

## THE BEAU MISER, AND WHAT HAPPENED TO HIM AT BRIGHTON.

By LEIGH HUNT,

THERE was a man of the name of Kennedy, who was well known to people of fashion in our childhood, but with whose origin, pretensions, or way of living nobody was acquainted. That he was rich was certain, for he wore the most precious stones on his fingers, and was known to keep a great deal of money at a banker's. He was evidently very fond of the upper circles, and for some time was admitted into their parties. He was now and then at the opera; oftener at routs and balls; and always went to court, when he could get there.

We have heard him described. He was a very spare man, not much above thirty, of the middle height, with eyes a little shut and lowering, a small nose, and a very long chin. But he dressed extremely well; had a softness of manners amounting to the timid; and paid exceeding homage to every person and thing of any fashionable repute.

All this, for some time, procured him a good reception; but at last people began to wonder that, though he got invitations from everybody, he gave none himself. It was not even known that he ever made a present, or had a person home with him even to a luncheon or a cup of tea. Twice he gave a great dinner, at which it was owned that there was a profusion of everything; but though it was not at a tavern, it was not at his own place of abode; and the people of the house knew nothing about him.

All this gave rise to a suspicion that he was a miser; and people soon contrived to have pretty strong proofs of it. In vain the least bashful of his acquaintances admired the beauty of his numerous rings; in vain others applied to him for loans of money,—some by way of trial and others from necessity; in vain his movements were watched by the more idle and gossiping; in vain hints were thrown out and questions asked, and his very footsteps pursued. His rings were all keepsakes; he always had no money just then; he referred for his lodgings to an hotel, where he occasionally put up, perhaps for that very purpose; and a curious fellow, who endeavoured to follow him home one night, was led such an enormous round through street after street, and even suburb after suburb, that he gave up the point with an oath.

After this his acquaintance grew more and more shy of him; they gradually left off inviting him to their houses,—some from mercenary disappointment, some from a more generous disgust, others because the rest did so; and at last, just after a singular adventure which happened to him at Brighton, he totally disappeared.

Everybody took him for a madman on that occasion. He had not been at the place above a day or two, and was seen, during that time, walking about the beach very thoughtfully, with an air of sorrow, owing, it was conjectured, to his having put himself to the expense of travelling without obtaining his expected repayment, for nobody invited him. But be this as it may, he was seen one morning, running in the most violent manner across the Steyne, and crying out "Fire!" His face was as pale as death; he seemed every now and then, in the midst of his haste, to be twitched and withered up with a sort of convulsion; and his hat having been blown off by the wind, no wonder he was thought seized with a frenzy. Yet when he arrived at his lodging there was no fire, nor even a symptom of it.

The suspicion of his being out of his wits was rendered still stronger by a rumour which took place the same day; for the servants of the family which he used to visit most, and in which he was paying his addresses to a young lady, declared that not many minutes after the uproar about the fire, he came to their master's house, through the by-ways, with a coal-heaver's hat on. And the assertion was confirmed by some tradesmen who had seen him pass, and by some boys who had followed him with shouts and nicknames.

The mystery supplied the world with talk for more than a week, when at length it was explained through the family we have just mentioned. Kennedy, it seems, was really a miser, and had inherited the estate of a third or fourth cousin, whose name he took. He had had little or no acquaintance with his kinsman before he found himself his heir. His father was a petty overseer somewhere or other, at a great distance from London; and the cousin whose estates he succeeded to was the son of a general officer in the East India service. The cousin had had a son whom he sent abroad to follow his grandfather's profession; but receiving the news of his death a little before his own, he sickened the faster, and being in a state of great weakness and despondency, left his estates to his next heir, without having much heart to inquire what sort of person he was. The fortunate young overseer quitted his shop immediately, and coming up to town had occasion to wait on a young lady, to whom his cousin's son had been attached. It was to give her a lock of her lover's hair, and a gold watch, which his father sent her with it in token of his own regard for her. A little note accompanied them, which she showed one day with the tears in her eyes, though she was then happy enough:—

