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Title: Kenelm Chillingly — Volume 07

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Release date: March 1, 2005 [EBook #7656]

Most recently updated: December 30, 2020

Language: English

*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK KENELM CHILLINGLY — VOLUME 07 ***

This eBook was produced by Dagny,

and David Widger,

BOOK VII.

CHAPTER I.

KENELM did not return home till dusk, and just as he was sitting down to his solitary meal there was a ring at the bell, and Mrs. Jones ushered in Mr. Thomas Bowles.

Though that gentleman had never written to announce the day of his arrival, he was not the less welcome.

"Only," said Kenelm, "if you preserve the appetite I have lost, I fear you will find meagre fare to-day. Sit down, man."

"Thank you, kindly, but I dined two hours ago in London, and I really can eat nothing more."

Kenelm was too well-bred to press unwelcome hospitalities. In a very few minutes his frugal repast was ended; the cloth removed, the two men were left alone.

"Your room is here, of course, Tom; that was engaged from the day I asked you, but you ought to have given me a line to say when to expect you, so that I could have put our hostess on her mettle as to dinner or supper. You smoke still, of course: light your pipe."

"Thank you, Mr. Chillingly, I seldom smoke now; but if you will excuse a cigar," and Tom produced a very smart cigar-case.

"Do as you would at home. I shall send word to Will Somers that you and I sup there to-morrow. You forgive me for letting out your secret. All straightforward now and henceforth. You come to their hearth as a friend, who will grow dearer to them both every year. Ah, Tom, this love for woman seems to me a very wonderful thing. It may sink a man into such deeps of evil, and lift a man into such heights of good."

"I don't know as to the good," said Tom, mournfully, and laying aside his cigar.

"Go on smoking; I should like to keep you company; can you spare me one of your cigars?"

Tom offered his case. Kenelm extracted a cigar, lighted it, drew a few whiffs, and, when he saw that Tom had resumed his own cigar, recommenced conversation.

"You don't know as to the good; but tell me honestly, do you think if you had not loved Jessie Wiles, you would be as good a man as you are now?"

"If I am better than I was, it is not because of my love for the girl."

"What then?"

"The loss of her."

Kenelm started, turned very pale, threw aside the cigar, rose, and walked the room to and fro with very quick but very irregular strides.

Tom continued quietly. "Suppose I had won Jessie and married her, I don't think any idea of improving myself would have entered my head. My uncle would have been very much offended at my marrying a day-labourer's daughter, and would not have invited me to Luscombe. I should have remained at Graveleigh, with no ambition of being more than a common farrier, an ignorant, noisy, quarrelsome man; and if I could not have made Jessie as fond of me as I wished, I should not have broken myself of drinking, and I shudder to think what a brute I might have been, when I see in the newspapers an account of some drunken wife-beater. How do we know but what that wife-beater loved his wife dearly before marriage, and she did not care for him? His home was unhappy, and so he took to drink and to wife-beating."

"I was right, then," said Kenelm, halting his strides, when I told you it would be a miserable fate to be married to a girl whom you loved to distraction, and whose heart you could never warm to you, whose life you could never render happy."

"So right!"

"Let us drop that part of the subject at present," said Kenelm, reseating himself, "and talk about your wish to travel. Though contented that you did not marry Jessie, though you can now, without anguish, greet her as the wife of another, still there are some lingering thoughts of her that make you restless; and you feel that you could more easily wrench yourself from these thoughts in a marked change of scene and adventure, that you might bury them altogether in the soil of a strange land. Is it so?"

"Ay, something of that, sir."

Then Kenelm roused himself to talk of foreign lands, and to map out a plan of travel that might occupy some months. He was pleased to find that Tom had already learned enough of French to make himself understood at least upon commonplace matters, and still more pleased to discover that he had been not only reading the proper guide-books or manuals descriptive of the principal places in Europe worth visiting, but that he had acquired an interest in the places; interest in the fame attached to them by their history in the past, or by the treasures of art they contained.

So they talked far into the night; and when Tom retired to his room, Kenelm let himself out of the house noiselessly, and walked with slow steps towards the old summer-house in which he had sat with Lily. The wind had risen, scattering the clouds that had veiled the preceding day, so that the stars were seen in far chasms of the sky beyond,—seen for a while in one place, and, when the swift clouds rolled over them there, shining out elsewhere. Amid the varying sounds of the trees, through which swept the night gusts, Kenelm fancied he could distinguish the sigh of the willow on the opposite lawn of Grasmere.

CHAPTER II.

KENELM despatched a note to Will Somers early the next morning, inviting himself and Mr. Bowles to supper that evening. His tact was sufficient to make him aware that in such social meal there would be far less restraint for each and all concerned than in a more formal visit from Tom during the day-time; and when Jessie, too, was engaged with customers to the shop.

But he led Tom through the town and showed him the shop itself, with its pretty goods at the plate-glass windows, and its general air of prosperous trade; then he carried him off into the lanes and fields of the country, drawing out the mind of his companion, and impressed with great admiration of its marked improvement in culture, and in the trains of thought which culture opens out and enriches.

But throughout all their multiform range of subject Kenelm could perceive that Tom was still

preoccupied and abstracted: the idea of the coming interview with Jessie weighed upon him.

When they left Cromwell Lodge at nightfall, to repair to the supper at Will's; Kenelm noticed that Bowles had availed himself of the contents of his carpet-bag to make some refined alterations in his dress. The alterations became him.

When they entered the parlour, Will rose from his chair with the evidence of deep emotion on his face, advanced to Tom, took his hand and grasped and dropped it without a word. Jessie saluted both guests alike, with drooping eyelids and an elaborate curtsy. The old mother alone was perfectly self-possessed and up to the occasion.

"I am heartily glad to see you, Mr. Bowles," said she, "and so all three of us are, and ought to be; and if baby was older, there would be four."

"And where on earth have you hidden baby?" cried Kenelm. "Surely he might have been kept up for me to-night, when I was expected; the last time I supped here I took you by surprise, and therefore had no right to complain of baby's want of respect to her parents' friends."

Jessie raised the window-curtain, and pointed to the cradle behind it. Kenelm linked his arm in Tom's, led him to the cradle, and, leaving him alone to gaze on the sleeping inmate, seated himself at the table, between old Mrs. Somers and Will. Will's eyes were turned away towards the curtain, Jessie holding its folds aside, and the formidable Tom, who had been the terror of his neighbourhood, bending smiling over the cradle: till at last he laid his large hand on the pillow, gently, timidly, careful not to awake the helpless sleeper, and his lips moved, doubtless with a blessing; then he, too, came to the table, seating himself, and Jessie carried the cradle upstairs.

Will fixed his keen, intelligent eyes on his bygone rival; and noticing the changed expression of the once aggressive countenance, the changed costume in which, without tinge of rustic foppery, there was the token of a certain gravity of station scarcely compatible with a return to old loves and old habits in the village world, the last shadow of jealousy vanished from the clear surface of Will's affectionate nature.

"Mr. Bowles," he exclaimed, impulsively, "you have a kind heart, and a good heart, and a generous heart. And your coming here to-night on this friendly visit is an honour which—which—" "Which," interrupted Kenelm, compassionating Will's embarrassment, "is on the side of us single men. In this free country a married man who has a male baby may be father to the Lord Chancellor or the Archbishop of Canterbury. But—well, my friends, such a meeting as we have to-night does not come often; and after supper let us celebrate it with a bowl of punch. If we have headaches the next morning none of us will grumble."

Old Mrs. Somers laughed out jovially. "Bless you, sir, I did not think of the punch; I will go and see about it," and, baby's socks still in her hands, she hastened from the room.

