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KENELM CHILLINGLY

HIS

ADVENTURES AND OPINIONS

BY

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KENELM CHILLINGLY

BOOK I.

CHAPTER I.

SIR PETER CHILLINGLY, of Exmundham, Baronet, F.R.S. and F.A.S., was the representative of an ancient family, and a landed proprietor of some importance. He had married young; not from any ardent inclination for the connubial state, but in compliance with the request of his parents. They took the pains to select his bride; and if they might have chosen better they might have chosen worse, which is more than can be said for many men who choose wives for themselves. Miss Caroline Brotherton was in all respects a suitable connection. She had a pretty fortune, which was of much use in buying a couple of farms, long desiderated by the Chillinglys as necessary for the rounding of their property into a ring-fence. She was highly connected, and brought into the county that experience of fashionable life acquired by a young lady who has attended a course of balls for three seasons, and gone out in matrimonial honours, with credit to herself and her chaperon. She was handsome enough to satisfy a husband's pride, but not so handsome as to keep perpetually on the *qui vive* a husband's jealousy. She was considered highly accomplished; that is, she played upon the pianoforte so that any musician would say she "was very well taught;" but no musician would go out of his way to hear her a second time. She

painted in water-colours—well enough to amuse herself. She knew French and Italian with an elegance so lady-like that, without having read more than selected extracts from authors in those languages, she spoke them both with an accent more correct than we have any reason to attribute to Rousseau or Ariosto. What else a young lady may acquire in order to be styled highly accomplished I do not pretend to know; but I am sure that the young lady in question fulfilled that requirement in the opinion of the best masters. It was not only an eligible match for Sir Peter Chillingly,—it was a brilliant match. It was also a very unexceptionable match for Miss Caroline Brotherton. This excellent couple got on together as most excellent couples do. A short time after marriage, Sir Peter, by the death of his parents—who, having married their heir, had nothing left in life worth the trouble of living for—succeeded to the hereditary estates; he lived for nine months of the year at Exmundham, going to town for the other three months. Lady Chillingly and himself were both very glad to go to town, being bored at Exmundham; and very glad to go back to Exmundham, being bored in town. With one exception it was an exceedingly happy marriage, as marriages go. Lady Chillingly had her way in small things; Sir Peter his way in great. Small things happen every day, great things once in three years. Once in three years Lady Chillingly gave way to Sir Peter; households so managed go on regularly. The exception to their connubial happiness was, after all, but of a negative description. Their affection was such that they sighed for a pledge of it; fourteen years had he and Lady Chillingly remained unvisited by the little stranger.

Now, in default of male issue, Sir Peter's estate passed to a distant cousin as heir-at-law; and during the last four years this heir-at-law had evinced his belief that, practically speaking, he was already heir-apparent; and (though Sir Peter was a much younger man than himself, and as healthy as any man well can be) had made his expectations

of a speedy succession unpleasantly conspicuous. He had refused his consent to a small exchange of lands with a neighbouring squire, by which Sir Peter would have obtained some good arable land, for an outlying unprofitable wood that produced nothing but faggots and rabbits, with the blunt declaration that he, the heir-at-law, was fond of rabbit-shooting, and that the wood would be convenient to him next season if he came into the property by that time, which he very possibly might. He disputed Sir Peter's right to make his customary fall of timber, and had even threatened him with a bill in Chancery on that subject. In short, this heir-at-law was exactly one of those persons to spite whom a landed proprietor would, if single, marry at the age of eighty in the hope of a family.

Nor was it only on account of his very natural wish to frustrate the expectations of this unamiable relation, that Sir Peter Chillingly lamented the absence of the little stranger. Although belonging to that class of country gentlemen to whom certain political reasoners deny the intelligence vouchsafed to other members of the community, Sir Peter was not without a considerable degree of book-learning, and a great taste for speculative philosophy. He sighed for a legitimate inheritor to the stores of his erudition, and, being a very benevolent man, for a more active and useful dispenser of those benefits to the human race which philosophers confer by striking hard against each other; just as, how full soever of sparks a flint may be, they might lurk concealed in the flint till doomsday, if the flint were not hit by the steel. Sir Peter, in short, longed for a son amply endowed with the combative quality, in which he himself was deficient, but which is the first essential to all seekers after renown, and especially to benevolent philosophers.

Under these circumstances one may well conceive the joy that filled the household of Exmundham, and extended to all the tenantry on that venerable estate, by whom the present possessor was much beloved, and the prospect of an heir-at-law with a special eye to the preservation of rabbits

much detested, when the medical attendant of the Chillinglys declared that "her ladyship was in an interesting way;" and to what height that joy culminated when, in due course of time, a male baby was safely enthroned in his cradle. To that cradle Sir Peter was summoned. He entered the room with a lively bound and a radiant countenance: he quitted it with a musing step and an overclouded brow.

Yet the baby was no monster. It did not come into the world with two heads, as some babies are said to have done; it was formed as babies are in general—was on the whole a thriving baby, a fine baby. Nevertheless, its aspect awed the father as already it had awed the nurse. The creature looked so unutterably solemn. It fixed its eyes upon Sir Peter with a melancholy reproachful stare; its lips were compressed and drawn downward as if discontentedly meditating its future destinies. The nurse declared in a frightened whisper that it had uttered no cry on facing the light. It had taken possession of its cradle in all the dignity of silent sorrow. A more saddened and a more thoughtful countenance a human being could not exhibit if he were leaving the world instead of entering it.

"Hem!" said Sir Peter to himself on regaining the solitude of his library; "a philosopher who contributes a new inhabitant to this vale of tears takes upon himself very anxious responsibilities——"

At that moment the joy-bells rang out from the neighbouring church tower, the summer sun shone into the windows, the bees hummed among the flowers on the lawn: Sir Peter roused himself and looked forth—"After all," said he, cheerily, "the vale of tears is not without a smile."

CHAPTER II.

A FAMILY council was held at Exmundham Hall to deliberate on the name by which this remarkable infant should be admitted into the Christian community. The junior