

ЭДВАРД БУЛЬВЕР-ЛИТТОН

**KENELM
CHILLINGLY —
VOLUME 02**

Эдвард Бульвер-Литтон

Kenelm Chillingly — Volume 02

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Содержание

BOOK II	5
CHAPTER I	5
CHAPTER II	6
CHAPTER III	10
CHAPTER IV	16
CHAPTER V	18
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	21

Edward Bulwer-Lytton

Kenelm Chillingly — Volume 02

BOOK II

CHAPTER I

KENELM CHILLINGLY had quitted the paternal home at daybreak before any of the household was astir. "Unquestionably," said he, as he walked along the solitary lanes, —"unquestionably I begin the world as poets begin poetry, an imitator and a plagiarist. I am imitating an itinerant verse-maker, as, no doubt, he began by imitating some other maker of verse. But if there be anything in me, it will work itself out in original form. And, after all, the verse-maker is not the inventor of ideas. Adventure on foot is a notion that remounts to the age of fable. Hercules, for instance; that was the way in which he got to heaven, as a foot-traveller. How solitary the world is at this hour! Is it not for that reason that this is of all hours the most beautiful?"

Here he paused, and looked around and above. It was the very height of summer. The sun was just rising over gentle sloping uplands. All the dews on the hedgerows sparkled. There was not a cloud in the heavens. Up rose from the green blades of corn a solitary skylark. His voice woke up the other birds. A few minutes more and the joyous concert began. Kenelm reverently doffed his hat, and bowed his head in mute homage and thanksgiving.

CHAPTER II

ABOUT nine o'clock Kenelm entered a town some twelve miles distant from his father's house, and towards which he had designedly made his way, because in that town he was scarcely if at all known by sight, and he might there make the purchases he required without attracting any marked observation. He had selected for his travelling costume a shooting-dress, as the simplest and least likely to belong to his rank as a gentleman. But still in its very cut there was an air of distinction, and every labourer he had met on the way had touched his hat to him. Besides, who wears a shooting-dress in the middle of June, or a shooting-dress at all, unless he be either a game-keeper or a gentleman licensed to shoot?

Kenelm entered a large store-shop for ready-made clothes and purchased a suit such as might be worn on Sundays by a small country yeoman or tenant-farmer of a petty holding,—a stout coarse broadcloth upper garment, half coat, half jacket, with waistcoat to match, strong corduroy trousers, a smart Belcher neckcloth, with a small stock of linen and woollen socks in harmony with the other raiment. He bought also a leathern knapsack, just big enough to contain this wardrobe, and a couple of books, which with his combs and brushes he had brought away in his pockets; for among all his trunks at home there was no knapsack.

These purchases made and paid for, he passed quickly through the town, and stopped at a humble inn at the outskirt, to which he was attracted by the notice, "Refreshment for man and beast." He entered a little sanded parlour, which at that hour he had all to himself, called for breakfast, and devoured the best part of a fourpenny loaf with a couple of hard eggs.

Thus recruited, he again sallied forth, and deviating into a thick wood by the roadside, he exchanged the habiliments with which he had left home for those he had purchased, and by the help of one or two big stones sunk the relinquished garments into a small but deep pool which he was lucky enough to find in a bush-grown dell much haunted by snipes in the winter.

"Now," said Kenelm, "I really begin to think I have got out of myself. I am in another man's skin; for what, after all, is a skin but a soul's clothing, and what is clothing but a decenter skin? Of its own natural skin every civilized soul is ashamed. It is the height of impropriety for any one but the lowest kind of savage to show it. If the purest soul now existent upon earth, the Pope of Rome's or the Archbishop of Canterbury's, were to pass down the Strand with the skin which Nature gave to it bare to the eye, it would be brought up before a magistrate, prosecuted by the Society for the Suppression of Vice, and committed to jail as a public nuisance.

"Decidedly I am now in another man's skin. Kenelm Chillingly, I no longer

"Remain

"Yours faithfully;

"But am,

"With profound consideration,

"Your obedient humble servant."

With light step and elated crest, the wanderer, thus transformed, sprang from the wood into the dusty thoroughfare. He had travelled on for about an hour, meeting but few other passengers, when he heard to the right a loud shrill young voice, "Help! help! I will not go; I tell you, I will not!" Just before him stood, by a high five-barred gate, a pensive gray cob attached to a neat-looking gig. The bridle was loose on the cob's neck. The animal was evidently accustomed to stand quietly when ordered to do so, and glad of the opportunity.

The cries, "Help, help!" were renewed, mingled with louder tones in a rougher voice, tones of wrath and menace. Evidently these sounds did not come from the cob. Kenelm looked over the gate, and saw a few yards distant in a grass field a well-dressed boy struggling violently against a stout middle-aged man who was rudely hauling him along by the arm.

The chivalry natural to a namesake of the valiant Sir Kenelm Digby was instantly aroused. He vaulted over the gate, seized the man by the collar, and exclaimed, "For shame! what are you doing to that poor boy? let him go!"

