







THE CAMBRIDGE SENIOR WRANGLER.

Though no one liked to own it, or much less speak of it, the coming struggle for senior wrangler was pretty generally felt in the University to be, as it were, between patrician and plebeian; since it had been for a length of time perceived that the contest lay between a noble member of a leading college and an obscure member of an obscure college, which had never before signalled itself by producing even a creditable candidate for the laurel.

His private tutor, himself a picked man, who had gained almost the highest honours, gave out from time to time confident assurances of his noble pupil's capabilities, and inspired high hopes of honour for his college; which, though a distinguished one, had not for the preceding four years produced a senior wrangler.

But his lord and his very numerous well-wishers were not, it seemed, to have it all their own way. For it had slowly grown into a rumour, during the year preceding the day of contest, that a person, of whom scarcely any one knew or had heard any thing—in fact, the aforesaid sizar—was coming out to do battle on behalf of his long unhonoured and humble college against the more famous and illustrious one.

Another there was, however, of nearly the same age as Southern—but how differently circumstanced! with what different feelings regarded by those who surrounded him? whose hearts he gladdened by displaying true nobility of disposition, as he grew up, and unequivocally superior intellectual endowments.

Shortly after the happening of the events which have last been mentioned, there came on at Cambridge the exciting struggle for pre-eminence, to which the whole University had for some time been looking forward with an unusual degree of interest and curiosity.

Lord Alkmond was stimulated to his utmost exertion; for to him, the future head and representative of an ancient and noble family, what could be more desirable than intellectual distinction—the highest honours of a great university, won in fair fight with an antagonist so formidable, so worthy of being ardently conquered, as Mr. Southern? But if the pressure of such incentives were great upon Lord Alkmond, what would have been the effect of his knowing, besides, that that formidable competitor really was?

But suppose that Mr. Southern had discovered who he himself really was, and the position in which he and his family at that moment stood toward that of his distinguished opponent, what would have done? Or, suppose him aware that among those who regarded him as an object of interest—as one of the two observed of all observers in that great academic struggle—was one who watched him with a straining eye and a well-nigh bursting heart—that long dissonant exile, that falsely-adjured murderer, his father?

Ultimately succeeded, with the assistance of a clerical relative in a village on the farthest outskirts of an adjoining county, in placing the child, under the name of Southern, in the house and under the care of a village schoolmaster—a person of much higher qualifications than were requisite for the humble sphere he then occupied, and to which he had been reduced by misfortune.

In a much shorter time than Mr. Hylton could have anticipated, he was gratified by receiving more and more decisive, and indeed surprising, reports of the child's capacity and progress, who presently evinced, over and above his general talents, such a mathematical faculty as very quickly placed him beyond the reach of his master, and commended him to the special notice of the clergyman whom Mr. Hylton had interested in his behalf, and who, like Mr. Hylton, had taken high honours at Cambridge.

The two persons often laid their good heads together on the subject; and at length Mr. Hylton, relying on the secret and most efficient patronage of Lady Emily, resolved to give the child a splendid start, as he called it, and put him into a position which would enable him to make the best of his rare talents. In short, Mr. Hylton resolved, but with a sort of spasmodic when he reflected on the boldness of the enterprise, to give him the advantage of a university education.

"Well, my good lad," said Mr. Hylton, on first leaving him in his tiny room, "give me thy hand; God's good Providence hath brought thee hither; and may His smile be upon thee! Ay, lad," Mr. Hylton added, more firmly grasping his hand, "the smile of Him from whom cometh every good and perfect gift! God bless thee, my lad! One day thou wilt perhaps see a very angel upon this earth, whose finger hath pointed thy way hither: but of this inquire and speak never a word to any one, as thou lovest me, and wouldst remain here!"

Southern listened to all this with a beating heart, full of tenderness, gratitude, fear, hope, wonder, but, withal, a sustaining sense of capacity and power; also, as he was among so many—the great, the wealthy, the proud—all of whom, whatever their disposition, would had they known who he was, have spurned him, or shrunk from him as one in whose veins ran the black and corrupted blood of hereditary crime! Poor youth! Happy, happy was thy ignorance; and mayhance the object and purpose of those who placed thee in it!

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into which he had entered, and on the issue of which depended all his earthly prospects. Yes, poor Ayliffe and his wife had indeed returned to their native country—to dreadful, but still dear England!

Unable to resist the poor father's importunities, Mr. Hylton had accompanied him to Cambridge the day before that on which the contest commenced, and in going thither had exacted the promise which had been mentioned above. Besides this, Mr. Hylton had most earnestly impressed upon him lessons of piety and gratitude toward Him who, out of seeming evil, brought, so often, good.

"Here, Adam, is your son, likely to become the foremost man of Cambridge University, and have all the honours and advantages attending such high distinction. He is now contending, as an equal, with the future Earl of Milverstone, whom he may vanquish by the force of his talents and learning. Could this have been, in all human probability, if what has happened to you had not taken place? And had he been strong and well-formed like you, might he not have gone to the plough—or, at all events, been never what now he is?"

Ayliffe, now a gray-headed, care-worn, sad-hearted man, was silent. Oh, with what feelings did he first, at a distance, catch sight of his son! That son in an academic costume, walking alone with an air of deep thought for a while, till he was joined by—Lord Alkmond! Poor Ayliffe, who gazed at his son from the window of an inn, with Mr. Hylton, beside him, was violently affected on seeing him, and wept like a child.

