

CHAPTER XXVII - Sammy Craddock's "Manny-ensis."

At least twice a week Jud Bates made a pilgrimage to Haviland Park. Having been enlightened to the extent of two or three chapters of "Robinson Crusoe," Sammy Craddock was athirst for more. He regarded the adventures of the hero as valuable information from foreign shores, as information that might be used in political debates, and brought forth on state occasions to floor a presumptuous antagonist. Accordingly, he held out inducements to Jud such as the boy was not likely to think lightly of. A penny a night, and a good supper for himself and Nib, held solid attractions for Jud, and at this salary he found himself engaged in the character of what "Owd Sammy" called "a manny-ensis."

"What's that theer?" inquired Mrs. Craddock on first hearing this imposing title. "A manny--what?"

"A manny-ensis, owd lass," said Sammy, chuckling. "Did tha ivver hear o' a private gentleman as had na a manny-ensis?"

"Nay. I know nowt about thy manny-ensisses, an' I'll warrant tha does na know what such loike is thysen."

"It means a power o' things," answered Sammy; "a power o' things. It's a word as is comprehensive, as they ca' it, an' it's one as will do as well as any fur th' lad. A manny-ensis!" and manny-ensis it remained.

Surely the adventures of the island-solitary had never given such satisfaction as they gave in the cheery house room of the lodge. Sammy listened to them over numerous pipes, with a respect for literature such as had never before been engendered in his mind by the most imposing display of bindings.

"I've allus thowt as th' newspaper wur enow fur a mon to tackle," he would say, reflectively; "but theer's summat outside o' th' newspapers. I nivver seed a paper as had owt in it about desert islands, let alone cannybles."

"Cannybles, indeed!" replied Mrs. Craddock, who was occasionally one of the audience. "I conna mak' no sense out o' thee an' thy cannybles. I wonder they are na' shamt o' theirsens, goin' about wi'out so mich as a hat on, an' eatin' each other, as if there wur na a bit o' good victual i' th' place. I wonder th' Queen dunnot put a stop to it hersen if th' parlyment ha' not gotten the sense to do it. It's noan respectable, let alone Christian."

"Eh!" said Sammy; "but tha'rt i' a muddle. Th'dst allus be i' a muddle if I'd let thee mak' things out thysen an' noan explain 'em to thee. Does tha think aw this here happent i' England? It wur i' furrin lands, owd wench, i' a desert island i' th' midst o' th' sea."

"Well, I wur hopin' it wur na i' Lancashire, I mun say!"

"Lancashire! Why, it happent further off nor Lunnon, i' a place as it's loike th' Queen has niv-ver seed nor heerd tell on."

The old woman looked dubious, if not disapproving. A place that was not in Lancashire, and that the Queen had nothing to do with, was, to her, a place quite "off color."

"Well! well!" she resumed, with the manner of an unbeliever, "thee go on thy way readin' if tha con tak' comfort i' it. But I mun say again as it does na sound Christian to me. That's the least I con say on't."

"Tha'rt slow i' understanding owd lass," was her husband's tolerant comment. "Tha' does na know enow o' litterytoor to appreciate. Th' female intylect is na strong at th' best, an' tha nivver wur more than ordinary. Get into it, Manny-ensis. It's getten late, and I'm fain to hear more about th' mon Friday, an' how th' poor' chap managed."

Both reader and audience were so full of interest that Jud's story was prolonged beyond the usual hour. But to the boy, this was a matter of small consequence. He had tramped the woods too often with Nib for a companion to feel fear at any time. He had slept under a hedge many a night from choice, and had enjoyed his slumber like a young vagabond, as he was.

He set out on this occasion in high good humor. There were no clouds to

hide the stars; he had had an excellent supper, and he had enjoyed his evening. He trudged along cheerily, his enjoyment as yet unabated. The trees and hedges, half stripped of their leaves, were so suggestive of birds' nests, that now and then he stepped aside to examine them more closely. The nests might be there yet, though the birds had flown. Where throstles had built this year, it was just possible others might build again, and, at any rate, it was as well to know where their haunts had been. So, having objects enough to attract his attention, the boy did not find the way long. He was close upon the mine before he had time to feel fatigue possible, and, nearing the mine, he was drawn from his path again by a sudden remembrance brought up by the sight of a hedge surrounding a field near it.

"Theer wur a bird as built i' that hedge i' th' spring," he said. "She wur a new kind. I'd forgotten her. I meant to ha' watched her. I wonder if any other felly fun her. I'll go an' see if th' nest is theer."