"Why the devil do you interfere?" cried the stout man, his eyes glaring and his lips foaming with rage. "Ah, are you the villain? yes, no doubt of it. I'll give it to you, jackanapes," and still grasping the boy with one hand, with the other the stout man darted a blow at Kenelm, from which nothing less than the practised pugilistic skill and natural alertness of the youth thus suddenly assaulted could have saved his eyes and nose. As it was, the stout man had the worst of it: the blow was parried, returned with a dexterous manoeuvre of Kenelm's right foot in Cornish fashion, and /procumbit humi bos/; the stout man lay sprawling on his back. The boy, thus released, seized hold of Kenelm by the arm, and hurrying him along up the field, cried, "Come, come before he gets up! save me! save me!" Ere he had recovered his own surprise, the boy had dragged Kenelm to the gate, and jumped into the gig, sobbing forth, "Get in, get in, I can't drive; get in, and drive—you. Quick! Quick!"

"But—" began Kenelm.

"Get in, or I shall go mad." Kenelm obeyed; the boy gave him the reins, and seizing the whip himself, applied it lustily to the cob. On sprang the cob. "Stop, stop, stop, thief! villain! Holloa! thieves! thieves! thieves! stop!" cried a voice behind. Kenelm involuntarily turned his head and beheld the stout man perched upon the gate and gesticulating furiously. It was but a glimpse; again the whip was plied, the cob frantically broke into a gallop, the gig jolted and bumped and swerved, and it was not till they had put a good mile between themselves and the stout man that Kenelm succeeded in obtaining possession of the whip and calming the cob into a rational trot.

"Young gentleman," then said Kenelm, "perhaps you will have the goodness to explain."

"By and by; get on, that's a good fellow; you shall be well paid for it, well and handsomely."

Quoth Kenelm, gravely, "I know that in real life payment and service naturally go together. But we will put aside the payment till you tell me what is to be the service. And first, whither am I to drive you? We are coming to a place where three roads meet; which of the three shall I take?"

"Oh, I don't know; there is a finger-post. I want to get to,—but it is a secret; you'll not betray me? Promise,—swear."

"I don't swear except when I am in a passion, which, I am sorry to say, is very seldom; and I don't promise till I know what I promise; neither do I go on driving runaway boys in other men's gigs unless I know that I am taking them to a safe place, where their papas and mammas can get at them."

"I have no papa, no mamma," said the boy, dolefully and with quivering lips.

"Poor boy! I suppose that burly brute is your schoolmaster, and you are running away home for fear of a flogging."

The boy burst out laughing; a pretty, silvery, merry laugh: it thrilled through Kenelm Chillingly. "No, he would not flog me: he is not a schoolmaster; he is worse than that."

"Is it possible? What is he?"

"An uncle."

"Hum! uncles are proverbial for cruelty; were so in the classical days, and Richard III. was the only scholar in his family."

"Eh! classical and Richard III.!" said the boy, startled, and looking attentively at the pensive driver. "Who are you? you talk like a gentleman."

"I beg pardon. I'll not do so again if I can help it."—"Decidedly," thought Kenelm, "I am beginning to be amused. What a blessing it is to get into another man's skin, and another man's gig too!" Aloud, "Here we are at the fingerpost. If you are running away from your uncle, it is time to inform me where you are running to."

Here the boy leaned over the gig and examined the fingerpost. Then he clapped his hands joyfully.

"All right! I thought so, 'To Tor-Hadham, eighteen miles.' That's the road to 'Tor-Hadham.'"

"Do you mean to say I am to drive you all that way,—eighteen miles?"

"Yes."

"And to whom are you going?"

"I will tell you by and by. Do go on; do, pray. I can't drive—never drove in my life—or I would not ask you. Pray, pray, don't desert me! If you are a gentleman you will not; and if you are not a gentleman, I have got L10 in my purse, which you shall have when I am safe at Tor-Hadham. Don't hesitate: my whole life is at stake!" And the boy began once more to sob.

Kenelm directed the pony's head towards Tor-Hadham, and the boy ceased to sob.

"You are a good, dear fellow," said the boy, wiping his eyes. "I am afraid I am taking you very much out of your road."

"I have no road in particular, and would as soon go to Tor-Hadham, which I have never seen, as anywhere else. I am but a wanderer on the face of the earth."

"Have you lost your papa and mamma too? Why, you are not much older than I am."

"Little gentleman," said Kenelm, gravely, "I am just of age, and you, I suppose, are about fourteen."

"What fun!" cried the boy, abruptly. "Isn't it fun?"

"It will not be fun if I am sentenced to penal servitude for stealing your uncle's gig, and robbing his little nephew of L10. By the by, that choleric relation of yours meant to knock down somebody else when he struck at me. He asked, 'Are you the villain?' Pray who is the villain? he is evidently in your confidence."

"Villain! he is the most honourable, high-minded—But no matter now: I'll introduce you to him when we reach Tor-Hadham. Whip that pony: he is crawling."

"It is up hill: a good man spares his beast."