"How like his mother!" he exclaimed: and, indeed, that young man was. "And is not Lord Alkmond like his poor father?" inquired Mr. Hylton. "He is!" replied Ayliffe, with a cold shudder.

The contest lay entirely that year, as all had foreseen, between Lord Alkmond and Mr. Southern, both of whom far outstripped all other competitors; and between these two, the issue was long doubtful to all but one or two of the most experienced and able members of the University, who privately expressed a decided opinion as to which of the two would be the senior wrangler.

Great curiosity was excited in the University about their new senior wrangler; and "Who is he? Where does he come from? Who knows any thing about him?" were questions asked eagerly on every hand. Who, however, could answer them? Lord Alkmond was repeatedly asked, but in spite of his apparent acquaintance with his victorious opponent, could give no information about the day after this great contest, his face exhibiting traces of strong and recent excitement and agitation, and an arm-in-arm with a tall, elderly, gray-haired man, with a melancholy countenance, and a very lonely appearance.

The person addressed bowed low, and in his turn looked greatly embarrassed. Nor was this all the food which events seemed to have provided for the lovers of mystery at the University, or in its neighbourhood. A very great dinner was given, two days after the contest for the senior wranglership, by the Duke and Duchess of Waverdale, who had come to a residence of theirs near the University, chiefly on account of the interest which they took in their relative, Lord Alkmond.

"Our new senior wrangler is a man that hath dropped down among us from the moon, brimful of mathematics," said the Vice-Chancellor. "He is a particular friend of mine," replied the brilliant Duchess of Waverdale, with sudden and visible emotion, her eyes filling with tears; "and he was invited to dinner here to-day, but has an engagement which all who know him must respect him for keeping. Do they not, dear Mr. Hylton?"

"Indeed, my dear duchess, they do! I shall never forget yesterday—or, rather, the day before! I am thinking very anxiously about—you know whom!—What will he say of it?" "Let us drink health and prosperity to the new senior wrangler," said the duke, somewhat abruptly, glancing significantly at the duchess; for he is an honour to your University. Come, my dear Alkmond!

"Indeed I will—with my entire heart," he replied. "I shall ever feel an inexpressible interest in Mr.—Southern!" The heads all looked at one another with a well-bred air of mystery, as though they had hit upon a problem that would bear discussing by-and-by. But one thing occurred to them all, that Mr. Southern was a person very fit to be friendly with, and on whom a little civility might be bestowed not unadvantageously.

On the next evening, it got noised about that Lord Alkmond, Mr. Southern, and the strange-looking person with whom he walked so much, had all died together at the inn; and it somehow or other got known that conversation was particularly restrained and formal so long as dinner was on the table, but seemed afterward more earnest. And the next day the whole party quitted Cambridge in a carriage and four! Such, indeed, was the fact; and their destination was Milverstone, whither Lord Alkmond very anxiously hastened to give an account of the defeat which he had sustained to his grandfather, and prepare him to hear by whom, in the strange course of events, that defeat had been occasioned. Mr. Hylton promising his assistance in the enterprise; for he knew, better even than the high-minded and frank-hearted young viscount, the bitter mortification which was in store for the earl, who seemed long to have set his heart upon his grandson's obtaining the distinction which his tutors had so confidently anticipated for him.

The earl had had, up to that moment, no knowledge whatever of young Ayliffe's being at the University; and how this fact, and that of his defeating Lord Alkmond, would be received by the earl, was a problem which Mr. Hylton was about to solve with some trepidation; and that trepidation he had communicated to Lord Alkmond.

"But," said his lordship, "I will answer for my grandfather. When he hears it all, he may be a little angry about the concealment, but that can be most amably accounted for; and then, if I know the nature of the blood that runs in our family, he may be some-

what dissatisfied with me for my failure, but toward my distinguished opponent he will feel as becomes a gentleman."

How differently turned out events from those for which they were preparing! The Earl of Milverstone was dead.

When Mr. Hylton had set off for Cambridge with Adam Ayliffe (whose accompanying him was not known to the earl), Lady Alkmond, who was from the first acquainted with the secret concerning him who had become unexpectedly so formidable a competitor with her son, resolved, being left alone with the earl, and seeing his subdued and gentle temper, herself to break the whole matter to him; and this she did so judiciously, and with such winning tenderness, that the earl expressed only great, very great surprise, but no anger whatever. He was, on the contrary, much affected by the silent, unostentatious generosity of his daughter, the Duchess of Waverdale. When the news came that Lord Alkmond had been defeated, and by young Ayliffe, Lady Alkmond shed a flood of tears, and with a mother's fondness lamented the grievous disappointment of their proud and ambitious hopes.

When she had sufficiently recovered her self-possession, she went to the earl, and broke the tidings to him as gently as possible. He was then lying in the bed from which he was destined never to rise, and received the intelligence with perfect calmness, though a faint flush at first overspread his features. The first words he uttered, after tenderly folding his arms round Lady Alkmond, and kissing her, were only these: "This God hath done, and as a scourge for my pride! As such I humbly receive it. God bless the boy! May God bless them both! Oh, send for him! my daughter! my friend Hylton!"

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