

ЭДВАРД БУЛЬВЕР-ЛИТТОН

**KENELM
CHILLINGLY —
VOLUME 04**

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Kenelm Chillingly — Volume 04

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Edward Bulwer-Lytton

Kenelm Chillingly

— Volume 04

BOOK IV

CHAPTER I

IT is somewhat more than a year and a half since Kenelm Chillingly left England, and the scene now is in London, during that earlier and more sociable season which precedes the Easter holidays,—season in which the charm of intellectual companionship is not yet withered away in the heated atmosphere of crowded rooms,—season in which parties are small, and conversation extends beyond the interchange of commonplace with one's next neighbour at a dinner-table,—season in which you have a fair chance of finding your warmest friends not absorbed by the superior claims of their chilliest acquaintances.

There was what is called a */conversazione/* at the house of one of those Whig noblemen who yet retain the graceful art of bringing agreeable people together, and collecting round them

the true aristocracy, which combines letters and art and science with hereditary rank and political distinction,—that art which was the happy secret of the Lansdownes and Hollands of the last generation. Lord Beaumanoir was himself a genial, well-read man, a good judge of art, and a pleasant talker. He had a charming wife, devoted to him and to her children, but with enough love of general approbation to make herself as popular in the fashionable world as if she sought in its gayeties a refuge from the dulness of domestic life.

Amongst the guests at the Beaumanoirs, this evening were two men, seated apart in a small room, and conversing familiarly. The one might be about fifty-four; he was tall, strongly built, but not corpulent, somewhat bald, with black eyebrows, dark eyes, bright and keen, mobile lips round which there played a shrewd and sometimes sarcastic smile.

This gentleman, the Right Hon. Gerard Danvers, was a very influential member of Parliament. He had, when young for English public life, attained to high office; but—partly from a great distaste to the drudgery of administration; partly from a pride of temperament, which unfitted him for the subordination that a Cabinet owes to its chief; partly, also, from a not uncommon kind of epicurean philosophy, at once joyous and cynical, which sought the pleasures of life and held very cheap its honours—he had obstinately declined to re-enter office, and only spoke on rare occasions. On such occasions he carried great weight, and, by the brief expression of his opinions, commanded

more votes than many an orator infinitely more eloquent. Despite his want of ambition, he was fond of power in his own way,—power over the people who /had/ power; and, in the love of political intrigue, he found an amusement for an intellect very subtle and very active. At this moment he was bent on a new combination among the leaders of different sections in the same party, by which certain veterans were to retire, and certain younger men to be admitted into the Administration. It was an amiable feature in his character that he had a sympathy with the young, and had helped to bring into Parliament, as well as into office, some of the ablest of a generation later than his own. He gave them sensible counsel, was pleased when they succeeded, and encouraged them when they failed,—always provided that they had stuff enough in them to redeem the failure; if not, he gently dropped them from his intimacy, but maintained sufficiently familiar terms with them to be pretty sure that he could influence their votes whenever he so desired.

The gentleman with whom he was now conversing was young, about five-and-twenty; not yet in Parliament, but with an intense desire to obtain a seat in it, and with one of those reputations which a youth carries away from school and college, justified, not by honours purely academical, but by an impression of ability and power created on the minds of his contemporaries and endorsed by his elders. He had done little at the University beyond taking a fair degree, except acquiring at the debating society the fame of an exceedingly ready and adroit speaker. On quitting college

he had written one or two political articles in a quarterly review, which created a sensation; and though belonging to no profession, and having but a small yet independent income, society was very civil to him, as to a man who would some day or other attain a position in which he could damage his enemies and serve his friends. Something in this young man's countenance and bearing tended to favour the credit given to his ability and his promise. In his countenance there was no beauty; in his bearing no elegance. But in that countenance there was vigour, there was energy, there was audacity. A forehead wide but low, protuberant in those organs over the brow which indicate the qualities fitted for perception and judgment,—qualities for every-day life; eyes of the clear English blue, small, somewhat sunken, vigilant, sagacious, penetrating; a long straight upper lip, significant of resolute purpose; a mouth in which a student of physiognomy would have detected a dangerous charm. The smile was captivating, but it was artificial, surrounded by dimples, and displaying teeth white, small, strong, but divided from each other. The expression of that smile would have been frank and candid to all who failed to notice that it was not in harmony with the brooding forehead and the steely eye; that it seemed to stand distinct from the rest of the face, like a feature that had learned its part. There was that physical power in the back of the head which belongs to men who make their way in life,—combative and destructive. All gladiators have it; so have great debaters and great reformers,—that is, reformers who can destroy, but not