No art and no eloquence could extort from his young companion any further explanation than Kenelm had yet received; and indeed, as the journey advanced, and they approached their destination, both parties sank into silence. Kenelm was seriously considering that his first day's experience of real life in the skin of another had placed in some peril his own. He had knocked down a man evidently respectable and well to do, had carried off that man's nephew, and made free with that man's goods and chattels; namely, his gig and horse. All this might be explained satisfactorily to a justice of the peace, but how? By returning to his former skin; by avowing himself to be Kenelm Chillingly, a distinguished university medalist, heir to no ignoble name and some L10,000 a year. But then what a scandal! he who abhorred scandal; in vulgar parlance, what a "row!" he who denied that the very word "row" was sanctioned by any classic authorities in the English language. He would have to explain how he came to be found disguised, carefully disguised, in garments such as no baronet's eldest son—even though that baronet be the least ancestral man of mark whom it suits the convenience of a First Minister to recommend to the Sovereign for exaltation over the rank of Mister—was ever beheld in, unless he had taken flight to the gold-diggings. Was this a position in which the heir of the Chillinglys, a distinguished family, whose coat-of-arms dated from the earliest authenticated period of English heraldry under Edward III. as Three Fishes /azure/, could be placed without grievous slur on the cold and ancient blood of the Three Fishes?

And then individually to himself, Kenelm, irrespectively of the Three Fishes,—what a humiliation! He had put aside his respected father's deliberate preparations for his entrance into real life; he had perversely chosen his own walk on his own responsibility; and here, before half the first day was over, what an infernal scrape he had walked himself into! and what was his excuse? A wretched little boy, sobbing and chuckling by turns, and yet who was clever enough to twist Kenelm Chillingly round his finger; twist /him/, a man who thought himself so much wiser than his parents,—a man who had gained honours at the University,—a man of the gravest temperament,—a man of so nicely critical a turn of mind that there was not a law of art or nature in which he did not detect a flaw; that he should get himself into this mess was, to say the least of it, an uncomfortable reflection.

The boy himself, as Kenelm glanced at him from time to time, became impish and Will-of-the-Wisp-ish. Sometimes he laughed to himself loudly, sometimes he wept to himself quietly; sometimes, neither laughing nor weeping, he seemed absorbed in reflection. Twice as they came nearer to the town of Tor-Hadham, Kenelm nudged the boy, and said, "My boy, I must talk with you;" and twice the boy, withdrawing his arm from the nudge, had answered dreamily, "Hush! I am thinking."

And so they entered the town of Tor-Hadham, the cob very much done up.

CHAPTER III

"NOW, young sir," said Kenelm, in a tone calm, but peremptory,— "now we are in the town, where am I to take you? and wherever it be, there to say good-by."

"No, not good-by. Stay with me a little bit. I begin to feel frightened, and I am so friendless;" and the boy, who had before resented the slightest nudge on the part of Kenelm, now wound his arm into Kenelm's, and clung to him caressingly.

I don't know what my readers have hitherto thought of Kenelm Chillingly: but, amid all the curves and windings of his whimsical humour, there was one way that went straight to his heart; you had only to be weaker than himself and ask his protection.

He turned round abruptly; he forgot all the strangeness of his position, and replied: "Little brute that you are, I'll be shot if I forsake you if in trouble. But some compassion is also due to the cob: for his sake say where we are to stop."

"I am sure I can't say: I never was here before. Let us go to a nice quiet inn. Drive slowly: we'll look out for one."

Tor-Hadham was a large town, not nominally the capital of the county, but, in point of trade and bustle and life, virtually the capital. The straight street, through which the cob went as slowly as if he had been drawing a Triumphal Car up the Sacred Hill, presented an animated appearance. The shops had handsome facades and plate-glass windows; the pavements exhibited a lively concourse, evidently not merely of business, but of pleasure, for a large proportion of the passers-by was composed of the fair sex, smartly dressed, many of them young and some pretty. In fact a regiment of her Majesty's ——th Hussars had been sent into the town two days before; and, between the officers of that fortunate regiment and the fair sex in that hospitable town, there was a natural emulation which should make the greater number of slain and wounded. The advent of these heroes, professional subtracters from hostile and multipliers of friendly populations, gave a stimulus to the caterers for those amusements which bring young folks together,—archery-meetings, rifle-shootings, concerts, balls, announced in bills attached to boards and walls and exposed at shop-windows.

The boy looked eagerly forth from the gig, scanning especially these advertisements, till at length he uttered an excited exclamation, "Ah, I was right: there it is!"

"There what is?" asked Kenelm,— "the inn?" His companion did not answer, but Kenelm following the boy's eye perceived an immense hand-bill.

"TO-MORROW NIGHT THEATRE OPENS

"RICHARD III. Mr. COMPTON."

"Do just ask where the theatre is," said the boy, in a whisper, turning away his head.

Kenelm stopped the cob, made the inquiry, and was directed to take the next turning to the right. In a few minutes the compo portico of an ugly dilapidated building, dedicated to the Dramatic Muses, presented itself at the angle of a dreary, deserted lane. The walls were placarded with play-bills, in which the name of Compton stood forth as gigantic as capitals could make it. The boy drew a sigh. "Now," said he, "let us look out for an inn near here,—the nearest."

