

KENELM CHILLINGLY - BOOK 8.

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BOOK VIII.

CHAPTER I.

NEVER in his whole life had the mind of Sir Peter been so agitated as it was during and after the perusal of Kenelm's flighty composition. He had received it at the breakfast-table, and, opening it eagerly, ran his eye hastily over the contents, till he very soon arrived at sentences which appalled him. Lady Chillingly, who was fortunately busied at the tea-urn, did not observe the dismay on his countenance. It was visible only to Cecilia and to Gordon. Neither guessed who that letter was from.

"No bad news, I hope," said Cecilia, softly.

"Bad news," echoed Sir Peter. "No, my dear, no; a letter on business. It seems terribly long," and he thrust the packet into his pocket, muttering, "see to it by and by."

"That slovenly farmer of yours, Mr. Nostock, has failed, I suppose," said Mr. Travers, looking up and observing a quiver on his host's lip. "I told you he would,—a fine farm too. Let me choose you another tenant."

Sir Peter shook his head with a wan smile.

"Nostock will not fail. There have been six generations of Nostocks on the farm."

"So I should guess," said Travers, dryly.

"And—and," faltered Sir Peter, "if the last of the race fails, he must lean upon me, and—if one of the two break down—it shall not be—"

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"Shall not be that cross-cropping blockhead, my dear Sir Peter. This is carrying benevolence too far."

Here the tact and /savoir vivre/ of Chillingly Gordon came to the rescue of the host. Possessing himself of the "Times" newspaper, he uttered an exclamation of surprise, genuine or simulated, and read aloud an extract from the leading article, announcing an impending change in the Cabinet.

As soon as he could quit the breakfast-table, Sir Peter hurried into his library and there gave himself up to the study of Kenelm's unwelcome communication. The task took him long, for he stopped at intervals, overcome by the struggle of his heart, now melted into sympathy with the passionate eloquence of a son hitherto so free from amorous romance, and now sorrowing for the ruin of his own cherished hopes. This uneducated country girl would never be such a helpmate to a man like Kenelm as would have been Cecilia Travers. At length, having finished the letter, he buried his head between his clasped hands, and tried hard to realize the situation that placed the father and son into such direct antagonism.

"But," he murmured, "after all it is the boy's happiness that must be consulted. If he will not be happy in my way, what right have I to say that he shall not be happy in his?"

Just then Cecilia came softly into the room. She had acquired the privilege of entering his library at will; sometimes to choose a book of his recommendation, sometimes to direct and seal his letters,—Sir Peter was grateful to any one who saved him an extra trouble,—and sometimes, especially at this hour, to decoy him forth into his wonted constitutional walk.

He lifted his face at the sound of her approaching tread and her winning voice, and the face was so sad that the tears rushed to her eyes on seeing it. She laid her hand on his shoulder, and said pleadingly, "Dear Sir Peter, what is it,—what is it?"

"Ah—ah, my dear," said Sir Peter, gathering up the scattered sheets of Kenelm's effusion with hurried, trembling hands. "Don't ask,—don't talk of it; 'tis but one of the disappointments that all of us must undergo, when we invest our hopes in the uncertain will of others."

Then, observing that the tears were trickling down the girl's fair, pale cheeks, he took her hand in both his, kissed her forehead, and said, whisperingly, "Pretty one, how good you have been to me! Heaven bless you. What a wife you will be to some man!"

Thus saying, he shambled out of the room through the open casement. She followed him impulsively, wonderingly; but before she reached his

side he turned round, waved his hand with a gently repelling gesture, and went his way alone through dense fir-groves which had been planted in honour of Kenelm's birth.

CHAPTER II.

KENELM arrived at Exmundham just in time to dress for dinner. His arrival was not unexpected, for the morning after his father had received his communication, Sir Peter had said to Lady Chillingly—"that he had heard from Kenelm to the effect that he might be down any day."

"Quite time he should come," said Lady Chillingly. "Have you his letter about you?"

"No, my dear Caroline. Of course he sends you his kindest love, poor fellow."

"Why poor fellow? Has he been ill?"

"No; but there seems to be something on his mind. If so we must do what we can to relieve it. He is the best of sons, Caroline."

"I am sure I have nothing to say against him, except," added her Ladyship, reflectively, "that I do wish he were a little more like other young men."

"Hum-like Chillingly Gordon, for instance?"

"Well, yes; Mr. Gordon is a remarkably well-bred, sensible young man. How different from that disagreeable, bearish father of his, who went to law with you!"

"Very different indeed, but with just as much of the Chillingly blood in him. How the Chillinglys ever gave birth to a Kenelm is a question much more puzzling."

"Oh, my dear Sir Peter, don't be metaphysical. You know how I hate puzzles."

"And yet, Caroline, I have to thank you for a puzzle which I can never interpret by my brain. There are a great many puzzles in human nature which can only be interpreted by the heart."

"Very true," said Lady Chillingly. "I suppose Kenelm is to have his old room, just opposite to Mr. Gordon's."

"Ay-ay, just opposite. Opposite they will be all their lives. Only think, Caroline, I have made a discovery!"

"Dear me! I hope not. Your discoveries are generally very expensive, and bring us in contact with such very odd people."

"This discovery shall not cost us a penny, and I don't know any people so odd as not to comprehend it. Briefly it is this: To genius the first requisite is heart; it is no requisite at all to talent. My dear Caroline, Gordon has as much talent as any young man I know, but he wants the first requisite of genius. I am not by any means sure that Kenelm has genius, but there is no doubt that he has the first requisite of genius,—heart. Heart is a very perplexing, wayward, irrational thing; and that perhaps accounts for the general incapacity to comprehend genius, while any fool can comprehend talent. My dear Caroline, you know that it is very seldom, not more than once in three years, that I presume to have a will of my own against a will of yours; but should there come a question in which our son's heart is concerned, then (speaking between ourselves) my will must govern yours."

"Sir Peter is growing more odd every day," said Lady Chillingly to herself when left alone. "But he does not mean ill, and there are worse husbands in the world."

Therewith she rang for her maid, gave requisite orders for the preparing of Kenelm's room, which had not been slept in for many months, and then consulted that functionary as to the adaptation of some dress of hers, too costly to be laid aside, to the style of some dress less costly which Lady Glenalvon had imported from Paris as *la derniere mode*.

On the very day on which Kenelm arrived at Exmundham, Chillingly Gordon had received this letter from Mr. Gerald Danvers.

DEAR GORDON,—In the ministerial changes announced as rumour in the public papers, and which you may accept as certain, that sweet little cherub—is to be sent to sit up aloft and pray there for the life of poor Jack; namely, of the government he leaves below. In accepting the peerage, which I persuaded him to do,—creates a vacancy for the borough of —, just the place for you, far better in every way than Saxborough. — promises to recommend you to his committee. Come to town at once. Yours, etc.

G. DANVERS.

Gordon showed this letter to Mr. Travers, and, on receiving the hearty good-wishes of that gentleman, said, with emotion partly genuine, partly assumed, "You cannot guess all that the realization of your

good-wishes would be. Once in the House of Commons, and my motives for action are so strong that—do not think me very conceited if I count upon Parliamentary success.”

”My dear Gordon, I am as certain of your success as I am of my own existence.”

”Should I succeed,—should the great prizes of public life be within my reach,—should I lift myself into a position that would warrant my presumption, do you think I could come to you and say, ”There is an object of ambition dearer to me than power and office,—the hope of attaining which was the strongest of all my motives of action? And in that hope shall I also have the good-wishes of the father of Cecilia Travers?”

”My dear fellow, give me your hand; you speak manfully and candidly as a gentleman should speak. I answer in the same spirit. I don’t pretend to say that I have not entertained views for Cecilia which included hereditary rank and established fortune in a suitor to her hand, though I never should have made them imperative conditions. I am neither potentate nor /parvenu/ enough for that; and I can never forget” (here every muscle in the man’s face twitched) ”that I myself married for love, and was so happy. How happy Heaven only knows! Still, if you had thus spoken a few weeks ago, I should not have replied very favourably to your question. But now that I have seen so much of you, my answer is this: If you lose your election,—if you don’t come into Parliament at all, you have my good-wishes all the same. If you win my daughter’s heart, there is no man on whom I would more willingly bestow her hand. There she is, by herself too, in the garden. Go and talk to her.”

Gordon hesitated. He knew too well that he had not won her heart, though he had no suspicion that it was given to another. And he was much too clever not to know also how much he hazards who, in affairs of courtship, is premature.

”Ah!” he said, ”I cannot express my gratitude for words so generous, encouragement so cheering. But I have never yet dared to utter to Miss Travers a word that would prepare her even to harbour a thought of me as a suitor. And I scarcely think I should have the courage to go through this election with the grief of her rejection on my heart.”

”Well, go in and win the election first; meanwhile, at all events, take leave of Cecilia.”

Gordon left his friend, and joined Miss Travers, resolved not indeed to risk a formal declaration, but to sound his way to his chances of acceptance.

The interview was very brief. He did sound his way skilfully, and

felt it very unsafe for his footsteps. The advantage of having gained the approval of the father was too great to be lost altogether, by one of those decided answers on the part of the daughter which allow of no appeal, especially to a poor gentleman who woos an heiress.

He returned to Travers, and said simply, "I bear with me her good-wishes as well as yours. That is all. I leave myself in your kind hands."

Then he hurried away to take leave of his host and hostess, say a few significant words to the ally he had already gained in Mrs. Campion, and within an hour was on his road to London, passing on his way the train that bore Kenelm to Exmundham. Gordon was in high spirits. At least he felt as certain of winning Cecilia as he did of winning his election.

"I have never yet failed in what I desired," said he to himself, "because I have ever taken pains not to fail."

The cause of Gordon's sudden departure created a great excitement in that quiet circle, shared by all except Cecilia and Sir Peter.

CHAPTER III.

KENELM did not see either father or mother till he appeared at dinner. Then he was seated next to Cecilia. There was but little conversation between the two; in fact, the prevalent subject of talk was general and engrossing, the interest in Chillingly Gordon's election; predictions of his success, of what he would do in Parliament. "Where," said Lady Glenalvon, "there is such a dearth of rising young men, that if he were only half as clever as he is he would be a gain."

"A gain to what?" asked Sir Peter, testily. "To his country? about which I don't believe he cares a brass button."

To this assertion Leopold Travers replied warmly, and was not less warmly backed by Mrs. Campion.

"For my part," said Lady Glenalvon, in conciliatory accents, "I think every able man in Parliament is a gain to the country; and he may not serve his country less effectively because he does not boast of his love for it. The politicians I dread most are those so rampant in France nowadays, the bawling patriots. When Sir Robert Walpole said, 'All those men have their price,' he pointed to the men who called themselves 'patriots.'"

"Bravo!" cried Travers.

"Sir Robert Walpole showed his love for his country by corrupting it. There are many ways besides bribing for corrupting a country," said Kenelm, mildly, and that was Kenelm's sole contribution to the general conversation.

It was not till the rest of the party had retired to rest that the conference, longed for by Kenelm, dreaded by Sir Peter, took place in the library. It lasted deep into the night; both parted with lightened hearts and a fonder affection for each other. Kenelm had drawn so charming a picture of the Fairy, and so thoroughly convinced Sir Peter that his own feelings towards her were those of no passing youthful fancy, but of that love which has its roots in the innermost heart, that though it was still with a sigh, a deep sigh, that he dismissed the thought of Cecilia, Sir Peter did dismiss it; and, taking comfort at last from the positive assurance that Lily was of gentle birth, and the fact that her name of Mordaunt was that of ancient and illustrious houses, said, with half a smile, "It might have been worse, my dear boy. I began to be afraid that, in spite of the teachings of Mivers and Welby, it was 'The Miller's Daughter,' after all. But we still have a difficult task to persuade your poor mother. In covering your first flight from our roof I unluckily put into her head the notion of Lady Jane, a duke's daughter, and the notion has never got out of it. That comes of fibbing."

"I count on Lady Glenalvon's influence on my mother in support of your own," said Kenelm. "If so accepted an oracle in the great world pronounce in my favour, and promise to present my wife at Court and bring her into fashion, I think that my mother will consent to allow us to reset the old family diamonds for her next reappearance in London. And then, too, you can tell her that I will stand for the county. I will go into Parliament, and if I meet there our clever cousin, and find that he does not care a brass button for the country, take my word for it, I will lick him more easily than I licked Tom Bowles."

"Tom Bowles! who is he?—ah! I remember some letter of yours in which you spoke of a Bowles, whose favourite study was mankind, a moral philosopher."

"Moral philosophers," answered Kenelm, "have so muddled their brains with the alcohol of new ideas that their moral legs have become shaky, and the humane would rather help them to bed than give them a licking. My Tom Bowles is a muscular Christian, who became no less muscular, but much more Christian, after he was licked."

And in this pleasant manner these two oddities settled their conference, and went up to bed with arms wrapped round each other's shoulder.

CHAPTER IV.

KENELM found it a much harder matter to win Lady Glenalvon to his side than he had anticipated. With the strong interest she had taken in Kenelm's future, she could not but revolt from the idea of his union with an obscure portionless girl whom he had only known a few weeks, and of whose very parentage he seemed to know nothing, save an assurance that she was his equal in birth. And, with the desire, which she had cherished almost as fondly as Sir Peter, that Kenelm might win a bride in every way so worthy of his choice as Cecilia Travers, she felt not less indignant than regretful at the overthrow of her plans.

At first, indeed, she was so provoked that she would not listen to his pleadings. She broke away from him with a rudeness she had never exhibited to any one before, refused to grant him another interview in order to re-discuss the matter, and said that, so far from using her influence in favour of his romantic folly, she would remonstrate well with Lady Chillingly and Sir Peter against yielding their assent to his "thus throwing himself away."

It was not till the third day after his arrival that, touched by the grave but haughty mournfulness of his countenance, she yielded to the arguments of Sir Peter in the course of a private conversation with that worthy baronet. Still it was reluctantly (she did not fulfil her threat of remonstrance with Lady Chillingly) that she conceded the point, that a son who, succeeding to the absolute fee-simple of an estate, had volunteered the resettlement of it on terms singularly generous to both his parents, was entitled to some sacrifice of their inclinations on a question in which he deemed his happiness vitally concerned; and that he was of age to choose for himself independently of their consent, but for a previous promise extracted from him by his father, a promise which, rigidly construed, was not extended to Lady Chillingly, but confined to Sir Peter as the head of the family and master of the household. The father's consent was already given, and, if in his reverence for both parents Kenelm could not dispense with his mother's approval, surely it was the part of a true friend to remove every scruple from his conscience, and smooth away every obstacle to a love not to be condemned because it was disinterested.

