

CHAPTER XX - The New Gate-Keeper

Sammy Craddock made his appearance at Mr. Haviland's promptly, and being

shown into the library, which was empty, took a seat and proceeded to regard the surroundings critically.

"Dunnot scald thy nose wi' thy own broth," Mrs. Craddock had said to him warningly, when he left her. "Keep a civil tongue i' thy head. Thy toime fur saucin' thy betters is past an' gone. Tha'lt ha' to tak' both fat an' lean together i' these days, or go wi'out mate."

Sammy remembered these sage remarks rather sorely, as he sat awaiting the master of the household. His independence had been very dear to him, and the idea that he must relinquish it was a grievous thorn in the flesh. He glanced round at the pictures and statuettes and shook his head dubiously.

"A mon wi' so many crinkum-crankums as he seems to ha' gotten 'll be apt to be reyther set i' polytics. An' I'll warrant this is na th' best parlor neyther. Aw th' wall covered wi' books too, an' a ornymental step-lather to climb up to th' high shelves. Well, Sammy, owd lad, tha's not seen aw th' world yet, tha finds out. Theer's a bit o' summat outside Riggan. After aw, it does a mon no hurt to travel. I should na wonder if I mought see things as I nivver heerd on if I gotten as fur as th' Contynent. Theer's France now--foak say as they dunnot speak

Lancashire i' France, an' conna so much as understand it. Well, their's ignorance aw o'er th' world."

The door opened at this juncture, and Mr. Haviland entered--fresh, florid and cordial. His temperament being an easy one, he rather dreaded collision with anybody, and would especially have disliked an uncomfortable interview with this old fellow. He would like to be able to preserve his affability of demeanor for his own sake as well as for Miss Barholm's.

"Ah!" he said, "Craddock, is it? Glad to see you, Craddock."

Sammy rose from his seat

"Aye," he answered. "Sam'll Craddock fro' Riggan. Same to you, Mester."

Mr. Haviland waved his hand good-naturedly.

"Take your seat again," he said. "Don't stand. You are the older man of the two, you know, and I dare say you are tired with your walk. You came about the lodge-keeper's place?"

"That little lass o' th' owd Parson's----" began Sammy.

"Miss Anice Barholm," interposed Mr. Havi-land. "Yes, she told me she would send you. I never had the pleasure of seeing her until she drove

here yesterday to ask for the place for you. She was afraid to lose time in waiting for her father's return."

"Yo' nivver saw her afore?"

"No."

"Well," rubbing his hands excitedly over the knob of his stick, "hoo's a rarer un than I thowt fur, even. Hoo'll stond at nowt, wont that little wench," and he gave vent to his feelings in a delighted chuckle. "I'd loike to ax yo'," he added, "wheer's th' other lass, as ud ha' had the pluck to do as mich?"

"I don't think there is another woman in the country who would have done it," said Mr. Havi-land smiling. "We shall agree in our opinion of Miss Barholm, I see, Craddock, if we quarrel about everything else."

Sammy took out his flowered bandanna and wiped his bald forehead. He was

at once mollified and encouraged. He felt that he was being treated with a kind of respect and consideration. Here was one of the gentry who placed himself on a friendly footing with him. Perhaps upon the whole he should not find it so difficult to reconcile himself to his change of position after all. And being thus encouraged, a certain bold simplicity made him address himself to Mr. Haviland not as a servant in prospective to a prospective master, but as man to man.

"Th' fact is," he said, "as I am na mich o' a lass's mon mysen, and I wunnot say as I ha' mich opinion o' woman foak i' general--they're flighty yo' see--they're flighty; but I mun say as I wur tuk by that little wench o' th' Parson's--I wur tuk by her."

"She would be glad to hear it, I am sure," with an irony so suave that Sammy proceeded with fresh gravity.

"I mak' no doubt on't," dogmatically. "I mak' no doubt on't i' th' world, but I dunnot know as th' flattery ud do her good. Sugar sop is na o'er digestible to th' best o' 'em. They ha' to be held a bit i' check, yo' see. But hoo's a wonderfu' little lass--fur a lass, I mun admit. Seems a pity to ha' wasted so mich good lad metal on a slip o' a wench,--does na it?"

