

ЭДВАРД БУЛЬВЕР-ЛИТТОН

**KENELM
CHILLINGLY —
VOLUME 06**

Edward Bulwer-Lytton

Kenelm Chillingly — Volume 06

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BOOK VI

CHAPTER I

SIR PETER had not heard from Kenelm since a letter informing him that his son had left town on an excursion, which would probably be short, though it might last a few weeks; and the good Baronet now resolved to go to London himself, take his chance of Kenelm's return, and if still absent, at least learn from Mivers and others how far that very eccentric planet had contrived to steer a regular course amidst the fixed stars of the metropolitan system. He had other reasons for his journey. He wished to make the acquaintance of Chillingly Gordon before handing him over the £20,000 which Kenelm had released in that resettlement of estates, the necessary deeds of which the young heir had signed before quitting London for Moleswich. Sir Peter wished still more to see Cecilia Travers, in whom Kenelm's accounts of her had inspired a very strong interest.

The day after his arrival in town Sir Peter breakfasted with Mivers.

"Upon my word you are very comfortable here," said Sir Peter, glancing at the well-appointed table, and round the well-furnished rooms.

"Naturally so: there is no one to prevent my being comfortable. I am not married; taste that omelette."

"Some men declare they never knew comfort till they were married, Cousin Miners."

"Some men are reflecting bodies, and catch a pallid gleam from the comfort which a wife concentrates on herself. With a fortune so modest and secure, what comforts, possessed by me now, would not a Mrs. Chillingly Mivers ravish from my hold and appropriate to herself! Instead of these pleasant rooms, where should I be lodged? In a dingy den looking on a backyard excluded from the sun by day and vocal with cats by night; while Mrs. Mivers luxuriated in two drawing-rooms with southern aspect and perhaps a boudoir. My brougham would be torn from my uses and monopolized by 'the angel of my hearth,' clouded in her crinoline and halved by her chignon. No! if ever I marry—and I never deprive myself of the civilities and needlework which single ladies waste upon me by saying I shall not marry—it will be when women have fully established their rights; for then men may have a chance of vindicating their own. Then if there are two drawing-rooms in the house I shall take one; if not, we will toss up who shall have the back parlour; if we keep a brougham, it will be exclusively mine three days in the week; if Mrs. M. wants £200 a year for her wardrobe she must be contented with one, the other half will belong to my personal decoration; if I am oppressed by proof-sheets and printers' devils, half of the oppression falls to her lot, while I take my holiday on the croquet ground at Wimbledon. Yes, when the present wrongs of women are exchanged for equality with men, I will cheerfully marry; and to do the thing generous, I will not oppose Mrs. M.'s voting in the vestry or for Parliament. I will give her my own votes with pleasure."

"I fear, my dear cousin, that you have infected Kenelm with your selfish ideas on the nuptial state. He does not seem inclined to marry,—eh?"

"Not that I know of."

"What sort of girl is Cecilia Travers?"

"One of those superior girls who are not likely to tower into that terrible giantess called a 'superior woman.' A handsome, well-educated, sensible young lady, not spoiled by being an heiress; in fine, just the sort of girl whom you could desire to fix on for a daughter-in-law."

"And you don't think Kenelm has a fancy for her?"

"Honestly speaking, I do not."

"Any counter-attraction? There are some things in which sons do not confide in their fathers. You have never heard that Kenelm has been a little wild?"

"Wild he is, as the noble savage who ran in the woods," said Cousin Mivers.

"You frighten me!"

"Before the noble savage ran across the squaws, and was wise enough to run away from them. Kenelm has run away now somewhere."

"Yes, he does not tell me where, nor do they know at his lodgings. A heap of notes on his table and no directions where they are to be forwarded. On the whole, however, he has held his own in London society,—eh?"

"Certainly! he has been more courted than most young men, and perhaps more talked of. Oddities generally are."

"You own he has talents above the average? Do you not think he will make a figure in the world some day, and discharge that debt to the literary stores or the political interests of his country, which alas, I and my predecessors, the other Sir Peters, failed to do; and for which I hailed his birth, and gave him the name of Kenelm?"

"Upon my word," answered Mivers,—who had now finished his breakfast, retreated to an easy-chair, and taken from the chimney-piece one of his famous trabucos,—"upon my word, I can't guess; if some great reverse of fortune befell him, and he had to work for his livelihood, or if some other direful calamity gave a shock to his nervous system and jolted it into a fussy, fidgety direction, I dare say he might make a splash in that current of life which bears men on to the grave. But you see he wants, as he himself very truly says, the two stimulants to definite action,—poverty and vanity."