After this conversation, Lady Glenalvon sought Kenelm, found him gloomily musing on the banks of the trout-stream, took his arm, led him into the sombre glades of the fir-grove, and listened patiently to all he had to say. Even then her woman's heart was not won to his reasonings, until he said pathetically, "You thanked me once for

saving your son's life: you said then that you could never repay me; you can repay me tenfold. Could your son, who is now, we trust, in heaven, look down and judge between us, do you think he would approve you if you refuse?"

Then Lady Glenalvon wept, and took his hand, kissed his forehead as a mother might kiss it, and said, "You triumph; I will go to Lady Chillingly at once. Marry her whom you so love, on one condition: marry her from my house."

Lady Glenalvon was not one of those women who serve a friend by halves. She knew well how to propitiate and reason down the apathetic temperament of Lady Chillingly; she did not cease till that lady herself came into Kenelm's room, and said very quietly,—

"So you are going to propose to Miss Mordaunt, the Warwickshire Mordaunts I suppose? Lady Glenalvon says she is a very lovely girl, and will stay with her before the wedding. And as the young lady is an orphan Lady Glenalvon's uncle the Duke, who is connected with the eldest branch of the Mordaunts, will give her away. It will be a very brilliant affair. I am sure I wish you happy; it is time you should have sown your wild oats."

Two days after the consent thus formally given, Kenelm quitted Exmundham. Sir Peter would have accompanied him to pay his respects to the intended, but the agitation he had gone through brought on a sharp twinge of the gout, which consigned his feet to flannels.

After Kenelm had gone, Lady Glenalvon went into Cecilia's room. Cecilia was seated very desolately by the open window. She had detected that something of an anxious and painful nature had been weighing upon the minds of father and son, and had connected it with the letter which had so disturbed the even mind of Sir Peter; but she did not divine what the something was, and if mortified by a certain reserve, more distant than heretofore, which had characterized Kenelm's manner towards herself, the mortification was less sensibly felt than a tender sympathy for the sadness she had observed on his face and yearned to soothe. His reserve had, however, made her own manner more reserved than of old, for which she was now rather chiding herself than reproaching him.

Lady Glenalvon put her arms round Cecilia's neck and kissed her, whispering, "That man has so disappointed me: he is so unworthy of the happiness I had once hoped for him!"

"Whom do you speak of?" murmured Cecilia, turning very pale.

"Kenelm Chillingly. It seems that he has conceived a fancy for some penniless girl whom he has met in his wanderings, has come here to get the consent of his parents to propose to her, has obtained their

consent, and is gone to propose.”

Cecilia remained silent for a moment with her eyes closed, then she said, ”He is worthy of all happiness, and he would never make an unworthy choice. Heaven bless him—and—and—” She would have added, ”his bride,” but her lips refused to utter the word bride.

”Cousin Gordon is worth ten of him,” cried Lady Glenalvon, indignantly.

She had served Kenelm, but she had not forgiven him.

CHAPTER V.

KENELM slept in London that night, and, the next day, being singularly fine for an English summer, he resolved to go to Moleswich on foot. He had no need this time to encumber himself with a knapsack; he had left sufficient change of dress in his lodgings at Cromwell Lodge.

It was towards the evening when he found himself in one of the prettiest rural villages by which

”Wanders the hoary Thames along
His silver-winding way.”

It was not in the direct road from London to Moleswich, but it was a pleasanter way for a pedestrian. And when, quitting the long street of the sultry village, he came to the shelving margin of the river, he was glad to rest a while, enjoy the cool of the rippling waters, and listen to their placid murmurs amid the rushes in the bordering shallows. He had ample time before him. His rambles while at Cromwell Lodge had made him familiar with the district for miles round Moleswich, and he knew that a footpath through the fields at the right would lead him, in less than an hour, to the side of the tributary brook on which Cromwell Lodge was placed, opposite the wooden bridge which conducted to Grasmere and Moleswich.

To one who loves the romance of history, English history, the whole course of the Thames is full of charm. Ah! could I go back to the days in which younger generations than that of Kenelm Chillingly were unborn, when every wave of the Rhine spoke of history and romance to me, what fairies should meet on thy banks, O thou our own Father Thames! Perhaps some day a German pilgrim may repay tenfold to thee the tribute rendered by the English kinsman to the Father Rhine.

Listening to the whispers of the reeds, Kenelm Chillingly felt the

haunting influence of the legendary stream. Many a poetic incident or tradition in antique chronicle, many a votive rhyme in song, dear to forefathers whose very names have become a poetry to us, thronged dimly and confusedly back to his memory, which had little cared to retain such graceful trinkets in the treasure-house of love. But everything that, from childhood upward, connects itself with romance, revives with yet fresher bloom in the memories of him who loves.

And to this man, through the first perilous season of youth, so abnormally safe from youth's most wanted peril,—to this would-be pupil of realism, this learned adept in the schools of a Welby or a Mivers,—to this man, love came at last as with the fatal powers of the fabled Cytherea; and with that love all the realisms of life became ideals, all the stern lines of our commonplace destinies undulated into curves of beauty, all the trite sounds of our every-day life attuned into delicacies of song. How full of sanguine yet dreamy bliss was his heart—and seemed his future—in the gentle breeze and the softened glow of that summer eve! He should see Lily the next morn, and his lips were now free to say all that they had as yet suppressed.

Suddenly he was roused from the half-awake, half-asleep happiness that belongs to the moments in which we transport ourselves into Elysium, by the carol of a voice more loudly joyous than that of his own heart—

”Singing, singing,
Lustily singing,
Down the road, with his dogs before,
Came the Ritter of Nierestein.”

Kenelm turned his head so quickly that he frightened Max, who had for the last minute been standing behind him inquisitively with one paw raised, and sniffing, in some doubt whether he recognized an old acquaintance; but at Kenelm's quick movement the animal broke into a nervous bark, and ran back to his master.

The minstrel, little heeding the figure reclined on the bank, would have passed on with his light tread and his cheery carol, but Kenelm rose to his feet, and holding out his hand, said, ”I hope you don't share Max's alarm at meeting me again?”

”Ah, my young philosopher, is it indeed you?”

”If I am to be designated a philosopher it is certainly not I. And, honestly speaking, I am not the same. I, who spent that pleasant day with you among the fields round Luscombe two years ago—”

”Or who advised me at Tor Hadham to string my lyre to the praise of a beefsteak. I, too, am not quite the same,—I, whose dog presented you

with the begging-tray.”

”Yet you still go through the world singing.”

”Even that vagrant singing time is pretty well over. But I disturbed you from your repose; I would rather share it. You are probably not going my way, and as I am in no hurry, I should not like to lose the opportunity chance has so happily given me of renewing acquaintance with one who has often been present to my thoughts since we last met.” Thus saying, the minstrel stretched himself at ease on the bank, and Kenelm followed his example.

There certainly was a change in the owner of the dog with the begging-tray, a change in costume, in countenance, in that indescribable self-evidence which we call ”manner.” The costume was not that Bohemian attire in which Kenelm had first encountered the wandering minstrel, nor the studied, more graceful garb, which so well became his shapely form during his visit to Luscombe. It was now neatly simple, the cool and quiet summer dress any English gentleman might adopt in a long rural walk. And as he uncovered his head to court the cooling breeze, there was a graver dignity in the man’s handsome Rubens-like face, a line of more concentrated thought in the spacious forehead, a thread or two of gray shimmering here and there through the thick auburn curls of hair and beard. And in his manner, though still very frank, there was just perceptible a sort of self-assertion, not offensive, but manly; such as does not misbecome one of maturer years, and of some established position, addressing another man much younger than himself, who in all probability has achieved no position at all beyond that which the accident of birth might assign to him.

”Yes,” said the minstrel, with a half-suppressed sigh, ”the last year of my vagrant holidays has come to its close. I recollect that the first day we met by the road-side fountain, I advised you to do like me, seek amusement and adventure as a foot-traveller. Now, seeing you, evidently a gentleman by education and birth, still a foot-traveller, I feel as if I ought to say, ’You have had enough of such experience: vagabond life has its perils as well as charms; cease it, and settle down.’”

”I think of doing so,” replied Kenelm, laconically.

”In a profession?—army, law, medicine?”

”No.”

”Ah, in marriage then. Right; give me your hand on that. So a petticoat indeed has at last found its charm for you in the actual world as well as on the canvas of a picture?”

"I conclude," said Kenelm, evading any direct notice of that playful taunt, "I conclude from your remark that it is in marriage /you/ are about to settle down."

"Ay, could I have done so before I should have been saved from many errors, and been many years nearer to the goal which dazzled my sight through the haze of my boyish dreams."

"What is that goal,—the grave?"

"The grave! That which allows of no grave,—fame."

"I see—despite of what you just now said—you still mean to go through the world seeking a poet's fame."

"Alas! I resign that fancy," said the minstrel, with another half-sigh. "It was not indeed wholly, but in great part the hope of the poet's fame that made me a truant in the way to that which destiny, and such few gifts as Nature conceded to me, marked out for my proper and only goal. But what a strange, delusive Will-o'-the-Wisp the love of verse-making is! How rarely a man of good sense deceives himself as to other things for which he is fitted, in which he can succeed; but let him once drink into his being the charm of verse-making, how the glamour of the charm bewitches his understanding! how long it is before he can believe that the world will not take his word for it, when he cries out to sun, moon, and stars, 'I, too, am a poet.' And with what agonies, as if at the wrench of soul from life, he resigns himself at last to the conviction that whether he or the world be right, it comes to the same thing. Who can plead his cause before a court that will not give him a hearing?"

It was with an emotion so passionately strong, and so intensely painful, that the owner of the dog with the begging-tray thus spoke, that Kenelm felt, through sympathy, as if he himself were torn asunder by the wrench of life from soul. But then Kenelm was a mortal so eccentric that, if a single acute suffering endured by a fellow mortal could be brought before the evidence of his senses, I doubt whether he would not have suffered as much as that fellow-mortal. So that, though if there were a thing in the world which Kenelm Chillingly would care not to do, it was verse-making, his mind involuntarily hastened to the arguments by which he could best mitigate the pang of the verse-maker.

Quoth he: "According to my very scanty reading, you share the love of verse-making with men the most illustrious in careers which have achieved the goal of fame. It must, then, be a very noble love: Augustus, Pollio, Varius, Maecenas,—the greatest statesmen of their day,—they were verse-makers. Cardinal Richelieu was a verse-maker; Walter Raleigh and Philip Sidney, Fox, Burke, Sheridan, Warren Hastings, Canning, even the grave William Pitt,—all were

verse-makers. Verse-making did not retard—no doubt the qualities essential to verse-making accelerated—their race to the goal of fame. What great painters have been verse-makers! Michael Angelo, Leonardo da Vinci, Salvator Rosa”—and Heaven knows how many other great names Kenelm Chillingly might have proceeded to add to his list, if the minstrel had not here interposed.

”What! all those mighty painters were verse-makers?”

”Verse-makers so good, especially Michael Angelo,—the greatest painter of all,—that they would have had the fame of poets, if, unfortunately for that goal of fame, their glory in the sister art of painting did not outshine it. But when you give to your gift of song the modest title of verse-making, permit me to observe that your gift is perfectly distinct from that of the verse-maker. Your gift, whatever it may be, could not exist without some sympathy with the non-verse-making human heart. No doubt in your foot travels, you have acquired not only observant intimacy with external Nature in the shifting hues at each hour of a distant mountain, in the lengthening shadows which yon sunset casts on the waters at our feet, in the habits of the thrush dropped fearlessly close beside me, in that turf moistened by its neighbourhood to those dripping rushes, all of which I could describe no less accurately than you,—as a Peter Bell might describe them no less accurately than a William Wordsworth. But in such songs of yours as you have permitted me to hear, you seem to have escaped out of that elementary accident of the poet’s art, and to touch, no matter how slightly, on the only lasting interest which the universal heart of man can have in the song of the poet; namely, in the sound which the poet’s individual sympathy draws forth from the latent chords in that universal heart. As for what you call ‘the world,’ what is it more than the fashion of the present day? How far the judgment of that is worth a poet’s pain I can’t pretend to say. But of one thing I am sure, that while I could as easily square the circle as compose a simple couplet addressed to the heart of a simple audience with sufficient felicity to decoy their praises into Max’s begging-tray, I could spin out by the yard the sort of verse-making which characterizes the fashion of the present day.”

Much flattered, and not a little amused, the wandering minstrel turned his bright countenance, no longer dimmed by a cloud, towards that of his lazily reclined consoler, and answered gayly,—

”You say that you could spin out by the yard verses in the fashion of the present day. I wish you would give me a specimen of your skill in that handiwork.”

”Very well; on one condition, that you will repay my trouble by a specimen of your own verses, not in the fashion of the present day,—something which I can construe. I defy you to construe mine.”

"Agreed."

"Well, then, let us take it for granted that this is the Augustan age of English poetry, and that the English language is dead, like the Latin. Suppose I am writing for a prize-medal in English, as I wrote at college for a prize-medal in Latin: of course, I shall be successful in proportion as I introduce the verbal elegances peculiar to our Augustan age, and also catch the prevailing poetic characteristic of that classical epoch.

"Now I think that every observant critic will admit that the striking distinctions of the poetry most in the fashion of the present day, namely, of the Augustan age, are,—first, a selection of such verbal elegances as would have been most repulsive to the barbaric taste of the preceding century; and, secondly, a very lofty disdain of all prosaic condescensions to common-sense, and an elaborate cultivation of that element of the sublime which Mr. Burke defines under the head of obscurity.

"These premises conceded, I will only ask you to choose the metre. Blank verse is very much in fashion just now."

"Pooh! blank verse indeed! I am not going so to free your experiment from the difficulties of rhyme."

"It is all one to me," said Kenelm, yawning; "rhyme be it: heroic or lyrical?"

"Heroics are old-fashioned; but the Chaucer couplet, as brought to perfection by our modern poets, I think the best adapted to dainty leaves and uncrackable nuts. I accept the modern Chaucerian. The subject?"

"Oh, never trouble yourself about that. By whatever title your Augustan verse-maker labels his poem, his genius, like Pindar's, disdains to be cramped by the subject. Listen, and don't suffer Max to howl, if he can help it. Here goes."

And in an affected but emphatic sing-song Kenelm began:—

"In Attica the gentle Pythias dwelt.
Youthful he was, and passing rich: he felt
As if nor youth nor riches could suffice
For bliss. Dark-eyed Sophronia was a nice
Girl: and one summer day, when Neptune drove
His sea-car slowly, and the olive grove
That skirts Ilissus, to thy shell, Harmonia,
Rippled, he said 'I love thee' to Sophronia.
Crocus and iris, when they heard him, wagged
Their pretty heads in glee: the honey-bagged

Bees became altars: and the forest dove
Her plumage smoothed. Such is the charm of love.
Of this sweet story do ye long for more?
Wait till I publish it in volumes four;
Which certain critics, my good friends, will cry
Up beyond Chaucer. Take their word for 't. I
Say 'Trust them, but not read,-or you'll not buy.'"

