

movement, and tried hard to find something definite below the surface words of his short letters. Otherwise, a great peace had settled over Seat-Sandal. Its hall-doors stood open all day long, and the August sunshine and the garden scents drifted in with the lights and shadows. Life had settled down into such simple ways, that it seemed to be always at rest. The hours went and came, and brought with them their little measure of duty and pleasure, both so usual and easy, that they took nothing from the feelings or the strength, and gave an infinite sense of peace and contentment.

One August evening they were in the garden; there had been several hot, clear days, and the harvesters were making the most of every hour. The squire had been in the field until near sunset, and now he was watching anxiously for the last wain. And they stood still to listen to the rumble of the waggon, and the rude, hearty chant that at intervals accompanied it:—

“Blest be the day that Christ was born !
The last sheaf of Sandal corn
Is well bound, and better shorn.
Hip, hip, hurrah !”

“Good-evening, squire.” The speaker had come quickly around one of the garden hedges, and his voice seemed to fall out of mid-air. Charlotte turned, with eyes full of light, and a flush of colour that made her exceedingly handsome.

“Well-a-mercy ! Good-evening, Stephen. When did you get home ? Nobody had heard tell. Eh ? What ?”

“I came this afternoon, squire ; and as there is a favour you can do us, I thought I would ask it at once.”

“Surely, Stephen. What can I do ? Eh ? What ?”

“I hear your harvest is home. Can you spare us a couple of men ? The wheat in Low Barra fields is ready for the sickle.”

“Three men, four, if you want them. You cannot have too many sickles. Cut wheat while the sun shines. Eh ? What ? How is the lady at Up-Hill ?”

“Mother is middling well, I’m obliged to you. I think she has failed though, since grandfather died.”

“It is likely. She has been too much by herself. You should stay at home, Stephen Latrigg. A man’s duty is more often there than anywhere else. Eh ?”

“I think you are right now, squire.” And then he blundered into the very statement that he ought to have let alone. “And I am not going to build the mill, squire,—not yet, at least. I would not do anything to annoy you for the world.”

The information was pleasant to Sandal ; but he had already heard it, in its least offensive way, through Ducie and Charlotte. Steve’s broad relinquishment demanded some acknowledgment, and appeared to put him under some obligation which he did not feel he had any right to acknowledge. He considered the building of a mill so near his own property a great social wrong, and why should he thank Stephen Latrigg for not committing it ?