"Surely there have been great men who were neither poor nor vain?"

"I doubt it. But vanity is a ruling motive that takes many forms and many aliases: call it ambition, call it love of fame, still its substance is the same,—the desire of applause carried into fussiness of action."

"There may be the desire for abstract truth without care for applause."

"Certainly. A philosopher on a desert island may amuse himself by meditating on the distinction between light and heat. But if, on returning to the world, he publish the result of his meditations, vanity steps in and desires to be applauded."

"Nonsense, Cousin Mivers, he may rather desire to be of use and benefit to mankind. You don't deny that there is such a thing as philanthropy."

"I don't deny that there is such a thing as humbug. And whenever I meet a man who has the face to tell me that he is taking a great deal of trouble, and putting himself very much out of his way, for a philanthropical object, without the slightest idea of reward either in praise or pence, I know that I have a humbug before me,—a dangerous humbug, a swindling humbug, a fellow with his pocket full of villanous prospectuses and appeals to subscribers."

"Pooh, pooh; leave off that affectation of cynicism: you are not a bad-hearted fellow; you must love mankind; you must have an interest in the welfare of posterity."

"Love mankind? Interest in posterity? Bless my soul, Cousin Peter, I hope you have no prospectuses in /your/ pockets; no schemes for draining the Pontine Marshes out of pure love to mankind; no propositions for doubling the income-tax, as a reserve fund for posterity, should our coal-fields fail three thousand years hence. Love of mankind! Rubbish! This comes of living in the country."

"But you do love the human race; you do care for the generations that are to come."

"I! Not a bit of it. On the contrary, I rather dislike the human race, taking it altogether, and including the Australian bushmen; and I don't believe any man who tells me that he would grieve half as much if ten millions of human beings were swallowed up by an earthquake at a considerable

distance from his own residence, say Abyssinia, as he would for a rise in his butcher's bills. As to posterity, who would consent to have a month's fit of the gout or tic-douloureux in order that in the fourth thousand year, A. D., posterity should enjoy a perfect system of sewage?"

Sir Peter, who had recently been afflicted by a very sharp attack of neuralgia, shook his head, but was too conscientious not to keep silence.

"To turn the subject," said Mivers, relighting the cigar which he had laid aside while delivering himself of his amiable opinions, "I think you would do well, while in town, to call on your old friend Travers, and be introduced to Cecilia. If you think as favourably of her as I do, why not ask father and daughter to pay you a visit at Exmundham? Girls think more about a man when they see the place which he can offer to them as a home, and Exmundham is an attractive place to girls,—picturesque and romantic."

"A very good idea," cried Sir Peter, heartily. And I want also to make the acquaintance of Chillingly Gordon. Give me his address."

"Here is his card on the chimney-piece, take it; you will always find him at home till two o'clock. He is too sensible to waste the forenoon in riding out in Hyde Park with young ladies."

"Give me your frank opinion of that young kinsman. Kenelm tells me that he is clever and ambitious."

"Kenelm speaks truly. He is not a man who will talk stuff about love of mankind and posterity. He is of our day, with large, keen, wide-awake eyes, that look only on such portions of mankind as can be of use to him, and do not spoil their sight by poring through cracked telescopes to catch a glimpse of posterity. Gordon is a man to be a Chancellor of the Exchequer, perhaps a Prime Minister."

"And old Gordon's son is cleverer than my boy,—than the namesake of Kenelm Digby!" and Sir Peter sighed.

"I did not say that. I am cleverer than Chillingly Gordon, and the proof of it is that I am too clever to wish to be Prime Minister,—very disagreeable office, hard work, irregular hours for meals, much abuse and confirmed dyspepsia."

Sir Peter went away rather down-hearted. He found Chillingly Gordon at home in a lodging in Jermyn Street. Though prepossessed against him by all he had heard, Sir Peter was soon propitiated in his favour. Gordon had a frank man-of-the-world way with him, and much too fine a tact to utter any sentiments likely to displease an old-fashioned country gentleman, and a relation who might possibly be of service in his career. He touched briefly, and with apparent feeling, on the unhappy litigation commenced by his father; spoke with affectionate praise of Kenelm; and with a discriminating good-nature of Mivers, as a man who, to parody the epigram on Charles II.,

"Never says a kindly thing
And never does a harsh one."