"You think so? Well, that is a matter of opinion, you know. However--concerning the lodge-keeper's place. You understand what your duties would be, I suppose?"

"Tendin' th' gates an' th' loike. Aye sir. Th' little lass towd me aw about it. Hoo is na one as misses owt."

"So I see," smiling again. "And you think you can perform them?"

"I wur thinkin' so. It did na stroike me as a mon need to be partic'lar

muskyllar to do th' reet thing by 'em. I think I could tackle 'em wi'out breakin' down."

After a brief discussion of the subject, it was agreed that Mr. Craddock should be installed as keeper of the lodge the week following.

"As to politics," said Mr. Haviland, when his visitor rose to depart, "I hear you are something of a politician, Craddock."

"Summat o' one, sir," answered Sammy, his evident satisfaction touched with a doubtful gravity. "Summat o' one. I ha' my opinions o' things i' gineral."

"So I have been told; and they have made you rather unpopular among our county people, per-haps?"

"I am na mich o' a favorite," with satisfaction.

"No, the fact is that until Miss Barholm came to me I had rather a bad idea of you, Craddock."

This looked somewhat serious, Craddock regarding it rather in the light of a challenge.

"I'd loike well enow to ha' yo' change it," he said, "but my coat is na o' th' turnin' web. I mun ha' my say about things--gentry or no gentry."

And his wrinkled old visage expressed so crabbed a determination that Mr. Haviland laughed outright.

"Oh! don't misunderstand me," he said, "stick to your party, Craddock. We will try to agree, for Miss Barholm's sake. I will leave you to your opinion, and you will leave me to mine--even a Member of Parliament has a right to an opinion, you know, if he doesn't intrude it upon the public too much."

Craddock went home in a mollified frame of mind. He felt that he had gained his point and held his ground, and he respected himself accordingly. He felt too that his associates had additional right to respect him. It was their ground too, and he had held it for them as well as for himself. He stopped at The Crown for his midday glass of ale; and his self-satisfaction was so evident that his friends observed it, and remarked among themselves that "th' owd lad wur pickin' up his crumbs a bit."

"Yo're lookin' graidely to-day, Sammy," said one.

"I'm feelin' a trifle graidelier than I ha' done," he answered, oracularly. "Things is lookin' up."

"I'm main glad to hear it. Tell us as how."

"Well,"--with studied indifference,--"it's noan so great luck i'

comparison, but it's summat to be thankfu' fur to a mon as is down i' th' world. I've gotten the lodge-keeper's place at Mr. Havi-land's."

"Tha' nivver says! Who'd a' thowt it? How ivver did that coom about?"

"Friends i' coort," with dignity. "Friends i' coort. Hond me that jug o' ale, Tummy. Havi-land's a mon o' discretion, if he is a Member o' Parlyment. We've had quoite a friendly chat this mornin' as we set i' th' loibery together. He is na so bad i' his pollytics after aw's said an' done. He'll do, upo' th' whole."

"Yo' stood up to him free enow, I warrant," said Tummy. "Th' gentle folk dunnot often hear sich free 'speakin' as yo' gi' 'em, Sammy."

"Well, I had to be a bit indyendent; it wur nat'ral. It would na ha' done to ha' turnt soft, if he wur th' mester an' me th' mon. But he's a mon o' sense, as I say, an' he wur civil enow, an' friendly enow. He's gotten gumption to see as pollytics is pollytics. I'll tell yo' what, lads, I'm comin' to th' opinion as happen theer's more sense i' some o' th' gentry than we gi' em credit fur; they ha' not mich but book larnin i' their heads, it's true, but they're noan so bad--some on 'em--if yo're charytable wi' 'em."

"Who was thy friend i' coort, Sammy?" was asked next.

Sammy's fist went down upon the table with a force which made the mugs

dance and rattle.

"Now tha'rt comin' to the meat i' th' egg." he said. "Who should tha think it wur 'at had th' good-will an' th' head to tak' th' business i' hond?"

"It ud be hard to say."

"Why, it wur that little lass o' th' owd Parsen's again. Dom'd if she wunnot run aw Riggan i' a twelvemonth. I dunnot know wkeer she gotten her head-fillin' fro' unless she robbed th' owd Parson, an' left his nob standin' empty. Happen that's what's up wi' th' owd chap."