"You have certainly kept your word," said the minstrel, laughing; "and if this be the Augustan age, and the English were a dead language, you deserve to win the prize-medal."

"You flatter me," said Kenelm, modestly. "But if I, who never before strung two rhymes together, can improvise so readily in the style of the present day, why should not a practical rhymester like yourself dash off at a sitting a volume or so in the same style; disguising completely the verbal elegances borrowed, adding to the delicacies of the rhyme by the frequent introduction of a line that will not scan, and towering yet more into the sublime by becoming yet more unintelligible? Do that, and I promise you the most glowing panegyric in 'The Londoner,' for I will write it myself."

"'The Londoner'!" exclaimed the minstrel, with an angry flush on his cheek and brow, "my bitter, relentless enemy."

"I fear, then, you have as little studied the critical press of the Augustan age as you have imbued your muse with the classical spirit of its verse. For the art of writing a man must cultivate himself. The art of being reviewed consists in cultivating the acquaintance of reviewers. In the Augustan age criticism is cliquism. Belong to a clique and you are Horace or Tibullus. Belong to no clique and, of course, you are Bavius or Maevius. 'The Londoner' is the enemy of no man: it holds all men in equal contempt. But as, in order to amuse, it must abuse, it compensates the praise it is compelled to bestow upon the members of its clique by heaping additional scorn upon all who are cliqueless. Hit him hard: he has no friends."

"Ah," said the minstrel, "I believe that there is much truth in what you say. I never had a friend among the cliques. And Heaven knows with what pertinacity those from whom I, in utter ignorance of the rules which govern so-called organs of opinion, had hoped, in my time of struggle, for a little sympathy, a kindly encouragement, have combined to crush me down. They succeeded long. But at last I venture to hope that I am beating them. Happily, Nature endowed me with a sanguine, joyous, elastic temperament. He who never despairs seldom completely fails."

This speech rather perplexed Kenelm, for had not the minstrel declared that his singing days were over, that he had decided on the

renunciation of verse-making? What other path to fame, from which the critics had not been able to exclude his steps, was he, then, now pursuing,—he whom Kenelm had assumed to belong to some commercial moneymaking firm? No doubt some less difficult prose-track, probably a novel. Everybody writes novels nowadays, and as the public will read novels without being told to do so, and will not read poetry unless they are told that they ought, possibly novels are not quite so much at the mercy of cliques as are the poems of our Augustan age.

However, Kenelm did not think of seeking for further confidence on that score. His mind at that moment, not unnaturally, wandered from books and critics to love and wedlock.

“Our talk,” said he, “has digressed into fretful courses; permit me to return to the starting-point. You are going to settle down into the peace of home. A peaceful home is like a good conscience. The rains without do not pierce its roof, the winds without do not shake its walls. If not an impertinent question, is it long since you have known your intended bride?”

“Yes, very long.”

“And always loved her?”

“Always, from her infancy. Out of all womankind, she was designed to be my life’s playmate and my soul’s purifier. I know not what might have become of me, if the thought of her had not walked beside me as my guardian angel. For, like many vagrants from the beaten high roads of the world, there is in my nature something of that lawlessness which belongs to high animal spirits, to the zest of adventure, and the warm blood that runs into song, chiefly because song is the voice of a joy. And no doubt, when I look back on the past years I must own that I have too often been led astray from the objects set before my reason, and cherished at my heart, by erring impulse or wanton fancy.”

“Petticoat interest, I presume,” interposed Kenelm, dryly.

“I wish I could honestly answer ‘No,’” said the minstrel, colouring high. “But from the worst, from all that would have permanently blasted the career to which I intrust my fortunes, all that would have rendered me unworthy of the pure love that now, I trust, awaits and crowns my dreams of happiness, I have been saved by the haunting smile in a sinless infantine face. Only once was I in great peril,—that hour of peril I recall with a shudder. It was at Luscombe.”

“At Luscombe!”

“In the temptation of a terrible crime I thought I heard a voice say, ‘Mischief! Remember the little child.’ In that supervision which is so readily accepted as a divine warning, when the imagination is

morbidly excited, and when the conscience, though lulled asleep for a moment, is still asleep so lightly that the sigh of a breeze, the fall of a leaf, can awake it with a start of terror, I took the voice for that of my guardian angel. Thinking it over later, and coupling the voice with the moral of those weird lines you repeated to me so appositely the next day, I conclude that I am not mistaken when I say it was from your lips that the voice which preserved me came."

"I confess the impertinence: you pardon it?"

The minstrel seized Kenelm's hand and pressed it earnestly.

"Pardon it! Oh, could you but guess what cause I have to be grateful, everlastingly grateful! That sudden cry, the remorse and horror of my own self that it struck into me,—deepened by those rugged lines which the next day made me shrink in dismay from 'the face of my darling sin'! Then came the turning-point of my life. From that day, the lawless vagabond within me was killed. I mean not, indeed, the love of Nature and of song which had first allured the vagabond, but the hatred of steadfast habits and of serious work,—/that/ was killed. I no longer trifled with my calling: I took to it as a serious duty. And when I saw her, whom fate has reserved and reared for my bride, her face was no longer in my eyes that of the playful child; the soul of the woman was dawning into it. It is but two years since that day, to me so eventful. Yet my fortunes are now secured. And if fame be not established, I am at last in a position which warrants my saying to her I love, 'The time has come when, without fear for thy future, I can ask thee to be mine.'"

The man spoke with so fervent a passion that Kenelm silently left him to recover his wonted self-possession,—not unwilling to be silent,—not unwilling, in the softness of the hour, passing from roseate sunset into starry twilight, to murmur to himself, "And the time, too, has come for me!"

After a few moments the minstrel resumed lightly and cheerily,—

"Sir, your turn: pray have you long known—judging by our former conversation you cannot have long loved—the lady whom you have wooed and won?"

As Kenelm had neither as yet wooed nor won the lady in question, and did not deem it necessary to enter into any details on the subject of love particular to himself, he replied by a general observation,—

"It seems to me that the coming of love is like the coming of spring: the date is not to be reckoned by the calendar. It may be slow and gradual; it may be quick and sudden. But in the morning, when we wake and recognize a change in the world without, verdure on the trees, blossoms on the sward, warmth in the sunshine, music in the air, then

we say Spring has come!"

"I like your illustration. And if it be an idle question to ask a lover how long he has known the beloved one, so it is almost as idle to ask if she be not beautiful. He cannot but see in her face the beauty she has given to the world without."

"True; and that thought is poetic enough to make me remind you that I favoured you with the maiden specimen of my verse-making on condition that you repaid me by a specimen of your own practical skill in the art. And I claim the right to suggest the theme. Let it be—"

"Of a beefsteak?"

"Tush, you have worn out that tasteless joke at my expense. The theme must be of love, and if you could improvise a stanza or two expressive of the idea you just uttered I shall listen with yet more pleased attention."

"Alas! I am no /improvisatore/. Yet I will avenge myself on your former neglect of my craft by chanting to you a trifle somewhat in unison with the thought you ask me to versify, but which you would not stay to hear at Tor Hadham (though you did drop a shilling into Max's tray); it was one of the songs I sang that evening, and it was not ill-received by my humble audience.

"THE BEAUTY OF THE MISTRESS IS IN THE LOVER'S EYE.

"Is she not pretty, my Mabel May?
Nobody ever yet called her so.
Are not her lineaments faultless, say?
If I must answer you plainly, No.

"Joy to believe that the maid I love
None but myself as she is can see;
Joy that she steals from her heaven above,
And is only revealed on this earth to me!"

As soon as he had finished this very artless ditty, the minstrel rose and said,—

"Now I must bid you good-by. My way lies through those meadows, and yours no doubt along the high road."

"Not so. Permit me to accompany you. I have a lodging not far from hence, to which the path through the fields is the shortest way."

The minstrel turned a somewhat surprised and somewhat inquisitive look towards Kenelm. But feeling, perhaps, that having withheld from his fellow-traveller all confidence as to his own name and attributes, he

had no right to ask any confidence from that gentleman not voluntarily made to him, he courteously said "that he wished the way were longer, since it would be so pleasantly halved," and strode forth at a brisk pace.

The twilight was now closing into the brightness of a starry summer night, and the solitude of the fields was unbroken. Both these men, walking side by side, felt supremely happy. But happiness is like wine; its effect differing with the differing temperaments on which it acts. In this case garrulous and somewhat vaunting with the one man, warm-coloured, sensuous, impressionable to the influences of external Nature, as an Aeolian harp to the rise or fall of a passing wind; and, with the other man, taciturn and somewhat modestly expressed, saturnine, meditative, not indeed dull to the influences of external Nature, but deeming them of no value, save where they passed out of the domain of the sensuous into that of the intellectual, and the soul of man dictated to the soulless Nature its own questions and its own replies.

The minstrel took the talk on himself, and the talk charmed his listener. It became so really eloquent in the tones of its utterance, in the frank play of its delivery, that I could no more adequately describe it than a reporter, however faithful to every word a true orator may say, can describe that which, apart from all words, belongs to the presence of the orator himself.

Not, then, venturing to report the language of this singular itinerant, I content myself with saying that the substance of it was of the nature on which it is said most men can be eloquent: it was personal to himself. He spoke of aspirations towards the achievement of a name, dating back to the dawn of memory; of early obstacles in lowly birth, stinted fortunes; of a sudden opening to his ambition while yet in boyhood, through the generous favour of a rich man, who said, "The child has genius: I will give it the discipline of culture; one day it shall repay to the world what it owes to me;" of studies passionately begun, earnestly pursued, and mournfully suspended in early youth. He did not say how or wherefore: he rushed on to dwell upon the struggles for a livelihood for himself and those dependent on him; how in such struggles he was compelled to divert toil and energy from the systematic pursuit of the object he had once set before him; the necessities for money were too urgent to be postponed to the visions of fame. "But even," he exclaimed, passionately, "even in such hasty and crude manifestations of what is within me, as circumstances limited my powers, I know that I ought to have found from those who profess to be authoritative judges the encouragement of praise. How much better, then, I should have done if I had found it! How a little praise warms out of a man the good that is in him, and the sneer of a contempt which he feels to be unjust chills the ardour to excel! However, I forced my way, so far as was then most essential to me, the sufficing breadmaker for those I loved; and in my holidays

of song and ramble I found a delight that atoned for all the rest. But still the desire of fame, once conceived in childhood, once nourished through youth, never dies but in our grave. Foot and hoof may tread it down, bud, leaf, stalk; its root is too deep below the surface for them to reach, and year after year stalk and leaf and bud re-emerge. Love may depart from our mortal life: we console ourselves; the beloved will be reunited to us in the life to come. But if he who sets his heart on fame loses it in this life, what can console him?"

"Did you not say a little while ago that fame allowed of no grave?"

"True; but if we do not achieve it before we ourselves are in the grave, what comfort can it give to us? Love ascends to heaven, to which we hope ourselves to ascend; but fame remains on the earth, which we shall never again revisit. And it is because fame is earth-born that the desire for it is the most lasting, the regret for the want of it the most bitter, to the child of earth. But I shall achieve it now; it is already in my grasp."

By this time the travellers had arrived at the brook, facing the wooden bridge beside Cromwell Lodge.

Here the minstrel halted; and Kenelm with a certain tremble in his voice, said, "Is it not time that we should make ourselves known to each other by name? I have no longer any cause to conceal mine, indeed I never had any cause stronger than whim,—Kenelm Chillingly, the only son of Sir Peter, of Exmundham, —shire."

"I wish your father joy of so clever a son," said the minstrel with his wonted urbanity. "You already know enough of me to be aware that I am of much humbler birth and station than you; but if you chance to have visited the exhibition of the Royal Academy this year—ah! I understand that start—you might have recognized a picture of which you have seen the rudimentary sketch, 'The Girl with the Flower-ball,' one of three pictures very severely handled by 'The Londoner,' but, in spite of that potent enemy, insuring fortune and promising fame to the wandering minstrel, whose name, if the sight of the pictures had induced you to inquire into that, you would have found to be Walter Melville. Next January I hope, thanks to that picture, to add, 'Associate of the Royal Academy.' The public will not let them keep me out of it, in spite of 'The Londoner.' You are probably an expected guest at one of the more imposing villas from which we see the distant lights. I am going to a very humble cottage, in which henceforth I hope to find my established home. I am there now only for a few days, but pray let me welcome you there before I leave. The cottage is called Grasmere."

CHAPTER VI.

THE minstrel gave a cordial parting shake of the hand to the fellow-traveller whom he had advised to settle down, not noticing how very cold had become the hand in his own genial grasp. Lightly he passed over the wooden bridge, preceded by Max, and merrily, when he had gained the other side of the bridge, came upon Kenelm's ear, through the hush of the luminous night, the verse of the uncompleted love-song,—

”Singing, singing,
Lustily singing,
Down the road, with his dogs before,
Came the Ritter of Nierestein.”

Love-song, uncompleted; why uncompleted? It was not given to Kenelm to divine the why. It was a love-song versifying one of the prettiest fairy tales in the world, which was a great favourite with Lily, and which Lion had promised Lily to versify, but only to complete it in her presence and to her perfect satisfaction.

CHAPTER VII.

IF I could not venture to place upon paper the exact words of an eloquent coveter of fame, the earth-born, still less can I dare to place upon paper all that passed through the voiceless heart of a coveter of love, the heaven-born.

From the hour in which Kenelm Chillingly had parted from Walter Melville until somewhere between sunrise and noon the next day, the summer joyousness of that external Nature which does now and then, though, for the most part, deceitfully, address to the soul of man questions and answers all her soulless own, laughed away the gloom of his misgivings.

No doubt this Walter Melville was the beloved guardian of Lily; no doubt it was Lily whom he designated as reserved and reared to become his bride. But on that question Lily herself had the sovereign voice. It remained yet to be seen whether Kenelm had deceived himself in the belief that had made the world so beautiful to him since the hour of their last parting. At all events it was due to her, due even to his rival, to assert his own claim to her choice. And the more he recalled all that Lily had ever said to him of her guardian, so openly, so frankly, proclaiming affection, admiration, gratitude, the more convincingly his reasonings allayed his fears, whispering, ”So

might a child speak of a parent: not so does the maiden speak of the man she loves; she can scarcely trust herself to praise."

In fine, it was not in despondent mood, nor with dejected looks, that, a little before noon, Kenelm crossed the bridge and re-entered the enchanted land of Grasmere. In answer to his inquiries, the servant who opened the door said that neither Mr. Melville nor Miss Mordaunt were at home; they had but just gone out together for a walk. He was about to turn back, when Mrs. Cameron came into the hall, and, rather by gesture than words, invited him to enter. Kenelm followed her into the drawing-room, taking his seat beside her. He was about to speak, when she interrupted him in a tone of voice so unlike its usual languor, so keen, so sharp, that it sounded like a cry of distress.