Then he drew Sir Peter on to talk of the country and agricultural prospects. Learned that among his objects in visiting town was the wish to inspect a patented hydraulic ram that might be very useful for his farm-yard, which was ill supplied with water. Startled the Baronet by evincing some practical knowledge of mechanics; insisted on accompanying him to the city to inspect the ram; did so, and approved the purchase; took him next to see a new American reaping-machine, and did not part with him till he had obtained Sir Peter's promise to dine with him at the Garrick; an invitation peculiarly agreeable to Sir Peter, who had a natural curiosity to see some of the more recently distinguished frequenters of that social club. As, on quitting Gordon, Sir Peter took his way to the house of Leopold Travers, his thoughts turned with much kindness towards his young kinsman. "Mivers and Kenelm," quoth he to himself, "gave me an unfavourable impression of this lad; they represent him as worldly, self-seeking, and so forth. But Mivers takes such cynical views of character, and Kenelm is too eccentric to judge fairly of a sensible man of the world. At all events, it is not like

an egotist to put himself out of his way to be so civil to an old fellow like me. A young man about town must have pleasanter modes of passing his day than inspecting hydraulic rams and reaping-machines. Clever they allow him to be. Yes, decidedly clever, and not offensively clever,—practical."

Sir Peter found Travers in the dining-room with his daughter, Mrs. Campion, and Lady Glenalvon. Travers was one of those men rare in middle age, who are more often to be found in their drawing-room than in their private study; he was fond of female society; and perhaps it was this predilection which contributed to preserve in him the charm of good breeding and winning manners. The two men had not met for many years; not indeed since Travers was at the zenith of his career of fashion, and Sir Peter was one of those pleasant /dilettanti/ and half humoristic conversationalists who become popular and courted diners-out.

Sir Peter had originally been a moderate Whig because his father had been one before him; but he left the Whig party with the Duke of Richmond, Mr. Stanley (afterwards Lord Derby), and others, when it seemed to him that that party had ceased to be moderate.

Leopold Travers had, as a youth in the Guards, been a high Tory, but, siding with Sir Robert Peel on the repeal of the Corn Laws, remained with the Peelites after the bulk of the Tory party had renounced the guidance of their former chief, and now went with these Peelites in whatever direction the progress of the age might impel their strides in advance of Whigs and in defiance of Tories.

However, it is not the politics of these two gentlemen that are in question now. As I have just said, they had not met for many years. Travers was very little changed. Sir Peter recognized him at a glance; Sir Peter was much changed, and Travers hesitated before, on hearing his name announced, he felt quite sure that it was the right Sir Peter towards whom he advanced, and to whom he extended his cordial hand. Travers preserved the colour of his hair and the neat proportions of his figure, and was as scrupulously well dressed as in his dandy days. Sir Peter, originally very thin and with fair locks and dreamy blue eyes, had now become rather portly,—at least towards the middle of him,—and very gray; had long ago taken to spectacles; his dress, too, was very old-fashioned, and made by a country tailor. He looked quite as much a gentleman as Travers did; quite perhaps as healthy, allowing for difference of years; quite as likely to last his time. But between them there was the difference of the nervous temperament and the lymphatic. Travers, with less brain than Sir Peter, had kept his brain constantly active; Sir Peter had allowed his brain to dawdle over old books and lazily delight in letting the hours slip by. Therefore Travers still looked young, alert,—up to his day, up to anything; while Sir Peter, entering that drawing-room, seemed a sort of Rip van Winkle who had slept through the past generation, and looked on the present with eyes yet drowsy. Still, in those rare moments when he was thoroughly roused up, there would have been found in Sir Peter a glow of heart, nay, even a vigour of thought, much more expressive than the constitutional alertness that characterized Leopold Travers, of the attributes we most love and admire in the young.

"My dear Sir Peter, is it you? I am so glad to see you again," said Travers. "What an age since we met, and how condescendingly kind you were then to me; silly fop that I was! But by-gones are by-gones; come to the present. Let me introduce to you, first, my valued friend, Mrs. Campion, whose distinguished husband you remember. Ah, what pleasant meetings we had at his house! And next, that young lady of whom she takes motherly charge, my daughter Cecilia. Lady Glenalvon, your wife's friend, of course needs no introduction: time stands still with her."

Sir Peter lowered his spectacles, which in reality he only wanted for books in small print, and gazed attentively on the three ladies,—at each gaze a bow. But while his eyes were still lingeringly fixed on Cecilia, Lady Glenalvon advanced, naturally in right of rank and the claim of old acquaintance, the first of the three to greet him.