"I leave you no money, my dear child; I am dying, and you are wealthy enough, and money is not the thing wanted by either of us. Just before I received the news of my poor boy's death he sent me this lock of his hair for you, to show you how glossy and healthy.... Excuse me, my love, the tears blot out what I was going to write; and so they ought. But I know well enough that the kind-hearted, generous girl, who was worthy of him, will think I pay her a greater compliment in leaving her only what belonged to her Charles, than if I had sent her all the money which he never possessed. The next heir, I am told, is a good young man, and he is poor with a number of poor relations. The watch was Charles's, when a boy. My father gave it me, and I to him, and he used to say that he would—God in heaven bless you, my poor sweet girl, pray your old

"CHARLES KENNEDY."

The consequence of the new heir's visiting Miss Cameron was his falling in love with her; if such a miser as he turned out to be could be said to fall in love. But though she could not help pitying him at first, as she afterwards said, it was only on account of his strange habits, which she soon detected, and which she foresaw would make him ridiculous and unhappy wherever he went. He soon tired and disgusted her. After a very unequivocal repulse one day, which seemed to

make him prodigiously thoughtful and unhappy, he came in the evening, with a mixture of odd triumph and uneasiness in his aspect, at which Miss Cameron said she could hardly forbear laughing, even from a feeling of bitterness. She saw that he expected to make an impression on her of some sort; and so he did; for taking an opportunity of speaking with her alone, he drew out of his waistcoat-pocket, with much anxiety, the first present his wealth had ever made her,—a fine diamond pin. A very fine one she confessed it was. It was clear that he thought this irresistible; and nothing could exceed his surprise when she refused him peremptorily once more, and the pin with him. She owned that her sense of the ridiculous so far surmounted her other feelings, as to give her a passing inclination to accept the diamond, as she knew very well that he had reckoned on its returning to him by marriage. But her contempt recovered itself; and her disgust and scorn were completed by his mentioning the words "Mrs Kennedy," which brought so noble and lamented a contrast before her, and visited her so fiercely with a sense of what she had lost, that she quitted the room with a sort of breathless and passionate murmur.

This was but the day before the adventure of the fire. She was almost inclined on the latter occasion to think him mad, as others did, especially when he once more appeared before her, shuffling in a most ludicrous manner, with something in his hand which he wished to conceal, and which she found afterwards was the hat. He would not have ventured to appear before her again; but the truth was that her father, who was but an ordinary sort of moneyed man, and not very delicate, did not interfere as he ought to prevent her being thus persecuted. But not only was the mystery explained to her next day: it was the most important one of both their lives.

On the morning when Kennedy was frightened by the fire he was standing very thoughtfully by the Ship Inn, near the seaside, when he was suddenly clapped by somebody on the shoulder. He turned round with a start, and saw a face which he knew well enough. It was that of a gentleman who, riding once when a youth by the place where he lived, had saved him from drowning in a little piece of water. Some mischievous companions had hustled him into it, not knowing how far their malicious joke might have gone. When he was pulled out and had recovered from his first fright, he thanked the young gentleman in as warm a way as he could express; and taking fourpence-halfpenny out of a little leathern bag, offered it him as a proof of his gratitude. The young gentleman declined it with a good-natured smile, thinking the offer to be the effect of mere simplicity; but the lady who were looking on, and who had helped to get him out when told of the danger, burst out into taunting reproaches of the fellow's meanness, and informed his preserver that he had at least three shillings in the other fob of his leathern bag, besides silver pennies. So saying, they wrenched it out of his hands in spite of his crying and roaring; and one of them opening it, shook out, together with the water, five shillings in sixpences, and the silver pennies to boot. The young gentleman laughed and blushed at the same instant, and not knowing well what to do, for he longed to give the young miser a lesson, and yet thought it would be unjust to share the money between the lady who had nearly drowned him, said to him, "I am not the only one to whom you are indebted for being saved, for it was the screams of those little girls there which brought me to you, and so you know," continued he, with a laugh in which the others joined, "they ought to be rewarded as well as myself. Don't you think so?" "Yes, sir," mumbled the young hunk, half frightened and half sulky. The young gentleman then divided all the silver but a shilling among the little girls, who dropped him a hundred curtseys; and giving the fourpence-halfpenny to the boy who had been most forward in helping, and least noisy in accusing, rode off amidst the shouts of the rest.

