

CHAPTER XVI - "Owd Sammy" in Trouble

"Craddock is in serious trouble," said Mr. Barholm to his wife and daughter.

"'Owd Sammy' in trouble," said Anice. "How is that, papa?"

The Reverend Harold looked at once concerned and annoyed. In truth he had cause for irritation. The laurels he had intended to win through Sammy Craddock were farther from being won to-day than they had ever been. He was beginning to feel a dim, scarcely developed, but sore conviction, that they were not laurels for his particular wearing.

"It is that bank failure at Illsbery," he answered. "You have heard of it, I dare say. There has been a complete crash, and Craddock's small savings being deposited there, he has lost everything he depended upon to support him in his old age. It is a hard business."

"Have you been to see Craddock?" Mrs. Barholm asked.

"Oh! yes," was the answer, and the irritation became even more apparent than before. "I went as soon as I heard it, last night indeed; but it was of no use. I had better have stayed away. I don't seem to make much progress with Craddock, somehow or other. He is such a cross-grained, contradictory old fellow, I hardly know what to make of him. And to add to his difficulties, his wife is so prostrated by the blow that she is

confined to her bed. I talked to them and advised them to have patience, and look for comfort to the Fountain-head; but Craddock almost seemed to take it ill, and was even more disrespectful in manner than usual."

It was indeed a heavy blow that had fallen upon "Owd Sammy." For a man to lose his all at his time of life would have been hard enough anywhere; but it was trebly hard to meet with such a trial in Riggan. To have money, however small a sum, "laid by i' th' bank," was in Riggan to be illustrious. The man who had an income of ten shillings a week was a member of society whose opinion bore weight; the man with twenty was regarded with private awe and public respect. He was deferred to as a man of property; his presence was considered to confer something like honor upon an assembly, or at least to make it respectable. The Government was supposed to be not entirely oblivious of his existence, and his remarks upon the affairs of the nation, and the conduct of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, were regarded as having something more than local interest. Sammy Craddock had been the man with twenty shillings income. He had worked hard in his youth and had been too shrewd and far-sighted to spend hard. His wife had helped him, and a lucky windfall upon the decease of a parsimonious relative had done the rest. The weekly deposit in the old stocking hidden under the mattress had become a bank deposit, and by the time he was incapacitated from active labor, a decent little income was ready. When the Illsbery Bank stopped payment, not only his daily bread but his dearly valued importance was swept away from him at one fell blow. Instead of being a man of property, with a voice in the affairs of the nation, he was a beggar. He

saw himself set aside among the frequenters of The Crown, his political opinions ignored, his sarcasms shorn of their point. Knowing his poverty and misfortune; the men who had stood in awe of him would begin to suspect him of needing their assistance and would avoid him accordingly.

"It's human natur'," he said. "No one loikes a dog wi' th' mange, whether th' dog's to blame or no. Th' dog may ha' gotten it honest. Tis na th' dog, it's the mange as foakes want to get rid on."

"Providence?" said he to the Rector, when that portly consoler called on him. "It's Providence, is it? Well, aw I say is, that if that's th' ways o' Providence, th' less notice Providence takes o' us, th' better."

His remarks upon his first appearance at The Crown among his associates, after the occurrence of the misfortune, were even more caustic and irreverent. He was an irreverent old sinner at his best, and now Sammy was at his worst. Seeing his crabbed, wrinkled old face drawn into an expression signifying defiance at once of his ill luck and worldly comment, his acquaintances shook their heads discreetly. Their reverence for him as a man of property could not easily die out. The next thing to being a man of property, was to have possessed worldly goods which had been "made away wi'," it scarcely mattered how. Indeed even to have "made away wi' a mort o' money" one's self, was to be regarded a man of parts and of no inconsiderable spirit.

"Yo're in a mort o' trouble, Sammy, I mak' no doubt," remarked one

oracle, puffing at his long clay.

"Trouble enow," returned Sammy, shortly, "if you ca' it trouble to be on th' road to th' poor-house."

"Aye, indeed!" with a sigh. "I should think so. But trouble's th' lot o' mon. Riches is deceitful an' beauty is vain--not as tha wur ivver much o' a beauty, Sammy; I canna mean that."

"Dunnot hurt thysen explaining I nivver set up fur one. I left that to thee. Thy mug wus allus thy fortune."

"Tha'rt fretted now, Sammy," he said. "Tha'rt fretted, an' it maks thee sharp-tongued."

"Loike as not," answered Sammy. "Frettin' works different wi' some foak to what it does wi' others. I nivver seed thee fretted, mysen. Does it ha' th' same effect on thee? If it happens to, I should think it would na harm thee,--or other foak either. A bit o' sharpness is na so hard to stand wheer it's a variety."