"Alas, my dear Sir Peter! time does not stand still for any of us; but what matter, if it leaves pleasant footprints? When I see you again, my youth comes before me,—my early friend, Caroline Brotherton, now Lady Chillingly; our girlish walks with each other; wreaths and ball-dresses the

practical topic; prospective husbands, the dream at a distance. Come and sit here: tell me all about Caroline."

Sir Peter, who had little to say about Caroline that could possibly interest anybody but himself, nevertheless took his seat beside Lady Glenalvon, and, as in duty bound, made the most flattering account of his She Baronet which experience or invention would allow. All the while, however, his thoughts were on Kenelm, and his eyes on Cecilia.

Cecilia resumes some mysterious piece of lady's work, no matter what,—perhaps embroidery for a music-stool, perhaps a pair of slippers for her father (which, being rather vain of his feet and knowing they looked best in plain morocco, he will certainly never wear). Cecilia appears absorbed in her occupation; but her eyes and her thoughts are on Sir Peter. Why, my lady reader may guess. And oh, so flatteringly, so lovingly fixed! She thinks he has a most charming, intelligent, benignant countenance. She admires even his old-fashioned frock-coat, high neckcloth, and strapped trousers. She venerates his gray hairs, pure of dye. She tries to find a close resemblance between that fair, blue-eyed, plumpish, elderly gentleman and the lean, dark-eyed, saturnine, lofty Kenelm; she detects the likeness which nobody else would. She begins to love Sir Peter, though he has not said a word to her.

Ah! on this, a word for what it is worth to you, my young readers. You, sir, wishing to marry a girl who is to be deeply, lastingly in love with you, and a thoroughly good wife practically, consider well how she takes to your parents; how she attaches to them an inexpressible sentiment, a disinterested reverence; even should you but dimly recognize the sentiment, or feel the reverence, how if between you and your parents some little cause of coldness arise, she will charm you back to honour your father and your mother, even though they are not particularly genial to her: well, if you win that sort of girl as your wife think you have got a treasure. You have won a woman to whom Heaven has given the two best attributes,—intense feeling of love, intense sense of duty. What, my dear lady reader, I say of one sex, I say of another, though in a less degree; because a girl who marries becomes of her husband's family, and the man does not become of his wife's. Still I distrust the depth of any man's love to a woman, if he does not feel a great degree of tenderness (and forbearance where differences arise) for her parents. But the wife must not so put them in the foreground as to make the husband think he is cast in the cold of the shadow. Pardon this intolerable length of digression, dear reader: it is not altogether a digression, for it belongs to my tale that you should clearly understand the sort of girl that is personified in Cecilia Travers.

"What has become of Kenelm?" asked Lady Glenalvon.

"I wish I could tell you," answered Sir Peter. "He wrote me word that he was going forth on rambles into 'fresh woods and pastures new,' perhaps for some weeks. I have not had a word from him since."

"You make me uneasy," said Lady Glenalvon. "I hope nothing can have happened to him: he cannot have fallen ill."

Cecilia stops her work, and looks up wistfully.

"Make your mind easy," said Travers with a laugh; "I am in this secret. He has challenged the champion of England, and gone into the country to train."

"Very likely," said Sir Peter, quietly: "I should not be in the least surprised; should you, Miss Travers?"

"I think it more probable that Mr. Chillingly is doing some kindness to others which he wishes to keep concealed."

Sir Peter was pleased with this reply, and drew his chair nearer to Cecilia's. Lady Glenalvon, charmed to bring those two together, soon rose and took leave.

Sir Peter remained nearly an hour talking chiefly with Cecilia, who won her way into his heart with extraordinary ease; and he did not quit the house till he had engaged her father, Mrs. Campion, and herself to pay him a week's visit at Exmundham, towards the end of the London season, which was fast approaching.

Having obtained this promise, Sir Peter went away, and ten minutes after Mr. Chillingly Gordon entered the drawing-room. He had already established a visiting acquaintance with the Traverses. Travers had taken a liking to him. Mrs. Campion found him an extremely well-informed, unaffected young man, very superior to young men in general. Cecilia was cordially polite to Kenelm's cousin. Altogether that was a very happy day for Sir Peter. He enjoyed greatly his dinner at the Garrick, where he met some old acquaintance and was presented to some new "celebrities." He observed that Gordon stood well with these eminent persons. Though as yet undistinguished himself, they treated him with a certain respect, as well as with evident liking. The most eminent of them, at least the one with the most solidly established reputation, said in Sir Peter's ear, "You may be proud of your nephew Gordon!"

"He is not my nephew, only the son of a very distant cousin."

"Sorry for that. But he will shed lustre on kinsfolk, however distant. Clever fellow, yet popular; rare combination,—sure to rise."