"I was just about to come to you. Happily, however, you find me alone, and what may pass between us will be soon over. But first tell me: you have seen your parents; you have asked their consent to wed a girl such as I described; tell me, oh tell me that that consent is refused!"

"On the contrary, I am here with their full permission to ask the hand of your niece."

Mrs. Cameron sank back in her chair, rocking herself to and fro in the posture of a person in great pain.

"I feared that. Walter said he had met you last evening; that you, like himself, entertained the thought of marriage. You, of course when you learned his name, must have known with whom his thought was connected. Happily, he could not divine what was the choice to which your youthful fancy had been so blindly led."

"My dear Mrs. Cameron," said Kenelm, very mildly, but very firmly, "you were aware of the purpose for which I left Moleswich a few days ago, and it seems to me that you might have forestalled my intention, the intention which brings me; thus early to your house. I come to say to Miss Mordaunt's guardian, 'I ask the hand of your ward. If you also woo her, I have a very noble rival. With both of us no consideration for our own happiness can be comparable to the duty of consulting hers. Let her choose between the two.'"

"Impossible!" exclaimed Mrs. Cameron; "impossible. You know not what you say; know not, guess not, how sacred are the claims of Walter Melville to all that the orphan whom he has protected from her very birth can give him in return. She has no right to a preference for another: her heart is too grateful to admit of one. If the choice were given to her between him and you, it is he whom she would choose. Solemnly I assure you of this. Do not, then, subject her to the pain of such a choice. Suppose, if you will, that you had attracted her fancy, and that now you proclaimed your love and urged your suit, she

would not, must not, the less reject your hand, but you might cloud her happiness in accepting Melville's. Be generous. Conquer your own fancy; it can be but a passing one. Speak not to her, nor to Mr. Melville, of a wish which can never be realized. Go hence, silently, and at once."

The words and the manner of the pale imploring woman struck a vague awe into the heart of her listener. But he did not the less resolutely answer, "I cannot obey you. It seems to me that my honour commands me to prove to your niece that, if I mistook the nature of her feelings towards me, I did not, by word or look, lead her to believe mine towards herself were less in earnest than they are; and it seems scarcely less honourable towards my worthy rival to endanger his own future happiness, should he discover later that his bride would have been happier with another. Why be so mysteriously apprehensive? If, as you say, with such apparent conviction, there is no doubt of your niece's preference for another, at a word from her own lips I depart, and you will see me no more. But that word must be said by her; and if you will not permit me to ask for it in your own house, I will take my chance of finding her now, on her walk with Mr. Melville; and, could he deny me the right to speak to her alone, that which I would say can be said in his presence. Ah! madam, have you no mercy for the heart that you so needlessly torture? If I must bear the worst, let me learn it, and at once."

"Learn it, then, from my lips," said Mrs. Cameron, speaking with voice unnaturally calm, and features rigidly set into stern composure. "And I place the secret you wring from me under the seal of that honour which you so vauntingly make your excuse for imperilling the peace of the home I ought never to have suffered you to enter. An honest couple, of humble station and narrow means, had an only son, who evinced in early childhood talents so remarkable that they attracted the notice of the father's employer, a rich man of very benevolent heart and very cultivated taste. He sent the child, at his expense, to a first-rate commercial school, meaning to provide for him later in his own firm. The rich man was the head partner of an eminent bank; but very infirm health, and tastes much estranged from business, had induced him to retire from all active share in the firm, the management of which was confined to a son whom he idolized. But the talents of the protege he had sent to school took there so passionate a direction towards art and estranged from trade, and his designs in drawing when shown to connoisseurs were deemed so promising of future excellence, that the patron changed his original intention, entered him as a pupil in the studio of a distinguished French painter, and afterwards bade him perfect his taste by the study of Italian and Flemish masterpieces.

"He was still abroad, when—" here Mrs. Cameron stopped, with visible effort, suppressed a sob, and went on, whisperingly, through teeth clenched together—"when a thunderbolt fell on the house of the

patron, shattering his fortunes, blasting his name. The son, unknown to the father, had been decoyed into speculations which proved unfortunate: the loss might have been easily retrieved in the first instance; unhappily he took the wrong course to retrieve it, and launched into new hazards. I must be brief. One day the world was startled by the news that a firm, famed for its supposed wealth and solidity, was bankrupt. Dishonesty was alleged, was proved, not against the father,—he went forth from the trial, censured indeed for neglect, not condemned for fraud, but a penniless pauper. The—son, the son, the idolized son, was removed from the prisoner's dock, a convicted felon, sentenced to penal servitude; escaped that sentence by—by—you guess—you guess. How could he escape except through death?—death by his own guilty deed?"

Almost as much overpowered by emotion as Mrs. Cameron herself, Kenelm covered his bended face with one hand, stretching out the other blindly to clasp her own, but she would not take it.

A dreary foreboding. Again before his eyes rose the old gray tower,—again in his ears thrilled the tragic tale of the Fletwodes. What was yet left untold held the young man in spell-bound silence. Mrs. Cameron resumed,—

"I said the father was a penniless pauper; he died lingeringly bedridden. But one faithful friend did not desert that bed,—the youth to whose genius his wealth had ministered. He had come from abroad with some modest savings from the sale of copies or sketches made in Florence. These savings kept a roof over the heads of the old man and the two helpless, broken-hearted women,—paupers like himself,—his own daughter and his son's widow. When the savings were gone, the young man stooped from his destined calling, found employment somehow, no matter how alien to his tastes, and these three whom his toil supported never wanted a home or food. Well, a few weeks after her husband's terrible death, his young widow (they had not been a year married) gave birth to a child,—a girl. She did not survive the exhaustion of her confinement many days. The shock of her death snapped the feeble thread of the poor father's life. Both were borne to the grave on the same day. Before they died, both made the same prayer to their sole two mourners, the felon's sister, the old man's young benefactor. The prayer was this, that the new-born infant should be reared, however humbly, in ignorance of her birth, of a father's guilt and shame. She was not to pass a suppliant for charity to rich and high-born kinsfolk, who had vouchsafed no word even of pity to the felon's guiltless father and as guiltless wife. That promise has been kept till now. I am that daughter. The name I bear, and the name which I gave to my niece, are not ours, save as we may indirectly claim them through alliances centuries ago. I have never married. I was to have been a bride, bringing to the representative of no ignoble house what was to have been a princely dower; the wedding day was fixed, when the bolt fell. I have never again seen my

betrothed. He went abroad and died there. I think he loved me; he knew I loved him. Who can blame him for deserting me? Who could marry the felon's sister? Who would marry the felon's child? Who but one? The man who knows her secret, and will guard it; the man who, caring little for other education, has helped to instil into her spotless childhood so steadfast a love of truth, so exquisite a pride of honour, that did she know such ignominy rested on her birth she would pine herself away."

"Is there only one man on earth," cried Kenelm, suddenly, rearing his face,—till then concealed and downcast,—and with a loftiness of pride on its aspect, new to its wonted mildness, "is there only one man who would deem the virgin at whose feet he desires to kneel and say, 'Deign to be the queen of my life,' not far too noble in herself to be debased by the sins of others before she was even born; is there only one man who does not think that the love of truth and the pride of honour are most royal attributes of woman or of man, no matter whether the fathers of the woman or the man were pirates as lawless as the fathers of Norman kings, or liars as unscrupulous, where their own interests were concerned, as have been the crowned representatives of lines as deservedly famous as Caesars and Bourbons, Tudors and Stuarts? Nobility, like genius, is inborn. One man alone guard /her/ secret!—guard a secret that if made known could trouble a heart that recoils from shame! Ah, madam, we Chillinglys are a very obscure, undistinguished race, but for more than a thousand years we have been English gentlemen. Guard her secret rather than risk the chance of discovery that could give her a pang! I would pass my whole life by her side in Kamtchatka, and even there I would not snatch a glimpse of the secret itself with mine own eyes: it should be so closely muffled and wrapped round by the folds of reverence and worship."

This burst of passion seemed to Mrs. Cameron the senseless declamation of an inexperienced, hot-headed young man; and putting it aside, much as a great lawyer dismisses as balderdash the florid rhetoric of some junior counsel, rhetoric in which the great lawyer had once indulged, or as a woman for whom romance is over dismisses as idle verbiage some romantic sentiment that befools her young daughter, Mrs. Cameron simply replied, "All this is hollow talk, Mr. Chillingly; let us come to the point. After all I have said, do you mean to persist in your suit to my niece?"

"I persist."

"What!" she cried, this time indignantly, and with generous indignation; "what, even were it possible that you could win your parents' consent to marry the child of a man condemned to penal servitude, or, consistently with the duties a son owes to parents, conceal that fact from them, could you, born to a station on which every gossip will ask, 'Who and what is the name of the future Lady Chillingly?' believe that the who and the what will never be

discovered! Have you, a mere stranger, unknown to us a few weeks ago, a right to say to Walter Melville, 'Resign to me that which is your sole reward for the sublime sacrifices, for the loyal devotion, for the watchful tenderness of patient years'?"

"Surely, madam," cried Kenelm, more startled, more shaken in soul by this appeal, than by the previous revelations, "surely, when we last parted, when I confided to you my love for your niece, when you consented to my proposal to return home and obtain my father's approval of my suit,—surely then was the time to say, 'No; a suitor with claims paramount and irresistible has come before you.'"

"I did not then know, Heaven is my witness, I did not then even suspect, that Walter Melville ever dreamed of seeking a wife in the child who had grown up under his eyes. You must own, indeed, how much I discouraged your suit; I could not discourage it more without revealing the secret of her birth, only to be revealed as an extreme necessity. But my persuasion was that your father would not consent to your alliance with one so far beneath the expectations he was entitled to form, and the refusal of that consent would terminate all further acquaintance between you and Lily, leaving her secret undisclosed. It was not till you had left, only indeed two days ago, that I received a letter from Walter Melville,—a letter which told me what I had never before conjectured. Here is the letter, read it, and then say if you have the heart to force yourself into rivalry, with—with—" She broke off, choked by her exertion, thrust the letter into his hands, and with keen, eager, hungry stare watched his countenance while he read.

— STREET, BLOOMSBURY.

MY DEAR FRIEND,—Joy and triumph! My picture is completed, the picture on which for so many months I have worked night and day in this den of a studio, without a glimpse of the green fields, concealing my address from every one, even from you, lest I might be tempted to suspend my labours. The picture is completed: it is sold; guess the price! Fifteen hundred guineas, and to a dealer,—a dealer! Think of that! It is to be carried about the country exhibited by itself. You remember those three little landscapes of mine which two years ago I would gladly have sold for ten pounds, only neither Lily nor you would let me. My good friend and earliest patron, the German merchant at Luscombe, who called on me yesterday, offered to cover them with guineas thrice piled over the canvas. Imagine how happy I felt when I forced him to accept them as a present. What a leap in a man's life it is when he can afford to say, "I give!" Now then, at last, at last I am in a position which justifies the utterance of the hope which has for eighteen years been my solace, my support; been the sunbeam that ever shone through the gloom when my fate was at the darkest; been the melody that buoyed me aloft as in the song of the skylark, when in the voices of men I heard but the laugh of scorn. Do

you remember the night on which Lily's mother besought us to bring up her child in ignorance of her parentage, not even to communicate to unkind and disdainful relatives that such a child was born? Do you remember how plaintively, and yet how proudly, she, so nobly born, so luxuriously nurtured, clasping my hand when I ventured to remonstrate, and say that her own family could not condemn her child because of the father's guilt,—she, the proudest woman I ever knew, she whose smile I can at rare moments detect in Lily, raised her head from her pillow, and gasped forth,—

”I am dying: the last words of the dying are commands. I command you to see that my child's lot is not that of a felon's daughter transported to the hearth of nobles. To be happy, her lot must be humble: no roof too humble to shelter, no husband too humble to wed, the felon's daughter.”

From that hour I formed a resolve that I would keep hand and heart free, that when the grandchild of my princely benefactor grew up into womanhood I might say to her, ”I am humbly born, but thy mother would have given thee to me.” The newborn, consigned to our charge, has now ripened into woman, and I have now so assured my fortune that it is no longer poverty and struggle that I should ask her to share. I am conscious that, were her fate not so exceptional, this hope of mine would be a vain presumption,—conscious that I am but the creature of her grandsire's bounty, and that from it springs all I ever can be,—conscious of the disparity in years,—conscious of many a past error and present fault. But, as fate so ordains, such considerations are trivial; I am her rightful choice. What other choice, compatible with these necessities which weigh, dear and honoured friend, immeasurably more on your sense of honour than they do upon mine? and yet mine is not dull. Granting, then, that you, her nearest and most responsible relative, do not condemn me for presumption, all else seems to me clear. Lily's childlike affection for me is too deep and too fond not to warm into a wife's love. Happily, too, she has not been reared in the stereotyped boarding-school shallowness of knowledge and vulgarities of gentility; but educated, like myself, by the free influences of Nature, longing for no halls and palaces save those that we build as we list, in fairyland; educated to comprehend and share the fancies which are more than booklore to the worshipper of art and song. In a day or two, perhaps the day after you receive this, I shall be able to escape from London, and most likely shall come on foot as usual. How I long to see once more the woodbine on the hedgerows, the green blades of the cornfields, the sunny lapse of the river, and dearer still the tiny falls of our own little noisy rill! Meanwhile I entreat you, dearest, gentlest, most honored of such few friends as my life has hitherto won to itself, to consider well the direct purport of this letter. If you, born in a grade so much higher than mine, feel that it is unwarrantable insolence in me to aspire to the hand of my patron's grandchild, say so plainly; and I remain not less grateful for your friendship than I was to your

goodness when dining for the first time at your father's palace. Shy and sensitive and young, I felt that his grand guests wondered why I was invited to the same board as themselves. You, then courted, admired, you had sympathetic compassion on the raw, sullen boy; left those, who then seemed to me like the gods and goddesses of a heathen Pantheon, to come and sit beside your father's protege and cheerily whisper to him such words as make a low-born ambitious lad go home light-hearted, saying to himself, "Some day or other." And what it is to an ambitious lad, fancying himself lifted by the gods and goddesses of a Pantheon, to go home light-hearted muttering to himself, "Some day or other," I doubt if even you can divine.