What with the supper, what with the punch, and what with Kenelm's art of cheery talk on general subjects, all reserve, all awkwardness, all shyness between the convivialists, rapidly disappeared. Jessie mingled in the talk; perhaps (excepting only Kenelm) she talked more than the others, artlessly, gayly, no vestige of the old coquetry; but, now and then, with a touch of genteel finery, indicative of her rise in life, and of the contact of the fancy shopkeeper with noble customers. It was a pleasant evening; Kenelm had resolved that it should be so. Not a hint of the obligations to Mr. Bowles escaped until Will, following his visitor to the door, whispered to Tom, "You don't want thanks, and I can't express them. But when we say our prayers at night, we have always asked God to bless him who brought us together, and has since made us so prosperous,—I mean Mr. Chillingly. To-night there will be another besides him, for whom we shall pray, and for whom baby, when he is older, will pray too."

Therewith Will's voice thickened; and he prudently receded, with no unreasonable fear lest the punch might make him too demonstrative of emotion if he said more.

Tom was very silent on the return to Cromwell Lodge; it did not seem the silence of depressed spirits, but rather of quiet meditation, from which Kenelm did not attempt to rouse him.

It was not till they reached the garden pales of Grasmere that Tom, stopping short, and turning his face to Kenelm, said, "I am very grateful to you for this evening,—very."

"It has revived no painful thoughts then?"

"No; I feel so much calmer in mind than I ever believed I could have been, after seeing her again."

"Is it possible!" said Kenelm, to himself. "How should I feel if I ever saw in Lily the wife of another

man, the mother of his child?" At that question he shuddered, and an involuntary groan escaped from his lips. Just then having, willingly in those precincts, arrested his steps when Tom paused to address him, something softly touched the arm which he had rested on the garden pale. He looked, and saw that it was Blanche. The creature, impelled by its instincts towards night-wanderings, had, somehow or other, escaped from its own bed within the house, and hearing a voice that had grown somewhat familiar to its ear, crept from among the shrubs behind upon the edge of the pale. There it stood, with arched back, purring low as in pleased salutation.

Kenelm bent down and covered with kisses the blue ribbon which Lily's hand had bound round the favourite's neck. Blanche submitted to the caress for a moment, and then catching a slight rustle among the shrubs made by some awaking bird, sprang into the thick of the quivering leaves and vanished.

Kenelm moved on with a quick impatient stride, and no further words were exchanged between him and his companion till they reached their lodging and parted for the night.

CHAPTER III.

THE next day, towards noon, Kenelm and his visitor, walking together along the brook-side, stopped before Izaak Walton's summer-house, and, at Kenelm's suggestion, entered therein to rest, and more at their ease to continue the conversation they had begun.

"You have just told me," said Kenelm, "that you feel as if a load were taken off your heart, now that you have again met Jessie Somers, and that you find her so changed that she is no longer the woman you loved. As to the change, whatever it be, I own, it seems to me for the better, in person, in manners, in character; of course I should not say this, if I were not convinced of your perfect sincerity when you assured me that you are cured of the old wound. But I feel so deeply interested in the question how a fervent love, once entertained and enthroned in the heart of a man so earnestly affectionate and so warm-blooded as yourself, can be, all of a sudden, at a single interview, expelled or transferred into the calm sentiment of friendship, that I pray you to explain."

"That is what puzzles me, sir," answered Tom, passing his hand over his forehead. "And I don't know if I can explain it."

"Think over it, and try."

Tom mused for some moments and then began. "You see, sir, that I was a very different man myself when I fell in love with Jessie Wiles, and said, 'Come what may, that girl shall be my wife. Nobody else shall have her.'"

"Agreed; go on."

"But while I was becoming a different man, when I thought of her—and I was always thinking of her—I still pictured her to myself as the same Jessie Wiles; and though, when I did see her again at Graveleigh, after she had married—the day—"

"You saved her from the insolence of the Squire."

"She was but very recently married. I did not realize her as married. I did not see her husband, and the difference within myself was only then beginning. Well, so all the time I was reading and thinking, and striving to improve my old self at Luscombe, still Jessie Wiles haunted me as the only girl I had ever loved, ever could love; I could not believe it possible that I could ever marry any one else. And lately I have been much pressed to marry some one else; all my family wish it: but the face of Jessie rose up before me, and I said to myself, 'I should be a base man if I married one woman, while I could not get another woman out of my head.' I must see Jessie once more, must learn whether her face is now really the face that haunts me when I sit alone; and I have seen her, and it is not that face: it may be handsomer, but it is not a girl's face, it is the face of a wife and a mother. And, last evening, while she was talking with an open-heartedness which I had never found in her before, I became strangely conscious of the difference in myself that had been silently at work within the last two years or so. Then, sir, when I was but an ill-conditioned, uneducated, petty village farrier, there was no inequality between me and a peasant girl; or, rather, in all things except fortune, the peasant girl was much above me. But last evening I asked myself, watching her and listening to her talk, 'If Jessie were now free, should I press her to be my wife?' and I answered myself, 'No.'"

Kenelm listened with rapt attention, and exclaimed briefly, but passionately, "Why?"

"It seems as if I were giving myself airs to say why. But, sir, lately I have been thrown among persons, women as well as men, of a higher class than I was born in; and in a wife I should want a companion up to their mark, and who would keep me up to mine; and ah, sir, I don't feel as if I could find that companion in Mrs. Somers."

"I understand you now, Tom. But you are spoiling a silly romance of mine. I had fancied the little girl with the flower face would grow up to supply the loss of Jessie; and, I am so ignorant of the human heart, I did think it would take all the years required for the little girl to open into a woman, before the loss of the old love could be supplied. I see now that the poor little child with the flower face has no chance."

"Chance? Why, Mr. Chillingly," cried Tom, evidently much nettled, "Susey is a dear little thing, but she is scarcely more than a mere charity girl. Sir, when I last saw you in London you touched on that matter as if I were still the village farrier's son, who might marry a village labourer's daughter. But," added Tom, softening down his irritated tone of voice, "even if Susey were a lady born I think a man would make a very great mistake, if he thought he could bring up a little girl to regard him as a father; and then, when she grew up, expect her to accept him as a lover."

"Ah, you think that!" exclaimed Kenelm, eagerly, and turning eyes that sparkled with joy towards the lawn of Grasmere. "You think that; it is very sensibly said,—well, and you have been pressed to marry, and have hung back till you had seen again Mrs. Somers. Now you will be better disposed to such a step; tell me about it?"

"I said, last evening, that one of the principal capitalists at Luscombe, the leading corn-merchant, had offered to take me into partnership. And, sir, he has an only daughter, she is a very amiable girl, has had a first-rate education, and has such pleasant manners and way of talk, quite a lady. If I married her I should soon be the first man in Luscombe, and Luscombe, as you are no doubt aware, returns two members to Parliament; who knows, but that some day the farrier's son might be—" Tom stopped abruptly, abashed at the aspiring thought which, while speaking, had deepened his hardy colour and flashed from his honest eyes.

"Ah!" said Kenelm, almost mournfully, "is it so? must each man in his life play many parts? Ambition succeeds to love, the reasoning brain to the passionate heart. True, you are changed; my Tom Bowles is gone."

"Not gone in his undying gratitude to you, sir," said Tom, with great emotion. "Your Tom Bowles would give up all his dreams of wealth or of rising in life, and go through fire and water to serve the friend who first bid him be a new Tom Bowles! Don't despise me as your own work: you said to me that terrible day, when madness was on my brow and crime within my heart, 'I will be to you the truest friend man ever found in man.' So you have been. You commanded me to read; you commanded me to think; you taught me that body should be the servant of mind."