"Sithee, Sammy," called out a boisterous young fellow from the other side of the room. "What did th' Parson ha' to say to thee? Thwaite wur tellin' me as he carried th' prayer-book to thee, as soon as he heerd th' news. Did he read thee th' Christenin' service, or th' Burial, to gi' thee a bit o' comfort?"

"Happen he gi' him both, and throwed in th' Litany," shouted another.

"How wur it, Sammy? Let's hear."

Sammy's face began to relax. A few of the knots and wrinkles showed signs of dispersing. A slow twisting of the features took place, which might have been looked upon as promising a smile in due course of time. These young fellows wanted to hear him talk, and "tak' off th' Par-son." His occupation was not entirely gone, after all. It was specially soothing to his vanity to feel that his greatest importance lay in his own powers, and not altogether in more corruptible and uncertain attractions. He condescended to help himself to a pipe-full of a friend's tobacco.

"Let's hear," cried a third member of the company. "Gi' us th' tale owt an' owt, owd lad. Tha'rt th' one to do it graidely."

Sammy applied a lucifer to the fragrant weed, and sucked at his pipe deliberately.

"It's noan so much of a tale," he said, with an air of disparagement and indifference. "Yo' chaps mak' so much out o' nowt. Th' Parson's well enow i' his way, but," in naïve self-satisfaction, "I mun say he's a foo', an' th' biggest foo' fur his size I ivver had th' pleasure o' seein'."

They knew the right chord was touched. A laugh went round, but there was no other interruption and Sammy proceeded.

"Whatten yo' lads think as th' first thing he says to me wur?" puffing vigorously. "Why, he cooms in an' sets hissen down, an' he swells hissen out loike a frog i' trouble, an' ses he, 'My friend, I hope you cling to th' rock o' ages.' An' ses I, 'No I dunnot nowt o' th' soart, an' be dom'd to yo'. 'It wur na hospitable,'" with a momentary touch of deprecation,--"An' I dunnot say as it wur hospitable, but I wor na i' th' mood to be hospitable just at th' toime. It tuk him back too, but he gettin round after a bit, an' he tacklet me agen, an' we had it back'ard and for'ard betwixt us for a good haaf hour. He said it wur Providence, an' I said, happen it wur, an' happen it wurn't. I wur na so friendly and familiar wi' th' Lord as he seemed to be, so I could na tell foak aw he meant, and aw he did na mean. Sithee here, lads," making a fist of his knotty old hand and laying it upon the table, "that theer's what stirs me up wi' th' parson kind. They're allus settin down to explain what th' Lordamoigty's up to, as if he wur a confidential friend o' theirs as they wur bound to back up i' some road; an' they mun drag him in endways or sideways i' their talk whether or not, an' they wun-not be content to leave him to work fur hissen. Seems to me if I wur a disciple as they ca' it, I should be ashamed i' a manner to be allus apolo-gizin' fur him as I believed in. I dunnot say for 'em to say nowt, but I do say for 'em not to be so dom'd free an' easy about it. Now theer's th' owd Parson, he's gotten a lot o' Bible words as he uses, an' he brings 'em in by the scruft o' th' neck, if he canna do no better,--fur bring

'em in he mun,--an' it looks loike he's aw i' a fever till he's said 'em an' gotten 'em off his moind. An' it seems to me loike, when he has said 'em, he soart o' straightens hissen out, an' feels comfortable, loike a mon as has done a masterly job as conna be mended. As fur me, yo' know, I'm noan the Methody soart mysen, but I am na a foo', an' I know a foine loike principle when I see it, an' this matter o' religion is a foine enow thing if yo' could get it straightforward an' plain wi'out so much trimmins. But----" feeling perhaps that this was a large admission, "I am noan o' th' Methody breed mysen."

"An' so tha tellt Parson, I'll warrant," suggested one of his listeners, who was desirous of hearing further particulars of the combat.

"Well, well," admitted Craddock with the self-satisfaction of a man who feels that he has acquitted himself creditably. "Happen I did. He wur fur havin' me thank th' A'moighty fur aw ut had happent me, but I tow'd him as I did na quoite see th' road clear. I dunnot thank a chap as gi'es me a crack at th' soide o' th' yed. I may stand it if so be as I conna gi' him a crack back, but I dunnot know as I should thank him fur th' favor, an' not bein' one o' th' regenerate, as he ca's 'em, I dunnot feel loike singin' hymns just yet; happen it's 'cause I'm onregenerate, or happen it's human natur'. I should na wonder if it's 'pull devil, pull baker,' wi' th' best o' foak,--foak as is na prize foo's, loike th' owd Parson. Ses I to him, 'Not bein' regenerate, I dunnot believe i' so much grace afore meat. I say, lets ha' th' meat first, an' th' grace arterward.'"