But should you be as kind to the presumptuous man as you were to the bashful boy, and say, "Realized be the dream, fulfilled be the object of your life! take from me as her next of kin, the last descendant of your benefactor," then I venture to address to you this request. You are in the place of mother to your sister's child, act for her as a keeper now, to prepare her mind and heart for the coming change in the relations between her and me. When I last saw her, six months ago, she was still so playfully infantine that it half seems to me I should be sinning against the reverence due to a child, if I said too abruptly, "You are woman, and I love you not as child but as woman." And yet, time is not allowed to me for long, cautious, and gradual slide from the relationship of friend into that of lover. I now understand what the great master of my art once said to me, "A career is a destiny." By one of those merchant princes who now at Manchester, as they did once at Genoa or Venice, reign alike over those two civiliziers of the world which to dull eyes seem antagonistic, Art and Commerce, an offer is made to me for a picture on a subject which strikes his fancy: an offer so magnificently liberal that his commerce must command my art; and the nature of the subject compels me to seek the banks of the Rhine as soon as may be. I must have all the hues of the foliage in the meridian glories of summer. I can but stay at Grasmere a very few days; but before I leave I must know this, am I going to work for Lily or am I not? On the answer to that question depends all. If not to work for her, there would be no glory in the summer, no triumph in art to me: I refuse the offer. If she says, "Yes; it is for me you work," then she becomes my destiny. She assures my career. Here I speak as an artist: nobody who is not an artist can guess how sovereign over even his moral being, at a certain critical epoch in his career of artist or his life of man, is the success or the failure of a single work. But I go on to speak as man. My love for Lily is such for the last six months that, though if she rejected me I should still serve art, still yearn for fame, it would be as an old man might do either. The youth of my life would be gone.

As man I say, all my thoughts, all my dreams of happiness, distinct from Art and fame, are summed up in the one question, "Is Lily to be my wife or not?"

Yours affectionately,

W. M.

Kenelm returned the letter without a word.

Enraged by his silence, Mrs. Cameron exclaimed, "Now, sir, what say you? You have scarcely known Lily five weeks. What is the feverish fancy of five weeks' growth to the lifelong devotion of a man like this? Do you now dare to say, 'I persist'?"

Kenelm waved his hand very quietly, as if to dismiss all conception of taunt and insult and said with his soft melancholy eyes fixed upon the working features of Lily's aunt, "This man is more worthy of her than I. He prays you, in his letter, to prepare your niece for that change of relationship which he dreads too abruptly to break to her himself. Have you done so?"

"I have; the night I got the letter."

"And—you hesitate; speak truthfully, I implore. And she—"

"She," answered Mrs. Cameron, feeling herself involuntarily compelled to obey the voice of that prayer—"she seemed stunned at first, muttering, 'This is a dream: it cannot be true,—cannot! I Lion's wife—I—I! I, his destiny! In me his happiness!' And then she laughed her pretty child's laugh, and put her arms round my neck, and said, 'You are jesting, aunty. He could not write thus!' So I put that part of his letter under her eyes; and when she had convinced herself, her face became very grave, more like a woman's face than I ever saw it; and after a pause she cried out passionately, 'Can you think me—can I think myself—so bad, so ungrateful, as to doubt what I should answer, if Lion asked me whether I would willingly say or do anything that made him unhappy? If there be such a doubt in my heart, I would tear it out by the roots, heart and all!' Oh, Mr. Chillingly! There would be no happiness for her with another, knowing that she had blighted the life of him to whom she owes so much, though she never will learn how much more she owes." Kenelm not replying to this remark, Mrs. Cameron resumed, "I will be perfectly frank with you, Mr. Chillingly. I was not quite satisfied with Lily's manner and looks the next morning, that is, yesterday. I did fear there might be some struggle in her mind in which there entered a thought of yourself. And when Walter, on his arrival here in the evening, spoke of you as one he had met before in his rural excursions, but whose name he only learned on parting at the bridge by Cromwell Lodge, I saw that Lily turned pale, and shortly afterwards went to her own room for the night. Fearing that any interview with you, though it would not alter her resolve, might lessen her happiness on the only choice she can and ought to adopt, I resolved to visit you this morning, and make that

appeal to your reason and your heart which I have done now,—not, I am sure, in vain. Hush! I hear his voice!”

Melville entered the room, Lily leaning on his arm. The artist’s comely face was radiant with ineffable joyousness. Leaving Lily, he reached Kenelm’s side as with a single bound, shook him heartily by the hand, saying, ”I find that you have already been a welcomed visitor in this house. Long may you be so, so say I, so (I answer for her) says my fair betrothed, to whom I need not present you.”

Lily advanced, and held out her hand very timidly. Kenelm touched rather than clasped it. His own strong hand trembled like a leaf. He ventured but one glance at her face. All the bloom had died out of it, but the expression seemed to him wondrously, cruelly tranquil.

”Your betrothed! your future bride!” he said to the artist, with a mastery over his emotion rendered less difficult by the single glance at that tranquil face. ”I wish you joy. All happiness to you, Miss Mordaunt. You have made a noble choice.”

He looked round for his hat; it lay at his feet, but he did not see it; his eyes wandering away with uncertain vision, like those of a sleep-walker.

Mrs. Cameron picked up the hat and gave it to him.

”Thank you,” he said meekly; then with a smile half sweet, half bitter, ”I have so much to thank you for, Mrs. Cameron.”

”But you are not going already,—just as I enter too. Hold! Mrs. Cameron tells me you are lodging with my old friend Jones. Come and stop a couple of days with us: we can find you a room; the room over your butterfly cage, eh, Fairy?”

”Thank you too. Thank you all. No; I must be in London by the first train.”

Speaking thus, he had found his way to the door, bowed with the quiet grace that characterized all his movements, and was gone.

”Pardon his abruptness, Lily; he too loves; he too is impatient to find a betrothed,” said the artist gayly: ”but now he knows my dearest secret, I think I have a right to know his; and I will try.”

He had scarcely uttered the words before he too had quitted the room and overtaken Kenelm just at the threshold.

”If you are going back to Cromwell Lodge,—to pack up, I suppose,—let me walk with you as far as the bridge.”

Kenelm inclined his head assentingly and tacitly as they passed through the garden-gate, winding backwards through the lane which skirted the garden pales; when, at the very spot in which the day after their first and only quarrel Lily's face had been seen brightening through the evergreen, that day on which the old woman, quitting her, said, "God bless you!" and on which the vicar, walking with Kenelm, spoke of her fairy charms; well, just in that spot Lily's face appeared again, not this time brightening through the evergreens, unless the palest gleam of the palest moon can be said to brighten. Kenelm saw, started, halted. His companion, then in the rush of a gladsome talk, of which Kenelm had not heard a word, neither saw nor halted; he walked on mechanically, gladsome, and talking.

Lily stretched forth her hand through the evergreens. Kenelm took it reverentially. This time it was not his hand that trembled.

"Good-by," she said in a whisper, "good-by forever in this world. You understand,—you do understand me. Say that you do."

"I understand. Noble child! noble choice! God bless you! God comfort me!" murmured Kenelm. Their eyes met. Oh, the sadness; and, alas! oh the love in the eyes of both!

Kenelm passed on.

All said in an instant. How many Alls are said in an instant! Melville was in the midst of some glowing sentence, begun when Kenelm dropped from his side, and the end of the sentence was this:

"Words cannot say how fair seems life; how easy seems conquest of fame, dating from this day—this day"—and in his turn he halted, looked round on the sunlit landscape, and breathed deep, as if to drink into his soul all of the earth's joy and beauty which his gaze could compass and the arch of the horizon bound.

"They who knew her even the best," resumed the artist, striding on, "even her aunt, never could guess how serious and earnest, under all her infantine prettiness of fancy, is that girl's real nature. We were walking along the brook-side, when I began to tell how solitary the world would be to me if I could not win her to my side; while I spoke she had turned aside from the path we had taken, and it was not till we were under the shadow of the church in which we shall be married that she uttered the word that gives to every cloud in my fate the silver lining; implying thus how solemnly connected in her mind was the thought of love with the sanctity of religion."

Kenelm shuddered,—the church, the burial-ground, the old Gothic tomb, the flowers round the infant's grave!

"But I am talking a great deal too much about myself," resumed the

artist. "Lovers are the most consummate of all egotists, and the most garrulous of all gossips. You have wished me joy on my destined nuptials, when shall I wish you joy on yours? Since we have begun to confide in each other, you are in my debt as to a confidence."

They had now gained the bridge. Kenelm turned round abruptly, "Good-day; let us part here. I have nothing to confide to you that might not seem to your ears a mockery when I wish you joy." So saying, so obeying in spite of himself the anguish of his heart, Kenelm wrung his companion's hand with the force of an uncontrollable agony, and speeded over the bridge before Melville recovered his surprise.

The artist would have small claim to the essential attribute of genius—namely, the intuitive sympathy of passion with passion—if that secret of Kenelm's which he had so lightly said "he had acquired the right to learn," was not revealed to him as by an electric flash. "Poor fellow!" he said to himself pityingly; "how natural that he should fall in love with Fairy! but happily he is so young, and such a philosopher, that it is but one of those trials through which, at least ten times a year, I have gone with wounds that leave not a scar."

Thus soliloquizing, the warm-blooded worshipper of Nature returned homeward, too blest in the triumph of his own love to feel more than a kindly compassion for the wounded heart, consigned with no doubt of the healing result to the fickleness of youth and the consolations of philosophy. Not for a moment did the happier rival suspect that Kenelm's love was returned; that an atom in the heart of the girl who had promised to be his bride could take its light or shadow from any love but his own. Yet, more from delicacy of respect to the rival so suddenly self-betrayed than from any more prudential motive, he did not speak even to Mrs. Cameron of Kenelm's secret and sorrow; and certainly neither she nor Lily was disposed to ask any question that concerned the departed visitor.

In fact the name of Kenelm Chillingly was scarcely, if at all, mentioned in that household during the few days which elapsed before Walter Melville quitted Grasmere for the banks of the Rhine, not to return till the autumn, when his marriage with Lily was to take place. During those days Lily was calm and seemingly cheerful; her manner towards her betrothed, if more subdued, not less affectionate than of old. Mrs. Cameron congratulated herself on having so successfully got rid of Kenelm Chillingly.

CHAPTER VIII.

SO, then, but for that officious warning, uttered under the balcony at Luscombe, Kenelm Chillingly might never have had a rival in Walter Melville. But ill would any reader construe the character of Kenelm, did he think that such a thought increased the bitterness of his sorrow. No sorrow in the thought that a noble nature had been saved from the temptation to a great sin.

The good man does good merely by living. And the good he does may often mar the plans he formed for his own happiness. But he cannot regret that Heaven has permitted him to do good.

What Kenelm did feel is perhaps best explained in the letter to Sir Peter, which is here subjoined:—

”MY DEAREST FATHER,—Never till my dying day shall I forget that tender desire for my happiness with which, overcoming all worldly considerations, no matter at what disappointment to your own cherished plans or ambition for the heir to your name and race, you sent me away from your roof, these words ringing in my ear like the sound of joy-bells, ‘Choose as you will, with my blessing on your choice. I open my heart to admit another child: your wife shall be my daughter.’ It is such an unspeakable comfort to me to recall those words now. Of all human affections gratitude is surely the holiest; and it blends itself with the sweetness of religion when it is gratitude to a father. And, therefore, do not grieve too much for me, when I tell you that the hopes which enchanted me when we parted are not to be fulfilled. Her hand is pledged to another,—another with claims upon her preference to which mine cannot be compared; and he is himself, putting aside the accidents of birth and fortune, immeasurably my superior. In that thought—I mean the thought that the man she selects deserves her more than I do, and that in his happiness she will blend her own—I shall find comfort, so soon as I can fairly reason down the first all-engrossing selfishness that follows the sense of unexpected and irremediable loss. Meanwhile you will think it not unnatural that I resort to such aids for change of heart as are afforded by change of scene. I start for the Continent to-night, and shall not rest till I reach Venice, which I have not yet seen. I feel irresistibly attracted towards still canals and gliding gondolas. I will write to you and to my dear mother the day I arrive. And I trust to write cheerfully, with full accounts of all I see and encounter. Do not, dearest father, in your letters to me, revert or allude to that grief which even the tenderest word from your own tender self might but chafe into pain more sensitive. After all, a disappointed love is a very common lot. And we meet every day, men—ay, and women too—who have known it, and are thoroughly cured. The manliest of our modern lyrical poets has said very nobly, and, no doubt, very justly,

"To bear is to conquer our fate.

"Ever your loving son,

"K. C."

CHAPTER IX.

NEARLY a year and a half has elapsed since the date of my last chapter. Two Englishmen were—the one seated, the other reclined at length—on one of the mounds that furrow the ascent of Posilippo. Before them spread the noiseless sea, basking in the sunshine, without visible ripple; to the left there was a distant glimpse through gaps of brushwood of the public gardens and white water of the Chiaja. They were friends who had chanced to meet abroad unexpectedly, joined company, and travelled together for many months, chiefly in the East. They had been but a few days in Naples. The elder of the two had important affairs in England which ought to have summoned him back long since. But he did not let his friend know this; his affairs seemed to him less important than the duties he owed to one for whom he entertained that deep and noble love which is something stronger than brotherly, for with brotherly affection it combines gratitude and reverence. He knew, too, that his friend was oppressed by a haunting sorrow, of which the cause was divined by one, not revealed by the other.

To leave him, so beloved, alone with that sorrow in strange lands, was a thought not to be cherished by a friend so tender; for in the friendship of this man there was that sort of tenderness which completes a nature, thoroughly manlike, by giving it a touch of the woman's.

It was a day which in our northern climates is that of winter: in the southern clime of Naples it was mild as an English summer day, lingering on the brink of autumn; the sun sloping towards the west, and already gathering around it roseate and purple fleeces; elsewhere the deep blue sky was without a cloudlet.

Both had been for some minutes silent; at length the man reclining on the grass—it was the younger man—said suddenly, and with no previous hint of the subject introduced, "Lay your hand on your heart, Tom, and answer me truly. Are your thoughts as clear from regrets as the heavens above us are from a cloud? Man takes regret from tears that have ceased to flow, as the heavens take clouds from the rains that have ceased to fall."

"Regrets? Ah, I understand, for the loss of the girl I once loved to distraction! No; surely I made that clear to you many, many, many months ago, when I was your guest at Moleswich."

"Ay, but I have never, since then, spoken to you on that subject. I did not dare. It seems to me so natural that a man, in the earlier struggle between love and reason, should say, 'Reason shall conquer, and has conquered;' and yet—and yet—as time glides on, feel that the conquerors who cannot put down rebellion have a very uneasy reign. Answer me not as at Moleswich, during the first struggle, but now, in the after-day, when reaction from struggle comes."

"Upon my honour," answered the friend, "I have had no reaction at all. I was cured entirely, when I had once seen Jessie again, another man's wife, mother to his child, happy in her marriage; and, whether she was changed or not,—very different from the sort of wife I should like to marry, now that I am no longer a village farrier."

"And, I remember, you spoke of some other girl whom it would suit you to marry. You have been long abroad from her. Do you ever think of her,—think of her still as your future wife? Can you love her? Can you, who have once loved so faithfully, love again?"

"I am sure of that. I love Emily better than I did when I left England. We correspond. She writes such nice letters." Tom hesitated, blushed, and continued timidly, "I should like to show you one of her letters."

"Do."

Tom drew forth the last of such letters from his breast-pocket.

