

Home Circle.

The Mill and the Manor.

PART II (concluded.)

It was deep winter. The snow lay thickly on the ground. The little river ceased to flow over the securely constructed dam which had been substituted since the accident. The ice lay so thickly upon the water, that at intervals during the day the factory boys and girls were sliding and skating, and making the air ring with their joyous exclamations. Carts and wagons came and went along the roads. The sound of machinery seldom ceased within the factory during the day. Life, in its greatest activity, reigned in the neighborhood of the mill. It is not to be wondered at, therefore, that Kennedy, long used to the bustle of a camp, should often escape from the desolate solitude of Crumble Hall, and spend some of his time in examining the various processes of the manufacture of cotton. An attraction, however, existed in the dwelling-house of the wealthy manufacturer which took him there much oftener. On the morning to which we allude, he was returning from his daily visit to Mrs. and Miss Spindler, when, to his surprise, he saw Sir James's carriage roll away from the door of Crumble Hall. On entering, he was met by Penthouse, who, with the most perplexed countenance, announced that Sir James had been there, had insisted on seeing the squire; that they had met, and that the interview, so far as he could learn, was rather stormy. Charles hastened to his uncle, and found him unusually agitated. On seeing his nephew, he made a violent effort to check his feelings, whatever they were, and to assume that collectedness which was, he thought, becoming in the head of the house of Crumble. In a tone of severity, he inquired of his new nephew when he had last seen Miss Spindler?

Kennedy instantly blushed up to the eyes. He tried to answer, but stammered so much, that what he said was inaudible. "Despite," said the old squire, "my aversion to company in general, and to these people in particular, yet the father of that young woman forced himself into my library this morning, and whether agreeable or not to me, insisted on an interview. The subject of it, sir, you can easily divine." Charles, who had recovered himself, partly declared he had not the remotest idea.

"Would you believe it, sir?" said the haughty squire, "your new friend, the spinner of cotton, the employer of those noisy urchins who daily disturb my meditations by their vulgar acclamations, has had the presumption to hint at the probability of an alliance between our families."

"Of what nature?" inquired the nephew with an imitation of innocence really wonderful, considering the emotions of dread and hope which were contending for mastery within him.

"Would you trifle with me, sir?" inquired the uncle in a tone of severity.

"I do assure you," was the reply, "that I have not the smallest notion of what kind of alliance Sir James proposed."

"Then you have not sought the hand of his daughter?" This was a home question; but after a little consideration the young man answered frankly, boldly: "No, uncle; I can say with a clear conscience that I have not sought Miss Spindler in matrimony; no allusion to any such project has ever entered into our conversation during the many delightful hours I have spent in her and her family's society." Mr. Crumble brightened up at this. There was, he thought, some sense of family dignity still left in his nephew, despite his frequent visits to the mill-owner and his growing love for the mechanical arts. Hoping to have such an anticipation confirmed, he made further inquiries into the nature of the intimacy which existed between him and their neighbors. After a little consideration, Charles replied in these terms: "My dear uncle, it would be improper in me to deny that the feelings with which I regard Miss Spindler are the strongest it is possible for man to experience; but I have always looked upon their realization as hopeless. In the first place, the circumstances under which we first became acquainted give me, in the eyes of the world, a strong claim to her regard. Now, I am very unwilling to press that as a claim which, under other circumstances, would have been a voluntary solicitation. I am said to have saved her life, and upon that ground it is doubtful whether too high a sense of gratitude would not make her refusal of the cause, to her, of greater pain than I have a

right to inflict. For of course, whatever her feeling may be, her friends would not be justified in consenting to her union with a penniless man, the scion of a broken family." This speech being by no means accordant with his views, was very disappointing to the squire of Crumbleton. "What!" he asked, "do you expend all these delicate scruples upon a weaver's daughter?—a woman whom an alliance with us would elevate? who would have the honor of being the first of her class to be introduced into the Crumble family, which has remained untainted with plebeian blood since the Conquest? who would blot our escutcheon with quarterings of—'and here the old gentleman paused, to consider whether it would not be undignified to give way to a bit of playful extravagance—'who would, peradventure, as I was about to observe, quarter on our shield a spinning-jenny with shuttles volant, engrafted?" Charles, taking advantage of this little specimen of Herald's college humor, ventured to contradict his uncle—an experiment which, on such a subject, he knew to be highly dangerous. "There is no danger of such a misfortune, I assure you. The fact is, Sir James Spindler's family is as old as ours!" As if stung by some bitter retort, the squire eagerly seized the baronetage to confound his nephew from its pages. "They are," continued the latter, "the Spindlers of Sussex."

This simple piece of information perplexed rather than pleased the old gentleman. Incredulous, but anxious to satisfy his doubts, he forthwith left the room desiring his nephew to follow him to the library. Mr. Crumble went straight to a large folio, and opening it with the utmost eagerness, became so deeply immersed in the genealogy of the Spindlers, that all Charles's information concerning the young lady and her father, the cotton-spinner, went for nought. Volume after volume was consulted and replaced. At length the old gentleman, uttering an exclamation of wonder, ejaculated, "Ennobled in the thirteenth century, quartered with royalty in the fourteenth, and in the peerage down to the Revolution! A man with this splendid lineage turned weaver! Alas, alas, what are we coming to!"