"Hush, hush, times are altered; it is you who can teach me now. Teach me, teach me; how does ambition replace love? How does the desire to rise in life become the all-mastering passion, and, should it prosper, the all-atoning consolation of our life? We can never be as happy, though we rose to the throne of the Caesars, as we dream that we could have been, had Heaven but permitted us to dwell in the obscurest village, side by side with the woman we love."

Tom was exceedingly startled by such a burst of irrepressible passion from the man who had told him that, though friends were found only once in a life, sweethearts were as plentiful as blackberries.

Again he swept his hand over his forehead, and replied hesitatingly: I can't pretend to say what maybe the case with others. But to judge by my own case, it seems to me this: a young man who, out of his own business, has nothing to interest or excite him, finds content, interest, and excitement when he falls in love; and then, whether for good or ill, he thinks there is nothing like love in the world, he don't care a fig for ambition then. Over and over again did my poor uncle ask me to come to him at Luscombe, and represent all the worldly advantage it would be to me; but I could not leave the village in which Jessie lived, and, besides, I felt myself unfit to be anything higher than I was. But when I had been some time at Luscombe, and gradually got accustomed to another sort of people, and another sort of talk, then I began to feel interest in the same objects that interested those about me; and when, partly by mixing with better educated men, and partly by the pains I took to educate myself, I felt that I might now more easily rise above my uncle's rank of life than two years ago I could have risen above a farrier's forge, then the ambition to rise did stir in me, and grew stronger every day. Sir, I don't think you can wake up a man's intellect but what you wake with it emulation. And, after all, emulation is ambition."

"Then, I suppose, I have no emulation in me, for certainly I have no ambition."

"That I can't believe, sir; other thoughts may cover it over and keep it down for a time. But sooner or later, it will force its way to the top, as it has done with me. To get on in life, to be respected by those who know you, more and more as you grow older, I call that a manly desire. I am sure it comes as naturally to an Englishman as—as—"

"As the wish to knock down some other Englishman who stands in his way does. I perceive now that you were always a very ambitious man, Tom; the ambition has only taken another direction. Caesar might have been

"But the first wrestler on the green."

"And now, I suppose, you abandon the idea of travel: you will return to Luscombe, cured of all regret for the loss of Jessie; you will marry the young lady you mention, and rise, through progressive steps of alderman and mayor, into the rank of member for Luscombe."

"All that may come in good time," answered Tom, not resenting the tone of irony in which he was addressed, "but I still intend to travel: a year so spent must render me all the more fit for any station I aim at. I shall go back to Luscombe to arrange my affairs, come to terms with Mr. Leland the corn-merchant, against my return, and—"

"The young lady is to wait till then."

"Emily—"

"Oh, that is the name? Emily! a much more elegant name than Jessie."

"Emily," continued Tom, with an unruffled placidity,—which, considering the aggravating bitterness for which Kenelm had exchanged his wonted dulcitudes of indifferentism, was absolutely saintlike, "Emily knows that if she were my wife I should be proud of her, and will esteem me the more if she feels how resolved I am that she shall never be ashamed of me."

"Pardon me, Tom," said Kenelm softened, and laying his hand on his friend's shoulder with brotherlike tenderness. "Nature has made you a thorough gentleman; and you could not think and speak more nobly if you had come into the world as the head of all the Howards."

CHAPTER IV.

TOM went away the next morning. He declined to see Jessie again, saying curtly, "I don't wish the impression made on me the other evening to incur a chance of being weakened."

Kenelm was in no mood to regret his friend's departure. Despite all the improvement in Tom's manners and culture, which raised him so much nearer to equality with the polite and instructed heir of the Chillinglys, Kenelm would have felt more in sympathy and rapport with the old disconsolate fellow-wanderer who had reclined with him on the grass, listening to the minstrel's talk or verse, than he did with the practical, rising citizen of Luscombe. To the young lover of Lily Mordaunt there was a discord, a jar, in the knowledge that the human heart admits of such well-reasoned, well-justified transfers of allegiance; a Jessie to-day, or an Emily to-morrow; "*La reine est morte: vive la reine*"

An hour or two after Tom had gone, Kenelm found himself almost mechanically led towards Braefieldville. He had instinctively divined Elsie's secret wish with regard to himself and Lily, however skilfully she thought she had concealed it.

At Braefieldville he should hear talk of Lily, and in the scenes where Lily had been first beheld.

He found Mrs. Braefield alone in the drawing-room, seated by a table covered with flowers, which she was assorting and intermixing for the vases to which they were destined.

It struck him that her manner was more reserved than usual and somewhat embarrassed; and when, after a few preliminary matters of small talk, he rushed boldly /in medias res/ and asked if she had seen Mrs. Cameron lately, she replied briefly, "Yes, I called there the other day," and immediately changed the conversation to the troubled state of the Continent.

Kenelm was resolved not to be so put off, and presently returned to the charge.

"The other day you proposed an excursion to the site of the Roman villa, and said you would ask Mrs.

Cameron to be of the party. Perhaps you have forgotten it?"

"No; but Mrs. Cameron declines. We can ask the Emlyns instead. He will be an excellent /cicerone/."

"Excellent! Why did Mrs. Cameron decline?"

Elsie hesitated, and then lifted her clear brown eyes to his face, with a sudden determination to bring matters to a crisis.

"I cannot say why Mrs. Cameron declined, but in declining she acted very wisely and very honourably. Listen to me, Mr. Chillingly. You know how highly I esteem, and how cordially I like you, and judging by what I felt for some weeks, perhaps longer, after we parted at Tor Hadham—" Here again she hesitated, and, with a half laugh and a slight blush, again went resolutely on. "If I were Lily's aunt or elder sister, I should do as Mrs. Cameron does; decline to let Lily see much more of a young gentleman too much above her in wealth and station for—"

"Stop," cried Kenelm, haughtily, "I cannot allow that any man's wealth or station would warrant his presumption in thinking himself above Miss Mordaunt."

"Above her in natural grace and refinement, certainly not. But in the world there are other considerations which, perhaps, Sir Peter and Lady Chillingly might take into account."

"You did not think of that before you last saw Mrs. Cameron."

"Honestly speaking, I did not. Assured that Miss Mordaunt was a gentlewoman by birth, I did not sufficiently reflect upon other disparities."

"You know, then, that she is by birth a gentlewoman?"

"I only know it as all here do, by the assurance of Mrs. Cameron, whom no one could suppose not to be a lady. But there are different degrees of lady and of gentleman, which are little heeded in the ordinary intercourse of society, but become very perceptible in questions of matrimonial alliance; and Mrs. Cameron herself says very plainly that she does not consider her niece to belong to that station in life from which Sir Peter and Lady Chillingly would naturally wish their son should select his bride. Then (holding out her hand) pardon me if I have wounded or offended you. I speak as a true friend to you and to Lily both. Earnestly I advise you, if Miss Mordaunt be the cause of your lingering here, earnestly I advise you to leave while yet in time for her peace of mind and your own."

"Her peace of mind," said Kenelm, in low faltering tones, scarcely hearing the rest of Mrs. Braefield's speech. "Her peace of mind? Do you sincerely think that she cares for me,—could care for me,—if I stayed?"

"I wish I could answer you decidedly. I am not in the secrets of her heart. I can but conjecture that it might be dangerous for the peace of any young girl to see too much of a man like yourself, to divine that he loved her, and not to be aware that he could not, with the approval of his family, ask her to become his wife."

Kenelm bent his face down, and covered it with his right hand. He did not speak for some moments. Then he rose, the fresh cheek very pale, and said,—

"You are right. Miss Mordaunt's peace of mind must be the first consideration. Excuse me if I quit you thus abruptly. You have given me much to think of, and I can only think of it adequately when alone."

CHAPTER V.

FROM KENELM CHILLINGLY TO SIR PETER CHILLINGLY.