Kenelm raised himself from the grass, took the letter, and read slowly, carefully, while Tom watched in vain for some approving smile to brighten up the dark beauty of that melancholy face.

Certainly it was the letter a man in love might show with pride to a friend: the letter of a lady, well educated, well brought up, evincing affection modestly, intelligence modestly too; the sort of letter in which a mother who loved her daughter, and approved the daughter's choice, could not have suggested a correction.

As Kenelm gave back the letter, his eyes met his friend's. Those were eager eyes,—eyes hungering for praise. Kenelm's heart smote him for that worst of sins in friendship,—want of sympathy; and that uneasy heart forced to his lips congratulations, not perhaps quite sincere, but which amply satisfied the lover. In uttering them, Kenelm rose to his feet, threw his arm round his friend's shoulder, and said, "Are you not tired of this place, Tom? I am. Let us go back to England

to-morrow." Tom's honest face brightened vividly. "How selfish and egotistical I have been!" continued Kenelm; "I ought to have thought more of you, your career, your marriage,—pardon me—"

"Pardon you,—pardon! Don't I owe to you all,—owe to you Emily herself? If you had never come to Graveligh, never said, 'Be my friend,' what should I have been now? what—what?"

The next day the two friends quitted Naples /en route/ for England, not exchanging many words by the way. The old loquacious crotchety humour of Kenelm had deserted him. A duller companion than he was you could not have conceived. He might have been the hero of a young lady's novel. It was only when they parted in London, that Kenelm evinced more secret purpose, more external emotion than one of his heraldic Daces shifting from the bed to the surface of a waveless pond.

"If I have rightly understood you, Tom, all this change in you, all this cure of torturing regret, was wrought, wrought lastingly,—wrought so as to leave you heart-free for the world's actions and a home's peace, on that eve when you saw her whose face till then had haunted you, another man's happy wife, and in so seeing her, either her face was changed or your heart became so."

"Quite true. I might express it otherwise, but the fact remains the same."

"God bless you, Tom; bless you in your career without, in your home within," said Kenelm, wringing his friend's hand at the door of the carriage that was to whirl to love and wealth and station the whilom bully of a village, along the iron groove of that contrivance which, though now the tritest of prosaic realities, seemed once too poetical for a poet's wildest visions.

CHAPTER X.

A WINTER'S evening at Moleswich. Very different from a winter sunset at Naples. It is intensely cold. There has been a slight fall of snow, accompanied with severe, bright, clean frost, a thin sprinkling of white on the pavements. Kenelm Chillingly entered the town on foot, no longer a knapsack on his back. Passing through the main street, he paused a moment at the door of Will Somers. The shop was closed. No, he would not stay there to ask in a roundabout way for news. He would go in straightforwardly and manfully to Grasmere. He would take the inmates there by surprise. The sooner he could bring Tom's experience home to himself, the better. He had schooled his

heart to rely on that experience, and it brought him back the old elasticity of his stride. In his lofty carriage and buoyant face were again visible the old haughtiness of the indifferentism that keeps itself aloof from the turbulent emotions and conventional frivolities of those whom its philosophy pities and scorns.

"Ha! ha!" laughed he who like Swift never laughed aloud, and often laughed inaudibly. "Ha! ha! I shall exorcise the ghost of my grief. I shall never be haunted again. If that stormy creature whom love might have maddened into crime, if he were cured of love at once by a single visit to the home of her whose face was changed to him,—for the smiles and the tears of it had become the property of another man,—how much more should I be left without a scar! I, the heir of the Chillinglys! I, the kinsman of a Mivers! I, the pupil of a Welby! I—I, Kenelm Chillingly, to be thus—thus—" Here, in the midst of his boastful soliloquy, the well-remembered brook rushed suddenly upon eye and ear, gleaming and moaning under the wintry moon. Kenelm Chillingly stopped, covered his face with his hands, and burst into a passion of tears.

Recovering himself slowly, he went on along the path, every step of which was haunted by the form of Lily. He reached the garden gate of Grasmere, lifted the latch, and entered. As he did so, a man, touching his hat, rushed beside, and advanced before him,—the village postman. Kenelm drew back, allowing the man to pass to the door, and as he thus drew back, he caught a side view of lighted windows looking on the lawn,—the windows of the pleasant drawing-room in which he had first heard Lily speak of her guardian.

The postman left his letters, and regained the garden gate, while Kenelm still stood wistfully gazing on those lighted windows. He had, meanwhile, advanced along the whitened sward to the light, saying to himself, "Let me just see her and her happiness, and then I will knock boldly at the door, and say, 'Good-evening, Mrs. Melville.'"

So Kenelm stole across the lawn, and, stationing himself at the angle of the wall, looked into the window.

Melville, in dressing-robe and slippers, was seated alone by the fireside. His dog was lazily stretched on the hearth rug. One by one the features of the room, as the scene of his vanished happiness, grew out from its stillness; the delicately tinted walls, the dwarf bookcase, with its feminine ornaments on the upper shelf; the piano standing in the same place. Lily's own small low chair; that was not in its old place, but thrust into a remote angle, as if it had passed into disuse. Melville was reading a letter, no doubt one of those which the postman had left. Surely the contents were pleasant, for his fair face, always frankly expressive of emotion, brightened wonderfully as he read on. Then he rose with a quick, brisk movement, and pulled the bell hastily.

A neat maid-servant entered,—a strange face to Kenelm. Melville gave her some brief message. "He has had joyous news," thought Kenelm. "He has sent for his wife that she may share his joy." Presently the door opened, and entered not Lily, but Mrs. Cameron.

She looked changed. Her natural quietude of mien and movement the same, indeed, but with more languor in it. Her hair had become gray. Melville was standing by the table as she approached him. He put the letter into her hands with a gay, proud smile, and looked over her shoulder while she read it, pointing with his finger as to some lines that should more emphatically claim her attention.

When she had finished her face reflected his smile. They exchanged a hearty shake of the hand, as if in congratulation.

"Ah," thought Kenelm, "the letter is from Lily. She is abroad. Perhaps the birth of a first-born."

Just then Blanche, who had not been visible before, emerged from under the table, and as Melville reseated himself by the fireside, sprang into his lap, rubbing herself against his breast. The expression of his face changed; he uttered some low exclamation. Mrs. Cameron took the creature from his lap, stroking it quietly, carried it across the room, and put it outside the door. Then she seated herself beside the artist, placing her hand in his, and they conversed in low tones, till Melville's face again grew bright, and again he took up the letter.

A few minutes later the maid-servant entered with the tea-things, and after arranging them on the table approached the window. Kenelm retreated into the shade, the servant closed the shutters and drew the curtains; that scene of quiet home comfort vanished from the eyes of the looker-on.

Kenelm felt strangely perplexed. What had become of Lily? was she indeed absent from her home? Had he conjectured rightly that the letter which had evidently so gladdened Melville was from her, or was it possible—here a thought of joy seized his heart and held him breathless—was it possible that, after all, she had not married her guardian; had found a home elsewhere,—was free? He moved on farther down the lawn, towards the water, that he might better bring before his sight that part of the irregular building in which Lily formerly had her sleeping-chamber, and her "own-own room."

All was dark there; the shutters inexorably closed. The place with which the childlike girl had associated her most childlike fancies, taming and tending the honey-drinkers destined to pass into fairies, that fragile tenement was not closed against the winds and snows; its doors were drearily open; gaps in the delicate wire-work; of its dainty draperies a few tattered shreds hanging here and there; and on

the depopulated floor the moonbeams resting cold and ghostly. No spray from the tiny fountain; its basin chipped and mouldering; the scanty waters therein frozen. Of all the pretty wild ones that Lily fancied she could tame, not one. Ah! yes, there was one, probably not of the old familiar number; a stranger that might have crept in for shelter from the first blasts of winter, and now clung to an angle in the farther wall, its wings folded,—asleep, not dead. But Kenelm saw it not; he noticed only the general desolation of the spot.

”Natural enough,” thought he. ”She has outgrown all such pretty silliness. A wife cannot remain a child. Still, if she had belonged to me—” The thought choked even his inward, unspoken utterance. He turned away, paused a moment under the leafless boughs of the great willow still dipping into the brook, and then with impatient steps strode back towards the garden gate.

”No,—no,—no. I cannot now enter that house and ask for Mrs. Melville. Trial enough for one night to stand on the old ground. I will return to the town. I will call at Jessie’s, and there I can learn if she indeed be happy.”

So he went on by the path along the brook-side, the night momentarily colder and colder, and momentarily clearer and clearer, while the moon noiselessly glided into loftier heights. Wrapped in his abstracted thoughts, when he came to the spot in which the path split in twain, he did not take that which led more directly to the town. His steps, naturally enough following the train of his thoughts, led him along the path with which the object of his thoughts was associated. He found himself on the burial-ground, and in front of the old ruined tomb with the effaced inscription.

”Ah! child! child!” he murmured almost audibly, ”what depths of woman tenderness lay concealed in thee! In what loving sympathy with the past—sympathy only vouchsafed to the tenderest women and the highest poets—didst thou lay thy flowers on the tomb, to which thou didst give a poet’s history interpreted by a woman’s heart, little dreaming that beneath the stone slept a hero of thine own fallen race.”

He passed beneath the shadow of the yews, whose leaves no winter wind can strew, and paused at the ruined tomb,—no flower now on its stone, only a sprinkling of snow at the foot of it,—sprinklings of snow at the foot of each humbler grave-mound. Motionless in the frosty air rested the pointed church-spire, and through the frosty air, higher and higher up the arch of heaven, soared the unpausing moon. Around and below and above her, the stars which no science can number; yet not less difficult to number are the thoughts, desires, aspirations which, in a space of time briefer than a winter’s night, can pass through the infinite deeps of a human soul.

From his stand by the Gothic tomb, Kenelm looked along the churchyard

for the infant's grave which Lily's pious care had bordered with votive flowers. Yes, in that direction there was still a gleam of colour; could it be of flowers in that biting winter time?—the moon is so deceptive, it silvers into the hue of the jessamines the green of the everlastings.

He passed towards the white grave-mound. His sight had duped him; no pale flower, no green "everlasting" on its neglected border,—only brown mould, withered stalks, streaks of snow.

"And yet," he said sadly, "she told me she had never broken a promise; and she had given a promise to the dying child. Ah! she is too happy now to think of the dead."

So murmuring, he was about to turn towards the town, when close by that child's grave he saw another. Round that other there were pale "everlastings," dwarfed blossoms of the laurestinus; at the four angles the drooping bud of a Christmas rose; at the head of the grave was a white stone, its sharp edges cutting into the starlit air; and on the head, in fresh letters, were inscribed these words:—

To the Memory of
L. M.
Aged 17,
Died October 29, A. D. 18—,
This stone, above the grave to which her mortal
remains are consigned, beside that of an infant not
more sinless, is consecrated by those who
most mourn and miss her,
ISABEL CAMERON,
WALTER MELVILLE.
"Suffer the little children to come unto me."

CHAPTER XI.

THE next morning Mr. Emlyn, passing from his garden to the town of Moleswich, descried a human form stretched on the burial-ground, stirring restlessly but very slightly, as if with an involuntary shiver, and uttering broken sounds, very faintly heard, like the moans that a man in pain strives to suppress and cannot.

The rector hastened to the spot. The man was lying, his face downward, on a grave-mound, not dead, not asleep.

"Poor fellow overtaken by drink, I fear," thought the gentle pastor; and as it was the habit of his mind to compassionate error even more

than grief, he accosted the supposed sinner in very soothing tones—trying to raise him from the ground—and with very kindly words.

Then the man lifted his face from its pillow on the grave-mound, looked round him dreamily into the gray, blank air of the cheerless morn, and rose to his feet quietly and slowly. The vicar was startled; he recognized the face of him he had last seen in the magnificent affluence of health and strength. But the character of the face was changed,—so changed! its old serenity of expression, at once grave and sweet, succeeded by a wild trouble in the heavy eyelids and trembling lips.

”Mr. Chillingly,—you! Is it possible?”

”Varus, Varus,” exclaimed Kenelm, passionately, ”what hast thou done with my legions?”

At that quotation of the well-known greeting of Augustus to his unfortunate general, the scholar recoiled. Had his young friend’s mind deserted him,—dazed, perhaps, by over-study?

He was soon reassured; Kenelm’s face settled back into calm, though a dreary calm, like that of the wintry day.

”I beg pardon, Mr. Emlyn; I had not quite shaken off the hold of a strange dream. I dreamed that I was worse off than Augustus: he did not lose the world when the legions he had trusted to another vanished into a grave.”

Here Kenelm linked his arm in that of the rector,—on which he leaned rather heavily,—and drew him on from the burial-ground into the open space where the two paths met.

”But how long have you returned to Moleswich?” asked Emlyn; ”and how came you to choose so damp a bed for your morning slumbers?”

”The wintry cold crept into my veins when I stood in the burial-ground, and I was very weary; I had no sleep at night. Do not let me take you out of your way; I am going on to Grasmere. So I see, by the record on a gravestone, that it is more than a year ago since Mr. Melville lost his wife.”

”Wife? He never married.”

”What!” cried Kenelm. ”Whose, then, is that gravestone,—’L. M.’?”

”Alas! it is our poor Lily’s.”

"And she died unmarried?"

As Kenelm said this he looked up, and the sun broke out from the gloomy haze of the morning. "I may claim thee, then," he thought within himself, "claim thee as mine when we meet again."

"Unmarried,—yes," resumed the vicar. "She was indeed betrothed to her guardian; they were to have been married in the autumn, on his return from the Rhine. He went there to paint on the spot itself his great picture, which is now so famous,—'Roland, the Hermit Knight, looking towards the convent lattice for a sight of the Holy Nun.' Melville had scarcely gone before the symptoms of the disease which proved fatal to poor Lily betrayed themselves; they baffled all medical skill,—rapid decline. She was always very delicate, but no one detected in her the seeds of consumption. Melville only returned a day or two before her death. Dear childlike Lily! how we all mourned for her!—not least the poor, who believed in her fairy charms."

"And least of all, it appears, the man she was to have married."

"He?—Melville? How can you wrong him so? His grief was intense—overpowering—for the time."

"For the time! what time?" muttered Kenelm, in tones too low for the pastor's ear.

They moved on silently. Mr. Emlyn resumed,—

"You noticed the text on Lily's gravestone—'Suffer the little children to come unto me'? She dictated it herself the day before she died. I was with her then, so I was at the last."

"Were you—were you—at the last—the last? Good-day, Mr. Emlyn; we are just in sight of the garden gate. And—excuse me—I wish to see Mr. Melville alone."

"Well, then, good-day; but if you are making any stay in the neighbourhood, will you not be our guest? We have a room at your service."

"I thank you gratefully; but I return to London in an hour or so. Hold, a moment. You were with her at the last? She was resigned to die?"

"Resigned! that is scarcely the word. The smile left upon her lips was not that of human resignation: it was the smile of a divine joy."