No inn, however, beyond the rank of a small and questionable looking public-house was apparent, until at a distance somewhat remote from the theatre, and in a quaint, old-fashioned, deserted square, a neat, newly whitewashed house displayed upon its frontispiece, in large black letters of funereal aspect, "Temperance Hotel."

"Stop," said the boy; "don't you think that would suit us? it looks quiet."

"Could not look more quiet if it were a tombstone," replied Kenelm.

The boy put his hand upon the reins and stopped the cob. The cob was in that condition that the slightest touch sufficed to stop him, though he turned his head somewhat ruefully as if in doubt whether hay and corn would be within the regulations of a Temperance Hotel. Kenelm descended and entered the house. A tidy woman emerged from a sort of glass cupboard which constituted the bar, minus the comforting drinks associated with the /beau ideal/ of a bar, but which displayed instead two large decanters of cold water with tumblers /a discretion, and sundry plates of thin biscuits and sponge-cakes. This tidy woman politely inquired what was his "pleasure."

"Pleasure," answered Kenelm, with his usual gravity, "is not the word I should myself have chosen. But could you oblige my horse—I mean /that/ horse—with a stall and a feed of oats, and that young gentleman and myself with a private room and a dinner?"

"Dinner!" echoed the hostess,— "dinner!"

"A thousand pardons, ma'am. But if the word 'dinner' shock you I retract it, and would say instead something to eat and drink."

"Drink! This is strictly a Temperance Hotel, sir."

"Oh, if you don't eat and drink here," exclaimed Kenelm, fiercely, for he was famished, "I wish you good morning."

"Stay a bit, sir. We do eat and drink here. But we are very simple folks. We allow no fermented liquors."

"Not even a glass of beer?"

"Only ginger-beer. Alcohols are strictly forbidden. We have tea and coffee and milk. But most of our customers prefer the pure liquid. As for eating, sir,—anything you order, in reason."

Kenelm shook his head and was retreating, when the boy, who had sprung from the gig and overheard the conversation, cried petulantly, "What does it signify? Who wants fermented liquors? Water will do very well. And as for dinner,—anything convenient. Please, ma'am, show us into a private room: I am so tired." The last words were said in a caressing manner, and so prettily, that the hostess at once changed her tone, and muttering, "Poor boy!" and, in a still more subdued mutter, "What a pretty face he has!" nodded, and led the way up a very clean old-fashioned staircase.

"But the horse and gig, where are they to go?" said Kenelm, with a pang of conscience on reflecting how ill treated hitherto had been both horse and owner.

"Oh, as for the horse and gig, sir, you will find Jukes's livery-stables a few yards farther down. We don't take in horses ourselves; our customers seldom keep them: but you will find the best of accommodation at Jukes's."

Kenelm conducted the cob to the livery-stables thus indicated, and waited to see him walked about to cool, well rubbed down, and made comfortable over half a peck of oats,—for Kenelm Chillingly was a humane man to the brute creation,—and then, in a state of ravenous appetite, returned to the Temperance Hotel, and was ushered into a small drawing-room, with a small bit of carpet in the centre, six small chairs with cane seats, prints on the walls descriptive of the various effects of intoxicating liquors upon sundry specimens of mankind,—some resembling ghosts, others fiends, and all with a general aspect of beggary and perdition; contrasted by Happy-Family pictures, —smiling wives, portly husbands, rosy infants, emblematic of the beatified condition of members of the Temperance Society.

A table with a spotless cloth, and knives and forks for two, chiefly, however, attracted Kenelm's attention.

The boy was standing by the window, seemingly gazing on a small aquarium which was there placed, and contained the usual variety of small fishes, reptiles, and insects, enjoying the pleasures of Temperance in its native element, including, of course, an occasional meal upon each other.

"What are they going to give us to eat?" inquired Kenelm. "It must be ready by this time I should think."

Here he gave a brisk tug at the bell-pull. The boy advanced from the window, and as he did so Kenelm was struck with the grace of his bearing, and the improvement in his looks, now that he was without his hat, and rest and ablution had refreshed from heat and dust the delicate bloom of his complexion. There was no doubt about it that he was an exceedingly pretty boy, and if he lived to be a man would make many a lady's heart ache. It was with a certain air of gracious superiority such as is seldom warranted by superior rank if it be less than royal, and chiefly becomes a marked seniority in years, that this young gentleman, approaching the solemn heir of the Chillinglys, held out his hand and said,—

"Sir, you have behaved extremely well, and I thank you very much."

"Your Royal Highness is condescending to say so," replied Kenelm Chillingly, bowing low, "but have you ordered dinner? and what are they going to give us? No one seems to answer the bell here. As it is a Temperance Hotel, probably all the servants are drunk."

"Why should they be drunk at a Temperance Hotel?"

"Why! because, as a general rule, people who flagrantly pretend to anything are the reverse of that which they pretend to. A man who sets up for a saint is sure to be a sinner, and a man who boasts that he is a sinner is sure to have some feeble, maudlin, snivelling bit of saintship about him which is enough to make him a humbug. Masculine honesty, whether it be saint-like or sinner-like, does not label itself either saint or sinner. Fancy Saint Augustine labelling himself saint, or Robert Burns sinner; and therefore, though, little boy, you have probably not read the poems of Robert Burns, and have certainly not read the 'Confessions' of Saint Augustine, take my word for it, that both those personages were very good fellows; and with a little difference of training and experience, Burns might have written the 'Confessions' and Augustine the poems. Powers above! I am starving. What did you order for dinner, and when is it to appear?"