MY FATHER, MY DEAR FATHER,—This is no reply to your letters. I know not if itself can be called a letter. I cannot yet decide whether it be meant to reach your hands. Tired with talking to myself, I sit down to talk to you. Often have I reproached myself for not seeing every fitting occasion to let you distinctly know how warmly I love, how deeply I reverence you; you, O friend, O father. But we Chillinglys are not a demonstrative race. I don't remember that you, by words, ever expressed to me the truth that you loved your son infinitely more than he deserves. Yet, do I not know that you would send all your beloved old books to the hammer rather than I should pine in vain for some untried, if sinless, delight on which I had set my heart? And do you not know equally well, that I would part with all my heritage, and turn day-labourer, rather than you should miss the beloved old books?

That mutual knowledge is taken for granted in all that my heart yearns to pour forth to your own. But, if I divine aright, a day is coming when, as between you and me, there must be a sacrifice on the part of one to the other. If so, I implore that the sacrifice may come from you. How is this? How am I so ungenerous, so egotistical, so selfish, so ungratefully unmindful of all I already owe to you, and may never repay? I can only answer, "It is fate, it is nature, it is love"—

.....

Here I must break off. It is midnight, the moon halts opposite to the window at which I sit, and on the stream that runs below there is a long narrow track on which every wave trembles in her light; on either side of the moonlit track all the other waves, running equally to their grave in the invisible deep, seem motionless and dark. I can write no more.

.....

(Dated two days later.)

They say she is beneath us in wealth and station. Are we, my father—we, two well-born gentlemen—coveters of gold or lackeys of the great? When I was at college, if there were any there more heartily despised than another it was the parasite and the tuft-hunter; the man who chose his friends according as their money or their rank might be of use to him. If so mean were the choice is so little important to the happiness and career of a man who has something of manhood in him, how much more mean to be the parasite and tuft-hunter in deciding what woman to love, what woman to select as the sweetener and ennobler of one's everyday life! Could she be to my life that sweetener, that ennobler? I firmly believe it. Already life itself has gained a charm that I never even guessed in it before; already I begin, though as yet but faintly and vaguely, to recognize that interest in the objects and aspirations of my fellow-men which is strongest in those whom posterity ranks among its ennoblers. In this quiet village it is true that I might find examples enough to prove that man is not meant to meditate upon life, but to take active part in it, and in that action to find his uses. But I doubt if I should have profited by such examples; if I should not have looked on this small stage of the world as I have looked on the large one, with the indifferent eyes of a spectator on a trite familiar play carried on by ordinary actors, had not my whole being suddenly leaped out of philosophy into passion, and, at once made warmly human, sympathized with humanity wherever it burned and glowed. Ah, is there to be any doubt of what station, as mortal bride, is due to her,—her, my princess, my fairy? If so, how contented you shall be, my father, with the worldly career of your son! how perseveringly he will strive (and when did perseverance fail?) to supply all his deficiencies of intellect, genius, knowledge, by the energy concentrated on a single object which—more than intellect, genius, knowledge, unless they attain to equal energy equally concentrated—commands what the world calls honours.

Yes, with her, with her as the bearer of my name, with her to whom I, whatever I might do of good or of great, could say, "It is thy work," I promise that you shall bless the day when you took to your arms a daughter.

.....

"Thou art in contact with the beloved in all that thou feelest elevated above thee." So it is written by one of those weird Germans who search in our bosoms for the seeds of buried truths, and conjure them into flowers before we ourselves were even aware of the seeds.

Every thought that associates itself with my beloved seems to me born with wings.

.....

I have just seen her, just parted from her. Since I had been told—kindly, wisely told—that I had no right to hazard her peace of mind unless I were privileged to woo and to win her, I promised myself that I would shun her presence until I had bared my heart to you, as I am doing now, and received that privilege from yourself; for even had I never made the promise that binds my honour, your consent and blessing must hallow my choice. I do not feel as if I could dare to ask one so innocent and fair to wed an ungrateful, disobedient son. But this evening I met her, unexpectedly, at the vicar's, an excellent man, from whom I have learned much; whose precepts, whose example, whose delight in his home, and his life at once active and serene, are in harmony with my own dreams when I dream of her.

I will tell you the name of the beloved; hold it as yet a profound secret between you and me. But oh for the day when I may hear you call her by that name, and print on her forehead the only kiss by man of which I should not be jealous.

It is Sunday, and after the evening service it is my friend's custom to gather his children round him, and, without any formal sermon or discourse, engage their interests in subjects harmonious to

associations with the sanctity of the day; often not directly bearing upon religion; more often, indeed, playfully starting from some little incident or some slight story-book which had amused the children in the course of the past week, and then gradually winding into reference to some sweet moral precept or illustration from some divine example. It is a maxim with him that, while much that children must learn they can only learn well through conscious labour, and as positive task-work, yet Religion should be connected in their minds not with labour and task-work, but should become insensibly infused into their habits of thought, blending itself with memories and images of peace and love; with the indulgent tenderness of the earliest teachers, the sinless mirthfulness of the earliest home; with consolation in after sorrows, support through after trials, and never parting company with its twin sister, Hope.

I entered the vicar's room this evening just as the group had collected round him. By the side of his wife sat a lady in whom I feel a keen interest. Her face wears that kind of calm which speaks of the lassitude bequeathed by sorrow. She is the aunt of my beloved one. Lily had nestled herself on a low ottoman, at the good pastor's feet, with one of his little girls, round whose shoulder she had wound her arm. She is much more fond of the companionship of children than that of girls of her own age. The vicar's wife, a very clever woman, once, in my hearing, took her to task for this preference, asking her why she persisted in grouping herself with mere infants who could teach her nothing? Ah! could you have seen the innocent, angel-like expression of her face when she answered simply, "I suppose because with them I feel safer, I mean nearer to God."

Mr. Emlyn—that is the name of the vicar—deduced his homily this evening from a pretty fairy tale which Lily had been telling to his children the day before, and which he drew her on to repeat.

Take, in brief, the substance of the story:—

"Once on a time, a king and queen made themselves very unhappy because they had no heir to their throne; and they prayed for one; and lo, on some bright summer morning, the queen, waking from sleep, saw a cradle beside her bed, and in the cradle a beautiful sleeping babe. Great day throughout the kingdom! But as the infant grew up, it became very wayward and fretful: it lost its beauty; it would not learn its lessons; it was as naughty as a child could be. The parents were very sorrowful; the heir, so longed for, promised to be a great plague to themselves and their subjects. At last one day, to add to their trouble, two little bumps appeared on the prince's shoulders. All the doctors were consulted as to the cause and the cure of this deformity. Of course they tried the effect of back-bands and steel machines, which gave the poor little prince great pain, and made him more unamiable than ever. The bumps, nevertheless, grew larger, and as they increased, so the prince sickened and pined away. At last a skilful surgeon proposed, as the only chance of saving the prince's life, that the bumps should be cut out; and the next morning was fixed for that operation. But at night the queen saw, or dreamed she saw, a beautiful shape standing by her bedside. And it said to her reproachfully, 'Ungrateful woman! How wouldst thou repay me for the precious boon that my favour bestowed on thee! In me behold the Queen of the Fairies. For the heir to thy kingdom, I consigned to thy charge an infant from Fairyland, to become a blessing to thee and to thy people; and thou wouldst inflict upon it a death of torture by the surgeon's knife.' And the queen answered, 'Precious indeed thou mayest call the boon,—a miserable, sickly, feverish changeling.'

"'Art thou so dull,' said the beautiful visitant, 'as not to comprehend that the earliest instincts of the fairy child would be those of discontent, at the exile from its native home? and in that discontent it would have pined itself to death, or grown up, soured and malignant, a fairy still in its power but a fairy of wrath and evil, had not the strength of its inborn nature sufficed to develop the growth of its wings. That which thy blindness condemns as the deformity of the human-born, is to the fairy-born the crowning perfection of its beauty. Woe to thee, if thou suffer not the wings of the fairy child to grow.'