CHAPTER XII.

"YES, sir, Mr. Melville is at home in his studio."

Kenelm followed the maid across the hall into a room not built at the date of Kenelm's former visits to the house: the artist, making Grasmere his chief residence after Lily's death, had added it at the back of the neglected place wherein Lily had encaged "the souls of infants unbaptized."

A lofty room, with a casement partially darkened, to the bleak north; various sketches on the walls; gaunt specimens of antique furniture, and of gorgeous Italian silks, scattered about in confused disorder; one large picture on its easel curtained; another as large, and half finished, before which stood the painter. He turned quickly, as Kenelm entered the room unannounced, let fall brush and palette, came up to him eagerly, grasped his hand, drooped his head on Kenelm's shoulder, and said, in a voice struggling with evident and strong emotion,—

"Since we parted, such grief! such a loss!"

"I know it; I have seen her grave. Let us not speak of it. Why so needlessly revive your sorrow? So—so—your sanguine hopes are fulfilled: the world at last has done you justice? Emlyn tells me that you have painted a very famous picture."

Kenelm had seated himself as he thus spoke. The painter still stood with dejected attitude on the middle of the floor, and brushed his hand over his moistened eyes once or twice before he answered, "Yes, wait a moment, don't talk of fame yet. Bear with me. The sudden sight of you unnerved me."

The artist here seated himself also on an old worm-eaten Gothic chest, rumpling and chafing the golden or tinsel threads of the embroidered silk, so rare and so time-worn, flung over the Gothic chest, so rare also, and so worm-eaten.

Kenelm looked through half-closed lids at the artist, and his lips, before slightly curved with a secret scorn, became gravely compressed. In Melville's struggle to conceal emotion the strong man recognized a strong man,—recognized, and yet only wondered; wondered how such a man, to whom Lily had pledged her hand, could so soon after the loss of Lily go on painting pictures, and care for any praise bestowed on a yard of canvas.

In a very few minutes Melville recommenced conversation,—no more reference to Lily than if she had never existed. "Yes, my last

picture has been indeed a success,—a reward complete, if tardy, for all the bitterness of former struggles made in vain, for the galling sense of injustice, the anguish of which only an artist knows, when unworthy rivals are ranked before him.

”’Foes quick to blame, and friends afraid to praise.’

”True that I have still much to encounter; the cliques still seek to disparage me, but between me and the cliques there stands at last the giant form of the public, and at last critics of graver weight than the cliques have deigned to accord to me a higher rank than even the public yet acknowledge. Ah, Mr. Chillingly, you do not profess to be a judge of paintings, but, excuse me, just look at this letter. I received it only last night from the greatest connoisseur of my art, certainly in England, perhaps in Europe.” Here Melville drew, from the side-pocket of his picturesque /moyen age/ surtout, a letter signed by a name authoritative to all who, being painters themselves, acknowledge authority in one who could no more paint a picture himself than Addison, the ablest critic of the greatest poem modern Europe has produced, could have written ten lines of the ”Paradise Lost,” and thrust the letter into Kenelm’s hand. Kenelm read it listlessly, with an increased contempt for an artist who could so find in gratified vanity consolation for the life gone from earth. But, listlessly as he read the letter, the sincere and fervent enthusiasm of the laudatory contents impressed him, and the preeminent authority of the signature could not be denied.

The letter was written on the occasion of Melville’s recent election to the dignity of R. A., successor to a very great artist whose death had created a vacancy in the Academy. He returned the letter to Melville, saying, ”This is the letter I saw you reading last night as I looked in at your window. Indeed, for a man who cares for the opinion of other men, this letter is very flattering; and for the painter who cares for money, it must be very pleasant to know by how many guineas every inch of his canvas may be covered.” Unable longer to control his passions of rage, of scorn, of agonizing grief, Kenelm then burst forth: ”Man, man, whom I once accepted as a teacher on human life,—a teacher to warm, to brighten, to exalt mine own indifferent, dreamy, slow-pulsed self! has not the one woman whom thou didst select out of this overcrowded world to be bone of thy bone, flesh of thy flesh, vanished evermore from the earth,—little more than a year since her voice was silenced, her heart ceased to beat? But how slight is such loss to thy life compared to the worth of a compliment that flatters thy vanity!”

The artist rose to his feet with an indignant impulse. But the angry flush faded from his cheek as he looked on the countenance of his rebuker. He walked up to him, and attempted to take his hand, but Kenelm snatched it scornfully from his grasp.

"Poor friend," said Melville, sadly and soothingly, "I did not think you loved her thus deeply. Pardon me." He drew a chair close to Kenelm's, and after a brief pause went on thus, in very earnest tones, "I am not so heartless, not so forgetful of my loss as you suppose. But reflect, you have but just learned of her death, you are under the first shock of grief. More than a year has been given to me for gradual submission to the decree of Heaven. Now listen to me, and try to listen calmly. I am many years older than you: I ought to know better the conditions on which man holds the tenure of life. Life is composite, many-sided: nature does not permit it to be lastingly monopolized by a single passion, or while yet in the prime of its strength to be lastingly blighted by a single sorrow. Survey the great mass of our common race, engaged in the various callings, some the humblest, some the loftiest, by which the business of the world is carried on,—can you justly despise as heartless the poor trader, or the great statesman, when it may be but a few days after the loss of some one nearest and dearest to his heart, the trader reopens his shop, the statesman reappears in his office? But in me, the votary of art, in me you behold but the weakness of gratified vanity; if I feel joy in the hope that my art may triumph, and my country may add my name to the list of those who contribute to her renown, where and when ever lived an artist not sustained by that hope, in privation, in sickness, in the sorrows he must share with his kind? Nor is this hope that of a feminine vanity, a sicklier craving for applause; it identifies itself with glorious services to our land, to our race, to the children of all after time. Our art cannot triumph, our name cannot live, unless we achieve a something that tends to beautify or ennoble the world in which we accept the common heritage of toil and of sorrow, in order therefrom to work out for successive multitudes a recreation and a joy."

While the artist thus spoke Kenelm lifted towards his face eyes charged with suppressed tears. And the face, kindling as the artist vindicated himself from the young man's bitter charge, became touchingly sweet in its grave expression at the close of the not ignoble defence.

"Enough," said Kenelm, rising. "There is a ring of truth in what you say. I can conceive the artist's, the poet's escape from this world, when all therein is death and winter, into the world he creates and colours at his will with the hues of summer. So, too, I can conceive how the man whose life is sternly fitted into the grooves of a trader's calling, or a statesman's duties, is borne on by the force of custom, afar from such brief halting-spot as a grave. But I am no poet, no artist, no trader, no statesman; I have no calling, my life is fixed into no grooves. Adieu."

"Hold a moment. Not now, but somewhat later, ask yourself whether any life can be permitted to wander in space, a monad detached from the lives of others. Into some groove or other, sooner or later, it must

settle, and be borne on obedient to the laws of Nature and the responsibility to God.”

CHAPTER XIII

KENELM went back alone, and with downcast looks, through the desolate, flowerless garden, when at the other side of the gate a light touch was laid on his arm. He looked up, and recognized Mrs. Cameron.

”I saw you,” she said, ”from my window coming to the house, and I have been waiting for you here. I wished to speak to you alone. Allow me to walk beside you.”

Kenelm inclined his head assentingly, but made no answer. They were nearly midway between the cottage and the burial-ground when Mrs. Cameron resumed, her tones quick and agitated, contrasting her habitual languid quietude,—

”I have a great weight on my mind; it ought not to be remorse. I acted as I thought in my conscience for the best. But oh, Mr. Chillingly, if I erred,—if I judged wrongly, do say you at least forgive me.” She seized his hand, pressing it convulsively. Kenelm muttered inaudibly: a sort of dreary stupor had succeeded to the intense excitement of grief. Mrs. Cameron went on,—

”You could not have married Lily; you know you could not. The secret of her birth could not, in honour, have been concealed from your parents. They could not have consented to your marriage; and even if you had persisted, without that consent and in spite of that secret, to press for it,—even had she been yours—”

”Might she not be living now?” cried Kenelm, fiercely.

”No,—no; the secret must have come out. The cruel world would have discovered it; it would have reached her ears. The shame of it would have killed her. How bitter then would have been her short interval of life! As it is, she passed away,—resigned and happy. But I own that I did not, could not, understand her, could not believe her feeling for you to be so deep. I did think that when she knew her own heart she would find that love for her guardian was its strongest affection. She assented, apparently without a pang, to become his wife; and she seemed always so fond of him, and what girl would not be? But I was mistaken, deceived. From the day you saw her last, she began to fade away; but then Walter left a few days after, and I thought that it was his absence she mourned. She never owned to me that it was yours,—never till too late,—too late,—just when my sad

letter had summoned him back, only three days before she died. Had I known earlier, while yet there was hope of recovery, I must have written to you, even though the obstacles to your union with her remained the same. Oh, again I implore you, say that if I erred you forgive me. She did, kissing me so tenderly. She did forgive me. Will not you? It would have been her wish."

"Her wish? Do you think I could disobey it? I know not if I have anything to forgive. If I have, now could I not forgive one who loved her? God comfort us both."

He bent down and kissed Mrs. Cameron's forehead. The poor woman threw her arm gratefully, lovingly round him, and burst into tears.

When she had recovered her emotion, she said,—

"And now, it is with so much lighter a heart that I can fulfil her commission to you. But, before I place this in your hands, can you make me one promise? Never tell Melville how she loved you. She was so careful he should never guess that. And if he knew it was the thought of union with him which had killed her, he would never smile again."

"You would not ask such a promise if you could guess how sacred from all the world I hold the secret that you confide to me. By that secret the grave is changed into an altar. Our bridal now are only a while deferred."

Mrs. Cameron placed a letter in Kenelm's hand, and murmuring in accents broken by a sob, "She gave it to me the day before her last," left him, and with quick vacillating steps hurried back towards the cottage. She now understood him, at last, too well not to feel that on opening that letter he must be alone with the dead.

It is strange that we need have so little practical household knowledge of each other to be in love. Never till then had Kenelm's eyes rested upon Lily's handwriting. And he now gazed at the formal address on the envelope with a sort of awe. Unknown handwriting coming to him from an unknown world,—delicate, tremulous handwriting,—handwriting not of one grown up, yet not of a child who had long to live.

He turned the envelope over and over,—not impatiently, as does the lover whose heart beats at the sound of the approaching footstep, but lingeringly, timidly. He would not break the seal.

He was now so near the burial-ground. Where should the first letter ever received from her—the sole letter he ever could receive—be so reverentially, lovingly read, as at her grave?

He walked on to the burial-ground, sat down by the grave, broke the envelope; a poor little ring, with a poor little single turquoise, rolled out and rested at his feet. The letter contained only these words,—

The ring comes back to you. I could not live to marry another. I never knew how I loved you—till, till I began to pray that you might not love me too much. Darling! darling! good-by, darling!

LILY.

Don't let Lion ever see this, or ever know what it says to you. He is so good, and deserves to be so happy. Do you remember the day of the ring? Darling! darling!

CHAPTER XIV.

SOMEWHAT more than another year has rolled away. It is early spring in London. The trees in the park and squares are budding into leaf and blossom. Leopold Travers has had a brief but serious conversation with his daughter, and now gone forth on horseback. Handsome and graceful still, Leopold Travers when in London is pleased to find himself scarcely less the fashion with the young than he was when himself in youth. He is now riding along the banks of the Serpentine, no one better mounted, better dressed, better looking, or talking with greater fluency on the topics which interest his companions.

Cecilia is in the smaller drawing-room, which is exclusively appropriated to her use, alone with Lady Glenalvon.

LADY GLENALVON.—"I own, my dear, dear Cecilia, that I arrange myself at last on the side of your father. How earnestly at one time I had hoped that Kenelm Chillingly might woo and win the bride that seemed to me most fitted to adorn and to cheer his life, I need not say. But when at Exmundham he asked me to befriend his choice of another, to reconcile his mother to that choice,—evidently not a suitable one,—I gave him up. And though that affair is at an end, he seems little likely ever to settle down to practical duties and domestic habits, an idle wanderer over the face of the earth, only heard of in remote places and with strange companions. Perhaps he may never return to England."

CECILIA.—"He is in England now, and in London."

LADY GLENALVON.—"You amaze me! Who told you so?"

CECILIA.—"His father, who is with him. Sir Peter called yesterday, and spoke to me so kindly." Cecilia here turned aside her face to conceal the tears that had started to her eyes.

LADY GLENALVON.—"Did Mr. Travers see Sir Peter?"

CECILIA.—"Yes; and I think it was something that passed between them which made my father speak to me—for the first time—almost sternly."

LADY GLENALVON.—"In urging Chillingly Gordon's suit?"

CECILIA.—"Commanding me to reconsider my rejection of it. He has contrived to fascinate my father."

LADY GLENALVON.—"So he has me. Of course you might choose among other candidates for your hand one of much higher worldly rank, of much larger fortune; yet, as you have already rejected them, Gordon's merits become still more entitled to a fair hearing. He has already leaped into a position that mere rank and mere wealth cannot attain. Men of all parties speak highly of his parliamentary abilities. He is already marked in public opinion as a coming man,—a future minister of the highest grade. He has youth and good looks; his moral character is without a blemish: yet his manners are so free from affected austerity, so frank, so genial. Any woman might be pleased with his companionship; and you, with your intellect, your culture,—you, so born for high station,—you of all women might be proud to partake the anxieties of his career and the rewards of his ambition."

CECILIA (clasping her hands tightly together).—"I cannot, I cannot. He may be all you say,—I know nothing against Mr. Chillingly Gordon,—but my whole nature is antagonistic to his, and even were it not so—"

She stopped abruptly, a deep blush warming up her fair face, and retreating to leave it coldly pale.

LADY GLENALVON (tenderly kissing her).—"You have not, then, even yet conquered the first maiden fancy; the ungrateful one is still remembered?"

Cecilia bowed her head on her friend's breast, and murmured imploringly, "Don't speak against him; he has been so unhappy. How much he must have loved!"

"But it is not you whom he loved."

"Something here, something at my heart, tells me that he will love me yet; and, if not, I am contented to be his friend."

CHAPTER XV.

WHILE the conversation just related took place between Cecilia and Lady Glenalvon, Chillingly Gordon was seated alone with Mivers in the comfortable apartment of the cynical old bachelor. Gordon had breakfasted with his kinsman, but that meal was long over; the two men having found much to talk about on matters very interesting to the younger, nor without interest to the elder one.