It was the first time the two had met since. "I believe," said the stranger, with a sort of smile, "I have had the honour of meeting you before?"

"The same, sir," answered the other, "at your service. I believe, sir,—I think,—I am sure."

"Yes, sir," returned the stranger, "it was I who played you that trick with your bag of sixpences."

"Oh, dear sir," rejoined the other, half ashamed at the recollection, and admiring the fashionable air of his preserver, "I am sure I had no reason to complain. Been abroad, sir, I presume, by a certain brownness of complexion, not at all unbecoming?"

"Yes, sir," said the gentleman, smiling more and more: "I hope you have been as lucky at home as some of us who go abroad."

"Why, yes, sir; I have a pretty fortune, thank Heaven, though at present—just now—"

"O, my dear sir," interrupted the stranger, with a peculiar sort of look, in which animal spirits and a sense of the ridiculous seemed predominant, "I can wait,—I can wait."

"Can wait, sir?"

"Yes, sir, I know what you mean; you have a sort of liberal yearning, which incites you to make me an acknowledgment for the little piece of service I was enabled to render you. But I am not poor, sir; and indeed should decline such a thing from any but a man of fortune, and upon any other score than that of relieving his own feelings. So that I can very easily wait, you know, for an opportunity more convenient to you; when I shall certainly not hesitate to accept a trifle or so,—a brilliant, or a diamond seal, or any little thing of that sort."

"Bless me, sir, you are very good. But you see, sir, you—you—see—I am very sorry, sir, but no doubt—in the fashionable circles,—but at present, I have an engagement."

"Ah, sir," said the stranger with a careless air, and giving him a thump on the shoulder which made him jump, "pray do not let me interrupt you. I only hope you are not lodging in—in—what's the name of the street?"

"North Street?—I tried the Steyne, but—"

"Ah, North Street."

"Why so, sir, pray?" asked the other, with an air of increasing fidget and alarm, and looking about him.

"Why, sir, an accident has just happened there."

"An accident! O my dear sir, you know those sort of things cannot be helped."

"No, sir, but it's a very awkward sort of accident, and the lodger, I understand, is from home."

"How, sir,—what lodger,—what accident, what is it you mean, dear sir?"

"Why look there, my good friend,—look there:—there they are, removing them,—removing the goods; a fire has broken out."

Kennedy seemed petrified. There was a great crowd in the street to which the stranger pointed, occasioned by a scuffle with a puppet-show man. The boys were shouting, and the little movable Punch theatre tumbled about in the top of the fray, looking in the distance like a piece of a bedstead, or some other sort of goods.

"There they are," continued the stranger; "now they take away the bedstead,—now they bring the engines,—now they are conveying out something else,—the smoke,—don't you see the smoke?"

"O lord, I do, I do," exclaimed the miser, who saw nothing but his own imagination, and his boxes of brilliants carried off. He turned deadly pale, then red, then pale again, and seeming to summon up a convulsive strength, sprang off with all his might, and rushed across the Steyne like a madman.

When he arrived at his lodging he found the street empty, and the house quite cool, and being anxious to make the best and quickest of his story with his mistress and her father, went there as instantly as possible; but first, in a great hurry, he borrowed a hat of his landlord, who, half in haste also, and half in joke, gave him one of his coalmeter's, which he unconsciously put on.

Scarcely had he astonished the young lady, and set his foot again out of doors, than he encountered the stranger who had played him the joke. His first impulse was to be very angry, but he wanted courage to complain; and, recollecting his first adventure with his preserver, would have passed by under pretence of not seeing him. He was stopped, however, by the elbow. "My dear sir," exclaimed the stranger, with his old smile, "I rejoice to find that all was safe." "Pray," continued he, changing his aspect, and looking grave and earnest, "you know the various families at Brighton; I have found just now that there is one here which will save me a journey to London,—the name is Cameron,—can you tell me where they live? There is a person of the name of Kennedy also, who I understand is here too; but that doesn't signify at present; pray tell me if you know where the Camerons are?"