"And the next morning the queen sent away the surgeon when he came with his horrible knife, and removed the back-board and the steel machines from the prince's shoulders, though all the doctors predicted that the child would die. And from that moment the royal heir began to recover bloom and health. And when at last, out of those deforming bumps, budded delicately forth the plumage of snow-white wings, the wayward peevishness of the prince gave place to sweet temper. Instead of scratching his teachers, he became the quickest and most docile of pupils, grew up to be the joy of his parents and the pride of their people; and people said, 'In him we shall have hereafter such a king as we have never yet known.'"

Here ended Lily's tale. I cannot convey to you a notion of the pretty, playful manner in which it was told. Then she said, with a grave shake of the head, "But you do not seem to know what happened afterwards. Do you suppose that the prince never made use of his wings? Listen to me. It was discovered by the courtiers who attended on His Royal Highness that on certain nights, every week, he disappeared. In fact, on these nights, obedient to the instinct of the wings, he flew from palace halls into Fairyland; coming back thence all the more lovingly disposed towards the human home from which

he had escaped for a while."

"Oh, my children," interposed the preacher earnestly, "the wings would be given to us in vain if we did not obey the instinct which allures us to soar; vain, no less, would be the soaring, were it not towards the home whence we came, bearing back from its native airs a stronger health, and a serener joy; more reconciled to the duties of earth by every new flight into heaven."

As he thus completed the moral of Lily's fairy tale, the girl rose from her low seat, took his hand, kissed it reverently, and walked away towards the window. I could see that she was affected even to tears, which she sought to conceal. Later in the evening, when we were dispersed on the lawn, for a few minutes before the party broke up, Lily came to my side timidly and said, in a low whisper,—

"Are you angry with me? what have I done to displease you?"

"Angry with you; displeased? How can you think of me so unjustly?"

"It is so many days since you have called, since I have seen you," she said so artlessly, looking up at me with eyes in which tears still seemed to tremble.

Before I could trust myself to reply, her aunt approached, and noticing me with a cold and distant "Good-night," led away her niece.

I had calculated on walking back to their home with them, as I generally have done when we met at another house. But the aunt had probably conjectured I might be at the vicarage that evening, and in order to frustrate my intention had engaged a carriage for their return. No doubt she has been warned against permitting further intimacy with her niece.

My father, I must come to you at once, discharge my promise, and receive from your own lips your consent to my choice; for you will consent, will you not? But I wish you to be prepared beforehand, and I shall therefore put up these disjointed fragments of my commune with my own heart and with yours, and post them to-morrow. Expect me to follow them after leaving you a day free to consider them alone,—alone, my dear father: they are meant for no eye but yours.

K. C.

CHAPTER VI.

THE next day Kenelm walked into the town, posted his voluminous letter to Sir Peter, and then looked in at the shop of Will Somers, meaning to make some purchases of basket-work or trifling fancy goods in Jessie's pretty store of such articles, that might please the taste of his mother.

On entering the shop his heart beat quicker. He saw two young forms bending over the counter, examining the contents of a glass case. One of these customers was Clemmy; in the other there was no mistaking the slight graceful shape of Lily Mordaunt. Clemmy was exclaiming, "Oh, it is so pretty, Mrs. Somers! but," turning her eyes from the counter to a silk purse in her hand, she added sorrowfully, "I can't buy it. I have not got enough, not by a great deal."

"And what is it, Miss Clemmy?" asked Kenelm.

The two girls turned round at his voice, and Clemmy's face brightened.

"Look here," she said, "is it not too lovely?"

The object thus admired and coveted was a little gold locket, enriched by a cross composed of small pearls.

"I assure you, miss," said Jessie, who had acquired all the coaxing arts of her trade, "it is really a great bargain. Miss Mary Burrows, who was here just before you came, bought one not nearly so pretty and gave ten shillings more for it."

Miss Mary Burrows was the same age as Miss Clementina Emlyn, and there was a rivalry as to smartness between those youthful beauties. "Miss Burrows!" sighed Clemmy, very scornfully.

But Kenelm's attention was distracted from Clemmy's locket to a little ring which Lily had been persuaded by Mrs. Somers to try on, and which she now drew off and returned with a shake of the head. Mrs. Somers, who saw that she had small chance of selling the locket to Clemmy, was now addressing herself to the elder girl more likely to have sufficient pocket-money, and whom, at all

events, it was quite safe to trust.

"The ring fits you so nicely, Miss Mordaunt, and every young lady of your age wears at least one ring; allow me to put it up." She added in a lower voice, "Though we only sell the articles in this case on commission, it is all the same to us whether we are paid now or at Christmas."

"'Tis no use tempting me, Mrs. Somers," said Lily, laughing, and then with a grave air, "I promised Lion, I mean my guardian, never to run into debt, and I never will."

Lily turned resolutely from the perilous counter, taking up a paper that contained a new ribbon she had bought for Blanche, and Clemmy reluctantly followed her out of the shop.

Kenelm lingered behind and selected very hastily a few trifles, to be sent to him that evening with some specimens of basket-work left to Will's tasteful discretion; then purchased the locket on which Clemmy had set her heart; but all the while his thoughts were fixed on the ring which Lily had tried on. It was no sin against etiquette to give the locket to a child like Clemmy, but would it not be a cruel impertinence to offer a gift to Lily?

Jessie spoke: "Miss Mordaunt took a great fancy to this ring, Mr. Chillingly. I am sure her aunt would like her to have it. I have a great mind to put it by on the chance of Mrs. Cameron's calling here. It would be a pity if it were bought by some one else."

"I think," said Kenelm, "that I will take the liberty of showing it to Mrs. Cameron. No doubt she will buy it for her niece. Add the price of it to my bill." He seized the ring and carried it off; a very poor little simple ring, with a single stone shaped as a heart, not half the price of the locket.

Kenelm rejoined the young ladies just where the path split into two, the one leading direct to Grasmere, the other through the churchyard to the vicarage. He presented the locket to Clemmy with brief kindly words which easily removed any scruple she might have had in accepting it; and, delighted with her acquisition, she bounded off to the vicarage, impatient to show the prize to her mamma and sisters, and more especially to Miss Mary Burrows, who was coming to lunch with them.

Kenelm walked on slowly by Lily's side.

"You have a good heart, Mr. Chillingly," said she, somewhat abruptly. "How it must please you to give such pleasure! Dear little Clemmy!"

This artless praise, and the perfect absence of envy or thought of self evinced by her joy that her friend's wish was gratified, though her own was not, enchanted Kenelm.

"If it pleases to give pleasure," said he, "it is your turn to be pleased now; you can confer such pleasure upon me."

"How?" she asked, falteringly, and with quick change of colour.

"By conceding to me the same right your little friend has allowed."

And he drew forth the ring.

Lily reared her head with a first impulse of haughtiness. But when her eyes met his the head drooped down again, and a slight shiver ran through her frame.

"Miss Mordaunt," resumed Kenelm, mastering his passionate longing to fall at her feet and say, "But, oh! in this ring it is my love that I offer,—it is my troth that I pledge!" "Miss Mordaunt, spare me the misery of thinking that I have offended you; least of all would I do so on this day, for it may be some little while before I see you again. I am going home for a few days upon a matter which may affect the happiness of my life, and on which I should be a bad son and an unworthy gentleman if I did not consult him who, in all that concerns my affections, has trained me to turn to him, the father; in all that concerns my honour to him, the gentleman."