necessarily reconstruct. So, too, in the bearing of the man there was a hardy self-confidence, much too simple and unaffected for his worst enemy to call it self-conceit. It was the bearing of one who knew how to maintain personal dignity without seeming to care about it. Never servile to the great, never arrogant to the little; so little over-refined that it was never vulgar,—a popular bearing.

The room in which these gentlemen were seated was separated from the general suite of apartments by a lobby off the landing-place, and served for Lady Beaumanoir's boudoir. Very pretty it was, but simply furnished, with chintz draperies. The walls were adorned with drawings in water-colours, and precious specimens of china on fanciful Parian brackets. At one corner, by a window that looked southward and opened on a spacious balcony, glazed in and filled with flowers, stood one of those high trellised screens, first invented, I believe, in Vienna, and along which ivy is so trained as to form an arbour.

The recess thus constructed, and which was completely out of sight from the rest of the room, was the hostess's favourite writing-nook. The two men I have described were seated near the screen, and had certainly no suspicion that any one could be behind it.

"Yes," said Mr. Danvers, from an ottoman niched in another recess of the room, "I think there will be an opening at Saxboro' soon: Milroy wants a Colonial Government; and if we can reconstruct the Cabinet as I propose, he would get one. Saxboro'

would thus be vacant. But, my dear fellow, Saxboro' is a place to be wooed through love, and only won through money. It demands liberalism from a candidate,—two kinds of liberalism seldom united; the liberalism in opinion which is natural enough to a very poor man, and the liberalism in expenditure which is scarcely to be obtained except from a very rich one. You may compute the cost of Saxboro' at L3000 to get in, and about L2000 more to defend your seat against a petition,—the defeated candidate nearly always petitions. L5000 is a large sum; and the worst of it is, that the extreme opinions to which the member for Saxboro' must pledge himself are a drawback to an official career. Violent politicians are not the best raw material out of which to manufacture fortunate placemen."

"The opinions do not so much matter; the expense does. I cannot afford L5000, or even L3000."

"Would not Sir Peter assist? He has, you say, only one son; and if anything happen to that son, you are the next heir."

"My father quarrelled with Sir Peter, and harassed him by an imprudent and ungracious litigation. I scarcely think I could apply to him for money to obtain a seat in Parliament upon the democratic side of the question; for, though I know little of his politics, I take it for granted that a country gentleman of old family and L10,000 a year cannot well be a democrat."

"Then I presume you would not be a democrat if, by the death of your cousin, you became heir to the Chillinglys."

"I am not sure what I might be in that case. There are times

when a democrat of ancient lineage and good estates could take a very high place amongst the aristocracy."

"Humph! my dear Gordon, /vous irez loin/."

"I hope to do so. Measuring myself against the men of my own day, I do not see many who should outstrip me."

"What sort of a fellow is your cousin Kenelm? I met him once or twice when he was very young, and reading with Welby in London. People then said that he was very clever; he struck me as very odd."

"I never saw him, but from all I hear, whether he be clever or whether he be odd, he is not likely to do anything in life,—a dreamer."

"Writes poetry perhaps?"

"Capable of it, I dare say."

Just then some other guests came into the room, amongst them a lady of an appearance at once singularly distinguished and singularly prepossessing, rather above the common height, and with a certain indescribable nobility of air and presence. Lady Glenalvon was one of the queens of the London world, and no queen of that world was ever less worldly or more queen-like. Side by side with the lady was Mr. Chillingly Mivers. Gordon and Mivers interchanged friendly nods, and the former sauntered away and was soon lost amid a crowd of other young men, with whom, as he could converse well and lightly on things which interested them, he was rather a favourite, though he was not an intimate associate. Mr. Danvers retired into a corner of

the adjoining lobby, where he favoured the French ambassador with his views on the state of Europe and the reconstruction of Cabinets in general.