He crossed the road to the place where he fancied he had seen this treasure; but not being quite certain as to the exact spot, he found his search lengthened by this uncertainty.

"It wur here," he said to himself; "at least I thowt it wur. Some chap mun ha' fun it an' tuk it."

At this moment he paused, as if listening.

"What's that theer?" he said. "Theer's some one on th' other side o' th' hedge."

He had been attracted by the sound of voices--men's voices--the voices of men who were evidently crouching under the shadow of the hedge on the other side, and whose tones in a moment more reached him distinctly and were recognized.

The first was Dan Lowrie's, and before he had heard him utter a dozen words, Jud dropped upon his knees and laid his hand warningly upon Nib's neck. The dog pricked his pointed ears and looked up at him restlessly. All the self-control of his nature could scarcely help him to suppress a whine.

"Them as is feared to stand by Dan Lowrie," said the voice, with an oath, "let 'em say so."

"Theer's not a mon here as is feart," was the gruff answer.

"Then theer's no need to gab no more," returned Lowrie. "Yo' know what yo' ha' gotten to do. Yo' ha' th' vitriol an' th' sticks. Wait yo' fur him at th' second corner an' I'll wait at th' first. If he does na tak' one turn into th' road he'll tak' th' other, an' so which turn he tak's we'll be ready fur him. Blast him! he'll be done wi' engineerin' fur a while if he fa's into my hands, an' he'll mak' no more rows about th' Davvies."

Impatient for the word of command, Nib stirred uneasily among the dead leaves, and the men heard him. Not a moment's space was given to the two listeners, or they would have saved themselves. There was a smothered exclamation from three voices at once, a burst of profanity, and Dan Lowrie had leaped the low hedge and caught Jud by the collar. The man was ghastly with rage. He shook the lad until even he himself was breathless.

"Yo' young devil!" he cried, hoarsely, "yo've been listenin', ha' yo'? Nay, theer's no use o' yo' tryin' to brave it out. Yo've done for yorsen, by God!"

"Let me a-be," said Jud, but he was as pale as his captor. "I wur na doin' thee no harm. I on'y coom to look fur a bird's nest."

"Yo' listened," said Lowrie; "y o' heerd what we said."

"Let me a-be," was Jud's sullen reply.

At this moment a man's face rose above the whitethorn hedge.

"Who is it?" asked the fellow, in a low voice.

"A dom'd young rascal as has been eaves-droppin'. Yo' may as well coom out, lads. We've getten to settle wi' him, or we'n fun ourselves in th'

worst box yet."

The man scrambled over the hedge without further comment and his companion followed him; and seeing who they were, Jud felt that his position was even more dangerous than he fancied at first. The three plotters who grouped themselves about him were three of the most desperate fellows in the district--brutal, revengeful, vicious, combining all the characteristics of a bad class. The two last looked at him with evident discomfort and bewilderment.

"Here's a pretty go," said one.

"Aye, by th' Lord Harry!" added the other. "How long's he bin here?"

"How long'st bin here?" demanded Lowrie, with another shake.

"Long enow to look fur a bird's nest an' not find it," said Jud, trying to speak stoutly.

The three exchanged glances and oaths.

"He's heerd ivvery word," said Lowrie, in a savage answer.

There was a moment's silence, and then Lowrie broke out again.

"Theer's on'y one road to stop his gab," he said. "Pitch him into th'

mine, an' be dom'd to him. He shall na spoil th' job, if I ha' to swing fur it."

Nib gave a low whine, and Jud's heart leaped within him. Every lad in Riggan knew Dan Lowrie and feared him. There was not a soul within hearing, and people were not fond of visiting the mine at night, so if they chose to dispose of him in any way, they would have time and opportunity to do it without risk of being interfered with. But it happened that upon the present occasion Lowrie's friends were not as heated as himself. It was not a strictly personal grudge they were going to settle, and consequently some remnant of humanity got the better of them.

"Nay," said the youngest, "one's enow."

"Nay," Lowrie put in; "one's not enow fur me, if theer's another as is goin' to meddle. Sum-mat's gotten to be done, an' done quick."

"Mak' him promise to keep his mouth shut," suggested No. 3. "He'll do it sooner nor get hissen into trouble."

"Wilt ta?" demanded the young one.

Jud looked up at him. He had the stubborn North country blood in him, and the North country courage. Having heard what he had, he was sharp enough to comprehend all. There was only one engineer whom Lowrie could



have a grudge against, and that one was Derrick. They were going to work some harm against "Mester Derrick," who was his friend and Miss Anice's.