The boy, who had opened to an enormous width a naturally large pair of hazel eyes, while his tall companion in fustian trousers and Belcher neckcloth spoke thus patronizingly of Robert Burns and Saint Augustine, now replied, with rather a deprecatory and shamefaced aspect, "I am sorry I was not thinking of dinner. I was not so mindful of you as I ought to have been. The landlady asked me what we would have. I said, 'What you like;' and the landlady muttered something about—" here the boy hesitated.

"Yes. About what? Mutton-chops?"

"No. Cauliflowers and rice-pudding."

Kenelm Chillingly never swore, never raged. Where ruder beings of human mould swore or raged, he vented displeasure in an expression of countenance so pathetically melancholic and lugubrious that it would have melted the heart of an Hyrcanian tiger. He turned his countenance now on the boy, and murmuring "Cauliflower!—Starvation!" sank into one of the cane-bottomed chairs, and added quietly, "so much for human gratitude."

The boy was evidently smitten to the heart by the bitter sweetness of this reproach. There were almost tears in his Voice, as he said falteringly, "Pray forgive me, I /was/ ungrateful. I'll run down and see what there is;" and, suiting the action to the word, he disappeared.

Kenelm remained motionless; in fact he was plunged into one of those reveries, or rather absorptions of inward and spiritual being, into which it is said that the consciousness of the Indian dervish can be by prolonged fasting preternaturally resolved. The appetite of all men of powerful muscular development is of a nature far exceeding the properties of any reasonable number of cauliflowers and rice-puddings to satisfy. Witness Hercules himself, whose cravings for substantial nourishment were the standing joke of the classic poets. I don't know that Kenelm Chillingly would have beaten the Theban Hercules either in fighting or in eating; but, when he wanted to fight or when he wanted to eat, Hercules would have had to put forth all his strength not to be beaten.

After ten minutes' absence, the boy came back radiant. He tapped Kenelm on the shoulder, and said playfully, "I made them cut a whole loin into chops, besides the cauliflower; and such a big rice-pudding, and eggs and bacon too! Cheer up! it will be served in a minute."

"A-h!" said Kenelm.

"They are good people; they did not mean to stint you: but most of their customers, it seems, live upon vegetables and farinaceous food. There is a society here formed upon that principle; the landlady says they are philosophers!"

At the word "philosophers" Kenelm's crest rose as that of a practised hunter at the cry of "Yoiks! Tally-ho!" "Philosophers!" said he, "philosophers indeed! O ignoramus, who do not even know the structure of the human tooth! Look you, little boy, if nothing were left on this earth of the present race of man, as we are assured upon great authority will be the case one of these days,—and a mighty good riddance it will be,—if nothing, I say, of man were left except fossils of his teeth and his thumbs, a philosopher of that superior race which will succeed to man would at once see in those relics all his characteristics and all his history; would say, comparing his thumb with the talons of an eagle, the claws of a tiger, the hoof of a horse, the owner of that thumb must have been lord over creatures with talons and claws and hoofs. You may say the monkey tribe has thumbs. True; but compare an ape's thumb with a man's: could the biggest ape's thumb have built Westminster Abbey? But even thumbs are trivial evidence of man as compared with his teeth. Look at his teeth!"—here Kenelm expanded his jaws from ear to ear and displayed semicircles of ivory, so perfect for the purposes of mastication that the most artistic dentist might have despaired of his power to imitate them,—"look, I say, at his teeth!" The boy involuntarily recoiled. "Are the teeth those of a miserable cauliflower-eater? or is it purely by farinaceous food that the proprietor of teeth like man's obtains the rank of the sovereign destroyer of creation? No, little boy, no," continued Kenelm, closing his jaws, but advancing upon the infant, who at each stride receded towards the aquarium,—"no; man is the master of the world, because of all created beings he devours the greatest variety and the greatest number of created things. His teeth evince that man can live upon every soil from the torrid to the frozen zone, because man can eat everything that other creatures cannot eat. And the formation of his teeth proves it. A tiger can eat a deer; so can man: but a tiger can't eat an eel; man can. An elephant can eat cauliflowers and rice-pudding; so can man! but an elephant can't eat a beefsteak; man can. In sum, man can live everywhere, because he can eat anything, thanks to his dental formation!" concluded Kenelm, making a prodigious stride towards the boy. "Man, when everything else fails him, eats his own species."

"Don't; you frighten me," said the boy. "Aha!" clapping his hands with a sensation of gleeful relief, "here come the mutton-chops!"

A wonderfully clean, well-washed, indeed well-washed-out, middle-aged parlour-maid now appeared, dish in hand. Putting the dish on the table and taking off the cover, the handmaiden said civilly, though frigidly, like one who lived upon salad and cold water, "Mistress is sorry to have kept you waiting, but she thought you were Vegetarians."