"But," said Lady Glenalvon to Chillingly Mivers, "are you quite sure that my old young friend Kenelm is here? Since you told me so, I have looked everywhere for him in vain. I should so much like to see him again."

"I certainly caught a glimpse of him half an hour ago; but before I could escape from a geologist who was boring me about the Silurian system, Kenelm had vanished."

"Perhaps it was his ghost!"

"Well, we certainly live in the most credulous and superstitious age upon record; and so many people tell me that they converse with the dead under the table that it seems impertinent in me to say that I don't believe in ghosts."

"Tell me some of those incomprehensible stories about table-rapping," said Lady Glenalvon. "There is a charming, snug recess here behind the screen."

Scarcely had she entered the recess when she drew back with a start and an exclamation of amaze. Seated at the table within the recess, his chin resting on his hand, and his face cast down in abstracted revery, was a young man. So still was his attitude, so calmly mournful the expression of his face, so estranged did he seem from all the motley but brilliant assemblage which circled around the solitude he had made for himself, that he might well have been deemed one of those visitants from another world

whose secrets the intruder had wished to learn. Of that intruder's presence he was evidently unconscious. Recovering her surprise, she stole up to him, placed her hand on his shoulder, and uttered his name in a low gentle voice. At that sound Kenelm Chillingly looked up.

"Do you not remember me?" asked Lady Glenalvon. Before he could answer, Mivers, who had followed the marchioness into the recess, interposed.

"My dear Kenelm, how are you? When did you come to London? Why have you not called on me; and what on earth are you hiding yourself for?"

Kenelm had now recovered the self-possession which he rarely lost long in the presence of others. He returned cordially his kinsman's greeting, and kissed with his wonted chivalrous grace the fair hand which the lady withdrew from his shoulder and extended to his pressure. "Remember you!" he said to Lady Glenalvon with the kindest expression of his soft dark eyes; "I am not so far advanced towards the noon of life as to forget the sunshine that brightened its morning. My dear Mivers, your questions are easily answered. I arrived in England two weeks ago, stayed at Exmundham till this morning, to-day dined with Lord Thetford, whose acquaintance I made abroad, and was persuaded by him to come here and be introduced to his father and mother, the Beaumanoirs. After I had undergone that ceremony, the sight of so many strange faces frightened me into shyness. Entering this room at a moment when it was quite

deserted, I resolved to turn hermit behind the screen."

"Why, you must have seen your cousin Gordon as you came into the room."

"But you forget I don't know him by sight. However, there was no one in the room when I entered; a little later some others came in, for I heard a faint buzz, like that of persons talking in a whisper. However, I was no eavesdropper, as a person behind a screen is on the dramatic stage."

This was true. Even had Gordon and Danvers talked in a louder tone, Kenelm had been too absorbed in his own thoughts to have heard a word of their conversation.

"You ought to know young Gordon; he is a very clever fellow, and has an ambition to enter Parliament. I hope no old family quarrel between his bear of a father and dear Sir Peter will make you object to meet him."

"Sir Peter is the most forgiving of men, but he would scarcely forgive me if I declined to meet a cousin who had never offended him."

"Well said. Come and meet Gordon at breakfast to-morrow,—ten o'clock. I am still in the old rooms."

While the kinsmen thus conversed, Lady Glenalvon had seated herself on the couch beside Kenelm, and was quietly observing his countenance. Now she spoke. "My dear Mr. Mivers, you will have many opportunities of talking with Kenelm; do not grudge me five minutes' talk with him now."

"I leave your ladyship alone in your hermitage. How all the

men in this assembly will envy the hermit!"

CHAPTER II

"I AM glad to see you once more in the world," said Lady Glenalvon; "and I trust that you are now prepared to take that part in it which ought to be no mean one if you do justice to your talents and your nature."