"There, there, sir," answered the other, almost frightened out of his wits, and anxious to get away;—"there, two or three doors off."

The stranger dropped his arm in an instant, and in an instant knocked at the door. With almost as much speed poor Kennedy returned to his lodging. We know not what he was thinking about; but he surprised the landlord with his exceeding hurry to be gone; and gone he would have been much sooner than he was, if it had not been for a dispute about a bill, which he was in the midst of contesting, when a footman came from the Camerons, requesting his presence immediately upon important business.

The poor miser's mortifications were not to cease by the way. The footman, upon being admitted to him, turned out to be the same person who was riding as a foot-boy behind the young gentleman when the latter came up to help him out of the water. "Good God, sir," says the man, who had something of his master's look about him, "I beg your pardon,—but are you the Mr. Kennedy who has got my master's fortune?" The other had been agitated already; but the whole truth seemed now to come upon him as fast as if it would squeeze the breath out of his body; and muttering a few indistinct words, he motioned to the footman that he would go with him. He then looked about in a bewildered manner for his hat, and taking up the coal-heaver's, which, in spite of some other feelings, made the footman turn aside to hold his own to his mouth, he dropped it down again, and turning as pale as a sheet, fell back into a chair.

The footman, after administering a glass of water, called up the landlord; and begging him, in a respectful manner, to take care of the gentleman, to whom he would fetch his master, hastened back to inform the latter, who, comparing the accounts of his old acquaintance with the Camerons, had already guessed the secret, to the great wondering of all parties.

You have doubtless been guessing with him; and it is easy to fancy the remainder. There had been a false return of the young soldier's death, in accounts from the army in India. He had been taken prisoner, and when he obtained his liberty learnt with great grief and surprise that his father had died under the impression that he was dead also, and had left his property to unknown heirs. The property would have been a very secondary thing, in his mind, for its own sake; and he was aware he could regain it; but his father's death afflicted him much, particularly under all the circumstances; and he felt so much anguish at the thought of what Miss Cameron must suffer, to whom he had plighted his faith but two years before, that it was with difficulty he held up against grief, and hurry, and a burning climate, so as not to fall into an illness; the very fear of which, and the delay that it would cause, was almost enough to produce it. Not to mention that it was possible his mistress, believing him dead, might too quickly enter into engagements with another, though he did not suppose it very likely. But we need not dwell upon these matters. He found his mistress the same as ever; shed sweet bitter tears with her, for his father, his own supposed loss, and her grieving constancy; and, regaining his fortune, settled an income upon the poor miser; which the latter, remembering the adventure of the drowning, could hardly believe possible.

It is well-known that in June, 1871, if he should live so long, the Pope will have completed the 25th year of his Pontificate, and have outnumbered the years of any of his predecessors in the see of St. Peter, unless that of St. Peter himself who held that dignity for a quarter of a century and some months. In order to testify their loyal devotion to the Holy See, the Roman Catholic youth of Great Britain under thirty years of age are being invited to tender their contributions to a subscription which is to be entitled "the Pontifical Anniversary Fund." The priests of the various Roman Catholic missions throughout the land are urgently called upon to appoint some one youthful member of each sex to go round among the faithful in their several neighbourhoods and solicit contributions. The whole amount so collected is to be paid into the London Joint Stock Bank, 69 Pall Mall, to the credit of Lord Beaumont and Mr. William Vavasour, who have undertaken to act as joint trustees of the fund.

The following is the conclusion of an epitaph on a tombstone in East Tennessee: "She lived a life of virtue and died of the cholera morbus, caused by eating green fruit in the full hope of a blessed immortality, at the early age of 21 years, 7 months, and 17 days. Reader, go thou and do likewise."