Poor Kennedy was dying of impatience to hear what had passed, in the interview between Sir James and his uncle, concerning the subject next his heart, but the old gentleman was so overcome with wonderment at the fact of the owner of a better pedigree than his own taking to trade, that he could give no satisfactory answer to the query. Hence Kennedy still remained in suspense—a state in which he must be for the present left, for it is now our business to follow Sir James Spindler, as he drove down the avenue to the Crumbleton village, after the unsatisfactory interview with the squire. He had previously arranged to meet his agent at the Tabard on some matter connected with Kennedy and his uncle. The peculiar notions and pride the squire had, however, disarranged these plans.

On reaching the rustic porch of the inn he beheld Mr. Brevor, his agent, in close conversation with two strangers; their business seemed urgent, and they appeared annoyed at being recognized by Sir James's attorney. Immediately the carriage came in sight, they made off towards Crumble Hall. "You need not take out the draught of the deed I desired you to make; it will be useless now," said Sir James as he entered the best room of the little inn, followed by his man of business. "The peculiar notions of the eccentric old lord of the manor will not allow me to carry out my project—at all events not for the present. By the way, who were those two men you were talking to?"

"Mr. Tapp, the Chancery tipstaff, and an assistant. The poor old squire! he will have his pride lowered now; for to-night he will sleep in the Fleet prison."

Sir James was much shocked at this news, and made further inquiries. "It is rather odd," began his informant, "that I should meet Tap here, for I was concerned for the respondent in the Crumbleton peerage case, and know all the particulars. The truth is, the tipstaff is the bearer of an attachment for costs, and must, as in duty bound, convey the appellant to close quarters, and keep him there until the costs are paid."

"Be kind enough to follow me into the carriage," said Sir James, hastily entering it himself. He ordered the coachman to drive back to Crumble Hall as quickly as possible. On reaching the old manor-house, he lost not a moment but proceeded to the library. Here a scene presented itself which would have appalled the stoutest heart. The Chancery officer had already executed his commission; the immediate effect of which was to render Mr. Crumble senseless; in which state he lay in a chair,

Penthouse, the old faithful servant, was weeping like a child, and Kennedy was struggling with the most violent grief while trying to revive his uncle. Spindler, when the first emotions produced by this melancholy scene were mastered, quietly induced the tipstaff and his companion to accompany him to the drawing-room, where Brevor was waiting. The after-proceedings of the worthy knight were few, but decisive. He desired Brevor to examine Mr. Tap's papers, with a view to ascertain correctly the amount of the demand. This done, he arranged at once with the officer for its discharge by cheque, and a guarantee for its due payment by the London bankers from Brevor, which was perfectly satisfactory from so well-known and eminent a lawyer. "Mr. Tap, glad to escape from a scene he owned shook even his nerves, took his departure, and the master of Crumbleton was free.

This information was cautiously conveyed through Kennedy; but still the recluse was for the rest of that day unable to comprehend the nature of the events which had passed. His reason seemed clouded, and he was left to enjoy that quiet which was so congenial to his habits. When Kennedy returned to his true friend, he felt oppressed with a weight of obligation that seemed for him difficult to bear, and impossible to remove. But Sir James knew how to make it sit easily. "Things have come to a crisis with a vengeance!" he exclaimed, as he returned Charles's warm grasp of the hand; "and there is no more necessity for that caution which both myself and Lady Spindler have been obliged to use in reference to a subject which has caused us much uneasiness. Motives of honor, which cannot be to highly appreciated, have, it is evident, prevented you from divulging certain feelings towards a certain young lady which, it has been long manifest to us, exist. Those feelings, we have also ascertained, are mutual. Your honorable reserve was, we found, making the young lady miserable, destroying her spirits, and undermining her health. I therefore took the bold step of consulting your uncle on the matter. He would not, however, even hear me. My next application may, however, be more successful. Indeed, there is another affair I wish to consult you both about; but I will not open it now, for I see you are agitated." Charles, who trembled from head to foot with the most acute emotions, begged Sir James to go on; for though filled with happiness, he was, he said, too old a soldier to feel much agitated.

"Well, then, I have simply to ask whether you would like to become a cotton-spinner?"

How Charles answered this question, was shown by what took place at Bampton and Crumble Hall during the month following this interview. The neighborhood felt the effects of his reply for miles round, and Crumbleton had no longer occasion to envy the prosperity of Bampton.

Crumble Hall was invaded by workmen; gardeners and foresters were spread over the lawn and park; carpenters and smiths were dotted about the enclosures; and the sound of the hammer was heard where nothing had been previously audible but the cawing of rooks. All these people were superintended by Penthouse, who gave them lectures on the belles lettres; and having been idle himself for so many years, wondered how they could get through the quantity of work they performed.

By slow and cautious degrees, Kennedy had managed to get his uncle's consent to give to a Spindler a new branch of the family tree. The squire of Crumbleton had pored over the respective pedigrees for more than a week, and it was only when he discovered that Sir James was the first man of his family who had done anything useful, or dabbled in trade, that he gave his consent. He, however, stipulated that the male heir in future should, on attaining his majority, obtain letters patent to change his name to Crumble, that the much cherished name should not be lost to posterity. And he insisted that the marriage ceremony should be performed by a right reverend bishop, who was his fifth or sixth cousin, reserving to himself the right of giving away the bride.

All this was done exactly to his mind. The Bampton cotton factory was managed entirely by Kennedy, whom Sir James retiring from active business—took into partnership. Devoting an energetic and well-formed mind to the undertaking, it flourished; and Crumble Hall gradually regained the stately alliance it had formerly enjoyed. The old squire lived to see this consummation, to dandle on his knee a future applicant for the royal letters patent, and to be cured of his dislike to the Mill for the sake of the wonders it had worked on the prosperity of the Manor.

Uncle

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