KENELM.—"When you go to the theatre, and see one of the pieces which appear now to be the fashion, which would you rather be,—an actor or a looker-on?"

LADY GLENALVON.—"My dear young friend, your question saddens me." (After a pause.)—"But though I used a stage metaphor when I expressed my hope that you would take no mean part in the world, the world is not really a theatre. Life admits of no lookers-on. Speak to me frankly, as you used to do. Your face retains its old melancholy expression. Are you not happy?"

KENELM.—"Happy, as mortals go, I ought to be. I do not think I am unhappy. If my temper be melancholic, melancholy has a happiness of its own. Milton shows that there are as many charms in life to be found on the /Penseroso/ side of it as there are on the /Allegro/."

LADY GLENALVON.—"Kenelm, you saved the life of my poor son, and when, later, he was taken from me, I felt as if he had commended you to my care. When at the age of sixteen, with a boy's years and a man's heart, you came to London, did I not

try to be to you almost as a mother? and did you not often tell me that you could confide to me the secrets of your heart more readily than to any other?"

"You were to me," said Kenelm, with emotion, "that most precious and sustaining good genius which a youth can find at the threshold of life,—a woman gently wise, kindly sympathizing, shaming him by the spectacle of her own purity from all grosser errors, elevating him from mean tastes and objects by the exquisite, ineffable loftiness of soul which is only found in the noblest order of womanhood. Come, I will open my heart to you still. I fear it is more wayward than ever. It still feels estranged from the companionship and pursuits natural to my age and station. However, I have been seeking to brace and harden my nature, for the practical ends of life, by travel and adventure, chiefly among rougher varieties of mankind than we meet in drawing-rooms. Now, in compliance with the duty I owe to my dear father's wishes, I come back to these circles, which under your auspices I entered in boyhood, and which even then seemed to me so inane and artificial. Take a part in the world of these circles; such is your wish. My answer is brief. I have been doing my best to acquire a motive power, and have not succeeded. I see nothing that I care to strive for, nothing that I care to gain. The very times in which we live are to me, as to Hamlet, out of joint; and I am not born like Hamlet to set them right. Ah! if I could look on society through the spectacles with which the poor hidalgo in 'Gil Blas' looked on his meagre board,—spectacles by

which cherries appear the size of peaches, and tomtits as large as turkeys! The imagination which is necessary to ambition is a great magnifier."

"I have known more than one man, now very eminent, very active, who at your age felt the same estrangement from the practical pursuits of others."

"And what reconciled those men to such pursuits?"

"That diminished sense of individual personality, that unconscious fusion of one's own being into other existences, which belong to home and marriage."

"I don't object to home, but I do to marriage."

"Depend on it there is no home for man where there is no woman."

"Prettily said. In that case I resign the home."

"Do you mean seriously to tell me that you never see the woman you could love enough to make her your wife, and never enter any home that you do not quit with a touch of envy at the happiness of married life?"

"Seriously, I never see such a woman; seriously, I never enter such a home."

"Patience, then; your time will come, and I hope it is at hand. Listen to me. It was only yesterday that I felt an indescribable longing to see you again,—to know your address that I might write to you; for yesterday, when a certain young lady left my house after a week's visit, I said this girl would make a perfect wife, and, above all, the exact wife to suit Kenelm Chillingly."

"Kenelm Chillingly is very glad to hear that this young lady has left your house."

"But she has not left London: she is here to-night. She only stayed with me till her father came to town, and the house he had taken for the season was vacant; those events happened yesterday."

"Fortunate events for me: they permit me to call on you without danger."

"Have you no curiosity to know, at least, who and what is the young lady who appears to me so well suited to you?"

"No curiosity, but a vague sensation of alarm."

"Well, I cannot talk pleasantly with you while you are in this irritating mood, and it is time to quit the hermitage. Come, there are many persons here, with some of whom you should renew old acquaintance, and to some of whom I should like to make you known."

"I am prepared to follow Lady Glenalvon wherever she deigns to lead me,—except to the altar with another."