"Wilt ta?" repeated his questioner, feeling quite sure of him. The youth of Riggan were generally ready enough for mischief, and troubled by no scruples of conscience, so the answer he received took him by surprise.

"Nay," said Jud, "I will na."

"Tha will na?"

"Nay."

The fellow fell back a step or two to stare at him.

"Well, tha'rt a plucky one at ony rate," he growled, discomfited.

Jud stood his ground.

"Mester Derrick's bin good to me," he said, "an' he's bin good to Nib. Th' rest o' yo' ha' a kick for Nib whenivver he gits i' yo're way; but he nivver so much as spoke rough to him. He's gin me a penny more nor onct to buy him sum-mat to eat. Chuck me down the shaft, if yo' want to."

Though he scarcely believed they would take him at his word, since the

two were somewhat in his favor, it was a courageous thing to say. If his fate had rested in Lowrie's hands alone, heaven knows what the result might have been; but having the others to contend with, he was safe so far. But there was not much time to lose, and even the less interested parties to the transgression had a stolid determination to stand by their comrade. There was a hurried consultation held in undertones, and then the youngest man bent suddenly, and, with a short laugh, caught Nib in his arms. He was vicious enough to take a pleasure in playing tormentor, if in his cooler moods he held back from committing actual crime.

"Tha'rt a plucky young devil," he said; "but tha's gotten to swear to howd thy tongue between thy teeth, an' if tha wunnot do it fur thy own sake, happen tha will fur th' dog's."

"What art tha goin' to do wi' him?" cried Jud, trembling. "He has na done yo' no hurt."

"We're goin' to howd him over th' shaft a minnit till tha mak's up thy mind. Bring th' young chap along, lads."

He had not struggled before, but he began to struggle now with all his strength. He grew hot and cold by turns. It might not be safe to kill him; but it would be safe enough to kill Nib.

"Let me a-be," he cried. "Let that theer dog loose. Nib, Nib,--seize

him, lad!"

"Put thy hond over his mouth," said the young man.

And so Jud was half dragged, half carried to the shaft. It was as useless for him to struggle as it was for Nib. Both were powerless. But Jud's efforts to free himself were so frantic that the men laughed,--Lowrie grimly, the other two with a kind of malicious enjoyment of the grotesqueness of the situation.

"Set him down, but keep him quiet," was the command given when they reached the pit's side.

The next instant a dreadful cry was smothered in the boy's grappled throat. They were leaning against the rail and holding Nib over the black abyss.

"Wilt ta promise?" he was asked. "Tha may let him speak, Lowrie; he canna mak' foak hear."

Nib looked down into the blackness, and broke into a terrific whine, turning his head toward his master.

"I--I--conna promise," said Jud; but he burst into tears.

"Let th' dog go," said Lowrie.

"Try him again. Wilt ta promise, or mun we let th' dog go, lad? We're noan goin' to do th' chap ony great harm; we're on'y goin' to play him a trick to pay him back fur his cheek."

Jud looked at Nib.

"Lowrie said you had vitriol and knob-sticks," he faltered. "Yo' dunnat play tricks wi' them."

"Yo' see how much he's heerd," said Lowrie. "He'll noan promise."

The one who held the dog was evidently losing patience.

"Say yes or no, yo' young devil," he said, and he made a threatening gesture. "We conna stand here aw neet. Promise ta will na tell mon, woman, nor choild, what tha heerd us say. When I say 'three,' I'll drop th' dog. One--two--"

The look of almost human terror in Nib's eyes was too much for his master. Desperation filled him. He could not sacrifice Nib--he could not sacrifice the man who had been Nib's friend; but he might make a sort of sacrifice of himself to both.

"Stop!" he cried. "I'll promise yo'"

He had saved Nib, but there was some parleying before he was set free, notwithstanding his promise to be silent. But for the fact that he was under the control of the others for the time being, Lowrie would have resorted to harsher precautions; but possibly influenced by a touch of admiration for the lad, the youngest man held out against his companions. They wrangled together for a few minutes, and then Nib was handed over.

"Here, cut an' run, tha young beggar," said the fellow who had stood by him, "an' dunnot let's hear ony more on thee. If we do, it'll be worse fur thee an' th' dog too. So look out."

Jud did not wait for a second command. The instant he felt Nib in his arms, he scudded over the bare space of ground before him at his best speed. They should not have time to repent their decision. If the men had seen his face, they might not have felt so safe. But the truth was, they were reckoning upon Jud Bates as they would have reckoned upon any other young Riggan rascal of his age. After all, it was not so much his promise they relied on as his wholesome fear of the consequences of its being broken. It was not a matter of honor but of dread.