After helping his young friend to a mutton-chop, Kenelm helped himself, and replied gravely, "Tell your mistress that if she had only given us vegetables, I should have eaten you. Tell her that though man is partially graminivorous, he is principally carnivorous. Tell her that though a swine eats cabbages and such like, yet where a swine can get a baby, it eats the baby. Tell her," continued Kenelm (now at his third chop), "that there is no animal that in digestive organs more resembles man than a swine. Ask her if there is any baby in the house; if so, it would be safe for the baby to send up some more chops."

As the acutest observer could rarely be quite sure when Kenelm Chillingly was in jest or in earnest, the parlour-maid paused a moment and attempted a pale smile. Kenelm lifted his dark eyes, unspeakably sad and profound, and said mournfully, "I should be so sorry for the baby. Bring the chops!" The parlour-maid vanished. The boy laid down his knife and fork, and looked fixedly and inquisitively on Kenelm. Kenelm, unheeding the look, placed the last chop on the boy's plate.

"No more," cried the boy, impulsively, and returned the chop to the dish. "I have dined: I have had enough."

"Little boy, you lie," said Kenelm; "you have not had enough to keep body and soul together. Eat that chop or I shall thrash you: whatever I say I do."

Somehow or other the boy felt quelled; he ate the chop in silence, again looked at Kenelm's face, and said to himself, "I am afraid."

The parlour-maid here entered with a fresh supply of chops and a dish of bacon and eggs, soon followed by a rice-pudding baked in a tin dish, and of size sufficient to have nourished a charity school. When the repast was finished, Kenelm seemed to forget the dangerous properties of the carnivorous animal; and stretching himself indolently out, appeared to be as innocently ruminative as the most domestic of animals graminivorous.

Then said the boy, rather timidly, "May I ask you another favour?"

"Is it to knock down another uncle, or to steal another gig and cob?"

"No, it is very simple: it is merely to find out the address of a friend here; and when found to give him a note from me."

"Does the commission press? 'After dinner, rest a while,' saith the proverb; and proverbs are so wise that no one can guess the author of them. They are supposed to be fragments of the philosophy of the antediluvians: came to us packed up in the ark."

"Really, indeed," said the boy, seriously. "How interesting! No, my commission does not press for an hour or so. Do you think, sir, they had any drama before the Deluge?"

"Drama! not a doubt of it. Men who lived one or two thousand years had time to invent and improve everything; and a play could have had its natural length then. It would not have been necessary to crowd the whole history of Macbeth, from his youth to his old age, into an absurd epitome of three hours. One cannot trace a touch of real human nature in any actor's delineation of that very interesting Scotchman, because the actor always comes on the stage as if he were the same age when he murdered Duncan, and when, in his sear and yellow leaf, he was lopped off by Macduff."

"Do you think Macbeth was young when he murdered Duncan?"

"Certainly. No man ever commits a first crime of violent nature, such as murder, after thirty; if he begins before, he may go on up to any age. But youth is the season for commencing those wrong calculations which belong to irrational hope and the sense of physical power. You thus read in the newspapers that the persons who murder their sweethearts are generally from two to six and twenty; and persons who murder from other motives than love—that is, from revenge, avarice, or ambition—are generally about twenty-eight,—Iago's age. Twenty-eight is the usual close of the active season for getting rid of one's fellow-creatures; a prize-fighter falls off after that age. I take it that Macbeth was about twenty-eight when he murdered Duncan, and from about fifty-four to sixty when he began to whine about missing the comforts of old age. But can any audience understand that difference of years in seeing a three-hours' play? or does any actor ever pretend to impress it on the audience, and appear as twenty-eight in the first act and a sexagenarian in the fifth?"

"I never thought of that," said the boy, evidently interested. "But I never saw 'Macbeth.' I have seen 'Richard III.:' is not that nice? Don't you dote on the play? I do. What a glorious life an actor's must be!"

Kenelm, who had been hitherto rather talking to himself than to his youthful companion, here roused his attention, looked on the boy intently, and said,—

"I see you are stage-stricken. You have run away from home in order to turn player, and I should not wonder if this note you want me to give is for the manager of the theatre or one of his company."

The young face that encountered Kenelm's dark eye became very flushed, but set and defiant in its expression.

"And what if it were? would not you give it?"

"What! help a child of your age run away from his home, to go upon the stage against the consent of his relations? Certainly not."

"I am not a child; but that has nothing to do with it. I don't want to go on the stage, at all events without the consent of the person who has a right to dictate my actions. My note is not to the manager of the theatre, nor to one of his company; but it is to a gentleman who condescends to act here for a few nights; a thorough gentleman,—a great actor,—my friend, the only friend I have in the world. I say frankly I have run away from home so that he may have that note, and if you will not give it some one else will!"

The boy had risen while he spoke, and he stood erect beside the recumbent Kenelm, his lips quivering, his eyes suffused with suppressed tears, but his whole aspect resolute and determined. Evidently, if he did not get his own way in this world, it would not be for want of will.

"I will take your note," said Kenelm.

"There it is; give it into the hands of the person it is addressed to,—Mr. Herbert Compton."

