lowrie's pipe."

Derrick carried the history of his ill-success to Anice, somewhat dejectedly.

"All this is discouraging to a man," said Derrick, and then he added meditatively, "As to the rest, I wonder what Joan Lowrie will think of it."

A faint sense of discomfort fell upon Anice--not exactly easy to understand. The color fluttered to her cheek and her smile died away. But she did not speak,--merely waited to hear what Derrick had to say.

He had nothing more to say about Joan Lowrie:--when he recovered himself, as he did almost immediately, he went back to the discussion of his pet plans, and was very eloquent on the subject.

Going home one evening, Derrick found himself at a turn of the road only a few paces behind Joan. He had thought much of her of late, and wondered whether she was able to take an utterly unselfish view of his action. She had a basket upon her arm and looked tired. He strode up to her side and spoke to her without ceremony.

"Let me carry that," he said. "It is too heavy for you."

The sun was setting redly, so perhaps it was the sunset that flung its color upon her face as she turned to look at him.

"Thank yo'," she answered. "I'm used to car-ryin' such-loike loads."

But he took her burden from her, and even if she had wished to be left

to herself she had no redress, and accordingly submitted. Influences long at work upon her had rendered her less defiant than she had been in the past. There was an element of quiet in her expression, such as Derrick had not seen when her beauty first caught his attention.

They walked together silently for a while.

"I should like to hear you say that you do not blame me," said Derrick, at last, abruptly.

She knew what he meant, it was evident

"I conna blame yo' fur doin' what were reet," she answered.

"Right,--you thought it right?"

"Why should na I? Yo' couldna ha' done no other."

"Thank you for saying that," he returned. "I have thought once or twice that you might have blamed me."

"I did na know," was her answer. "I did na know as I had done owt to mak' yo' think so ill of me."

He did not find further comment easy. He felt, as he had felt before, that Joan had placed him at a disadvantage. He so often made irritating

mistakes in his efforts to read her, and in the end he seldom found that he had made any advance. Anice Barholm, with her problems and her moods, was far less difficult to comprehend than Joan Lowrie.

Liz was at the cottage door when they parted, and Liz's eyes had curiosity and wonder in them when she met her friend.

"Joan," she said, peering over the door-sill at Derrick's retreating figure, "is na that one o' th' mesters? Is na it the Lunnon engineer, Joan?"

"Yes," Joan answered briefly.

The pretty, silly creature's eyes grew larger, with a shade of awe.

"Is na it th' one as yore feyther's so bitter agen?"

"Yes."

"An' is na he a gentleman? He dunnot look loike a workin' mon. His cloas dunnot fit him loike common foakes. He mun be a gentleman."

"I've heerd foak ca' him one; an' if his cloas fit him reet, he mun be one, I suppose."

Liz looked after him again.

"Aye," she sighed, "he's a gentleman sure enow. I've seed gentlemen enow to know th' look on 'em. Did----" hesitating fearfully, but letting her curiosity get the better of her discretion nevertheless,--"did he court thee, Joan?"

The next moment she was frightened into wishing she had not asked the question. Joan turned round and faced her suddenly, pale and wrathful.

"Nay, he did na," she said. "I am na a lady, an' he is what tha ca's him--a gentleman."