Sir Peter suppressed a gulp in the throat. "Ah, if some one as eminent had spoken thus of Kenelm!"

But he was too generous to allow that half-envious sentiment to last more than a moment. Why should he not be proud of any member of the family who could irradiate the antique obscurity of the Chillingly race? And how agreeable this clever young man made himself to Sir Peter!

The next day Gordon insisted on accompanying him to see the latest acquisitions in the British Museum, and various other exhibitions, and went at night to the Prince of Wales's Theatre, where Sir Peter was infinitely delighted with an admirable little comedy by Mr. Robertson, admirably placed on the stage by Marie Wilton. The day after, when Gordon called on him at his hotel, he cleared his throat, and thus plunged at once into the communication he had hitherto delayed.

"Gordon, my boy, I owe you a debt, and I am now, thanks to Kenelm, able to pay it."

Gordon gave a little start of surprise, but remained silent.

"I told your father, shortly after Kenelm was born, that I meant to give up my London house, and lay by £1000 a year for you, in compensation for your chance of succeeding to Exmundham should I have died childless. Well, your father did not seem to think much of that promise, and went to law with me about certain unquestionable rights of mine. How so clever a man could have made such a mistake would puzzle me, if I did not remember that he had a quarrelsome temper. Temper is a thing that often dominates cleverness,—an uncontrollable thing; and allowances must be made for it. Not being of a quarrelsome temper myself (the Chillinglys are a placid race), I did not make the allowance for your father's differing, and (for a Chillingly) abnormal, constitution. The language and the tone of his letter respecting it nettled me. I did not see why, thus treated, I should pinch myself to lay by a thousand a year. Facilities for buying a property most desirable for the possessor of Exmundham presented themselves. I bought it with borrowed money, and though I gave up the house in London, I did not lay by the thousand a year."

"My dear Sir Peter, I have always regretted that my poor father was misled—perhaps out of too paternal a care for my supposed interests—into that unhappy and fruitless litigation, after which no one could doubt that any generous intentions on your part would be finally abandoned. It has been a grateful surprise to me that I have been so kindly and cordially received into the family by Kenelm and yourself. Pray oblige me by dropping all reference to pecuniary matters: the idea of compensation to a very distant relative for the loss of expectations he had no right to form, is too absurd, for me at least, ever to entertain."

"But I am absurd enough to entertain it, though you express yourself in a very high-minded way. To come to the point, Kenelm is of age, and we have cut off the entail. The estate of course remains absolutely with Kenelm to dispose of, as it did before, and we must take it for granted that he will marry; at all events he cannot fall into your poor father's error: but whatever Kenelm hereafter does with his property, it is nothing to you, and is not to be counted upon. Even the title dies with

Kenelm if he has no son. On resettling the estate, however, sums of money have been realized which, as I stated before, enable me to discharge the debt which Kenelm heartily agrees with me is due to you. L20,000 are now lying at my bankers' to be transferred to yours; meanwhile, if you will call on my solicitor, Mr. Vining, Lincoln's-inn, you can see the new deed and give to him your receipt for the L20,000, for which he holds my cheque. Stop! stop! stop! I will not hear a word: no thanks; they are not due."

Here Gordon, who had during this speech uttered various brief exclamations, which Sir Peter did not heed, caught hold of his kinsman's hand, and, despite of all struggles, pressed his lips on it. "I must thank you; I must give some vent to my emotions," cried Gordon. "This sum, great in itself, is far more to me than you can imagine: it opens my career; it assures my future."

"So Kenelm tells me; he said that sum would be more use to you now than ten times the amount twenty years hence."

"So it will,—it will. And Kenelm consents to this sacrifice?"

"Consents! urges it."

Gordon turned away his face, and Sir Peter resumed: "You want to get into Parliament; very natural ambition for a clever young fellow. I don't presume to dictate politics to you. I hear you are what is called a Liberal; a man may be a Liberal, I suppose, without being a Jacobin."

"I hope so, indeed. For my part I am anything but a violent man."

"Violent, no! Who ever heard of a violent Chillingly? But I was reading in the newspaper to-day a speech addressed to some popular audience, in which the orator was for dividing all the lands and all the capital belonging to other people among the working class, calmly and quietly, without any violence, and deprecating violence: but saying, perhaps very truly, that the people to be robbed might not like it, and might offer violence; in which case woe betide them; it was they who would be guilty of violence; and they must take the consequences if they resisted the reasonable propositions of himself and his friends! That, I suppose, is among the new ideas with which Kenelm is more familiar than I am. Do you entertain those new ideas?"