CHAPTER IV

KENELM took his way to the theatre, and inquired of the door-keeper for Mr. Herbert Compton. That functionary replied, "Mr. Compton does not act to-night, and is not in the house."

"Where does he lodge?"

The door-keeper pointed to a grocer's shop on the other side of the way, and said tersely, "There, private door; knock and ring."

Kenelm did as he was directed. A slatternly maid-servant opened the door, and, in answer to his interrogatory, said that Mr. Compton was at home, but at supper.

"I am sorry to disturb him," said Kenelm, raising his voice, for he heard a clatter of knives and plates within a room hard by at his left, "but my business requires to see him forthwith;" and, pushing the maid aside, he entered at once the adjoining banquet-hall.

Before a savoury stew smelling strongly of onions sat a man very much at his ease, without coat or neckcloth,—a decidedly handsome man, his hair cut short and his face closely shaven, as befits an actor who has wigs and beards of all hues and forms at his command. The man was not alone; opposite to him sat a lady, who might be a few years younger, of a somewhat faded complexion, but still pretty, with good stage features and a profusion of blond ringlets.

"Mr. Compton, I presume," said Kenelm, with a solemn bow.

"My name is Compton: any message from the theatre? or what do you want with me?"

"I—nothing!" replied Kenelm; and then deepening his naturally mournful voice into tones ominous and tragic, continued, "By whom you are wanted let this explain;" therewith he placed in Mr. Compton's hand the letter with which he was charged, and stretching his arms and interlacing his fingers in the /pose/ of Talma as Julius Caesar, added, "'Qu'en dis-tu, Brute?'"

Whether it was from the sombre aspect and awe-inspiring delivery of the messenger, or the sight of the handwriting on the address of the missive, Mr. Compton's countenance suddenly fell, and his hand rested irresolute, as if not daring to open the letter.

"Never mind me, dear," said the lady with blond ringlets, in a tone of stinging affability: "read your /billet-doux/; don't keep the young man waiting, love!"

"Nonsense, Matilda, nonsense! /billet-doux/ indeed! more likely a bill from Duke the tailor. Excuse me for a moment, my dear. Follow me, sir," and rising, still with shirtsleeves uncovered, he quitted the room, closing the door after him, motioned Kenelm into a small parlour on the opposite side of the passage, and by the light of a suspended gas-lamp ran his eye hastily over the letter, which, though it seemed very short, drew from him sundry exclamations. "Good heavens, how very absurd! what's to be done?" Then, thrusting the letter into his trousers-pocket, he fixed upon Kenelm a very brilliant pair of dark eyes, which soon dropped before the steadfast look of that saturnine adventurer.

"Are you in the confidence of the writer of this letter?" asked Mr.

Compton, rather confusedly.

"I am not the confidant of the writer," answered Kenelm, "but for the time being I am the protector!"

"Protector!"

"Protector."

Mr. Compton again eyed the messenger, and this time fully realizing the gladiatorial development of that dark stranger's physical form, he grew many shades paler, and involuntarily retreated towards the bell-pull.

After a short pause, he said, "I am requested to call on the writer. If I do so, may I understand that the interview will be strictly private?"

"So far as I am concerned, yes: on the condition that no attempt be made to withdraw the writer from the house."

"Certainly not, certainly not; quite the contrary," exclaimed Mr. Compton, with genuine animation. "Say I will call in half an hour."

"I will give your message," said Kenelm, with a polite inclination of his head; "and pray pardon me if I remind you that I styled myself the protector of your correspondent, and if the slightest advantage be taken of that correspondent's youth and inexperience or the smallest encouragement be given to plans of abduction from home and friends, the stage will lose an ornament and Herbert Compton vanish from the scene." With these words Kenelm left the player standing aghast. Gaining the street-door, a lad with a band-box ran against him and was nearly upset.

"Stupid," cried the lad, "can't you see where you are going? Give this to Mrs. Compton."

"I should deserve the title you give if I did for nothing the business for which you are paid," replied Kenelm, sententiously, and striding on.

CHAPTER V

"I HAVE fulfilled my mission," said Kenelm, on rejoining his travelling companion. "Mr. Compton said he would be here in half an hour."

"You saw him?"

"Of course: I promised to give your letter into his own hands."

"Was he alone?"

"No; at supper with his wife."

"His wife! what do you mean, sir?—wife! he has no wife."

"Appearances are deceitful. At least he was with a lady who called him 'dear' and 'love' in as spiteful a tone of voice as if she had been his wife; and as I was coming out of his street-door a lad who ran against me asked me to give a band-box to Mrs. Compton."

The boy turned as white as death, staggered back a few steps, and dropped into a chair.

A suspicion which during his absence had suggested itself to Kenelm's inquiring mind now took strong confirmation. He approached softly, drew a chair close to the companion whom fate had forced upon him, and said in a gentle whisper,—

"This is no boy's agitation. If you have been deceived or misled, and I can in any way advise or aid you, count on me as women under the circumstances count on men and gentlemen."

The boy started to his feet, and paced the room with disordered steps, and a countenance working with passions which he attempted vainly to suppress. Suddenly arresting his steps, he seized Kenelm's hand, pressed it convulsively, and said, in a voice struggling against a sob,—

"I thank you,—I bless you. Leave me now: I would be alone. Alone, too, I must face this man. There may be some mistake yet; go."