It is true that Chillingly Gordon had, within the very short space of time that had elapsed since his entrance into the House of Commons, achieved one of those reputations which mark out a man for early admission into the progressive career of office,—not a very showy reputation, but a very solid one. He had none of the gifts of the genuine orator, no enthusiasm, no imagination, no imprudent bursts of fiery words from a passionate heart. But he had all the gifts of an exceedingly telling speaker,—a clear metallic voice; well-bred, appropriate action, not less dignified for being somewhat too quiet; readiness for extempore replies; industry and method for prepared expositions of principle or fact. But his principal merit with the chiefs of the assembly was in the strong good sense and worldly tact which made him a safe speaker. For this merit he was largely indebted to his frequent conferences with Chillingly Mivers. That gentleman, whether owing to his social qualities or to the influence of "The Londoner" on public opinion, enjoyed an intimate acquaintance with the chiefs of all parties, and was up to his ears in the wisdom of the world. "Nothing," he would say, "hurts a young Parliamentary speaker like violence in opinion, one way or the other. Shun it. Always allow that much may be said on both sides. When the chiefs of your own side suddenly adopt a violence, you can go with them or against them, according as best suits your own book."

"So," said Mivers, reclined on his sofa, and approaching the end of his second Trabuco (he never allowed himself more than two), "so I think we have pretty well settled the tone you must take in your speech to-night. It is a great occasion."

"True. It is the first time in which the debate has been arranged so that I may speak at ten o'clock or later. That in itself is a great leap; and it is a Cabinet minister whom I am to answer,—luckily, he is a very dull fellow. Do you think I might hazard a joke,—at least a witticism?"

"At his expense? Decidedly not. Though his office compels him to introduce this measure, he was by no means in its favour when it was discussed in the Cabinet; and though, as you say, he is dull, it is precisely that sort of dullness which is essential to the formation of every respectable Cabinet. Joke at him, indeed! Learn that gentle

dulness never loves a joke—at its own expense. Vain man! seize the occasion which your blame of his measure affords you to secure his praise of yourself; compliment him. Enough of politics. It never does to think too much over what one has already decided to say. Brooding over it, one may become too much in earnest, and commit an indiscretion. So Kenelm has come back?”

”Yes. I heard that news last night, at White’s, from Travers. Sir Peter had called on Travers.”

”Travers still favours your suit to the heiress?”

”More, I think, than ever. Success in Parliament has great effect on a man who has success in fashion and respects the opinion of clubs. But last night he was unusually cordial. Between you and me, I think he is a little afraid that Kenelm may yet be my rival. I gathered that from a hint he let fall of the unwelcome nature of Sir Peter’s talk to him.”

”Why has Travers conceived a dislike to poor Kenelm? He seemed partial enough to him once.”

”Ay, but not as a son-in-law, even before I had a chance of becoming so. And when, after Kenelm appeared at Exmundham, while Travers was staying there, Travers learned, I suppose from Lady Chillingly, that Kenelm had fallen in love with and wanted to marry some other girl, who it seems rejected him; and still more when he heard that Kenelm had been subsequently travelling on the Continent in company with a low-lived fellow, the drunken, riotous son of a farrier, you may well conceive how so polished and sensible a man as Leopold Travers would dislike the idea of giving his daughter to one so little likely to make an agreeable son-in-law. Bah! I have no fear of Kenelm. By the way, did Sir Peter say if Kenelm had quite recovered his health? He was at death’s door some eighteen months ago, when Sir Peter and Lady Chillingly were summoned to town by the doctors.”

”My dear Gordon, I fear there is no chance of your succession to Exmundham. Sir Peter says that his wandering Hercules is as stalwart as ever, and more equable in temperament, more taciturn and grave,—in short, less odd. But when you say you have no fear of Kenelm’s rivalry, do you mean only as to Cecilia Travers?”

”Neither as to that nor as to anything in life; and as to the succession to Exmundham, it is his to leave as he pleases, and I have cause to think he would never leave it to me. More likely to Parson John or the parson’s son,—or why not to yourself? I often think that for the prizes immediately set before my ambition I am better off without land: land is a great obfuscator.”

”Humph, there is some truth in that. Yet the fear of land and

obfuscation does not seem to operate against your suit to Cecilia Travers?"

"Her father is likely enough to live till I maybe contented to 'rest and be thankful' in the Upper House; and I should not like to be a landless peer."

"You are right there; but I should tell you that, now Kenelm has come back, Sir Peter has set his heart on his son's being your rival."

"For Cecilia?"

"Perhaps; but certainly for Parliamentary reputation. The senior member for the county means to retire, and Sir Peter has been urged to allow his son to be brought forward,—from what I hear, with the certainty of success."

"What! in spite of that wonderful speech of his on coming of age?"

"Pooh! that is now understood to have been but a bad joke on the new ideas, and their organs, including 'The Londoner.' But if Kenelm does come into the House, it will not be on your side of the question; and unless I greatly overrate his abilities—which very likely I do—he will not be a rival to despise. Except, indeed, that he may have one fault which in the present day would be enough to unfit him for public life."

"And what is that fault?"

"Treason to the blood of the Chillinglys. This is the age, in England, when one cannot be too much of a Chillingly. I fear that if Kenelm does become bewildered by a political abstraction,—call it, no matter what, say, 'love of his country,' or some such old-fashioned crotchet,—I fear, I greatly fear, that he may be—in earnest."

CHAPTER THE LAST.

IT was a field night in the House of Commons,—an adjourned debate, opened by George Belvoir, who had been, the last two years, very slowly creeping on in the favour, or rather the indulgence of the House, and more than justifying Kenelm's prediction of his career. Heir to a noble name and vast estates, extremely hard-working, very well informed, it was impossible that he should not creep on. That night he spoke sensibly enough, assisting his memory by frequent references to his notes; listened to courteously, and greeted with a faint "Hear, hear!" of relief when he had done.

Then the House gradually thinned till nine o'clock, at which hour it became very rapidly crowded. A Cabinet minister had solemnly risen, deposited on the table before him a formidable array of printed papers, including a corpulent blue-book. Leaning his arm on the red box, he commenced with this awe-compelling sentence,—

”Sir, I join issue with the right honourable gentleman opposite. He says this is not raised as a party question. I deny it. Her Majesty’s Government are put upon their trial.”

Here there were cheers, so loudly, and so rarely greeting a speech from that Cabinet minister, that he was put out, and had much to ”hum” and to ”ha,” before he could recover the thread of his speech. Then he went on, with unbroken but lethargic fluency; read long extracts from the public papers, inflicted a whole page from the blue-book, wound up with a peroration of respectable platitudes, glanced at the clock, saw that he had completed the hour which a Cabinet minister who does not profess to be oratorical is expected to speak, but not to exceed; and sat down.

Up rose a crowd of eager faces, from which the Speaker, as previously arranged with the party whips, selected one,—a young face, hardy, intelligent, emotionless.

I need not say that it was the face of Chillingly Gordon. His position that night was one that required dexterous management and delicate tact. He habitually supported the Government; his speeches had been hitherto in their favour. On this occasion he differed from the Government. The difference was known to the chiefs of the Opposition, and hence the arrangement of the whips, that he should speak for the first time after ten o'clock, and for the first time in reply to a Cabinet minister. It is a position in which a young party man makes or mars his future. Chillingly Gordon spoke from the third row behind the Government; he had been duly cautioned by Mivers not to affect a conceited independence, or an adhesion to ”violence” in ultra-liberal opinions, by seating himself below the gangway. Speaking thus, amid the rank and file of the Ministerial supporters, any opinion at variance with the mouthpieces of the Treasury Bench would be sure to produce a more effective sensation than if delivered from the ranks of the mutinous Bashi Bazouks divided by the gangway from better disciplined forces. His first brief sentences enthralled the House, conciliated the Ministerial side, kept the Opposition side in suspense. The whole speech was, indeed, felicitously adroit, and especially in this, that, while in opposition to the Government as a whole, it expressed the opinions of a powerful section of the Cabinet, which, though at present a minority, yet being the most enamoured of a New Idea, the progress of the age would probably render a safe investment for the confidence which honest Gordon reposed in its chance of beating its colleagues.

It was not, however, till Gordon had concluded that the cheers of his audience—impulsive and hearty as are the cheers of that assembly when the evidence of intellect is unmistakable—made manifest to the gallery and the reporters the full effect of the speech he had delivered. The chief of the Opposition whispered to his next neighbour, "I wish we could get that man." The Cabinet minister whom Gordon had answered—more pleased with a personal compliment to himself than displeased with an attack on the measure his office compelled him to advocate—whispered to his chief, "That is a man we must not lose."

Two gentlemen in the Speaker's gallery, who had sat there from the opening of the debate, now quitted their places. Coming into the lobby, they found themselves commingled with a crowd of members who had also quitted their seats, after Gordon's speech, in order to discuss its merits, as they gathered round the refreshment table for oranges or soda-water. Among them was George Belvoir, who, on sight of the younger of the two gentlemen issuing from the Speaker's gallery, accosted him with friendly greeting,—

"Ha! Chillingly, how are you? Did not know you were in town. Been here all the evening? Yes; very good debate. How did you like Gordon's speech?"

"I liked yours much better."

"Mine!" cried George, very much flattered and very much surprised. "Oh, mine was a mere humdrum affair, a plain statement of the reasons for the vote I should give. And Gordon's was anything but that. You did not like his opinions?"

"I don't know what his opinions are. But I did not like his ideas."

"I don't quite understand you. What ideas?"

"The new ones; by which it is shown how rapidly a great state can be made small."

Here Mr. Belvoir was taken aside by a brother member, on an important matter to be brought before the committee on salmon fisheries, on which they both served; and Kenelm, with his companion, Sir Peter, threaded his way through the crowded lobby and disappeared. Emerging into the broad space, with its lofty clock-tower, Sir Peter halted, and pointing towards the old Abbey, half in shadow, half in light, under the tranquil moonbeams, said,—

"It tells much for the duration of a people when it accords with the instinct of immortality in a man; when an honoured tomb is deemed recompense for the toils and dangers of a noble life. How much of the

history of England Nelson summed up in the simple words,—'Victory or Westminster Abbey.'"

"Admirably expressed, my dear father," said Kenelm, briefly.

"I agree with your remark, which I overheard, on Gordon's speech," resumed Sir Peter. "It was wonderfully clever; yet I should have been sorry to hear you speak it. It is not by such sentiments that Nelsons become great. If such sentiments should ever be national, the cry will not be 'Victory or Westminster Abbey!' but 'Defeat and the Three per Cents!'"

Pleased with his own unwonted animation, and with the sympathizing half-smile on his son's taciturn lips, Sir Peter then proceeded more immediately to the subjects which pressed upon his heart. Gordon's success in Parliament, Gordon's suit to Cecilia Travers, favoured, as Sir Peter had learned, by her father, rejected as yet by herself, were somehow inseparably mixed up in Sir Peter's mind and his words, as he sought to kindle his son's emulation. He dwelt on the obligations which a country imposed on its citizens, especially on the young and vigorous generation to which the destinies of those to follow were intrusted; and with these stern obligations he combined all the cheering and tender associations which an English public man connects with an English home: the wife with a smile to soothe the cares, and a mind to share the aspirations, of a life that must go through labour to achieve renown; thus, in all he said, binding together, as if they could not be parted, Ambition and Cecilia.

His son did not interrupt him by a word, Sir Peter in his eagerness not noticing that Kenelm had drawn him aside from the direct thoroughfare, and had now made halt in the middle of Westminster bridge, bending over the massive parapet and gazing abstractedly upon the waves of the starlit river. On the right the stately length of the people's legislative palace, so new in its date, so elaborately in each detail ancient in its form, stretching on towards the lowly and jagged roofs of penury and crime. Well might these be so near to the halls of a people's legislative palace: near to the heart of every legislator for a people must be the mighty problem how to increase a people's splendour and its virtue, and how to diminish its penury and its crime.

"How strange it is," said Kenelm, still bending over the parapet, "that throughout all my desultory wanderings I have ever been attracted towards the sight and the sound of running waters, even those of the humblest rill! Of what thoughts, of what dreams, of what memories, colouring the history of my past, the waves of the humblest rill could speak, were the waves themselves not such supreme philosophers,—roused indeed on their surface, vexed by a check to their own course, but so indifferent to all that makes gloom or death to the mortals who think and dream and feel beside their banks."

"Bless me," said Peter to himself, "the boy has got back to his old vein of humours and melancholies. He has not heard a word I have been saying. Travers is right. He will never do anything in life. Why did I christen him Kenelm? he might as well have been christened Peter." Still, loth to own that his eloquence had been expended in vain and that the wish of his heart was doomed to expire disappointed, Sir Peter said aloud, "You have not listened to what I said; Kenelm, you grieve me."

"Grieve you! you! do not say that, Father, dear Father. Listen to you! Every word you have said has sunk into the deepest deep of my heart. Pardon my foolish, purposeless snatch of talk to myself: it is but my way, only my way, dear Father!"

"Boy, boy," cried Sir Peter, with tears in his voice, "if you could get out of those odd ways of yours I should be so thankful. But if you cannot, nothing you can do shall grieve me. Only, let me say this; running waters have had a great charm for you. With a humble rill you associate thoughts, dreams, memories in your past. But now you halt by the stream of the mighty river: before you the senate of an empire wider than Alexander's; behind you the market of a commerce to which that of Tyre was a pitiful trade. Look farther down, those squalid hovels, how much there to redeem or to remedy; and out of sight, but not very distant, the nation's Walhalla, 'Victory or Westminster Abbey!' The humble rill has witnessed your past. Has the mighty river no effect on your future? The rill keeps no record of your past: shall the river keep no record of your future? Ah, boy, boy, I see you are dreaming still,—no use talking. Let us go home."

"I was not dreaming, I was telling myself that the time had come to replace the old Kenelm with the new ideas, by a new Kenelm with the Ideas of Old. Ah! perhaps we must,—at whatever cost to ourselves,—we must go through the romance of life before we clearly detect what is grand in its realities. I can no longer lament that I stand estranged from the objects and pursuits of my race. I have learned how much I have with them in common. I have known love; I have known sorrow."

Kenelm paused a moment, only a moment, then lifted the head which, during that pause, had drooped, and stood erect at the full height of his stature, startling his father by the change that had passed over his face; lip, eye, his whole aspect, eloquent with a resolute enthusiasm, too grave to be the flash of a passing moment.

"Ay, ay," he said, "Victory or Westminster Abbey! The world is a battle-field in which the worst wounded are the deserters, stricken as they seek to fly, and hushing the groans that would betray the secret of their inglorious hiding-place. The pain of wounds received in the thick of the fight is scarcely felt in the joy of service to some

honoured cause, and is amply atoned by the reverence for noble scars. My choice is made. Not that of deserter, that of soldier in the ranks.”

”It will not be long before you rise from the ranks, my boy, if you hold fast to the Idea of Old, symbolized in the English battle-cry, ‘Victory or Westminster Abbey.’”

So saying, Sir Peter took his son’s arm, leaning on it proudly; and so, into the crowded thoroughfares, from the halting-place on the modern bridge that spans the legendary river, passes the Man of the Young Generation to fates beyond the verge of the horizon to which the eyes of my generation must limit their wistful gaze.

THE END.