A speech more unlike that which any delineator of manners and morals in the present day would put into the mouth of a lover, no critic in "The Londoner" could ridicule. But, somehow or other, this poor little tamer of butterflies and teller of fairy tales comprehended on the instant all that this most eccentric of human beings thus frigidly left untold. Into her innermost heart it sank more deeply than would the most ardent declaration put into the lips of the boobies or the scamps in whom delineators of manners in the present day too often debase the magnificent chivalry embodied in the name of "lover."

Where these two had, while speaking, halted on the path along the brook-side, there was a bench, on

which it so happened that they had seated themselves weeks before. A few moments later on that bench they were seated again.

And the trumpery little ring with its turquoise heart was on Lily's finger, and there they continued to sit for nearly half an hour; not talking much, but wondrously happy; not a single vow of troth interchanged. No, not even a word that could be construed into "I love." And yet when they rose from the bench, and went silently along the brook-side, each knew that the other was beloved.

When they reached the gate that admitted into the garden of Grasmere, Kenelm made a slight start. Mrs. Cameron was leaning over the gate. Whatever alarm at the appearance Kenelm might have felt was certainly not shared by Lily; she advanced lightly before him, kissed her aunt on the cheek, and passed on across the lawn with a bound in her step and the carol of a song upon her lips.

Kenelm remained by the gate, face to face with Mrs. Cameron. She opened the gate, put her arm in his, and led him back along the brook-side.

"I am sure, Mr. Chillingly," she said, "that you will not impute to my words any meaning more grave than that which I wish them to convey, when I remind you that there is no place too obscure to escape from the ill-nature of gossip, and you must own that my niece incurs the chance of its notice if she be seen walking alone in these by-paths with a man of your age and position, and whose sojourn in the neighbourhood, without any ostensible object or motive, has already begun to excite conjecture. I do not for a moment assume that you regard my niece in any other light than that of an artless child, whose originality of tastes or fancy may serve to amuse you; and still less do I suppose that she is in danger of misrepresenting any attentions on your part. But for her sake I am bound to consider what others may say. Excuse me, then, if I add that I think you are also bound in honour and in good feeling to do the same. Mr. Chillingly, it would give me a great sense of relief if it suited your plans to move from the neighbourhood."

"My dear Mrs. Cameron," answered Kenelm, who had listened to this speech with imperturbable calm of visage, "I thank you much for your candour, and I am glad to have this opportunity of informing you that I am about to move from this neighbourhood, with the hope of returning to it in a very few days and rectifying your mistake as to the point of view in which I regard your niece. In a word," here the expression of his countenance and the tone of his voice underwent a sudden change, "it is the dearest wish of my heart to be empowered by my parents to assure you of the warmth with which they will welcome your niece as their daughter, should she deign to listen to my suit and intrust me with the charge of her happiness."

Mrs. Cameron stopped short, gazing into his face with a look of inexpressible dismay.

"No! Mr. Chillingly," she exclaimed, "this must not be,—cannot be. Put out of your mind an idea so wild. A young man's senseless romance. Your parents cannot consent to your union with my niece; I tell you beforehand they cannot."

"But why?" asked Kenelm, with a slight smile, and not much impressed by the vehemence of Mrs. Cameron's adjuration.

"Why?" she repeated passionately; and then recovering something of her habitual weariness of quiet. "The why is easily explained. Mr. Kenelm Chillingly is the heir of a very ancient house and, I am told, of considerable estates. Lily Mordaunt is a nobody, an orphan, without fortune, without connection, the ward of a humbly born artist, to whom she owes the roof that shelters her; she is without the ordinary education of a gentlewoman; she has seen nothing of the world in which you move. Your parents have not the right to allow a son so young as yourself to throw himself out of his proper sphere by a rash and imprudent alliance. And, never would I consent, never would Walter Melville consent, to her entering into any family reluctant to receive her. There,—that is enough. Dismiss the notion so lightly entertained. And farewell."

"Madam," answered Kenelm very earnestly, "believe me, that had I not entertained the hope approaching to conviction that the reasons you urge against my presumption will not have the weight with my parents which you ascribe to them, I should not have spoken to you thus frankly. Young though I be, still I might fairly claim the right to choose for myself in marriage. But I gave to my father a very binding promise that I would not formally propose to any one till I had acquainted him with my desire to do so, and obtained his approval of my choice; and he is the last man in the world who would withhold that approval where my heart is set on it as it is now. I want no fortune with a wife, and should I ever care to advance my position in the world, no connection would help me like the approving smile of the woman I love. There is but one qualification which my parents would deem they had the right to exact from my choice of one who is to bear our name. I mean that she should have the appearance, the manners, the principles, and—my mother at least might add—the birth of a

gentlewoman. Well, as to appearance and manners, I have seen much of fine society from my boyhood, and found no one among the highest born who can excel the exquisite refinement of every look, and the inborn delicacy of every thought, in her of whom, if mine, I shall be as proud as I shall be fond. As to defects in the frippery and tinsel of a boarding-school education, they are very soon remedied. Remains only the last consideration,—birth. Mrs. Braefield informs me that you have assured her that, though circumstances into which as yet I have no right to inquire, have made her the ward of a man of humble origin, Miss Mordaunt is of gentle birth. Do you deny that?"

"No," said Mrs. Cameron, hesitating, but with a flash of pride in her eyes as she went on. "No. I cannot deny that my niece is descended from those who, in point of birth, were not unequal to your own ancestors. But what of that?" she added, with a bitter despondency of tone. "Equality of birth ceases when one falls into poverty, obscurity, neglect, nothingness!"

"Really this is a morbid habit on your part. But, since we have thus spoken so confidentially, will you not empower me to answer the question which will probably be put to me, and the answer to which will, I doubt not, remove every obstacle in the way of my happiness? Whatever the reasons which might very sufficiently induce you to preserve, whilst living so quietly in this place, a discreet silence as to the parentage of Miss Mordaunt and your own,—and I am well aware that those whom altered circumstances of fortune have compelled to altered modes of life may disdain to parade to strangers the pretensions to a higher station than that to which they reconcile their habits,—whatever, I say, such reasons for silence to strangers, should they preclude you from confiding to me, an aspirant to your niece's hand, a secret which, after all, cannot be concealed from her future husband?"

"From her future husband? of course not," answered Mrs. Cameron. "But I decline to be questioned by one whom I may never see again, and of whom I know so little. I decline, indeed, to assist in removing any obstacle to a union with my niece, which I hold to be in every way unsuited to either party. I have no cause even to believe that my niece would accept you if you were free to propose to her. You have not, I presume, spoken to her as an aspirant to her hand. You have not addressed to her any declaration of your attachment, or sought to extract from her inexperience any words that warrant you in thinking that her heart will break if she never sees you again."

"I do not merit such cruel and taunting questions," said Kenelm, indignantly. "But I will say no more now. When we again meet let me hope you will treat me less unkindly. Adieu!"

"Stay, sir. A word or two more. You persist in asking your father and Lady Chillingly to consent to your proposal to Miss Mordaunt?"

"Certainly I do."

"And you will promise me, on your word as a gentleman, to state fairly all the causes which might fairly operate against their consent,—the poverty, the humble rearing, the imperfect education of my niece,—so that they might not hereafter say you had entrapped their consent, and avenge themselves for your deceit by contempt for her?"

"Ah, madam, madam, you really try my patience too far. But take my promise, if you can hold that of value from one whom you can suspect of deliberate deceit."

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Chillingly. Bear with my rudeness. I have been so taken by surprise, I scarcely know what I am saying. But let us understand each other completely before we part. If your parents withhold their consent you will communicate it to me; me only, not to Lily. I repeat I know nothing of the state of her affections. But it might embitter any girl's life to be led on to love one whom she could not marry."

"It shall be as you say. But if they do consent?"

"Then you will speak to me before you seek an interview with Lily, for then comes another question: Will her guardian consent?—and—and—"

"And what?"