These remarks upon matters theological were applauded enthusiastically by Craddock's audience. "Owd Sammy" had finished his say, however, and believing that having temporarily exhausted his views upon any subject, it was well to let the field lie fallow, he did not begin again. He turned his attention from his audience to his pipe, and the intimate friends who sat near.

"What art tha goin' to do, owd lad?" asked one.

"Try fur a seat i' Parlyment," was the answer, "or pack my bits o' duds i' a wheelbarrow, an' set th' owd lass on 'era an' tak' th' nighest road to th' Union. I mun do summat fur a bein'."

"That's true enow. We're main sorry fur thee, Sammy. Tak' another mug o' sixpenny to keep up thy sperrets. Theer's nowt as cheers a mon loike a sup o' th' reet soart."

"I shanna get much on it if I go to th' poor-house," remarked Sammy, filling his beer mug. "Skilly an' water-gruel dunnot fly to a raon's head, I'll warrant Aye! I wonder how th' owd lass'll do wi'out her drop o' tea, an' how she'll stand bein' buried by th' parish? That'll be worse than owt else. She'd set her moind on ridin' to th' grave-yard i' th' shiniest hearse as could be gotten, an' wi' aw th' black feathers i' th' undertaker's shop wavin' on th' roof. Th' owd wench wur quite set i' her notion o' bein' a bit fashynable at th' last. I believe hoo'd ha'

enjoyed th' ride in a quiet way. Eh, dear! I'm feart she'll nivver be able to stand th' thowt o' bein' put under i' a common style. I wish we'd kept a bit o' brass i' th' owd stockin'."

"It's a bad enow lookout," granted another, "but I would na gi' up aw at onct, Sammy. Happen tha could find a bit o' leet work, as ud keep thee owt o' th' Union. If tha could get a word or two spoke to Mester Hoviland, now. He's jest lost his lodge-keeper an' he is na close about payin' a mon fur what he does. How would tha loike to keep the lodge?"

"It ud be aw I'd ax," said Sammy. "I'd be main well satisfied, yo' mebbe sure; but yo' know theer's so mony lookin' out for a job o' that koind, an' I ha' na mony friends among th' quality. I nivver wur smooth-tongued enow."

True enough that. Among the country gentry, Sammy Craddock was regarded as a disrespectful, if not a dangerous, old fellow. A man who made satirical observations upon the ways and manners of his social superiors, could not be much better than a heretic. And since his associates made an oracle of him, he was all the more dangerous. He revered neither Lords nor Commons, and was not to be awed by the most imposing institutions. He did not take his hat off when the gentry rode by, and it was well known that he had jeered at several of the most important individuals in county office. Consequently, discreet persons who did not believe in the morals of "the masses" shook their heads at

him, figuratively speaking, and predicted that the end of his career would be unfortunate. So it was not very likely that he would receive much patronage in the hour of his downfall.

Sammy Craddock was in an uncomfortable frame of mind when he left his companions and turned homeward. It was a bad lookout for himself, and a bad one for "th' owd lass." His sympathy for the good woman was not of a sentimental order, but it was sympathy nevertheless. He had been a good husband, if not an effusive one. "Th' owd lass" had known her only rival in The Crown and his boon companions; and upon the whole, neither had interfered with her comfort, though it was her habit and her pleasure to be loud in her condemnation and disparagement of both. She would not have felt her connubial life complete without a grievance, and Sammy's tendency to talk politics over his pipe and beer was her standard resource.

When he went out, he had left her lying down in the depths of despair, but when he entered the house, he found her up and dressed, seated by the window in the sun, a bunch of bright flowers before her.

"Well now!" he exclaimed. "Tha niwer says! What's takken thee? I thowt tha wur bedrid fur th' rest o' thy days."

"Howd thy tongue," she answered with a proper touch of wifely irritation at his levity. "I've had a bit o' company an' it's chirked me up summat. That little lass o' th' owd Parson has been settin wi' me."

"That's it, is it?"

"Aye, an' I tell yo' Sammy, she's a noice little wench. Why, she's gotten th' ways o' a woman, stead o' a lass,--she's that theer quiet an' steady, an' she's gotten a face as pretty as her ways, too."

Sammy scratched his head and reflected.

"I mak' no doubt on it," he answered. "I mak' no doubt on it. It wur her, tha knows, as settlet th' foight betwixt th' lads an' th' dog. I'm wonderin' why she has na been here afore."

"Well now!" taking up a stitch in her knitting, "that's th' queer part o' it. Whatten yo' think th' little thing said, when I axt her why? She says, 'It did na seem loike I was needed exactly, an' I did na know as yo'd care to ha' a stranger coom wi'out bein' axt.' Just as if she had been nowt but a neebor's lass, and would na tak' th' liberty."

"That's noan th' owd Parson's way," said Sammy.

"Th' owd Parson!" testily; "I ha' no patience wi' him. Th' little lass is as different fro' him as chalk is fro' cheese."