"You will promise not to leave the house till I return?"

"Yes, I promise that."

"And if it be as I fear, you will then let me counsel with and advise you?"

"Heaven help me, if so! Whom else should I trust to? Go, go!"

Kenelm once more found himself in the streets, beneath the mingled light of gas-lamps and the midsummer moon. He walked on mechanically till he reached the extremity of the town. There he halted, and seating himself on a milestone, indulged in these meditations:—

"Kenelm, my friend, you are in a still worse scrape than I thought you were an hour ago. You have evidently now got a woman on your hands. What on earth are you to do with her? A runaway woman, who, meaning to run off with somebody else—such are the crosses and contradictions in human destiny—has run off with you instead. What mortal can hope to be safe? The last thing I thought could befall me when I got up this morning was that I should have any trouble about the other sex before the day was over. If I were of an amatory temperament, the Fates might have some justification for leading me into this snare, but, as it is, those meddling old maids have none. Kenelm, my friend, do you think you ever can be in love? and, if you were in love, do you think you could be a greater fool than you are now?"

Kenelm had not decided this knotty question in the conference held with himself, when a light and soft strain of music came upon his ear. It was but from a stringed instrument, and might have sounded thin and tinkling but for the stillness of the night, and that peculiar addition of fulness which music acquires when it is borne along a tranquil air. Presently a voice in song was heard from the distance accompanying the instrument. It was a man's voice, a mellow and a rich voice, but Kenelm's ear could not catch the words. Mechanically he moved on towards the quarter from which the sounds came, for Kenelm Chillingly had music in his soul, though he was not quite aware of it himself. He saw before him a patch of greensward, on which grew a solitary elm with a seat for wayfarers beneath it. From this sward the ground receded in a wide semicircle bordered partly by shops, partly by the

tea-gardens of a pretty cottage-like tavern. Round the tables scattered throughout the gardens were grouped quiet customers, evidently belonging to the class of small tradespeople or superior artisans. They had an appearance of decorous respectability, and were listening intently to the music. So were many persons at the shop-doors and at the windows of upper rooms. On the sward, a little in advance of the tree, but beneath its shadow, stood the musician, and in that musician Kenelm recognized the wanderer from whose talk he had conceived the idea of the pedestrian excursion which had already brought him into a very awkward position. The instrument on which the singer accompanied himself was a guitar, and his song was evidently a love-song, though, as it was now drawing near to its close, Kenelm could but imperfectly guess at its general meaning. He heard enough to perceive that its words were at least free from the vulgarity which generally characterizes street ballads, and were yet simple enough to please a very homely audience.

When the singer ended there was no applause; but there was evident sensation among the audience,—a feeling as if something that had given a common enjoyment had ceased. Presently the white Pomeranian dog, who had hitherto kept himself out of sight under the seat of the elm-tree, advanced, with a small metal tray between his teeth, and, after looking round him deliberately, as if to select whom of the audience should be honoured with the commencement of a general subscription, gravely approached Kenelm, stood on his hind legs, stared at him, and presented the tray.

Kenelm dropped a shilling into that depository, and the dog, looking gratified, took his way towards the tea-gardens. Lifting his hat, for he was, in his way, a very polite man, Kenelm approached the singer, and, trusting to the alteration in his dress for not being recognized by a stranger who had only once before encountered him he said,—

"Judging by the little I heard, you sing very well, sir. May I ask who composed the words?"

"They are mine," replied the singer.

"And the air?"

"Mine too."

"Accept my compliments. I hope you find these manifestations of genius lucrative?"

The singer, who had not hitherto vouchsafed more than a careless glance at the rustic garb of the questioner, now fixed his eyes full upon Kenelm, and said, with a smile, "Your voice betrays you, sir. We have met before."

"True; but I did not then notice your guitar, nor, though acquainted with your poetical gifts, suppose that you selected this primitive method of making them publicly known."

"Nor did I anticipate the pleasure of meeting you again in the character of Hobnail. Hist! let us keep each other's secret. I am known hereabouts by no other designation than that of the 'Wandering Minstrel.'"

"It is in the capacity of minstrel that I address you. If it be not an impertinent question, do you know any songs which take the other side of the case?"

"What case? I don't understand you, sir."

"The song I heard seemed in praise of that sham called love. Don't you think you could say something more new and more true, treating that aberration from reason with the contempt it deserves?"

"Not if I am to get my travelling expenses paid."

"What! the folly is so popular?"

"Does not your own heart tell you so?"

"Not a bit of it,—rather the contrary. Your audience at present seem folks who live by work, and can have little time for such idle phantasies; for, as it is well observed by Ovid, a poet who wrote much on that subject, and professed the most intimate acquaintance with it, 'Idleness is the parent of love.' Can't you sing something in praise of a good dinner? Everybody who works hard has an appetite for food."

The singer again fixed on Kenelm his inquiring eye, but not detecting a vestige of humour in the grave face he contemplated, was rather puzzled how to reply, and therefore remained silent.

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