"No matter. I rely on your honour in this request, as in all else. Good-day."

She turned back with hurried footsteps, muttering to herself, "But they will not consent. Heaven grant that they will not consent, or if they do, what—what is to be said or done? Oh, that Walter Melville were here, or that I knew where to write to him!"

On his way back to Cromwell Lodge, Kenelm was overtaken by the vicar.

"I was coming to you, my dear Mr. Chillingly, first to thank you for the very pretty present with which you have gladdened the heart of my little Clemmy, and next to ask you to come with me quietly to-day to meet Mr. ——, the celebrated antiquarian, who came to Moleswich this morning at my request to examine that old Gothic tomb in our churchyard. Only think, though he cannot read the inscription any better than we can, he knows all about its history. It seems that a young knight renowned for feats of valour in the reign of Henry IV. married a daughter of one of those great Earls of Montfichet who were then the most powerful family in these parts. He was slain in defending the church from an assault by some disorderly rioters of the Lollard faction; he fell on the very spot where the tomb is now placed. That accounts for its situation in the churchyard, not within the fabric. Mr. —— discovered this fact in an old memoir of the ancient and once famous family to which the young knight Albert belonged, and which came, alas! to so shameful an end, the Fletwodes, Barons of Fletwode and Malpas. What a triumph over pretty Lily Mordaunt, who always chose to imagine that the tomb must be that of some heroine of her own romantic invention! Do come to dinner; Mr. —— is a most agreeable man, and full of interesting anecdotes."

"I am so sorry I cannot. I am obliged to return home at once for a few days. That old family of Fletwode! I think I see before me, while we speak, the gray tower in which they once held sway; and the last of the race following Mammon along the Progress of the Age,—a convicted felon! What a terrible satire on the pride of birth!"

Kenelm left Cromwell Lodge that evening, but he still kept on his apartments there, saying he might be back unexpectedly any day in the course of the next week.

He remained two days in London, wishing all that he had communicated to Sir Peter in writing to sink into his father's heart before a personal appeal to it.

The more he revolved the ungracious manner in which Mrs. Cameron had received his confidence, the less importance he attached to it. An exaggerated sense of disparities of fortune in a person who appeared to him to have the pride so common to those who have known better days, coupled with a nervous apprehension lest his family should ascribe to her any attempt to ensnare a very young man of considerable worldly pretensions into a marriage with a penniless niece, seemed to account for much that had at first perplexed and angered him. And if, as he conjectured, Mrs. Cameron had once held a much higher position in the world than she did now,—a conjecture warranted by a certain peculiar conventional undeniable elegance which characterized her habitual manner,—and was now, as she implied, actually a dependant on the bounty of a painter who had only just acquired some professional distinction, she might well shrink from the mortification of becoming an object of compassion to her richer neighbours; nor, when he came to think of it, had he any more right than those neighbours to any confidence as to her own or Lily's parentage, so long as he was not formally entitled to claim admission into her privy.

London seemed to him intolerably dull and wearisome. He called nowhere except at Lady Glenalvon's; he was glad to hear from the servants that she was still at Exmundham. He relied much on the influence of the queen of the fashion with his mother, whom he knew would be more difficult to persuade than Sir Peter, nor did he doubt that he should win to his side that sympathizing and warm-hearted queen.

CHAPTER VII.

IT is somewhere about three weeks since the party invited by Sir Peter and Lady Chillingly assembled at Exmundham, and they are still there, though people invited to a country house have seldom compassion enough for the dulness of its owner to stay more than three days. Mr. Chillingly Mivers, indeed, had not exceeded that orthodox limit. Quietly observant, during his stay, of young Gordon's manner towards Cecilia, and hers towards him, he had satisfied himself that there was no cause to alarm Sir Peter, or induce the worthy baronet to regret the invitation he had given to that clever kinsman. For all the visitors remaining Exmundham had a charm.

To Lady Glenalvon, because in the hostess she met her most familiar friend when both were young girls, and because it pleased her to note the interest which Cecilia Travers took in the place so associated with memories of the man to whom it was Lady Glenalvon's hope to see her united. To Chillingly Gordon, because no opportunity could be so favourable for his own well-concealed designs on the hand and heart of the heiress. To the heiress herself the charm needs no explanation.

To Leopold Travers the attractions of Exmundham were unquestionably less fascinating. Still even he was well pleased to prolong his stay. His active mind found amusement in wandering over an estate the acreage of which would have warranted a much larger rental, and lecturing Sir Peter on the old-

fashioned system of husbandry which that good-natured easy proprietor permitted his tenants to adopt, as well as on the number of superfluous hands that were employed on the pleasure-grounds and in the general management of the estate, such as carpenters, sawyers, woodmen, bricklayers, and smiths.

When the Squire said, "You could do just as well with a third of those costly dependants," Sir Peter, unconsciously plagiarizing the answer of the old French grand seigneur, replied, "Very likely. But the question is, could the rest do just as well without me?"

Exmundham, indeed, was a very expensive place to keep up. The house, built by some ambitious Chillingly three centuries ago, would have been large for an owner of thrice the revenues; and though the flower-garden was smaller than that at Braefieldville, there were paths and drives through miles of young plantations and old woodlands that furnished lazy occupation to an army of labourers. No wonder that, despite his nominal ten thousand a year, Sir Peter was far from being a rich man. Exmundham devoured at least half the rental. The active mind of Leopold Travers also found ample occupation in the stores of his host's extensive library.

Travers, never much of a reader, was by no means a despiser of learning, and he soon took to historical and archaeological researches with the ardour of a man who must always throw energy into any pursuit that occasion presents as an escape from indolence. Indolent Leopold Travers never could be. But, more than either of these resources of occupation, the companionship of Chillingly Gordon excited his interest and quickened the current of his thoughts. Always fond of renewing his own youth in the society of the young, and of the sympathizing temperament which belongs to cordial natures, he had, as we have seen, entered very heartily into the ambition of George Belvoir, and reconciled himself very plially to the humours of Kenelm Chillingly. But the first of these two was a little too commonplace, the second a little too eccentric, to enlist the complete good-fellowship which, being alike very clever and very practical, Leopold Travers established with that very clever and very practical representative of the rising generation, Chillingly Gordon. Between them there was this meeting-ground, political and worldly, a great contempt for innocuous old-fashioned notions; added to which, in the mind of Leopold Travers, was a contempt—which would have been complete, but that the contempt admitted dread—of harmful new-fashioned notions which, interpreted by his thoughts, threatened ruin to his country and downfall to the follies of existent society, and which, interpreted by his language, tamed itself into the man of the world's phrase, "Going too far for me." Notions which, by the much more cultivated intellect and the immeasurably more soaring ambition of Chillingly Gordon, might be viewed and criticised thus: "Could I accept these doctrines? I don't see my way to being Prime Minister of a country in which religion and capital are still powers to be consulted. And, putting aside religion and capital, I don't see how, if these doctrines passed into law, with a good coat on my back I should not be a sufferer. Either I, as having a good coat, should have it torn off my back as a capitalist, or, if I remonstrated in the name of moral honesty, be put to death as a religionist."

Therefore when Leopold Travers said, "Of course we must go on," Chillingly Gordon smiled and answered, "Certainly, go on." And when Leopold Travers added, "But we may go too far," Chillingly Gordon shook his head, and replied, "How true that is! Certainly too far."

Apart from the congeniality of political sentiment, there were other points of friendly contact between the older and younger man. Each was an exceedingly pleasant man of the world; and, though Leopold Travers could not have plumbed certain deeps in Chillingly Gordon's nature,—and in every man's nature there are deeps which his ablest observer cannot fathom,—yet he was not wrong when he said to himself, "Gordon is a gentleman."