"Certainly not: I despise the fools who do."

"And you will not abet revolutionary measures if you get into Parliament?"

"My dear Sir Peter, I fear you have heard very false reports of my opinions if you put such questions. Listen," and therewith Gordon launched into dissertations very clever, very subtle, which committed him to nothing, beyond the wisdom of guiding popular opinions into right directions: what might be right directions he did not define; he left Sir Peter to guess them. Sir Peter did guess them, as Gordon meant he should, to be the directions which he, Sir Peter, thought right; and he was satisfied.

That subject disposed of, Gordon said, with much apparent feeling, "May I ask you to complete the favours you have lavished on me? I have never seen Exmundham, and the home of the race from which I sprang has a deep interest for time. Will you allow me to spend a few days with you, and under the shade of your own trees take lessons in political science from one who has evidently reflected on it profoundly?"

"Profoundly, no; a little,—a little, as a mere bystander," said Sir Peter, modestly, but much flattered. "Come, my dear boy, by all means; you will have a hearty welcome. By the by, Travers and his handsome daughter promised to visit me in about a fortnight, why not come at the same time?"

A sudden flash lit up the young man's countenance.

"I shall be so delighted," he cried. "I am but slightly acquainted with Mr. Travers, but I like him much, and Mrs. Campion is so well informed."

"And what say you to the girl?"

"The girl, Miss Travers. Oh, she is very well in her way. But I don't talk with young ladies more than I can help."

"Then you are like your cousin Kenelm?"

"I wish I were like him in other things."

"No, one such oddity in a family is quite enough. But though I would not have you change to a Kenelm, I would not change Kenelm for the most perfect model of a son that the world can exhibit." Delivering himself of this burst of parental fondness, Sir Peter shook hands with Gordon, and walked off to Mivers, who was to give him luncheon and then accompany him to the station. Sir Peter was to return to Exmundham by the afternoon express.

Left alone, Gordon indulged in one of those luxurious guesses into the future which form the happiest moments in youth when so ambitious as his. The sum Sir Peter placed at his disposal would insure his entrance in Parliament. He counted with confidence on early successes there. He extended the scope of his views. With such successes he might calculate with certainty on a brilliant marriage, augmenting his fortune, and confirming his position. He had previously fixed his thoughts on Cecilia Travers. I will do him the justice to say not from mercenary motives alone, but not certainly with the impetuous ardour of youthful love. He thought her exactly fitted to be the wife of an eminent public man, in person, acquirement, dignified yet popular manners. He esteemed her, he liked her, and then her fortune would add solidity to his position. In fact, he had that sort of rational attachment to Cecilia which wise men, like Lord Bacon and Montaigne, would commend to another wise man seeking a wife. What opportunities of awaking in herself a similar, perhaps a warmer, attachment the visit to Exmundham would afford! He had learned when he had called on the Traverses that they were going thither, and hence that burst of family sentiment which had procured the invitation to himself.

But he must be cautious, he must not prematurely awaken Travers's suspicions. He was not as yet a match that the squire could approve of for his heiress. And, though he was ignorant of Sir Peter's designs on that, young lady, he was much too prudent to confide his own to a kinsman of whose discretion he had strong misgivings. It was enough for him at present that way was opened for his own resolute energies. And cheerfully, though musingly, he weighed its obstacles, and divined its goal, as he paced his floor with bended head and restless strides, now quick, now slow.

Sir Peter, in the meanwhile, found a very good luncheon prepared for him at Mivers's rooms, which he had all to himself, for his host never "spoiled his dinner and insulted his breakfast" by that intermediate meal. He remained at his desk writing brief notes of business, or of pleasure, while Sir Peter did justice to lamb cutlets and grilled chicken. But he looked up from his task, with raised eyebrows, when Sir Peter, after a somewhat discursive account of his visit to the Traverses, his admiration of Cecilia, and the adroitness with which, acting on his cousin's hint, he had engaged the family to spend a few days at Exmundham, added, "And, by the by, I have asked young Gordon to meet them."

"To meet them! meet Mr. and Miss Travers! you have? I thought you wished Kenelm to marry Cecilia. I was mistaken, you meant Gordon!"

"Gordon," exclaimed Sir Peter, dropping his knife and fork. "Nonsense, you don't suppose that Miss Travers prefers him to Kenelm, or that he has the presumption to fancy that her father would sanction his addresses?"