CHAPTER III

THE rooms were now full,—not overcrowded, but full,—and it was rarely even in that house that so many distinguished persons were collected together. A young man thus honoured by so /grande/ a dame as Lady Glenalvon could not but be cordially welcomed by all to whom she presented him, Ministers and Parliamentary leaders, ball-givers, and beauties in vogue,—even authors and artists; and there was something in Kenelm Chillingly, in his striking countenance and figure, in that calm ease of manner natural to his indifference to effect, which seemed to justify the favour shown to him by the brilliant princess of fashion and mark him out for general observation.

That first evening of his reintroduction to the polite world was a success which few young men of his years achieve. He produced a sensation. Just as the rooms were thinning, Lady Glenalvon whispered to Kenelm,—

"Come this way: there is one person I must reintroduce you to; thank me for it hereafter."

Kenelm followed the marchioness, and found himself face to face with Cecilia Travers. She was leaning on her father's arm, looking very handsome, and her beauty was heightened by the blush which overspread her cheeks as Kenelm Chillingly approached.

Travers greeted him with great cordiality; and Lady Glenalvon

asking him to escort her to the refreshment-room, Kenelm had no option but to offer his arm to Cecilia.

Kenelm felt somewhat embarrassed. "Have you been long in town, Miss Travers?"

"A little more than a week, but we only settled into our house yesterday."

"Ah, indeed! were you then the young lady who—" He stopped short, and his face grew gentler and graver in its expression.

"The young lady who—what?" asked Cecilia with a smile.

"Who has been staying with Lady Glenalvon?"

"Yes; did she tell you?"

"She did not mention your name, but praised that young lady so justly that I ought to have guessed it."

Cecilia made some not very audible answer, and on entering the refreshment-room other young men gathered round her, and Lady Glenalvon and Kenelm remained silent in the midst of a general small-talk. When Travers, after giving his address to Kenelm, and, of course, pressing him to call, left the house with Cecilia, Kenelm said to Lady Glenalvon, musingly, "So that is the young lady in whom I was to see my fate: you knew that we had met before?"

"Yes, she told me when and where. Besides, it is not two years since you wrote to me from her father's house. Do you forget?"

"Ah," said Kenelm, so abstractedly that he seemed to be dreaming, "no man with his eyes open rushes on his fate: when

he does so his sight is gone. Love is blind. They say the blind are very happy, yet I never met a blind man who would not recover his sight if he could."

CHAPTER IV

Mr. CHILLINGLY MIVERS never gave a dinner at his own rooms. When he did give a dinner it was at Greenwich or Richmond. But he gave breakfast-parties pretty often, and they were considered pleasant. He had handsome bachelor apartments in Grosvenor Street, daintily furnished, with a prevalent air of exquisite neatness, a good library stored with books of reference, and adorned with presentation copies from authors of the day, very beautifully bound. Though the room served for the study of the professed man of letters, it had none of the untidy litter which generally characterizes the study of one whose vocation it is to deal with books and papers. Even the implements for writing were not apparent, except when required. They lay concealed in a vast cylinder bureau, French made, and French polished. Within that bureau were numerous pigeon-holes and secret drawers, and a profound well with a separate patent lock. In the well were deposited the articles intended for publication in "The Londoner," proof-sheets, etc.; pigeon-holes were devoted to ordinary correspondence; secret drawers to confidential notes, and outlines of biographies of eminent men now living, but intended to be completed for publication the day after their death.

No man wrote such funeral compositions with a livelier pen than that of Chillingly Mivers; and the large and miscellaneous

circle of his visiting acquaintances allowed him to ascertain, whether by authoritative report or by personal observation, the signs of mortal disease in the illustrious friends whose dinners he accepted, and whose failing pulses he instinctively felt in returning the pressure of their hands; so that he was often able to put the finishing-stroke to their obituary memorials days, weeks, even months, before their fate took the public by surprise. That cylinder bureau was in harmony with the secrecy in which this remarkable man shrouded the productions of his brain. In his literary life Mivers had no "I," there he was ever the inscrutable, mysterious "We." He was only "I" when you met him in the world, and called him Mivers.

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