Utterly would my readers misconceive that very clever young man, if they held him to be a hypocrite like Blifil or Joseph Surface. Chillingly Gordon, in every private sense of the word, was a gentleman. If he had staked his whole fortune on a rubber at whist, and an undetected glance at his adversary's hand would have made the difference between loss and gain, he would have turned away his head and said, "Hold up your cards." Neither, as I have had occasion to explain before, was he actuated by any motive in common with the vulgar fortune-hunter in his secret resolve to win the hand of the heiress. He recognized no inequality of worldly gifts between them. He said to himself, "Whatever she may give me in money, I shall amply repay in worldly position if I succeed, and succeed I certainly shall. If I were as rich as Lord Westminster, and still cared about being Prime Minister, I should select her as the most fitting woman I have seen for a Prime Minister's wife."

It must be acknowledged that this sort of self-commune, if not that of a very ardent lover, is very much that of a sensible man setting high value on himself, bent on achieving the prizes of a public career, and desirous of securing in his wife a woman who would adorn the station to which he confidently aspired. In fact, no one so able as Chillingly Gordon would ever have conceived the ambition of being Minister of England if in all that in private life constitutes the English gentleman he

could be fairly subject to reproach.

He was but in public life what many a gentleman honest in private life has been before him, an ambitious, resolute egotist, by no means without personal affections, but holding them all subordinate to the objects of personal ambition, and with no more of other principle than that of expediency in reference to his own career than would cover a silver penny. But expediency in itself he deemed the statesman's only rational principle. And to the consideration of expediency he brought a very unprejudiced intellect, quite fitted to decide whether the public opinion of a free and enlightened people was for turning St. Paul's Cathedral into an Agapemone or not.

During the summer weeks he had thus vouchsafed to the turfs and groves of Exmundham, Leopold Travers was not the only person whose good opinion Chillingly Gordon had ingratiated. He had won the warmest approbation from Mrs. Champion. His conversation reminded her of that which she had enjoyed in the house of her departed spouse. In talking with Cecilia she was fond of contrasting him to Kenelm, not to the favour of the latter, whose humours she utterly failed to understand, and whom she pertinaciously described as "so affected." "A most superior young man Mr. Gordon, so well informed, so sensible,—above all, so natural." Such was her judgment upon the unavowed candidate to Cecilia's hand; and Mrs. Champion required no avowal to divine the candidature. Even Lady Glenalvon had begun to take friendly interest in the fortunes of this promising young man. Most women can sympathize with youthful ambition. He impressed her with a deep conviction of his abilities, and still more with respect for their concentration upon practical objects of power and renown. She too, like Mrs. Champion, began to draw comparisons unfavourable to Kenelm between the two cousins: the one seemed so slothfully determined to hide his candle under a bushel, the other so honestly disposed to set his light before men. She felt also annoyed and angry that Kenelm was thus absenting himself from the paternal home at the very time of her first visit to it, and when he had so felicitous an opportunity of seeing more of the girl in whom he knew that Lady Glenalvon deemed he might win, if he would properly woo, the wife that would best suit him. So that when one day Mrs. Champion, walking through the gardens alone with Lady Glenalvon while from the gardens into the park went Chillingly Gordon, arm-in-arm with Leopold Travers, abruptly asked, "Don't you think that Mr. Gordon is smitten with Cecilia, though he, with his moderate fortune, does not dare to say so? And don't you think that any girl, if she were as rich as Cecilia will be, would be more proud of such a husband as Chillingly Gordon than of some silly earl?"

Lady Glenalvon answered curtly, but somewhat sorrowfully, "Yes."

After a pause she added, "There is a man with whom I did once think she would have been happier than with any other. One man who ought to be dearer to me than Mr. Gordon, for he saved the life of my son, and who, though perhaps less clever than Mr. Gordon, still has a great deal of talent within him, which might come forth and make him—what shall I say?—a useful and distinguished member of society, if married to a girl so sure of raising any man she marries as Cecilia Travers. But if I am to renounce that hope, and look through the range of young men brought under my notice, I don't know one, putting aside consideration of rank and fortune, I should prefer for a clever daughter who went heart and soul with the ambition of a clever man. But, Mrs. Champion, I have not yet quite renounced my hope; and, unless I do, I yet think there is one man to whom I would rather give Cecilia, if she were my daughter."

Therewith Lady Glenalvon so decidedly broke off the subject of conversation that Mrs. Champion could not have renewed it without such a breach of the female etiquette of good breeding as Mrs. Champion was the last person to adventure.

Lady Chillingly could not help being pleased with Gordon. He was light in hand, served to amuse her guests, and made up a rubber of whist in case of need.

There were two persons, however, with whom Gordon made no ground; namely, Parson John and Sir Peter. When Travers praised him one day for the solidity of his parts and the soundness of his judgment, the Parson replied snappishly, "Yes, solid and sound as one of those tables you buy at a broker's; the thickness of the varnish hides the defects in the joints: the whole framework is rickety." But when the Parson was indignantly urged to state the reason by which he arrived at so harsh a conclusion, he could only reply by an assertion which seemed to his questioner a declamatory burst of parsonic intolerance.

"Because," said Parson John, "he has no love for man, and no reverence for God. And no character is sound and solid which enlarges its surface at the expense of its supports."

On the other hand, the favour with which Sir Peter had at first regarded Gordon gradually vanished, in proportion as, acting on the hint Mivers had originally thrown out but did not deem it necessary to repeat, he watched the pains which the young man took to insinuate himself into the good graces of Mr. Travers and Mrs. Champion, and the artful and half-suppressed gallantry of his manner to the

heiress.

Perhaps Gordon had not ventured thus "to feel his way" till after Mivers had departed; or perhaps Sir Peter's parental anxiety rendered him, in this instance, a shrewder observer than was the man of the world, whose natural acuteness was, in matters of affection, not unfrequently rendered languid by his acquired philosophy of indifferentism.

More and more every day, every hour, of her sojourn beneath his roof, did Cecilia become dearer to Sir Peter, and stronger and stronger became his wish to secure her for his daughter-in-law. He was inexpressibly flattered by her preference for his company: ever at hand to share his customary walks, his kindly visits to the cottages of peasants or the homesteads of petty tenants; wherein both were sure to hear many a simple anecdote of Master Kenelm in his childhood, anecdotes of whim or good-nature, of considerate pity or reckless courage.

Throughout all these varieties of thought or feeling in the social circle around her, Lady Chillingly preserved the unmoved calm of her dignified position. A very good woman certainly, and very ladylike. No one could detect a flaw in her character, or a fold awry in her flounce. She was only, like the gods of Epicurus, too good to trouble her serene existence with the cares of us simple mortals. Not that she was without a placid satisfaction in the tribute which the world laid upon her altars; nor was she so supremely goddess-like as to soar above the household affections which humanity entails on the dwellers and denizens of earth. She liked her husband as much as most elderly wives like their elderly husbands. She bestowed upon Kenelm a liking somewhat more warm, and mingled with compassion. His eccentricities would have puzzled her, if she had allowed herself to be puzzled: it troubled her less to pity them. She did not share her husband's desire for his union with Cecilia. She thought that her son would have a higher place in the county if he married Lady Jane, the Duke of Clanville's daughter; and "that is what he ought to do," said Lady Chillingly to herself. She entertained none of the fear that had induced Sir Peter to extract from Kenelm the promise not to pledge his hand before he had received his father's consent. That the son of Lady Chillingly should make a /mesalliance/, however crotchety he might be in other respects, was a thought that it would have so disturbed her to admit that she did not admit it.

Such was the condition of things at Exmundham when the lengthy communication of Kenelm reached Sir Peter's hands.

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK KENELM CHILLINGLY — VOLUME 07 ***

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