"I indulge in no suppositions of the sort. I content myself with thinking that Gordon is clever, insinuating, young; and it is a very good chance of bettering himself that you have thrown in his way. However, it is no affair of mine; and though on the whole I like Kenelm better than Gordon, still I like Gordon very well, and I have an interest in following his career which I can't say I have in conjecturing what may be Kenelm's—more likely no career at all."

"Mivers, you delight in provoking me; you do say such uncomfortable things. But, in the first place, Gordon spoke rather slightly of Miss Travers."

"Ah, indeed; that's a bad sign," muttered Mivers.

Sir Peter did not hear him, and went on.

"And, besides, I feel pretty sure that the dear girl has already a regard for Kenelm which allows no room for a rival. However, I shall not forget your hint, but keep a sharp lookout; and, if I see the young man wants to be too sweet on Cecilia, I shall cut short his visit."

"Give yourself no trouble in the matter; it will do no good. Marriages are made in heaven. Heaven's will be done. If I can get away I will run down to you for a day or two. Perhaps in that case you can ask Lady Glenalvon. I like her, and she likes Kenelm. Have you finished? I see the brougham is at the door, and we have to call at your hotel to take up your carpet-bag."

Mivers was deliberately sealing his notes while he thus spoke. He now rang for his servant, gave orders for their delivery, and then followed Sir Peter down stairs and into the brougham. Not a word would he say more about Gordon, and Sir Peter shrank from telling him about the £20,000. Chillingly Mivers was perhaps the last person to whom Sir Peter would be tempted to parade an act of generosity. Mivers might not unfrequently do a generous act himself, provided it was not divulged; but he had always a sneer for the generosity of others.

CHAPTER II

WANDERING back towards Moleswich, Kenelm found himself a little before sunset on the banks of the garrulous brook, almost opposite to the house inhabited by Lily Mordaunt. He stood long and silently by the grassy margin, his dark shadow falling over the stream, broken into fragments by the eddy and strife of waves, fresh from their leap down the neighbouring waterfall. His eyes rested on the house and the garden lawn in the front. The upper windows were open. "I wonder which is hers," he said to himself. At last he caught a glimpse of the gardener, bending over a flower border with his watering-pot, and then moving slowly through the little shrubbery, no doubt to his own cottage. Now the lawn was solitary, save that a couple of thrushes dropped suddenly on the sward.

"Good evening, sir," said a voice. "A capital spot for trout this."

Kenelm turned his head, and beheld on the footpath, just behind him, a respectable elderly man, apparently of the class of a small retail tradesman, with a fishing-rod in his hand and a basket belted to his side.

"For trout," replied Kenelm; "I dare say. A strangely attractive spot indeed."

"Are you an angler, sir, if I may make bold to inquire?" asked the elderly man, somewhat perhaps puzzled as to the rank of the stranger; noticing, on the one hand, his dress and his mien, on the other, slung to his shoulders, the worn and shabby knapsack which Kenelm had carried, at home and abroad, the preceding year.

"Ay, I am an angler."

"Then this is the best place in the whole stream. Look, sir, there is Izaak Walton's summer-house; and further down you see that white, neat-looking house. Well, that is my house, sir, and I have an apartment which I let to gentleman anglers. It is generally occupied throughout the summer months. I expect every day to have a letter to engage it, but it is vacant now. A very nice apartment, sir,—sitting-room and bedroom."

"*/Descende ceolo, et dic age tibia/*," said Kenelm.

"Sir?" said the elderly man.

"I beg you ten thousand pardons. I have had the misfortune to have been at the university, and to have learned a little Latin, which sometimes comes back very inopportunist. But, speaking in plain English, what I meant to say is this: I invoked the Muse to descend from heaven and bring with her—the original says a fife, but I meant—a fishing-rod. I should think your apartment would suit me exactly; pray show it to me."

"With the greatest pleasure," said the elderly man. "The Muse need not bring a fishing-rod! we have all sorts of tackle at your service, and a boat too, if you care for that. The stream hereabouts is so shallow and narrow that a boat is of little use till you get farther down."

"I don't want to get farther down; but should I want to get to the opposite bank, without wading across, would the boat take me or is there a bridge?"

"The boat can take you. It is a flat-bottomed punt, and there is a bridge too for foot-passengers, just opposite my house; and between this and Moleswich, where the stream widens, there is a ferry. The stone bridge for traffic is at the farther end of the town."

"Good. Let us go at once to your house."

The two men walked on.

"By the by," said Kenelm, as they walked, "do you know much of the family that inhabit the pretty cottage on the opposite side, which we have just left behind?"

"Mrs. Cameron's. Yes, of course, a very good lady; and Mr. Melville, the painter. I am sure I ought to know, for he has often lodged with me when he came to visit Mrs. Cameron. He recommends my apartment to his friends, and they are my best lodgers. I like painters, sir, though I don't know

much about paintings. They are pleasant gentlemen, and easily contented with my humble roof and fare."

"You are quite right. I don't know much about paintings myself; but I am inclined to believe that painters, judging not from what I have seen of them, for I have not a single acquaintance among them personally, but from what I have read of their lives, are, as a general rule, not only pleasant but noble gentlemen. They form within themselves desires to beautify or exalt commonplace things, and they can only accomplish their desires by a constant study of what is beautiful and what is exalted. A man constantly so engaged ought to be a very noble gentleman, even though he may be the son of a shoeblick. And living in a higher world than we do, I can conceive that he is, as you say, very well contented with humble roof and fare in the world we inhabit."

"Exactly, sir; I see—I see now, though you put it in a way that never struck me before."

"And yet," said Kenelm, looking benignly at the speaker, "you seem to me a well-educated and intelligent man; reflective on things in general, without being unmindful of your interests in particular, especially when you have lodgings to let. Do not be offended. That sort of man is not perhaps born to be a painter, but I respect him highly. The world, sir, requires the vast majority of its inhabitants to live in it,—to live by it. 'Each for himself, and God for us all.' The greatest happiness of the greatest number is best secured by a prudent consideration for Number One."

Somewhat to Kenelm's surprise (allowing that he had now learned enough of life to be occasionally surprised) the elderly man here made a dead halt, stretched out his hand cordially, and cried, "Hear, hear! I see that, like me, you are a decided democrat."

"Democrat! Pray, may I ask, not why you are one,—that would be a liberty, and democrats resent any liberty taken with themselves; but why you suppose I am?"

"You spoke of the greatest happiness of the greatest number. That is a democratic sentiment surely! Besides, did not you say, sir, that painters,—painters, sir, painters, even if they were the sons of shoeblicks, were the true gentlemen,—the true noblemen?"

"I did not say that exactly, to the disparagement of other gentlemen and nobles. But if I did, what then?"

"Sir, I agree with you. I despise rank; I despise dukes and earls and aristocrats. 'An honest man's the noblest work of God.' Some poet says that. I think Shakspeare. Wonderful man, Shakspeare. A tradesman's son,—butcher, I believe. Eh! My uncle was a butcher, and might have been an alderman. I go along with you heartily, heartily. I am a democrat, every inch of me. Shake hands, sir, shake hands; we are all equals. 'Each man for himself, and God for us all.'"

"I have no objection to shake hands," said Kenelm; "but don't let me owe your condescension to false pretences. Though we are all equal before the law, except the rich man, who has little chance of justice as against a poor man when submitted to an English jury, yet I utterly deny that any two men you select can be equals. One must beat the other in something; and, when one man beats another, democracy ceases and aristocracy begins."

"Aristocracy! I don't see that. What do you mean by aristocracy?"

"The ascendancy of the better man. In a rude State the better man is the stronger; in a corrupt State, perhaps the more roguish; in modern republics the jobbers get the money and the lawyers get the power. In well-ordered States alone aristocracy appears at its genuine worth: the better man in birth, because respect for ancestry secures a higher standard of honour; the better man in wealth, because of the immense uses to enterprise, energy, and the fine arts, which rich men must be if they follow their natural inclinations; the better man in character, the better man in ability, for reasons too obvious to define; and these two last will beat the others in the government of the State, if the State be flourishing and free. All these four classes of better men constitute true aristocracy; and when a better government than a true aristocracy shall be devised by the wit of man, we shall not be far off from the Millennium and the reign of saints. But here we are at the house,—yours, is it not? I like the look of it extremely."

The elderly man now entered the little porch, over which clambered honeysuckle and ivy intertwined, and ushered Kenelm into a pleasant parlour, with a bay window, and an equally pleasant bedroom behind it.

"Will it do, sir?"

"Perfectly. I take it from this moment. My knapsack contains all I shall need for the night. There is a portmanteau of mine at Mr. Somers's shop, which can be sent here in the morning."

"But we have not settled about the terms," said the elderly man, beginning to feel rather doubtful whether he ought thus to have installed in his home a stalwart pedestrian of whom he knew nothing, and who, though talking glibly enough on other things, had preserved an ominous silence on the subject of payment.

"Terms? true, name them."

"Including board?"

"Certainly. Chameleons live on air; democrats on wind bags. I have a more vulgar appetite, and require mutton."

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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